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Pupils' Views On Their SEN Support

This project aimed to understand the experiences of pupils in mainstream school who receive SEN Support.

Pupils receiving SEN Support have identified SEN and receive additional support at school, but they do not have a legal document outlining their needs, such as an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

The 2015 Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice mandates that pupils' views on their educational experience should be sought and used to inform practice. Practitioners have responded to this recommendation by actively including pupils with EHCPs in planning meetings for statutory assessments and annual reviews. However, there is no clear process in place to capture the views of pupils receiving SEN Support.

This study stemmed from a Local Authority request to better understand the lived experiences of pupils experiencing SEN Support.

Method

- Three female pupils in mainstream secondary school receiving SEN Support for either literacy difficulties or speech, language and communication needs.

- Lisa, Amy and Sophia* were interviewed individually using William & Hanke's 'Drawing the Ideal School' activity[1] based on principles of Personal Construct Psychology. Drawing and questioning were used to explore features of the participant's ideal and non-ideal schools and to prompt discussion about their current and previous experiences and how those could be improved.

- Qualitative data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.[2]

*Pseudonyms

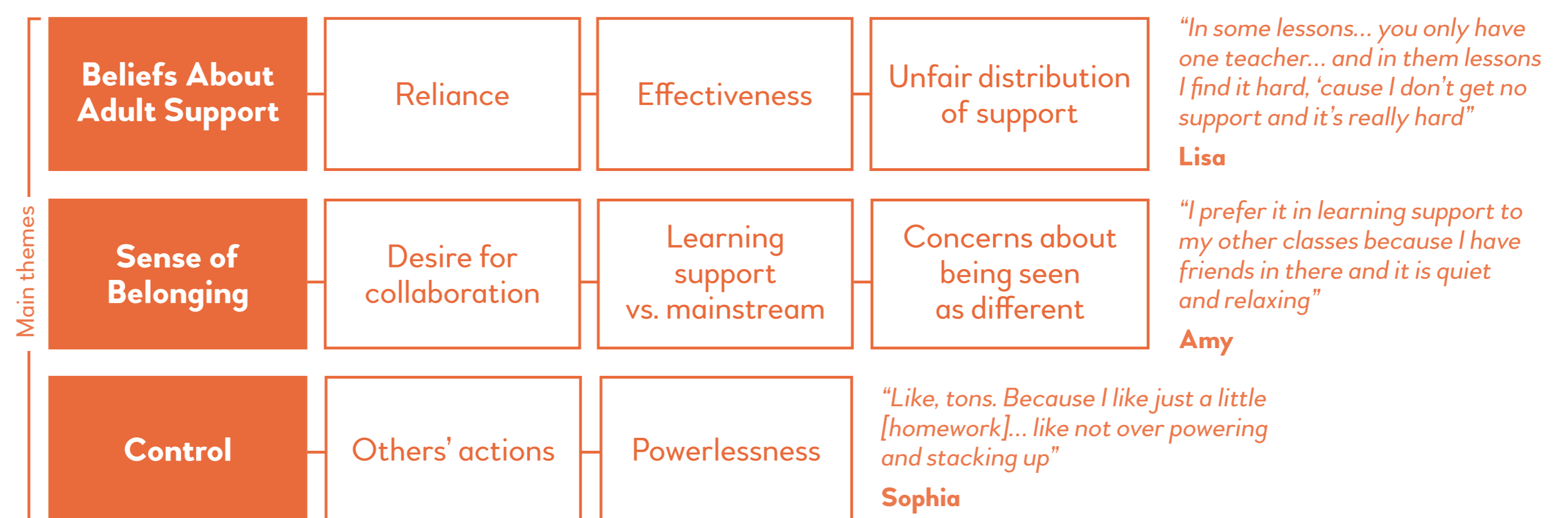Figure 1. Section from Amy's ideal classroom

Results

Participants felt reliant on their additional support; they wanted more support and felt it was unfair that they did not receive as much as some other pupils. The pupils had views on how support should be more consistent and reliable.

All participants demonstrated a greater sense of belonging in their learning support classroom than their mainstream classes; they had friendships within their support setting and the environment suited their needs. They also valued the possibility for collaborative working.

Participants expressed feeling powerless, for example, in managing their work. They also felt they had little control over the actions of others, including their teachers, who they felt prioritised dealing with other pupils' behaviour over providing support for learning.

Figure 2. Thematic map showing the three **main themes** and the **subthemes** that emerged.

Main themes				
Beliefs About Adult Support	Reliance	Effectiveness	Unfair distribution of support	*"In some lessons… you only have one teacher… and in them lessons I find it hard, 'cause I don't get no support and it's really hard"* **Lisa**
Sense of Belonging	Desire for collaboration	Learning support vs. mainstream	Concerns about being seen as different	*"I prefer it in learning support to my other classes because I have friends in there and it is quiet and relaxing"* **Amy**
Control	Others' actions	Powerlessness		*"Like, tons. Because I like just a little [homework]… like not over powering and stacking up"* **Sophia**

Discussion

- Pupils felt they would benefit from continuous one-to-one support, yet research findings suggest this is not always beneficial. High levels of TA support can have detrimental effects on academic progress, due to TAs replacing interactions with Teachers[3]. In some cases, pupils who have experienced one-to-one support find it reduces their independence[4].

· Sense of belonging for pupils with SEN can be a good measure of inclusion in a school[5]. The pupils in this study expressed limited sense of belonging in their mainstream classes, therefore we could conclude that these classes were not experienced as being inclusive. Aspects of the learning support classroom, such as collaborative learning and building relationships, fostered a greater sense of belonging.

· The pupils felt they had a lack of control over aspects of their school support, including their workload and the behaviour of others.

· The main themes relate to Self-Determination Theory[6], which states that motivation requires feelings of competence, relatedness and autonomy:

   - The pupils expressed a lack of autonomy in terms of their ability to control their workload and their support.

   - The pupils' lacked a sense of belonging in their mainstream classes, suggesting low feelings of relatedness.

   - The pupils did not see themselves as capable without adult support, which suggests low feelings of competence.

These findings bring into question the motivation of these pupils for school, given that three necessary features may be missing.

Conclusions and Implications

- EPs and schools should consult pupils regarding their support; increasing their sense of control and autonomy may improve motivation and outcomes.

- EPs can support schools' understanding of sense of belonging and help them to foster an inclusive atmosphere, where pupils engage in collaborative learning and develop positive relationships.

- Pupils did not always feel competent and felt they needed high levels of adult support. However, rather than offering additional one-to-one TA support, schools should consider increasing pupils' feelings of competence through providing well differentiated work that pupils can access and succeed in independently.

References:
[1]Williams & Hanke (2007); [2]Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009); [3]Blatchford et al. (2008); [4]Broer, Doyle & Giangreco (2005); [5]Prince & Hadwin (2013); [6]Deci et al. (1991)

For futher information about this research, please contact: *rgl1g15@soton.ac.uk*