'Safe Space': An Exploration of the Term

within Psychological and Educational Literature and Gaining the Views of Children and their Parents.

Submitted by Amy Mumford, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Educational Child and Community Psychology.

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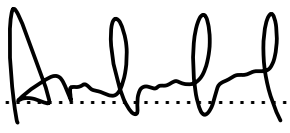
I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that any material that has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University has been acknowledged.



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Abstract

‘Safe Space’ is an often-used but rarely explored term within education. This thesis aims to explore the use of the term firstly within literature related to schools in both educational and psychological journals, and then the meaning of the term to specific individuals, through interviews of parents and children, within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In phase one, a systematic literature review was conducted, exploring how ‘safe spaces’ for children and young people were described and discussed in in educational and psychological literature between 2005 and 2020; 14 studies were included in a thematic synthesis which found five common themes. These were ‘physical aspects’, ‘emotional and psychological safety’, ‘relational aspects’, ‘adult facilitation’ and “peace amongst chaos” for marginalised groups’. In phase two, parent and child interviews were conducted on the topic of ‘safe spaces’ for children and young people; ten child interviews were conducted ‘by proxy’ through parental participation. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. Findings highlighted the importance of relationships with people, pets, special objects and the importance of play to children. Parents additionally highlighted the importance of personalised approaches at school for their child’s feelings of safety. Links are made across both the phases regarding features of ‘safe spaces’, and a model is presented which highlights the transcendental nature of ‘safe spaces’ for children.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Definitions
SLR	Systematic Literature Review
CASP	Critical Appraisal Skills Programme
MMAT	Mixed Method Appraisal Tool
ASC	Autism Spectrum Condition
EP	Educational Psychologist
GSA	Gay Straight Alliances

1. Introduction

1.1. *'Safe Space'*

The concept of a 'safe space' is not a new one (Boostrom, 1998; Kenney, 2001; Noterman & Rosenfeld, 2014), however the increasing use of it in education (Callan, 2016; Flensner & Von der Lippe, 2019), means that it is developing from a term which is "often used […] though largely undiscussed" (Boostrom, 1998, p. 397) to one which is considered increasingly relevant by researchers (Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010; Grzegrzółka, 2019; Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015; Stuckey et al., 2019; Van der Kolk, 2017), and as existing within educational discourse (Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015; Stuckey et al., 2019).

The 'safe space' concept, has a "lively history" (Noterman & Rosenfeld, 2014, p. 1346), emerging in the late twentieth century from the feminist movement (Kenney, 2001; Noterman & Rosenfeld, 2014, p. 1346). Boostrom (1998) notes the variety of uses for the term; he writes "some papers talk about the removal of asbestos or protecting children from abuse, others about the feelings of immigrants or the acceptance of minorities" (p. 399). Since Boostrom's paper was written over twenty years ago this variety amongst uses has continued to perpetuate (Flensner & Von der Lippe, 2019). The development in technology and social media has additionally given the term new dimensions (Maliepaard, 2017; Twemlow et al., 2002), with the term 'online safe spaces' being frequently used to describe spaces for support, which often allow for anonymity, and full freedom of expression; these spaces appear to be especially utilised for those individuals marginalised by society (Clark-Parsons, 2018; Dickins et al., 2016; Lucero, 2017).

One of the most notable uses of the term ‘safe space’ is within education (Barrett, 2010; Conteh & Brock, 2011; Holley & Steiner, 2005; Hunter, 2008). Although a common definition is not shared by researchers or educators (Barrett, 2010; Boostrom, 1998; Noterman & Rosenfeld, 2014; Stengel & Weems, 2010), some scholars have proposed their own conceptualisations. Hunter (2008) produces a multi-faceted definition of a ‘safe space’, constructed within the context of drama education. It has been used by authors beyond this context and can be applied to other learning environments (Barrett, 2010). It additionally aligns with what I personally consider to constitute a safe place, both physically and figuratively. Hunter’s components of a ‘safe space’ are as follows:

1) Provides safety from danger and protecting the human body.
2) Connotes metaphorical safety; “bordered by temporal dimensions […] in which discriminatory activities, expressions of intolerance or policies of inequity are barred.” (p. 8)
3) Contains people, practices, and relations that are familiar and comfortable.

Safe spaces should induce creativity and (appropriate) risk taking; “safe space is conceptualised through rules of engagement that scaffold the creation of new work and, somewhat paradoxically, invite a greater degree of aesthetic risk” (p. 8) Boostrom (1998) was one of the first authors to critically analyse the term ‘safe space’, and his components of the term arguably form a more philosophical basis than that of Hunter’s. Boostrom’s components include the notions that “we are all isolated” and that the expression of individuality enables individuals to overcome this isolation (Boostrom, 1998, p. 398). As explored in

appendix A, this aspect of ‘safe space’ has salience with me personally; as a child I sought a ‘safe space’ at school due to needing isolation from negative experiences within the wider environment. Boostrom additionally primarily captures the metaphorical aspect of a ‘safe space’, rather than Hunter’s description which encapsulates both the physical and the figurative.

Despite Hunter’s contribution to the research on ‘safe spaces’ being valuable and insightful, the context of the paper is not within a conventional educational setting, and is not exclusive to young people’s experiences, and therefore its relevance to the field of educational psychology is somewhat limited. Furthermore, Boostrom’s definition is over 20 years old, so potentially lacks relevance within the current educational context. Further exploration of the term ‘safe space’, relevant within the field of educational psychology and within the present-day context, is therefore presented within this thesis.

1.2. *The Physiological Importance of Safety*

Although criticised for lacking validity (Alderfer, 1969; Miner & Dachler, 1973; Wahba & Bridwell, 1976), Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs is widely accepted as a tool to measure need and motivation (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976).

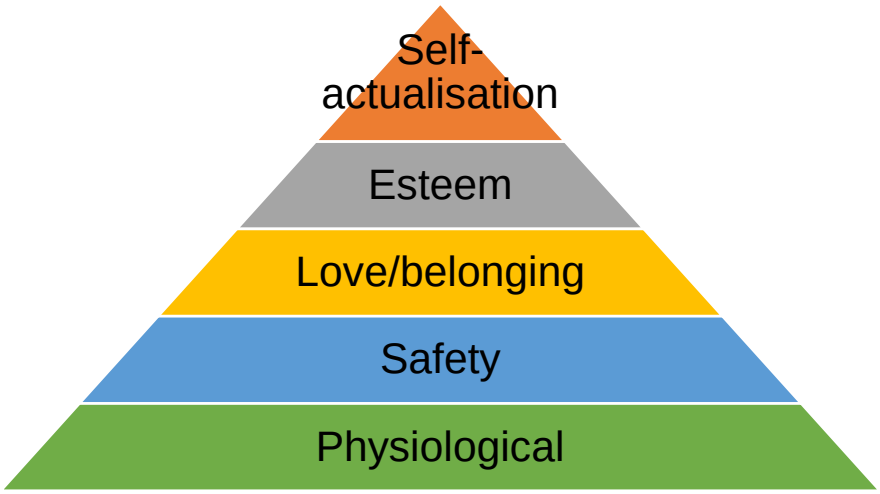

Figure 1 – Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943)

hierarchy (see figure 1); suggesting that “practically everything looks less important than safety” and describes the human body as primarily a “safety-seeking mechanism” (p. 376).

Sometimes referred to as the ‘quiescence state’ (Duarte & Pinto-Gouveia, 2017), feelings of safeness and warmth are often associated with parasympathetic activity, increased heart rate variability and vagal tone which help the body to relax and regulate (Blase & van Waning, 2019; Duarte & Pinto-Gouveia, 2017). Feeling unsafe, or stressed, comparably is associated with the ‘fight or flight’ response, initiated by the sympathetic nervous system, and is characteristic of activation of the amygdala, increased heart rate and release of the hormone cortisol (Bookhout et al., 2018; Zeman et al., 2006). This allows for heightened alertness and vigilance to take place, alongside attentional and energy resources being utilised to fight a threat and protect oneself. (Zeman et al., 2006).

1.3. *Physical and Figurative ‘Safe Spaces’*

There are distinctions within the literature between ‘safe spaces’ which are described as ‘metaphorical’ or ‘figurative’ (Boostrom, 1998; Hunter, 2008), and physical, explicit ‘safe spaces’ (Harris & Kiyama, 2015). Holley and Steiner (2005) argue that the term ‘safe space’ does not refer to physical safety and is concerned instead with “emotional or psychological harm” (p. 50). Harris and Kiyama (2015) highlight the importance of both, and conceptualise the difference between the ‘figurative’ and the ‘physical’ notions of ‘safe spaces’ in their research:

> [A safe space] was noted [by students] in two ways—school as a physical or literal safe area (such as a room in school or a building in the community) where they could go for

> support and a figurative ‘safe space’ where they could turn for advice and support including finding the emotional help needed when working through difficulties at home. (p.193).

It is my personal view that a ‘safe space’ cannot fully provide safety without having features which encapsulate both the figurative and the physical, as is presented within this section.

1.4. *Physical ‘Safe Spaces’ and the Current Context*

With regards to physical safety, this can first be conceptualised as the physical environment providing feelings of safety. There is abundant research on the impact that physical features of school design has upon success within learning and attainment (Imms et al., 2016; Shernoff et al., 2017; Thomas, 2010) and safety is prioritised in the design and building of schools (Barone, 2019). Within school design, Ghaziani (2008) found that safety is also given a high level of importance by children themselves.

Being safe from physical harm is another component of physical safety (Hunter, 2008); leadership teams in schools have a duty to ensure that the school environment is physically safe to uphold their legal duty with regards to safeguarding and the physical protection of children (Bunting et al., 2018; Bywaters et al., 2020; Daoust & Dyvik, 2020; Department for Education, 2018). This includes preventing children leaving the school site in addition to ensuring individuals entering the school are not a danger to children (Department for Education, 2018).

Internationally, the description of a ‘safe space’ may vary depending on the level of physical safety within the environment. For example, a ‘safe space’ in a war zone will arguably have a different purpose and meaning to that within a

country at peace (Bau, 2017; Nuttman-Shwartz & Shay, 2006). Within North America, the public perceptions of schools as unsafe, due predominantly to the prevalence of school shootings, means that local and national policies on keeping children safe in school are heavily scrutinised (Larsen, 2008; Snell et al., 2002; Winton, 2011), and the result is the implementation of hardening measures (Lamoreaux & Sulkowski, 2020). These measures can include an increase of the presence of police in schools, security mechanisms like cameras or metal detectors, emergency response plans and drills, bullet proof backpacks, reinforced 'pods' in classrooms, and teachers carrying firearms (Curran et al., 2020; Holland et al., 2019; Lamoreaux & Sulkowski, 2020). Similarly, despite a difference in the type of threat, the placement of devices such as metal detectors (Taylor, 2013) and surveillance devices are becoming more commonplace in British schools also (Chadderton, 2015; McCahill & Finn, 2010).

Whilst physical safety measures are fundamental, some researchers note that the features of a school which promote the most feelings of comfort and wellbeing contradict those features that may make a school the most physically secure, such as 'hardening measures' (Lamoreaux & Sulkowski, 2020; Lindstrom Johnson et al., 2018; Tillyer et al., 2011). Lindstrom et al., (2018) found that the presence of interior security cameras at their schools related to lower student perceptions of safety, equity, and support (arguably the more 'figurative' aspects of safety). Similarly, Perumean-Chaney and Sutton (2013) found that the number of visible security measures employed in school were associated with a decrease in student reports of feeling safe. Research in this area has produced conflicting results (Tillyer et al., 2011) and there have been observed differences in perceptions across different groups (Lamoreaux &

Sulkowski, 2020); these differences are particularly notable between black and white students (Lindstrom Johnson et al., 2018).

Twemlow et al., (2002) postulates that by committing to promoting the mental health and wellbeing of students within an educational setting, that it makes the setting a physically safer place to be in, for example decreasing the likelihood of acts of violence. Although research on this notion is limited (Twemlow et al., 2002), the importance of feelings of emotional safety and relational safety alongside the environmental provision for physical safety is apparent within the discussion on 'safe spaces'.

The notion of physical safety is one particularly relevant within the present context due to the coronavirus pandemic. School leaders have had to respond quickly to the safety measures outlined by the UK Government to facilitate the safe schooling of the children attending their schools, and to control the spread of the virus. Since March 2020, schools have put into place many physical safety measures such as face coverings, hand washing procedures, and 'bubbles' of social contact within the classroom (Department for Education, 2021; Viner et al., 2021). The use of space has changed also, with restrictions put in place regarding where children can congregate, with whom, and additional restrictions on individuals entering the school premises (Department for Education, 2021). The impact of the pandemic upon children and families is captured within the second chapter of this thesis, with a particular focus on the impact of home life for children during the period of school closure, in addition to changes at school.

1.5. *Figurative Safety within Psychodynamic Psychology*

The notion of figurative ‘safe spaces’ are perhaps particularly apparent within psychodynamic literature, where the dynamics between people and relationships create feelings of safety (Hyman, 2012; Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015), in addition to spaces which are experienced more tangibly within the environment (Harris & Kiyama, 2015; Hunter, 2008).

The relevance of safety to the psychodynamic paradigm of psychology was first illustrated in 1960 by Joseph Sandler coining the term ‘the background of safety” (Ofer, 2019). Sandler (1960) described the role of the ego in monitoring and maintaining feelings of safety, which included acknowledging familiar people, (such as caregivers) providing reassurance and safety, in addition to familiar locations and objects (Twemlow et al., 2002). The importance of a safe environment within the psychological development of an infant is complemented by the writings of other psychoanalysts such as Winnicott and Bion (Ofer, 2019).

The language used within attachment theory, namely the principles of a ‘secure attachment’ and ‘secure base’, are further example of how safety and security is entwined within this paradigm of psychology (Twemlow et al., 2002). These terms were first coined by Ainsworth and Bell (1969), building on the research of Bowlby (1958) in relation to infant and caregiver relationships (Bretherton, 1992). Attachment theory conceptualises the intimate relationship between the caregiver and the child. It is argued by theorists that this dynamic (referred to as a ‘dyad’), has an enduring impact upon an individual; strongly influencing the development of the child’s identity, their regulation of emotions and the mental model (referred to as the ‘internal working model’) of oneself and others (Deal, 2007; Kinniburgh et al., 2017). Since Attachment Theory was first proposed by Bowlby in the 1950s, it has become a key theory within child psychology

(Bretherton, 1992; Crittenden, 2017; Geddes, 2006), and has had significant policy implications concerning the care of children around the world, especially the creation of emotionally-safe environments for those in-care (Rutter, 2008). It is important to note however that because the psychodynamic paradigm focuses upon unconscious processes, it lacks solid empirical support due to its concepts being difficult to operationalise (Beail & Warden, 1996). Psychodynamic psychology has also been criticised for being deterministic and focusing on pathology rather than an individual's successes and strengths (Deal, 2007).

The notion of feeling 'contained', first introduced by Bion (1962), is described by Twemlow (2002, p. 313) as the "interpersonal aspects of feeling safe", and highlighted by Hunter (2008) as a crucial component of a 'safe space'. Within the context of a dynamic between a child and a caregiver, such as that captured within attachment theory, containment is a continual process of the caregiver receiving unmanageable feelings from the infant, absorbing and reflecting back so that these feelings become manageable. The process of containing and co-regulating these overwhelming emotions allows the child to feel safe (Twemlow et al., 2002), and therefore the creation of positive associations with the wider world begins; carrying those feelings of safety into other environments and relationships (Solomon & George, 2011). A 'container' is usually referred to in terms of a relationship, such as a caregiver-child or therapist-client, however it can also be used to describe a group of people or a physical space, such as a school (Hordyk et al., 2015). I consider containment is one of the most crucial aspects of a 'safe space', and that this is a defining feature of any space which is emotionally regulating and emotionally beneficial. This aspect additionally highlights the necessity of relational spaces, and creating 'safe spaces' through

safe interactions with others. As I explore in appendix A, this is an important aspect of ‘safe space’ to me personally due to my experiences at school.

Containment relates to another psychodynamic principle; Winnicott (1965)’s notion of a “holding environment”, as it is also primarily discussed within the context of the dyad between caregiver and child, but can additionally be extended to refer to educational provision (Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015). Winnicott writes that “the term ‘holding’ is used here to denote not only the actual physical holding of the infant, but also the total environmental provision” (Winnicott, 1965, p. 43). Kisfalvi and Oliver (2015) discuss Winnicott’s writings on ‘holding’ as being “important to the concept of creating a ‘safe space’ or container”, noting the role of teachers to be able to metaphorically “hold” children and young people; “they can do so by providing the students with a feeling of boundaries and limits, of being ‘held together,’ and not in danger of chaotic disintegration in an emotionally charged but unmanaged situation” (Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015, p. 723).

The “total environmental provision” referred by Winnicott often will not be made explicit to a child, and the language of ‘holding’ conceptualises the implicit attributes of safe provision for children, and its benefits upon the child’s development and wellbeing (Twemlow et al., 2002). This reference to a ‘safe space’ is arguably similar to that of Boostrom’s (1998) ‘educational metaphor’ mentioned above. The implicit notion of the ‘holding environment’ is clear through Winnicott’s (1965) comparison to the provision of bath water provided by a child; he writes:

> No one can hold a baby unless able to identify with the baby. Balint (1951, 1958) has referred to the oxygen in the air, of which the infant knows nothing. I could remind you of the temperature of the bathwater, tested by the mother’s elbow; the infant does not

> know that the water might have been too hot or too cold, but comes to take for granted the body temperature (p. 89).

Within a school context, an appropriate comparison for the bath water may be a secure fence around the perimeter of a school, or a focus on the positive wellbeing of students. This provision may be taken "for granted" (as described in the quote above) by the children in attendance, as they may not be aware of the alternative (Twemlow et al., 2002). However this provision will positively impact on their emotional wellbeing and development (Janson & King, 2006), despite the ignorance of its existence. Twemlow et al., (2002) writes that "the characteristics of a secure system are only revealed when dysregulation occurs (e.g., lack of discipline, community violence, etc.)" (pp. 319-320). This is relevant to discussions surrounding 'safe spaces' as it is important to recognise and reflect upon the figurative, implicit spaces (e.g. an interpersonal dynamic, or a school climate) in addition to the more physical, explicit 'safe spaces', such as a corner of the classroom (Harris & Kiyama, 2015).

The individual differences in relation to 'safe spaces' is also important to note. Within a school where students and staff generally feel emotionally and physically safe, there may be some children or young people that still struggle with the notion that they are safe and protected within that environment; for example, those children who have experienced trauma (Gubi et al., 2019). To continue Winnicott's metaphor, these children will have experienced the bath "too hot or too cold" and are therefore are vigilant to ensure safety at all times (Winnicott, 1965, p. 89). This is when the formation of a more explicit 'safe space' may be necessary within a classroom context (Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010; Twemlow et al., 2002; Wright, 2013), such as specially designed "corners in the classroom that have bean bags or a rocking chair,

stress balls or a plush rug" (Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010, p. 66). These explicit, physical spaces therefore symbolise those implicit mechanisms which are taking place every day in school contexts, making the safety and "holding" overtly clear to the children that use them.

Kerr (1996), writes that "each of us needs safe harbors for meeting and confronting our demons" (p. 54), not just those children, or adults that stand out as requiring additional provision in schools. This is arguably reflected within attachment theory, where security and exploration is illustrated as a component of the developmental process for *all* children (Ainsworth & Bell, 1969).

1.6. *Rationale for Current Study*

The concept of 'safe spaces' in relation to the experiences of children and young people, both inside and outside school, is therefore relevant and of interest due to a lack of a universal meaning and use of the term (Barrett, 2010; Boostrom, 1998; Noterman & Rosenfeld, 2014; Stengel & Weems, 2010).

As noted above, there is increasing physical provision regarding safety discussed within educational policy (Chadderton, 2015; Daoust & Dyvik, 2020; McCahill & Finn, 2010; Taylor, 2013). This provision is arguably an indication of a wider context which is increasingly less safe for children and young people (Coppock & McGovern, 2014; Hansen et al., 2013; Stephen, 2009). Examples of this include the prevalence of crime and bullying, mental health needs and lack of social mobility for children and young people (Traynor, 2016). The notion of a 'safe space' within educational settings is worth exploring, therefore, as it can allow for the creation of a protected physical or figurative space, which enables feelings of safety to exist within a wider school, community or societal environment that is potentially less emotionally protected and more physically

threatening (Wittmann & Fisher-Allison, 2020). This is particularly relevant within the context of a global pandemic whereby safety is paramount, and measures are in place which infringe freedoms and social interactions, and the impact of this upon children and young people's emotional and physical feelings of safety is currently unexplored (Rowland & Cook, 2021).

There is also a lack of a representation of the views of primary-aged children and their parents within the literature (for more exploration of this see section 6). Therefore, this thesis is structured as follows:

- Phase one: A systematic literature review (SLR) exploring 'safe spaces' for children and young people, described within literature relating to schools in educational and psychological journals.
- Phase two: Empirical research exploring the perceptions of children and their parents on the notion of 'safe spaces'. Data from children were gathered by proxy with parents supporting their child; this was achieved through a drawing task. This was conducted by parents partly due to COVID-19 restrictions upon conducting research at the time of planning my study. Further rationale, including the benefits of utilising the 'parent as researcher' methodology, can be found in section 7.2. Data from Parents within their telephone interview included exploring their perspective upon 'safe spaces' for their child, both within and outside the school environment, and data were gathered via telephone conversations in November and December 2020.

1.6.1. *Rationale and Aim for the Systematic Literature Review*

Within the available literature in psychological and educational journals, this systematic literature review aims to explore how ‘safe spaces’ for young people are described within the context of education. During my exploration of research into ‘safe spaces’ and safety in schools, I did not find any published systematic reviews on descriptions of ‘safe spaces’ for children and young people within educational settings.

The systematic literature review includes studies published from English-speaking countries beyond the UK and therefore acknowledges that the topic has relevance and importance within these contexts. Research capturing commonalities across the world in relation to safety within schools includes concerns regarding physical safety; for example bush fires, earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions (Dengler & Preuss, 2003; D. Johnston et al., 2011; Lu et al., 2012; Mercer & Kelman, 2010; Santos-Reyes, 2020) in addition to projects in schools which educate young people about how to respond to, and where possible, prevent these disasters (Towers et al., 2014).

In terms of figurative ‘safe spaces’ bullying is considered an international problem by researchers (Carney & Merrell, 2001) and therefore emotional, safe spaces which restrict the likelihood of bullying and harassment is arguably additionally universal.

Research with regards to providing safer school environments for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and others (LGBTQ+) youth, who are disproportionately bullied and harassed in schools (Gower et al., 2018; Kosciw & Pizmony-Levy, 2016) also takes place across borders (Kosciw & Pizmony-Levy, 2016; Thompson, 2019). Racism within schools is additionally internationally acknowledged (Sriprakash et al., 2020), and researchers note

the connection that this has to feelings of safety (Forrest et al., 2016; Macfarlane et al., 2007).

It is worthwhile therefore to conduct a systematic review of literature within this thesis to enable a better understanding of ‘safe spaces’ for children and young people across English-speaking countries, as this will allow for some commonalities and differences to be discussed, in addition to discussion surrounding implications within education, and to plan for future research.

2. Phase One: Design and Methodology

A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted, which involved the systematic searching of relevant and high-quality studies (Siddaway, 2014) which addressed the research question: How are 'safe spaces' for young people in educational settings described within research between 2005-2020, in psychological and educational journals?

2.1. *Ontological and Epistemological Position*

My ontological position emerges from my own experience of 'safe spaces' as areas whose meaning is constructed not only through language, but also through use; they become real through what Hardt (2013) has called "praxis" (p.175). As such, I subscribe to the idea that human action and discourse helps to construct both physical and mental realities (Negri & Toscano, 2006); a position which has been called 'ontological constructivism' (Grandy, 2010, p. 359).

During the SLR, my ontological position is that 'safe spaces' are a subject of research, are socially constructed through the interpretations, formulations and language used within the research literature itself. This position is reflected in the literature concerning 'safe spaces', where the ontological status of 'safe spaces' is debated in terms of their physical and figurative components (Barrett, 2010; Boostrom, 1998; Noterman & Rosenfeld, 2014; Stengel & Weems, 2010).

Within this systematic literature review, therefore, I have not been selective about whether the 'safe space' is described as physically existing and therefore tangible within an environment, or whether it is more figurative; existing instead within dynamics, dialogue, and academic discussion. Instead, my

understanding is that both types of ‘safe space’ may have equal ontological importance because each category of ‘safe space’ is argued for in the literature, and therefore each category of ‘safe space’ is constituted through praxis.

The way in which researchers construct ‘safe spaces’ through their praxis is of interest to me during my SLR, however I am additionally interested in what these researchers can reveal about the significance of these spaces for the children and young people using them. Therefore, within this review, I also discuss both the tangible and intangible aspects of ‘safe spaces’ as highlighted by children and young people.

In order to fully describe my epistemology, it is necessary to consider two epistemological positions. The first is the social constructionist position, which for Gergen (2015) means accepting that each person’s views emerge from “a particular standpoint or tradition of understanding” (p.5), and that it is through dialogue that we foster our “theories about the nature of the world” (p.12). It is my view that researchers interested in ‘safe spaces’ have reached their understanding of this subject through dialogue; either by engaging in their own research, or by engaging with the work of others. As such, they have opened up a discourse involving other researchers, as well as those for whom ‘safe spaces’ are a part of their daily lives, such as education professionals and children and young people. It is by systematically reviewing this discourse that I hope to construct a meaningful conception of ‘safe space’.

The second consideration is that my epistemological position is interpretivist in nature. This is because I understand that, as a researcher engaging with this literature, I am aware of how my own biases, expectations, and socially constructed ideas influence the way in which ‘safe spaces’ are described and

understood within this thesis (Cohen et al., 2011; Ryan, 2018). For example, the process of systematic review, and subsequent synthesis and analysis, might result in very different outcomes if conducted by another individual, who would differ in terms of their pre-conceived ideas about the topic explored. Within my reflexive statement within appendix A, I further note how my own positionality as a researcher impacts upon the research design and data analysis of the present research.

2.2. *Criteria for Considering Studies*

2.2.1. *Scoping Searches*

Scoping searches were conducted which enabled me to determine appropriate methods to conduct the review, and facilitated decisions regarding which search terms to use and the parameters of the inclusion and exclusion criteria. This was achieved through searching using different terms and criteria as well as assessing the results to ensure they were relevant to the research question and appropriate to the scope of the review. It was noted during the scoping searches that the search was yielding a significant number of results (the first search yielded 72,999 results), which was largely irrelevant to the topic of interest. In light of this, my scoping searches helped to identify ways in which I could modify my search to ensure papers of high relevance and quality. By way of example, search terms were reduced and stricter inclusion and exclusion criteria were added. Some inclusion criteria were extended, however, based on scoping searches when appropriate; I included, for example, adults discussing children's experiences of 'safe spaces' within the inclusion criteria, as the scoping searches highlighted interesting and relevant studies in this regard.

2.2.2. *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

A review protocol was written which included the inclusion and exclusion criteria in table 1

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Study Item	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	***Rationale***
Type of research	Original/primary research.	Secondary research e.g. review articles, conference presentations, discussions.	*This criteria was to ensure a high quality of papers, it also facilitated me to narrow my search results significantly which was more appropriate to the scope of the review.*
Publication requirements	Published in a peer-reviewed journal.	Books or book chapters, non-peer-reviewed articles (e.g. reviews and opinion pieces) and unpublished work (e.g. theses).	
Date	Published between 2005-2020 (inclusive).	Any date prior to 2005.	*This is due to an increase in articles from 2005, as is demonstrated in Figure 2.*
Language	English language.	Any language other than English.	*I only understand written English and it was not within my budget or capacity to be translating non-English papers.*
Context	Educational settings; pre-school, primary school, secondary school, colleges, and universities. Other educational provision e.g. home tutoring. Other settings (e.g. extra-curricular/community-based clubs) researched alongside	Education in relation to the adult workplace and apprenticeships. Professional training courses (E.g. medical education). Adult education which involves participants predominantly over the age of 25.	*As a trainee educational psychologist (EP), I am mostly working with young people up to the age of 25 within the settings listed under the inclusion criteria. Therefore, the included contexts and populations are of interest to me within this review.*

Study Item	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	***Rationale***
	an educational setting within the same research.		*As per my research question, I was interested in 'safe spaces' for children and young people, and not 'safe spaces' for adults.*
Population	Predominantly focusing on children and young people up to the age of 25. Papers which include the participation of adults, alongside participation from children and young people. Papers where adult(s) are describing the experiences of children and/or young people (e.g. teacher perspectives on their students).	Predominantly focusing on the experiences of adults. 'Safe spaces'* are described solely within the context of these spaces for adults (e.g. 'safe spaces' for teachers). Papers where adults are predominantly describing their own experiences without reference to the perceived experience of children or young people.	
Methodology/ study design	Any	N/A.	*I was interested in research utilising all methodologies and research designs.*

Study Item	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	***Rationale***
Topic (/intervention)	The notion of 'safe space(s)'* for children and young people is a primary focus of the paper. A 'safe space'* is a predominant finding/theme of the study. **or safe place(s)*	The term 'safe space' or 'safe place' is used infrequently throughout the paper. The term 'safe space'* or 'safe place' is not used within the abstract of the document. 'Safe space'* is used as a noun (e.g. to describe a commercial programme).	*This was to ensure the relevance of the notion of 'safe spaces' was central to the topic or findings of the papers synthesised. For more information on the process of refining studies, based on this criteria, please refer to appendix B*

Table 1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria for SLR

2.3. Method for Identification of Studies

The electronic databases used were EBSCO host, OVID and Web of Science. EBSCO host was used to search within 'British Education Index', 'Education Research Complete' and 'Education Resources Information Centre' (ERIC). 'APA PsychInfo' and 'APA PsychExtra' databases were searched via OVID, and the 'Core Database Collection' in 'Web of Science' was additionally searched. These databases were chosen due to their access to a large number of journals within educational and psychological literature.

EBSCO	OVID	Web of Science
British Education Index Education Research Complete Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC)	APA PsychInfo APA PsychExtra	Core Database Collection

Table 2 Electronic databases searched.

The search terms I used within my search are displayed in table 3 below. These were selected based on synonyms of key components of my research question.

"safe space$" OR "safe place$"	AND	definition OR define OR description OR characterisation OR meaning OR	AND	education* OR classroom* OR school* OR learn*	AND	child* OR adolescen* OR "young people" OR "young person" OR youth*

		concept				OR teenager*

Table 3 Search terms

2.4. *Search Strategy*

My Search strategy included the limitation of my search to:

- Publications in the English Language.
- Papers published between 2005-2020. This is due to a steady increase in articles[1] using the term ‘safe space’ in the social sciences and psychological literature, according to the website ‘Scopus’ (*Scopus*, n.d.), as is demonstrated in Figure 2.

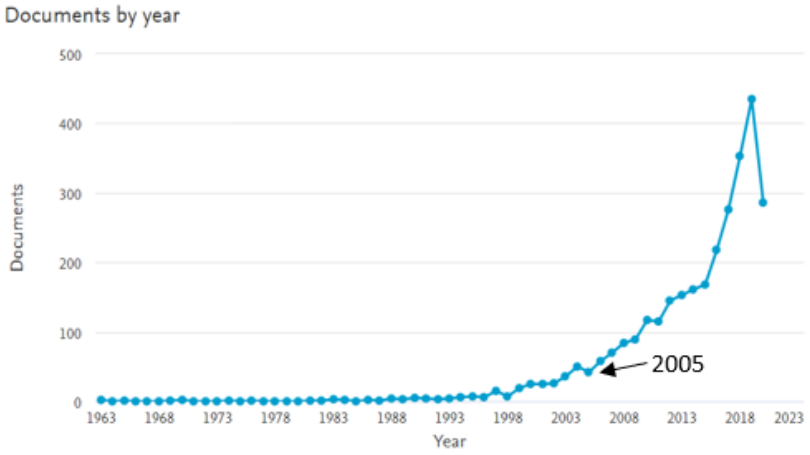

Figure 2 A graph showing the number of documents within the social sciences and psychological literature using the term 'safe space', generated by the website ‘Scopus’ (Scopus, n.d.)

I did not limit my search to:

- Articles where the full text was attached, as I was attempting to find the article elsewhere if it is unavailable via this database.

[1] Although the term has been in use for many years before 2005, the increase since 2005 may be due to the discourse surrounding ‘safe spaces’ for LGBT youth around this time (*Safe Space*, 2005; *Safe Space – EQUAL!*, 2005; *Safe Space Initiative*, 2005), although more investigation would be needed to explain this increase with certainty.

- In my initial search I searched within the widest parameters (e.g. ‘topic’ or ‘all text’) for each of my search terms.

2.5. *Data Collection*

I followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) method. This evidence-based method provides a minimum set of items for reporting in systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021) and ensures that decision-making is accountable and clear (Shamseer et al., 2015). This method is illustrated in the ‘PRISMA’ diagram is shown in Figure 3.

After scoping searches (8053 records were identified initially), records were then screened electronically to identify studies where the search terms were found in either the abstract, topic or title to ensure relevance. Records were also screened electronically via reference management software to ensure they were primary research and published in a peer-reviewed journal. Duplicates were removed both electronically and manually. After this additional screening process 824 records remained.

Manual screening against inclusion and exclusion criteria was then conducted with titles and abstracts, this process removed 728 records. This high number was due to term ‘safe space’ being a frequently applied term throughout academia. It has uses as a noun (e.g. Erulkar & Medhin, 2017), and an adjective (e.g. Avinger, 2006), in addition to often being used in reference to settings and populations outside of the educational context (e.g. Azeri et al., 2016; Bates et al., 2020; Boutros, 2017). This means that the term ‘safe space’ occurs within papers in a magnitude of ways and is frequently used as a description, or comment, rather than being the focus of the paper.

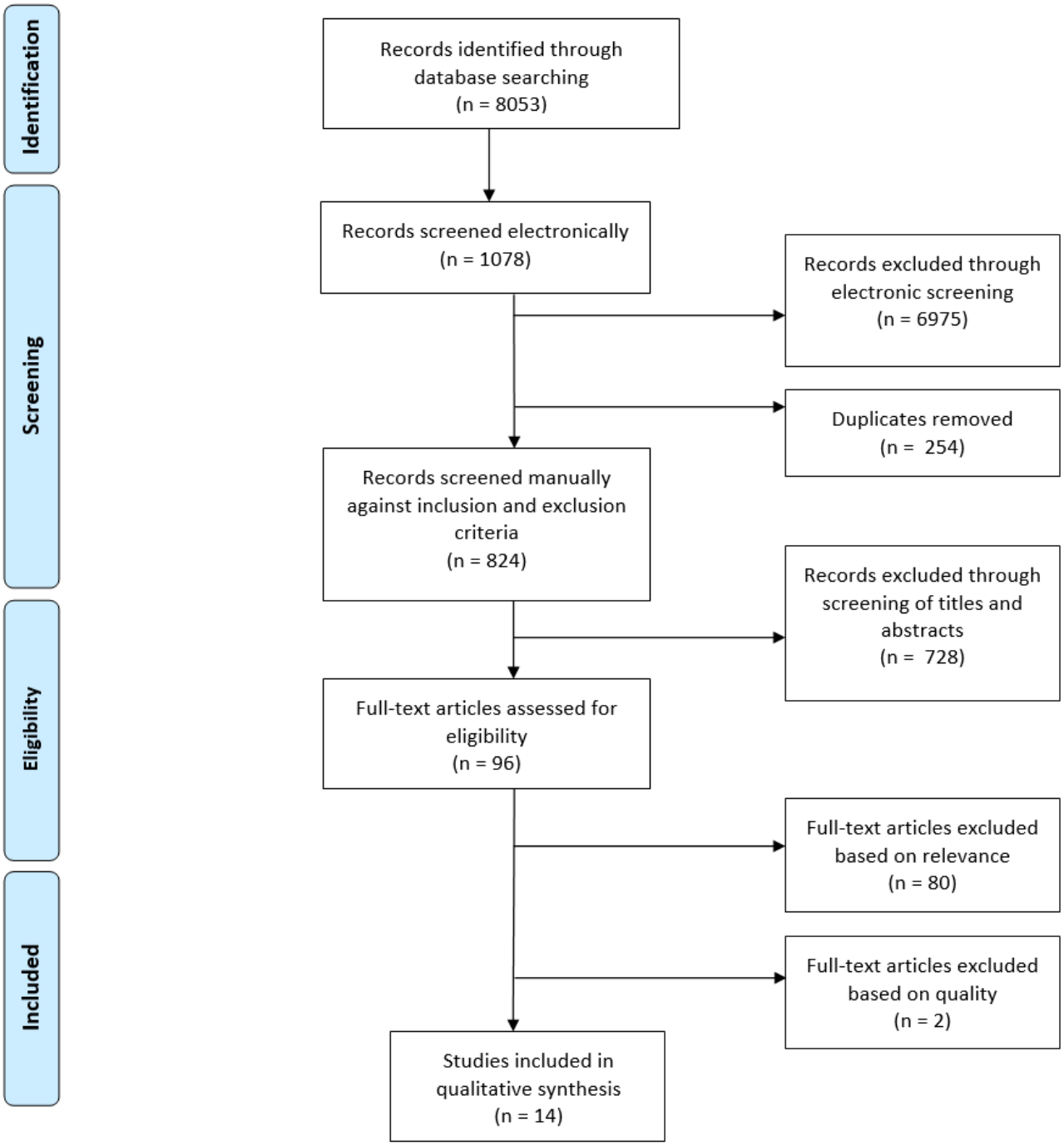

Figure 3 - Studies for the SLR using the PRISMA flow diagram (*PRISMA*, 2015)

To ensure relevance to the topic of 'safe space', appendix B shows my decision-making process regarding assessing each study by screening the titles and abstracts.

After the screening of titles and abstracts, 96 full text articles remained and these full-texts were assessed for eligibility against the inclusion and exclusion

criteria. By using the full-text I was able to look in more depth at the relevance of the topic of ‘safe spaces’ to the paper and select those that were closest to the search criteria. A final total of 16 papers were deemed as appropriate for the review, based on the criteria, and entered the following stage of quality assessment.

2.6. Quality Assessment Tools

To critically evaluate the quality of the selected papers, the critical appraisal skills programme (CASP) qualitative checklist was used (*CASP*, 2018). This facilitated the assessment of the study by providing screening questions which highlight the theoretical framework, appropriateness of research design, data collection, data analysis, findings, impact of researcher, ethics, and contribution (Hannes et al., 2010). The CASP framework has been praised for its ease-of-use and accessibility (Hannes et al., 2010); it provides the user with three discrete answers ‘yes’, ‘no’ ‘can’t tell’ and space to leave comments within the first nine screening questions. The tenth criterion is an open question which is presented with a comments section only (see appendix C for a summary). Due to the nature of published articles being constrained by publishing restrictions (e.g. word or character limits), it is difficult to determine whether some criteria were not considered by the authors, or merely excluded from the published article available. Therefore, those papers which did not provide evidence to meet the CASP assessment were attributed a ‘Can’t tell’ label, and there was an additional intermediate category added for those papers which did provide limited evidence (see Appendix C). I attributed a number to each study based on their assessed quality, as described in Appendix D.

For the papers selected which used mixed method methodology, I combined the CASP framework for the qualitative component alongside the appropriate sections of the Mixed Method Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (see Appendix E).

Based on the results of the CASP, two studies were excluded based on quality (for more information see section 4.1.) and the final 14 papers were included in the final thematic synthesis.

2.7. *Data Analysis and Synthesis*

Data concerning the characteristics of the studies were extracted including the context of the research (e.g. country and type of educational setting), the sample characteristics, the aims and objectives of the paper (e.g. research questions) and any additional notes. In the 'additional notes' section I added a description of the 'safe space' being discussed within the paper, for example, if it was a distinct room or a more figurative space. See Appendix J for the full table of characteristics, and Table 4 (in section 3.2) for a simplified version.

Relevant data were extracted from the sections of the papers which described the findings of the research, in addition to relevant discussion surrounding these findings. This was from the findings and discussions sections of the paper primarily. These data were extracted into NVivo qualitative data analysis software.

Most data were extracted before beginning the synthesis process. However, some data were considered irrelevant during the synthesis process and excluded accordingly. On a practical level, this ensured that the context was not lost which was useful within the larger extracts of text, as contextual information is deemed beneficial to ensure the information within the synthesis does not lose its meaning through decontextualisation (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

2.8. Thematic Synthesis

A thematic synthesis was conducted on two levels. Firstly themes derived from the data were produced, and next these descriptive themes were further interpreted in-line with the research question, and thus analytic themes were produced (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Alongside this process was the rearranging of codes and themes to ensure consistency throughout the synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

2.8.1. *Producing the Initial Descriptive Themes*

The process began by the initial line by line coding of the extracted data using NVivo software. Each line of data were allocated to at least one code and when the initial coding had been completed codes were checked for consistency and adjusted accordingly (See appendix F). Next, these codes were grouped into descriptive themes (See appendix G). Eleven initial descriptive themes were produced, as listed below:

- Physical aspects e.g. space, time and activities
- Expression, creativity and risk
- Comfort, calm and wellbeing
- Containment, rehearsal and distance
- Relational and social spaces
- Community, membership and ownership
- Adults and learning
- The wider context
- ‘Safe from what?’
- Diversity and inclusionary factors
- Exclusionary factors.

2.8.2. *Developing Analytical Themes.*

Thomas and Harden (2008) refer to analytical themes as “going beyond” the data, and compare the process to producing “third order interpretations” (p. 7). They also note the importance of the research question in driving the production of these themes.

In line with this, I began by grouping my initial descriptive themes into categories which went ‘beyond’ those descriptions within the data. To do this, I rearranged codes from some descriptive themes and relocated, or reproduced these codes into different themes (see appendix H). This ensured that my analytic themes were in line with the research question (concerning the literature *describing* safe spaces). By imposing the research question onto my themes, I noted that some themes were irrelevant to my research question (for example, some were concerned with the wider context of the spaces rather than *descriptions* of the ‘safe spaces’ themselves) and were therefore not included within my final analytical themes. For the remaining themes, I again checked for consistency and appropriateness of the organisation of information before finalising the final five themes.

The final five analytical themes and the hierarchical structure of the thematic maps are displayed in Appendix I. The final analytic themes are discussed within the findings and discussion section of this thesis, and are listed below:

- Physical Aspects
- Emotional and Psychological Safety
- Relational Aspects
- ‘Peace amongst Chaos’ for marginalised groups
- Adult Facilitation

2.9. *Methodological Limitations*

The first limitation of this method and design is due to my use of technology to electronically search and screen journal articles. By relying on technology to filter out some of the literature from my search, especially in the early stages, there may have been errors that I have missed, an example of this could have been the referencing software identifying an article as a book and then being removed from the process of my review. It was necessary to rely on these types of aides to help me with my review due to the large scope of my research question, and number of studies mentioning 'safe spaces'. Therefore, I could not have reviewed the topic to such depth without it, however the flaws in this approach are important to note.

Secondly, the notion of a qualitive synthesis is heavily criticised by some authors, due to its specificity in relation to a specific context, time and sample of participants (Thomas & Harden, 2008). The de-contextualisation of the data within a synthesis consequently implies that the concepts identified in one setting are applicable to others, which may not be the case (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Therefore relating the findings of the systematic literature review to the 'safe space' that the descriptions originate from will be important to mitigate this. The nature of the review however will involve the comparison between spaces to some degree, and consequently this is a possible criticism of this approach.

The 14 synthesised papers were spread across many different countries (see Figure 4) including the United States, Australia, and the UK The fact that the majority of the papers were from the USA indicates that any findings may be more applicable in the USA than the UK context. However, the contribution from many populations, cultures and perspectives will arguably add to the richness of the synthesis.

3. Findings

3.1. *Quality Assessment*

The results of the quality assessment are presented in Appendix C. Due to the lack of sufficient evidence presented in the papers by Willcox (2017) and Toraiwa (2009) for the criteria listed within the CASP, in comparison to the other studies, these papers were excluded from the synthesis, to ensure the findings of the review reflected high quality research (Moller & Myles, 2016). Not every included study demonstrated a perfect performance within the CASP assessment, and these were attributed a '2' within the table in appendix C, however they were still of high enough quality to be included within the thematic synthesis.

3.2. *Study Characteristics*

The remaining 14 papers had data extracted, characteristics regarding the papers are presented in Appendix J. Table 4 displays a simplified 'table of characteristics':

Paper	Country	Educational Setting	Participants	The safe space(s) described
Biag (2014)	USA	Middle school	Students	Multiple 'safe spaces' within a school are explored.
Butler et al. (2017)	Canada	High school	School administrators and students	This research explores a particular school being a 'safe space' for students.
Fetner et al. (2012)	USA and Canada	High schools	Young adults (aged 15-18) who had participated in Gay straight alliances (GSAs)	GSAs were described as the 'safe space'.

Paper	Country	Educational Setting	Participants	The safe space(s) described
Gross and Rutland (2016)	Australia	Primary and secondary schools	Students and teachers	Special religious education (SRE) classes.
Harris and Kiyama (2015)	USA	High schools, higher education institutions and community colleges	Students and parents/carers	School and community-based programmes.
Hemi and Mortlock (2017)	New Zealand	Secondary school	Students and staff	The 'safe space' discussed is the school environment, specifically for LQBTQ+ - identifying individuals.
Jindal-Snape et al. (2011)	Scotland	Primary schools	Students and staff	The 'safe space' is within the activity of creative drama.
Langhout and Annear (2011)	USA	Elementary school (primary school)	Students, referral data and injury data	Multiple 'safe spaces' within a school are explored.
Lockley-Scott (2019)	UK	Secondary school	Students and staff	This research looks at the notion of creating a 'safe space' for religion-related dialogue in classrooms.
Mayberry et al., (2013)	USA	High schools	Students and staff	Safe spaces discussed in regard to supporting or destabilising antigay school environments.
Ross (2019)	UK	Independent school for children aged 4-19	Staff	The 'Oasis Room'.
Spencer (2015)	USA	Colleges and universities	Staff	Creating a 'safe space' for class discussion in feminist classrooms.
Steck and Perry (2018)	USA	Secondary school	School administrators	Safe spaces were discussed in relation to the school experience for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Paper	Country	Educational Setting	Participants	The safe space(s) described
Turner and Braine (2015)	UK	Secondary schools	Teachers and trainee teachers	Teachers and trainee teachers' interpretations of the term.

Table 4 A Simplified Table of Characteristics (see Appendix J for full table)

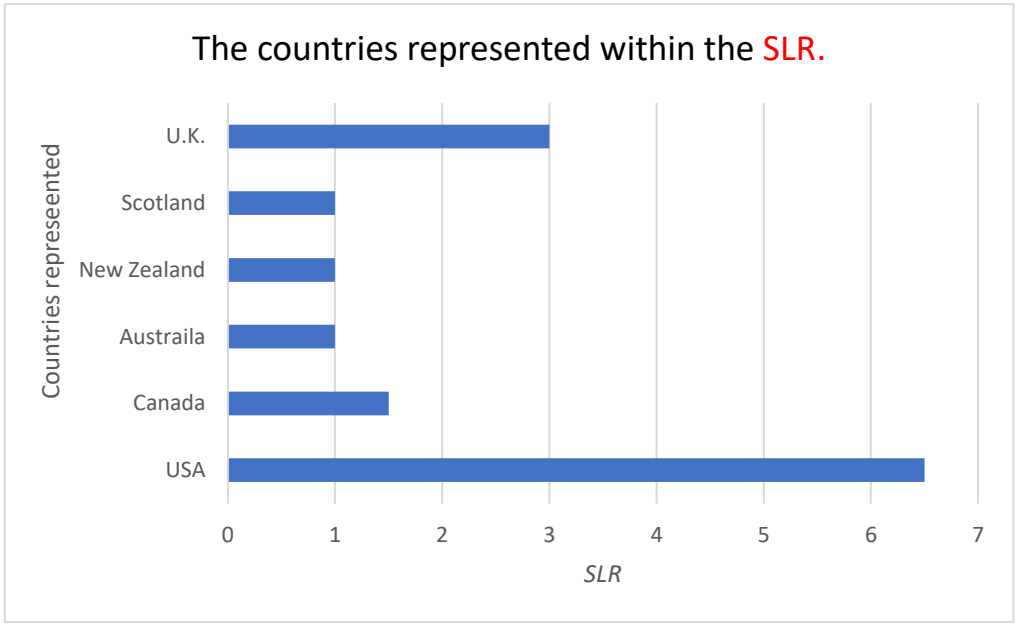

Figure 4 A graph representing the countries represented within the SLR

3.3. *Synthesis of Findings*

The themes and subthemes identified during the synthesis are presented in this section. Thematic maps are displayed in appendix I.

3.3.1. Theme 1: Physical Aspects

This theme incorporates the descriptions of the physical aspects of 'safe spaces' and includes four subthemes. Firstly, capturing the physical safety of children and young people described within the 'physical safety and injuries' subtheme, in addition to the safety of 'specific locations' and 'activities' in the following subthemes. Finally, some 'features of the environment' of the safe spaces are also explored.

Physical Safety and Injuries

Langhout and Annear (2011) collected injury data within an elementary school in the United States, with the aim of examining what places were labelled as 'safe' and 'unsafe'. Perhaps obviously, the authors reported that there was a correlation between areas where injuries are likely to take place and feelings of being unsafe. Within the synthesis physical fighting was described by several authors as reasons why children may feel unsafe (Biag, 2014; Langhout & Annear, 2011; Mayberry et al., 2013) in addition to being bullied at school (Mayberry et al., 2013; Steck & Perry, 2018).

Turner and Braine (2015) gathered data on teacher views of safety at school and noted that experienced teachers' views were "dominated by the classroom space and physical safety" (p. 57) including "Health and Safety documents and extreme behaviour being dealt with appropriately" (p. 58). Interestingly the authors contrast this to the trainee teachers who participated in their study, who focused on the emotional aspects of safety for young people, such as not being "overly criticised" in addition to the physical aspects (p. 59).

Specific Spaces

Biag (2014) also gathered data from their participants on specific spaces within schools in relations to feelings of safety and being unsafe. Both Biag (2014) and Langhout and Annear (2011) noted individual differences across the participating students. Despite this variation in response, Biag (2014) highlighted a preference for the library as safe:

> Students portrayed the library as "comforting," "the most organised and safest place on campus," where "fights never occur" and "where no one will harass you." They described feeling a "sense of calmness," in the library, where they can be "free of worries or distractions" away from "drama, people, and tests" (Biag, 2014, p. 175).

These descriptions correspond to many of the descriptions of a ‘safe space’ across this synthesis, such as calmness and safety from physical or psychological injuries. Biag (2014) notes that the academic abilities of the participants may impact on where they feel safe, highlighting the sampling bias within his study as participants were “identified as being gifted or high-achieving; therefore, it comes as no surprise that they report the library as a particularly safe and appealing location at school*”* (p.180)*.*

Langhout and Annear (2011) also found that the library was described as ‘safe’ by the majority of their participants in “grades three to five” (p.78). In contrast to Biag (2014) this sample included 225 students from a variety of academic abilities. As Laughout and Annear (2011) state however, their findings cannot be generalised outside of their sample school. Combined together, the findings of Biag (2014) Laughout and Annear (2011) are indicative that the library may be a specific space where some adolescent students from the USA experience feelings of safety.

Activities

Although the library itself was not mentioned by other studies in the synthesis, reading was referred to as a ‘safe’ activity by Spencer (2015); describing it as a “safer place to push people from their comfort zones” (p. 203).

Creativity was described as both an activity within a ‘safe space’ (Jindal-Snape et al., 2011; Ross, 2019), and an outcome of a creation of such a space (Turner & Braine, 2015). Turner and Braine (2015) additionally note that classrooms becoming ‘safe spaces’ can promote the ability of teachers to be creative, and therefore foster more productive academic environments for the young people within them.

Discussion surrounding activism was common within papers that explored the experiences of LGBTQ+ students. Some participants in ‘safe spaces’ such as GSAs, engaged with activism and activities which promoted social justice and educated others in the school to promote a more inclusive environment (Fetner et al., 2012; Mayberry et al., 2013; Steck & Perry, 2018).

With regards to activities deemed as unsuitable within a ‘safe space’, Ross (2019) documented concern amongst staff members in her study surrounding the space becoming a “games room” and the apprehension of “personalities ignit[ing]” within the room, and therefore the possibility of the activity being detrimental to the aims of the room to provide a ‘safe space’ (p. 174).

Features of the Environment

Due to the varying purposes and contexts of the ‘safe spaces’ across the papers, and the reasons why they were being examined, there was not a great degree of commonality across the studies. For papers which discussed a more figurative or psychological ‘safe space’ for example, features of the physical environment were not necessarily relevant, and therefore were not described (Jindal-Snape et al., 2011; Lockley-Scott, 2019).

A physically quiet space being characteristic of a ‘safe space’ was discussed within Biag (2014) and Ross (2019). Although some participants in Biag (2014) found that the noise could be advantageous, especially with regards to discussing private matters with a safe member of staff, indicating the individual and nuanced nature of what makes a space safe for those who use it.

Both Biag (2014) and Langhout and Annear (2011) identified that areas which were supervised were deemed as safer. Biag (2014) describes that “by not having adults around, students report an increased risk of being verbally,

socially, or physically harassed" (p.179). Conversely, adult supervision is also noted as having disadvantages by some young people: "students describe[d] adults who do not make places safer" (Langhout & Annear, 2011, p. 83). More discussion regarding the role of adults is within the 'adult facilitation' theme in section 3.3.5.

Time

Regarding the communication and management of time, Turner and Braine (2015) note that teachers perceive that "clear routines" as a component of 'safe spaces' for children and young people (p. 60), and similarly Ross (2010) includes reference to a visual timetable, which provides a structured environment where these routines are clearly managed and communicated to the students within the space.

Certain periods of time may make a 'safe space' more necessary than others – Ross (2019) reported that the 'safe space' within her research was frequented more by children during "challenging periods of the school year, such as exams" (p. 174).

Unfortunately however, the synthesis did not capture young people's views on this aspect of 'safe spaces'.

3.3.2. Theme 2: Emotional and Psychological Safety

This theme incorporates discussion and reference to the emotional aspects of safety. The theme has six subthemes:

- Comfort
- Containment
- Emotional Support

- Ownership and an ‘active role’
- Identity and expression
- Containment

‘Emotional Safety’ as a construct was explicitly referred to across several studies (Mayberry et al., 2013; Steck & Perry, 2018; Turner & Braine, 2015), and emotional and psychological aspects of ‘safe spaces’ were described in some detail within many more studies (Biag, 2014; Butler et al., 2017; Harris & Kiyama, 2015; Langhout & Annear, 2011). Related to this theme is the previously noted difference between “physical or literal” ‘safe spaces’ (Harris & Kiyama, 2015, p. 193), as the feelings of emotional and psychological safety described in this theme often create a figurative ‘safe space’ for the individuals that use them. Although these intangible aspects can also occur alongside a more physical space (Ross, 2019).

Comfort

Many studies reported being safe as synonymous with being comfortable (Biag, 2014; Butler et al., 2017; Langhout & Annear, 2011; Mayberry et al., 2013), and familiarity appeared as a component of the comfort described (Butler et al., 2017; Mayberry et al., 2013). Familiar people were particularly essential to induce feelings of comfort into students at the schools researched (Biag, 2014; Butler et al., 2017; Mayberry et al., 2013). Butler et al. (2017) reported a young person comparing their ‘safe space’ (the school environment) to their home: “You have to call this place: It’s my ‘safe space’. Like my house is my own” (p. 3).

An advantage of a comfortable space presented by Spencer (2015) and Turner and Braine (2015) was the ability for children to be comfortably vulnerable;

“where no child is embarrassed about sharing their opinions/answers, where pupils are comfortable about taking risks in their learning” (Turner & Braine, 2015, p. 47).

Similarly, Spencer (2015) describes the nature of the comfort felt by students and the advantages it can have in an undergraduate learning context:

> Comfort here refers not to the sort of comfort one would expect from customer service at a high-end hotel, but to creating a classroom that invites students to share their ideas and questions in a safe place, that makes it okay for students to be vulnerable even while they are being challenged (p.203).

The feeling of safety and comfort is depicted here to allow for the production of challenging learning processes and environments, something which is also noted within the ‘relational aspects’ theme in section 3.3.3.

Relaxation and Calm

When in a safe environment, children and young people describe feeling relaxed (Biag, 2014; Gross & Rutland, 2016; Harris & Kiyama, 2015; Ross, 2019). Here children are not “on their guard” (Gross & Rutland, 2016, p. 39); a child from Harris and Kiyama (2015) describes this: “I went there, and then it calms me down. It’s like another world” (p. 195).

Feeling safe eliciting relaxation and calm is perhaps an obvious feature, however it is important to note as it illustrates the similarity amongst papers in regard to the psychological and emotional impact of the ‘safe space’, even if their purpose, context and depiction may vary.

Emotional Support

Many papers noted the provision of emotional support being a feature of a ‘safe space’ (Biag, 2014; Harris & Kiyama, 2015; Hemi & Mortlock, 2017; Mayberry et

al., 2013; Steck & Perry, 2018). The role of adults in providing this was also widely noted (Biag, 2014; Harris & Kiyama, 2015; Mayberry et al., 2013; Steck & Perry, 2018). Biag (2014) describes a particular member of staff having a supportive role within the school: “Students in the study also regarded the P.E. teacher, Ms. Ryan, as warm and dependable. For example, one respondent found her to be an important resource for emotional support” (p. 177).

Ownership and an ‘Active Role’

Children and young people participating within the formulation of the ‘safe space’ and having an “active role in creating and maintaining this ‘safe space’ for themselves and others” was depicted as important by several authors to ensure empowerment and ownership over the ‘safe space’ (Harris & Kiyama, 2015, p. 194; Mayberry et al., 2013; Ross, 2019).

With regards to ‘safe spaces’ for LGBTQ+ students, Mayberry et al. (2011) highlight that by being an active participant within the community of the ‘safe space’ (in this case, GSAs) produced a *“*sense of responsibility toward that community” which “fuelled willingness among [GSA] members to take both individual and collective action to advocate for LGBT youth” (p. 325). Therefore, the participation within the ‘safe space’ had a positive impact on the environment surrounding it. This is similarly noted in Steck and Perry (2018).

Active and creative aspects of education were highlighted by Jindal-Snape et al. (2011) as particularly empowering and enabling ownership within learning, which helped participants express concerns, and prepare for the anxiety-inducing transition to secondary school.

With regard to ownership of specific spaces within the school environment, Biag (2014) noted that when this ownership is unclear, it created feelings of being unsafe in students:

> Findings show that unsafe areas are predominantly non-classroom settings where ownership and responsibility for the space are arbitrary and unclear […] Organizing systems of patrol of unowned spaces might better secure the area and promote students' sense of safety at Jaramillo (p. 179).

Langhout and Annear (2011) and Harris and Kiyama (2015) both note that signage, student artwork and other methods of visual representation have a positive impact by facilitating ownership and territoriality for young people.

Identity and Expression

Ownership and territorial markers arguably allow for an expression of identity and a celebration of the group which the 'safe space' serves. Descriptions relating to identity, and having one's identity reflected and validated within the 'safe spaces' was noted by several authors within the review (Fetner et al., 2012; Gross & Rutland, 2016; Harris & Kiyama, 2015; Spencer, 2015). Similarly, developing a "positive sense of self" (Gross & Rutland, 2016, p. 42) and having the freedom to be authentic, and express oneself, was a common description of an emotionally safe environment across the synthesis (Biag, 2014; Harris & Kiyama, 2015; Lockley-Scott, 2019; Mayberry et al., 2013; Spencer, 2015; Turner & Braine, 2015).

One of the teachers in Mayberry et al. (2013) described this as a "collective sort of exhale" when participants within the 'safe space' entered the environment and became "more comfortable with themselves" (p. 321). Similarly, a participant in Harris and Kiyama (2015) described that "you don't have to be

something else outside of these four walls to impress everybody else. You can be yourself. You can be yourself in this classroom" (p.194). Capturing the notion of having the freedom and empowerment to express oneself, and one's true identity within the safe space.

Containment

Jindal-Snape et al. (2011) refer to a 'safe space' within creative drama as a "container" (p.390) and although other papers in the review do not use this same language, some of the findings from other studies appear to qualify the notion that a 'safe space' can provide a place for emotions to be expressed, held, and managed in a safe and contained way (Butler et al., 2017; Langhout & Annear, 2011; Steck & Perry, 2018). A participant in Butler et al. (2017) describes that "problems that might seem overwhelming in other contexts are more manageable" within their 'safe space' (the school researched) (p. 19), and this is similarly considered by adult administrators within Steck and Perry (2018) who described the space as an "intermediary holding place within the school environment" (p. 234), which has connotations with the concept of an emotionally containing space, alongside the notion of Winnicott's 'holding environment' (Winnicott, 1965, p. 43).

3.3.3. *Theme 3: Relational Aspects*

When 'safe spaces' were described, relationships and relational aspects within the space were a predominant theme throughout all studies within the synthesis. The two subthemes within this theme are 'trust and respect' and 'community'.

Positive relationships with adults were described frequently throughout the synthesis, with Gross and Rutland (2016) illustrating that "teachers providing a

warm and caring environment acted as ‘pull’ factors” for the space” (p. 41). Similarly, Ross (2019) portraying the informal, celebratory dynamic between adults and children within the safe space:

> Kids will now tend to walk past, put their head round the door and just say "hello" and they’re not coming in for a reason or maybe not even stopping, but they want to tell us that they’ve got a merit for something (p. 173).

Adults providing opportunities for problem-solving was described (Biag, 2014; Harris & Kiyama, 2015; Langhout & Annear, 2011). Illustrating this, in answer to the question “what do you think it means for a place to be safe?”, Langhout and Annear (2011) recorded a student stating “you could have...an adult help you with your dilemma.” (p.82).

Trust and Respect

Trust being a feature of ‘safe spaces’ was described within much research within the synthesis (Biag, 2014; Langhout & Annear, 2011; Lockley-Scott, 2019; Turner & Braine, 2015). Lockley-Scott (2019) found that “both the teachers and pupils feel the classroom is a space of trust; most pupils are happy and confident enough to feel able to express their views and ideas” (p.52). Similarly, Lockley-Scott (2019) summarises the connection between ‘safe spaces’, trust, and freedom of expression within the dynamics between pupils:

> Safe space is needed for pupils to feel willing to enter into an openness, to trust the recipients of their words, and to allow for the possibility of exchange, growth, and development within their beliefs and ideas. ‘Safe space’ can be seen to exist within this case study, to the extent that pupils respect one another and their views, specifically expressed through the language of human rights (p.54)

Teachers placing importance on trust and respect within a learning dynamic is also captured by Turner and Braine (2015). The authors conclude their paper by highlighting the relationship between “mutual respect” and the taking of risks to encourage learning in the classroom; “pupils need to feel they can get things wrong in order for them to go on to achieve [and feel] confident to ask/ answer questions” (p. 59).

Harris and Kiyama (2015) studied the success of community and school-based programmes for Latino/a youths; the authors summarise in the abstract of the study that the “consensus among student participants revealed these programmes provided a ‘safe space’ where students were able to develop confianza (mutual trust) with caring adults” (p.182). The authors additionally noted the benefits of adults having shared experiences with the children, to enhance this mutuality and relationship.

Demonstrating this further, Fetner et al. (2012) discuss how a lack of mutual trust and respect between teachers and their student participants (due to the staff members engaging with homophobic harassment) led to unsafe spaces being created in the classroom. Lockley-Scott (2019) notes the consequences of a lack of trust within the student-teacher dynamic, writing that “a lack of trust felt by any in the room renders the space ineffective, leaving dialog shallow, if indeed it occurs at all” (p. 52) also describing this within the paper as “basically killing the ability to be able to discuss things” within the classroom (p. 51).

Lockley-Scott (2019) relates this finding to the difficulty of teachers being able to safeguard children, and protect them from discrimination, when expression and dialogue is shut-down due to a dynamic based on mistrust. They discuss this mistrust in relation to the Prevent Strategy, a policy aimed at teachers

protecting young people from radicalisation in the UK Lockley-Scott (2019) conclude that:

> The emergence of the school as a securitized space and a tool of counter-terrorism policy restricts discussion. This is due to an anxiety on the part of the teachers about fulfilling the Prevent duty by identifying radicalized pupils and, on the pupils' side, is due to a fear of being labelled as "extremist." Thus, pupils self-censor, reducing the depth of their responses or personal offerings to the classroom (p. 56).

This is interesting as the counter-terrorism policy aims to promote safety within a physical sense, but the policy itself is seen as destructive within the relational aspects of safety which arguably damages the ability of those teaching professionals to help and protect children from marginalisation. It also highlights the impact of the wider systems and policies in the creation of 'safe spaces' within educational settings.

Community

Positive relationships amongst peers was highlighted as an important aspect of 'safe spaces' within the literature synthesised (Butler et al., 2017; Lockley-Scott, 2019; Mayberry et al., 2013). A sense of community among students was particularly apparent in Butler et al. (2017), with one student participant describing the school community as having "a family atmosphere" (p.15).

Feelings of belonging and membership within these spaces were additionally described within the research (Butler et al., 2017; Fetner et al., 2012; Gross & Rutland, 2016; Langhout & Annear, 2011; Steck & Perry, 2018). Benefits of these feelings by pupils included the healthy development of students psychologically and academically (Steck & Perry, 2018) in addition to students having a greater connection to their school (Langhout and Annear, 2011).

A feeling of acceptance within the community was depicted as a facilitator for freedom of expression, which is expressed by a student in Harris and Kiyama (2015); “you can say what you want. You can express how you feel. And we got the whiteboard so we can express whatever we feel. We can write it on the board” (p. 47). This demonstrates the emotional expression, validation and arguably containment of the space are due, in part, to the relationships within it.

3.3.4. Theme 4: “Peace amongst chaos” for Marginalised Groups.

Much of the research synthesised focused on, or made mention to, individuals who could be considered as marginalised within the school population. This includes minority religious groups (Gross & Rutland, 2016; Lockley-Scott, 2019), minority-ethnic groups (Butler et al., 2017; Harris & Kiyama, 2015), LGBTQ+ individuals (Fetner et al., 2012; Hemi & Mortlock, 2017; Mayberry et al., 2013; Steck & Perry, 2018), women (Spencer, 2015) and those with additional learning needs (Ross, 2019). The theme is named from a quote from Harris and Kiyama (2015) which investigated ‘safe spaces’ for Latina/o students within the context of a school within the USA, describing that “when confronted with negotiating within large urban schools and everyday practices that marginalise Latina/o students, these programmes […] provide “peace among chaos” (p. 47). This theme has two subthemes, firstly exploring the “peace amongst chaos” ‘within school’ environments and then within the ‘wider context’.

Ross (2011) notes that children with additional learning needs, such as children with Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC), used the ‘safe space’ provided to avoid feelings of being unsafe and discomfort arising from unstructured times, where sensory stimulation may become difficult for these children. Ross (2011) writes:

“the room would provide a lightly structured setting for them, where they would feel safe” (p.168).

Three studies included discussion surrounding GSAs on LGBTQ+ communities within the participating schools (Fetner et al., 2012; Mayberry et al., 2013; Steck & Perry, 2018), these alliances are described as necessary by some authors due to a depiction of the external spaces, within the wider school community, to be emotionally and physically dangerous. Fetner et al. (2012) noted that young people in their study “experienced verbal harassment and physical abuse from their peers, teachers, administration, and parents” (p. 198), illustrating the all-encompassing danger within the school context. The same study noted: “the perceived level of hostility or insecurity of the environment is a key factor in participants’ need for safe spaces” (Fetner et al., 2012, p. 196).

This contrasts to Mayberry et al. (2011)’s study however, where it is noted that “the GSA student members in this study rarely referred to themselves or other LGBT students as at-risk or refer to the GSA as a ‘safe space’ where they could avoid victimisation” (p. 323). This is indicative that this “hostility” could vary depending on the educational context of the studies presented, which vary significantly.

Participants (school administrators) in Steck and Perry (2018) described ‘safe spaces’ for LGBTQ+ students as an “intermediary” place while the wider school environment worked to “foster a more accepting and inclusive environment” (p. 234), noting that if successful, this had the potential to “eliminat[e] the need for safe spaces” (p. 234). Illustrating the necessity for providing safety for LGBTQ+ identifying individuals outside of the ‘safe space’, as well as within it. Other authors describe that similar interventions are needed within the context

surrounding the ‘safe space’ for the marginalised groups discussed (Fetner et al., 2012; Hemi & Mortlock, 2017; Lockley-Scott, 2019; Mayberry et al., 2013).

The Wider Context

Lockley-Scott (2019) discusses how a ‘safe space’ for marginalised children in schools not only need to provide protection from prejudice and mistreatment within the school, “but also safe from the outside world […] one teacher interviewed (4) raised the question about whether enough is being done by the school to counter or address the Islamophobia experienced by the pupils beyond the school gate.” (p. 50). Similarly, within the context of marginalisation for LGBTQ+ young people, a participant from Fetner et al. (2012) describes a hostile environment outside of the school for these students, and a participant described how the students felt a need for “a supportive network or club where they could connect. This participant and some fellow students formed an underground “dance club,” basically, their version of a gay-straight alliance. However, their club was later investigated for “promoting homosexuality“ (p. 199).

Fetner et al. (2012) additionally note that when hostility is high within the environment of the school, and within the wider context “deeply felt ties to fellow group members [within the safe space] and to the group itself” were felt (p. 200). One can hypothesise that these “ties” to the fellow students may be, in part, due to the freedom of expression and authenticity within the ‘safe space’ leading to these deeper bonds and friendships (Allport, 1954). This contrasts with the wider environment, as the quote above illustrates, where components of individuals’ identities, and the nature of the ‘safe space’ itself, had to be concealed.

Two schools where a ‘underground’ ‘safe space’ was necessary were reported by Fetner et al. (2012). Although this is not reported as explicitly within any other ‘safe space’ within the synthesis, a wider hostile environment limiting expression, and students being uncomfortable with explicitly identifying with certain values and beliefs is also noted by Lockley-Scott (2019). A lack of prayer space for Muslim students is discussed, and how lack of provisions such as this “may have an effect on how Muslim pupils perceive the opportunity for religion-related dialogue within the school” (Lockley-Scott, 2019, p. 50). Gross and Rutland (2016) additionally discuss religion-related dialogue within the Australian context of special religious education classes, describing these classes as a ‘safe space’, providing Jewish children within their research “with a protective safety net of identity capital and spirituality” (p. 44). They are presented as ‘safe spaces’ for these religious groups exclusively, and this is particularly apparent in one quote from a participant who described the space as safe due to the students being able to “relax amongst their own. They are not on their guard” (p. 39).

Other studies within the synthesis report positive outcomes when the participants within the safe space(s) included those people who are not marginalised within the wider school and society with those who are. For example, in Fetner et al. (2012) the authors note that “all of the LGBTQ participants in our study were pleased by the support and involvement of straight allies” (p. 201) One participant from this study contributed: “I was happy that a straight guy was willing to be out front in support of queer issues. (Mark, queer, male)” (p. 200). In addition, it was illustrated within this study that “the inclusion of straight allies in the club provided cover for students who were not

ready to disclose their sexual identity" (p. 201), enabling freedom of expression for these students.

Corroborating this, within Butler et al. (2017) the whole school was perceived as the 'safe space' under discussion (rather than a component or 'club' within the school). Participants noted within this study that representation and diversity was high among the students, with one participant noting "we're such a diverse population that no one argues or bullies anyone else" (p. 15). This arguably suggests that the more diverse, accepting and inclusive school environment, the need for a distinctive 'safe space' within the school is lessened, (to use the title of this theme - there is less "chaos" to need "peace" from). Spencer (2015) alludes to this culture of acceptance by reporting a participant's views on teaching feminism within his classroom that: "safety and "mutual respect for differences" are a "part of the classroom culture from the beginning" of every class he teaches, not just ideas he introduces when "the subject turns to identity, diversity, or social justice" (p. 203). Highlighting the need for an ethos of acceptance and safety, arguably rather than dedicated spaces where individuals have access to a reception of this kind.

3.3.5. Theme 5: Adult Facilitation

This theme includes references within the studies to the role adults have in facilitating children and young people's feelings of safety. It has two subthemes:

- Applying rules and expectations
- Mediation

Applying rules and Expectations

As is noted in the findings reported within the 'Physical Aspects' theme, adult supervision appears to play a role in making students feel safe in school. From

a staff members' perspective, it was portrayed that the presence of teachers provides students with feelings of safety due to the expectations they can apply and the rules that they can impose on students (Steck & Perry, 2018; Turner & Braine, 2015). An administrator interviewed in Steck and Perry (2018) described that staff members:

> Get out there and say 'these are the expectations.' Bullying and harassment will not be tolerated. This is a safe place for all students. No one should be scared to come to school. And hope that translates to all students (p. 237).

Turner and Braine (2015) provide the perspective of trainee teachers, and noted that "trainee teachers focussed on applying rules consistently" (p. 58) when describing a 'safe space' for students. Endorsing this finding further, providing the views of professors in undergraduate classrooms, Spencer (2015) notes that "by establishing rules for respectful dialogue […] Chad manages conflict by channelling it into respectful conversation" (p. 203).

Mediation

Effective facilitation by an adult to create a 'safe space' is explored by Jindal-Snape et al. (2011). The importance of the adults' role within drama education is described in terms of a good and bad facilitator, with the former able to "make the drama session a worthwhile and tremendously enjoyable experience", whereas "a bad facilitator can not only ruin a session but can leave children feeling very vulnerable and unsure afterwards."(Jindal-Snape et al., 2011, p. 391). As already captured, Jindal-Snape et al. (2011) also note the importance of the adult being a 'container' for expressions of emotions, drawing on literature surrounding this concept to describe that the adult can "structure extremely 'real' dramatic experiences that pull on all the senses and yet are very much contained in the aesthetic space that drama provides" (p. 390).

The active role of the adult as a creator of this ‘safe space’ is additionally mirrored in Lockley-Scott (2019); “when you talk about a ‘safe space’, that is the person running the lesson – the teacher- someone who makes that space feel OK” (p.50). Although not all participants in this study agreed, with one teacher stating that “it’s more about the students than it is about the teachers” (p.50). The authors conclude that “arguably both ingredients are needed to engender a space of trust; the pupils’ leadership with a teacher facilitating […] pupils have to trust the teacher as well as one another in the room” (Lockley-Scott, 2019, pp. 50–55).

Ross (2019) describes how playing games within the ‘oasis room’ (the ‘safe space’ identified within the research) was perceived as an unsafe activity by some staff members. Nonetheless, she documents that due to the careful and active role of the adult within that environment, skills were developed which facilitated the children navigating the wider world, outside of the room, with more ease. Ross (2019) described the process of implementing the ‘oasis room’ in her school over the course of an academic year, and therefore was able to describe the journey of her students’ development. At the first ‘Review Point’ the author writes that “it had become clear that closer, more active supervision was necessary to support the young people in the room” (p. 170). When describing this “brokering of friendships” the author notes that staff members “could act to mediate students’ responses to these situations and help them navigate them pre-emptively instead of reactively. TAs felt this directly contributed to the reduction of ‘problematic social incidents for some students within the setting’” (p. 171).

Three months later, when the space is reviewed by staff members again, Ross (2019) notes that students started “to develop and maintain friendships

independent of adult support. As such, the adults in the room continued to monitor students' interactions but found they did not often need to offer friendship-brokering to the extent that they had done" (p. 172).

These quotes illustrate that the supervision and mediation from adults, within a safe environment, allowed for the effective development of these skills before they were required within a less controlled and unpredictable environment external to the 'safe space' (such as the wider school). Jindal-snape et al. (2011) additionally describe this process, detailing how creative drama "offers a 'safe space' in which to rehearse for real life" (p. 392).

A potential barrier noted by researchers was a lack of training of the staff members on how to effectively mediate and create this space; this was noted in Lockley-Scott (2019) and Ross (2019).

4. Phase One: Discussion

4.1 The Ethics and Wider Impact of 'Safe Spaces'

Lockley Scott (2019) note that "when using the term 'safe space' it must first be asked safe "for whom" and "from what"" (p. 42), and the synthesis captured not just descriptions within the 'safe space', but also the depiction of a dangerous 'unsafe space' beyond. This was perhaps particularly apparent in the '"peace amongst chaos" for marginalised groups' theme. The use of 'safe spaces' for groups who suffer victimisation and mistreatment is widely-discussed and well documented within the literature (Chatmon & Gray, 2015; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Peters, 2003; Stengel & Weems, 2010; Toomey et al., 2011), as it allows space for freedom of expression (Carter, 2015; Gibson et al., 2004; Harris & Kiyama, 2015; Wong, 2010) safety from bullying and harassment (Swanson &

Gettinger, 2016) and opportunities to engage with a familiar community, encouraging feelings of belonging (Carter, 2015; Fetner et al., 2012).

Within the synthesis, there were varying levels of the exclusivity of these spaces; Butler et al. (2017) depicted the entire school as a 'safe space' for a diverse population. This raises an ethical consideration about the concept of 'safe spaces' as an exclusive location, group or activity within an educational setting. The consideration that for a 'safe space' to be required, it is indicative that the wider context, such as the educational setting, are not safe (emotionally and/or physically) for these young people. One must question therefore whether the creation of an exclusive space for these individuals adds to the alienation and 'otherness' experienced – as Peters (2003) highlights, does a 'safe space' therefore promote inclusion or isolation? Consequently, instead of resources being channeled into the creation of an isolated 'safe space', it should arguably be focusing instead on the creation of a safer wider environment which promotes acceptance and inclusivity, and consequently emotional and physical safety (Deo, 2013).

An implication of this research to the practice of an E.P could therefore be to advocate for the implementation of 'safe spaces' within schools for those groups of individuals which may find the wider school environment less safe, such as marginalised groups (Connor & Atkinson, 2021). However, it will be the EP's role to also consider the factors within the school that are making these spaces necessary and addressing the root cause of the need for 'safe spaces'. Connor and Atkinson (2021) note that facilitating a shared understanding of the needs of the child can enable positive systemic change, in addition to training staff.

To consider ‘safe spaces’ beyond the conceptualisation of tangible, physical spaces arguably creates less danger of them becoming isolated, exclusive spaces. These more figurative spaces were also noted in the review, such as safe spaces for discussion highlighted by Spencer (2015) or the ‘safe space’ produced by engaging within an activity that was described by Jindal-Snape et al. (2011). These ‘safe spaces’ alongside Butler et al.’s (2017) whole school ‘safe space’, were less common within the synthesis, with most ‘safe spaces’ being a separate environment for individuals which were seeking refuge or support in some way. This highlights the reality of the imperfect world in which this synthesis was conducted, where individuals are not always fully supported, and certain groups are marginalised, within the educational environment and beyond (Brigley Thompson, 2020; Forrest et al., 2019; Gower et al., 2018; Kosciw & Pizmony-Levy, 2016; Macfarlane et al., 2007; Sriprakash et al., 2020). This arguably captures the importance of further exploration and research into these spaces and how they can positively impact individuals both within the ‘safe space’ and within the wider context.

4.2. Variation and Individual Differences

As is noted in Table 4, the ‘safe spaces’ discussed and described across the papers vary significantly in many aspects, such as their members, purpose and the surrounding context. Examples of this array of ‘safe spaces’ include a distinctive room within a school designed primarily for children and young people with ASC (Ross, 2019), to a more figurative space within a creative drama activity (Jindal-Snape et al., 2011). The synthesis also included studies which conducted audits from students of different locations within the schools studied (Biag, 2014; Langhout & Annear, 2011), and these therefore produced a range of different safe and unsafe spaces within these studies alone.

Individual differences were noted across the synthesis, such as the studies in the review highlighting that where the children felt safe within their school varied significantly depending on the child or young person; highlighting the individual nature of safety; additionally observed by several other authors on the topic (Stengel & Weems, 2010; Twemlow et al., 2002).

The notion of 'emotional safety' explored within the 'emotional and psychological safety' theme is additionally conceptualised within the wider literature as dependent on individual differences (Bluestein, 2001; Haddon et al., 2005; Janson & King, 2006; Vincent, 1995; Wang et al., 2018) and this additionally noted by Biag (2014) and Langhout and Annear (2011) within the synthesis. One of the earlier explorations of the term 'emotional safety' was used within the paradigm of adventure therapy programmes by Vincent (1995); who noted that feelings of emotional safety and the perception of threat was dependent on the previous experiences and interpretations of the participating individuals.

4.3. Similarities

4.3.1.The School Library

With regard to the similarities among specific locations noted as safe within the literature, Biag (2014) and Langhout and Annear (2011) are not alone in capturing the importance of the school library to provide a sanctuary and a refuge; Wittmann and Fisher-Allison (2020) write that "besides providing a space to feel safe emotionally and physically, the library is also a place to safely explore ideas of personal interest" (p. 48), and is described as a space where children are protected from bullying and marginalisation (Oltmann, 2016). Although Biag (2014) notes that there may be a bias of academic ability within

his research, there are authors who argue that the school library is used as a 'safe space' for students from a range of backgrounds, and with varying academic abilities (Shilling & Cousins, 1990; Wittmann & Fisher-Allison, 2020). Research into libraries additionally highlights the quietness and tranquillity of the space (Wittmann & Fisher-Allison, 2020), which is additionally noted as a positive feature with regards to safety by some papers within this review (Biag, 2014; Ross, 2019). The importance of a school library during the coronavirus pandemic is also highlighted by Merga (2020), who argues that the space helps to continue to promote a sense of security wherever possible for young people during the anxiety-inducing period of the pandemic.

4.3.2. Ownership and Identity

Highlighted within the synthesis were feelings of control and ownership within the 'safe spaces' depicted. This has been captured by authors within the wider literature on 'safe spaces' (Canning & Robinson, 2021; Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015; Twemlow et al., 2002). The notion of ownership has been discussed by Hunter (2008) in relation to 'safe spaces' within drama education, noting the importance of investment and "actions of representation" in the production of such a space (p. 13); the author additionally notes the importance of asserting one's identity, especially for young people. The importance of the having one's identity reflected and validated was noted within the review. Much of the research which was synthesised was conducted within adolescent samples (see table 4); this is of interest as adolescence is a period of identity formulation where a young person searches for their role within society and purpose within the wider world in which they live (Erikson, 1968; Schultz & Schultz, 2016), and 'safe spaces' within the synthesis were described as allowing the young person to experiment and assert identities, through a freedom of expression and "mutual respect for

differences" (Biag, 2014; Gross & Rutland, 2016; Harris & Kiyama, 2015; Lockley-Scott, 2019; Mayberry et al., 2013; Spencer, 2015, p. 194).

A large proportion of the young participants in the synthesised research were additionally developing their identity in respect of being a member of a group which is typically marginalised, and discriminated against within the wider society. These identities are often multiple and complex, involving uncomfortable emotions such as anger and cognitive dissonance (Salazar & Abrams, 2005). The purpose of the safe space within this process therefore is to help support the young people during these emotional experiences and psychological negotiations. Research within the synthesis suggests that developing a "positive sense of self" (Gross & Rutland, 2016, p. 42) and a sense of balance and peace can be facilitated within the 'safe space', facilitated predominantly by the community of "like-minded" individuals experiencing similar thoughts and feelings (Fetner et al., 2012, p. 193).

4.3.3. Trust and Relationships

The importance of mutuality and trust was discussed within the synthesis, with Harris and Kiyama (2015) identifying mutual trust (confianza) as a primary feature of the 'safe spaces' explored within their research. Trust is addressed by Erikson (1955) as being a foundational attribute in social-emotional development, and is also explored within psychodynamic literature (Rotenberg, 1995). Trust is described as enabling the child's understanding of dynamics with others as safe, in addition to the knowledge that separation from the caregiver and the consequent exploration into the world is safe (Rotenberg, 1995).

Vincent (1995) links feelings of trust to her conceptualisation of emotional safety, and alludes to the notion of separation from a trusted figure with

reference to individuals who “need a little push to increase their participation so they can learn how to trust others” (Vincent, 1995, p. 80). These individuals, she continues, would have low levels of emotional safety at first, but by enabling an emotionally safe environment whereby individuals feel able to participate, the degree of safety felt by the individual will be increased for the next time, whereby trust in the process and the context will be more established. Figure 5 illustrates this, demonstrating that this process can continue to be progressive, if the levels of emotional safety and trust are maintained.

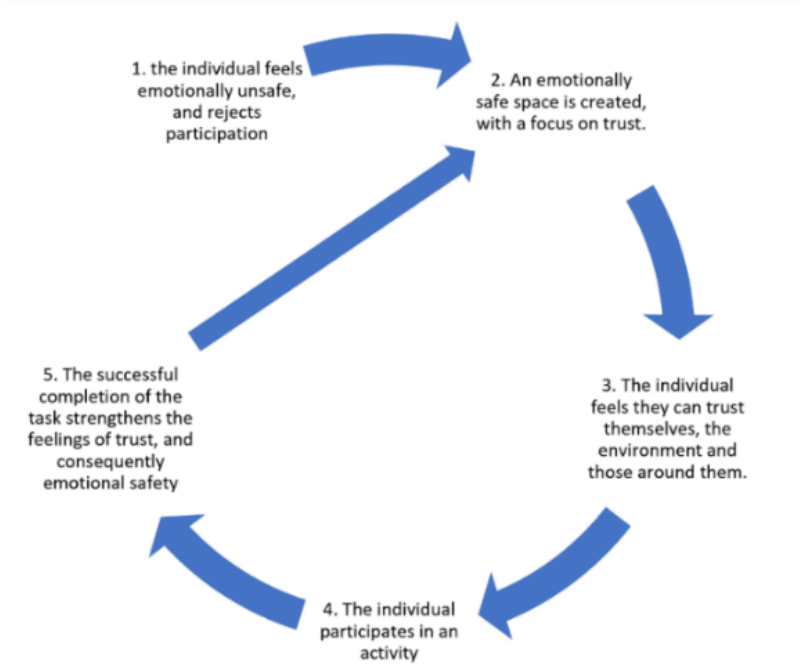

Figure 5 A conceptualisation of Vincent’s description of the impact of trust on the likelihood of participation.

Although Vincent (1995) is not discussing this dynamic within an educational environment, or with children or young adults, the notion of the risk involved within participation, is arguably similar to within a classroom context, whereby an element of vulnerability is essential to develop skills and acquire new knowledge (Poskiparta et al., 2003). This is reflected within the synthesis in relation to studies noting the importance of feeling able to take risks; especially in relation to emotional expression, participation in debates and discussions,

asking questions and the completion of academic work (Jindal-Snape et al., 2011; Lockley-Scott, 2019; Spencer, 2015; Turner & Braine, 2015).

Further to the depiction of 'trust' within the description of 'safe spaces', the 'relational aspects' theme also included reference to positive relationships, and the benefits of being part of a community. Relationships being central to feelings of security and safety is well documented (Ainsworth & Bell, 1969; Hunter, 2008; Wang et al., 2018; Winnicott, 1965); Wang (2018) writes "the need 'to love and to be loved' is the most basic human emotional safety need" (p. 37) and this is supported by psychodynamic theory on attachment and relationships (Bowlby, 1982; Crittenden, 2017; Rotenberg, 1995; Winnicott, 1965).

The notion that community facilitates feelings of safety was additionally portrayed, and is acknowledged within the wider literature (Bluestein, 2001); having a sense of belonging and community within a school has been shown to have positive benefits to the wellbeing of students and staff (McLaughlin, 2008).

4.3.4. The Role of Adults

The educational dynamic between the adults and young people were depicted as a large and essential component of the 'safe spaces' explored within the synthesis. Jindal-Snape et al. (2011) describe the containing dynamic facilitated by the adults within the 'safe space' in their paper, allowing for the children and young people to "rehearse-real life", without the risk of embarrassment and failure, and the emotional unsafety which occurs with this (Jindal-Snape et al., 2011, p. 383). This notion is mirrored in the wider literature by Hunter (2008) who describes that "'Safe space' is conceptualised through rules of engagement that scaffold the creation of new work and, somewhat paradoxically, invite a

greater degree of aesthetic risk". (p.8). Ross (2019) additionally depicted the process of learning new and difficult skills within a 'safe space', and the independence and confidence that this fostered within the children discussed.

Similarly, a learning dynamic which has been referred to as a 'safe space' is Vygotsky (1978)'s zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Soto-Santiago et al., 2015). The ZPD, illustrated in Figure 6, is a component of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, and highlights the role of the social environment within learning (Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD illustrates that for learners to be successful

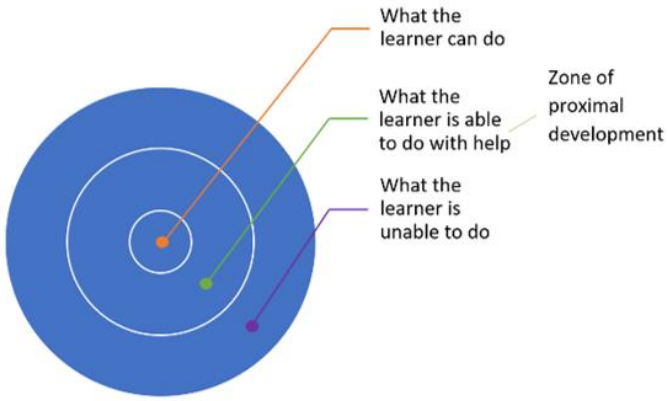

Figure 6 - The ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978)

they must progress through their most immediate 'zone' before progressing to more independent, or difficult tasks (Vygotsky, 1978, 1980) - arguably similar to Hunter (2008)'s "unknown (risky) outcomes" noted above (p. 8). One of the primary findings of Soto-Santiago et al. (2015) was that confianza (mutual trust) is a feature of the figurative 'safe space' within the ZPD described. The findings of Harris and Kiyama (2015) within the review additionally noted the importance of confianza within their 'safe space'.

Although the ZPD was not explicitly referred to within the studies within the review, there were parallels in the description of the active role of the adults to assist and collaborate with children and young people, to learn, develop new skills and navigate new situations (Jindal-Snape et al., 2011; Lockley-Scott,

2019; Ross, 2019; Spencer, 2015). The notion of differentiating work, and therefore adapting the environment for learners, was additionally noted by Turner and Braine (2015).

The role of adults in the implementation of both physical and figurative ‘safe spaces’ has been highlighted within this review. Consequently, an implication of this review for the practice of an EP would be to use this information to best inform and train staff members within schools to facilitate feelings of safety, and consequently increase feelings of wellbeing and inclusion within schools.

5. Phase One: Author's Conclusions

Five themes identified throughout the thematic synthesis of 14 papers highlight the individual differences in places children and young people feel safe. However there was some commonality across the findings highlighted.

Relationships and communities within the school were illustrated as important in the production of 'safe spaces', as was the facilitation of adults to enable feelings of safety. A trusting safe space within a learning environment between the dynamic of teacher and student (or group of students) therefore can create a 'safe space' and also facilitate the development of new skills.

Other common emotional and psychological aspects of 'safe spaces' highlight a necessity for self-expression, ownership and the ability to affirm one's identity. This is thought to be particularly necessary for groups, who are heavily represented within this review, who are marginalised within the school community. These individuals seek the community of like-minded individuals and therefore create their own 'safe spaces', and the descriptions of these have been insightful and have added diverse perspectives to this thesis. The existence of such spaces highlight ethical dilemmas surrounding safety within the wider school context and the nature of meaningful inclusion of these groups in the school community.

5.1. *Limitations*

The research within this review was largely conducted within secondary schools (or the international equivalent), there was less information gathered from primary schools. In addition, the views of staff members were captured more widely than the views of children and young people. Parents' views were only

captured within one paper and therefore this review was not inclusive of their perspective.

This review does additionally also not represent the nature of being physically unsafe due to the coronavirus within public spaces (Jasiński, 2020), such as schools. The searches completed for this review were conducted in the spring and summer of 2020, and therefore no primary research on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, which met the criteria for this review, had been published in relation to the pandemic. Consequently, a limitation of this review is that it has not captured the element of ‘safe space’ which is now relevant for children and young people within educational settings. As research continues to be published on the impact of school closures, and the additional measures implemented within schools, the notion of ‘physical safety’ within ‘safe spaces’ should be used alongside this review to provide a full picture of the notion of safety within educational settings.

5.2. *Further Research*

In regard to implications for further research, this review provides a good range of research from the perspective of staff members, however the views of children and young people are more limited, they are especially limited in relation to these individuals at a primary-school age. In addition, the synthesis highlights a need for more research on parental views for ‘safe spaces’ for their children.

Phase Two: A Research Study into Child and Parent Views on Safe Spaces

6. Phase Two Introduction

The second half of this thesis presents empirical research capturing child and parent voice. It aims to explore the views of children on their ‘safe spaces’ in addition to parent views on the same topic, both within and outside of the school setting.

6.1. Literature Review

6.1.1. Gathering Child and Parental Views

Research into ‘safe spaces’ has largely focused upon the views of researchers and practitioners (Gellert, 2000; Stengel & Weems, 2010) and some researchers have noted the sparsity of the voice of the children and young people (Holley & Steiner, 2005). Although child views were captured within the SLR presented within the first phase of this thesis, there was only one study which represented their voice within the UK context (Lockley-Scott, 2019). Furthermore, when children’s views were collected, this was often in relation to a specific function or aspect of a ‘safe space’ and did not provide an insight into what the personal ‘safe spaces’ were for each individual (for example Lockley-Scott (2019) explored ‘safe spaces’ in relation to religion-related dialogue), although there was some research on this within the United States (Biag, 2014; Langhout & Annear, 2011).

The views of children and young people being accounted for and listened to is internationally acknowledged as important (Ingram, 2013; UNCRC, 1989), and researchers note that empowering children can be beneficial in promoting

change and in problem solving situations (Ingram, 2013; Mannion, 2007). In relation to ‘safe spaces’, the lack of a universal definition (Barrett, 2010; Boostrom, 1998; Noterman & Rosenfeld, 2014; Stengel & Weems, 2010) means that asking children to explore the concept, may help to fill this gap in knowledge. EPs have a “central role in representing and advocating for children’s views” (Ingram, 2013, p. 335), and therefore examining their voice in relation to ‘safe spaces’ can help inform further research and practice in this area.

Parental views were captured within one paper within the SLR within the first phase of this thesis; these views were discussing a specific space in particular (school and community-based programmes) rather than the concept of ‘safe spaces’ more generally (Harris & Kiyama, 2015). Beyond this, I have found no other published research on parental views of ‘safe spaces’ for children and young people. There is evidence that the term is used by parents. For example, Reupert et al. (2015) found that when parents were asked about inclusion with regards to their children, some of these parents described the positive implications for ‘safe spaces’ to the researchers.

White & Rae (2016) note the importance of parent perspective and participation in the promotion of provision for children and young people, noting the contribution of EPs in empowering and centering parents with this regard. The notion that parents should be treated as equal partner and their expertise bolstered was additionally a finding of the Lamb Inquiry (2009). Parent participation is further largely featured within the SEN and Disability Code of practice (DfE, 2015).

Parental views are essential for obtaining information regarding the child’s presentation at home and outside of the educational settings (Canning &

Robinson, 2021; Kelly et al., 2008; Woolfson et al., 2003), and by exploring them within the present research I hope to gain insight into ‘safe spaces’ for child and young people in locations outside of school, which enables a more extensive perspective and understanding of ‘safe spaces’ for young people.

6.1.2. *‘Safe Spaces’ Outside of School*

Exploring parental views regarding ‘safe spaces’ for children outside of educational settings is especially interesting due to the context of the pandemic, and the additional time that children have been spending in their homes due to national and local lockdowns. Home has been perceived as a ‘safe space’ for many children and adults alike throughout the pandemic (Canning & Robinson, 2021) with messages from the UK government including “stay at home” (Miles et al., 2021). Similarly in other countries, the notion of staying within the home has had connotations with staying safe (Storr et al., 2021).

Conversely, Canning and Robinson (2021) researched the impact of school closures on children with ASC and their families. The research found that due to the expectations of home schooling, and virtual lessons and meetings taking place within the home, the boundaries had been blurred between home and school for the participating children (Canning & Robinson, 2021). The authors write that the “notion of home as a ‘safe space’ where children are able to be autonomous, rely on familiarity and have a space they can call their own was disrupted” (p.76) due to the pandemic.

In addition, for some children the pandemic has increased their likelihood of unsafety at home due to the possibility of child maltreatment within this environment (Sharma & Borah, 2020); this includes abusive situations as well as the negative impact of poverty such as child hunger (Katz et al., 2021). In

these scenarios, one can hypothesise that children would perceive their school as a ‘safe space’, and this has been taken away due to school closures, and these children are in jeopardy during this period as a consequence (Bradbury-Jones & Isham, 2020).

6.1.3. ‘*Safe Spaces’ at School*

As is explored in phase one, the ‘safe spaces’ for children and young people within educational settings can vary significantly. The literature reviewed within the first phase of this thesis mainly captured safe spaces within the schools of secondary-school-aged children and young people, although did include some research which included the participation of younger participants (Jindal-Snape et al., 2011; Langhout & Annear, 2011; Ross, 2019).

Within the literature on ‘safe spaces’ within primary schools, producing spaces for self-expression and inter-faith conversation has been explored (Malone et al., 2020; Whitinui, 2019), and these authors highlight the importance of the role of teachers in facilitating this. Also a common theme in the literature surrounding ‘safe spaces’ for primary-aged children is play (Benninger & Savahl, 2016; Nitecki & Chung, 2016). Nitecki and Chung (2016) write that “the world is a big, unknown and sometimes scary place for young children. They need a safe place, a space where they can be comfortable learning about their surroundings. That place is the child’s world of play” (p. 25). This is additionally supported by Piagetian theory which argues for the critical importance of play for cognitive and social development, especially between the ages of two to seven (Piaget, 1972).

An example of a physical ‘safe space’ found within primary schools is nurture groups (Middleton, 2018); these groups aim to provide an experience of early-

nurture to children who can present as emotionally overwhelmed within the context of the wider school environment (Boxall, 2002). Although nurture groups are sometimes formed within educational settings for older children, they are found more commonly in primary schools (Colley, 2009). Boxall (2002) who founded nurture groups, describes a crucial feature of the space being “safe and secure” for the children within them (p. 84), and again highlights the important role of the staff members at facilitating these feelings; such as the fostering of “warm and close relationship[s]” with the children participating in the group (p. 158).

Although the term ‘safe space’ is used frequently in relation to spaces (both literal and figurative) within primary-schools, research which captures views of stakeholders on the term more generally, and what it means to the children who attend the schools, appears to be limited. Often researchers are searching for (or have found) ‘safe spaces’ in relation to a particular activity (Jindal-Snape et al., 2011), topic (Malone et al., 2020) or context (Benninger & Savahl, 2016). The present research instead takes an inductive approach to discovering the meaning of the term for primary-aged children and their parents within the context of UK, and although encourages participants to think of the term in relation to activities, people, and objects as well as more fixed and physical ‘safe spaces’, the exploration of what ‘safe spaces’ means is as participant-led as possible within interviews with both children and parents.

6.2. *Research Questions*

This research aims to answer the following research questions:

- What is important to primary-aged children in relation to their ‘safe spaces’?

- What are the views of parents regarding 'safe spaces' for their child outside of school?
- What are the views of parents regarding their child’s potential 'safe spaces' at school?

7. Phase Two: Design and Methodology

7.1. Methodological Position

Each researcher's orientation is shaped by their ontological and epistemological position, and this shapes their approach to methods and theory employed within their work (Marsh & Furlong, 2002).

7.1.1. Ontological Position

Within this empirical study I am interested in how 'safe spaces' are described and understood by primary-aged children and their parents. The fact that the reality of 'safe spaces' is constructed through discourse by these participants allows for a consistency in ontological position to that explored in relation to my SLR. My ontological position remains 'ontological constructivist' in nature, therefore (Grandy, 2009, p. 359), as I understand the world as constructed by multiple truths and stories, rather than one universal truth, which exist due to multiple experiences and interactions within the world

7.1.2. Epistemological Position

The aim of this phase of my research is to discover the views of primary-aged children, and their parents, in relation to 'safe spaces' for children and young people, both inside and outside of school. In seeking the perspective of the participants, and learning about their experiences, beliefs and understandings, I have adopted a social constructionist epistemological position, because it is my view that parents and children will have constructed their understanding of 'safe spaces' through ongoing dialogue (and action). As such, I subscribe to Gergen's (2015) argument that dialogue supports an individual to develop "theories about the nature of the world"; it is my intention to collect data which

“shines a light” on the dialogue which has been used by these participants to develop the understanding of ‘safe spaces’ (pg. 12).

I have once again taken an interpretivist approach for this phase of the research. Adherents of this approach assert that ‘‘the social world can be understood only from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 19). As such, I am aware that I, as the researcher, will be interpreting the participants’ responses, and therefore I am a component of the interpretation of the information I gather and analyse. The findings that I produce, therefore, may be influenced by my own biases and preconceptions. As explored in appendix A, the importance of this topic to me personally will influence interpretations of the findings within the present research. It is consequently likely that there will be projection of my own feelings and experiences regarding ‘safe spaces’ onto the data collection and analysis process (for example, my feelings regarding the importance and necessity of these spaces in schools).

Lastly, due to restrictions in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, changes to this research were made after receiving ethical approval and designing a pilot study for a different design. This is relevant to mention because the method of data collection differed slightly from that which would have been adopted if my epistemological stance were followed more strictly. In a more ideal situation, the research would have been conducted more inductively and directly with children, putting their views at the centre of this research. The methodology utilised has benefits however, as presented in the following section.

7.2. ‘*Parent as Researcher’ Methodology*

Pope (2020) writes that “researchers request a variety of levels of engagement from their participants in a research study. This can range from merely serving as a data generation opportunity to being actively involved in each stage of the project” (p. 3749). Pope here describes, what could be conceptualised as, a spectrum of levels of engagement for participants. It is somewhere in the middle of Pope’s spectrum that my parent participants are placed for the present research; I asked parents of primary-aged children to temporarily adopt the role of researcher to collect the perspectives of their children. Parents were asked to conduct a task with their child, each receiving the same instructions to do so; this task involved the child drawing their ‘safe space’ and was audio-recorded to be subsequently shared with me. Although research on this exact method of data collection is limited, the ‘parents-as-researchers’ ethnographic method is perhaps the most interesting comparison. This method appears to vary quite significantly in the degrees of participation (Adler & Adler, 1996; Carpenter, 1997; Hackett, 2017) yet similarity exists as parents’ involvement in the research is consistently above that of a more conventional “data generation opportunity” (Pope, 2020, p. 3749).

Within her commentary on the ‘parents-as-researchers’ method, Hackett (2017) includes studies where participatory methods have been employed to gain parental perspectives. Liebenberg (2009) notes that participatory methodologies challenge the established power dynamics present within the researcher-participant relationship, and instead acknowledge experiences within the context that they are truly lived. Liebenberg also discusses the increased validity of these methods of data collection, as it is captured contextually and not extracted artificially (Liebenberg, 2009). This is additionally noted by Carpenter (1997) in relation to ‘parents-as-researchers’ studies, stressing that

human behaviour cannot be understood without also gaining an understanding of the social context surrounding it.

To gain an understanding of lived experiences and true context of the voices within the present research, I collected parents' views on the data they had collected during the activity with their child, to obtain further insight and knowledge on the child's perspective. The perception of the parents enabled me to analyse the data with more confidence, as I felt that I was truly capturing the perspectives of the children. Although it should be acknowledged that the data presented from children is, in part, constructed through the lens of their parents. By facilitating these conversations with parents and engaging them in analytic conversations regarding their children, and their children's views gathered through data collection, the transactional validity is arguably increased (Liebenberg, 2009). Transactional validity is defined as "an interactive process between the researcher, the researched, and the collected data that is aimed at achieving a relatively higher level of accuracy and consensus by means of revisiting facts, feelings, experiences, and values or beliefs collected and interpreted" (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 321).

The 'parent as researcher' design therefore places "a particular emphasis on foregrounding the expertise parents themselves have" (Hackett, 2017, p. 434), with the aim of empowering parents as the authority on their own family systems and children (Carpenter, 1997; Hackett, 2017). This therefore creates stronger, trusting bonds between researcher and parent which facilitates more sensitive data collection, increased richness of data (Adler & Adler, 1996; Carpenter, 1997) and higher transactional validity (Liebenberg, 2009).

Using this the 'parents-as-researchers' design in practice, I found that there was a degree of variation across the interviews being conducted. This variation in

consistency is a feature of research which is perceived as more ecologically valid and a more realistic illustration of the realities of the lived experience (Carpenter, 1997). In addition, semi-structured interview designs are an emergent methodology, and adapt the structure based on the responses of the participants accordingly (Tomlinson, 1989).

7.3. *Participants.*

7.3.1. Recruitment

I recruited participants for my research through opportunity sampling. I contacted individuals that I knew personally who were parents or carers of primary-school aged children. I also separately recruited through a Facebook group for individuals interested in educational psychology. This meant that my sample of parent participants consisted of three qualified EPs (who I knew personally) and three individuals with an interest in the subject area (who I did not know). The implications for this are discussed in section 10.1, and ethical considerations, including steps taken to mitigate any issues arising from this, are detailed in section 7.6. Due to recruiting through the Facebook group, I was able to have participation from individuals of different backgrounds and living within different areas across the UK

Once parents showed an initial interest in participating, I shared with them an information sheet for themselves and another for their child, in addition to a frequently asked questions document (see Appendix K and L) and directed them to an online consent form to complete if they were happy to proceed.

7.3.2. Participant Characteristics

Eight parents participated in my study, and ten children. The two additional child participants were firstly due to one parent carrying out the ‘safe space’ activity with both of her children, and secondly, one parent participated alongside their child doing the activity component, but did not continue to participate in the parent interview. More information regarding my participants, and the criteria for involvement in the research can be found in Appendix M.

I additionally conducted a pilot interview with an additional parent, and this parent conducted the activity and interview with their child beforehand. I altered the study design according to their feedback, as is noted in the following section.

7.4. *Data Collection*

Data for this study was collected in two parts:

1) Primary aged children were interviewed, this interview was conducted by the child’s parent and audio recorded. A drawing activity to enable discussion surrounding the topic of their ‘safe space’ was conducted alongside the interview.
2) Interviews with parents were conducted via a telephone conversation with myself.

7.4.1. Children’s Drawing Activity and Interview

To ensure that the views of the children were heard within the data collection of the present study, I arranged a phone call to discuss the activity and answer any questions with parents before they carried out the activity, and interview, with their child. In this conversation I discussed with parents the importance of allowing the activity to be as child-led as possible (the adult not imposing their

view of what a ‘safe space’ should be) and to follow the instructions provided as closely as possible.

Children’s Drawing Activity

During the activity, children were asked to draw their ‘safe space’ on a worksheet (see appendix N) that I distributed via email to parents. The parents gave their children this worksheet to complete, and then uploaded it onto the university’s secure drive when completed.

The children’s drawings were used as a tool to elicit child views verbally, as it enabled the children to conceptualise their notion of a ‘safe space’ to facilitate further discourse on the topic (Søndergaard & Reventlow, 2019). The verbal data from the parent-child interviews was audio-recorded and analysed.

Child Interview

I provided parents with an instruction sheet (see Appendix O) which included scripts on how the task should be explained, and to ask for the child’s consent. In addition to the questions for them to ask their child provided in the style of a brief semi-structured interview.

The explanation of what ‘safe’ meant for children, within the instruction sheet, was added after piloting the interview. The child who piloted found the concept hard to understand and the parent asked for more clarity on what to say as a response to this confusion. Information for this explanation was informed by the findings from the SLR within the first phase of this thesis.

Most parents kept to the language used and questions listed on the instruction sheet provided, however there were some occurrences of leading questions.

When these occurred I made a note of it within NVivo so it was apparent to me during the analysis, and these instances were only reported if they occurred alongside other contributions from other children on the same theme (which were not lead by the interviewer) rather being a stand alone instance.

Parents were asked to audio record the activity. This was for data-collection purposes (so I could later analyse the child's responses) in addition to providing me with insight into the language used by the adult, so I could account for any leading questions or adult-initiated responses within my analysis. The instruction sheet included information on how to do this, and there was also information sent to the parents on how to upload their files to the university secure drive.

7.4.2. Parent Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted over the telephone with eight parents. These were between 45 minutes and one hour long and were audio recorded. The schedule for the interviews was generated using hierarchal focusing (Tomlinson, 1989) and can be found in Appendix P. Hierarchical focusing was utilised due to the method recognising the "active nature and idiosyncracy of human understanding and language" within semi-structured interviews, whilst still ensuring a focus on the questioning of topics of importance (Tomlinson, 1989, p. 155).

The interview prompted the parents to consider 'safe spaces' as both literal physical spaces, and more figurative, transient spaces. (Although the questions did not ask this directly, it was prompted when the information was not produced spontaneously within the questioning). This was due to the research within the SLR highlighting the multi-faced aspects to the concept of 'safe

spaces' (Lockley-Scott, 2019; Turner & Braine, 2015), and although I wanted the data collected to be as inductive as possible, I also wanted to ensure that the participants were considering the notion of 'safe spaces' beyond the most obvious application of the term, to add richness and depth to the data.

The topics explored related to the 'safe spaces' at home, at school and other locations. I also asked questions in relation to the pandemic and how it had impacted on the child participants. Although this is not captured in the research question, I felt that it was necessary to ask this in relation to the wider context at the time of the interviews, and the changing nature of the notion of a 'safe space' in relation to the pandemic.

7.5. Thematic Analysis

My analysis was inductive or 'data-driven', whereby I was looking to the data to provide descriptions and definitions of 'safe spaces'. However, due to the nature of my first phase of my research I had significant engagement with the literature on the topic of 'safe spaces' for children and young people, and therefore cannot claim that this had not guided my analysis process, even if I did not consciously impose these upon the data collection and analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition, my position as the researcher is embedded within the analysis conducted (Marsh & Furlong, 2002), and therefore this cannot be illustrated as detached from the process. To mitigate this as much as possible, I ensured that reflections on my position were ongoing throughout the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These reflections allowed me to separate the meanings generated by the participants, which were at the forefront of my analysis, and my pre-conceived notions of 'safe spaces' (Yardley, 2017).

I followed the process of thematic analysis provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) in Table 5, more information on this in relation to my data and analysis can be found in appendix Q.

After interviews were conducted, I transcribed the data, which allowed me to become fully immersed within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006); also facilitating the beginning of my journey of analysis (Bird, 2005). Next, I imported the transcripts into NVivo software to start generating initial codes under the headings of my three research questions (phase 2). Once initial codes were generated I used the 'concept map' component of NVivo to look at my codes and to see commonality and began collating these codes into potential themes (phase 3).

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarisation with data	Transcription, reading and re-reading the data including the notation of initial ideas.
2. Generation of initial codes	The coding of interesting features within the data systematic. Relevant data to each code is collated.
3. Searching for themes	Codes are collated into potential themes. All data relevant to potential themes is gathered.
4. Reviewing themes	Confirmation of themes being effective in relation to coded extracts and the entire data set. A thematic map is generated of the analysis.
5. Themes are defined and named	Analysis is ongoing to refine specifics of each theme. Each theme has clear definitions and names generated.
6. Producing the report	This provides the final opportunity for analysis. Extract examples are selected. Selected extracts are analysed for the final time, relating back to the research question.

Table 5 Phases of Thematic Analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006).

I then reviewed and re-defined themes, producing thematic maps which adequately captured the data I was analysing (phase 4). The thematic maps generated at this stage of the analysis are presented in appendix R. Next, I began to write paragraphs describing each of my themes to see if there was any overlap between them (phase 5), this allowed me to conceptualise reflexive dialogue, also to reflect on my position and how that was affecting my interpretation of the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Some of the themes were not as distinctive and separate as I felt was necessary, and I therefore reviewed and refined them further. At this stage I also found some new names for my themes.

Finally, the report of my findings was written, and still some data were repositioned within themes and the structure of the themes was altered accordingly (phase 6). After all six phases were completed, 15 themes over three research questions were produced. The final findings are reported in the following chapter of this thesis, and the final thematic maps can be found in Appendix S.

7.6. Ethical Considerations

I adhered to the British Psychological Society's (BPS) code of human research ethics (2014) and the British Educational Research Association (BERA)'s ethical guidelines for educational research (2018). More information on this can be found in Appendix T. Detailed in this section are some of the ethical challenges that I faced during the designing and implementation of this research and how I overcame them. Ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Committee at the University of Exeter. A copy of the Certificate of Ethical Approval can be found in Appendix U.

Due to the opportunity sampling within this study, there was a possibility of the participants feeling obliged to take part due to my knowing them personally. To mitigate against this, documentation was sent to participants, before they gave their consent to participate, which outlined the voluntary nature of the study; this can be seen in both the 'information sheet' and 'FAQ document' in appendix K. Furthermore, an introductory phone call additionally addressed this issue by reassuring participants about confidentiality procedures and the ethical guidelines I adhere to as a researcher.

To ensure that I showed respect for the autonomy, privacy and dignity of individuals and communities in my research, I designed a study that is designed to value and advocate for the autonomy and voice of the participants. To ensure that I respected "individual, cultural and role differences " (British Psychological Society, 2014, p. 8) within my design and recruitment of participants I had an awareness of those with experiences which may have made the discussion of threat and safety a sensitive one, and ensured fully informed consent was obtained from all participants which states the nature of the study, and I discussed any potential sensitivities with the parent-participants and I ensured they knew they were able to talk to me if any of the activities upset or distressed them.

I minimised harm in my research and ensured that it avoided "potential risks to psychological well-being, mental health, personal values [and] the invasion of privacy and dignity" (British Psychological Society, 2014, p. 11). For example, where necessary it was decided, in collaboration between myself and the parent, that it was not ethically appropriate for an individual to participate; one parent who was approached about participating in the study disclosed to me that her child was experiencing high levels of anxiety and feeling generally

unsafe due to the pandemic. It was decided that it was best not to proceed with this child's participation to ensure her wellbeing was not adversely affected.

I additionally ensured that participants were not pressured to disclose anything they do not feel comfortable discussing, if appropriate I was prepared to signpost to appropriate agencies (e.g. Samaritans), and I worked closely with my supervisors and followed university guidance with regard to any distressing topics or information coming to light during the interviews (e.g. if there was a safeguarding concern).

BPS's code of human research ethics (2014) states that research must have valid consent. To ensure this I obtained valid, informed consent from all participants, and the information provided to participants was aligned with that stated in BPS' Code of Human Research Ethics (2014). Where participants are younger than 16, I obtained full informed consent from those with parental responsibility, both in written and verbal form.

To ensure confidentiality I used the introductory virtual meeting with parents as an opportunity to talk about the importance of confidentiality regarding the interview with their child, and discussed appropriate locations for the interview to be carried out. In addition, all information (visual, audio and text) was kept in a confidential location, and was anonymised in written form.

The 'parent as researcher' methodology presented possible additional challenges to ensure minimised harm to the child participants. For example, I cannot assume that the child feels safe within the dynamic between the child and parent. In a circumstance where the child does not feel safe, the type of questioning within the parent-to-child interview may upset them, and they may not wish to disclose their 'safe space' to their parent. To attempt to mitigate this,

I have sent a debrief letter to the child participants highlighting the options to them if they wish to discuss anything with a trusted adult (I highlight that this does not have to be a parent) about the topics raised within the ‘safe space’ task. This was sent out alongside a letter outlining the findings of the study (in a child-friendly and age-appropriate way for the children involved), in addition to thanking them for the participation.

8. Phase Two: Findings

8.1. *Child and Parent Views on Safe Spaces*

There were many similarities across themes produced from the interviews conducted with both parents and children. Therefore to avoid repetition this section explores the findings in relation to the research questions below:

- What is important to primary-aged children in relation to their ‘safe spaces’?
- What are the views of parents regarding 'safe spaces' for their child outside of school?

8.1.1. *Specific Spaces*

The thematic analysis of data, both from parents and children, resulted in a ‘specific spaces’ theme being produced for each data set, as figure 7 demonstrates. With regard to the specific spaces mentioned by children, a list of the frequency of these can be seen in Table 6.

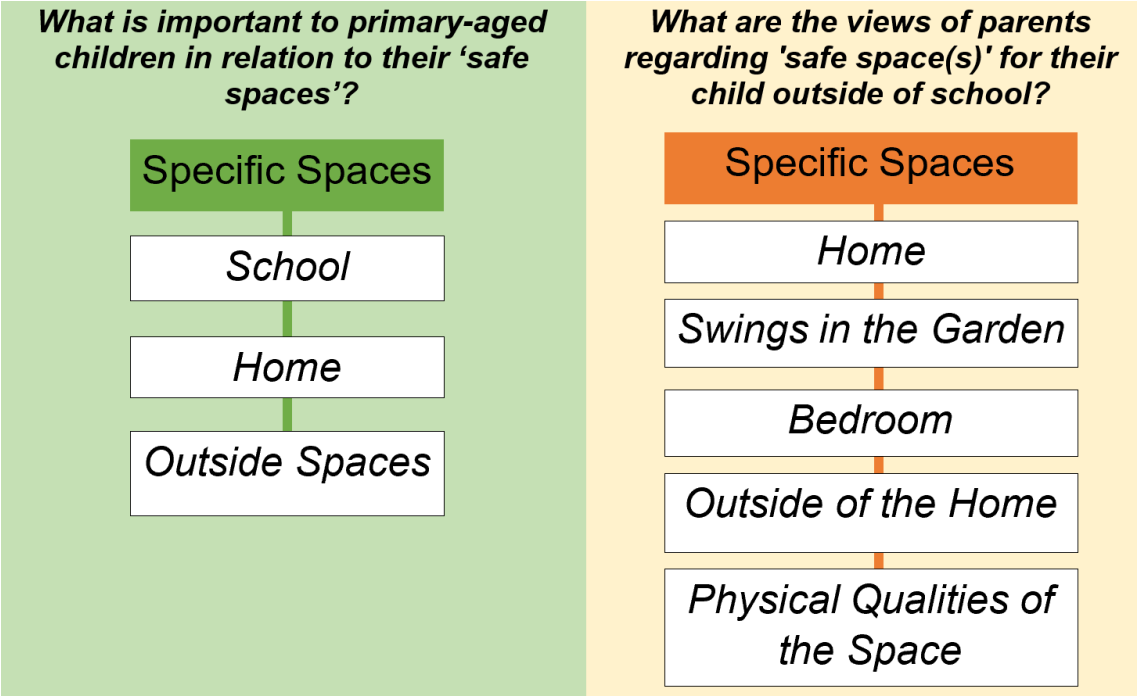

Figure 7 – An extract from the thematic map (appendix S) demonstrating 'specific spaces' themes across the two research questions.

Child Pseudonym	Contents of 'Safe Space' Drawing
Enid	Bottom step of stairs at home, with pet rabbit.
Dave	Playground at school with friends, goalposts and trees.
Rosie	Under her bed in her bedroom at home.
Daisy	Lounge at home, with a fire and pet cat.
Kayden	A house (his home).
Adam	Outside, with a swimming pool and treehouse. Family and pets.
Faye	School with a nativity scene and friends.
Richard	Bedroom with bunk bed.
Hallie	Bedroom, with bed and Christmas tree.
Ronald	House (his home).

Table 6 The Contents of Child Participants' 'Safe Space' Drawings

Physical Qualities of the Space

The physical characteristics of the ‘safe spaces’ described by some parents included quieter locations, Anne told me that when Kayden goes upstairs to his bedroom, she perceives this as Kayden needing the “peaceful, the calmness and the quietness”.

Three children mentioned that they utilise soft furnishings, such as blankets and cushions in their ‘safe space’, with Daisy describing the blanket as “like a great big cuddle”. Feelings of cosiness and comfort were described by parent participants also, with blankets also being a common component of the spaces discussed.

Having privacy was a feature which occurred amongst many descriptions from parents; their child’s ‘safe spaces’ being separate from siblings, especially after disagreements, was expressed by most parents who had more than one child in the house. Janice noted potential for sibling disagreements creating a necessity for a ‘safe space’:

> Janice: she might then seek a physical ‘safe space’, usually related to [Enid’s brother] teasing, or something happening between the two of them.

School

Within the child interviews, Faye describes that she “feel[s] safe in school” as she draws a nativity scene from her classroom, surrounded by her school friends. Similarly, Adam draws his school playground, with his school friends in close proximity.

Home

Seven of the children’s drawings were set inside the home. As seen in Table 6, two consisted of the whole house and the home was also often discussed by

children as safe. Daisy explains that she chose the lounge as her ‘safe space’; “because it's in my house. And, like, I know it”. Indicating that the familiarity of the space as a feature which makes it safe for Daisy. Kayden further adds that getting “to spend time with family” makes his home his safe space.

In the parent interview, I asked participants whether they were surprised by the ‘safe space’ drawn by their child, and if so, what they anticipated their child’s ‘safe space’ to be. Most parents told me places within the family home or garden, and most parents described the affinity they felt their children had with their home. Millie captured Dave’s special relationship to his home by telling me that if Dave “could be anywhere, he would choose to be at home”.

Being at home more, and spending time with family, was described as a positive outcome of the pandemic, and period of school closure, for some families. Sophie describes:

> Sophie: [Rosie] often now talks about the first lockdown. And if we could go back to it […] I think she felt safe and was just, kind of, switched off from everything, and was just in this lovely little bubble of, kind of, enjoying time at home.

Bedroom

The most common ‘safe space’ drawn within the drawing activity was of a child’s bedroom, Hallie described the colour of her wallpaper in her bedroom with pride within the interview (and this is demonstrated in her drawing in figure 8); portraying that being able to personalise her room was important to her.

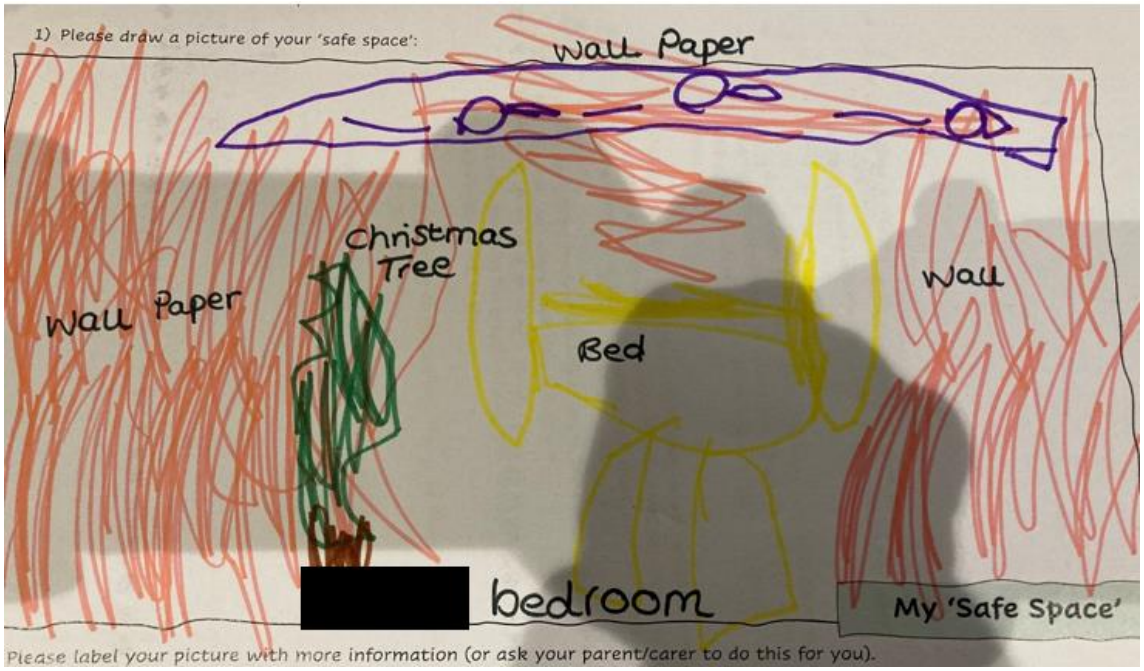

Figure 8 Hallie's 'Safe Space' Drawing

This was described within the parent interviews also; Millie told me that her son Dave “loves his room because he and his brother have chosen their paint colour on the walls”, and Sophie noted how the furniture in her daughter (Rosie)’s room helps Rosie to feel “in control”. Sophie also told me that as a family they are “respectful of those spaces” and that it will “always be [Rosie’s] space”, and this contributed to Rosie feeling safe there.

The importance of ensuring that this space was available, and maintained, as a ‘safe space’ was additionally expressed by Dennis:

> Dennis: Your room should be a space where you feel safe and happy, shouldn't be used as a punishment […] So if our children ever do anything, we never send them to their room as punishment, their room is always a place that we encourage them to feel happy and safe in.

Millie told me a bit about why she was surprised that her son, Dave, didn’t draw his bedroom as his ‘safe space’ during the activity. I learnt that Dave “loves

playing up there with his brother. He loves being up there if we're playing with him as well. I know, he finds his bedroom quite a relaxing and nice place to be."

Outside Spaces

Being amongst nature also occurred within the children's drawings, with the mention of trees and outside spaces. Adam told his mum about being outside in his garden: "I feel safe here because there's wildlife and it's like a very safe place".

Some parents described to me how the garden had been used at times during the summer months as a 'safe space' for their children to go to.

> Dennis: So, over lockdown there was this joke with the swing chair in the garden and to kind of have a 'therapy session' with Daddy, because [Daisy] has, almost, so many thoughts, they're just bubbling over. And she'd be like 'well, can I come and talk to you?'
>
> Researcher: so why do you think she chose the swing to share those thoughts with you?
>
> Dennis: Partly because it was out of the house […] and it was all away from everywhere else. It's away from the system - so it felt quite containing and safe, I think.

The importance of a space to express feelings and offload is captured here, which relates to other themes and notions depicted within this analysis, and the SLR, as does the concept of "containment" also depicted by Dennis.

Enid additionally mentioned the swing as an alternative 'safe space' within her interview with her mother. Janice told me that this space was often used as an escape: "If something had gone wrong with home schooling, she would suddenly be outside on the swing."

Outside of the Home

Some parents described spaces which were outside of both the home and school environment as ‘safe spaces’ for their child. Sophie and Millie both mentioned their child’s grandparents’ homes as possible ‘safe spaces’. Sophie identified the grandparent’s utility room specifically within this space as being used to help Rosie calm down and regulate when she is feeling emotionally overwhelmed. Jane told me that she was Faye’s ‘safe space’ describing how Faye “tends to just find me, wherever I am”. Continuing this conversation, Jane discusses how the car can be a ‘safe space’ for Faye:

> Researcher: What do you think it is about that that space in the car that allows her open up?
>
> Jane: I do think having ‘one to one’ time is part of what makes it safe for her […] I am quite glad she uses it, if she didn't, then she wouldn't talk things through. I quite like that [Faye] gets in and she speaks about something.

Like Dennis, Jane has depicted a space where a child can comfortably “talk things through”.

Despite these environments being separate from the home and school contexts, it is apparent that these spaces are very familiar to the participating children and therefore could arguably be conceptualised as an extension of their home environment.

8.1.2. *Relationships*

Both parents and children spoke about others in relation to their ‘safe space’. This was represented within the themes shown in figure 9 below.

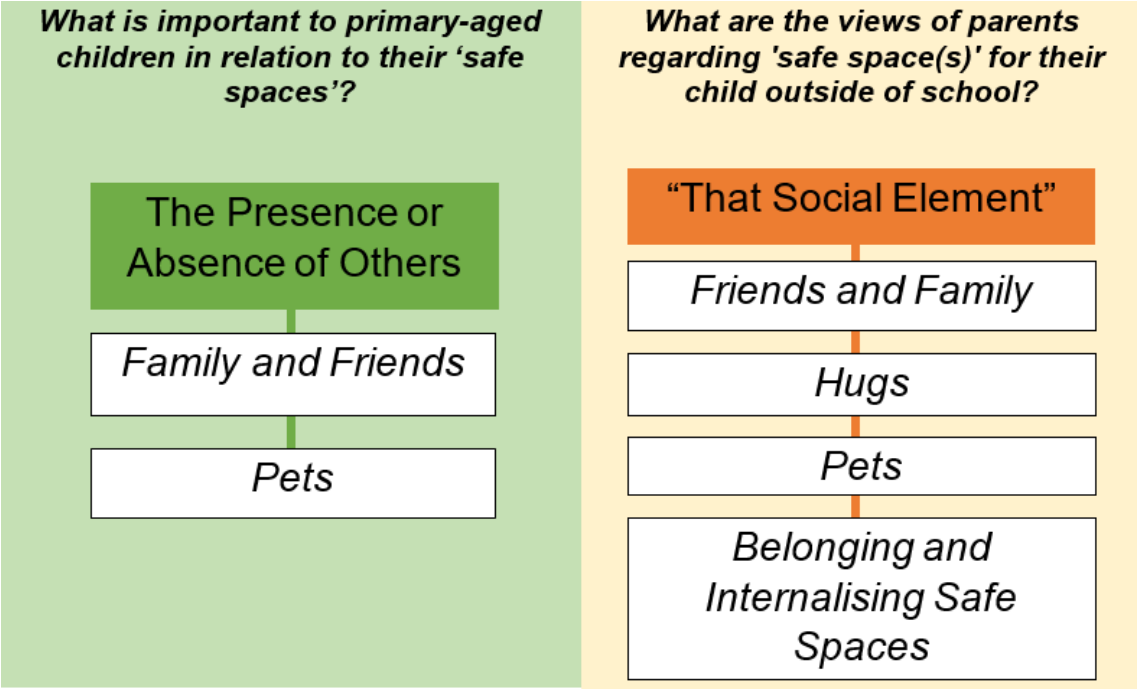

Figure 9 – An extract from the thematic map (appendix S) demonstrating similarities between themes across the two research questions.

There appeared to be some polarisation of views with regard to whether children's 'safe spaces' were occupied by other humans, with some children wanting others' company, whereas some perceiving it as a solitary space. Often when children spoke about other people visiting their 'safe space', it was indicated that this would be on their own terms, and not necessarily *all* of the time. This appeared to be especially important with regards to reference to family members. For example, Ronald told his parent that he is by himself "in my room when I don't feel like sharing".

Regarding parents being able to enter the space, Enid noted that it would depend on why the space was being used, as to whether she would permit a parent to enter or not:

> Enid (child): Erm… well… now I've thought about it more, maybe if it was [Enid's brother] being mean to me, I would maybe go there with you, or you may come.
>
> Parent: Sometimes you do ask me to come and sit on the step with you, don't you?

Enid: Yes [to] have a hug…

Parent: …and how does that help?

Enid: Ermm… because I'm with you?

Parent: …and does that make you feel safe?

Enid: Yes, but maybe if you've been cross it doesn't.

This is illustrative of Enid controlling the space depending on what (or who) may have upset her at the time, and what she is seeking to be 'safe from'.

Enid also indicates that a hug from her parent would be comforting within the space in some instances. Tactile comfort from others, such as hugs and cuddles were often mentioned by a number of parents. Janice provides her view on how she is invited into Enid's identified 'safe space' (on the stairs):

> Janice: She'll say, to me, I need a hug, come sit on the steps, it's not that she needs it in an upset way, it's just that she wants to hug. And she'll quite often ask me to come and sit on that step, and then she'll sit on my lap and give me a hug.

Hugging not necessarily being for comforting after an upset, but a position in which to relax, is apparent in Hayley's description as well:

> Hayley: he likes me to watch the film next to him if he can cuddle me while he's watching a film. I think that's a form of security using his blanket and cuddling.

Describing a hug as a "form of security" captures the importance of this interaction and activity when discussing feelings of safety. While discussing the impact of the pandemic, Dennis noted how hard Daisy had found not being able to receive as much tactile comfort as usual:

> Dennis: She is a very sociable, tactile person, she will often be hugging a friend among other things. And because that has obviously not been allowed, discouraged, etc. She's found that hard.

Dennis portrays the importance of Daisy's friends to her here. Friends were included in some of the 'safe spaces' drawn by children, with Dave saying about his friends that "I prefer it when they're nearby because they're my best friends". Faye's drawing is displayed in Figure 10, which shows her with her friends at school.

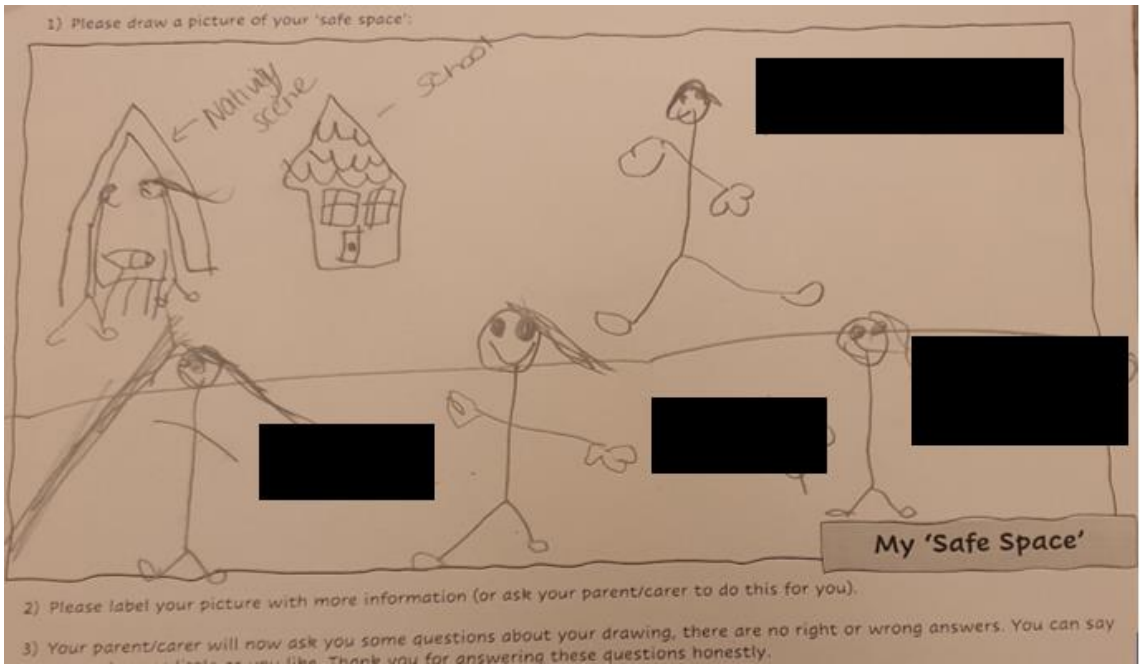

Figure 10 Faye's 'Safe Space' Drawing

In the parent interviews, Sarah described Richard making plans with friends (e.g. going for a bike ride). She told me that the shared "excitement" added to "the connection" Richard felt to these other children, and that this contributed to the activity being referred to as a 'safe space' for Richard within the interview. Furthermore, disagreements with friends were described as contributing to Adam feeling unsafe: "when he doesn't feel safe is when he hasn't had a good friendship day with his friends" (Hayley).

Also in the parent interviews, Dennis explained to me that he felt that his daughter, Daisy, chose the lounge in her family home as her 'safe space' "for that social element". This was expressed by other parent participants also. For

example, Sarah told me that “strong family connections” made the local community within the village a ‘safe space’ for Richard. Similarly, Sophie noted that by having family living nearby, and a strong connection to her family home, helped Rosie to develop a sense of belonging and this ensured that she felt safe in “most places”.

Hayley noted that she felt if Adam had been asked to draw his ‘safe space’ prior to the pandemic, it would have included more of his family, including his grandparents. It was depicted by many parents that they felt the pandemic had restricted interactions with grandparents, and this was something their children missed. Millie describes the emotional reaction that Dave had to learning that he had to socially distance from his grandmother:

> Millie: There was a time where my mum came into our bubble, and so after 12 weeks of not seeing her, they were allowed to go in her house, she was allowed to come in our house, and they were allowed to hug her and be completely normal around her, which they loved. And then somebody at school, tested positive […] I said, just for a few weeks, we will need to go back to social distancing with grandma. And [Dave] literally burst into tears straight away.

Millie told me this story to highlight how much Dave was affected by firstly, not being able to see his grandmother for a long period of time (12 weeks), and then how happy he was for the relationship to return to “normal”. Unfortunately, Dave was upset by the news that this ‘normality’ had to be paused, and Millie described how his “body language” illustrated that Dave “had to flip back to thinking, ‘okay, we need to keep humans away from Grandma”, and described the mental and emotional strain she felt that this had upon Dave.

Pets

Pets were mentioned by four children as being present in their ‘safe space’, Figure 11 shows Enid’s drawing of her ‘safe space’ with her pet rabbit. The exchange between Daisy and Dennis below illustrates the calming impact of the pet being in the space with Daisy:

> Dennis (Parent): Why does the cat make you feel calm?
>
> Daisy (child): because she is nice and calm too (…) she also makes me laugh as well, sometimes because she like meows and rolls over and stuff.

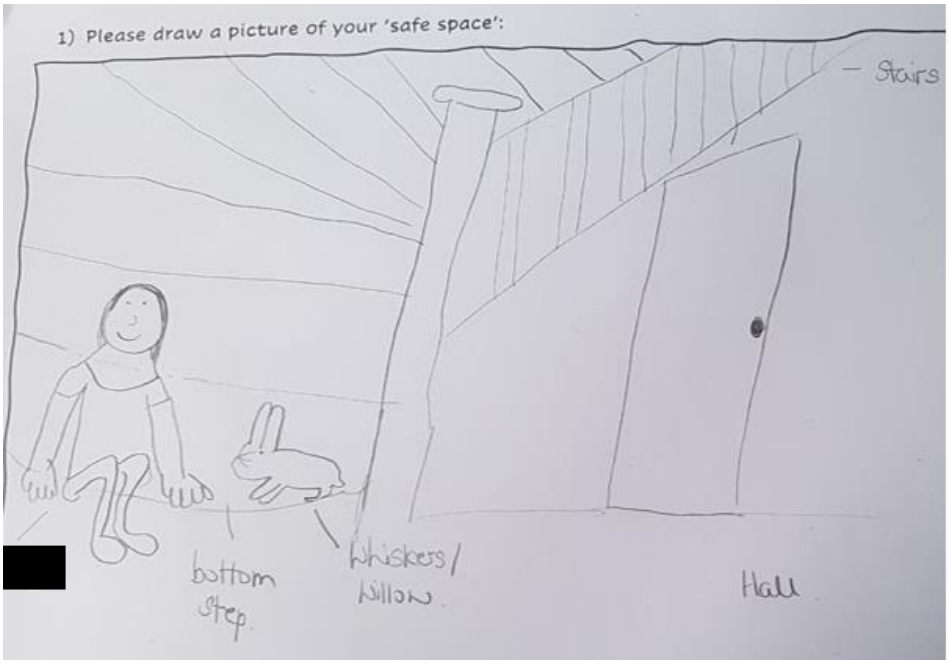

Figure 11 Enid's 'Safe Space' Drawing

When interviewing parents, I gained insight into the reasons behind the connection between the children, their pets and feelings of safety. Dennis spoke about the role of Daisy’s pet cat in her ‘safe space’:

> Dennis: with the cat, [Daisy’s] very confident. So, I think she does like, and has an affinity with, animals. They seem to understand and trust her because they genuinely engage with her […] and she likes that sort of physical contact stroking the cat or sitting with her on her lap and things like that.

Dennis later refers to this stroking as “sensory feedback”, and it is apparent that the sensory, tactile comforting nature of this interaction providing feelings of

safety and happiness. This can be compared to the sensation of a hug or cuddle as previously explored.

Dennis highlighted that the selective attention that their family pet gives to Daisy makes her feel special. Also unique, and explored by Janice, was the use of space within Enid's 'safe space', as Janice identified that there are not many places within the family home where their pet rabbits were allowed, describing it as "a powerful and exciting thing" for Enid.

Belonging and Internalising Safe Spaces

At the end of the parent interviews, I asked the parent participants if they imagined anything changing over time regarding their child's 'safe spaces', this could be within the short term (next few weeks and months) but also longer term, as the children get older. Sophie discussed with me Rosie's strong sense of belonging, and how she hopes that will create an "internalised safe space" as she grows:

> Sophie: I guess my long-term hope is that the 'safe space' is created by her internalising things that make her safe. So her sense of belonging, her sense of self-esteem, her confidence, the strategies she uses when she's nervous or scared, I think hopefully long term, my feeling would be that she'd be able to create a 'safe space' anywhere, whether that be through her relationships with others, or kind of, jobs that she does, or her own home environment, or strategies that she uses when she's nervous or scared as well.

8.1.3. *Activities*

Activities conducted within the child's 'safe space' was discussed by both children and parents, as illustrated within the themes in figure 12.

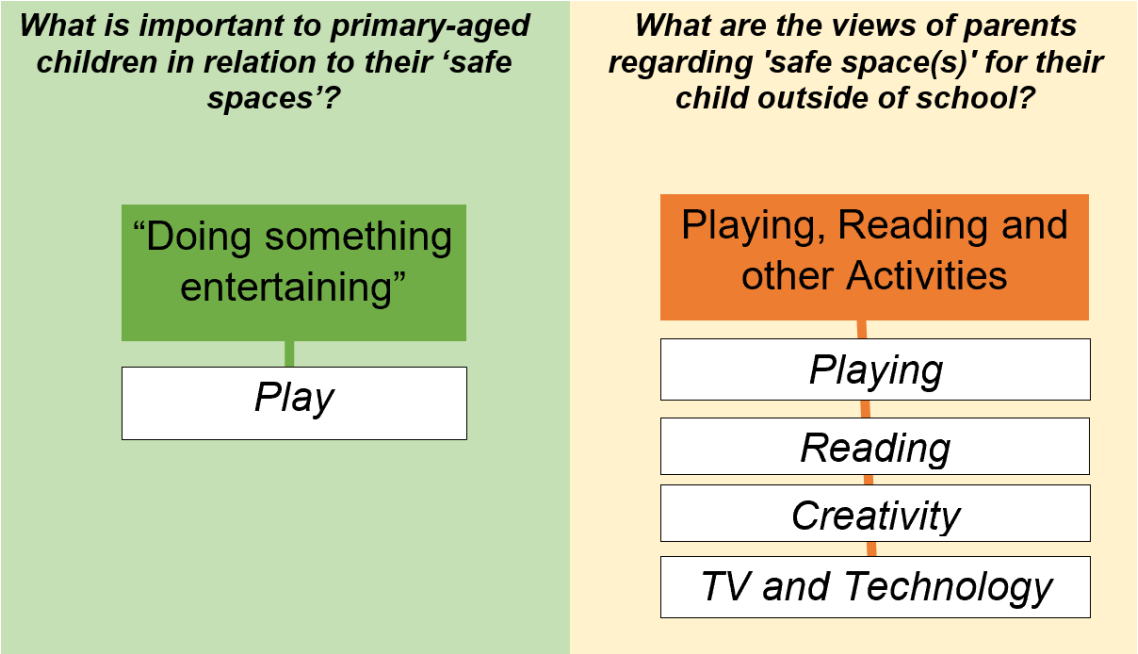

Figure 12 – An extract from the thematic map (appendix S) demonstrating similarities between themes relating to activities across the two research questions.

The theme from the child interviews (see figure 12) is named from the following quote from Kayden:

> Anne (parent): Why do you feel safe there?
>
> Kayden (child): "Because Well, I get to […] chill and relax and do something entertaining".

This captures the view that being entertained is an important part of a 'safe space' for Kayden. This is additionally mirrored in other children's safe spaces; technology such as televisions, ipads and computers were mentioned by the child participants. Technology was also frequently mentioned by parents, with Sarah describing the connectivity it gives Richard when he is in his 'safe space': "he'll go to his bedroom, lay on his bed, and play with his friends on his phone".

Creative activities, such as drawing and listening to music were also amongst those activities stated by children. This was explored in more detail within the parent interviews; Anne describes Kayden's 'safe space' as somewhere that he can 'focus', and this is mirrored within Dennis and Sophie's interviews with

regards to focusing on creative activities. Sophie highlights why a private space is good for Rosie when she is being creative, as it allows her to be in a space free of other people's influence or "judgement", and she can share her creative projects with others on her terms. Conversely, this contrasts to Dennis' descriptions of the spaces which Daisy is creative within; noting that "she is creative anywhere […] there isn't a specific area where she is more or less creative."

Physical activities were components of two of the ten 'safe spaces' drawn by children; Dave drew a football pitch in the school playground, and Adam drew a swimming pool within his 'safe space'. It is interesting to note that both Dave and Adam (children) explained that their family or friends would be engaging in these activities with them, highlighting the importance of the social element of these activities.

Reading was mentioned by three parents as a 'safe' activity. This was often described alongside the quieter aspects of a space; Anne highlighted that Kayden could seek out a 'safe space' when reading to ensure that nobody "disturbs him or distracts him". Similarly, Millie described reading as an activity that Dave does privately to unwind before bed.

Playing

Play was commonly mentioned by children, with only two out of eight children not referring to either playing or toys within their safe space, it was similarly mentioned frequently within parent interviews.

Within the child interviews, LEGO was described by several children as being their play activity of choice within their 'safe space'. Rosie said she uses her 'safe space' when she feels "sad", she added that she "can go up there and I

have my LEGO to play with. It makes me happy". Hayley, a parent, noted how playing with LEGO can help Kayden; telling me that if he is "feeling upset or frustrated he might go to his bedroom and play LEGO".

Playing with others was additionally captured within parent interviews as 'safe' activities, including siblings (Millie about Adam and his brother) and friends (Anne and Sarah about their sons); Anne expressed that "I think one of [Kayden's] 'safe spaces' is probably playing football".

Anne continued by expressing that it had been difficult for Kayden to miss out on playing football with his friends due to restrictions in place because of the pandemic and that interactions with peers have been less frequent due to this. Millie similarly noted that Dave "is always telling me that he can't wait to go to friends' houses for play dates", highlighting the impact of the pandemic on opportunities for play.

8.1.4. *Relaxing and Regulating*

There were similarities in the description of being relaxed and emotionally-regulating in 'safe spaces' across both parent and child interviews. This was represented in a 'relax and regulate' theme in the analysis from the child interviews, and within a subtheme from the parent interviews. This is illustrated in figure 13

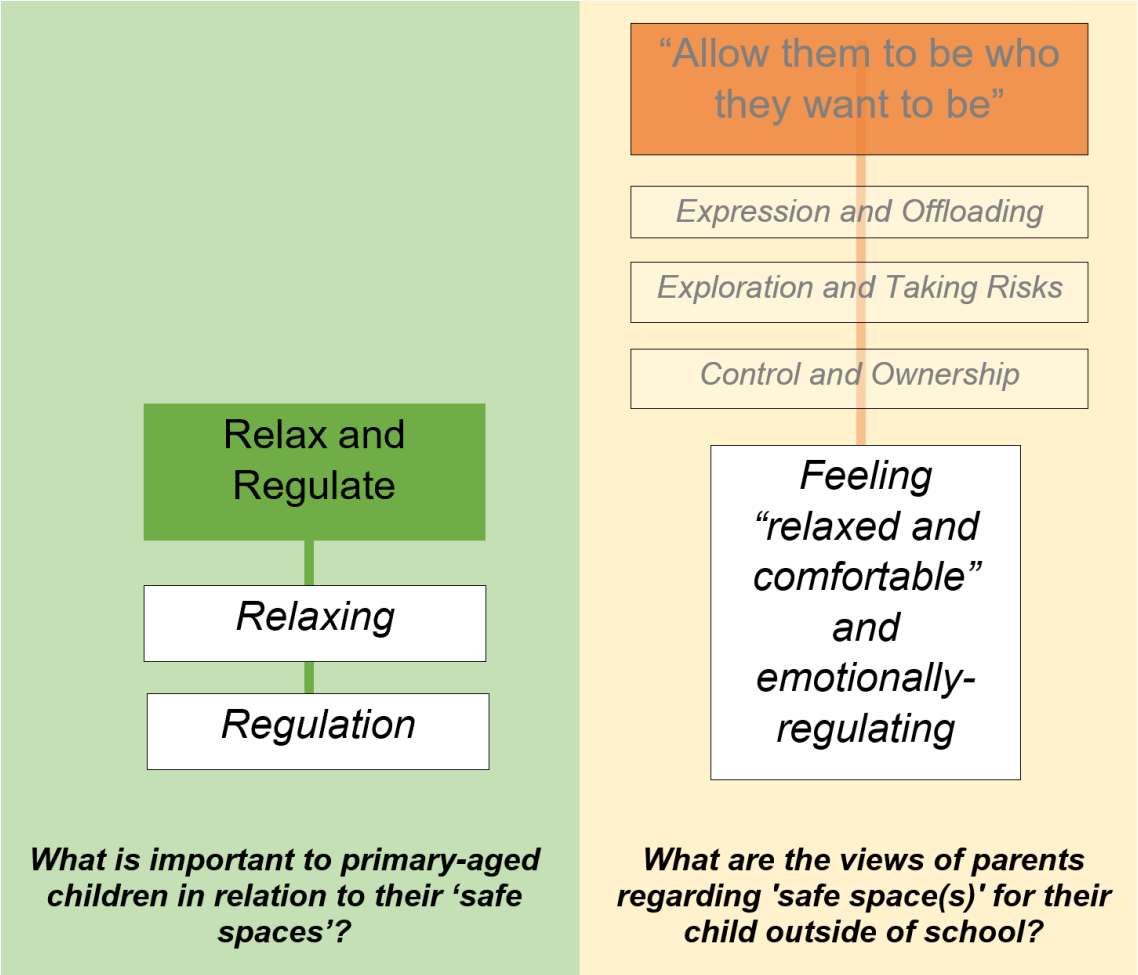

Figure 13 – An extract from the thematic map (appendix S) demonstrating similarities between a theme and a subtheme across the two research questions.

Capturing the view that a 'safe space' is somewhere to go to unwind and relax; Daisy noted that she is "nice and calm" in her 'safe space' and Rosie further described how her 'safe space' helps her to feel "relaxed" and "happy".

Sophie (parent) discussed the importance of a space for her daughter (Rosie) to relax after times which might be busier, or "overwhelming". She described that within this context, Rosie would seek out a "quieter space [..], as a, kind of, wind down from that initial transition from school". This presents the space as a way for children to regulate their emotions and become calmer. Sophie mentioning the transition after school also highlights how settling from one environment to another may be important for Rosie to have those regulatory opportunities. Indicating a regulatory use of the space. Anne (also a parent) used language

such as “readjust” and “reset” to describe her son’s use of a quiet and calming ‘safe space’.

Children noted how their mood may change by entering their ‘safe space’ when discussing their space; Richard related being “by himself” to helping him to “calm down”, and Enid noted that she may use the space when feeling “a bit sad or cross”. Daisy adds to this further, by describing how she would notice she felt calmer as a consequence of going into her ‘safe space’ (the lounge):

> Dennis (parent): And if you're not calm and you go to the lounge, what happens? What does it do?
>
> Daisy (Child): Calms me down […] I stop crying and stuff.

These descriptions indicate that these ‘safe spaces’ have a positive emotional significance to these children, and that the affective impact may be a defining feature of this space for them.

Within parent interviews, using a ‘safe space’ when feeling emotionally overwhelmed was often described by the children and parent participants. This enables children to become “calm” (Sarah about Richard). Hayley told me that she sees this process because her son, Kayden “will come down and he will say to me “I feel okay now”".

Some parents described how their child’s ‘safe space’ would be different depending on their emotional state, and which context would help them to become the most relaxed and settled. Janice spoke about Enid’s multiple ‘safe spaces’ in relation to this:

> Janice: If there was something wrong, but she just needed a little bit of comfort she would go [to the stairs]. But I think if she was really, really upset […] she'd just go off

somewhere. So, I guess there's probably a moderation of upset-ness. which determines which space she chooses?

8.1.5. *Additional themes*

The similarities across themes captured within the analysis from both parent and child interviews that has been explored above. This section will explore themes which are unique within the perceptions of either the children or their parents.

Theme from Child Interviews: "I have drawn my favourite stuff".

Children who did not mention playing as an activity explicitly were still likely to mention their toys, or similar special objects as in their 'safe space' with them. This theme captures this depicted importance, named from a quote from Adam:

> Adam (child): I have drawn my favourite stuff in my space because I think these are my favourite things I have.

Adam's drawing was very imaginative, and contained some imaginary special objects, as well as some real ones, such as his TV. The importance of toys came across however:

> Adam: I would like to fit a toy shop in my treehouse, a toy shop or maybe just lots of toys.

I learnt that in the absence of other people, special dolls can help Daisy to regulate:

> Dennis (parent): Okay. So, is anybody in your safe space?
> Daisy (child): no […] apart from my favourite doll, Lyla
> Dennis (parent): Lyla. Why is Lyla your favourite doll?
> Daisy (child): Because I've had her for a long time and she's just really special to me.
> Dennis (parent): So, how does Lyla make you feel?
> Daisy (child): Happy

Richard additionally described that “Teddies” in his ‘safe space’ provided someone “to talk to” (see Figure 14).

Discussing why these objects have particular importance to her daughter; Sophie referred to the special objects as “transient safe spaces” which have helped Rosie to stay content, and feel safe, in less familiar settings. Sophie also observed the relationship that these objects have to sleep, illustrating this as a comforting notion. Millie, Dave’s mother, discussed with me Dave’s important objects which appear to have a similar role to Rosie’s:

> Millie: [Dave] always has him in bed, at nighttime. And if we go and sleep anywhere else, we take him with us. And when he started preschool, he had [the toy] in his bag. So, he's definitely got a little comfort object, which is his teddy, especially if he's really tired.

The reference to sleep and night-time is also mirrored within the data set, as several children referenced their bed as being in their ‘safe space’. Illustrating this, Hallie expressed that “when I am sad, I get to warm up in my lovely cosy bed.”

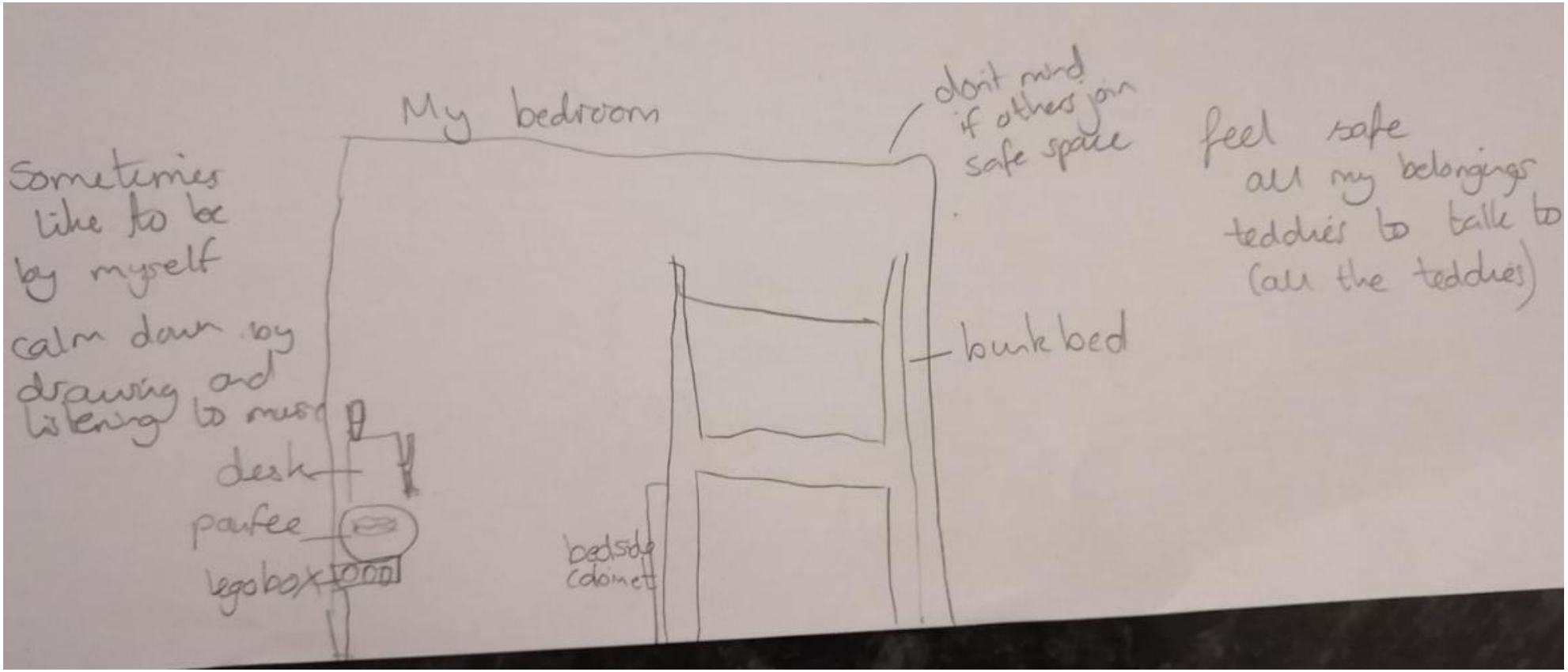

Figure 14 Richard's 'Safe Space' Drawing

Theme from Child Interviews: Tangible Safety

When asked about safety, children did sometimes refer to physical dangers, and the things that prevent physically dangerous things occurring within their 'safe space'; Adam describes "loads of gates and a big wall" in the school playground. In addition, Rosie notes how in her 'safe space': "can be somewhere where I feel safe, and nothing will get me".

Adam mentioned physical safety in relation to the coronavirus pandemic and drew something which he referred to as 'good corona' in his drawing (see Figure 15), describing that "good corona stops you from getting Corona […] it also stops you from getting too many bad things". Hayley, Adam's mother, described to me that she felt that this was Adam's "way of interpreting a vaccination" in response to the pandemic, adding that Adam "wants to make people better".

Adam also stated how the tree in his drawing was important, as he would be safe to climb it within this hypothetical 'safe space'. He describes that this is in contrast to "if you climbed them in Corona because you could have some of these germs". This captures the impact of the pandemic on Adam's sense of safety. Especially so in relation to his interaction with the environment, and his sense of restriction at being unable to do activities such as climbing a tree.

Theme from Parent Interviews: "Allow them to be who they want to be"

One component of this theme has already been explored in relation to relaxation and regulation (see figure 13). This section explores other elements of this theme, portraying the children as free to express themselves, offload, explore and take risks in a containing space.

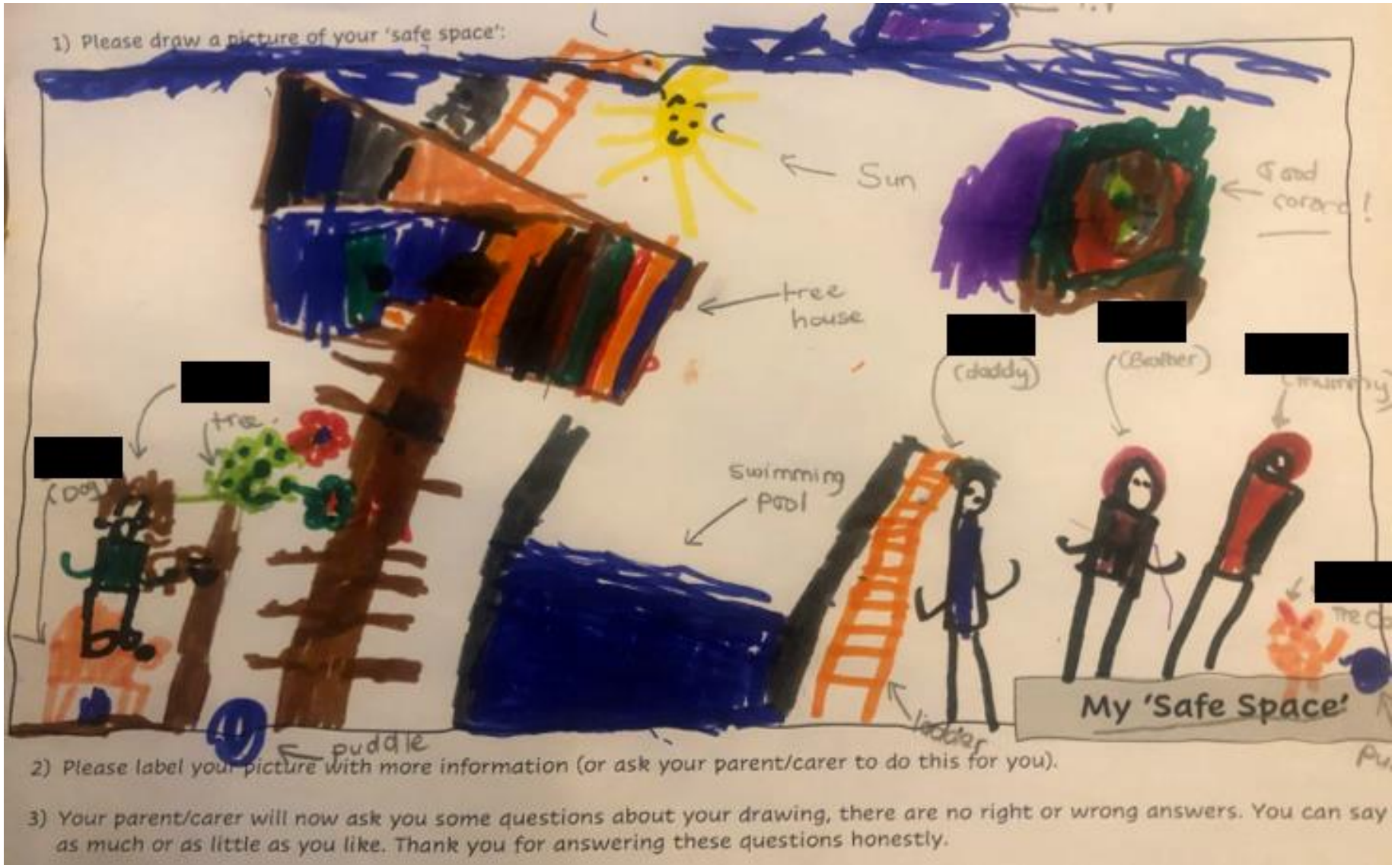

Figure 15 Adam's 'Safe Space' Drawing

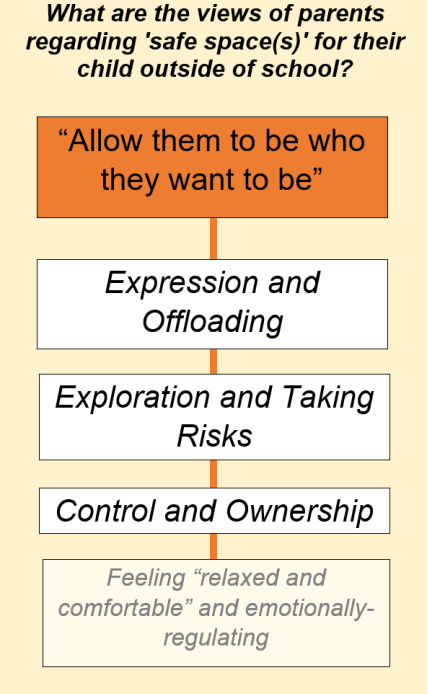

Figure 16 – An extract from the thematic map (appendix S) demonstrating "allow them to be who they want to be" theme.

Expression and Offloading

Spaces to be able to offload thoughts and feelings was highlighted by parents as a component of a 'safe space'. Anne, portrays the importance of Kayden expressing himself at home (Kayden's drawn safe space):

> Researcher: What is it about the house that makes him feel safe?
>
> Anne: I think the main thing is he's allowed; I think it's an environment where he is allowed to express himself. You know, as parents, we have boundaries and restrictions, but at the same time, we allow them to be who they want to be […] And I've noticed when he is in a different environment, like school, he always tries to, I don't know if I should use the word, professional. So, he's aware how he needs to act, for example, or what he needs to say and how he needs to act, whereas it is the home is like he says whatever is on his mind.

Dennis additionally notes that he feels it is important to create a space within the family to express views and feelings and "take social risks and say things in a safe environment." Furthermore, due to the worries elicited from the pandemic, Dennis

spoke about how important it was to create a ‘safe space’ for Daisy to discuss her worries “during the lockdown period [as Daisy] was ruminating and then mulling over things… She will often […] come and talk to me or ask me questions and then I'll try explain to it”.

A connection between the space being private, and the ability to authentically express oneself emotionally was also noted:

> Sarah: I think because [Richard] could go there. And he could have whatever emotion he wanted to have without anybody seeing him.

Being able to offload worries within ‘safe spaces’ was described by many parents. Jane described the bedroom as a ‘safe space’ for Faye and added that it is a place where, as a parent, Jane can find out “a little bit more information about how [Faye’s] feeling and stuff”.

Exploration and Taking Risks

Creating a ‘safe space’ to experiment, make mistakes and take risks was captured by Sophie during the interview. She discussed Rosie’s creativity and writing “plays and stories” within her bedroom (her identified ‘safe space’) privately and without an audience. Sophie explained that Rosie is “not necessarily thinking about it being perfect […] And she also understands that you've learned, and you get better by practice, and she's not afraid necessarily of making mistakes”.

Dennis highlighted the importance of taking risks with regards to personal development and learning. He spoke to me about creating a balance between an emotionally safe environment and one which allows for risk-taking:

> Dennis: But if they don't take risks, then they won't develop, and expand, and learn. I think part of our job as parents is to enable them and encourage them to take risks. And part of that is their expression of their emotions and feelings […] I suppose if a safer place is artificially, overly safe, and that exploration is not encouraged, then I think it can have a detrimental effect […] So I suppose it's that balance of 'yes, it must be emotionally safe', but also, you need to encourage them to explore and do things. So, they can develop those skills that they will need later in life.

Sarah and Millie both shared with me the difficulties of creating this "balance" and ensuring that their sons are provided with enough independence and opportunities for exploration, but still feel protected. Sarah describes feeling "a bit helpless when you have to leave them to do it and hopefully find the right path".

Control and Ownership

Children feeling in-control of their 'safe space,' and having ownership over it, were raised as reasons children had a strong affinity to the space:

> Millie: I guess it comes down to him, getting a free choice of what he wants to do when it comes to an activity. So, I guess [Dave] wants to control what he's playing with. Or if he said to me that 'I'm gonna go and do my LEGO for a while, but I just want to do it by myself'. I guess it's because he wants to choose, you know, something about his day.

Having autonomy over the space and the activities, and things within it, was additionally captured by Hayley, who described Adam as having "more control over the rules of his environment".

With regard to Faye's personal space and belongings, Jane told me that "she feels she's got control. It's up to her if people are allowed in there. And it's up to her if she shares the things in there. Because we always say, you know, those are *your* things", therefore highlighting the importance of ownership within the space also.

8.2. *Exploring the Views of Parents Regarding their Child's Potential 'Safe Spaces' at School.*

This section explores the research question:

- What are the views of parents regarding their child's potential 'safe spaces' at school?

It is important to note here the context of the parent interviews in relation to the disruption caused to the education of their children. The interviews were conducted in November and December 2020, when children were attending school, but had missed a considerable amount of time in school that year due to the pandemic. The second national closure of schools was not announced until after my interviews were completed.

8.2.1. Theme One: "An Environment Where They are Given Set Tasks, Structure and Routine" - Physical Aspects of the School Environment

This theme captures the more tangible aspects of 'safe spaces', such as features of the environment, specific locations and activities.

Aspects of School

The majority of the parent participants described their child as primarily happy at school, Janice and Sophie described to me how they felt the whole school environment was a type of 'safe space' for their children due to feeling so happy there.

Janice noted that Enid "missed the routine of school" when not attending due to the lockdown (this is explored in more detail in section 8.2.3). The notion that routine

was a positive aspect of school was vocalised by many parents interviewed, Millie discussed the positive aspects of routine, in addition to structure and transparency for Dave:

> Millie: He's obviously in an environment where they are given set tasks, and structure and routine, [and] I think routine and structure is really important when they are this age […] if [Dave] knows what's coming and what's to be expected of him, I think that helps them feel safe, you know, in an emotional sense.

Locations

I asked the parent participants whether they knew of any ‘safe spaces’ for their child within the school environment, I prompted them to think of both tangible (e.g. the library) and more transient spaces (e.g. relationships and activities). Some of the locations provided by parents illustrated a quieter retreat, away from the busy environment of the classroom or school. For example, Sophie told me that for her daughter Rosie she feels that “it's about that kind of taking herself away either to someone that feels safe or to a space that feels maybe safer or just quieter”.

I also asked each of the parent interviewees if there was anything in the school environment that they would change for their child if they could. Anne was inspired by a previous discussion within the interview, about how she had tried to replicate positive school environments at home (such as a football pitch in the garden) for Kayden during the period of school closure, and responded as follows:

> Anne: …Like we've just mentioned about Kayden liking a couch at home. So, if they had a library, for example, with little couches or little bean bags, where they offer that ‘safe space’, they replicated those kind of like home environments, in the school environment. Or you know, if they can bring a cuddly toy in school or bring a little blanket one day […] It's just ideas about replicating this same home environment.

This further relates to the importance of ‘home’ to these children, as noted within the previous section.

Hayley described a dedicated ‘safe space’ for her son at school:

> Hayley: His teacher says to me that sometimes [Adam] is quite sensitive and sometimes he will try to remove himself from the activity, and just says ‘I need time to think’, he'll go and take a minute or so in the corner of the classroom […] and come back after a couple of minutes […] I think it's certainly helpful because it gives him time to calm down, because otherwise he will lose his temper and he'll have a tantrum. So, I think he's starting to think ‘I'm going to remove myself from this situation before I get really angry and upset’.

I learnt that a similar scenario takes place for Dave at school. Millie told me that Dave was taking himself away from the group to engage in activities alone; describing Dave as “opting out” of activities with his peers due to them “annoying” him at times, and noting that “he's quite happy playing myself quite a bit […] he's not upset about it”.

The experiences of Adam and Dave, as described by their parents, appear to depict a social environment which can be difficult for children to navigate, and therefore more protected, isolated time is needed to provide them with space to organise their thoughts and enjoy the activities at hand, whether that is in the environment or in the playground.

Despite Dave’s objections to social activities, such as playing football in the playground, his ‘safe space’ drawing was of exactly that, playing football in the playground with his friends. Millie told me that she was surprised that Dave chose this space, but felt that the playground being somewhere Dave “goes in between his learning to let loose [and] let off steam” where he can “be a bit more free […] and do whatever he likes in his free time”. This indicates that Dave being able to choose

where to play, and to have time alone if needed, is appealing to him, and constitutes his ‘safe space’, as illustrated in his drawing.

Further ‘safe spaces’ within school noted in both child and parent interviews included Faye (child) drawing her classroom as her safe space, and other ‘safe spaces’ within school presented by parents included a “staff room” (Dennis about daughter, Daisy) and a “football pitch” (Anne about son, Kayden).

Activities

Anne’s description of football being a positive activity for Kayden has been noted. Conversely however, sports were mentioned by some parents are unsafe activities – where their child might become upset because of instances of “unfairness” (Janice) or not being “that good at it” (Millie).

Creative activities at school were described positively by some parents – with Jane noting how Faye will use drawing to express herself at school. I learnt that Faye “would draw people that she had been thinking about” and “express how she felt” through this medium.

Sarah stated that the more practical aspects of school were more positive for Richard describing that “reading from a book that's not how he learns”. In contrast, Anne listed the library as one of the places Kayden would have as his ‘safe space’ at school.

The variety, and often polar opposites, of these descriptions by parents demonstrates the very individual nature of ‘safe spaces’ for children in schools, and the personal preferences and strengths of the children dictate the spaces that they are drawn to.

8.2.2. Theme 2: "It's Less the Physical Space and More About the People She's With, I Guess" - Safe People

Safe members of Staff

> I don't think they're necessarily spaces at school that [Rosie] would take herself to, if she wasn't happy about something, she'd maybe talk to the teacher. But that would be that kind of, I guess, 'safe space' in terms of a relationship with an adult. (Sophie, regarding her daughter, Rosie).

The quote from Sophie captures this theme acutely, describing a figurative 'safe space' for Rosie within the dynamic of a relationship. The theme is named from a description from Dennis, as he notes the importance of staff members on Daisy's feelings of safety at school:

> Dennis: It's probably more about the people in the arena, good teaching assistants who have been proactively working with her to support her. And she certainly feels safe with [a particular member of staff] - I think she feels safe with her wherever she is in the school. So it's less the physical space and more about the people that she's with, I suppose.

Special relationships or a fondness toward a particular member of staff was also noted by Jane, whose daughter "talked about her teacher of last year as being one of her safe people that she could speak to".

School Friends

The majority of parents spoke to me about their child's friendships in school, and how these impacted on their children. One parent suggested that 'safe spaces' in school were linked to friendships: "I think just being with friends because he does value friendships, he does value friendships a lot" (Anne, about son Kayden); capturing the importance of this aspect of school.

As already noted, Faye and Dave both drew their ‘safe spaces’ at school surrounded by their school friends. Dave’s interview made it clear that the physical proximity of his friends created feelings of safety and security, Millie commented that “just being around friends and being around familiar things, and games, and people, and the more [Dave is] around those things, I guess it kind of enforces the safety kind of feeling”.

Familiarity, and consistency of friendships, was also described; Anne expressed how the reliability of having the “same friends” had helped Kayden to feel particularly safe in their company. This was also illustrated through Jane’s description of Faye’s friendships as “consistent” and “secure”.

This is in addition to feelings of belonging being explored in my interview with Sarah; concerning Richard’s desire to “fit in” at school, she described how her son “just wants to feel he has that belonging he wants to feel he is part of his class and that he is appreciated”.

8.2.3. Theme 3: “It’s taken a while for her to understand why the school system changed” – Safety at School during a Pandemic.

The coronavirus pandemic has changed the way most people think about safety, and ‘safe spaces’ (Jasiński, 2020), both in the physical and figurative interpretations of the term. One of the questions I put to parents was ‘how do you feel the pandemic has affected your child’s sense of safety?’ and this theme captures their answers to this, and other answers relating to the pandemic, in relation to school. I interviewed the parents in amongst the second wave of the pandemic, where the restrictions imposed by the coronavirus were within the lived experienced of all of the participants, and was consuming most aspects of their lives.

None of the parent participants communicated that they felt their child felt physically less safe at school due the coronavirus, and a few noted how impressed and "surprised" (Millie about Dave) they were at their child's resilience to the changes.

Sophie described a similar reaction by Rosie to school during the pandemic, and described how she felt the staff within the school had contributed to Rosie feeling safe within the school environment:

> Sophie: I don't think [the school] is somewhere where staff […] have been nervous or seen as not wanting to go in. [Rosie would] probably say everything's just normal and probably not even on her radar really, which is nice for me as a parent.

Not all parents were as positive about the changes as Sophie however, some parents told me that restrictions on the use of space in their child's school had negatively impacted their child. Dennis described that for Daisy, as she often felt nervous on the transition to school, Dennis had previously accompanied her to the staff room to help with this, describing that:

> Dennis: Just sitting quietly and being able to calm her [would help Daisy], and then I would leave when she was calmer […] then when COVID came, we were obviously not allowed to go into school site passed the school gate. And I think that, in addition to other things, was a factor that she found challenging.

The Pandemic and People

I learnt during the interviews that the requirement to be physically separate, and socially distance from others in school, due to the pandemic, was difficult for some children, especially not being able to mix with children outside of their 'bubble'. Millie described that Dave "didn't like this very much" but was accepting of it nonetheless,

and Hayley described how it was very difficult for Adam to come to terms with due to his extroverted personality.

Some interactions between staff and pupils have also changed at school, with Dennis describing that his daughter found it “difficult when [members of staff] were interacting with her in a very different way”, noting the alteration between the “quiet and laid back […] school ethos” that has changed due to the pandemic. This change included staff members being more authoritative about certain rules relating to containing the virus. About this, Dennis said that it was “very difficult” for Daisy, adding that “it's taken a while for her to understand why the school system changed.”

Additionally difficult for Daisy was the school policy to reduce physical contact, and I learnt from Dennis that this had a negative impact on her, until “ultimately a teaching assistant that she has a relationship with, just said ‘this is ridiculous, I need to sit with her and you know, hold her hand and stuff’. And that was obviously her choice that she was willing to make, it was certainly for Daisy the right choice. Because that's what she needed”.

These descriptions of the changes within the dynamics or relational rules of a space, depicted within this subtheme, is illustrative of the importance of relational dynamics in the formulation of a ‘safe space’. In addition to illustrating the impact of the pandemic on feelings of being unsafe extending beyond a fear of catching the coronavirus.

Impact of the School Closures

Millie described how Dave had become more emotional and attached to her since their time at home during the first lockdown:

> Millie: We have had a lot of time together and then he has gone back to school. He said to me, ‘sometimes when I get to my desk, and I think six hours until I see mummy’.

And Hayley similarly noted emotional changes in Adam due to being unable to “build” his emotional resilience whilst not at school.

Conversely, some children, who felt particularly happy and safe at school according to their parents, missed access to it during lockdown. Janice was one of the parents that described school as a ‘safe space’ for her child, and she shared with me that it was difficult for Enid to adjust to life without school.

Being Restricted at School

Jane told me that children at Faye’s school have “been sort of mainly stuck in the classroom”. The use of the word ‘stuck’ conveying a lack of freedom within the school. Many parents mentioned to me that their child was more restricted with how they can move around spaces within school.

Changes to free time, such as playtime and lunchtime, were raised as particularly displeasing. The timing for eating lunch specifically was mentioned to me by two parents; Hayley commented on how the pandemic had “completely impacted on everything” in terms of Adam’s feelings of safety surrounding routines: “he used to like school dinners but he doesn’t like them anymore as he has to eat them in a rushed time”. On the same topic, I learnt that Enid’s opportunity to socialise had “been taken away from her” because of similar changes, according to Janice.

These social spaces being restricted is relevant and important to note because for some children, their ‘safe spaces’ are these social times with their peers (as Dave

and Faye's drawings illustrated) and therefore the restrictions at school are limiting these opportunities to access such a space.

8.2.4. Theme 4: "He Feels the Happiest and the Safest When He's Playing" - Play, Exploration And Expression.

Play and Exploration

Concerning figurative 'safe spaces' for their children at school, parents of the younger children promoted the importance for their child to play, and expressed concern about the lack of opportunity for this in the school environment. Jane told me how she was "really sad" Faye had missed a significant period of time out of her reception year due to the pandemic, as it "is really the only [school] year where they get to play". I learnt that Faye, now in year one, has a different schooling environment with more academic expectation and less of a play-based curriculum to that in reception. Jane described this to me as "a dramatic change" which she felt the children in Faye's class are "too young" for.

Hayley mirrored this view, as her son Adam was at a similar stage to Faye in his school career, telling me that the expectations between reception and year one was such a "huge difference":

> Hayley: So he's gone from reception where, he only did half of the year at reception [due to the pandemic], where it's all about play, to suddenly being in year one, where they're sitting down and having to do a lot of writing. So, there's been no easing in. And as a child who really, really loves to play, that's suddenly been taken away from him. And that's when he feels the happiest and the safest when he's playing. I know as someone who teaches, we have to follow the curriculum, we've got certain things to cover. But he's five, and suddenly it's all these things about what he can do and what he can't do, he's very aware of his targets.

This powerful quote highlights how the pandemic has taken away the period of "easing in" between reception and year one, and the impact of the lack of opportunities for play (and therefore feelings of safety) on Adam's development. This unease mimics that of Janice regarding Enid's "social time" at school being "rushed" also, as explored above.

Sophie, parent to Rosie, a child further along in her primary-school career than Adam and Faye, also stressed the importance of play. Sophie told me that she makes sure that Rosie has access to provision outside of school as "she's just a kid and needs time to just play and be".

The importance of exploration in a wider sense; problem solving "without an adult there […] to kind of steer them, and help them work through things" and developing some independence from parents - was highlighted by Millie about Dave:

> Millie: They have got to stand on their own two feet […] When they're this age, where they're just starting to have their own world completely separate from home and mum and dad, and everyone else. You kind of just want to be there to help them out. The way they learn how to, you know, manage situations and certain things

This arguably highlights the need for exploration as well as safety within the discussion surrounding 'safe spaces'.

Hayley also captured the importance of this within her interview; Hayley was asked whether she feels if there are any disadvantages to 'safe spaces', her reply draws on her experience as a teacher, capturing the importance of some "anxious" feelings, and exploration, to enable learning:

> Hayley: It's important that we experience all emotions because, being a maths teacher, I know that if I'm teaching children how to solve something, there should be that bit of excitement, a little bit of anxiety, you know, to get them going to get them to want to do

> something. You don't want it to be a dangerous space, but you want to be in a space where you can take, I suppose you can feel slightly anxious or slightly, you know, on edge.

'Space for Expression' at School

When I asked Jane if there was anything she would change for Faye in school, she captured a concern regarding the "space for expression" being limited in the more structured environment of year one:

> Jane: I guess, like some self-awareness, like space to talk about how she's feeling and how she's interpreted things and why. There's less space to validate how she's feeling in some classes […] I just want, I don't know, I guess, more space for expression.

The importance of expression and validation was highlighted by Hayley as important for her son, Adam in relation to his feelings of emotional safety:

> Hayley: I think sometimes he doesn't feel listened to. And I feel that if he doesn't feel listened to this is why he throws the tantrum.

We discussed the use of Adam's 'safe space' in the corner of the classroom in these moments, where Adam can "think about what has happened" and become calmer. This captures the importance of the space, away from the group, to express and be listened to for Adam.

8.2.5. Theme 5: "He's Definitely Not Like a Sheep" – Personalised Provision

Often within my interviews the parent participants advocated for more personal, individualised approaches, or adjustments to be made with their children to increase their child's sense of safety and wellbeing in school. I learnt that parents felt these adjustments would enable a figurative 'safe space' to be created to enable feelings of success and inclusion within the learning environment. For example, Sarah raised concerns regarding a "blanket" approach to provision at Richard's school, and

highlighted that strategies that compare children to each other have a negative impact on Richard's feelings of safety:

> Researcher: Is there anything that you would change about the environment at school for Richard, to make him feel more safe, whether that's physical or emotional?
>
> Sarah: For him to be able to do things in ways that he is more comfortable with, rather than, kind of, being forced to do things, like counting out loud in front of the class or reading out loud in front of the class. I think it's just being a bit more sensitive to what suits him. Because sometimes, it just seems to be a blanket; everybody's doing this, everybody's doing this. Sometimes, it would be better to just have a bit more leeway for this actual child. I just think, it sets some children up to fail before they've even tried. It needs to be less about comparison and competitiveness.

Hayley mirrored this by noting the importance of Adam feeling acknowledged and "listened to" in school, and how his physical 'safe space' in the corner of the classroom helps with this. Millie discussed Dave's independent nature with me, telling me that he is "definitely not like a sheep, like he doesn't ever feel like he has to do something because someone else is doing it. And if anything, he's the opposite", capturing the importance of an individualised approach to Dave's schooling.

Part of the provision noted by parents as benefiting their child's feelings of safety within school was a level of understanding about why the rules and systems which impacted them were implemented in the school environment. Janice described how her daughter Enid saw "contradictions "and illogical decisions being made regarding the new rules surrounding the coronavirus, and this frustrated her. Furthermore, both Millie told me that if Dave "knows the logical reason behind the decision, [Dave]

works at it completely. So as long as he can understand what the reason was for what we were saying to him? Then yes, it was fine".

This highlights that a collaborative, attuned approach between staff and students, which works on the basis of mutual respect and understanding arguably produces the most feelings of safety within the school environment.

Academic pressure

A number of parents mentioned the pressure of academic work, and how this affects their child's wellbeing at school, illustrating that the environment at times can feel emotionally unsafe for some children at school. Although not a description of a 'safe space', it is interesting to capture these views within this subtheme as it arguably demonstrates a necessity for 'safe spaces' (both figuratively and physically) within schools.

Jane notes the causation between her daughter, Faye being successful and her sense of emotional security at school telling me that "how successful she's been makes a difference. So, the reading group and stuff. I don't think she felt particularly successful there, and therefore she doesn't feel secure in herself".

Jane also mentioned that if Faye had been "told off" by her teacher she would become "very upset", adding that "most of the time when she does it's not that she's doing it intentionally. It's just it's hard for five-year olds to pay attention for a long period of time." This captures Jane's view of the difference between the expectation and reality of the academic environment for Faye.

Adam, a similar age to Faye, similarly depicted this

> Hayley: You realise [the pressure is] only going to get worse and worse, the pressure's gonna just pile on, and on, and on. And we go home and now I do activities with him to help

> strengthen his maths and his written work etc. So having that pressure as well. I must be applying pressure to him. And as I said he's only five. But I don't want the teacher to say to me, oh, he's below expected.

This quote illustrates how concerned Hayley is by the expectations of school, and that the “pressure” described does not just impact Adam at school, but extends within the home environment also.

9. Phase Two: Discussion

This discussion explores those aspects of the findings presented which were consistent across both parent and child views of safe 'spaces', and of interest in relation to wider literature on the topic.

9.1. *Relational Aspects of a 'Safe Space'*

Humans are social beings who seek the comfort and attachment of others (Clark et al., 2020; Mitchell, 2021; von Mohr et al., 2017), especially those with whom we have the strongest bond and greatest familiarity (R. Johnston & Edmonds, 2009). Familiar objects, spaces and people are associated with feelings of wellbeing, comfort and safety (Hunter, 2008; Scannell & Gifford, 2017; Wiles et al., 2009). The importance of relational aspects of space was also noted by the synthesis of the 14 papers in phase one (Butler et al., 2017; Gross & Rutland, 2016; Harris & Kiyama, 2015; Lockley-Scott, 2019; Mayberry et al., 2013; Ross, 2019). It is not surprising therefore that in the present study relational aspects of the 'safe space' reoccurred as a theme under all three research questions.

9.1.1. *Touch*

A component of these relationships captured within the interviews was tactility; hugging and cuddling were mentioned by children and parents, especially in relation to a child being emotionally overwhelmed and needing comfort. Touch is connected to social and affective bonds (Brauer et al., 2016; McGlone et al., 2014; Suvilehto et al., 2015; von Mohr et al., 2017), and has effects which alleviate stress, regulate emotions and increase wellbeing (Brauer et al., 2016; Cascio et al., 2019; Morrison, 2016) and is particularly important in the early development of an infant (Cascio et

al., 2019; Clark et al., 2020; Harlow & Zimmermann, 1958; McGlone et al., 2014; Suomi, 2011).

Fotopoulou (2020) has explored the impact of the pandemic on the wellbeing of adults in relation to the changes in frequency and availability of touch, and has highlighted that the absence of social and emotional touch has had detrimental consequences. Although this research was conducted with adults, it is interesting to note the views of the child participants within the present study alongside recent research within the same context of the pandemic. Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, Walker and McGlone (2013) wrote that “in a world where “social interactions” increasingly occur in virtual environments, the growing social and neurobiological evidence that touch is central to psychological well-being has profound implications” (p. 388). This is is particularly salient within the context of the pandemic, as most individuals have reduced their interpersonal touch with others (Fotopoulou, 2020), with virtual communication becoming the predominant method of communication.

Research into the links between wellbeing and touch also facilitate the formulation of implications for intervention within classrooms when touch is absent. Examples include the imagining of a hug, which can have a similar, if reduced, regulatory affect (Cione et al., 2011; Morrison et al., 2011) or the use of tools such as blankets to simulate similar biological and physical responses (Eron et al., 2020).

9.1.2. Pets

Pets were included in the ‘safe spaces’ of four of the child participants, and this research is not singular in reporting that children describe their pets as special companions and play mates (Cassels et al., 2017). The benefits of a relationship

between children and their pets has been explored by a number of authors (Cassels et al., 2017; Levinson & Mallon, 1997; Melson, 2001; Melson & Fine, 2015; Strand, 2004). Pets reportedly provide children with a “sense of reassurance, calm and security” (Melson & Fine, 2015, p. 183). In an earlier publication, Melson (2001) suggests that pets function as an “attachment object” for children, and thus are subject to the same dynamics as that of a parental figure or family member (Melson, 2001). Strand (2004) notes that pets provide additional benefits to their typical human counterparts, such as “less emotional entanglement” and a sense of “mastery” when involved in their care (p. 152).

The role of animals as an emotional regulator and psychological “buffer” in relation to inter-parental conflict was explored by Strand (2004, p. 162) who concludes that a companion animal for children during times of conflict in the home may provide “constancy, nurturance and acceptance” (p. 164); Strand (2004) does note that further research is needed to produce more certain conclusions within this context specifically, but she is among many researchers who report positive outcomes for children’s interactions with, and access to, a familiar animal (Cassels et al., 2017; Levinson & Mallon, 1997; Melson & Fine, 2015; Rost & Hartmann, 1994; Strand, 2004).

More recent research has additionally highlighted the need for further research on the nature of the interaction between children and their pets (Cassels et al., 2017). Cassels et al. (2017) highlight that pets cannot pass judgement, and therefore allow for freedom of expression and communication, which is an attractive feature for children, especially adolescents, which was the sample within Cassels’ study. Levinson (1997) describes a pet as a “mirror in which the child sees himself wanted and loved not for what he should be, or might be or might have been but for what he

is" (p. 144), illustrating the accepting and non-judgemental qualities highlighted by Levinson and other authors.

The qualities of a relationship with a pet are mirrored within the descriptions of 'safe spaces' by children and parents in the present study, where common themes across the three research questions included emotional and self-expression, and the ability to freely and comfortably communicate their worries. Feeling able to make mistakes and take risks was also highlighted as a feature of such a space, and one which a pet would facilitate, being accepting, non-judgemental and unaware of the types of human mistakes which may trouble young people (Cassels et al., 2017; Levinson & Mallon, 1997). To quote a parent participant, the 'safe space' "allow[s] them to be who they want to be", and according to Levinson (1997), so does a pet. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that children reported feeling calm and safe in the presence of a pet within the present research.

9.1.3. Special Objects and Object Relations Theory

Within psychodynamic psychology the relationships with others, and with oneself, is considered to exist both internally and externally through mental representations of these relationships as well as the external reality (Mitchell, 2021). This is referred to as 'object relations theory' (Garber, 2019; Mitchell, 2021). As the child develops, he or she begins a process of distinguishing between these mental representations of oneself and those which are separate, attempting to identify where these representations begin and end; Winnicott (1953) referred to this as 'not-me' representations. Further clarification comes from Mahler (1972) who describes this phenomena as follows: "Growing up entails a gradual growing away from the normal state of human symbiosis, of 'one-ness' with the mother [..] through gradual steps of

a separation-individuation process" (p. 333). Mahler (1972) also notes that this as a "lifelong" process (p. 333).

This is of interest in relation to the present study, due to the presence of special objects depicted by the young people within their 'safe space' (and the discussion surrounding this by their parents also). A psychoanalyst would interpret these objects, and arguably also the pets described, as representations of this separation-individuation process (Garber, 2019). While the children are in a place they feel safe, they may desire privacy and aloneness (the individuation), but still crave a representation of a safe relationship or connection to a familiar and special other (a caregiver), therefore within this research one could argue that these special objects and pets provide mediation between these two states, and allow for feelings of safety and security whilst also allowing for separation and exploration (Richins & Chaplin, 2021).

A special toy or blanket which is used to soothe and comfort a child in the absence of his or her parent is often referred to as a 'transitional object', a term coined by Winnicott (1953). The object here is not necessarily a tangible thing but instead can refer to "anything outside of the self [...] as tangible as a teddy bear or as ephemeral as a scent or a taste, a sound or a texture that subjectively carries the security and comfort of an absent caregiver by association" (Garber, 2019, p. 553). There has been some debate within the literature regarding pets as transitional objects (Garber, 2019). Garber (2019) described a pet as "a child's emotional 'port in a storm;' that is, a secure base or relationship anchor" (p. 557) and notes that animals have the potential to "carry with them mother's affection by association" as transitional objects do (p. 557). More recent research on the study of object attachment has looked

beyond objects that are important during developmental transitions to more widely examine any object to which a person becomes attached (Lee & Hood, 2021).

9.1.4. Separation and Privacy

Within the present study, some children described their desire for privacy and separation from family or friends within their identified ‘safe space’. Most children did, according to their parents, crave the company and comfort of others at times when they were seeking security and safety, even if this may not have been presented by the children during the activity, or within the particular ‘safe space’ identified within the drawing activity.

Separation is a key component within attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bell, 1969); separation allows for the child to explore the world and enables the child to know that the world is safe. A mark of a securely attached child is one where the child will happily explore the environment around them while keeping their attachment figure in sight (Ainsworth & Bell, 1969). The presence of the parent in this situation is therefore the ‘secure base’ facilitating the independence and development of their child separate from themselves (Waters & Cummings, 2000). Similarly to a ‘secure base’, a ‘safe space’ allows for expression creativity and risk taking (Hunter, 2008), and some researchers have noted the parallels between a nurturing safe space and the notion of a ‘secure base’ (Kelly et al., 2020; Twemlow et al., 2002). Within the parent interviews, the notion of exploration was captured, and a couple of parents shared their nervousness around finding the balance between exploration, independence and parental intervention and protection. One child identified his ‘safe space’ (a playground) as a space where there were challenging situations for him previously, but where he has the independence and autonomy to deal with these

challenging situations as a young person, away from the protection of his parents. This ‘space’ arguably provided for those negotiations explored within attachment theory, and the development of skills. This process was also noted by Ross (2019) within the systematic literature review, and connects to prevalence of exploration and ‘play’ being mentioned by many young people and parents in this phase of the study.

9.2. *Play and Child-led Activities*

Play was highlighted as important to children within their ‘safe space’ throughout their interviews, and parents additionally often mentioned the importance of play within both the home and school contexts. Within the wider literature, Nitecki and Chung (2016) note that play is itself a ‘safe space’ where children can “explore and demystify some of the scary and unknown aspects of the world” (p. 26), which demonstrates its relevance to the topic of ‘safe spaces’ for primary-aged children.

Although play has been the subject to numerous debate due to the complexities of finding a common definition (Sutton-Smith, 2009; Youngquist & Pataray-Ching, 2004), it is generally agreed, socially and academically, that it is an essential component of a child’s development and has numerous benefits associated with it (Nitecki & Chung, 2016; Youngquist & Pataray-Ching, 2004). Commonly agreed features of play include it being self-directed and freely chosen and intrinsically motivating for the playful child or individual (Ludvigsen, 2005; Youngquist & Pataray-Ching, 2004). The developmental benefits of play have been illustrated by seminal researchers citing it as essential within their theories (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1980). The emotional impact of the activity is considered to be positive, and the activity creating positive affect is considered to be a defining feature of play (Keating et al., 2000; Winnicott, 1971), although there are discussions within the literature

surrounding play also being manageably challenging to aid the development of understanding (McArdle & Grieshaber, 2010). Research concerning children's perspectives on play have highlighted the importance of it being separate from more formal tasks, such as learning or work (Howard, 2002). Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that children often included play within their identified 'safe space' during the drawing activity, and the self-directed and freely chosen aspects of play highlight why children illustrated that it was a feature of their 'safe space', especially when the child wanted to be separate from adults or other people.

Research has noted the mediative aspect to the function of play – allowing the child to interact with the world outside their 'safe space' on their terms, through play, and process some of the more difficult and unknown aspects of life (Nitecki & Chung, 2016; Winnicott, 1971). The aspects of self-direction, control and autonomy captured by the definition of play within the research also mirror the features of 'safe space' already explored in the present research, and the large subtheme of 'ownership and an "active role"' explored within the SLR.

LEGO was mentioned by a significant proportion of parents and children, as their play activity of choice. LEGO has been used by educators and researchers within a therapeutic role and to increase social motivation and engagement (Baron-Cohen et al., 2014; Griffiths, 2016; LeGoff, 2004), however this usage of LEGO is arguably not play, as it is adult directed (Howard, 2002). However, one of the reasons behind the success of interventions such as this, is believed to be the motivation of children and young people to engage with LEGO (Baron-Cohen et al., 2014). Much of the writings on LEGO are with participants with ASC, and these authors note that due to the predictably, simplicity and ease of use, LEGO allows the controller of the play to fully dictate the nature of the activity (Owens et al., 2008), and therefore devise the

creative and imaginative aspects of the play. This may consequently explain why this play resource was captured to such an extent within the present study.

Play is defined as a fundamental right under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and there has been recent concern amongst academics and psychological associations that these rights are not being upheld (Barclay et al., 2019). The pandemic has led academics and child psychologists to further research and advocate for the child's right to play (Barron & Emmet, 2020; Dodd et al., 2021) and research has highlighted the lack of opportunities for children to socialise with friends, play, and to express imagination and creativity (Barron & Emmet, 2020; CYPCS, 2020). This was highlighted in the present research through parents advocating for the importance of play both within a social and educational context, and the described missed opportunities due to the pandemic for their children to experience this.

The narrative surrounding 'educational catch up' after the periods of school closure in the UK has additionally led to an advocacy for the necessity of opportunities for child-led play and social engagement, alongside formal academic work, to 'catch up' with these missed opportunities also (BPS, 2021; Dodd et al., 2021).

9.3. *'Safe Spaces' in Schools*

By exploring the views of parents regarding their child's 'safe spaces' at school I learnt that physical spaces are used by some participating children to take themselves away from overwhelming situations, this has been additionally noted within wider literature as a recommended strategy for helping children who struggle with the busyness of the school environment (Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010), and the emotional demands of a school day. The research of Kelly et al.

(2020) explored an ‘attachment aware’ schools programme, and the strategy of providing a physical ‘safe space’ within this. The authors note that:

> The busyness of schools was often remarked upon, as schools became more aware of the need for a safe, quiet space within their busy school, to allow children time to talk and share, or to be calm. Some schools have named specific places outside of the classrooms where young people can go to calm down (p. 345).

Within the present research, not all of the participating children needed these physical spaces in school according to their parents; instead other children found feelings of safety within the relationships with members of staff or their friends. The familiarity and consistency of these relationships was highlighted by parents as particularly important with regards to feelings of safety, and this is reflected in the wider literature (Carter, 2015; Fetner et al., 2012).

The present research additionally captured aspects of the wider environment within schools, which arguably necessitate ‘safe spaces’. Reference to ‘academic pressure’ for example highlighted the awareness of children and their parents to the expectation of meeting certain standards within learning, and this was considered negatively by some parents towards the child’s sense of safety and wellbeing. Research has highlighted the negative impact of academic pressure on the wellbeing of children and young people (Lazaratou et al., 2010). In research commissioned by the national union of teachers, Hutchings (2015) argues that there are “increasingly high levels of school-related anxiety and stress, disaffection and mental health problems in school-aged pupils” (p.5). The seriousness of this is highlighted by research noting that numbers of adolescent suicides peak during periods of examination (University of Manchester, 2016). Hutchings (2015) additionally noted that academic pressure is damaging the quality of relationships between teachers

and pupils. As this relationship within the present research was noted as a possible ‘safe space’, this highlights that academic pressure not only causes children to seek safety but may also damage a crucial ‘safe space’ available to a child within the school environment when they do so.

This study did not knowingly capture views of children whereby school is a ‘safe space’ for them due to being unsafe within the home environment, as noted in section 6.1.2, this is therefore a recommendation for further research, captured in section 12.2.2.

10. Phase Two: Author’s Conclusions

By exploring ‘safe spaces’ for children within both home and school environments, this research has captured a range of different ‘safe spaces’ from both child and parent perspectives. These ‘safe spaces’ have different purposes and contexts and the individual differences between the children, and their context, determine how they are produced, maintained and used, and why they may be necessary.

Similarities lie in the dependence on others; whether this is other humans, pets or special objects – comfort is found in these things for children. Relationships with humans was especially apparent throughout the data collected from parents. Similarities were also found in the use of play, and other child-led activities. Relatedly, children having control of aspects of the space (such as who is there and when) was presented as important, indicating that children find these aspects of their lived experience relate to feelings of safety.

Parents had a similar notion when asked about ‘safe spaces’ within a school setting, as they advocated for more personalised provision where their children were empowered whether by utilising child-led, low pressure, activities such as play, or by

adults communicating regarding the explanation of systems and rules. Also captured was the wider context of this; why children may need ‘safe spaces’ within their schools. Academic pressure and “targets” were depicted as leading to feelings of unsafety and the children were discussed as often needing a sanctuary from this, whether this was within a physical space – such as a corner of a classroom – or a relationship or activity, such as social time and play.

Some impacts of the pandemic were also illustrated within this research and analysis. When discussing the findings in relation to the wider literature, it is apparent the missed opportunities for children discussed have not just been noted by the parents within my sample, but by the wider psychological and educational community also. The lack of opportunities for play was perhaps particularly notable and relevant within the context in the UK at present.

10.1. *Limitations*

As already noted, I used an opportunity sample and therefore the findings are only reflective of a small number of individuals. Due to some of the participants being known to me, there is a possibility that the participants could have concealed personal information from the research process. Steps taken to mitigate this however are described in section 7.6.

The children participants were more representative of younger children in their primary school career than older children. There was an equal divide between girls and boys across participating children, however the adult participants lacked representation from fathers; with only one male included within my sample.

A lot of the parent participants were either EPs or aspiring to train to be EPs. This means that the participants were possibly more informed on the psychological nature

of ‘safe spaces’ than individuals from other areas of profession/interest. A high hunterproportion of the aspiring EPs were teachers, so many of the participants were based within the education field professionally, and therefore it is important to note that their constructions of the notion of ‘safe spaces’ will have been influenced by this. Therefore, this research captures the view of parents on the topic of ‘safe spaces’, however also captures the view of parent-educational professional participants (not exclusively, but in the majority).

It is worth noting that the views of parents regarding ‘safe spaces’ for children at school are somewhat limited by the fact that they have restricted opportunities to spend time in the school environment, and it cannot be assumed that the children would concur with these views. Further research exploring children’s perceptions of ‘safe spaces’ within schools would be interesting to learn more about this. The views of teachers and staff members in schools would be additionally worth exploring in relation to this topic.

This research was designed with the assumption that children feel happy and able to talk to their parents about their ‘safe spaces’. However, this may not be the case for all children and it therefore possible that child participants may not have been completely open and honest about their ‘safe spaces’ within the interviews. This will consequently have an impact on the accuracy of the data collection. The ethical consequences of this have additionally been considered in section 7.6.

Within my reflexive statement within Appendix A I note how my own positionality and experiences will be imposed on the research I conduct. The importance of this topic to me personally will have influenced the interpretations of the findings within the present research, and this will be a limitation of this research also. By taking an

interpretivist stance I have acknowledged that, to some degree, my own understanding about ‘safe spaces’ within the literature will have been imposed onto the data collection and analysis process.

11. Overall Discussion

The two phases of research have offered an insight into how 'safe spaces' for children and young people are defined and understood. This overall discussion will draw together the findings from phase one and two, to explore the features of a ‘safe space’ which have been presented by this thesis.

11.1. Regulatory Impact of ‘Safe Spaces’

‘Safe Spaces’ having a relaxing, regulating impact upon the children and young people that use them has been presented across the thesis. Korpela (1992) describes this concept as ‘environmental self-regulation’ whereby a place, can initiate a “sorting out” of feelings (p. 253) which would not be available, or appropriate, in other contexts. The notion that a ‘safe space’ should be an emotionally containing environment has been explored by many authors on the topic (Butler et al., 2017; Hunter, 2008; Jindal-Snape et al., 2011). This is affirmed by the depiction of the children-participants freely expressing themselves and offloading worries within the current project.

It is notable however that this component of a ‘safe space’ does not necessarily always exist merely as a product of the environment. The present research has indicated that dynamics between other people, possessions and pets also contribute towards this containment and regulation.

11.2 Relational Aspects and Community

Relationships, or representations of a relationships, within ‘safe spaces’ are a recurring theme throughout this thesis. Within the context of an educational setting, producing a sense of community which endeavours to promote strong positive social

and adult-child relationships is supported within the wider educational literature (Brown et al., 2012; Hamm & Faircloth, 2005; Keay et al., 2015; McLaughlin, 2008). It was presented within the findings of the synthesis within the SLR that children who felt marginalised by the wider school community sought refuge in, and retreated to, space wherey they could create their own feelings of community and belonging, (Fetner et al., 2012; Hemi & Mortlock, 2017; Mayberry et al., 2013; Ross, 2019; Steck & Perry, 2018). Within the research which explored the whole school community, familiar, friendly interactions appeared to correlate to those feelings of safety (Butler et al., 2017). This was supported in phase 2, as the children and parents interviewed discussed 'safe spaces' in relation to others, and the importance of those positive bonds with family, friends and school staff was additionally highlighted. Furthermore, the negative impact of the pandemic on the opportunity of children to socialise and play with their peers was evident within the parent interviews.

11.3. Physical Safe Spaces and Safe Activities

Both phases of this thesis have highlighted the individual differences apparent across children and young people in descriptions of the physical aspects of a 'safe space'. Commonalities within 'safe spaces' discussed in regards to the physical aspects have been infrequent, however, environments which are described as quiet, are notable across both the SLR and the research study. In addition to aspects of the environment, such as blankets, which produced feelings of comfort and coziness being additionally described by children and parents within the research presented.

With regard to specific locations, bedrooms were 'safe spaces' for many children interviewed and home was additionally frequently discussed as a 'safe space'. Within

the findings of the SLR the library was one of the few common places highlighted as safe between studies (Biag, 2014; Langhout & Annear, 2011), and reading was noted in an additional study as being a 'safe' activity (Spencer, 2015). This is supported by the empirical study, where reading was highlighted as a common activity within a child's safe space. In the wider literature, Merga (2017) found that children (especially less-able readers) can seek 'safe spaces' to read in to avoid being corrected or criticised by adults, and highlighted the importance of 'safe spaces' for young people to read in outside of the classroom context (p.10).

Creative activities were noted across both phases within this thesis as common within 'safe spaces', and is a topic discussed at length by Hunter (2008), who describes "the experimentation encouraged to happen" within a creative 'safe space' as a "product of the dynamic tension between known (safe) processes and unknown (risky) outcomes" (p.8). Both reading and creativity are presented therefore as potentially fear-inducing activities whereby a 'safe space' facilitates resilience and confidence for young people, leading to participation within these tasks (Hunter, 2008; Merga, 2017).

11.4. Safety Versus Risk

The "dynamic tensions" or "paradox" captured by Hunter (2008, p. 8) above is additionally captured across this thesis; within the SLR, Spencer (2015) highlights how it is "okay for students to be vulnerable even while they are being challenged" (p. 203) and Turner and Braine (2015) conclude that "pupils need to feel they can get things wrong in order for them to achieve". Some parents interviewed additionally highlighted that their child's 'safe space' allowed for the making of mistakes, which enabled imaginative and creative outcomes and activities.

Additionally highlighting the importance of social risks and vulnerability was the fact that ‘expression’ was represented within themes and subthemes throughout findings from both phases within this thesis; with individuals discussing the ability to ‘be themselves’ as a feature of a ‘safe space’. The individuation within schools advocated for by parents within the second phase, highlights as Boostrom (1998) notes, that safe spaces enable an “expression of individuality” which overcomes the feelings of “isolation” (p. 398). This is additionally captured within the ‘‘peace amongst chaos’ for marginalised groups’ theme within the SLR

It can be conceptualised therefore, that a ‘safe space’ (whether figurative or physical, transient or fixed) allows for exploration and expression, whilst still feeling safe, held and contained (Hunter, 2008; Twemlow et al., 2002). It is clear that there is a balance to be met in the art of creating an environment which facilitates these attributes (much like the ‘attachment-exploration balance’), which depends on feelings of safety to enable the confidence to explore, risk-take and creatively develop. This is noted within the SLR when Jindal-Snape (2011) highlight that “a bad facilitator” can “leave children feeling very vulnerable and unsure” (p. 391).

One may view the notion of risk and the idea of safety as constructs either side of a two-dimensional pole, or spectrum, whereby spaces, activities and relationships (amongst other things) are placed upon it depending on the feelings enticed. However, the research conducted within this thesis, alongside the wider research into safe spaces, arguably illustrates that the relationship between risk and safety is not as binary as this would suggest (Hunter, 2008; Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015). Instead, feelings of safety generate the likelihood of expression, in doing-so the allowance and acceptance of vulnerability and therefore within this, the likelihood of taking

risks, which then facilitates the development of new skills. With this development arrives fresh feelings of success, and the circle continues (see figure 17).

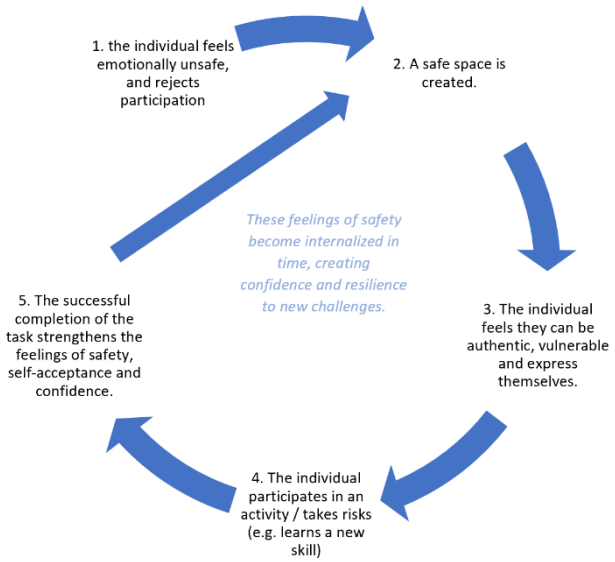

Figure 17 A conceptualisation of the impact of safety on the likelihood to risk taking and participation, inspired by Vincent (1995)

Figure 17 is inspired by Vincent (1995)'s writings on emotional safety (see figure 5), already discussed in relation to findings from the SLR Vincent (1995) discusses emotional safety in relation to the impact of success and feelings of safety on the likelihood of participation and further success. In the parent interviews, feelings of success leading to participation and self-expression and therefore feelings of safety and resilience was captured. Sophie, discussed with me the hope that her daughter would "internalise" her safe space as she grows, and therefore feel more confident in environments when she is "nervous or scared". This is also conceptualised by object relations theory (Garber, 2019; Mahler, 1972; Mitchell, 2021); the notion of a transcending safe space which extends beyond the physical into the figurative as a child grows.

11.5. Adult Facilitation

Figure 11 does not illuminate how to form a ‘safe space’ at the beginning of the cyclical process (or if the cycle becomes disrupted) however, the depiction of the facilitation of such environments by adults has been presented within this thesis.

‘Safe spaces’ which mediate risk is a relevant topic within the context of learning and the development of new skills (Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015). This was apparent within papers synthesised in phase one (Ross, 2019; Spencer, 2015; Turner & Braine, 2015), and is supported within the parental views captured of their children’s safe spaces at school in Phase 2; Dennis, a parent participant captures this by telling me “if [children] don’t take risks, then they won’t develop, and expand and learn”. Play was also deemed as important by parents, and there were feelings of disappointment surrounding the lack of access to play for their children in the school environment, by the parents of the younger children especially. Play was additionally depicted as very important within the children’s own safe spaces and interviews. The importance of play has already been explored in this thesis but its relevance to the topic of adult facilitation, and of the ‘separation-individuation’ process, is additionally salient here and within the model I present below.

11.6. The ‘Transcending Safe Space’ Model

Using the findings from both phases of this thesis, I have created a model seen in Figure 17. This model is based upon the notion of a ‘transcending safe space’ in a similar way to object relations theory (Summers, 2013); a child would begin with an emotional ‘safe space’ at a young age, develop to learn through playing and developmentally appropriate experiences to progressing eventually to independence. The model is primarily informed by Winnicott’s descriptions of the processes of a

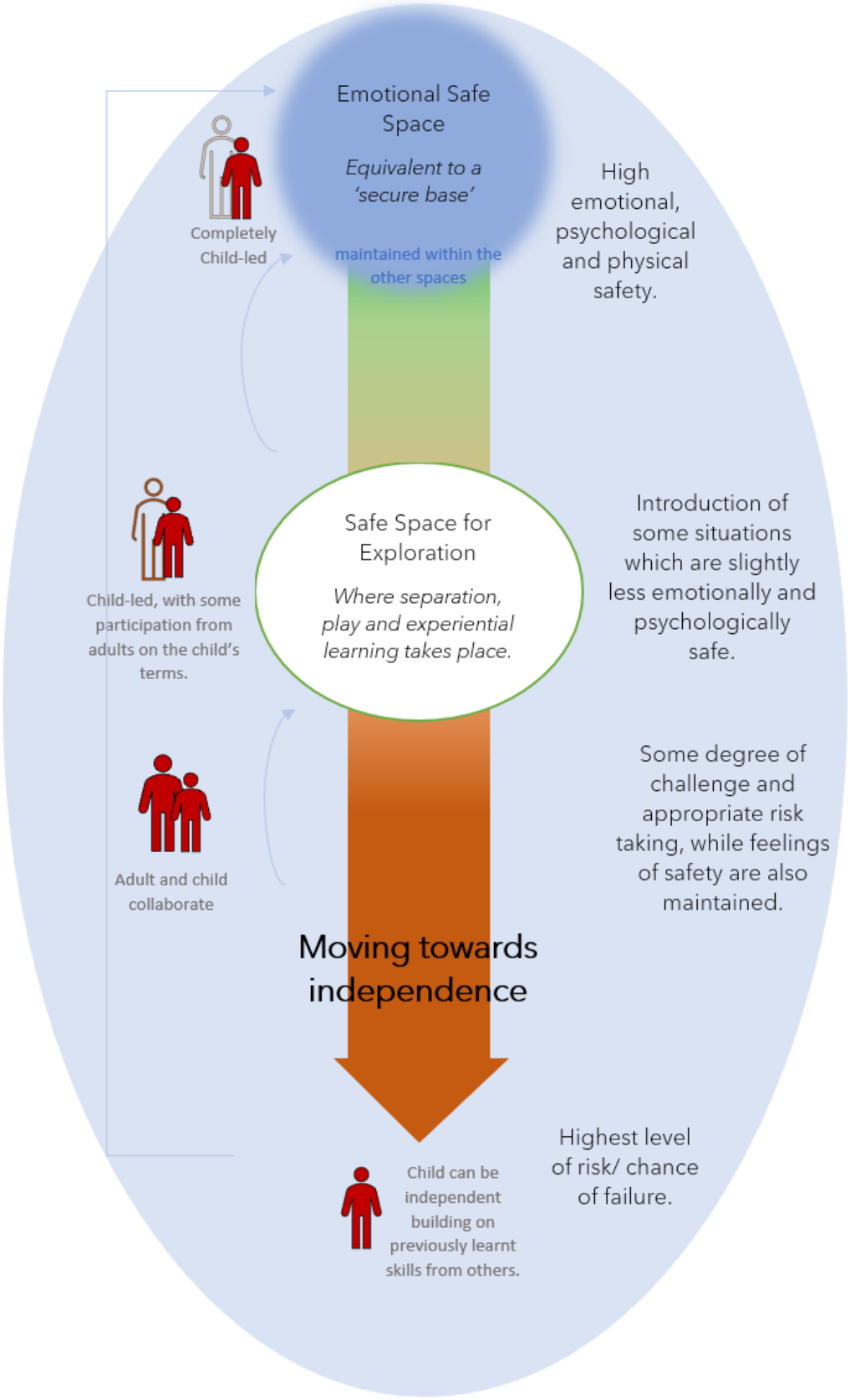

Figure 18 The 'Transcending Safe Space' Model

child separating from his or her caregiver through varying degrees of ‘dependence’ (Winnicott, 1960) (see table 7). It also has similarities to Vygotsky’s ZPD model (see Figure 6), as the learner moves through the model and becomes less reliant on adult assistance and more capable of independence.

The ‘holding phase’	Absolute Dependence	The infant does not have an awareness or understanding of the care provided by the caregivers, has no control over his/her care and is fully dependent and reliant on that care.
	Relative Dependence	The infant becomes aware of the need for aspects of care, and can relate them to their own impulses. The infant begins to transfer these feelings to other situations and relationships.
	Towards Independence	The infant develops the means for separation from the caregiver, alongside intellectual understanding. This is accomplished through the memories of care possessed, and the internalisation of these feelings. In addition to the projection of personal needs and the development of confidence in the environment.

Table 7 The ‘Varying Degrees of Dependence’. Adapted from Winnicott (1960)

Furthermore, the representation of the transcending safe space can be interpreted both physically by representing the environment and surrounding context of the child or learner, and figuratively by representing the relationships and dynamics experienced by the learner.

11.6.1. Emotional Safe Space

This first ‘safe space’ is inspired by the psychodynamic theories of a ‘secure base’ (Bowlby, 1988), Winnicott’s “absolute dependence” within the “holding phase” (Winnicott, 1965) and the notion that a child builds up resilience to the wider world by engaging in positive, containing dynamics with their caregiver (Ainsworth & Bell, 1969; Crittenden, 2017; Winnicott, 1965). This space exists and is maintained for children with a ‘good enough’ childhood and caregiver-relations[2] relatively easily, but

[2] ‘good enough’ caregiver is a term employed by Winnicott (1965) meaning that the child’s emotional needs have been met both implicitly and explicitly.

may be need to be more external, physical and constant for those who do not have these experiences (Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010; Geddes, 2006).

The outer blue circle which descends from this ‘emotional safe space’ symbolises the emotional protection that these ‘good enough’ relationships and experiences have on the transcendental processes outside of this space. While the child experiences the wider world, separated from their ‘emotional safe space’ the feelings of safety and security transfer into other contexts, relationships and environments (Mahler, 1972; Mitchell, 2021; Winnicott, 1953). For example, due to a ‘good enough’ experience at home, a child may go to school each day and generally continue to feel safe and secure during this time. At the end of the day this child returns to the physical ‘emotional safe space’ – the caregiver, and the home environment (and other ‘objects’ which represent this caregiver).

Within the current thesis the references to home being safe, and parents and family being a secure relationship, has inspired this depiction of a an ‘emotional safe space’. Parents often described the more figurative spaces such as their relationships with children, whereas the children’s drawings and interviews captured the physical aspects of this space. The importance of a secure emotional space, especially for support and regulation, is apparent across both phases, captured in the ‘emotional and psychological safety’ theme in the SLR and many themes across phase two, perhaps most notably ‘that social element’ and ‘allow them to be who they want to be’ themes.

Within the ‘emotional safe space’, risk, threat and likelihood of failure are low or non-existent. This is a space which is completely determined by a child’s need to feel protected and safe. It is unconditional and child-led. However, a space such as this

alone does not fully prepare children to face the challenges of the world outside (Boostrom, 1998), and the children within the present study demonstrated that their safe space would involve exploration, separation and play, and these aspects are depicted through the other 'safe spaces' in this model.

11.6.2. 'Safe Space' for Exploration

Hunter (2008) notes the importance of 'safe spaces' empowering students to take risks "on their own terms" (p. 19), and this was supported by the findings presented within this thesis. The second component of this model, 'safe space for exploration', where children can take managed and mediated risks, is inspired by the finding within this these that child-led activities (e.g. play), and ownership was motivating for children within their safe space.

Within attachment theory, exploratory behavior provides opportunities for the child to engage with the wider physical and social environment, at a pace which is appropriate, maintaining an atmosphere of security and safety whilst also providing opportunities to be independent and to take risks (Ainsworth & Bell, 1969; Deal, 2007). This is deemed as essential as the attachment itself, referred to as the "attachment-exploration balance" by Ainsworth and Bell (1969, p. 1655).

This component therefore captures the importance of separation from the child's caregiver, to develop, learn and explore (Ainsworth & Bell, 1969; Winnicott, 1971). Mahler (1972) writes that "inherent in every new step of independent functioning is a minimal threat of object loss" (p.333); in my interviews Millie captured this acutely, noting that her son was "just starting to have their own world completely separate from home and mum and dad" and describing the difficulties of this from a parent's perspective.

Winnicott's 'holding environment' is described as the location for a process of detachment from the caregiver to begin establishing a separate personal self (Winnicott, 1965). The notion of the child psychologically detaching themselves from the caregiver is an important developmental process (Winnicott, 1965), and can involve a transitional object, or space whereby a child can emotionally compute the interrelating realities that they experience (Parker, 2008). This was explored within the phase 2 discussion, as many 'transitional phenomena' were mentioned by the children. The importance of this, is described by Parker (2008) as "both the child and the parent provid[ing] a safe place in which the infant can experiment or "play" with its emerging ability to sort the real, external world from its own internal fantasy world". This is arguably similar to the rehearsal of "real-life" described by Jindal-Snape et al. (2011) within the synthesis of papers within the SLR

The importance of play has been discussed in relation to my interviews with children and parents (children most notably). Play providing space for experiential learning and the taking of risks is well documented (Kolb & Kolb, 2010; Piscitelli & Penfold, 2015; Vygotsky, 2004). Winnicott (1971) additionally comments on the importance of play as an "experience of control" for a child, and it being a transitional activity away from the dependence on the mother (p.47). Parents of the younger children that participated in the interviews described their disappointment at their child being unable to access play within the school setting, largely due to the period of school closure due to the pandemic. Hayley noted that the period of "easing in" to more formal learning had been lost. This 'Safe Space for Exploration' component of the model aims to represent this "easing in" which allows for feelings of safety to be maintained whilst learning and development still takes place.

11.6.3. *Collaboration and Moving Towards Independence*

Both the empirical study and the SLR have demonstrated that mutual trust and collaboration between children and adults produce feelings of safety (Jindal-Snape et al., 2011; Lockley-Scott, 2019; Ross, 2019; Spencer, 2015). Within the model, collaborative approaches are presented as a step away from child-led activities (such as play) and a step towards activities which are less determined by the child's terms.

Criticism of 'safe spaces' within educational environments portray 'safe spaces' as a barrier to independence, critical thinking and challenge (Barrett, 2010; Boostrom, 1998). I present a model where it is implied as ultimately the aim of any 'safe space' to render itself useless (or used-less), as the child progresses to be more independent and free-functioning, within a particular context or activity, at the appropriate time. Independence here may refer to, for example, a child going to pre-school for the first time, a child leaving behind their special object to go to a sleepover, or engaging in a critical discussion within the classroom. Here, feelings of safety are internalised from the other 'safe spaces' experienced, and the child has the ability to be less dependent as a consequence (Winnicott, 1960).

11.6.4. A Multi-Directional Model

The process of learning new skills arguably always involves an increased level of risk (possibilities of failure) and decreased level of safety (Barrett, 2010; Boostrom, 1998). Therefore, to return to one of the prior 'safe spaces' within the model may arguably help to build the foundation for feelings of safety within learning and development. This is to ensure these feelings of safety are internalised, and therefore enabling participation and fully developing skills (Hunter, 2008; Kisfalvi &

Oliver, 2015; Mahler, 1972; Winnicott, 1960). For children and young people within the learning environment, this could involve going back to a higher level of support or allowing a child to explore a concept on their own terms (Feuerstein et al., 1991). For older children or adults, where play is unlikely, a circumstance where one can familise oneself with key ideas and concepts at their own pace, and have ownership over the problem, may provide feelings of security which enable the development of new skills (Poehner & Infante, 2017).

12. Conclusions and Implications for Practice

12.1. Conclusions

This thesis has demonstrated that the notion of a ‘safe space’ is interesting to explore in relation to its application at both home and school for children and young people. In addition to exploring ‘safe spaces’ for children in relation to psychological theory and the practice of an EP The research has demonstrated that entering a ‘safe space’ (either physically or figuratively) is a positive and comforting experience for children and young people.

I have learnt that a crucial component of these spaces being created and maintained is relationships; dynamics which are based in mutual trust and provide opportunities for regulation, expressions of vulnerability, risk-taking and exploration. The role of the adult is often to collaborate with children and young people within the space to establish the correct balance between safe and too safe, risk and too much risk.

This facilitation is not always solely conducted by people; the child participants within the research illustrated that the presence of objects and pets can help to create and maintain aspects of their ‘safe space’. These symbols of safety arguably represent the love and security felt within the wider dynamic of the child’s lived experience, and

demonstrates the importance of the individuation-separation balance within the formulation of such a space.

The correct balance between safety and risk, individuation and separation, does not appear to be a ‘one size fits all’ solution. Indeed, the individual differences within feelings of safety demonstrated within the present research, the advocacy for personalised approaches from parents, and the common thread of the importance of relationships, leads me to the conclusion that this balance is likely to be effectively maintained when knowledge about the child or young person is ascertained, and dynamics of trust and respect have been created. It has been indicated in this thesis that when created, such an environment invites playfulness, expression and creativity, and in doing-so creates learning. Success felt by participation within these activities additionally appears to perpetuate the safety felt within the space.

When discussing ‘safe spaces’ therefore, the idea of complete physical safety within a protected sanctuary is perhaps not sufficient. Instead I would argue that a ‘safe space’ must extend, transcend and be internalised for it to be a productive space, and a space which is useful to the developing child as he or she navigates the world. This led me to create the model which represents the complexities of safe spaces in Figure 18, to promote facilitation and mediation from adults at a sensitive, yet productive pace.

12.1.1. Defining Features of a ‘Safe Space’

In summary therefore, this research has highlighted that defining features of a ‘safe space’ for children and young people include:

- Creating a positive, regulatory and comforting experience for children and young people.

- Positive relationships with familiar and containing people and representations of people such as objects and pets.
- The correct balance between safety and risk, attachment and separation – where exploration is cherished but protection and supervision are maintained.
- An individualised space which is personal to those who use it.
- A space which allows for safety to be internalised and consequently transcends to other contexts.

12.2. Implications

12.2.1 Implications for EP Practice

This thesis has highlighted the individual nature of physical 'safe spaces'. Within the context of EP practice, this illuminates the importance of 'safe spaces' being perceived as a personal space, whereby a space set up for one child is understood as not necessarily a 'safe space' for another child. Within this thesis, feelings of ownership and control have been illustrated as important within 'safe spaces'. As an EP it will be necessary to gather information and collaborate with the child about the creation of a space (or advocate for staff members to do so) to enable the generation of these feelings.

The possible practical difficulties of such a personalised approach should not go unnoticed by an EP – it is unlikely, for example, that a school can set up 30 different physical 'safe spaces' within a classroom. This thesis has highlighted however that often these physical qualities are only one aspect of a 'safe space'. By training professionals and staff members to understand and recognise the importance of some of the more 'figurative' aspects of a 'safe space', therefore, will enable their creation without dominating the physical environment of the classroom. Examples of

this illustrated within the present project include the presence of certain people and the nature of the relationships within the space (and how much privacy is given to a child), in addition to special objects or representations of other 'safe spaces' (such as caregivers) being present.

The importance of relationships which are built on trust, respect and an ability to be vulnerable, authentic and take-risks, has been apparent within this research. Advocating for this style of interaction within schools is often the role of the EP (Fernie & Cubeddu, 2016). This is in addition to promoting school climates which cherish feelings of community and belongingness, which can have positive impact of feelings of safety and security at school, and consequently promote positive wellbeing (Allen et al., 2018). EPs can be informed by the research presented within this thesis (conducted by both myself and other researchers) in relation to the importance of these relationships and feelings of belongingness. For example, an EP could advocate for systemic interventions such as 'relationship policies' within schools which can be used to encourage the promotion of positive student-staff member relationships (Dunnett & Jones, 2020).

The importance of play has been highlighted as especially relevant within the current context of learning within a post-pandemic world (Dodd et al., 2021). Highlighted within phase two was the lack of "easing in" to more formal work. The model presented in Figure 18 can help teachers and practitioners to see the benefit of child-led exploration and play. Unfortunately the intermediate 'safe space' represented in this model – 'Safe Space for Exploration' – has been bypassed, or visited briefly, for some of the young people participating. It will be the role of the EP to ensure that children have access to this provision, and the positive feelings associated with ownership over a task, and the success that comes with that this exploration, before

processing to more formal learning (Barclay et al., 2019; Winnicott, 1971). Within my own practice, I will consider this, especially in relation to children who missed some of their reception year due to the pandemic, and advocate for their right to access child-led play-based learning where appropriate (Barclay et al., 2019).

12.2.2 *Implications for Future Research*

This thesis only provides insight on the meaning of the term ‘safe space’ for a small sample of children, and an even smaller sample of adults. The literature review provided insight into a large range of ‘safe spaces’ which was insightful and interesting, however does not allow for generalisation within one specific context. Therefore, the implications are that more research is needed on the topic of ‘safe spaces’, as a general term and concept, as there remains a lack of research on the spaces which are important to children and parents beyond the small scope of this thesis. As already noted for example, an exploration of ‘safe spaces’ within schools from the perspective of children and staff members would be insightful. As well as capturing the perspective of children more directly and deeply than within the current research. A sample which is more inclusive of fathers’ perspectives would additionally build on the parental views gathered within the present project.

As noted within section 6.1.2., school is often a safe place for children who are being neglected or abused at home, and the inability for children to access this ‘safe space’ due to the pandemic, has highlighted this (Sharma & Borah, 2020). A recommendation for future research, therefore, would be to explore the concept of ‘safe spaces’ within schools for children and young people who feel unsafe at home.

This thesis has largely perceived ‘safe spaces’ through the lens of the psychodynamic paradigm. Further research could instead focus on how other

psychological approaches may interpret the term. For example, social-cognitive theories such as the ZPD have been mentioned within this thesis (Vygotsky, 1978), and research in the future may wish to explore further the relationship between this (and mediated learning, including dynamic assessment within EP practice) and feelings of safety.

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Appendix A - A Reflexive Statement

It is important for me to explain my position, as both a human being, a professional in the field in which I am researching, and as a researcher. I am a white woman who is, 28 years old, heterosexual and cis-gender. I am a trainee educational psychologist training through the University of Exeter. This thesis has relevance to me within the field in which I work, and therefore reflects things that I am passionate about and interested in.

I did not realise quite how personal the topic in question was to me until I began to design, and write, the two phases of this thesis. My personal experience of school is that I loved learning, but I hated school (for the most part anyway). This was mainly due to social difficulties and bullying. To escape from these negative experiences, I would spend a lot of my time in secondary school seeking safe spaces to retreat to, my favourite place was the library.

I remember this immense feeling of being imprisoned, of being trapped into the continuous routine of school every day, with no escape from the insecurity I felt in that environment. This is relevant because the interpretations of the research and the perspectives of my participants may involve some projection from my own personal experiences, and transference of feelings about them. My views on the importance of safe spaces for children and young people may also be disproportionate due to these experiences.

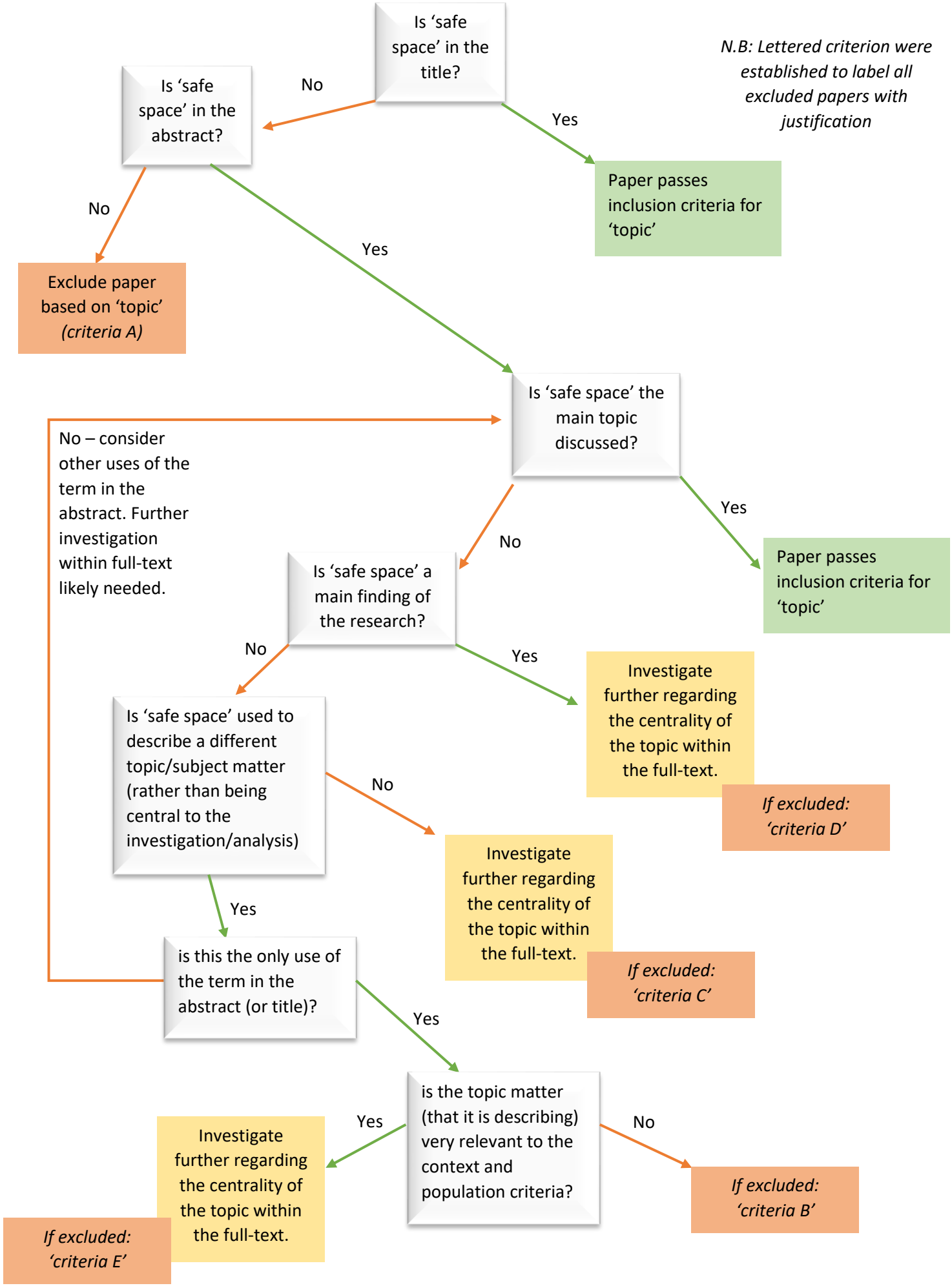
As a trainee psychologist reflecting back on my experiences as a young person, I am struck by how a positive relationship with a teacher or a peer would have prevented me from seeking the physical safe space of the library. This relationship would have

instead met my psychological need to feel safe by creating a figurative ‘safe space’ at school.

These experiences have also taught me as a researcher to place importance on the views of children and young people when seeking a greater understanding of ‘safe spaces’. In my personal experience however, at the time when I used a ‘safe space’, I would not have used that term to describe it. Consequently the language used to construct the notion of ‘safe spaces’ is interesting to me, and how to ensure a universal understanding of the term is additionally of importance.

Other than some periods of time at school, my childhood was very happy, I am very privileged to have felt safe, looked after and loved all my life, therefore my insight into what life is like for those children that experience troubled upbringings, and feel unsafe and threatened, is limited.

Appendix B – Decision Tree for 'Topic' Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria



N.B: Lettered criterion were established to label all excluded papers with justification

Green – Yes

Light green – Yes, but limited evidence

Yellow – Can't tell

Appendix C - Quality Assessment Table using CASP Checklist

	1) Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	2) Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	3) Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	4) Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	5) Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	6) Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	7) Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	8) Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	9) Is there a clear statement of findings?	10) How valuable is the research?	**Include or exclude ?**
Biag (2014)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Potential contribution of research and possible limitations on generalisability explored.	**1 Include**
Comments	The research had clear aims.	Explores subjective experiences of student's perceptions of safety.	The research design has been justified.	There were discussions surrounding recruitment, including the advantages and disadvantages of the sample.	How the data were collected was explored, evaluated and justified in-depth.	Power differential was explored, methods were chosen to illuminate this as much as possible	consent was explored.	In-depth description of analysis and process of derivation of themes.	Findings are explicit with credibility and generalisation of findings discussed.		
Butler et al. (2017)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Contribution to existing literature explored. Limited exploration of how findings can be transferred.	**2 Include**
Comments	The importance and relevance of the research topic is explore.	Qualitative methodology is appropriate for exploring subjective experience of students.	Justification of theoretical framework and research design.	Recruitment discussed and appropriate to aims/ context.	Setting was justified, methods used justified, interview sample included in appendix.	Limited evaluation of this is included in the article. Lacked critical evaluation of researcher bias and any changes in the research design.	Notes regarding confidentiality included. Some discussion regarding context of interviews.	Two-step approach to data analysis explained. Contradictory data taken into consideration. Limited critical examination of researchers own role/potential bias.	Discussion surrounding both sides of researcher's arguments. Explicit findings. Limited exploration of limitations.		
Fetner et al (2012)	Yes	Yes	Yes – but limited	Yes – but limited	Yes	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Discusses contribution to existing knowledge/understand and potential for positive	**2 Include**
Comments	Importance and relevance	Seeks to interpret subjective experiences of	Some justification of	Explained how the participants were selected. Some explanation of	Setting justified, details surrounding interviews	No critical examination of researcher's own role.	Reference to approval from an ethics board.	In-depth description of the analysis process.	Reference to 'wide variety of experienced' in data. Discussion		

	1) Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	2) Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	3) Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	4) Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	5) Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	6) Has the relationship between researcher and participants between adequately considered?	7) Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	8) Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	9) Is there a clear statement of findings?	10) How valuable is the research?	**Include or exclude ?**
	explored. Aims are explicit.	young adults who have participated in GSAs.	research design.	why the participants selected were the most appropriate.	provided. Form of data clear.		Discussion/ exploration of participation's own identity nd language used.	Some contradictory data explored.	surrounding context and credibility of findings. Findings dicussed within framework presented in research questions.	impact on policy and marginalised groups.	
Gross and Rutland (2016)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Yes – to an extent	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Contribution to existing knowledge is explored. Implications discussion, in relation to wider context, policy etc.	**2 Include**
Comments	Goal of research and its importance explored.	Qualitative methodology justified.	Justification for the research design is included.	No explanation as to how participants were selected/were appropriate. No discussions surrounding recruitment.	Some justification for the setting/wider context of the study. Some limited justification of methods. Very limited information provided regarding detail of interview, no information re. any modifications and the form of data.	No examination of own role/influence/bias or how researcher responded to events during study.	Ethical issues considered.	In-depth description of analysis process.	Findings were explicitly presented and information triangulated. Findings discussed in relation to research question.		
Harris & Kiyama (2015)	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Yes – to an extent	Yes – to an extent	Can't tell	Yes – to an extent	Yes	Yes	Contribution and wider context discussed	**2 Include**

	1) Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	2) Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	3) Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	4) Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	5) Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	6) Has the relationship between researcher and participants between adequately considered?	7) Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	8) Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	9) Is there a clear statement of findings?	10) How valuable is the research?	**Include or exclude ?**
Comments	Clear aims, relevance/context explored.	Interpret subjective expereicnes of participants.	No explanation for why focus groups were chosen.	Recruitment strategy noted, and justification explored to a degree.	School district (context) justified. No justification of methods chosen. No discussion regarding saturation/modified data.	No mention of relationship between participants and researchers.	Anonymity of participants noted.	Analysis described in detail including software used etc and how categories were determined.	Findings very explicit.		
Hemi & Mortlock (2017)*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes – but limited	Yes	Yes	Cant tell	Yes	Valuable within the context it was researched - 'action research' as demonstrated through 'plans for ongoing improvement' section.	**2 Include**
Comments	Clear aim, relevance explore.	This is a mixed method approach, the qualitative element is appropriate.	Justified research design.	Sample briefly discussed and reference to number of responses to each question.	Some justification/exploration of 'multi-pronged' approach.	Researcher as paid employee, limitations discussed.	Ethical issues such as consent explored.	No explanation of analysis.	Findings explicitly summarised in 'conclusions' section.		
Jindal-Snape et al. (2011)	Yes	Yes	Yes – but limited	Yes	Yes – but limited	Yes – but limited	Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Discusses contribution, identifies new areas where research is necessary.	**2 Include**
Comments	'Research Objectives' clearly stated and relevance explored.	Perception of pupils and teachers explore.	Some justification of research methods chosen.	How participants were selected was explanation and justified.	Clarity regarding methods and some justification of why those methods were chosen.	One comment about relationship between researcher and some participants. No explanation of bias.	Ethical considerations noted and sufficient details provided.	The description regarding analysis is very concise. No explanation to why data presented was chosen. Contradictory data taken into account.	Findings are explicit. Adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments.		

	1) Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	2) Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	3) Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	4) Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	5) Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	6) Has the relationship between researcher and participants between adequately considered?	7) Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	8) Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	9) Is there a clear statement of findings?	10) How valuable is the research?	**Include or exclude ?**
Langhout & Annear (2011)*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes- to a degree	Can't tell	Can't tell	Yes	Contribution discussed. Contribution discussed. How findings can be transferred discussed.	**2 Include**
Comments	Clear aims. Context explored.	Mixed method approach used. Views of students explored through qualitative methods.	Justified method with reference to their hypothesis.	Context explored and appropriateness of recruitment explored.	Methods clear and use justified. Data presented alongside research questions.	Considered to a degree.	No mention of ethical issues being considered.	Analysis process not clear. Mentions 'themes' of qualitative data but no reference to thematic analysis/ exploration of how themes derived.	Findings are explicit, mention of evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments.		
Lockley-Scott (2019)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes/Can't tell	Yes	Yes - to a degree	Yes – but limited.	Yes – to an extent	Yes	Context of study and limitations of case study approach discussed.	**1 Include**
Comments	Goal clear and relevance explored.	Interpreting experiences of pupils and teachers.	Research design discussed and justified.	How and why participants were selected discussed. Some discussion surrounding recruitment.	Setting for data collection justified, data collection methods were clear, which explicit reference nature of collection, timings etc.	Reference to researcher's 'own positioning' and prior assumptions.	Anonymity of participants noted.	Exploration of grounded theory approach. Sufficient data presented to support findings.	Clear statements of findings. Limitations of case study approach discussed.		
Mayberry et al. (2011)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Contribution discussed. New areas	**1 Include**

	1) Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	2) Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	3) Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	4) Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	5) Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	6) Has the relationship between researcher and participants between adequately considered?	7) Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	8) Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	9) Is there a clear statement of findings?	10) How valuable is the research?	**Include or exclude ?**
Comments	Relevance explored in detail, and goal of research clear.	Sought to interpret perspectives of members of GSAs.	Research design justified.	Detailed reference to participants and selection process.	Setting justified. Data collection clear. Methods explicit.	Researcher role critically examined.	Ethical issues considered.	In-depth description of analysis process. Section of themes for presentation noted. Some contradictory data taken into account. Researchers' own role explored.	Findings explicitly stated. Noted in relation to RQ.	where research is necessary discussed. Ability to transfer findings to other contexts noted.	
Ross (2019)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes – but limited	Can't tell	**Very helpful within the context of the school where the action research took place.**	**2 Include**
Comments	Relevance and importance explored in depth.	Interpretation of views/actions of staff members.	Action research approach justified.	Action research approach justified.	Justified via being within context of action research project, and documenting process.	Researchers position adequately explored.	Ethical considerations explored in detail.	mention of 'cod[ing] thematically', however not explored in depth. Explored how the data presented was selected. Researcher critically examined own role.	Findings are less explicit but there is a list of action points going forward which could be viewed as findings? Unclear.		
Spencer (2015)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes – but limited	Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	**Valuable to researcher - hence linking to own practice. Implications and limitations discussed.**	**2 Include**
Comments	Goal of research clear, RQs clear. Relevance of research discussed.	Seeks to interpret professors' best practices	Method/design justified	Explained how participants were selected, and why this selection was appropriate.	Using semi-structured interviewed justified. No detail provided on details of interviews or if modified, or what data used to record etc.	Researchers own role and positionality explored.	Reference to an 'Institutional Review Board', however no mention of	Analysis process described and data selected for presentation justified.	Themes explicitly stated, could be more obviously discussed in relation to research question.		

	1) Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	2) Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	3) Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	4) Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	5) Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	6) Has the relationship between researcher and participants between adequately considered?	7) Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	8) Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	9) Is there a clear statement of findings?	10) How valuable is the research?	**Include or exclude ?**
					Saturation of data not discussed.		ethics/ consent etc.				
Steck and Perry (2018)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes – but limited exploration.	Context and contribution explored. Discussion of how findings can be transferred/considered in different contexts.	**1 Include**
Comments	Clear goal, relevance discussed.	Seeks to interpret subjective experiences and views of administrators.	Semi-structured interviews justified	Describe why participants were chosen.	Explicit methods described and decisions justified.	Potential for researcher bias explored. Positionality of researcher noted.	Consent and confidentiality noted.	In-depth description of the analysis process, data presented was justified.	Findings explicit. Limited/no exploration of contradictory findings/evidence for and against researcher's argument.		
Toraiwa (2009)	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	Yes – but with little justification.	Can't tell	Can't tell	Can't tell	Yes	Explored within context of women's studies classrooms.	**3- Exclude**
Comments	Importance, goal and relevance clear.	Students perspectives explored.	Research design was not justified	Recruitment strategy not discussed.	justification of why these were used, timing of interviews noted but no detail beyond that. Form of data/modification of data not explored.	No reference to this relationship.	Only reference was to pseudonyms	No reference to analysis/researcher bias/ why data selected to present.	Findings explicit, some discussion of evidence for and against researchers arguments. Referred to 'scope' of paper.		
Turner & Braine (2015)*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Context of study discussed. Some reference to further research.	**2 Include**
Comments	"This case study reports the use of the 'safe' concept by trainee and	Subjective experience of trainee and	Justified research design	How and why participants were selected was noted/considered.	Setting for data collection was justified and methods were explicitly stated.	Some reference to author's understanding regarding concept of	No reference to ethics.	In-depth description of analysis. Data presented is justified, some	Explicit findings and credibility of them discussed.		

	1) Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	2) Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	3) Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	4) Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	5) Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	6) Has the relationship between researcher and participants between adequately considered?	7) Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	8) Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	9) Is there a clear statement of findings?	10) How valuable is the research?	**Include or exclude ?**
	experienced teachers".	experienced teachers.				'safe', but not to the participants.		contradictory data are acknowledged.			
Willcox (2017)	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	Can't tell	Can't tell	Can't tell	Can't tell	Cant tell	Some mention to relevance and wider context. Little discussion of contribution/ new research/transferability.	**3- Exclude**
Comments	Aim of "understanding how to create a psychologically safe art classroom for students".	Exploring subjective/ lived experiences.	No justification of research design.	No explanation of recruitment/ sample/ participants.	Data collection unclear, methods not justified, methods not explicit (i.e. type of interviews/how conducted) form of data unclear. Saturation of data not discussed. Some very limited justification of setting.	No discussion/consideration of relationship. Lack of criticality suggests bias.	Pseudonyms mentioned. Beyond this no mention of ethics.	Analysis process not described. Unclear how the categories/themes were derived from the data. No explanation as to how the data presented were selected from the original sample. Contradictory data not considered. Researchers own role not critically examined own role/bias.	Findings are not clearly stated, but woven into the article. There is not adequate discussion of arguments for and against. No discussion surrounding credibility of findings.		
*This study used a mixed method approach and is additionally assessed as such using the MMAT appraisal tool. See Appendix E											

Appendix D – Key for the Inclusion of Studies during Quality Assessment

Classification	Description
1	Paper included - Study meets all CASP criteria (‘yes’ answered to all questions)
2	Paper included – Evidence is not sufficient to say that all criteria have been met.
3	Paper excluded – Excluded based on lack of evidence in many aspects of the CASP. Quality has been assessed by the CASP criteria as poor.

Appendix E – Components of the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool used for the Quality Assessment Process for Hemi and Mortlock (2017) and Turner and Braine (2015) within SLR

Mixed methods appraisal tool (MMAT)

version 2018

Hemi and Mortlock (2017)

Quantitative descriptive

			Comments
4.1. Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?	Yes	X	Sample embedded within the context of the study (the participating school).
	Can't Tell		
	No		
4.2. Is the sample representative of the target population?	Yes	X	Sample is representative.
	Can't Tell		
	No		
4.3. Are the measurements appropriate?	Yes	X	Variables clearly defined. Measurements justified.
	Can't Tell		
	No		
4.4. Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?	Yes		No mention of non-responders.
	Can't Tell	x	
	No		
Mixed methods			
5.1. Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?	Yes		Limited justification/exploration of mixed method approach.
	Can't Tell	X	
	No		
	Yes	X	

5.2. Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question?	Can't Tell		Qualitative and quantitative data are presented together to answer research question in a coherent way.
	No		
5.3. Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted?	Yes	X	Integration of the qualitative and quantitative components apparent and consequent findings considered at length.
	Can't Tell		
	No		
5.4. Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?	Yes	X	Divergences explored and addressed.
	Can't Tell		
	No		
5.5. Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?	Yes	X	Qualitative component assessed using CASP – quality deemed satisfactory, although there is no reference to qualitative analysis used. Descriptive Quantitative element explored and also deemed of high enough quality.
	Can't Tell		
	No		

Mixed methods appraisal tool (MMAT)

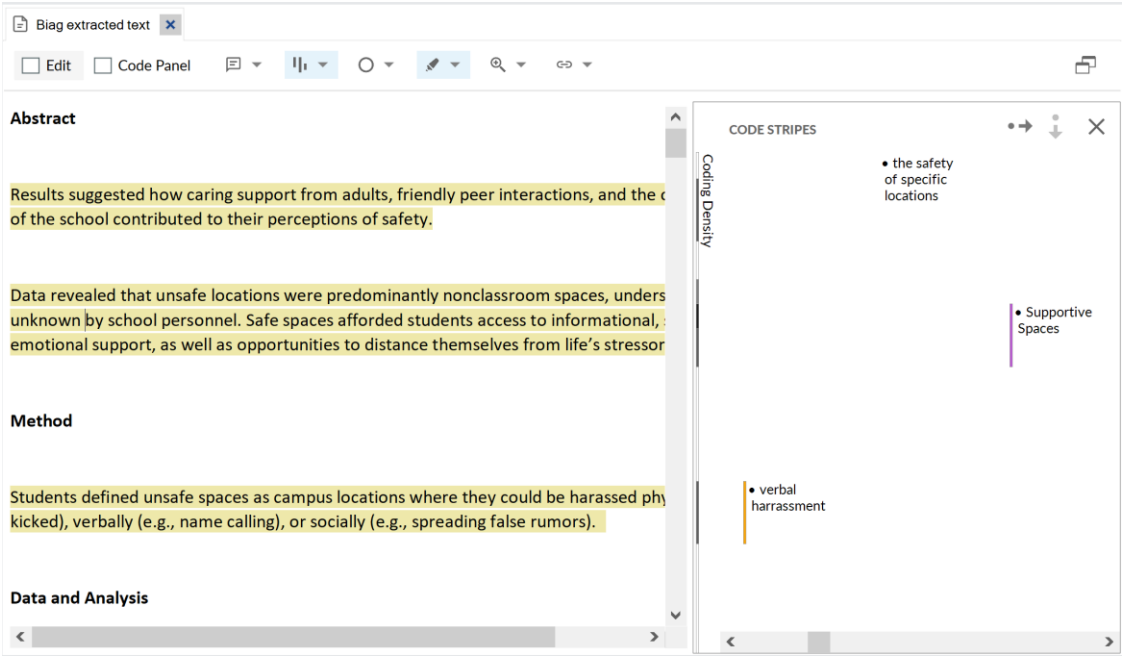
version 2018

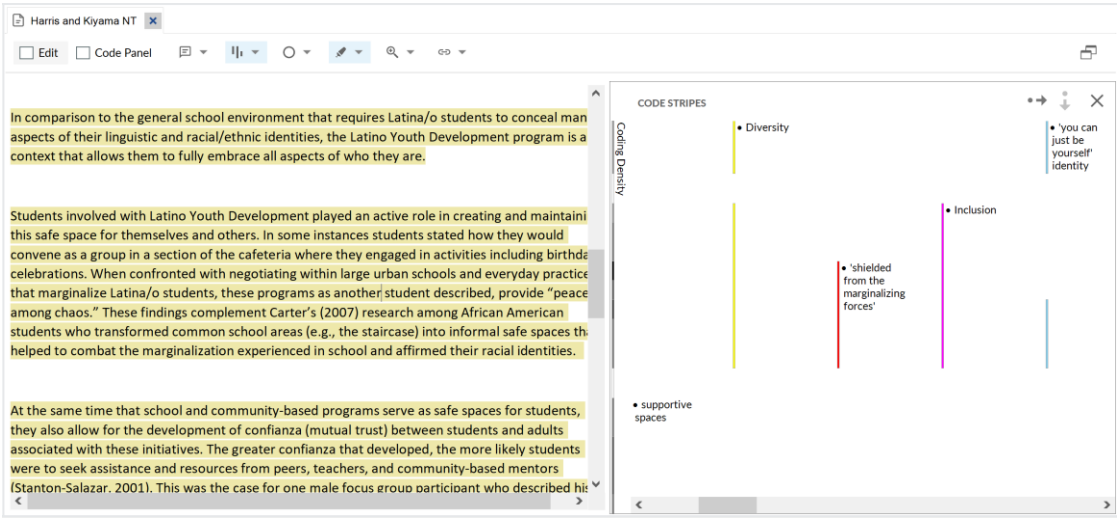
Turner and Braine (2015)

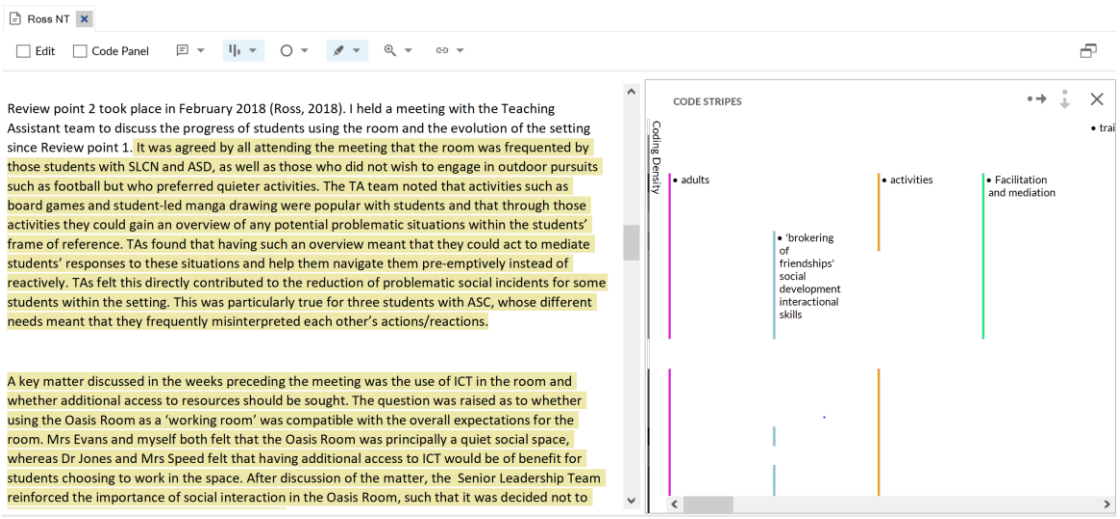
Quantitative descriptive			**Comments**
4.1. Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?	Yes	X	Participation of trainee and experienced teachers relevant to research question.
	Can't Tell		
	No		
4.2. Is the sample representative of the target population?	Yes	X	Target population is trainee and experienced teachers, and this is sample population.
	Can't Tell		
	No		
4.3. Are the measurements appropriate?	Yes		Triangulation of information is measured by number of responses, more information about this would be necessary to determine reliability/validity and whether appropriate.
	Can't Tell	X	
	No		

4.4. Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?	Yes	X	Authors were very transparent about amount of responses /non-respondents.
	Can't Tell		
	No		
Mixed methods			
5.1. Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?	Yes	X	Rationale provided
	Can't Tell		
	No		
5.2. Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question?	Yes	X	Triangulation of information neatly presented
	Can't Tell		
	No		
5.3. Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted?	Yes	X	Integrated adequately
	Can't Tell		
	No		
5.4. Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?	Yes	X	Contradictory data explored
	Can’t Tell		
	No		
5.5. Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?	Yes	X	Qualitative methods assessed via CASP.
	Can't Tell		
	No		

Appendix F - Examples of Line-by-line Coding on NVivo for the Thematic Synthesis





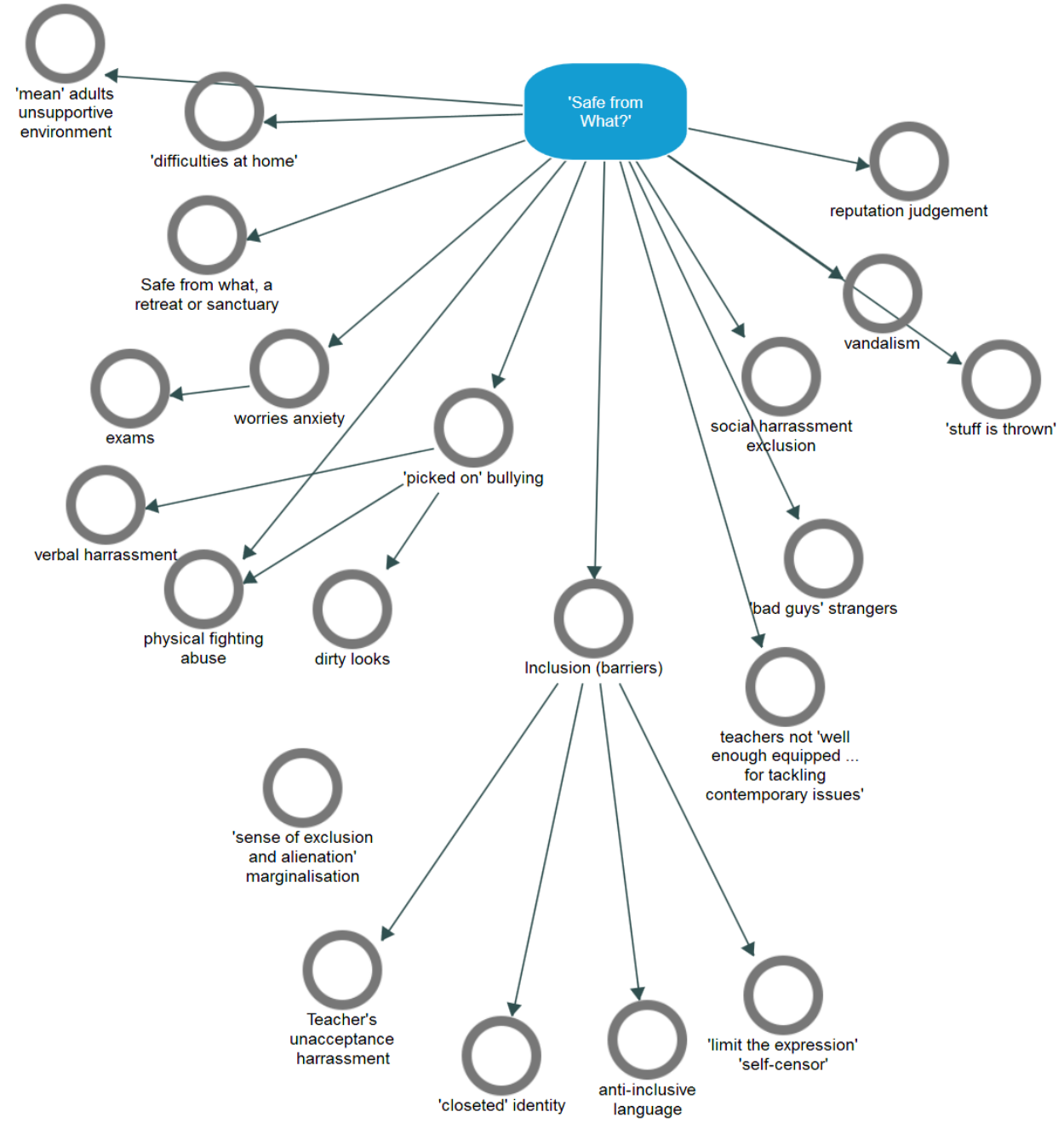


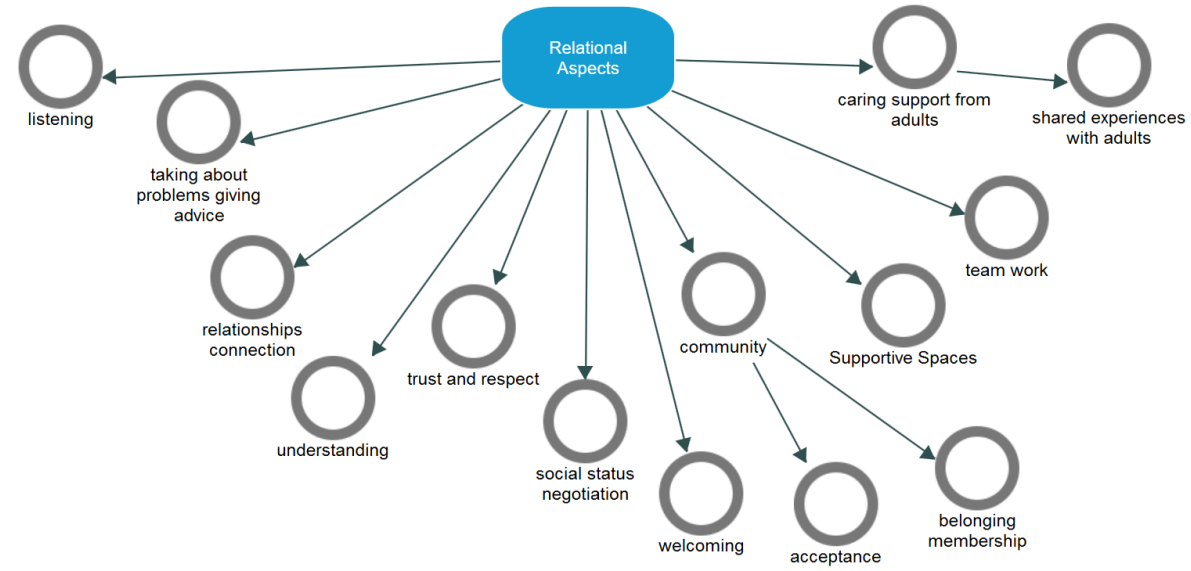
Appendix G - Descriptive themes with their codes

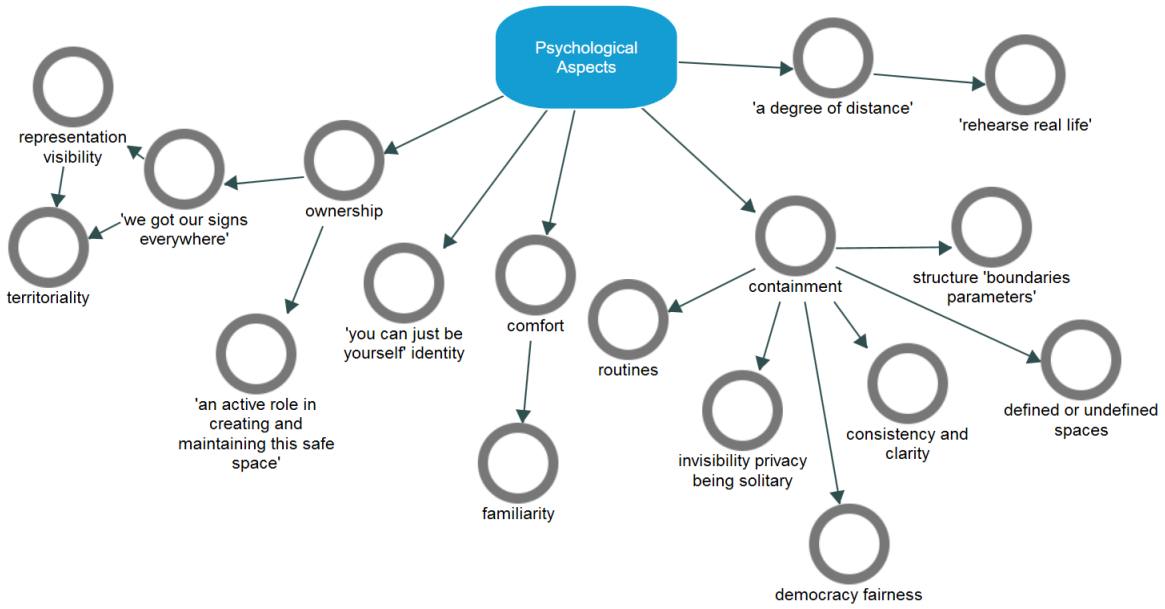
Descriptive theme	Physical aspects e.g. space, time and activities	Expression, creativity and risk	Comfort, calm and wellbeing	Containment, rehearsal and distance	Relational and social spaces	Community, membership and ownership	Adults and learning	The wider context	Safe from what?	Diversity and Inclusionary factors	Exclusionary factors
Initial Codes	A literal safe area/ environmental factors The safety of specific locations Library Reading Activities Resources ICT Celebrations Noise/ sensory Times of day/ periods of time Physical safety	SRE /SRI classes Religion-related dialogue Vulnerability 'Importance of discussion and space for dialogue' 'Just let them out': expressions, views, thoughts and feelings. 'Can be a dangerous space'; balancing safety and danger Challenge /debate 'Feeling confident to ask	Happiness/ wellbeing Emotional safety Benefits of safe spaces "Fun spaces" Familiarity 'Sense of calmness'/ relaxation Emotional development	'Rehearse real-life' 'A degree of distance' Invisibility/ privacy and solitary 'Distance themselves from life's stressors' 'Free of worries' Containment Defined/ undefined spaces Consistency and clarity Democracy/ fairness	Supportive spaces Welcoming Understanding Problem-solving /advice Listening Relationships/ connection Listening Teamwork Fun spaces Social status and negotiation reputation	Belonging/ membership "We got our signs everywhere" Representation and visibility "You can just be yourself/ identity" Community Acceptance "an active role in creating and maintaining the safe space" Ownership Territoriality	Wellbeing of adults Relationship with other adults Training Adults' shared experiences Caring support from adults Counselling Problem solving/ advice Adult supervision and safety Facilitation and mediation	Organisation of the school/ school culture Attending school Home life Larger community/ society Power and privilege Hostile climate in wider community	Worries/ anxiety Exams Unsafe spaces "Bad guys"/ strangers "An unsafe feeling" Criticism Judgement Vandalism Physical fighting Verbal Harassment "Picked on"/ bullying "Stuff is thrown"	Individual differences Inclusion Resilience "An ally" Safe space for diverse groups Shielding from "marginalised forces" Additional needs "More education and talks about it" - activism/ social justice Ethnic diversity Hostile climate in	Hostile climate in wider community 'Closeted' identity Gay-straight alliances "limit the experiences'/ self-censor LGBTQ+ Otherness Language Teachers' unacceptance and harassment Teachers "not equipped" Marginalisation

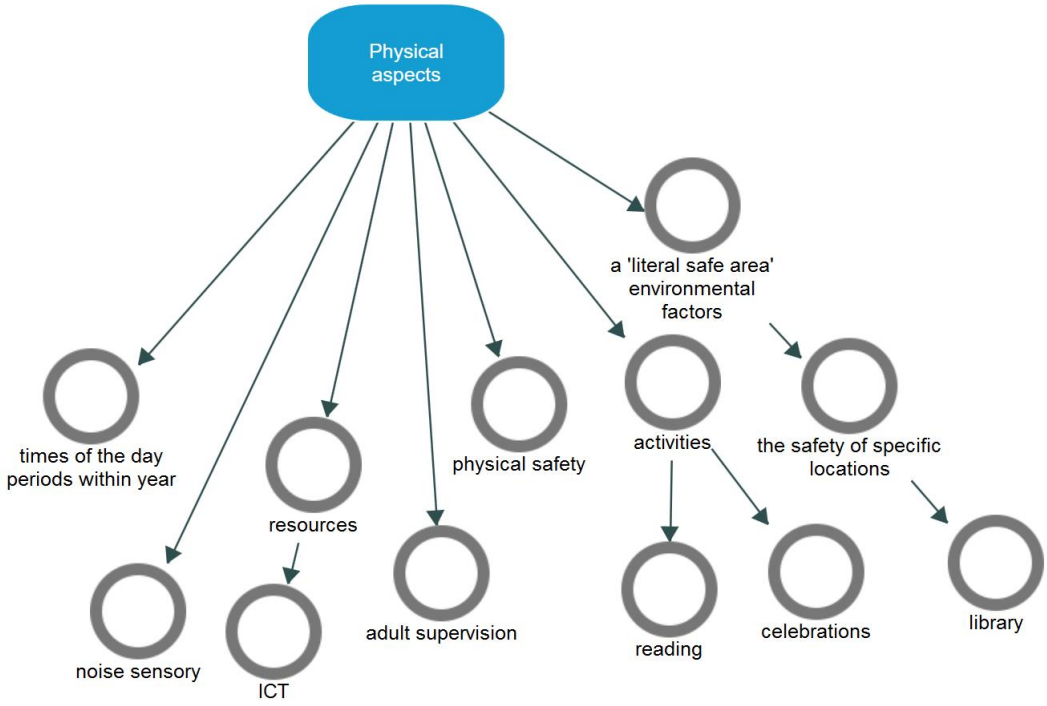
		and answer questions' Empowerment Creativity Territoriality Teamwork		Routines Structure / boundaries / parameters			Managing or preventing conflict Brokering of friendships Applying rules/ expectations Taking risks in their learning		Social harassment/ exclusion "Chaos" for marginalised groups.	wider community	

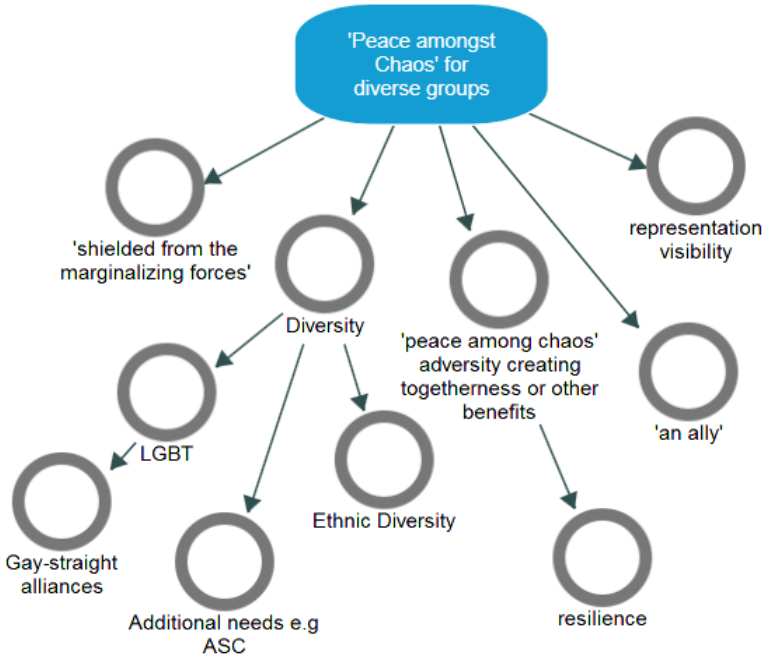
Appendix H - Initial Thematic Maps for Analytic Themes (before imposing the research question onto the analysis).

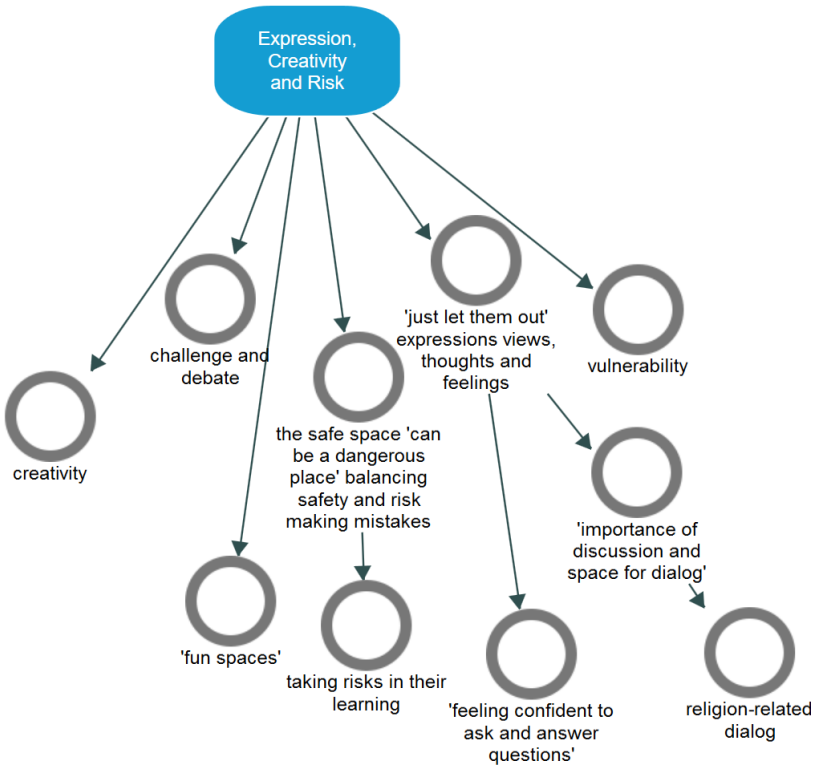


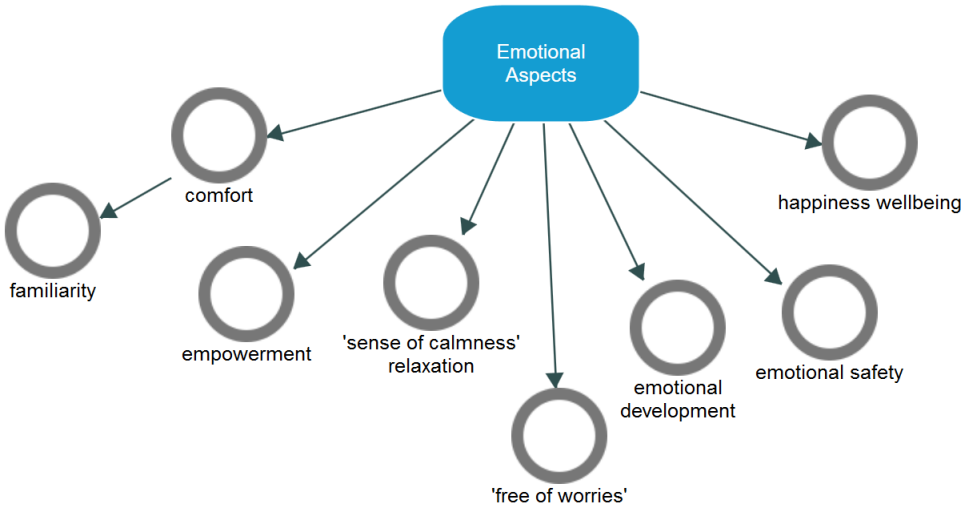

Relational Aspects
listening
taking about problems giving advice
relationships connection
understanding
trust and respect
social status negotiation
welcoming
community
acceptance
belonging membership
Supportive Spaces
team work
caring support from adults
shared experiences with adults

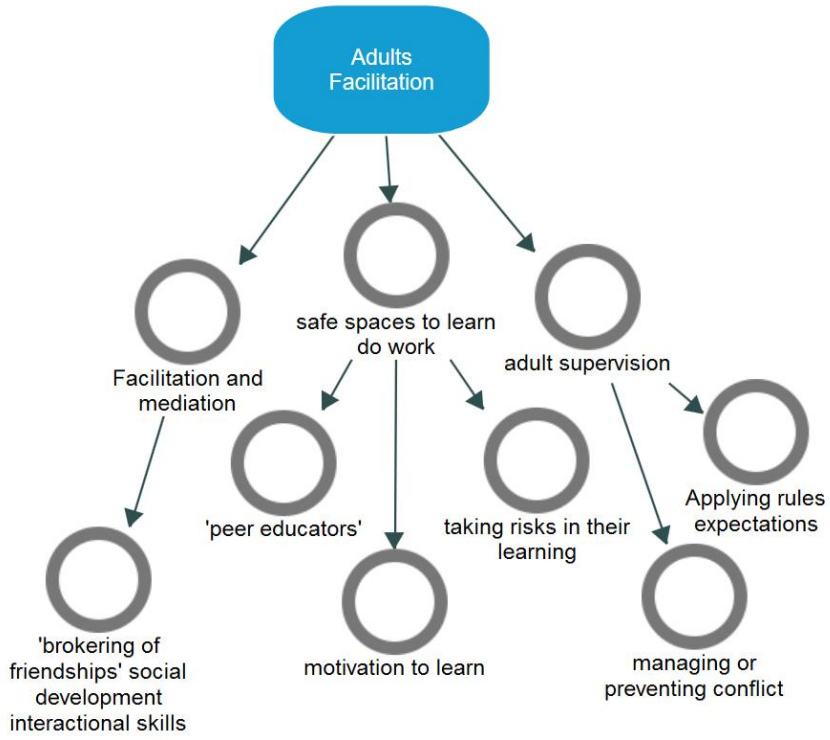

Psychological Aspects
representation visibility
territoriality
'we got our signs everywhere'
ownership
'an active role in creating and maintaining this safe space'
'you can just be yourself' identity
comfort
familiarity
routines
containment
invisibility privacy being solitary
democracy fairness
consistency and clarity
defined or undefined spaces
structure 'boundaries parameters'
'a degree of distance'
'rehearse real life'

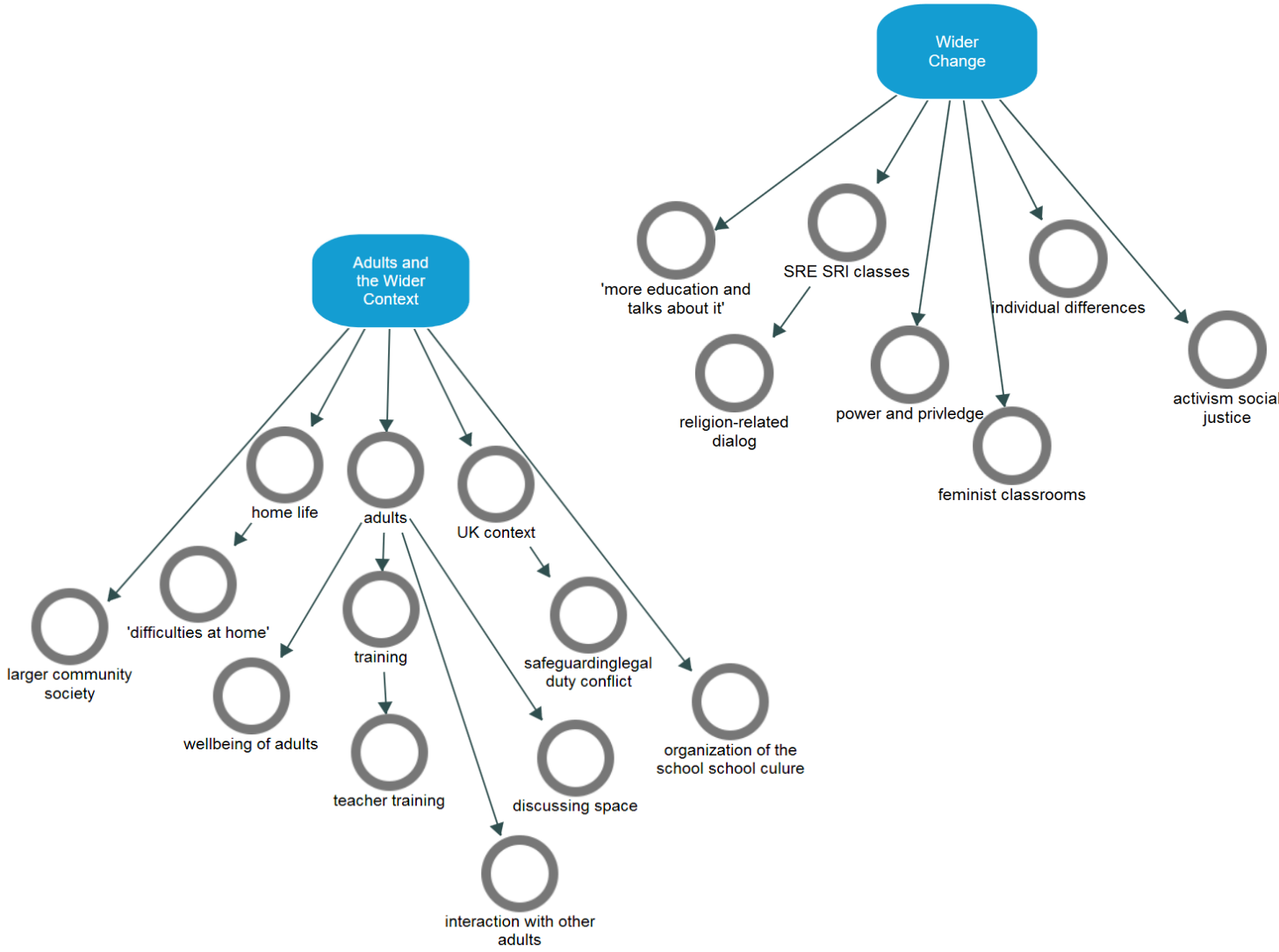

Physical aspects
times of the day periods within year
noise sensory
resources
ICT
adult supervision
physical safety
a 'literal safe area' environmental factors
activities
reading
the safety of specific locations
celebrations
library


'Peace amongst Chaos' for diverse groups
'shielded from the marginalizing forces'
Diversity
LGBT
Gay-straight alliances
Additional needs e.g ASC
Ethnic Diversity
'peace among chaos' adversity creating togetherness or other benefits
resilience
representation visibility
'an ally'

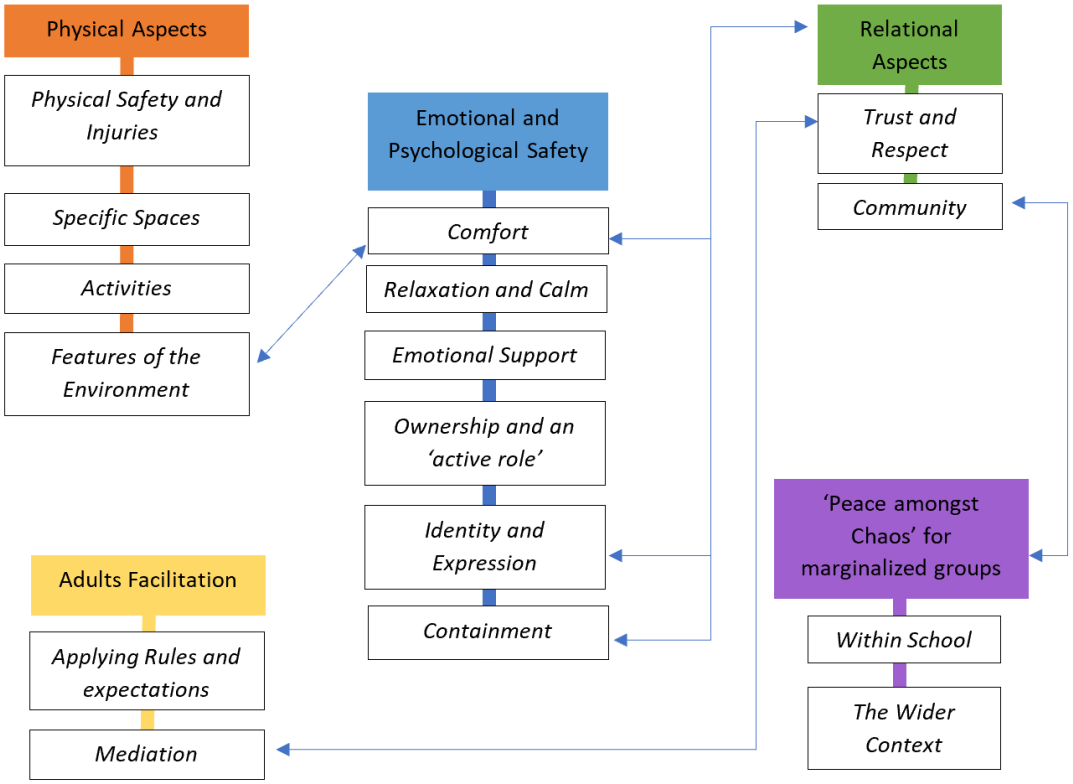

Expression, Creativity and Risk
creativity
challenge and debate
the safe space 'can be a dangerous place' balancing safety and risk making mistakes
'just let them out' expressions views, thoughts and feelings
vulnerability
'importance of discussion and space for dialog'
'fun spaces'
taking risks in their learning
'feeling confident to ask and answer questions'
religion-related dialog


Emotional Aspects
comfort
familiarity
empowerment
'sense of calmness' relaxation
'free of worries'
emotional development
emotional safety
happiness wellbeing


Adults Facilitation
Facilitation and mediation
safe spaces to learn do work
adult supervision
'peer educators'
taking risks in their learning
Applying rules expectations
'brokering of friendships' social development interactional skills
motivation to learn
managing or preventing conflict


Wider Change
'more education and talks about it'
SRE SRI classes
individual differences
religion-related dialog
power and privledge
activism social justice
feminist classrooms
Adults and the Wider Context
home life
adults
UK context
larger community society
'difficulties at home'
training
safeguardinglegal duty conflict
wellbeing of adults
organization of the school school culure
teacher training
discussing space
interaction with other adults

Appendix I - Final Thematic Map from SLR Thematic Analysis



Appendix J - Full Table of Characteristics

Citation	Context	Sample	Aims and Objectives	Study method/ design	Any additional notes
Biag (2014) Perceived School Safety: Visual Narratives from the Middle Grades, Journal of School Violence, 13:2, 165-187.	California, USA "An urban/inner-city school" "with an ethnically diverse, and economically disadvantaged population".	Gifted and talented classroom	"How do middle school students characterize safe and unsafe spaces at their school?" (p. 167) "to investigate the social dynamics and temporal qualities of campus locations deemed unsafe and identify "hot spots" that may necessitate the attention of teachers and administrators" (p. 170)	Participatory visual methods	Research was part of a larger study on 'school caring' Safe spaces within a school are explored.
Butler, J. K., Kane, R. G., & Morshead, C. E. (2017). 'It's My Safe Space': Student Voice, Teacher Education, and the Relational Space of an Urban High School. Urban	Canada "Urban multi-ethic school" High school	Opportunistic sample 6 school administrators 16 students	"To gather student voice data on best practices for teacher candidates in urban high schools." (p. 11)	Semi-structured interviews	"part of a larger multiyear study across urban high schools that commenced in April 2013, involving conversations between teacher candidates and high school students" (p.10)

Citation	Context	Sample	Aims and Objectives	Study method/ design	Any additional notes
Education, 52(7), 889–916.		"Three were in their first year at the school, 6 each were in their third and fourth years, and 1 was in second year" – (p. 10)			This research explores a particular school being a 'safe space' for students.
Fetner, T., Elafros, A., Bortolin, S., & Drechsler, C. (2012). Safe Spaces: Gay-Straight Alliances in High Schools. Canadian Review of Sociology-Revue Canadienne De Sociologie, 49(2), 188–207.	United States and Canada High Schools	Young adults – aged 18-25. Sample has participated in gay-straight alliances.	Examining gay-straight alliances in high schools.	Qualitative online interviews	Research collected between 2005-2008. The 'safe space' explored in this research is a Gay-Straight Alliance.
Gross & Rutland (2016) Creating a safe place: SRE teaching as an act of security and identity formation in government schools in Australia, British Journal of	Australia – Sydney and Melbourne. Special Religious Education	90 participants Students and teachers interviewed	"seeks to analyse the components that contribute to Special Religious Education (SRE) classes in government schools in Australia being considered as a 'safe place' and the ways in which they facilitate an	Case study Semi- structured interviews and classroom observations	The 'safe space' explored is Special Religious Education (SRE) classes.

Citation	Context	Sample	Aims and Objectives	Study method/ design	Any additional notes
Religious Education, 38:1, 30-46.	(SRE) classes in Australia are separate, denominational, confessional teaching for specific in-faith study.	Three primary schools and two secondary schools. "The students in the primary schools were from Grades 5 and 6 and in the high schools from Grades 9 and 10" (p. 37).	understanding of the students' own religious and cultural identity" (p. 30)	Ethnographic study using grounded theory methodology.	
Harris, D. M., & Kiyama, J. M. (2015). The Role of School and Community-Based Programs in Aiding Latina/o High School Persistence. Education and Urban Society, 47(2), 182–206.	"low-performing urban school district in the upper Atlantic region of the United States" (p.190)	95 students in one school district. 41 parents/carers From high schools, higher education institutions and community colleges.	RQ - how does the involvement with school and community-based programs influence the persistence of Latina/o secondary school students? Aim - to engage youth and families in identifying both problems and solutions, and offering recommendations on topic	Focus groups " inductive and deductive analysis was employed for interview transcripts" (p. 191)	Data collection during November of 2009 and April 2010. The 'safe space' was "school and community-based programs" according to the findings of this research (p. 47).

Citation	Context	Sample	Aims and Objectives	Study method/ design	Any additional notes
Hemi, W., & Mortlock, A. (2017). On the Periphery or at the Centre?: Ideas for Improving the Physical and Interpersonal Environments for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, and Transsexual/gender Students at a New Zealand Secondary School. New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work, 14(2), 99–113. Education Research Complete.	New Zealand Secondary school "At the start of the study, a new LGBT support group had been established in the school" (p. 101)	74 students and 20 staff members	"aimed to enhance the interpersonal and physical environments for students with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations." (p. 99)	Action Research Evaluation of physical environment A web-based survey A plan for ongoing action and improvement Portfolio of "author's observations and reflections of the school's physical and social environment, her own role as participant researcher, and other thinking, which was provoked and developed by relevant research articles" (p. 103)	"The first author participated in the school environment as a paid employee throughout the duration of the study, hence site selection was the researcher's workplace and participants, their colleagues." – p. 101 The 'safe space' discussed is the school environment for "lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans-sexual and trans-gendered students and staff" (p.99)

Citation	Context	Sample	Aims and Objectives	Study method/ design	Any additional notes
Jindal-Snape, Vettraino, Lowson & McDuff (2011) Using creative drama to facilitate primary–secondary transition, Education 3-13, 39:4, 383-394,	Scotland Transition between primary to secondary – children aged 12	6 primary schools in one local authority 357 pupils and 12 teachers Purposive sampling	"To consider ways in which creative drama can lead to successful primary– secondary transition." (p. 385)	Focus groups Interviews Evaluation data via Questionnaires	The 'safe space' is within the activity of creative drama
Langhout, R. D., & Annear, L. (2011). Safe and Unsafe School Spaces: Comparing Elementary School Student Perceptions to Common Ecological Interventions and Operationalizations. Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 21(1), 71–86.	United States One school described as having a 'working class or poor' population. (p. 75)	225 students from an elementary school	Aims: Examine what elementary school students label as safe and unsafe school places. Assess if ecological interventions designed to alter school safety and popular operationalizations of safety are correlated with students' perceptions.	Questionnaires The collection of student referral data and injury data (Quantitative) Environmental inventories	Safe spaces within a school are explored.

Citation	Context	Sample	Aims and Objectives	Study method/ design	Any additional notes
			RQ: (1) Do students conceptualize safe places simply as places that are not unsafe?; (2) How do students' perceptions of (un)safe places relate to ecological school safety interventions and operationalizations?; and (3) How do students define unsafe and safe places?" (p. 74)		
Anna Lockley-Scott (2019) Closing down the Discussion: Is a Classroom a Conducive Space for Religion Related Dialogue? A United Kingdom Based Case Study, Religion & Education, 46:1, 40-58.	UK "multicultural, single-sex girls' state comprehensive school." - 43	36 teachers responded to surveys, an additional 5 did interviews 76 pupils, aged between 12 and 16	" This article examines possibilities and limitations for religion-related dialogue in classrooms though the exploration of a UK based case-study." (p. 40)	Case study Student qualitative questionnaires Staff surveys and semi-interviews	"Interviews with teachers carried out in the Spring and Autumn of 2016" (p. 44) This research looks at the notion of creating a 'safe space' for religion-related dialogue in classrooms.

Citation	Context	Sample	Aims and Objectives	Study method/ design	Any additional notes
				Multi-method "A constructivist form of grounded theory" (p.44)	
Mayberry, M., Chenneville, T., & Currie, S. (2013). Challenging the Sounds of Silence: A Qualitative Study of Gay-Straight Alliances and School Reform Efforts. Education and Urban Society, 45(3), 307–339.	United States "four high schools in a large metropolitan school district" (p. 313) Four Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) participated.	12 GSA student members 4 GSA advisors 2 two high school principals 2 district administrators.	"what practices hinder and what practices help GSAs pursue school reform efforts aimed at challenging homophobic and heterosexist practices embedded in school cultures?" (p. 316) "The focus of this study is on the benefits and shortcomings of GSAs […] exploring three key school practices— silence and passive resistance; safe spaces; and breaking the silence and barriers to	Semi-structured interviews	"The provision of safe spaces" (p. 307) is discussed in relation to school practices with regard to supporting or destabilizing antigay school environments (e.g. Gay-Straight Alliances).

Citation	Context	Sample	Aims and Objectives	Study method/ design	Any additional notes
			breaking the silence." (p. 311)		
Ross, H. (2019). A case study: Developing a 'safe space' for vulnerable young people at school. Support for Learning, 34(2), 162–178.	UK A small independent school with children aged 4-19 attending.	"Participants in this project were members of the school TA team (Mrs Evans, Dr Jones and Mrs Speed), as well as myself and the Head Teacher." (p. 167)	"This case study discusses the measures taken in in one school to address the needs of young people with ASC, with a view to supporting them within a newly designated 'safe space' at their school, The Oasis Room" p. 163	Case study Action-based research "Data were constructed through discussions, some of which were audio-recorded and others minuted, and notes were taken. Audio-recorded discussions were fully transcribed, and participants were provided with copies of those transcriptions." (p. 169) "Documentation pertaining to the Oasis Room was coded thematically and compared with findings	The 'safe space' explored is the 'oasis room' within a school.

Citation	Context	Sample	Aims and Objectives	Study method/ design	Any additional notes
				reported by the Teaching Assistant Team in their interview transcriptions. This allowed for both exploration of different standpoints and data triangulation" (p. 169)	
Spencer, L. G. (2015). Engaging Undergraduates in Feminist Classrooms: An Exploration of Professors' Practices. Equity & Excellence in Education, 48(2), 195–211.	United States	21 interviews with college and university professors	"RQ1: What strategies do professors in feminist classrooms use to teach undergraduates about human identity and diversity, privilege, and social justice? RQ2: How do professors in feminist classrooms foster student interest in studying diversity, recognizing privilege, and critiquing systems of injustice?" (pp. 200 – 201)	Semi-structured interviews Participatory action research Analysed used "constant comparative techniques" (p. 202)	"conducted in the spring of 2010" (p. 196) Professors "who teach classes related to feminism, intersectionality, human diversity, identity, and social justice" (p. 202) The 'safe space' was a finding of the research – professors recommended "creating a 'safe space' for class discussion" in feminist classrooms (p. 195).

Citation	Context	Sample	Aims and Objectives	Study method/ design	Any additional notes
Andy K. Steck & David Perry (2018) Challenging Heteronormativity: Creating a Safe and Inclusive Environment for LGBTQ Students, Journal of School Violence, 17:2, 227-243,	United States	7 secondary school administrators in secondary schools	"explore secondary administrators' perceptions about their experiences creating a school environment where LGBTQ students reported feeling safe, accepted, and supported academically" (p. 227)	"A qualitative phenomenographic method involving semistructured interviews" (p. 227)	Safe spaces were discussed in relation to the school experience for LGBTQ+ individuals.
Turner, S., & Braine, M. (2015). Unravelling the 'Safe' concept in teaching: What can we learn from teachers' understanding? Pastoral Care in Education, 33(1), 47–62.	UK	"Opportunistic sample, comprised of 24 Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) trainee teachers in secondary science and eight experienced school mentors" (p. 53)	"How do trainee teachers interpret the term 'safe' within the Teachers' Standards (2012) and in their teaching? (2) How do practising teachers interpret this term for themselves and their pupils?" (p. 53)	Case Study Questionnaires (both trainee and experienced teachers) Group interview (only trainee teachers)	"The data were drawn from two perspectives: trainee teachers' pre- and post-teaching practice interpretations and their understandings of the term 'safe classroom'" (p. 53) The notion of 'safe spaces' in school was discussed with teachers and trainee teachers.

Appendix K – Information Sheet and FAQ Sheet for Parents and Carers

Parent/Carer Final Information Sheet

Dear Parent/Carer,

My name is Amy Mumford, and I am Training to be an Educational Psychologist.

Part of my training includes carrying out a piece of research and writing it up in a document called a 'thesis'. My thesis is on the topic of 'safe spaces' for children and young people.

I am asking primary-aged children and one of their parents to participate remotely in this study in pairs.

Please take time to consider the information below carefully, and if you agree to you and your child participating please fill out the consent form, following the link indicated at the end of this document.

Many thanks and warm wishes,

Amy Mumford

Trainee Educational Psychologist
University of Exeter

Title of the Project:

'Safe Space: An Exploration of the Portrayal of the Emotional and Physical Safety Felt by Children and Young People'.

About the Project:

This project is about 'safe spaces' at school and beyond, exploring about how and where children feel safe, and what can be done to help them feel safe.

To explore this I will be remotely interviewing you, as a parent. In addition to this, I will ask you to fill out a worksheet with your child, exploring their views. I will ask you to audio-record this activity.

I hope that this research will provide educators and professionals involved with children information on the lived experience of children, and how this relates to their feelings of safety. This is considered especially relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Below are answers to some questions you may have about the study.

What Does Taking Part involve?

1. Introductory Phone call

Those involved: Researcher and Parent.

Activity: This is an opportunity for us to 'touch-base', to answer any questions you have about the study and to talk about the activity you will carry out with your child.

How: This can be over video-call or telephone, it will **not** be recorded.

Length of time: Approximately 10-20 minutes.

2. Child Worksheet Activity

N.B: I will provide a worksheet alongside instructions for you for this activity (either by post or email).

Those involved: Parent and Child

Activity: You and your child will do an activity, in the comfort of your own home, which will involve your child drawing their 'safe space'. This 'safe space' can be at home, school or any other location. There are no right or wrong answers. After your child has drawn his/her safe space, the worksheet asks him/her to annotate the drawing and for them to talk to you about their drawing.

How: This will take place face to face, between you and your child. I **will** ask you to audio-record this activity*, with your child's permission.

Length of time: Approximately 10-15 minutes.

3. Virtual Parent Interview

Those involved: Researcher and Parent.

Activity: This will be an interview gathering your views about your child's 'safe space' and feelings of safety at home, school and beyond.

How: This can be over video-call or telephone, it **will** be recorded*.

Length of time: Approximately 45-60 minutes.

After I have finished my research, you and your child will receive a letter detailing what I learnt from working with you both and thanking you for your participation.

**Please read the accompanying 'FAQ' document for more information on how I will store and use your data.*

Why have myself and my child been approached?

You and your child have been asked to participate primarily because of the age of your child (aged 4-11). Other suitability criteria includes your child:

- Being able to have some level of conceptual understanding of 'safety'.
- Not having complex/severe additional verbal communication needs.

In addition to both yourself and your child:

- Not being particularly sensitive to discussions surrounding 'safety'. For example: having experienced any severe and uncommon traumatizing event or adverse experience(s).
- Not having complex or severe mental health needs.

We will can discuss this criteria further in the introductory phone call, if you have any questions or concerns (e.g. you don't think you or your child will be suitable, based on the information above), please get in touch using the details below.

I am happy for my child and I to participate! What Next?

This is great news. Please ensure you have read the 'Frequently Asked Questions' document, and if you are still happy to proceed, please sign the consent forms for the study following the links below.

Consent form for your own participation:

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=d10qkZj77k6vMhM02PBKU4RPtiwcr6ZPn7fg5PF1WWxUOTJKVjcyUEQxNzhOVjQ2NUZGTVVJTlJTMC4u

Consent form for your child's participation (to be completed by yourself):

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=d10qkZj77k6vMhM02PBKU4RPtiwcr6ZPn7fg5PF1WWxURUU2NTI2Rko0VllNQkRPSElRRVBXRExTUC4u

We will obtain consent from your child verbally at the beginning of the 'worksheet activity'. If you would like to tell your child more information about the study in the meantime, please see the 'Information Sheet for Children' document.

Just so you know, you and your child will be able to withdraw from the study at any time if you change your mind.

I might be interested, but I have a few questions. What should I do?

I will be happy to answer any questions you may have. Please contact me via the phone number or email below to let me know that you have queries, and we can discuss. There will be no obligation to participate, it is completely your choice.

Amy's contact details:

Name:	Amy Mumford (Trainee Educational Psychologist)
Address:	Educational Psychology Department, St Lukes Campus, Heavitee Road, Exeter, Devon EX1 2LT
Phone:	07896996605
Email:	**am1185@exeter.ac.uk**

Many thanks for your interest in this project!

'Safe Spaces' FAQ

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You and your child will be part of a piece of research which hopes to benefit teachers, professionals and consequently other children by exploring the notion of emotional and physical safety for children and young people and advocate for schools to be 'safe spaces'.

The activity selected for this research was considered with children's enjoyment and engagement in mind, and consequently it is hoped that your child will enjoy the experience.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

As with all research, I will do everything in my power to make this advantageous as possible for those involved and remove any risks.

As required for all research undertaken by students of the University of Exeter this study has been approved by an ethics panel and consequently a general risk assessment has been undertaken. A possible risk that was identified through this process was unpleasant thoughts or feelings experienced by the children due to the subject matter of 'safety'. This is thought to be unlikely unless your child has an experience of trauma or feeling unsafe in the past. If this is the case please inform me (through the contact details below), so I can put the necessary safeguards in place.

If you know Amy (the researcher) personally, you may feel that you want to participate to help Amy with her research. Ensure you think about your participation carefully before proceeding, and only agree to participate if you feel completely happy to.

What will happen if my child does not want to carry on with the study?

If you, or your child, decide at any point that you would like to stop taking part in the study, please notify me as soon as possible. You do not have to give a reason, and all data concerning you and your child will be destroyed. Please note that once that information that you or your child has provided (e.g. audio recording) has been combined with data from other participants, it will be impossible to distinguish which data has come from you or your child. Consequently, it will be impossible to withdraw you or your child's data beyond the beginning of the analysis process. Identifying information by this point will already have been removed.

How will my information be stored and used?

The information you provide and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's guidelines. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The University of Exeter processes personal data for the purposes of carrying out research in the public interest. The University will endeavour to be transparent about its processing of your personal data and this information sheet should provide a clear explanation of this. If you do have any queries about the University's processing of your personal data that cannot be resolved by the research team, further information may be obtained from the University's Data Protection Officer by emailing dataprotection@exeter.ac.uk or at www.exeter.ac.uk/dataprotection.

The results of the research will be published in anonymised form. All written data gathered from interviews will be anonymised by labelling any information with codenames rather than you/your child's real name. The key to the coding system and any electronic data will be stored on a password protected U-drive that will be accessed only by the researcher and the research supervisors. Your consent form will protected securely using Mircosoft Forms, this software complies with GDPR regulations and will protect your jurisdictional legal rights. Any information which may identify a participant will not be included in any publications or presentations.

Every effort to maintain the anonymity and protect the identity of you and your child will be made. The electronic copy of the worksheet completed by your child will be stored on a password protected U-drive which will only be accessed by the researcher and

research supervisors, they will be deleted when the research is written up. The worksheet will not be used in any presentations or publications.

Audio-recorded and video-recorded information will be deleted as soon as they are transcribed. Transcribed data will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of you or your child's name. Any personal and contact details will be stored separately from the transcript information and may be retained for up to 5 years. Third parties will not be allowed access to interview tapes and transcripts except as required by law or in the event that something disclosed during the interview causes concerns about possible harm to you or to someone else.

The research is to be used as the researcher' doctorate thesis. The thesis is a component of the Professional Doctorate in Educational, Child and Community Psychology at the University of Exeter. All written data gathered from interviews will be anonymised. The information may also be presented at conferences or used as part of training, and may be written up for journal articles. No information which identifies you or your child will be used within these documents.

Who can I contact if I have more questions?

For further information about this research please contact:

Name: Amy Mumford (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

Address: Educational Psychology Department, St Lukes Campus, Heavitee Road, Exeter, Devon EX1 2LT

Email: am1185@exeter.ac.uk

If you have any concerns and/or questions about the research and you would like to discuss this with someone else at the university please contact:

Research Supervisors:

- *Dr Will Shield: w.e.shield@exeter.ac.uk*
- *Dr Shirley Larkin: s.larkin@exeter.ac.uk*

Research Ethics and Governance Manager:

- *Gail Seymour: g.m.seymour@exeter.ac.uk*

Many thanks for your interest in this project!

Appendix L – Information Sheet for Children

Hello!

My name is Amy, and I work as an Educational Psychologist. I work with lots of different children and young people, and I am interested in what makes children and young people feel **safe**. I would like to learn more about **where you feel safe.**

If you would like to help me to learn more about you, I am going to ask your grown-up to work with you to fill in a worksheet. This worksheet will ask you to draw your 'safe space', label it and talk to your grown-up about what you have drawn.

While you are doing this activity, your grown-up will record your voices and share the recording with me, so I can hear how you describe your 'safe space'. This is important so I can understand your views, and your drawing, correctly.

By doing this activity, it will help adults to know what makes children feel safe at school, and where their 'safe spaces' are.

You can stop doing the project at any time. You just need to tell your grown-up that you would like to stop.

If you don't want to do this activity, that is ok. Please talk to your grown-up, and they will let me know.

Looking forward to learning more about you.

Best wishes,

Amy

Appendix M - Information Regarding Participants for Phase 2, and the Criteria for Involvement in the Research

Child Pseudonym	Age Bracket	Gender
Enid	8-9 years old	Female
Dave	6-7 years old	Male
Rosie	8-9 years old	Female
Daisy	8-9 years old	Female
Kayden	6-7 years old	Male
Adam	4-5 years old	Male
Faye	4-5 years old	Female
Richard	10-11 years old	Male
Hallie	4-5 years old	Female

Parent/Carer Pseudonym	Gender
Janice	Female
Millie	Female
Sophie	Female
Dennis	Male
Anne	Female
Hayley	Female
Jane	Female
Sarah	Female

The criteria for involvement for the child participants were as follows:

- Aged 4-11 and in primary school.
- Being capable of having a conceptual understanding of ‘safety’.
- Not having complex/severe additional verbal communication needs.

The criteria for both the child and parent:

- Not being particularly sensitive to discussions surrounding ‘safety’ - for example, having experienced any severe and uncommon traumatizing event or adverse experience(s).
- Not having complex or severe mental health needs.

Appendix N – Worksheet for ‘Safe Space’ Drawing Activity

1) Please draw a picture of your ‘safe space’:

My ‘Safe Space’

2) Please label your picture with more information (or ask your parent/carer to do this for you).

3) Your parent/carer will now ask you some questions about your drawing, there are no right or wrong answers. You can say as much or as little as you like. Thank you for answering these questions honestly.

Thank you for your time!

Adult Instructions for the Worksheet Activity

Before the Activity

If possible:

- Read through all of these instructions before delivering them to your child.
- Find somewhere that is distraction-free, on a table/surface.
- Ensure that audio-recording is set up and ready to go. If possible, use two devices to record, in case one does not work as expected.
- Set aside a dedicated period of time with your son/daughter for this task.

You will need:

- ✓ A pencil
- ✓ The worksheet
- ✓ Device(s) for audio recording (e.g. a phone).
- ✓ These instructions (printed or accessed via a phone/tablet/laptop).

The Activity

1. **Start audio recording**
2. Explain the activity & gain consent:

How to Explain the Activity

Say the following to your child. It is important that you read this as precisely as you can:

> **"I am going to ask you to draw a place that you feel safe in. You might go to this space to feel happy and calm. We will call this your 'safe space'."**
>
> **If s/he needs more explanation, you can use the following ways to describe feeling safe/a 'safe space'.**
>
> - "Feeling safe is what happens when you know you will not be hurt - this means feelings are **not** hurt and your body is **not** hurt."
> - "When you feel safe you feel relaxed and comfortable."
> - "You might go to your safe space when you feel sad, so you can feel happy again"
>
> ***Ensure that s/he knows that there are no right or wrong answers, and how well s/he draws is not important.***

How to Gain Consent

- Simply ask your Son/Daughter if they are happy to complete the task, and happy for it to be recorded. If they agree, then proceed. Answer any questions that they have, referring to the Child Information Sheet if needed.

3. **Ask your Son/Daughter to draw their 'safe space' picture.** (This bit might be quiet.. and that's ok!)
4. Label aspects of the drawing to make it clear what your child has drawn.
5. Ask your Son/Daughter the following:

Remember: The drawing is not important. The reasons behind it are!

Firstly, say:
"Tell me about your drawing"
Secondly, ask:
"**What** else?"
Thirdly, check again:
"Is there anything else you want to tell me?"
Fourthly, ask:
"**Why** do you feel safe here?"

Then, if your child hasn't already covered the following areas, explore:

- **Where***? – you could ask "where is your safe space"? or alternatively "have I been to this place before?"/"is it anywhere I would know?", and follow-up with some more open questions (see red box below).

**Maybe your child's safe space isn't anywhere in particular - maybe its imaginary - and that's ok.*

- **Who**? – This one is tricky not to 'lead' so try giving your child a choice: "Is there anyone in your safe space with you, or are you by yourself?" If your child says he/she is not alone, ask about who they are there with using open questions.

Open vs Closed Questions:

Open questions elicit longer answers which encourage description. An example of an open question is "how are you?"

Closed questions can be answered with 'yes' 'no' or short responses. An example of a closed question is "are you ok?"

Appendix P – Parent Interview Schedule

1. This interview is to gain your view on 'safe spaces' as a concept and your views on CHILD's feelings of safety at home and school.
    - 30-40 minutes
    - Will be recorded and I will make notes as we go
    - If you have any questions at any point please do ask, and if you want to stop the recording at any point do just say and that is fine.
    - Explain gain verbal consent – in case technology fails us - just need to say yes to three questions I will ask you.
    - Do you have any questions before I start recording?
2. Gain consent
    - Do you consent to take part in the 'safe space' study??
    - Can you confirm that you have read all the information provided, for example how your data will be handled and stored. You understand what participation involve and are happy to proceed?
    - And do you consent to your child NAME participating in this study and agree to me using the data you've already collected from her in my thesis research?

'Safe space' - the term	**Do you think your child had heard of the term 'safe space' before the interview?**	
		Where/When?
		How (used)?
		Why? (is there a reason for that, do you think?)
	Had you heard of the term before? - what do you think 'safe space' means?	
	Use the language used by the participant in this question throughout the interview to describe different 'types' of safe spaces.	Physical and 'moveable' - I may refer to different types of safe spaces throughout this interview. Some of them may be more about a physical location others might be things that can move

		between locations. So for example someone's 'safe space' in the broader idea may be within a relationship, activity or object.
		- Activities – e.g. running
		- Objects – e.g. a teddy or blanket
		- Relationships – e.g. a special person or group
	Do you feel that there any disadvantages to 'safe spaces'?	Risk taking, exploration.
The Child's 'Safe Space'		
	Was the picture of HIS/HER 'safe space' what you expected HIM/HER to draw?	
		Expectation (if different)
		- Where/When?
		- How (used)?
		- Why? (is there a reason for that, do you think?)
		- **How surprised were you by what they drew?**
	In your view, what is it about SPACE that makes HIM/HER feel safe?	
		Physical ???
		Moveable qualities – Activites, Objects, Relationships. ???
	Are there any scenarios when SPACE might be used by CHILD?	
		Explore
		-

	How does CHILD present in this space?	behaviour
	Can you tell me about some other spaces which CHILD feels safe in? These can be physical spaces or moveable spaces.	
		In the past compared to now.
		Physical and movement – activities, objects and relationships.
The Pandemic & home	**How do you feel that the pandemic affected CHILD's sense of safety?**	Explore – When/where? How used? Why/ Is there a reason...?
	Are there any spaces that CHILD doesn't have access to due to the pandemic, that they used to enjoy or use as their 'safe space'?	How has this affected him/her?
Home and School	**Does CHILD have more Safe Spaces at home or at school?**	Physical Moveable
	What are CHILD's safe spaces at school? ***If previous safe space topics hasn't explored safe spaces at home, explore this more here. "Where are there safe spaces at home" etc…***	
	What are some of the things that affect CHILD's feelings of safety at school?	Emotional and physical
The pandemic & school	**Has COVID changed these feelings of safety at school?**	Emotional and physical

	Has the change of how 'space' is used (e.g. bubbles) affected CHILD?	Explore
	Is there anything you would like to change about the environment at school for CHILD? Or for them to feel more safe?	Follow up
Future	**Looking forward, are there any ways that you anticipate feelings of 'safety' and 'safe spaces' may change for your child in the Future?**	Short term – next few months Long term – years. E.g. Teenagers
Anything else	**Anything else you want to mention on the topic of 'safe spaces' for your child?**	

Appendix Q – Examples of Quotes, Codes and their Relationship to Themes and Subthemes within the Thematic Analysis.

	Quote	Code	Subtheme	Theme
Child Views	*CHILD: I was about to do good Corona to stop you getting the bad Corona.* *PARENT: And the good Corona does what?* *CHILD: Stops you from getting the bad Corona. its a very nice thing in my safe room,*	Good corona/protection from vaccine	The pandemic	Tangible safety
	PARENT: What makes you feel safe? *CHILD: Cos there is loads of gates and a big wall.*	Physical aspects & Playground/Play	School	Specific spaces
	PARENT: Okay, so you like it in the lounge when you're on the sofa with the blankie when the fire is on. So why do you feel safe in the lounge? *CHILD: Because it's in my house. And like, I know it.*	Home & Lounge	Home	
	PARENT: So can I ask you the question? My question is, is why do you feel safe here? *CHILD: Wow, I feel safe here because there's wildlife and it's like a very safe place.*	Nature/ tree	Outside spaces	
	CHILD: When I feel sad, I can go up there and I have my LEGO to play with. It makes me happy	Playground/Play	Play	Doing something entertaining
	CHILD: I would like to fit a toy shop in my treehouse.. a toy shop or maybe just lots of toys	Toy shop	Toys	I have drawn my favourite stuff
	PARENT: So why do you feel safe here? *CHILD: Because it's got all my belongings and I've got Teddies to talk to* *PARENT: have you got a particular favourite teddy?* *CHILD: No, no, I like them all.*	Toys/objects/possessions	Special Objects	

	Quote	Code	Subtheme	Theme
Parent Views about School	*ME: So these relationships, I suppose, or the things that he gets safety from, like, these consistent relationships and these these reliable friends? has the pandemic got in the way of that all this year? PARENT: Yes. It is, I think, definitely. It has. Yeah, the friendship has because I do not have the mum's contact details. so sometimes he would speak about his friends. And I wasn't in a position to get hold of the parents, or I didn't know how to get hold of the parents so if he said I want to talk to so. So it definitely has affected in that sense.*	Pandemic and "social freedoms"	The pandemic and people	"it's taken a while for her to understand why the school system changed" – safety at school during a pandemic.
	PARENT: Well, I guess, in the short term, I really do worry about her having to isolate or for whatever reason, meaning being out of school again, because I know how important that environment is to her.	Pandemic - changes	The impact of school closures	
	PARENT: She just can't mix with certain people and then break times a bit different. And she eats lunch in a classroom and stuff and that she just accept.	Pandemic and "social freedoms" and pandemic - changes	Being restricted at school	
	PARENT: I know that sometimes he feels like he might want to take himself off for a bit and do something in a bit of a quieter place in the playground.	"a space out of the group"	Aspects of school	"An environment where they are given set tasks, structure and routine" – physical aspects of the school environment
	PARENT: maybe he would have library since he likes reading probably would have said library. I	Library	Locations	

	Quote	Code	Subtheme	Theme
	don't know I'm just thinking about it now, since you asked if there's any more information.			
	PARENT: So I think one of his safe spaces is probably football on Friday. So in the playground when they meet up, and he plays with them, and probably football Fridays, because the same group of friends. They play super with him they are in the same year.	School activities e.g. football	Activities	
	PARENT: in reception, they had like a lovely learning journey, and like the little interventions that they did, where she got to express how she felt about what was going on how she would do things differently or, you know, different ideas. He was just like, this is what she said, I thought was more of her voice in there.	"express how she felt"	Space for expression at school	"he feels the happiest and the safest when he's playing" – play and exploration and expression
	ME: is there anything you'd like to change about the environment and school for Faye, for Faye to feel more safe at school? *PARENT: I would say that would be it an emphasis on play rather than academic.* *ME: And how do you think that would impact her?* *PARENT: I just feel like in this foundation stage curriculum, they just get, I think there's more opportunities to sort of explore and share it is in the non-academic format, you know what I mean,*	More exploration needed in school/play	Play and exploration	

	Quote	Code	Subtheme	Theme
	and there's quite a bit of emphasis on emotional and social development.			
	PARENT: how successful she's been makes a difference. So, the reading group and stuff. I don't think she felt particularly successful there, and therefore she doesn't feel secure in herself, and I think she's sort of been asked to do things in a certain way, she can be quite stubborn. So if she is finding something a bit tricky, I guess. It would affect things you should start saying I don't like it.	Academic pressure	Academic pressure	"he's definitely not like a sheep" – personalised provision
	PARENT: there's a couple of staff that worked very well with her. And I think she always she felt safer with certain staff or have better connectivity to some more emotionally aware. And they worked with her and then to say recently, she's been much better.	Safe staff members/interactions	Safe members of staff	"it's less the physical space and more about the people she's with" – safe people
	ME: Is there anything that impacts upon Kayden's feelings of safety at school? *PARENT: I think if they're not getting along, or if his friends have gone to play with somebody else or something like that.*	Friendship group changes negative	School friends	
Parent Views	*PARENT: I was expecting him to draw like, for example, where he spends probably most of his time in the house, I was expecting him to draw a house. Yes, his home because he loves his home. But I was expecting him to draw a bit more in terms of exactly where he actually feels be safe with a couch or on his bed in his bedroom, you know, to be more specific a bit.*	Home	Home	Specific spaces

	Quote	Code	Subtheme	Theme
	PARENT: I would have said that. In the last lockdown. She definitely used the outdoor space more. But I guess that was just because it was summer and it was sunny in there, she would definitely go outside to the swing. A lot, a lot more. So if if something had gone on with home schooling or Yes, she would suddenly be outside on the swing. So that I think the I think that was a reflection of the fact it was sunny, and probably nicer to be outside at that point. I wouldn't say they've changed. Other than that. I think that those are the places she would choose to go to.	Outside & Swings	Swings in the garden	
	PARENT: I suppose we've spoken a little bit about maybe if he's feeling upset or frustrated, he might go to his bedroom and play Lego.	Bedroom & LEGO	Bedroom	
	PARENT: If a safe space could be with a person, it would probably have been with my mum *AMY: Why do you think that was kind of a safe space for him.* *PARENT: My mum is different from me I have to have routines, like because I was studying full time and had a part time. job, and I don't have the patience my mum has.*	Grandparents	Outside of the home	
	PARENT: it's not a big open space, she feels kind of contained in she's got kind of a there's quite a soft rug under there. And so it's quite, I guess, quite cozy space to be in some she'll sometimes take	Warm/coziness/blankets etc.	Physical qualities of the space	

	Quote	Code	Subtheme	Theme
	blanket under there as well when she's sat under there.			
	PARENT: But then if she's playing, she generally would play in her room, which may be on her own or might be with her mates etc, when they were allowed round in previous life.	Play	Playing	Playing, Reading and other activities
	PARENT: But then if she's playing, she generally would play in her room, which may be on her own or might be with her mates etc, when they were allowed round in previous life.	Reading	Reading	
	PARENTS: She's got her pens and arts and craft, so if she's wants to play, she tends to go to her room. And she'll often be creating something or doing a tea party or drawing or she's quite arty crafty.	Creativity/drawing/ crafts/writing	Creativity	
	PARENT: It varies really, like technology time. So if he's on his phone, he'll go to his bedroom, lay on his bed, and play with his friends on his phone. And obviously, that's limited. What is it, you can access on there. But then you'll also go up there and it'll play for hours. with his lego and have his music going.	TV/technology/devices	TV and Technology	
	PARENT: When he's with my mum, it's all about, they don't really have much to achieve. It's more of an unconditional love of you know, there's no time pressures. He can do whatever wants. You can get as many sleeps as he wants. It's complete freedom, I suppose.	Unconditional love	Expression and offloading	"Allow them to be who they want to be"
	PARENT: I think it's important that children have that concept whereby they can say things	"they can take social risks"	Exploration and taking risks	

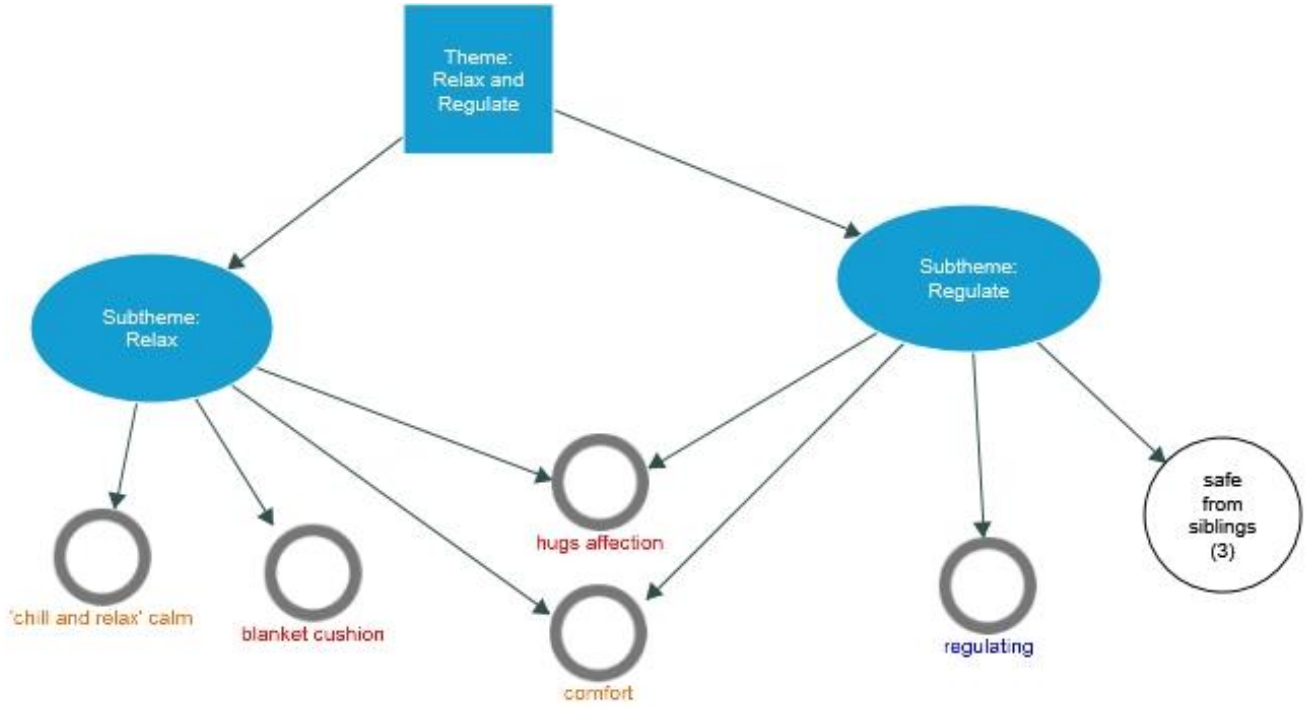
	Quote	Code	Subtheme	Theme
	within reason, and you won't get emotionally upset by it. And that has now you can process where they're coming from, because the child thinks as a child does. And then it grows into a teenager, an adult and their views change. So we need to be able to feel that they can take social risks and say things in a safe environment where one understands.			
	PARENT: I guess it comes down to him, getting a free choice of what he wants to do when it comes to an activity. So I guess he wants to control what he's playing with. Or if he said to me that I'm gonna go and do my Lego for a while, but I just want to do it by myself. I guess it's because he wants to choose, you know, something about his day. Whereas a lot of the time we do things as a family, or I try and do things that they both can do together as his brother is only four. So there's different things that work better than others when they doing it together. I guess it's just about him having personal choice over certain aspects of, his time.	"she's got… full ownership"	Control and ownership	
	PARENT: I think coming back to the house, like the going back to the point that we made earlier about his family, he just feels like oh, and then I have family that protects me. So, I	Regulating emotions	Feeling "relaxed and comfortable" and emotionally-regulating	

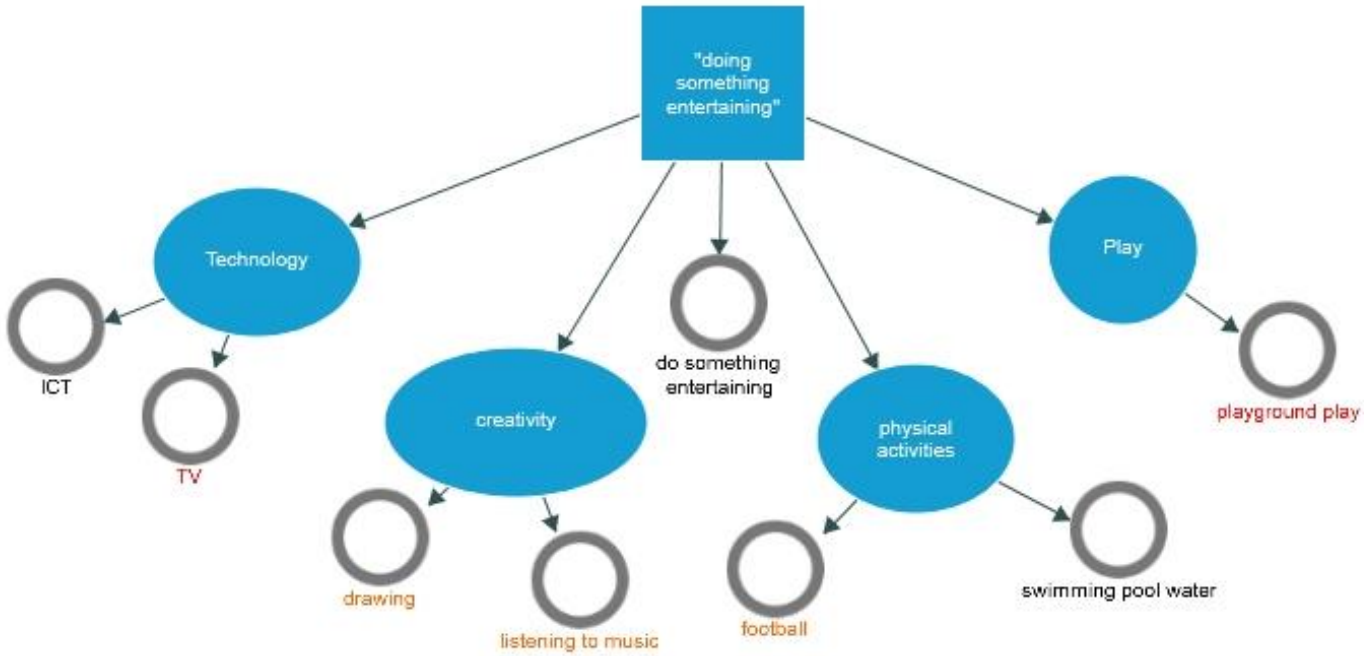
	Quote	Code	Subtheme	Theme
	can go and see mum, you know, when he's upset to come, you know, ask me fora hug or give me a hug he can ask his brother.			
	PARENT: We had just started to left him have a bit of independence with some friends he would go for a bike ride with his friends around the village and he was really enjoying that and he came back and he would talk for hours about what he's done. he was just really excited. So I think that was a space it was beginning to just really start to see another independent side of him but another happiness you know, have some time for him.	Relationships - friends	Friends and family	"That Social Element"
	PARENT: I think within the generic sense of safety, she's found it very difficult, because she is a very sociable, tactile person, she often be hugging a friend among other things. And because that has obviously not been allowed, discouraged, etc. She's found that hard to do.	Hugs/reassurance	Hugs	
	PARENT: He chose that his family, including, including the cat and the dog and the tortoise to be in this space.	Pets	Pets	
	PARENT: I generally think most places are safe for her maybe because of how she feels she belongs she belongs she's got that sense of belonging at home, she's got that sense of belonging it two sets of grandparents that live	Belonging	Belonging and internalising safe spaces	

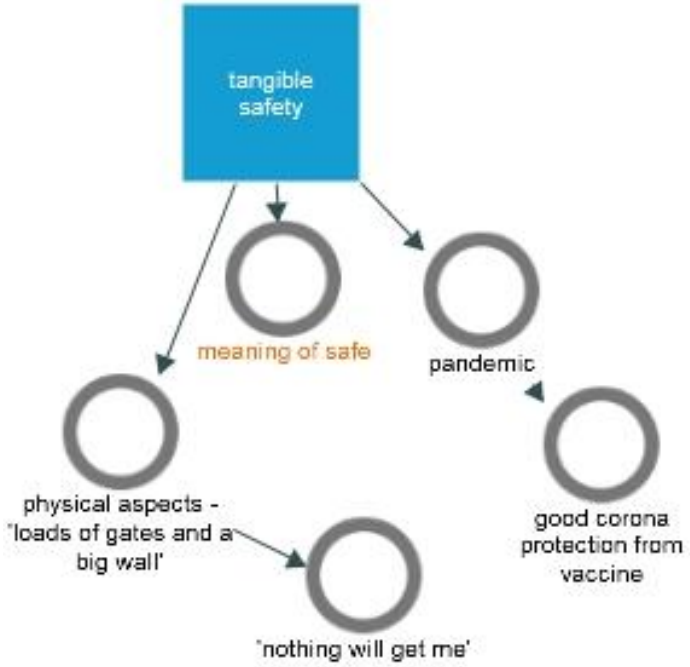
	Quote	Code	Subtheme	Theme
	locally. And she goes to quite regularly she's got that sense of belonging with cousins and the schools where she's been, she's always been happy there.			

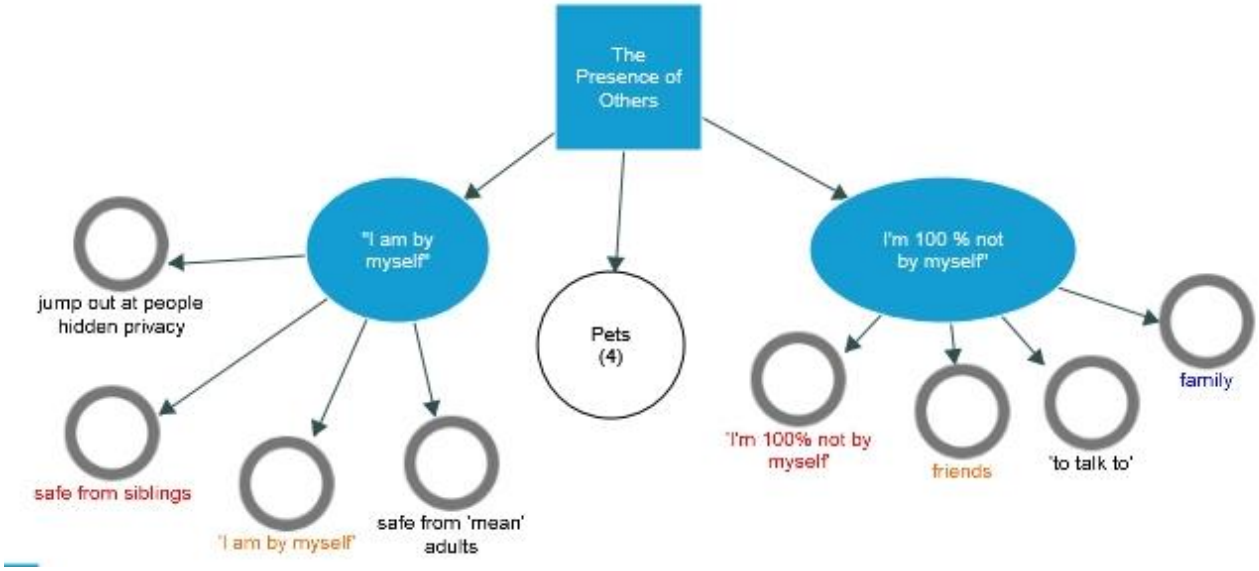
Appendix R – Early Thematic Maps within The Analysis Process (Phase 4), before the Refining of Themes.

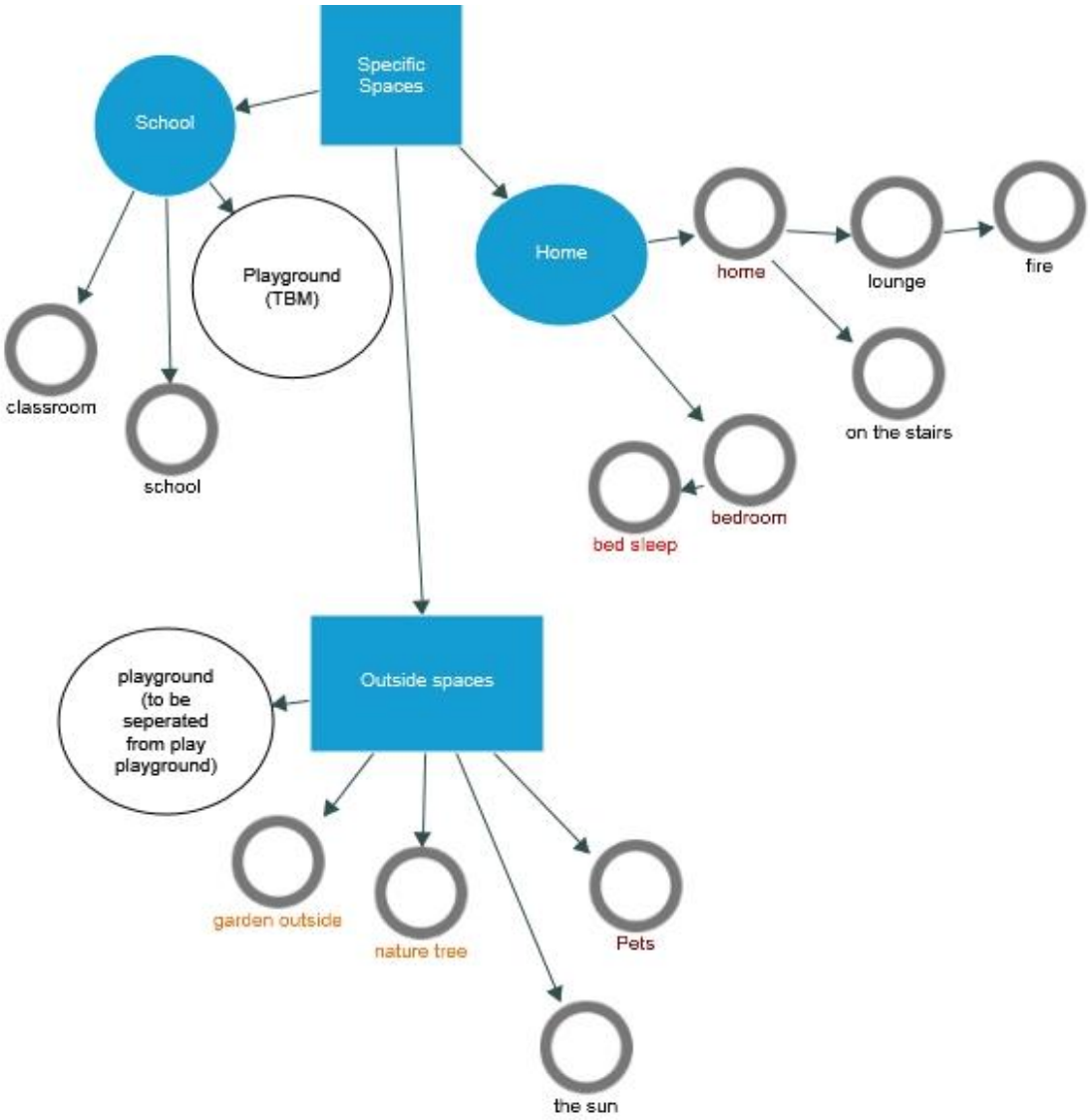
What is important to primary-aged children in relation to their 'safe spaces'?

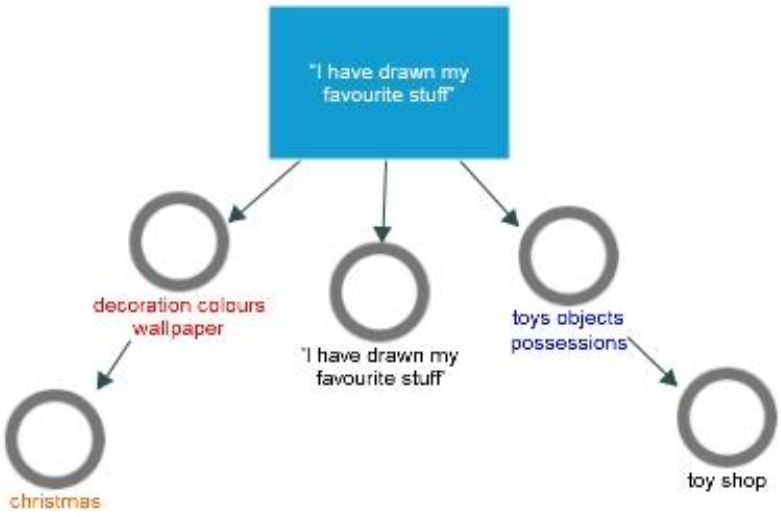


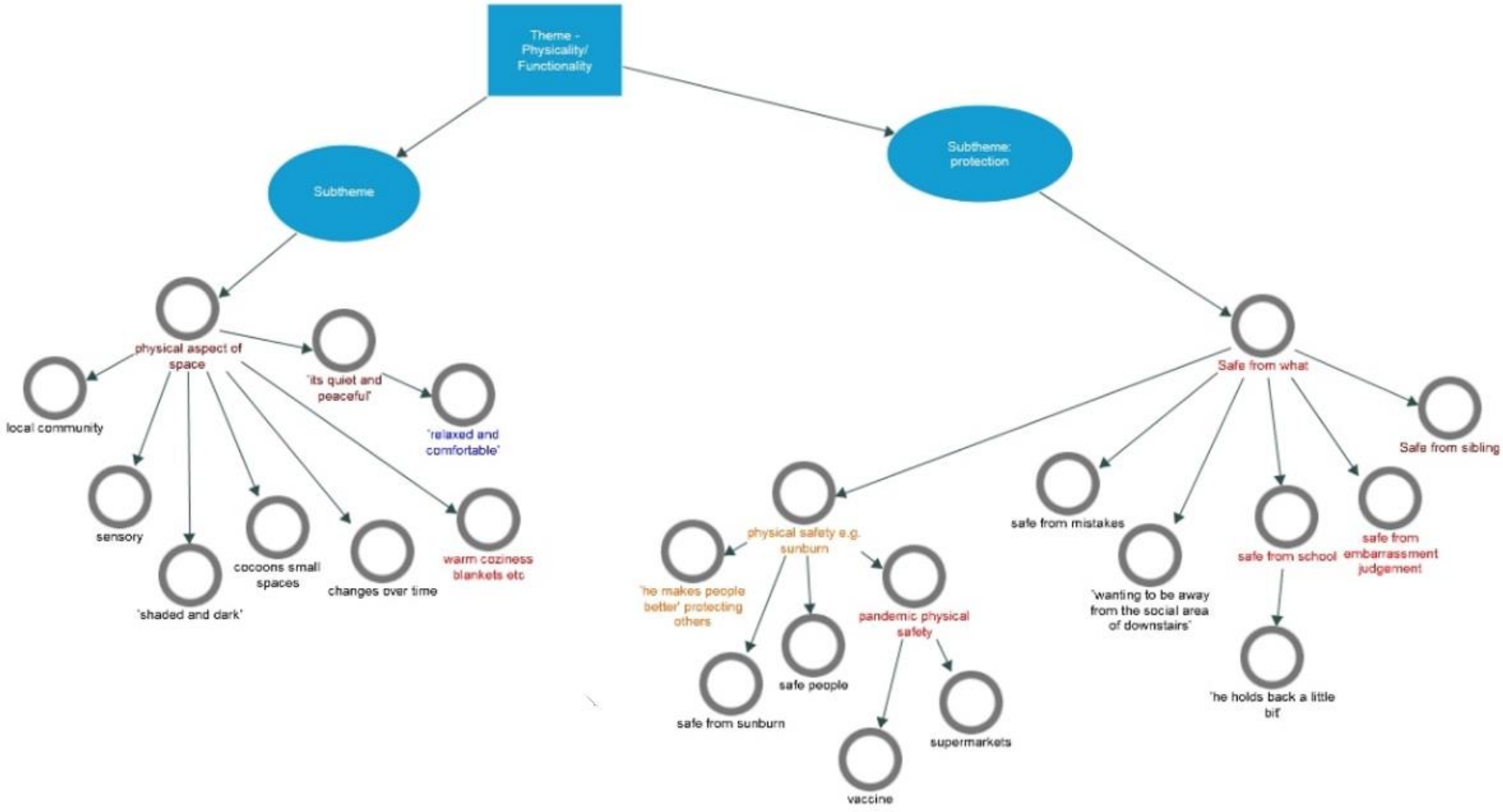


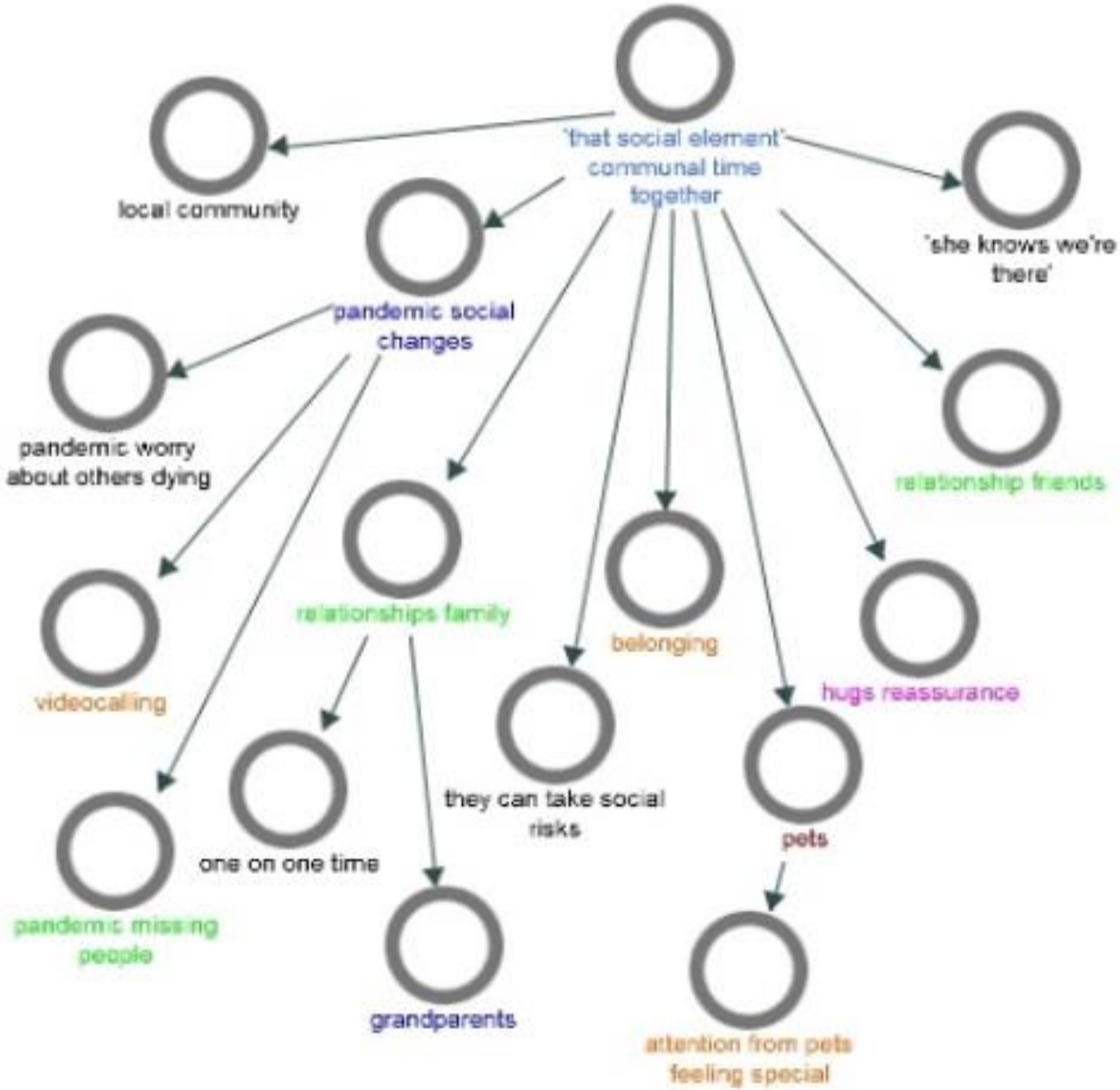

tangible safety
meaning of safe
pandemic
physical aspects - 'loads of gates and a big wall'
good corona protection from vaccine
'nothing will get me'


The Presence of Others
"I am by myself"
I'm 100 % not by myself'
jump out at people hidden privacy
Pets (4)
safe from siblings
'I am by myself'
safe from 'mean' adults
'I'm 100% not by myself'
friends
'to talk to'
family

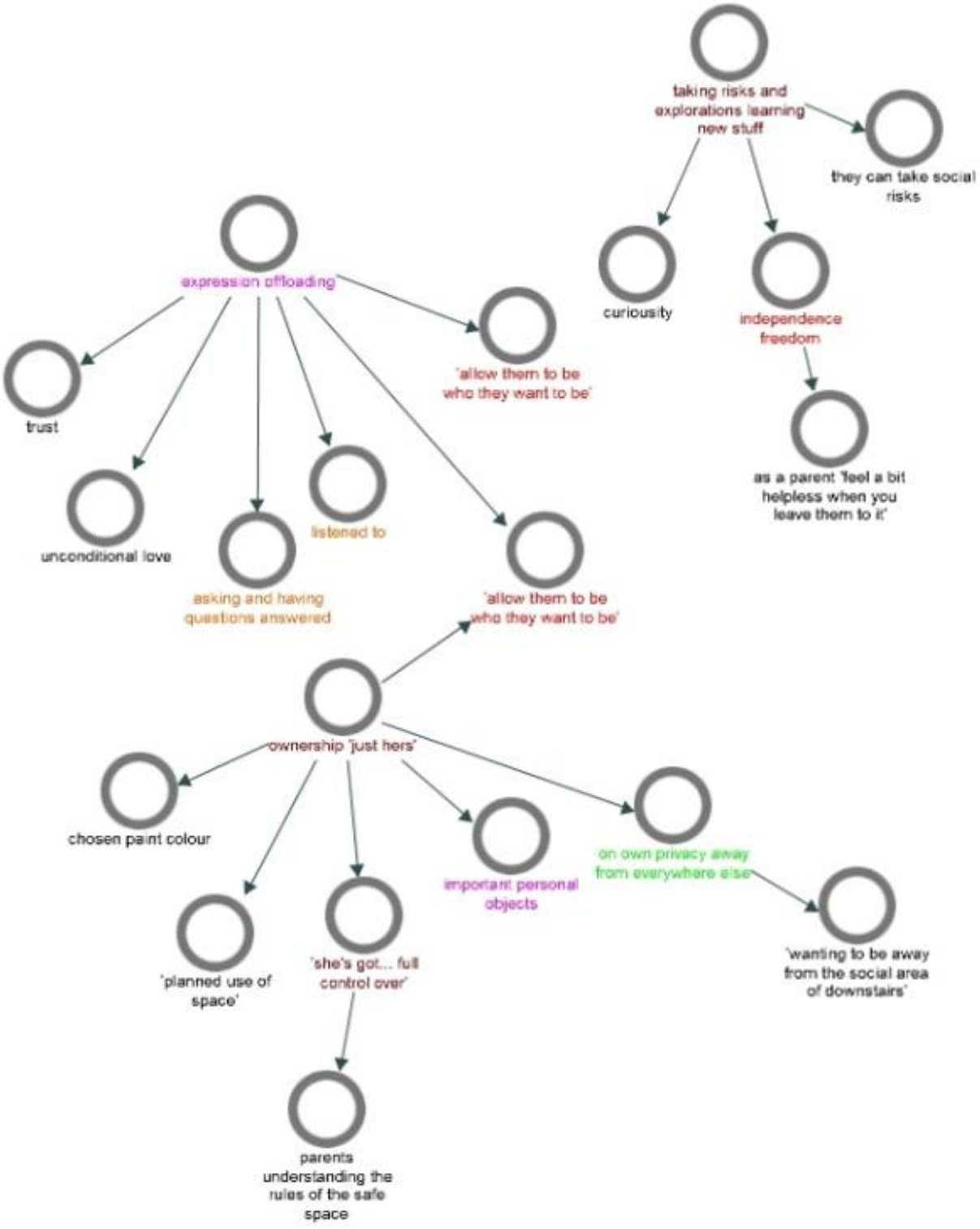

Specific Spaces
School
Playground (TBM)
classroom
school
Home
home
lounge
fire
on the stairs
bedroom
bed sleep
Outside spaces
playground (to be seperated from play playground)
garden outside
nature tree
Pets
the sun

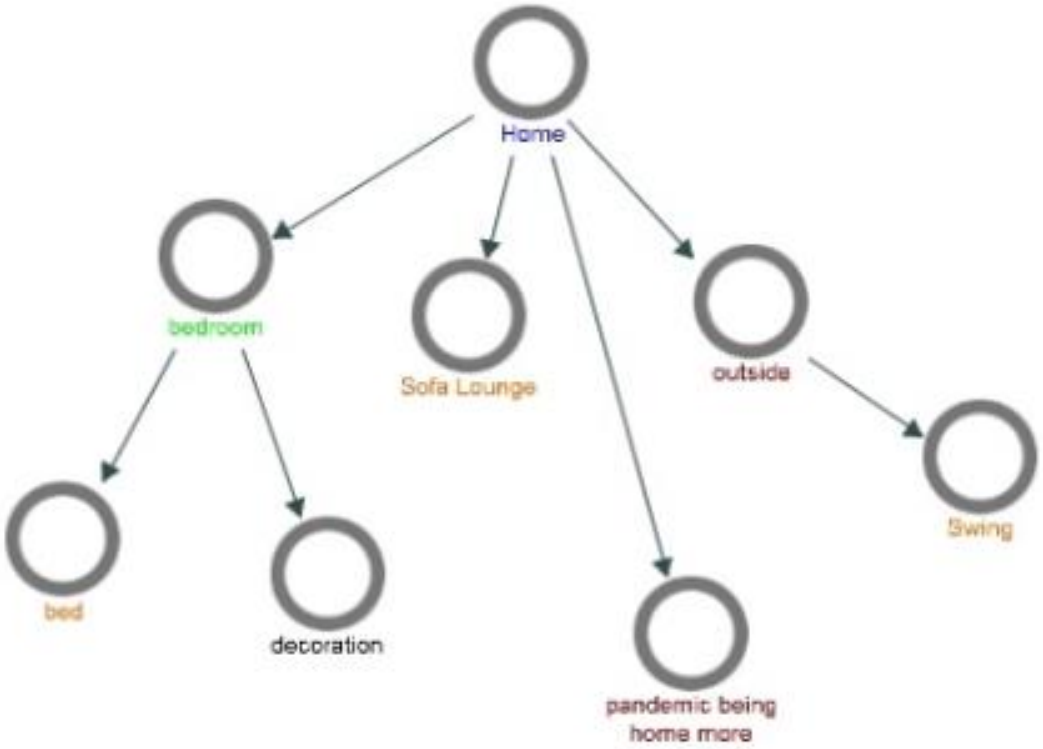

"I have drawn my favourite stuff"
decoration colours wallpaper
christmas
"I have drawn my favourite stuff"
toys objects possessions
toy shop

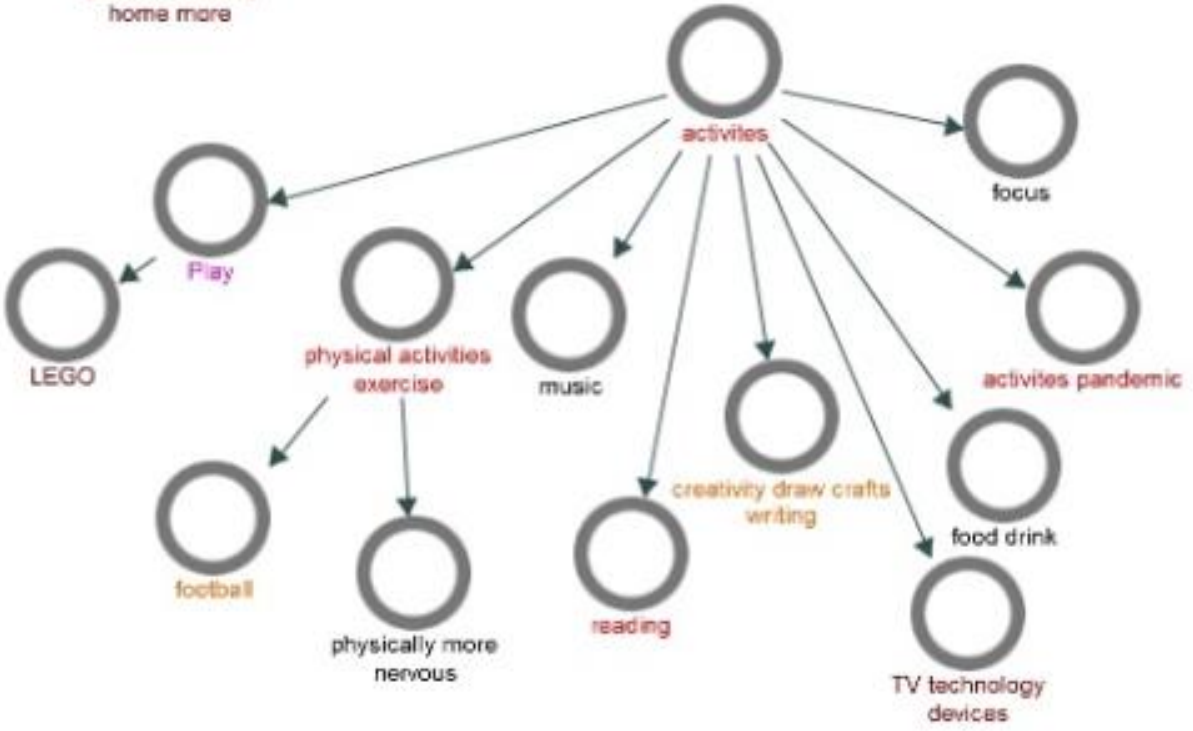

Theme - Physicality/ Functionality
Subtheme
Subtheme: protection
physical aspect of space
local community
sensory
'shaded and dark'
cocoons small spaces
changes over time
warm coziness blankets etc
'its quiet and peaceful'
'relaxed and comfortable'
Safe from what
physical safety e.g. sunburn
'he makes people better' protecting others
safe from sunburn
safe people
pandemic physical safety
vaccine
supermarkets
safe from mistakes
'wanting to be away from the social area of downstairs'
safe from school
'he holds back a little bit'
safe from embarrassment judgement
Safe from sibling

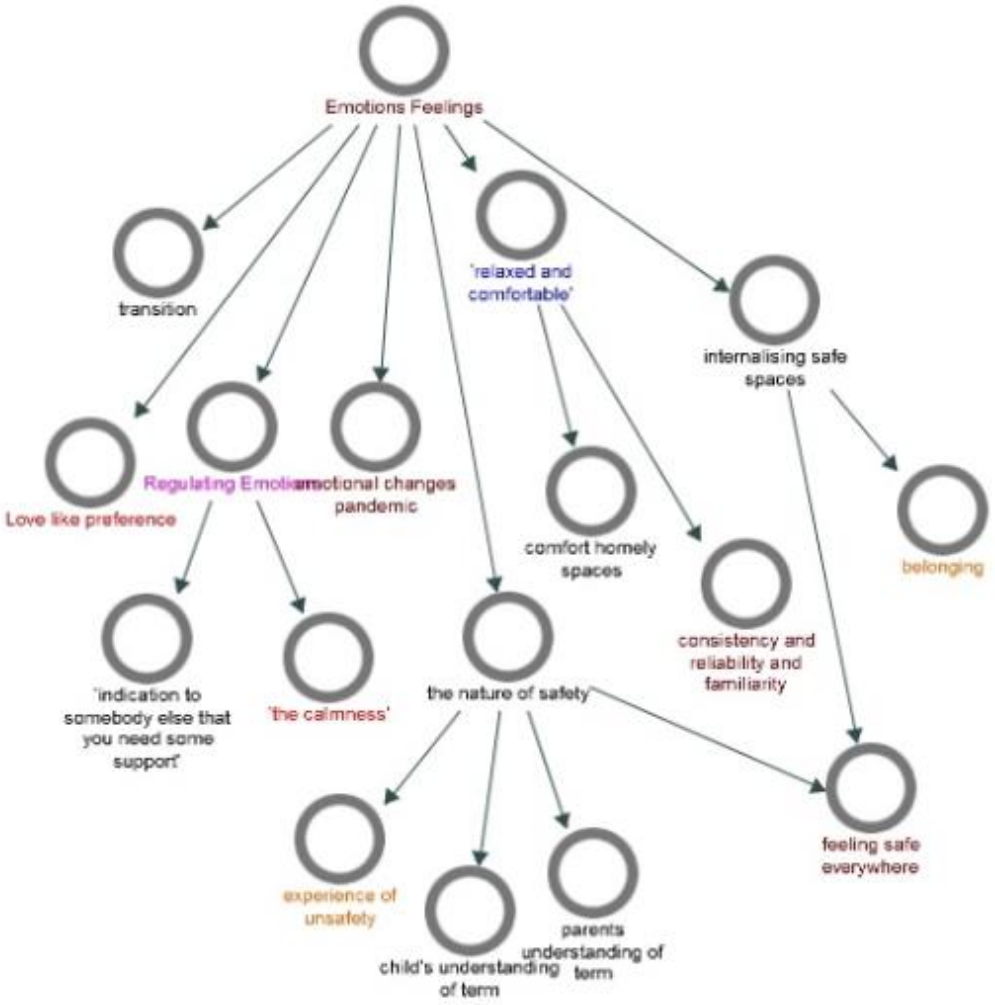

'that social element'
communal time
together
local community
pandemic social
changes
'she knows we're
there'
pandemic worry
about others dying
relationship friends
relationships family
belonging
videocalling
hugs reassurance
they can take social
risks
one on one time
pets
pandemic missing
people
grandparents
attention from pets
feeling special

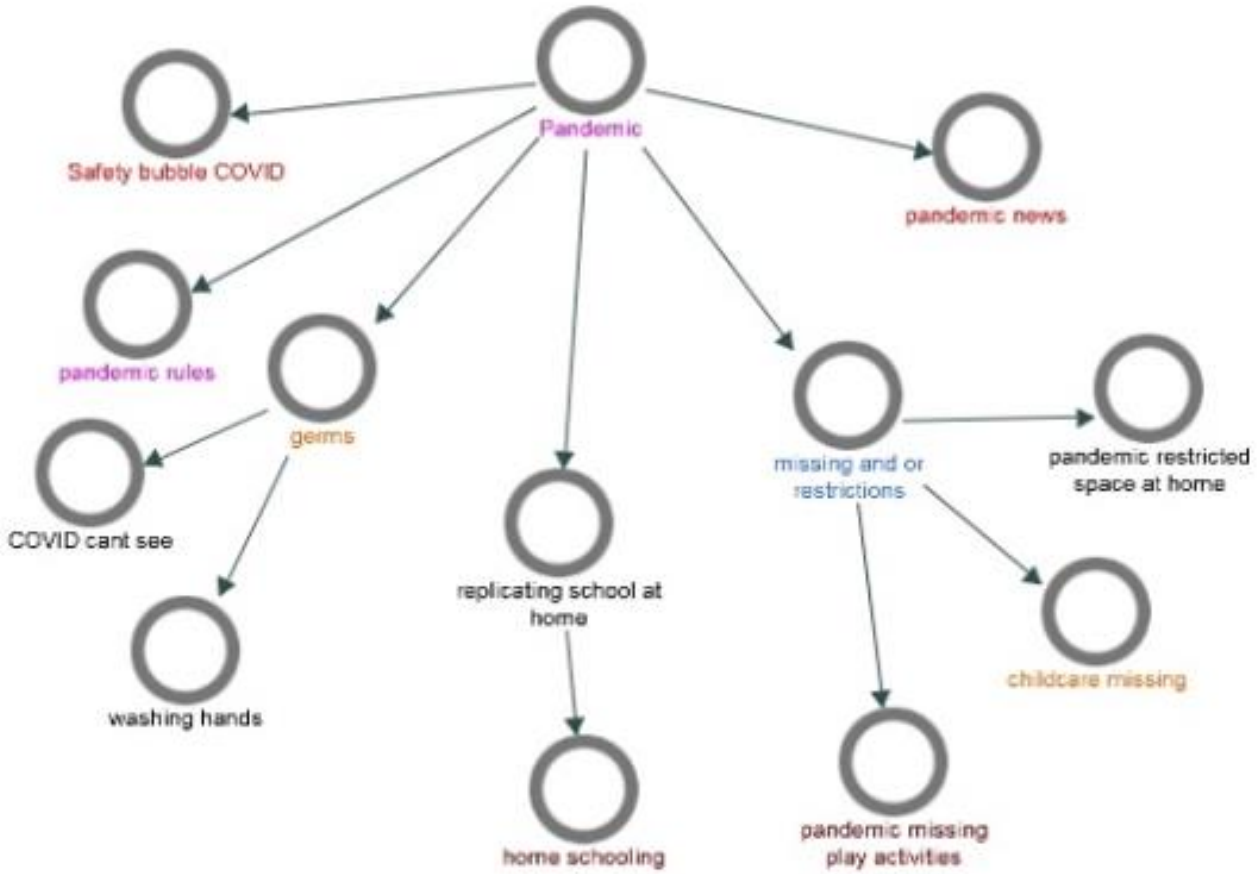
What are the views of parents regarding 'safe spaces' for their child outside of school?



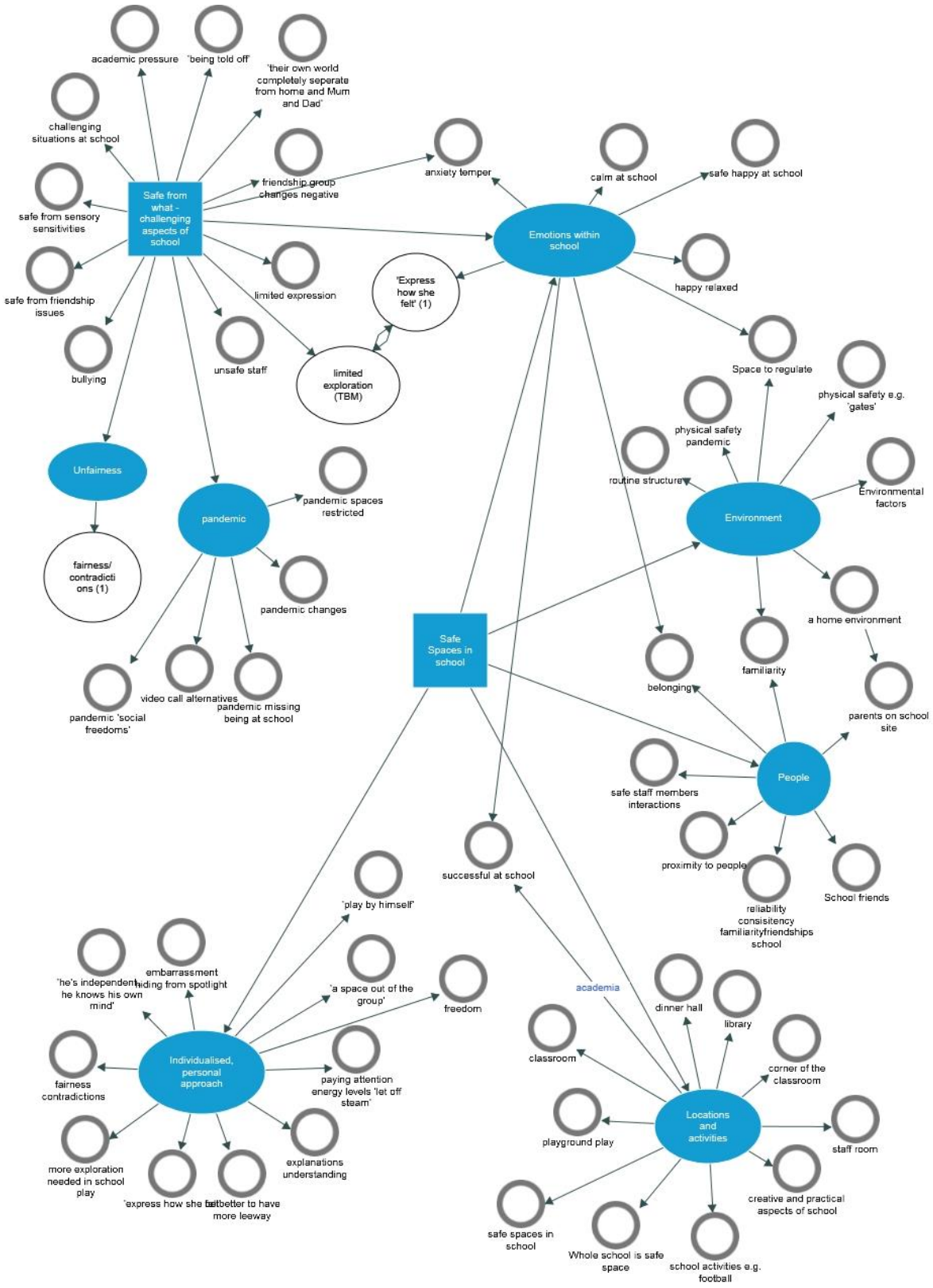

Home
bedroom
Sofa Lounge
outside
bed
decoration
Swing
pandemic being
home more


activites
focus
Play
LEGO
physical activities
exercise
music
activites pandemic
creativity draw crafts
writing
food drink
football
physically more
nervous
reading
TV technology
devices

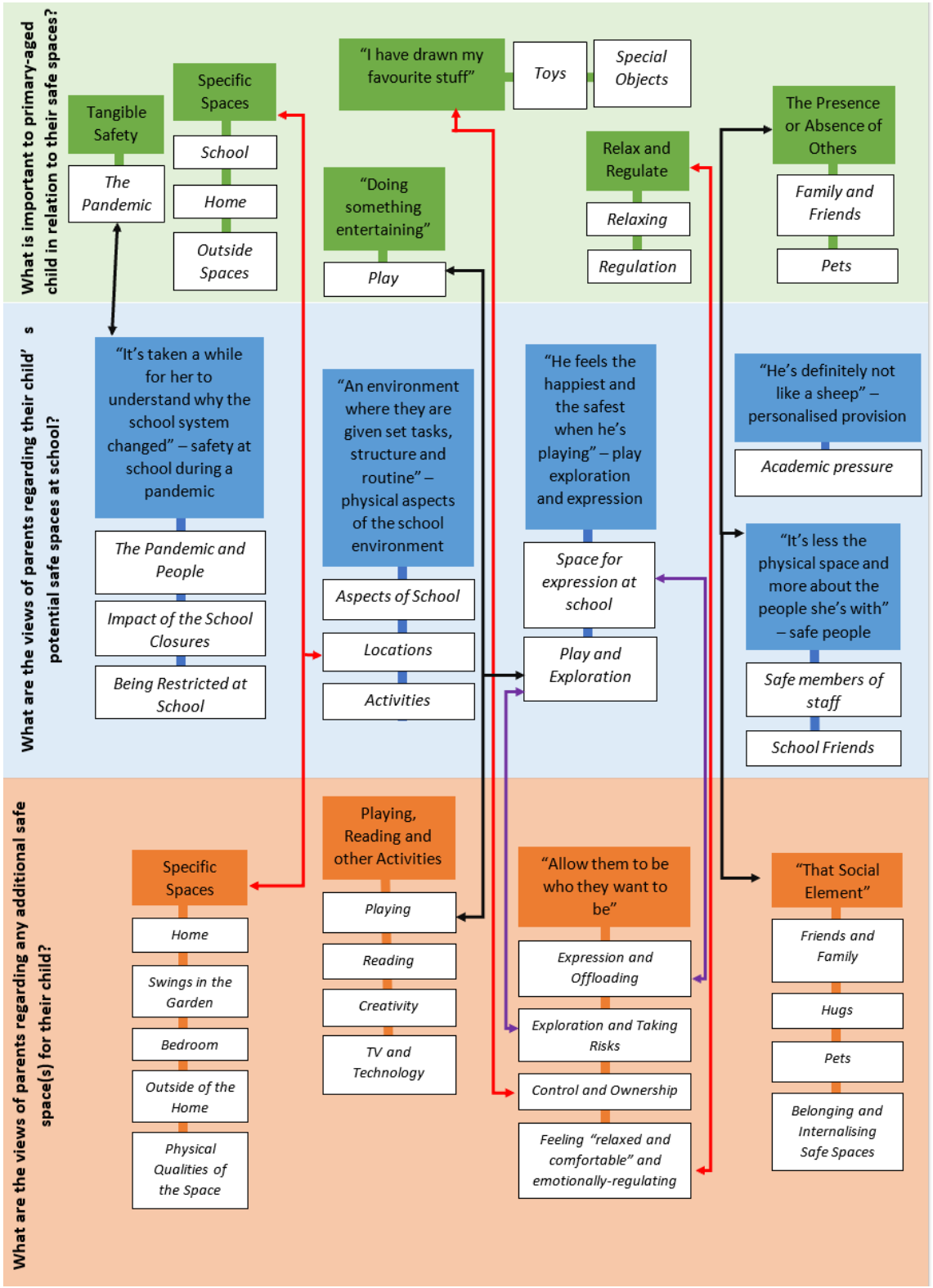

Emotions Feelings
transition
'relaxed and comfortable'
internalising safe spaces
Love like preference
Regulating Emotions
emotional changes pandemic
comfort homely spaces
belonging
'indication to somebody else that you need some support'
'the calmness'
the nature of safety
consistency and reliability and familiarity
feeling safe everywhere
experience of unsafety
child's understanding of term
parents understanding of term


Pandemic
Safety bubble COVID
pandemic news
pandemic rules
germs
COVID cant see
washing hands
replicating school at home
home schooling
missing and or restrictions
pandemic restricted space at home
childcare missing
pandemic missing play activities

What are the views of parents regarding their child's potential 'safe spaces' at school?



Appendix S –Thematic Map for the Findings for Phase 2



Appendix T – Ethical Application to the College of Social Sciences and International Studies Ethics Committee at the University of Exeter

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

All staff and students within SSIS should use this form; those in Egenis, the Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies, Law, Politics, the Strategy & Security Institute, and Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology should return it to ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk. Staff and students in the **Graduate School of Education** should use ssis-gseethics@exeter.ac.uk.

Before completing this form please read the Guidance document

which can be found at http://intranet.exeter.ac.uk/socialsciences/ethics/

Applicant details	
Name	**Amy Mumford**
Department	**Graduate School of Education**
UoE email address	**am1185@exeter.ac.uk**

Duration for which permission is required		
Please check the meeting dates and decision information online before completing this form; your start date should be at least one month after the Committee meeting date at which your application will be considered. You should request approval for the entire period of your research activity. Students should use the anticipated date of completion of their course as the end date of their work. Please note that retrospective ethical approval will never be given.		
Start date:11/09/2020	**End date:31/08/2021**	**Date submitted:11/09/2020**

Students only	
All students must discuss (face to face or via email) their research intentions with their supervisor/tutor prior to submitting an application for ethical approval. **Your application must be approved by your first or second supervisor (or dissertation supervisor/tutor) prior to submission and you MUST submit evidence of their approval with your application, e.g. a copy of an email stating their approval.**	
Student number	**680060714**
Programme of study	**Doctor of Educational Psychology (DEdPsych)**
Name of Supervisor(s) or Dissertation Tutor	**Will Shield and Shirley Larkin**
Have you attended any ethics training that is available to students?	Yes, I have taken part in ethics training at the University of Exeter EG the Research Integrity Ethics and Governance: http://as.exeter.ac.uk/rdp/postgraduateresearchers OR Ethics training received on Masters courses.

	If yes, please specify and give the date of the training: **Chris Boyle delivered a session to our cohort** 13/11/2019

Certification for all submissions

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given in this application and that I undertake in my research to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.

I confirm that if my research should change significantly I will seek advice, request approval of an amendment or complete a new ethics proposal. Any document translations used have been provided by a competent person with no significant changes to the original meaning.

Amy Mumford

Double click this box to confirm certification ☒

☒I confirm that if I travel outside the UK to conduct research I will:

(a) Obtain International Travel Insurance from the University of Exeter. (b) Monitor Travel Advice from Worldaware and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and (c) Complete an International Travel Risk Assessment

Submission of this ethics proposal form confirms your acceptance of the above.

TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT

'Safe Space': An Exploration of the portrayal of the Emotional and Physical Safety Felt by Children and Young People.

ETHICAL REVIEW BY AN EXTERNAL COMMITTEE

No, my research is not funded by, or doesn't use data from, either the NHS or Ministry of Defence.

If you selected yes from the list above you should apply for ethics approval from the appropriate organisation (the NHS Health Research Authority or the Ministry of Defence Research Ethics Committee). You do not need to complete this form, but you must inform the Ethics Secretary of your project and your submission to an external committee.

MENTAL CAPACITY ACT 2005

No, my project does not involve participants aged 16 or over who are unable to give informed consent (e.g. people with learning disabilities

If you selected yes from the list above you should apply for ethics approval from the NHS Health Research Authority. You do not need to complete this form, but you must inform the Ethics Secretary of your project and your submission to an external committee.

SYNOPSIS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Maximum of 750 words.

Phase One

Main Research Question:

- Within the literature concerning education, what common themes arise when safe spaces for children and young people are described?

Methodology and Sample

The methodology I will use will be a qualitative systematic literature review.

Phase Two

Main Research Questions:

1) What themes are present when primary aged children describe their 'safe space'?

2) What are the views of parents concerning their child's 'safe spaces', both at home and school?

3) What are the themes occur when discussing safety and 'safe spaces' with children and parents?

Methodology and Sample:

- Parents will interview their own children, audio record this, and let me access the recording.
- I will use semi-structured interviews over video-conferencing software for the Parent interviews.
- I will use opportunity sampling.

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

The research will take place in the UK.

The following sections require an assessment of possible ethical consideration in your research project. If particular sections do not seem relevant to your project please indicate this and clarify why.

RESEARCH METHODS

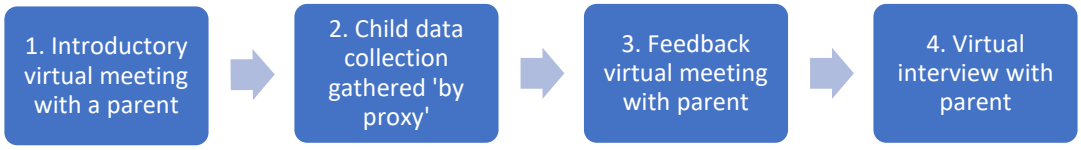
Phase 2

Phase 2 will have two components:

1) Remote data collection from primary aged children (information to be gathered by the proxy of the parents).

2) Interviews with parents.

The process will be as follows, and is explained in more detail below:



Introductory Virtual Meeting with a Parent

This will be an opportunity for me to meet the parent and to explain the study. Prior to this meeting information sheets will be emailed to the participant with links to access consent forms via Microsoft Forms, and therefore we can discuss any queries s/he may have about the information provided on these, and the study.

I will also have the opportunity to explain the 'by proxy' data collection procedure for their child, and the reasons why it has to be conducted in this way.

This meeting will not be recorded, it will be conducted over the telephone or video-conferencing software.

Data Collection from Children

This data will be collected remotely. To do this, children will be asked to draw their 'safe space' on a worksheet that I will distribute via email to parents (see below). The parents will give the children a worksheet (see appendix A) to complete and upload into a secure U-drive (such as One Drive).

will also ask the parents to audio record this activity. This is for data-collection purposes (so I can analyse the child's responses) in addition to knowing the language use by the adult, so I can account for any leading questions or adult-initiated responses.

I will distribute the following to parents via email or Microsoft Forms:

- Information sheet and consent form
- Instructions for the adult to do the 'by proxy' interview
- Worksheet

The worksheet will ask the children to:

1) 'Draw a picture of your safe space'
2) 'Please label your picture (or ask an adult to)'
3) 'Please talk to your parent about the drawing'.

The instruction sheet will include:

1) Scripts to:
    - Explain the task to the child,
    - Gain the child's consent to participate
    - Ask the questions about his/her 'safe space'
    - Answer any questions the children might have.

2) Details on when to audio record, and when to stop recording.
3) Any other information needed to carry out the 'by proxy' interview (e.g. instructions to ensure that the drawing is as child-led as possible).

Feedback Virtual Meeting with Parent

This will be an opportunity to check in with the parent and to see how the activity went. I will be able to talk to parent though the process of uploading the audio recording to a secure location. (Or, if easier, I will ask the parent to play the audio recording over the video call and I will record this part of the call).

I will ask the parent (and mention it in the instructions and the introductory meeting) not to talk about the content of the child's activity or anything on the topic of safe spaces in this meeting, as I will want to save these reflections for the recorded interview.

I will be able to answer any questions that the parent may have and check to see if they are happy with me proceeding with their participation.

Parent Interview

This will be conducted video-conferencing software. It will be recorded.

I will ask questions concerning:

- Their perspective of what a 'safe space' is for their child:

- At home
- At school

- Whether this has changed during the pandemic
- What schools can do to ensure 'safe spaces'
- Whether they feel that their child has 'safe spaces' within relationships or activities.

I hope for the output of this research to potentially include the following:

- Presentations to professionals (e.g. INSET day for school staff)
- Conference presentations (e.g. TEP conference)
- Journal articles (practitioner and academic)

Sample

I will use an opportunity sample – It will ask parents that I know with primary aged children.

Analysis

- Thematic analysis will be used to analyse the child's audio interview and the parent interviews.
- The drawings will be used as a tool to understand the child's spoken interview and descriptions but will not be analyzed separately.

Discussion of sensitive topics and possible harm:

The concept of safety may be troubling for some individuals, especially those who have experienced trauma or lack of safety in the past. Therefore, I will carefully communicate the nature of the study before-hand and ensure wellbeing of participants is prioritised throughout the study, by altering and/or finishing the activities early if needed. In addition to ensuring appropriate provision has been sought wherever needed.

My sample will not aim to include children who are known to have experienced trauma. For more information on protecting participants please see assessment of possible harm section below.

PARTICIPANTS

Children

Inclusion criteria:

- The children will be in Key Stage 1 and 2, and are therefore likely to be between the ages of 3-11.

Exclusion criteria:

- Children with verbal communication needs.
- Children that may be sensitive to discussions surrounding 'safety' - The children will not have experienced any uncommon traumatizing event or adverse experience(s), to negate any risk of inducing negative feelings in the children included in my sample.
- Children with educational needs which meas that they will struggle to have a conceptual understanding of 'safety' (an academically-low young primary age child may also fall into this category).

Parents

Inclusion criteria:

- Parents and/or carers of primary aged children who are available to the researcher and are willing to participate in the study.
- Parents who are technologically component will be preferable.

Exclusion criteria:

- Parents with communication needs.
- Parents with complex and/or severe mental health needs.

Sampling:

- Opportunity sampling will be used.
- I will aim for 10 parent/child pairs.

THE VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

Working with children:

I have completed the vetting procedures for working with children and have a full disclosure and barring service certificate. The consent of the children, headteacher and parents will be sought.

The research involves indirectly eliciting the views of children, in relation to their feelings of emotional and physical safety in the school environment. There is a lack of research on the views of the child in this area, and I hope that my research will enable discourse surrounding 'safe spaces' and feelings of safety to include the views and lived experiences of children.

Recruitment:

- I will recruit for Parents and Children together, as I want to recruit them within 'pairs'.
- I will use already established personal networks to recruit parents and children – e.g. friends of friends and extended family members. I will not recruit participants whom I have a very close and familiar relationship with.
- If this is unsuccessful, I may attempt to recruit using online forums (such as Mumsnet) or facebook groups.

I will ensure I receive informed consent from both the children and adults participating in this study.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Children

Due to the nature of the 'by proxy' interview with parents, Children should feel safe and cared for during the process, as they are in the presence of their parents/carers.

However, I will have conversations with parents about any distress or difficulty that may arise during the process and instruct them on how to deal with this in the most sensitive and ethical way e.g. stopping the recording, the task, and pulling out of the study if any distress or complex difficulty arises.

I will alter the wording of the worksheet and consent form/information sheet according to the age and need of the participants, e.g. simpler wording for younger participants.

Parents

The introductory and feedback virtual meetings with parents, either side of them collecting data with their children, will facilitate me gathering information about the parent and their needs in regards to carrying out the activity. I will ensure that I attune to their needs and provide any additional resources which may help them, e.g. information sheets and instruction sheets in bigger font. I will give parents my contact number so they can contact me if they have any questions regarding the process of the 'by proxy' interview with children.

THE INFORMED NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

Children

Parents/Carers will be provided with a consent form and information sheet (included in sections below). These will outline the purpose of the study and the aims of the research. In addition, information regarding anything which could possibly lead to any risk of harm will be included, alongside the actions that will be taken to minimise these risks (For more information on these please see 'Assessment of Possible Harm' section below).

Parents will have the opportunity to provide consent both in paper form and over a video call. I will write the children participating a letter explaining the nature of the study asking them to provide consent. I will ask their parent to explain this to them also, and answer any questions they may have. I will ask parents to start the audio recordings before the children give consent, to ensure they are not pressured into agreeing to participate. I will ensure that the information regarding the study is communicated in appropriate ways according to the age and need of the child in question.

Parents

Information and consent forms will be provided to parents detailing the study and any possible adverse consequences from participating in the research (see 'Assessment of Possible Harm' section below). This will also be detailed verbally at the introductory meeting.

I will be available to answer any questions from my participants by email/phone/video call.

ASSESSMENT OF POSSIBLE HARM

In my research I will adhere to the British Psychological Society's (BPS) code of human research ethics (2014) in the ways detailed in this section. I have also read and will adhere to British Educational Research Association (BERA)'s Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research.

To ensure that I show respect for the autonomy, privacy and dignity of individuals and communities in my research. I have designed a study that values and advocates for the autonomy and voice of the participants. To ensure that I am respecting "individual, cultural and role differences " (British Psychological Society, 2014, p. 8). I will ensure that there are:

- I will alter the wording of any written communications according to the age and need of the child participants, e.g. simpler wording for younger participants.
- I will adjust my communications with the parent on an individual basis and make provisions for any difficulties where necessary (e.g. helping with the process of recording and uploading an audio file).
- I will have an awareness of those with experiences which may make the discussion of threat and safety a sensitive one, and to:
    - Ensure fully informed consent is obtained from all participants which states the nature of the study.

- To discuss any potential sensitivities with the parent, in written communications and virtual meetings.
- Ensure participants are able to talk to me if any of the activities upset or distressed them, on the day of and the days/ weeks after their involvement.

To ensure scientific integrity, whereby my research is not "judged within a research community to be poorly designed" (British Psychological Society, 2014, p. 9). I have:

- Consistent support from research supervisors who are specialists within the field of research.
- Ensured a thorough research plan is submitted before proceeding with research.
- Ensured an ethical application is made and accepted prior to proceeding with research.

Within my research I need to ensure I am demonstrating social responsibility. I will do this by ensuring that I do not cause "unwarranted or unnecessary disruption" (British Psychological Society, 2014, p. 10) to the social context in which I work I shall ensure that:

- I am sensitive surrounding discussions of change to school context or infrastructure, aware of the financial situation of schools at the present time.
- Amend my approach appropriately, in a sensitive manner according to the wider social and economic contexts of my participants.

I need to ensure that I maximise the benefit of my research. I will do this by ensuring my research is in an area which is relevant, and meeting a need within educational research. My findings and conclusions will relate to real life applications of the research so it can benefit children, schools and communities.

In addition to maximising benefit I need to ensure I minimise harm in my research and that it avoids "potential risks to psychological well-being, mental health, personal values [and] the invasion of privacy and dignity" (British Psychological Society, 2014, p. 11). I will:

- Carry out actions as stated in 'respect for the autonomy, privacy and dignity of individuals and communities' paragraph above.
- My research involves being led by the participants in their views. I will ensure that participants are not pressured to disclose anything they do not feel comfortable discussing.
- If appropriate I will signpost to appropriate agencies (e.g. Samaritans).
- I will work closely with my supervisors and follow university guidance with regard to any distressing topics or information coming to light during the interviews (e.g. there is a safeguarding concern).

BPS' code of human research ethics (2014) states that research must have valid consent. To ensure this I will:

- Obtain valid, informed consent from all participants.
- The information provided to participants will align with that stated in BPS' Code of Human Research Ethics (2014).
- Where participants are younger than 16, I will obtain full informed consent from those with parental responsibility.

To ensure confidentiality I will:

- Use the introductory virtual meeting as an opportunity to talk about the importance of confidentiality regarding the interview with their child, and discuss appropriate locations for the interview to be carried out.
- All information (visual, audio and text) will be kept in a confidential location (see data protection and storage section below), and be anonymised in reports.
- All information collected from participants will be destroyed after use.

I have no intention of giving advice during my research, aiming instead to gather information and views.

I will not deceive any of the participants. I plan to be completely transparent in the aims and intentions of my study. As deception is not a component of my research, the need to debrief will be minimal. My involvement with the participants will conclude with a letter outlining the findings of the study (in a child-friendly and age appropriate way for the children involved), in addition to thanking them for the participation.

To ensure that I am following the University of Exeter's guidance on research online I will:

- Include reference to the limitations of remote participation on the information sheets and consent forms, to ensure I am gaining fully informed consent.
- Once the audio from the video call (parent) and audio file (child) has been transcribed, and anonymised, these files will be deleted. Prior to this, they will be stored in a secure location, approved by the university (e.g. One Drive).
- Follow specific university-guidance with regards to the video-conferencing software chosen from the 'Guidance for research online' guidance (e.g. using university versions of the software to ensure its certification within the EU-US Privacy Shield Framework).
- Ensure I have gained fully informed consent from participants with regards to the any potential limitations (if any) of the specific software chosen (video-conferencing or audio recording software).
- Ensure that documents that contain personal information (such as consent forms) follow the GDPR and university regulations, and are available within software that is protected within these regulations (such as Microsoft Forms).

Some additional risks are detailed in the table below:

Potential Risk	Likelihood	Solution
Participants experience unpleasant memories, feelings and/or thoughts through the experience	Low	Ensure fully informed consent is obtained which states the nature of the study. I will discuss any potential sensitivities with parents in the introductory meeting and discuss whether it is appropriate to proceed. I will ensure that participants are able to talk to myself if any of the topics have upset or distressed them. Participants are able to remove themselves from the study at any point and this is communicated to them clearly in consent forms and at the beginning of the study.
Safeguarding issue arises	Low	Follow university safeguarding policies and procedures, and liaise with supervisors regarding appropriate steps to take.

A child appearing on the video with their parent	Medium-high	I will communicate with the parent on the instruction sheet and verbally in the introductory meeting that I will not be able to see sight of their child on the video call. I will use video-editing software to remove the image of the child if this happens, as well as stopping the video for the length of time that the child is present.
It is difficult to maintain anonymity due to the video-nature of the interview	Medium	I will transcribe the audio from the video, anonymising names that are spoken, and will delete the video-file straight after the transcription has been completed.

DATA PROTECTION AND STORAGE

I will collect and store all data on password encrypted devices, and upload and access via OneDrive (university account). If any data are stored else where I will ensure it will contain aliases and any identifiable information will be removed.

I am responsible for processing personal data gathered for research purposes in compliance with GDPR regulations. In light of this I have read and will adhere to the 'conditions for processing personal data in research and consent' on the university website in addition to the university's 'guidance for research online'.

Confidential information regarding the participants (such as names, location, gender and age) will only be captured in written form on the consent form, this will be stored in a separate location to the data collected (Microsoft forms) and be destroyed as soon as possible. I will delete digital recording as soon as I have a transcript of the interviews.

Any identifiable information of any participants will not be included in any publications or presentations. Every effort will be made to protect the identity and maintain the anonymity of participants, including using aliases, anonymizing data straight away (using video/audio editing software where necessary) and place names being changed if deemed necessary.

Data that includes confidential information, such as contact details, will be destroyed as soon as I have been awarded my doctorate. This means that it is possible it may be kept for up to 5 year so I can contact my participants if necessary during the completion of the doctorate.

My information sheet will explain the process and details for how I will store data, and I will gain informed consent for this via the consent form.

Data will be kept confidential unless I am required by law to produce it, for example if something in the interview causes me concern (such as a safeguarding issue arising). These processes will be first discussed with my supervisors and I will follow their advice as to how to proceed.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

I may be socially familiar with some of my participants, I will reflect on, by myself and within my research supervision, the nature of this familiarity to ensure I am adhering to ethical and moral guidelines and ensuring that my research remains as objective as possible.

I will ensure confidentiality of my participants beyond the interview, not discussing anything with other people.

I will ensure that participants are not close friends or family members.

USER ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK

In my interview with the parent I will allow space for some reflections on their child's engagement with the drawing task and interview, and therefore ensure that I am allowing the parent's perspective (which is important due to their presence in the interview with the child) to my analysis. My involvement with the child and parent will conclude with a letter outlining the findings of the study in addition to thanking them for the participation.

Appendix U – Certificate of Ethical Approval

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St Luke's Campus
Heavitree Road
Exeter UK EX1 2LU

http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of Project:
'Safe Space': An Exploration of the portrayal of the Emotional and Physical Safety Felt by Children and Young People.

Researcher(s) name: Amy Mumford

Supervisor(s): Will Shield, Shirley Larkin

This project has been approved for the period

From: 15/09/2020
To: 31/08/2021

Ethics Committee approval reference: D2021-001

Signature: Justin Dillo Date: 15/09/2020

(Professor Justin Dillon, Professor of Science and Environmental Education, Ethics Officer)

Appendix V – Debrief letters sent to children and young people

Letter for older child (year 4-6):

Dear _____,

Thank you for drawing your 'safe space' for my research.

It was really helpful for me to learn about what is important to you, and what helps you to feel safe.

If anything upset you during or after this task, remember that you can:

- **Talk to an adult you trust: such as a teacher, family member, parent or member of your local community (such as a club leader or neighbour).**
- Contact the following organisations:
    - Childline – you can phone 0800 1111 or look at their website: https://www.childline.org.uk/
    - Young Minds – text 'YM' to 85258 or visit their website: https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/
    - The Mix – you can phone 0808 808 4994 or look at their website: https://www.themix.org.uk/

Best wishes,

Amy

Letter for younger child (Reception - Year 3):

Dear _____,

Thank you for drawing your 'safe space' for me.

If anything made you feel sad or worried while drawing your 'safe space', **talk to a special adult.**

This could be a:

Teacher

Family member

Parent

or other adult you trust.

Best wishes,

Amy