

**Outside the norm: An ethnographic study of
creative practitioner approaches in an alternative
provision site for 14-16 year olds.**

Submitted by Margo Greenwood, to the University of Exeter as a thesis
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Abstract:

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Alternative Provision, as a sector, is well positioned to offer a remarkable opportunity to cultivate a young person's humanity through care and challenge. Where practitioners embrace responsibility for young people and their environment, and honour context and complexity, they can mobilise the present as a rich source of possibility and agency. There needs to be a clear understanding of the contribution that Alternative Provision can make to young people's lives and how this relates to practice and policy perceptions of effectiveness.

Yet because it is difficult to know, track, manage and regulate, Alternative Provision remains largely uninspected and unregulated, with lack of clarity in purpose holding back the potential to inspire change in pupil perception and experience. On top of these issues, schools face the challenge of being held directly accountable for Alternative Provision they commission for their pupils, and responsible for ensuring that it is suitable, safe and effective. Research into current practice and theory is needed to help schools and policy makers fulfil their mandates at a time when policy makers are at the cusp of re-designing the field.

At these key beginnings of re-design for Alternative Provision in England, this ethnographic study offers to fill that research gap through a conceptualisation of practitioner approaches in one Alternative Provision site over an academic year, that led to pupil well-being, a sense of belonging and further training or employment. These outcomes, alongside the practitioner approaches of mutually transforming empathic engagement and mission, I argue, are central to sound thinking about Alternative Provision. The process involved – licensed chaos – with its authorised release of pupils into play, immersion, risk taking and ownership, is presented as one way of embodying this journey and is offered here as a model of process on which other schools could build their own.

Methodological contributions are made through the exploration of life writing as ontology and as a way of communicating the ever-present realities for many pupils attending Alternative Provision. Critical reflection and acknowledgement of the researcher's role and transformation through the research process is shared. Reciprocal virtual ethnography is explored and put forward as an effective means of researching young people in Alternative Provision.

This thesis tells a story of lives and learning that further humanises and empowers the field of Alternative Provision and its commissioning schools.