

What are some teachers' experiences of using Affective Social Tracking data to support proactive, targeted pastoral care in schools? A qualitative study

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“I lift my eyes up to the mountains - where does my help come from?”

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Abstract

This is a qualitative study that researched the experience of teachers' using the school pastoral care tool, AS Tracking. Seven teachers were interviewed across 3 UK based schools. The main findings demonstrate that teachers felt that the tool was a support to their provision of proactive, targeted pastoral care, and that it sit comfortably alongside the pastoral mix of other methods employed by their schools. The findings demonstrate that AS Tracking is a tool that requires a long term perspective to embed successfully in a school pastoral care system and that initially staff need time for training and practise to be able to use it to its optimum potential. In terms of its contribution to the wider picture of better mental health care provision in schools, it was considered a viable option for schools with the necessary resource levels to fund its use. The discussion centred on the the need for a renewal on the relational understanding of pastoral care as well as the need for a greater balance of teacher and pupil mental health care provision in schools.

Research aims and objectives

This project set out to explore teachers' experiences of using Affective Social Tracking (AST) data in schools, specifically in the context of providing proactive, targeted pastoral care in schools. It sought to examine what proactive, targeted pastoral care might look like, what is currently on offer in schools, and it focussed on three schools where AST was fully integrated into the school system. Participants were teachers from these schools who are willing to be interviewed on a confidential basis.

The aim of the study was twofold; to explore and try to understand teachers' experiences of using Affective Social Tracking (AST) data as a means of providing proactive, targeted pastoral care in schools. It also aimed to ascertain the contribution of AST in the context of growing demand for better mental health care provision in schools. It is hoped that this research will increase knowledge in the schools' community about teachers' opinions of a pastoral care tool that is currently operating in over 100 schools, and that this knowledge could also benefit the wider community of anyone interested in the provision of mental health care to children and young people in schools.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The concept of pastoral care in schools is traditionally an overarching one that relates to a school's ability to respond to and meet its pupils' personal, social and academic needs. For this to happen effectively, pastoral care must be integrated into the fabric of the school's organisation. Its successful delivery rests on the fact that it is as much linked with the academic curriculum and structural organisation of the school, as it is dependent on the "nature of relationships amongst pupils, teachers and adults other than teachers" (British Department of Education and Science, p.47). There is a duality in this understanding of pastoral care in schools, in that "schools should promote the wellbeing of their students as individuals and as members of the community" (Hearn, 2006, p.6). Among the different approaches to pastoral care in schools, prevention is recognised as one of the most important (Best, 2008). This is because proactive pastoral care in schools can play a key role in mental health provision for children and young people.

Affective Social Tracking (AST) is an early identification screening tool used to measure, track and improve pupil social and mental health, developed for use in schools, as an online assessment, for pupils from the ages of 8-18 years. It was developed by the UK based organisation known as Steer, founded in 2000 by Dr Simon Walker and Dr Jo Walker. Dr Simon Walker is a cognitive biologist

and has proposed a model of executive prospective and retrospective imagination function which he calls 'Steering Cognition' (Walker, 2015). Steering Cognition has been defined as:

a model of cognitive executive function describing how the brain biases attention toward specific stimuli whilst ignoring others, before, coordinating responsive actions, which cohere with our past patterns of self-representation (Walker S, Walker J, 2016, p.1). Dr Jo Walker (DProf, Adolescent self-regulation) is a specialist in adolescent self-regulation and has formerly worked as a deputy head teacher and a BESD advisor for a local authority.

Based on this model, as well as Walker and Walker's (2016) four factor model of affective-social self regulation, AST measures pupils' ability to adjust self-regulation and as such can be seen to be "measuring organised patterns of thinking which are both emergent and ecological but distinct from affective moods and states" (Walker, 2015, p. 11). "Developed through two doctoral studies, 15,000 pupil trials, over 17 years, AS Tracking measures how a child steers their actions in their imagination." (<https://www.steer.global>, 2017).

It is currently being deployed in over 106 schools, the majority are UK independent schools, but it is used in 2 UK state schools as well as 2 schools in Australia and one in France (www.steer.global, 2019). Over 800 teachers have been trained in its use (<http://www.steer.global>, 2017). AST can be seen to be supporting proactive, targeted pastoral care in schools (Walker, 2015). The question is how far and by what means? At a time when there is growing pressure on schools and teachers to provide better mental health care, the emphasis of this study will be on researching teachers' experience of working with AST as a proactive and targeted pastoral tool. It will also attempt to understand its contribution towards the provision of better mental health care in schools in general. Chapter Two will critically review any related literature to the subject as well as look at AST in more detail, Chapter Three will present and explain the methodology used in the study, Chapter Four will

present the findings. Chapter Five will present a discussion of the findings and examine them in their own context as well as in the broader field of mental health care provision in schools in general. Chapter Six offers a conclusion to the study.

Chapter 2.

Critical Review

In reviewing the literature, this critical review can be divided into two main parts. The first half is focussed on exploring and understanding the general concept of pastoral care in schools. It also examines current UK policies that drive current school pastoral care initiatives, and aims to present an understanding of mental health care needs and prevalence amongst children aged 8-18. Before introducing the tool, Affective Social Tracking (AST), the review considers research that relates to teachers' experiences of delivering pastoral care in schools. The second part of the review then focuses on the AST tool, starting with an understanding of the theory behind it, followed by an explanation of how it works in practice, with a review of the studies that demonstrate its effectiveness as an early identification screening tool to measure, track and improve pupil social and mental health. Finally, this chapter explores other comparable tools being used in schools.

The databases used to search for material for the critical review were CINAHL, MEDLINE, Psycinfo, British Education Index, Education Child Development and Adolescent Studies Educational Abstracts, ERIC and Web of Science. The rationale behind this choice of database was based on the criteria of research on pastoral care in the English speaking world, in particular within the educational sector (with the UK considered to have the most extensive research into pastoral care in schools owing to the long term existence of British based journals, such as *Pastoral Care in Education*, *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*,

The British Educational Research Journal and *Health Education Journal* as well as research on mental health of school aged children.

After an initial comprehensive search was performed which aimed to pick up studies on pastoral care in general, the search focussed on the Educational databases, using one-stop subject search to capture as much as possible on pastoral care within the educational sector, with the search phrase 'pastoral care and school*'. The databases included in this search were: British Education Index, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Abstracts, Educational Administration Abstracts and ERIC. This search was repeated using the Web of Science database. In order to search for papers that detailed any similar qualitative research projects conducted with teachers in secondary schools, a similar search was conducted with the one-stop search in the British Education Index, same databases as listed above, but this time with 3 separate search instructions, using the words, 'qualitative' (and) 'teacher*', and 'pastoral or pastoral care' and then joining them together.

2.1. What is understood by the term Pastoral Care in Schools?

The concept of Pastoral Care in Schools and the underlying theories have evolved over the last two hundred years from a spiritual and values based model of education based on the Christian philosophy (Lang, 1983), towards a universalist health and wellbeing philosophy, which encompasses the "social, emotional, physical and moral well being of all members of their school community" (WHO, 1999). In the UK, it has been associated with other terms such as "guidance teaching" "personal education" "personal, social and health education" (PSHE) and "personal, social and health education and citizenship" (PSHEC). Pastoral care is one of the criteria used to measure the quality of UK schools by the Office for Standards in

Education (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, 2012). Calvert (2009, p.267) describes it as "the term used in education in the United Kingdom to describe the structures, practices and approaches to support the welfare, well-being and development of children and young people" (p.267).

Since the publication of Michael Marland's seminal book "Pastoral Care" in 1974, there has been increasing recognition that schools are key to the provision of pastoral care. Policy and practice have more recently focussed on ways to integrate pastoral care into the organisational and relational fabric of schools, although the term "pastoral curriculum" has not been used since the development of the National Curriculum in 1988. In 2001, the government paper '*Promoting children's mental health within early years and school settings*' introduced the need for schools to promote good mental health to all, as well as support those with mental health difficulties (DfEE, 2001). In 2004, '*Every child matters*' (DfES, 2004) reinforced the need for all services to be focussed on children and young people's well-being and many school initiatives followed. It paved the way for a new way of thinking about the wider role of schools and aspects of pastoral care practice (Reid, 2005). The most recent government paper '*Mental health and behaviour in schools*' (DfE, 2018) outlines the central role that schools have in supporting good mental health in their pupils, and emphasises their statutory duty to do this (p.6).

Kidger et al (2010) chart the resulting evolution of different, "often poorly defined" (p. 921) terminologies and varied approaches to child and adolescent mental or emotional health. They cite that some approaches focus on 'emotional health and well being' as being part of a more general approach to health, sitting 'alongside' good physical health in general and some,

such as Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) have an emphasis on socio-emotional health (Kidger et al, 2010). Finally, they describe approaches that focus on identifying and supporting those with mental health difficulties, for example the Targeted Mental Health in Schools programme (TAMHS). They draw the distinction between initiatives that “aim to prevent or reduce mental disorders” (p.921) at an individual level and those that aim to work on a whole school level “health promotion perspective” (p.921). The National Children’s Bureau paper (Weare, 2015) builds on a systematic review of SEAL and mental health programmes and interventions in schools, and outlines a series of framing principles, informed by the evidence on ‘what works’. It refers to two overlapping areas of central importance to schools and calls for them to be ‘integrated to be effective’ (p.3); one is the area of ‘social and emotional well-being’ and the other is the area of ‘mental health problems’.

Commentators have written about the many tensions and divisions that exist in the field more generally; between the delivery of knowledge and care in schools (Tucker, 2015; Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, 2008), as well as those between a whole school pastoral approach versus one where support is targeted towards the more “vulnerable and needy” (Tucker, 2015 p.6). In their introduction, Watson et al (2012) remark that reducing the “complexity of wellbeing to a set of indicators that derive from professional practice is to subject the concept to the law of unintended consequences” (p.7). It would seem that the resulting fragmentation in meaning and practice contradicts the essential thinking behind Marland’s belief that “caring is an integral part of the overall educational process” (Tucker, 2015; p.6). Indeed, the relational aspect is seen as fundamental to the pastoral task of the school (Best, 2014). In pastoral care, there is an emphasis on all relationships, not just between pupils and their peers, teachers and other adults, (British Department of Education

and Science) but also between the individual pupil, the school and its wider community (Hearn, 2006).

2.2. Policy on mental health provision in schools.

The recent government green paper, *Transforming children and young people's mental health provision* (DoH, DoE, 2017), builds on *Future in Mind* (2015) and *the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health* (2016). It set out three key proposals; (1) all schools and colleges to have a Designated Senior Lead for Mental Health, (2) local Mental Health Support Teams to be set up locally and to be linked to schools and colleges, and (3) reduced waiting times for NHS services for children and young people who need specialist mental health help (4 weeks). In it there is emphasis on the need for 'whole school approaches' in order to provide a better integrated response from schools. A 'whole school approach' has been described as one which ensures that "all parts of the school organisation work coherently together" (Weare, 2015, p.4). There is an emphasis on supporting and promoting positive wellbeing in and out of the classroom, stemming from the taught curriculum as well as the "informal" curriculum (DoE, 2018, p.8). It aims for prevention and early intervention when necessary using targeted interventions. A long term perspective is required, as well as a focus on staff wellbeing as well as pupil (Weare, 2015).

The results of the consultation, published in July 2018, supported the proposals for the greater role of schools and colleges, but added the proviso for flexible implementation, so as to avoid teacher overload and increased pressures on school funding (DoHSC & DoE, 2018).

The green paper (DoH, DoE, 2017) drew on evidence bases such as an unpublished systematic review by the National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health (NCCH) and University College London (UCL), which reviewed evidence relating to the mental health of children and young people. This allegedly found limited evidence for the long term effectiveness of universal prevention approaches to mental health outcomes. The green paper evidence review (DoH, DoE, 2017) refers to specific interventions such as mindfulness and positive psychology programmes, mentoring interventions, Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL), suicide and self-harm prevention programmes, as well as the more general training of staff and recruitment of school counsellors able to identify and support children potentially demonstrating mental health problems. Specifically, the green paper (DoH, DoE, 2017) refers to 400 teachers having been trained from 280 schools in Mental Health Awareness using the Youth Mental Health First Aid Training Programme, and lays out the government commitment to train up at least one teacher from every primary school and secondary school nationally. The green paper (DoH, DoE, 2017) summarises evidence from the Department of Education's quantitative survey of mental health support in schools and colleges (Marshall et al, 2017):

“Around half of schools and colleges already have a dedicated lead for mental health. 61% of schools currently offer counselling, and 90% of schools and colleges offer staff training on supporting pupils' mental health and wellbeing.” (DoH, DoE, 2017, p.4).

2.3 Proactive and preventive pastoral care in schools?

In their response to the government green paper (DoH, DoE, 2017), The Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition (CYPMHC, 2018) applaud the “whole school approach”

proposed, but call for more of a “whole-system” based approach (1.16). They also draw the distinction between early identification and prevention, and the need for ongoing wellbeing, and call for a more “proactive response to addressing the social determinants of mental health” (2.11). Best (2007) defined this balance between early identification and prevention and ongoing wellbeing as “proactive and preventive pastoral care”.

Thus historically, the general emphasis of schools’ work seems to have shifted away from supporting and promoting positive mental health to intervening on a pathological level. Even the consistent use of the word *interventions* in the evidence review (appendix A) of the government green paper (DoH, DoE, 2017) implies a response to a “medical disorder”. This is a step away from Best’s understanding of proactive and preventive pastoral care with its focus on “being healthy” (2007).

2.4 Targeted pastoral care?

Targeted pastoral care implies an individualised approach, which when partnered with the concept of ‘proactive’ does not fit easily with concepts of universal *interventions* working on a whole school population level; thus delivery of proactive targeted pastoral care must imply a challenge to a system that is not currently preventive at the individual level. The NCB (2015) framework document makes the distinction between a ‘universal’ approach that allows for proactive ways that schools can promote emotional and social well-being of pupils and teachers alike, and a ‘targeted’ approach that focuses on actions schools can take to ‘prevent, identify and respond to mental health problems of staff and students’ (p.3). This distinction illustrates that activity in schools would seem to focus either on universal classroom SEAL interventions, or via individual targeted interventions *once* the individual has been identified

as showing signs of social, behavioural or learning problems. In the 2015 government PSHE review, research is cited that evidences positive impact of universal SEAL interventions *or* targeted SEAL interventions where children have been identified as having difficulties (Durlak et al, 2011; Payton et al, 2008).

2.5 A snapshot of mental health in UK school aged children today

Best (2007) foresaw the challenge to schools to respond to the outcomes of *Every Child Matters*, especially “being healthy” in the context of mental health. Sources suggest a general decline in the state of national child and adolescent mental health (Childline/NSPCC, 2016, Institute for Employment Studies, 2015). The latest NHS Digital survey (2018) reports an increase in the prevalence of mental and emotional disorders for 5-15 year olds with one in eight (12.8%) 5-19 year olds having at least one mental disorder when assessed in 2017. There is an absence of a complete picture of mental health for the 10-24 age group (AYPH, 2017) from recent representative population surveys. However, the recent Millennium Cohort Study, following the progress of children born in 2000, showed 24% of 14 year old girls to be suffering from depression (Patalay, 2017). The Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey showed the overall rate of common mental health problems for adults over 16 was one in 6 (McManus et al, 2016). Most common symptoms of mental disorders include anxiety, depression, self-harm, eating disorders, suicide, conduct disorder, behaviour problems and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Commentators have suggested a host of possible causes from the possible impact of the economic crisis of 2008, cuts to services, changes to examination systems and academic

pressures, concerns over exiting the European Union as well as an increased usage of social media, reports of cyberbullying and an increase in childhood obesity (AYPH, 2017, Faculty of Public Health, 2010).

2.6. Comparable qualitative studies with teaching staff on pastoral care

Fifty-seven journal papers were identified in a search for qualitative studies on teaching staff and pastoral care, using a subject based search of education databases cited above, (after discarding 20 duplicates). Of these, only those set in mainstream schools (not universities or higher educational establishments, or pre-schools) which focussed on the general population were closely analysed. Many of these studies focussed on teachers working with particular minority pupil groups such as; those with special needs, migrants, those at risk of exclusion, victims of disaster or abuse, rural populations, those with sexual orientation issues etc and these were discarded. Several studies that used quantitative or mixed methods or a mixed sample base, such as teachers and pupils or other school stakeholders, were also discarded as they used a different methodology to the one the study proposed. Nine studies were considered more closely aligned with the proposal of this study although they did not necessarily use the generic term 'pastoral care', but referenced terms such as mental wellbeing, emotional health and wellbeing, pupil welfare, mental health (one considered a teacher's role as a 'pastoral care teacher'). All nine collected data by interviewing teachers (8 individually, one in focus groups). The average sample size was about 15 teachers interviewed from between 1-8 schools. Two of the studies were carried out in Australia

(Vance, Pendergast, Garvis, 2015; Mazzer et al, 2015), one in Norway (Maelan et al, 2018), one in Finland (Koskela, Maatta, Uusiautti, 2013) and the rest in the UK (including Northern Ireland and Wales). Two of the UK studies were based in primary schools (Danby, Hamilton, 2016; Simm et al 2008).

All of the studies examined teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards pastoral care in schools with a focus on mental health, and all considered their roles as teachers in offering pupil support with a general understanding that schools were important providers of pastoral support for children (Simm et al, 2008; Danby, Hamilton, 2016; Kidger et al, 2010; Koskela, 2013). Common themes were the need for whole school approaches (Kidger et al, 2010), greater cross system links between schools and professionals (Rothi et al, 2008; Mc Connellogue, Storey, 2017), perceived constraints on teachers' ability to deliver care outside of their specialist subject areas (Mazzer, Rickwood, 2015; Vance, Pendergast and Garvis, 2015) and the need for more teacher training and support (Danby, Hamilton, 2016; Kidger et al, 2010; Koskela, Maatta and Uusiautti, 2013). Two of the studies examined teachers' attitudes towards preventive initiatives, a proposed suicide prevention programme (McConnellogue, Storey, 2017) and a resilience training programme (Vance, Pendergast, Garvis, 2015). Both studies revealed tensions existing between teachers' personal and professional lives in their attitudes towards these programmes. The Norwegian study (Maelan et al, 2018) looked at ways teachers proactively and reactively support pupils' mental health using everyday practices at school. They discuss the way that supportive teacher-pupil relations have been shown to be important to pupils' mental health, in particular ones that are open and trusting (Maelan et al, 2018, p.21), and key to the process of learning. They evidence teachers' need for clearer boundaries between their role as teachers as opposed to that of therapists (Maelan et al, 2018).

All studies were useful in comparing their findings as well as their methodologies, although the four international studies presented limitations for comparative purposes, given the differences in national policies and educational systems, as well as culture. All were qualitative in nature and most used semi-structured interviews which can provide access to representations of people's experiences, perceptions and opinions (Silverman, 2006) and allows for "deeper elaboration of the issue" (Mazzer and Rickwood, 2014, p. 38).

2.7 What is Affective Social Tracking, the theory behind it and its claims to support proactive, targeted pastoral care in schools.

Affective Social Tracking (AS Tracking) is an early identification screening tool, specifically an online pupil-voice assessment, which aims to measure, track and improve pupil social and mental health. It has been developed for use in schools for pupils from the age of 8-18 years. It has been used in flagship schools since the early 2000s, but was officially launched in 2014 to a wider selection of schools, and is currently being used in over 100 schools throughout the UK and internationally (www.steer.global, 2019). As a screening tool it has psychometric properties but is not a psychometric instrument as it is designed to track emerging cognitive function rather than a fixed set of traits or behaviours. The British Psychological Society (BPS) accredits psychometric instruments to measure fixed psychological characteristics (www.bps.org.uk). Dr Simon Walker, one of the co-developers of AST, proposes a model of executive prospective and retrospective imagination function which he terms "Steering Cognition" (Walker, 2015). Based on this model, as well as Walker and Walker's (2016) four

factor model of affective-social self regulation, AST measures pupils' abilities to adjust self-regulation.

“The importance of Steering Cognition lies in its explanation of human behaviours which lead to either risks or advantages for individuals and collective groups. A car driver with poor control will increase risks for himself and others. Similarly, individuals with poor Steering Cognition may increase risks for themselves and others whilst those with better steering travel further and more safely. Importantly, the ability to regulate one's Steering Cognition is unrelated to IQ or rational group behaviour, so measuring Steering Cognition offers an explanation of behaviours and events not currently detected by rational thinking metrics or models.”
(<http://www.steering-cognition.org>, Walker, 2015).

Steering Cognition and Self-regulation

Steering cognition has been described as a “component of affective-social self-regulation” (Walker and Walker, 2016, p.1). Walker and Walker (2016) recognise the key role the imagination plays in organising behaviours, both retrospective and prospective memory, and cite Schacter et al (2007) on p.2 of their paper in referring to evidence showing the neural mechanical links between imagining the future and the past. In a series of studies carried out on secondary school students Walker (2014) found that the “imagination was shown to contribute to planning, sequencing, perspective-taking and learner responsiveness” (Walker and Walker, 2016 p.2). In his paper “Thinking, straight or true?” (2015) he proposed his model of executive prospective and retrospective imagination function called “Steering Cognition” and described it as unifying the imagination, executive function and self-regulation.

“The analogy of the car has been used to explain Steering Cognition: Steering Cognition regulates the mind’s direction, brakes and gears as it navigates across the epistemological landscape” (Walker and Walker, 2016, p.3).

The metaphor of the car is further developed in the short video “Steering Education” (Steer, 2018). In it, the hippocampus region of the brain is described as being like an eye, responsible for looking ahead and steering the car, simulating and selecting appropriate responses to new stimuli. It describes the eye as developing ‘biases’ or patterns of thinking which limit the brain’s capacity to navigate new situations and can put the driver at risk of crashing. Real consequences of crashes are described as mental health and social problems as well as risks to academic success. Bias’ or patterns of steering are seen to present risks to pupil mental health in 3 sets of circumstances; in the case of the development of ‘fixed’ or polar biases, in the case of dysregulation or in the case of over regulation. Pupils who “over regulate” are described as those who do not develop biases because of their effortful conscious steering habits.

Between 2002-2015 Walker carried out a Steering Cognition test with more than 11,000 participants between the ages of 8 and 60. From these results, Walker identified 7 latent Steering Cognition factors and in 2015 Walker J described 4 of these factors and their relationship with affective social self-regulation literature (Walker 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d).

AS Tracking uses Walker and Walker’s (2016) 4 factor model to measure 4 key tasks a pupil’s self-regulation must act upon and measures the degree of bias a pupil may have in each of

these 4 key affective social factors. These 4 tasks are defined as: **self-disclosure**, described as the degree to which a pupil chooses to share, or hold back their thoughts, feelings, ideas and opinions, **trust of self**, the degree to which a pupil trusts or questions their own qualities, skills, ideas and opinions, **trust of others**, the degree to which a pupil trusts or questions others' qualities, skills, ideas and opinions and **seeking change**, the degree to which a pupil seeks to bring about or reduce change, novelty and risk (Walker and Walker, 2016, p.4).

How does AS Tracking work?

In keeping with the importance of a methodology that allows insight into the nature of the empirical world to be studied (Patton, 1990), the methodology of AST allows insight into the imagination of the pupil sitting the assessment. The assessment was developed to overcome limitations of self-report assessments which measure what pupils choose to disclose and rely on the pupils' own perception of their self-regulation. The AST assessment measures pupils' actual self-regulation by accessing their imagination and its relationship with self-regulation.

The assessment takes place twice an academic year (usually October and March). It takes the pupils on average between 15-30 minutes to complete on a school computer in a controlled classroom environment. It is done via a secure online interactive assessment platform. The pupils are led through a visualisation process which enables them to imagine their "own" space using "clean language cues" (Walker and Walker, 2016, p.4.). "Clean language" is a questioning technique developed by therapist psychologist David Grove (Grove D, Panzer B, 1989) which seeks to elicit an authentic expression of client subjective experience with minimum interference from the therapist. The technique involves asking simple questions with minimum presupposition using a particular syntax. Proceeding the visualisation exercise, the

pupils are asked questions which test their self-regulation of the four factors of Steering Cognition, between two different environments, general and contextual (ie school). The two parallel imagination exercises measure two sets of data, with the generalised bias acting as a “baseline” for comparison (Walker and Walker, 2016; p. 4). A Likert scale of responses is used to elicit replies from four clusters of priming stimuli that measure trust of self (how a pupil defines their space), trust of others (how a pupil responds to others in their space), seeking change (how a pupil manages change in their space, and self-disclosure (how much a pupil discloses of their space).

“The speed, direction and variance of each response is measured”. (Walker and Walker, 2016 p. 4) which demonstrates the pattern and speed of the pupil’s steering cognition.

Pupils’ responses are computed and compared against the entire database of AST pupil responses to provide a score giving an indication of the degree of bias a pupil may present in each factor. In-built algorithms can detect faking responses (studies show 95% of faking responses can be detected, of which 80% can be used as a diagnostic to demonstrate pupil strategies and risk diagnosis) (Walker J, Walker S, 2016).

A school using AST screening will have a team of dedicated teachers who have been trained in AST, headed up by their lead AS Tracking Practitioner, whose job it is to oversee the system within the school and the teachers using it, as well as to liaise with Steer and the AST consultant who visit the schools on a twice yearly basis. The heads of the schools decide which teachers are to be trained to use AST, but they will be those with pastoral care roles, ie tutor group leaders, or heads of houses. After each round of screening has been completed,

the results will be examined by the AST consultant who prepares a report for the school. About 10% of pupils will be flagged up as “priority pupils” in need of follow up or “action planning”. In addition, a further 10-15% are often highlighted as having patterns to watch carefully as they may lead to unhealthy behaviours or risks if continued.

Action planning involves a guided process whereby teachers put in place proactive, targeted, low level, in-school signposts to support healthy patterns of thinking for those pupils identified as priority. It may be that several teachers who have contact with that pupil will meet together to write a single action plan. The AST Action Plan online resource available to teachers provides teachers with a bank of possible signposts to select for each pupil. For those pupils who are already being supported by a welfare plan AST data can inform the welfare plan and track their progress. The Action Plans are implemented via the overall pastoral experience that the teacher has with the pupil, through meetings and general observation. The aim is to address a specific developmental need and aims to pre-empt patterns of behaviour which may place pupils at risk. Pupils are not aware that they may have an Action Plan in place and the aim is for teachers to draw on the strength of the relationship they may have already built up or be building up, in order to be able to fully support the pupil. For that reason, AST could be described as functioning as an interaction rather than an intervention. Once pupils leave school they are allowed to take their AST data, or assessment results, with them to enable them to understand and reflect on their AS Tracking history to help prepare them for adult life.

Schools using AST adopt a full sign-up approach, which means that parents have the option to withdraw their children from the AST programme at any time, but that unless their wish for withdrawal is specified, all pupils are automatically signed up to it.

2.8. Validity and reliability

Steer has been conducting a series of ongoing, internal review studies on AST referred to in the 2016 paper (Walker, Walker) focussing on validity (predictive, construct, consistency) and reliability (notably stability versus plasticity). For example, a predictive validity study of 2,900 11-18 year old students, showed accuracy rates of 82% in detecting early risks of self-harm, bullying and not coping with pressure/anxiety (Walker, 2014). Cross validation tests were done to reduce the risk of false positive and negative readings. Walker J (2015i) found no statistical difference in generalised AST scores in pupils from state or private, day or boarding schools regarding the educational type norms, when comparing a sample of 20 schools.

2.9. AST and other in-school mental health assessments and tools

There are several in-school mental health assessments and tools known to exist in the UK which could be seen as supporting schools in their pastoral responsibilities, in addition to AS Tracking. These include: Pupil Attitudes to Self & School, or PASS (<https://www.gla-assessment.co.uk>), the Boxall Profile (<https://nurturegroups.org>), the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (<https://sdqinfo.org>). These differ from each other and AS Tracking in varying ways:

Focus and purpose; PASS seeks to identify fragile learners and overcome barriers to learning, the Boxall Profile aims to support pupils identified with social, mental health or behavioural issues and the SDQ signals pupils' strengths and difficulties. AS Tracking seeks

to predict and improve mental health risks before they are visible and evident symptomatically. AS Tracking was developed for use as an integrated across schools assessment. PASS and the Boxall Profile are now being trialled for use across schools. The Boxall Childhood Project (Nurture UK, 2017) piloted a socio-emotional functioning (SEF) project assessing school pupils across 36 schools with the aim of promoting the importance of across school SEF assessment as a way to identify and meet needs of all. During the pilot phase in 2017 6160 pupils were assessed. 26 schools assessed whole year groups (rather than only focusing on pupils who had clear SEF needs). Most pupils were in primary school and were between 4 to 10 years old. The primary results showed that one fifth of pupils had “high levels of social emotional and behavioural difficulties” (Nurture UK, 2017).

All except the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire provide teachers with differing levels of follow up results-based targeted interventions.

Data collection: All except the Boxall Profile rely on self-reporting. The Boxall Profile is an assessment completed by teachers. The AST assessment does not use direct wellbeing questions and seeks to disclose hidden cognition biases.

Chapter summary: this chapter has attempted a review of key literature surrounding the subject of pastoral care in schools, considered what targeted proactive pastoral care would look like, and presented an overview of the prevalence of mental health problems in children and young people today. It has examined some qualitative studies that focus on teachers’ opinions on pastoral care in schools. It has given some background on AS Tracking and attempted to explain the theory, as well as looked at what interventions and approaches are currently being used in schools that focus on mental health. The next chapter will move onto the detail of the study itself.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This study is a qualitative study and aims to understand and describe teachers' experience of using the pastoral tool, AS Tracking (AST), and in so doing contribute to a better understanding of how AST fits in the bigger picture of improving mental health care provision in schools. It uses an interview based method of data collection. This chapter will describe the methodological process in full, from recruitment, data collection, analyses to the ethical considerations.

3.1. Philosophical Approach and Research Design

In keeping with Kant's (1785) beliefs on the importance of human interpretation in knowledge of the world, this study follows the interpretivist tradition, typical of qualitative research. A qualitative methodology was considered appropriate. Pope & Mays (1995) state the goal of qualitative research is the development of concepts that help with understanding of social phenomena with emphasis on experiences and views of participants. The primary goal of the research was to understand "the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, 1994, p.118). The context or world of the teachers would doubtless be "complex" due to the many responsibilities and roles they play in their schools (in addition to those of their personal lives) and, in addition, the notion of pastoral care is relational at its heart, so a research methodology, such as an interview based qualitative one, was considered to be best suited. In addition, the effectiveness of AST depends on the adoption and delivery of the teachers so it was considered vital to understand their

experiences of it, in their own words. Although the purpose of this research was not primarily evaluative, it does contain an evaluative aspect in exploring teachers' experience as the principal users of AST. Patton (1990, p. 94) suggests that qualitative enquiry strategies are especially "powerful and appropriate" in the context of process evaluations. Ritchie et al (2014) develop these ideas on the appropriate role of qualitative research in evaluation, and stresses the importance of the evaluation being done 'with' those most involved. A final reason for opting for a qualitative interview methodology is that the data was quite simply "not available in any other form" (Mason, p.115, 2018).

The study has been informed by different authors, but before describing these, it must be said that the researcher chose not to be too tightly aligned to one tradition, conscious of potential overlap and practicalities of a study that did not fit comfortably in one established methodology. Ritchie et al advise novice researchers to adopt a pragmatic approach rather than being forced into a "theoretical or methodological straitjacket" (Ritchie et al, 2014, p.19). According to Creswell (2014, p. 186): "The key idea behind qualitative research is to learn about the problem or issue from participants and to address the research to obtain that information."

A brief description of authors that have informed the study and how, follows:

Thinking behind the epistemological perspective and status of the data (including the analysis) has been aided by Ritchie et al (2014), Mason (2018) and Silverman (2013), and a broadly substantive approach was adopted as a result, with some overlap towards a structural or constructionist approach. The overall design is in keeping with Creswell's (2014) recommendations in that it is an emerging design, using both inductive and deductive data analysis, and broadly follows the grounded theory tradition. Rubin and Rubin (2005, p.221)

describe the steps of grounded theory (coding, recognizing concepts and themes and theory development) as “parts of one integrated process” and refer to open coding as giving “fresh and rich” results. However, they also refer to the enormous amount of coding required when working systematically through the data. In keeping with this tradition, the researcher was careful to let the data speak for itself by not referring to the literature to aid the development of themes, but conversely chose not to code every passage and term, and only selected those that were most aligned with the research questions.

Regarding the researcher as being the “key instrument” (Cresswell, 2014, p.184), there were considerations, both in terms of the interview process and the interpretative ability of the researcher. Mason broadly states that the epistemological view of qualitative researchers is “situated and contextual” and that the researcher needs to focus on the contexts in order to produce the “situated knowledge”(2018, p.110). She also suggests that this position influences the types of questions asked, to being situational rather than abstract. Ritchie et al (2014) stress the importance of an interpretivist approach constantly being supported by the data. It was therefore considered an imperative that the researcher was reflexive about her own perspective, beliefs and role in gathering and interpreting the data.

3.2 Method

3.2.1. Sample

In accordance with Bryman’s (2008) recommendations that sampling is conducted with reference to the research goals, the researcher proposed a purposive sampling method, at two levels. Charmaz refers to this process as ‘theoretical sampling’ and as a way to find data that will aid development of an “emerging theory” (2013, p.96). Mason (2018) adds to this by saying that this kind of sampling is not based on the need for empirical representation

but more for the purposes of comparison and to generate theory inductively. This choice was based on the fact that the study aimed to explore the experience of teachers who use AST in their schools and specifically from schools where there was some parity of process in the AST teacher training, as well as a minimal length of time since adoption. Schools were specifically selected who matched this criteria. Thus, the first level of sampling was in the selection of the schools, which also impacted the second level of teacher recruitment. At this level, there was an emphasis on the professional background of the teachers and their workplace, i.e. teachers working in schools where AST has been fully rolled out across the schools, or in other words, where all pupils were being tracked using the system.

Following obtaining Steer's overall permission for this study (see **Appendix 1**: Steer letter of permission), the researcher proposed seeking permission from Steer to introduce the study to Head Teachers of schools who fit the criteria and to ask them to circulate information about the study to teachers who fit the criteria (See **Appendices 2, 3**: Letter to Head Teachers, Information poster), should they be willing for their schools to participate. Teachers were to be invited to contact the researcher direct, for confidentiality and to protect their anonymity. Interviews would thus be set-up on an individual level. The required sample size was driven by the naturalistic methodology adopted, and it was proposed that between 8/10 interviews would take place. Marshall defends the usefulness of studying small samples, saying that "an appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research question." (1996, p.523). Crouch et al (2006) also justify the use of small samples when conducting interview-based research to allow the researcher a closer association with the respondents in a more natural setting, as the preferred option was for the researcher to travel to the schools to interview teachers in person.

3.2.2. Recruitment

In keeping with the emergent nature of the study, the recruitment stage diversified into two phases, each requiring separate approvals from the Faculty of Research Ethics Committee at Brookes University (See **Appendices 4,5**: ethical applications 1&2), as the second phase was not planned for in the research proposal. This was because of difficulty recruiting in the first phase; seven schools were contacted and invited, only one school responded with an interest in participating, with only one teacher expressing an interest initially. It was decided to change the criteria of schools who had been using AST for at least 2 years to those who had only been using it for one year, to open up a wider pool of eligible schools. Twelve additional schools were contacted in this second phase of the recruitment, this time via the Steer consultant-trainers who each had personal contact with their respective schools, namely via the AST Senior Practitioner teachers (see **Appendix 6**: letter to Senior Practitioner), the school nominated lead AST teacher. The Senior Practitioners were requested to seek permission from the Head Teachers before circulating recruitment sheets to teaching staff (See **Appendix 3**: Information Poster). Interested and eligible teachers responded direct to the researcher using the researcher's university email address, and were sent participants' information sheets (**Appendix 7**) and invited to make contact again if they were still willing to participate. Those teachers were then invited to choose their preferred date and time for the interview and location within the school, and teachers were also given the opportunity to discuss the research further and to ask any questions.

Two more schools were recruited in the second phases of recruitment. A total of 7 teachers from across 3 schools responded and agreed to participate in the study.

For interview purposes and confidentiality the participating teachers were assigned a random code of between 1-99. Any other system of de-identifying was considered unsuitable for such a small sample size .

3.3. Data Collection: Instruments and Procedures

The method used to collect data in this study was a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions, conducted in the school setting, and lasting a maximum of one hour. The interviews were audibly recorded, with the participant's prior consent (see **Appendix 8**: consent form). Appleton (1995) outlines some advantages of collecting data through a semi-structured interview. Amongst those she identifies are: high response rates, control for the interviewer over the process itself as well as the possibility of greater clarity of understanding responses. In addition, she mentions that open ended questions can allow for individual expansion of personal experiences. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) also comment on the suitability of using a semi-structured interview for small sample groups and say that structured interviews tend to be carried out with quite large samples (1995, p.154).

The choice of individual interviews over small focus groups was based on the fact that individual interviews, although less time efficient, allow participants more freedom to answer questions, without being challenged or swayed by other colleagues' answers, especially where different personalities, ages, positions are in play. In addition, individual interviews would aid the confidentiality of the interviews and protect the anonymity of all concerned. The researcher used an interview schedule (See **Appendix 9**: Interview Schedule) to ensure uniformity in the questions asked, and, as stated above, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for this, whilst open-ended questions provided for deeper, freer answers. The researcher made some field notes after each interview, however, these were

transcribed electronically on-site when possible. She also kept an electronic research diary, recording anything notable that arose in the interviews, as well as any interesting points raised, or any thinking that related to the study, that arose during or after the interviews themselves. The interviews lasted between 20 minutes and 50 minutes and as the researcher gained confidence with her interview technique, she asked more follow up questions when appropriate. The interview process became more of a natural dialogue with the interview schedule as a guiding document. This gave the researcher freedom to consider the schools' pastoral care systems in place, for example. The interviews were recorded successfully audibly, hence the researcher was able to give the participant her full attention, instead of being preoccupied with note taking. The researcher conducted a pilot interview with a teacher friend before any of the actual interviews took place, to rehearse the practicalities of the process, including the technicalities of recording. Although the pilot interviewee was not familiar with AST, she had worked as a teacher in pastoral care and was able to offer some insight on the way the questions were asked and the questions themselves.

3.4 Data analysis

The data analysis broadly followed a generic approach known as "thematic analysis" and as described by Ritchie et al (2014) and Braun and Clarke (2006) That is one that is: "substantive and cross-sectional, moves from data-driven description to abstract themes, may attempt explanation, and does not report on quantification" (Ritchie et al, 2014, p.279). Mason (2018) refers to cross-sectional thinking across the data set as allowing categorisation, manipulation and comparison often in themes. She describes thematic analysis as one way of identifying patterns of meaning in data, which are broken down into "higher-order key themes, the importance of which lies in their ability to address the overall

research question” (Mason, 2018, p.271). The data analysis followed the five interconnected stages of the Framework Method (Ritchie and Lewis, 1994), as described below. This technique builds on the work of Miles and Huberman (1994) in that it uses a thematic framework to organise data, using a list of descriptive themes or categories which are then broken into sub-themes or categories. The data is summarised and charted onto a matrix (in this case in the form of an excel spreadsheet). Each participant has a row and each column denotes a subtheme. This process enables data to be summarised and displayed at the same time, thus ensuring thorough rigour and reflection. This method was chosen as it fit with the research question and overall aims of the study. The research question was at once seeking to explore teachers’ experiences of using the tool of AST (experiential) but in doing so was also evaluating the tool as adopted by its key users (evaluative). The Framework Method is not aligned with a particular epistemological, philosophical or theoretical approach but is flexible and adaptable for use with deductive, inductive or combined types of qualitative analysis (Gale et al, 2013). It is suitable for analysis of interview data, where themes are generated by making comparisons within and between cases (Gale et al, 2013) which was considered especially useful in this instance of comparing and evaluating user experience of AST.

The five interconnected stages of the Framework Method

I. Familiarisation:

Data analysis begun as soon as the first interview took place and was ongoing with the organisation and management stages of the data, as well as in the formal data analysis stage which followed (Ritchie et al, 2014). The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, as soon as possible after the interview had taken place, for familiarisation

purposes as well as ethical considerations which required that the recordings were deleted as soon as possible after use. Ritchie et al stress the importance of this stage of becoming immersed in the data to ensure that labels used are “grounded in and supported by the data” (2014, p.282). The transcripts were transcribed precisely. Rubin and Rubin (2005) describe precise transcription as including, amongst other things, stalling words, silences, digressions, exclamations and laughter (see **Appendix 10** for an example of an extract of a transcription).

li. Constructing an initial thematic framework

After more familiarisation had taken place (this included reading and re-reading of the transcripts, listening to the audio recordings and listing key ideas and recurrent themes), the transcripts were coded. This entails underlining interesting segments of the text and using the right hand “comment” margin to describe the content with a code. The process was at once inductive and deductive in that some of the data fell into neat ready-made “piles” owing to the semi-structured interview technique adopted for data gathering (Ritchie et al, 2014, p.282), but sometimes the emerging data was broken down into more detailed codes. For example, the question that related to how teachers felt AST data had affected their provision of pastoral care, elicited many interesting and relevant comments and these were independently coded, such as: “early warning system”, “diagnostic”, “focus on everyone”.

Fig 1: Table highlighting data and identifying code name

Transcript	Code name (and sub name)
“It helps you not let the blue ones slip through the net”	Early Warning System (blue pupils)
“this is somebody we’ve missed that would have gone under the radar, we need to focus on that now.”	Early Warning System (under the radar)
“It gives me a snapshot of all the individuals but most other interactions that will generally just throw up 20% of the house...”	Focus on Everyone
“.. and it just gave me an absolute way in to that pupil umm straight to their heart basically,”	In depth understanding, revealing

After reviewing the codes, those that were conceptually related were grouped together. For example, those just mentioned were deemed to be “perceived benefits of the data” and this became a category, which included 17 codes. This was grouped together with another category entitled “first impressions of AST” and both of these sub-categories were placed under the over-arching category “Attitude towards AST as a tool to aid targeted, proactive, pastoral care”. This, plus four other over-arching categories formed the basis of an initial analytical framework (see fig.2 below). Codes were further refined, applied to the framework and refined until no new codes were found. A final set of 49 codes was fixed, in consultation with the researcher’s supervisor, and these formed the initial analytical framework (see fig. 3 below, the framework of codes and sub-codes, listed in categories with explanations).

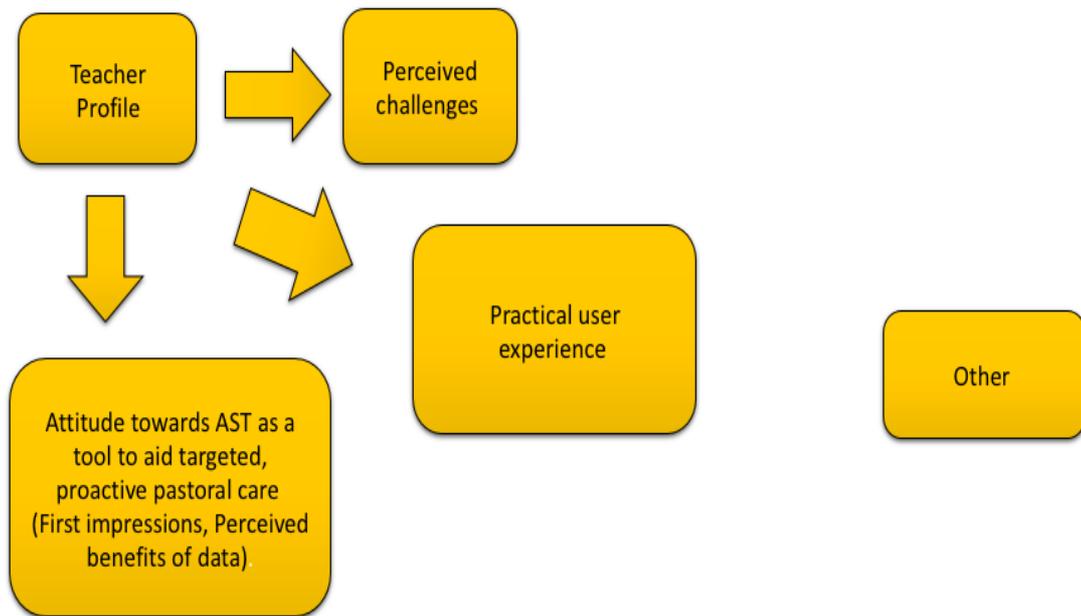


Fig 2: Overarching categories with main sub-categories

Fig 2: Framework of codes & sub-codes, listed in categories, with explanations

Code	Description
Teacher Profile	
School profile	Gen description of school, prep, senior, day, boarding
Previous pastoral experience	Gen description of previous experience
Current role	Current role at school and pastoral remit
Attitude towards AST as a tool to aid targeted, proactive, pastoral care	

First impressions of AST	First impressions after training
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitude towards theory and understanding 	Indication of level of understanding of theory & general buy-in
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weight on anecdotal evidence to buy-in 	Importance of anecdotal evidence to buy-in
Perceived benefits of data	List of perceived benefits specific to data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediacy of access to pupils' feelings 	Allows teachers quick insight into pupils' inner emotional state
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth knowledge, revealing 	Allows teachers deeper insight into pupils' emotional state
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic 	Provides an explanation for behaviour and emotions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early warning system 	Provides an early warning to potential problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blue pupils 	Over-regulators who maybe keeping up appearances and apparently doing fine.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under radar pupils 	Other pupils potentially having difficulties unseen
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on everyone (80/20 rule) 	Allowing an even distribution of pastoral care and attention on all, not just the 20% in obvious need, taking up 80% of staff time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily reference tool, pupil relations 	As a tool for regular referral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide individual pastoral response 	As an aid to guide follow-up care
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track success of strategies 	Providing ability to track impact of strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contextual versus general 	Differentiation between how pupils fare emotionally in school and home
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time saving 	As a time-saving tool
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disciplinary tool 	As a tool to aid disciplinary responses if needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships with pupils 	As a relational builder

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationships with parents, including tool for report writing and evidence of knowledge 	As a relational building, aiding report writing and providing evidence of insight into children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationships and tool for team working with other staff 	As a common tool for bigger pastoral team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers' children 	As a tool to gauge emotional state of children of teachers who are at school
Practical user experience	Impressions of practical aspects of AST
Ease of access to data	Ability to access data
Equipped by training	Gauge of adequacy of training
Equipped by other web-based resources	Gauge of adequacy of other resources
AST language	A formalised lexicom, unique to AST and its theory, to share and understand information about pupils
Action Plans	The formalised plans created by teachers to care for pupils flagged up as in need or at risk.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Usability 	The ease of using APs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Division of labour between staff 	The ease of working on these together, amongst colleagues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tool to enable review & tracking 	As a tool to chart pupil development in response to interventions
Technology	AST depends on trouble free IT
Time	Importance of time on user experience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impressions of impact on workload 	Time spent on top of normal work jobs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perceptions of long-term users versus short-term users 	Different perceptions according to length of time as a user
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular habit of usage 	Importance of habit to using
Attitude towards Steer consultant	Impressions of support from consultant
Sharing data	Issue of sharing data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With pupils 	

• With parents	
• With colleagues	
Perceived challenges	
Staff resistance	Importance of staff buy-in and understanding, in spite complexity
• Discretionary usage	Responsibility on individual teachers to use data wisely
Pupil resistance	Importance of pupil buy-in and understanding, in spite complexity
Complexity	Difficult to explain quickly
Cost	Expense to school of using AST
Time	Perception of increase to workload
Importance of integration in school pastoral system	Success depends on good fit within schools bigger pastoral system
Other	
Other observations on tool	Any other observations
Expressive language	Use of language considered to be especially expressive
Authenticity of pupil voice	Teachers' perception on authenticity of pupil voice

lii. Indexing

The final analytical framework was then applied to each transcript systematically for indexing.

iv. Charting

The summarised verbatim data was then charted onto an excel spreadsheet, with each row representing a participant and each column related to a specific code. The data from each participant took between half a day and a full day to enter.

v. Mapping and interpretation

Once the data had been fully charted on the matrix, each participant's data could be seen in comparison with the others' which allowed for the generation of final themes, as connections could be made within and between participant and categories. There was room for some deduction based on the original research question objectives as well as some induction which occurred naturally in the process.

4. Rigour

Unlike quantitative research whereby rigour is applied through disciplined adherence to applying "prescribed rules for instrument design", qualitative research relies on a more flexible but "principled" strategy of design (Holliday 2016:7). The researcher attempted to enhance rigour by adopting the guiding principles suggested by Denzin and Lincoln (1998) of credibility, transferability and dependability. Appleton (1995) refers to certain practices she used to ensure rigour to her research study which focused on the concept of vulnerability and health visiting practice, which also fit these principles. For example, returning to study sites and discussing findings can be a useful strategy to aid credibility. In this case, the researcher invited two participants to comment on their interview transcripts to ensure they were true recordings of their interviews as they remembered them, and reflected their views and beliefs accurately. Both came back and confirmed this after being sent the appropriate transcriptions. Appleton suggests transferability or "applicability", can be

furthered by repeatedly referring back to the interview and questionnaire data when developing themes and analysing data as well as asking another colleague to independently identify categories from reading some of the transcripts at random, or even conferring with the participants on the choice of themes selected. Regarding “dependability” or “consistency” Appleton (1995, p.996) stresses the importance of a strong “decision trail”. The researcher considered all these strategies where appropriate, and attempted to ensure the confirmability of the study by not allowing personal values or theoretical inclinations to affect the data collection or findings derived from it.

3. 5. Ethical Issues

Ethical issues were paramount to this study as, although the participants were not children, the subject matter was child-centred and data driven, and in addition to that, the subjects were teachers. Thus the researcher was determined that no harm would come to research subjects as a result of participating in the study and worked together with the Oxford Brookes Faculty Ethics Committee (FREC) to ensure that every requirement was fulfilled to prevent this. Approval was gained from the FREC before the research started, (REC no: 2017/41 approval received 11/6/18, see **Appendix 11**: approval letter) and when the sample criteria had to be amended to facilitate recruitment, two minor amendments to the proposal were sought permission for and approved by the FREC, with the support of the researcher’s supervisor (See **Appendix 12**: Approval received 23/10/18).

Emphasis was placed on preserving confidentiality and anonymity as much as possible for all participants and data. In the first place, the researcher was informed that STEER have been advised by Information Commission Office (ICO) to ensure full compliance with

General Data Protection Regulations May 2018 and thus it was clear that all pupil data on AST is already anonymised. In order to carry out the study, the researcher proposed full de-identification for the teacher participants as well, meaning that there would be no record of their names or the schools recorded in the final report and any quotations used would be de-identified. The researcher ensured informed consent was given from both the teacher participants and the head teacher of each school with teachers participating. Informed consent involved making the process and materials accessible for the participants and consent had to be ongoing, meaning the participants had permission to stop participating at any point in the research (see **Appendix 7**, Participants' Information Sheet). This could have been signalled verbally or non-verbally. Participants' written consent was documented in an auditable record to be stored at the University by the researcher's supervisor (See **Appendix 13** : Study Consent Form). Consent was also sought and gained for the use of data. Confidentiality of the data was carefully managed to safeguard, protect and maintain absolute anonymity of all data, and this included from within schools, amongst teacher participants, at all stages of the process. Electronic data was password encrypted and hard data temporarily locked in a cabinet in the researcher's workplace during use and destroyed once transcribed. The participants were informed of the confidentiality agreement beforehand. The researcher was able to provide evidence to support safeguarding training as well as an up to date DBS clearance which could support carrying out interviews in schools.

3. 6. Support for the Participants

The researcher was aware of potential sensitive issues that could have arisen in conversation with teachers when discussing young people's mental health, both from their professional experience or their personal lives. As a result, she was careful to conduct the interviews with sensitivity. She also researched any particular support networks available to teachers from each different schools in advance of the interviews taking place and made sure the participants were made aware of these before the interview started. She reiterated that they were not obliged to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable with and were free to stop the interview at any point without having to give a reason.

This chapter has outlined the qualitative methodology used in the study, including a brief look at the philosophical approach, and the research design. It examined the method used, explaining the sample choice and the recruitment process. It described the data collection process in the form of semi-structured interviews. It then detailed the data analysis, and explained how the five stages of the Framework Method were applied. It described how the researcher applied rigour to the study. Finally, it gave information about the ethical considerations and approval process, and referred to extra support that was sought for participants, should the need occur.

Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter will now present the study findings. They are organised in sections according to the three main overarching themes that most related to the research question, identified as: 'Attitude towards AST as a tool to support targeted, proactive pastoral care', 'Practical user experience' and 'Perceived challenges to using AST effectively'.

4.1 Interviews

Seven interviews were conducted over a period of just over 2 months, with 3 schools participating; 2 of which were senior schools (ages 13-18), and the third was a preparatory school (ages 7-13). All 3 schools provided boarding and day options to pupils, but the secondary schools were had higher ratios of boarding pupils over day. Participants all had significant pastoral care roles in their schools, being responsible for the pastoral well-being of between 35-60 children, Their experience of working in school pastoral care ranged from two years to over twenty years. All had been working with AST for at least one year, in accordance with the criteria for selection of the sample base. All participants were seemingly passionate about the challenge of providing proactive, targeted pastoral care for children and young people.

4.2 Attitude towards AST as a tool to support targeted proactive, pastoral care

4.2.1. First impressions of AST

Participants shared different experiences as to how they had first come across AST. Some were responsible for introducing it into their schools, having heard about it or attended a formal presentation about it, some were working in a school during its development phase, while the others were more recent adopters who were expected to use AST as part of their pastoral remit working in a school that used the system and had attended external one day Steer training days, as well as school based training sessions. These different first encounters sometimes affected first impressions, but not always. One described having “sceptical” first impressions, one mentioned concerns about “labelling children” but most were enthusiastic from the start (post-training) and “excited” by the possibilities presented:

“So I was excited to give it a go” (46).

“My first instinct was that it would be a tool for me to get to know the boys better and how to support them better” (12)

“ I guess after the initial training is when I first started using it myself, I was blown away by it...” (73)

In the context of first impressions of AST, a number of participants spoke positively about appreciating the theory underlying AST, presented as part of the training, when asked the question “Does the theory underpinning AST change your approach to pastoral care?”.

However, there was recognition that it can seem 'complicated' at first, and that a basic understanding of the theory was a necessary step in the adoption process. Several referred in particular to the benefits of being able to identify a "self-disclosure" bias in pupils, one of the four AST tracking factors outlined in the theory, and one that is strongly associated with the "early warning system" value attributed to the tool. (This will be discussed in more detail under the next section, "Perceived benefits of the data".)

"I think it definitely does (change your approach to pastoral care) and I think for me the biggest one has been the self-disclosing one, it's been really, really helpful to see which of my girls are going to struggle most with that". (46)

Some participants spoke about how understanding the theory was beneficial in their overall experience of using AST, and in particular how they felt this knowledge gave them a better understanding of pupils, and helped them in their provision of pastoral care to the pupils as *individuals*. One participant said it did not so much change their approach to pastoral care but rather their understanding of different pastoral situations.

"I'm not sure it (the theory) changes my approach but it certainly, because it changes your understanding quite often of what you're dealing with, because you know we try and help them all individually, but it really can change your understanding." (33)

Another participant spoke about the theory highlighting a focus on the individual at the same time as enabling an understanding of the school pastoral health in general.

“I think it’s helped us to be more focussed in our children as well.....but as a school our self-disclosure of our pupils is lower so actually our signposts as a school on to the children of how we want them to tell us things, they’re not working, so we have to look at what we do to improve our school err signposts to these children, so we’re looking at that actively in terms of how can we improve, so it’s changed us in how we look at our pastoral, it’s having our pastoral development actually having a bit more focus as well.” (86)

Several participants spoke about becoming more convinced about the effectiveness of the tool when they heard example case studies in the training about how it had been used successfully. Some spoke about being encouraged when the Steer Consultant was able to give them an accurate description of pupils on reviewing pupil data, some of whom were at risk of having pastoral concerns, without any former knowledge of the pupils.

Two participants alluded to the tension they noted between a computerised tool that enhanced human understanding. One referred to it as “a bit of a black box” and another concluded his interview by saying;

“Surprisingly this weird programme on imagination actually does throw up in a lot of cases some helpful information for us”. (5)

4.2.2. Perceived benefits of the data

Participants spoke about a wide range of perceived benefits of having access to the data from the bi-annual pupil screenings. All but one cited examples of when they had been able to use the data to support pupils pastorally proactively and individually. This participant was a recent adopter of the tool and said he could see how *“it would have been useful”* in the case of someone whose data suggested a low self-disclosing bias, but added *“I haven’t got first hand experience of it yet”* (B1). The self-disclosing factor measures the degree to which a pupil makes visible aspects of themselves to others. A low self-disclosing bias indicates a fixed tendency towards non-self disclosure, as well as an inability to steer or regulate their self-disclosure appropriately in different contexts (Walker J, 2015b). There are internalised risks to pupils who do not disclose their true thoughts and feelings and these risks can threaten mental health, especially if there are hidden stress related difficulties (Walker J, 2015b).

Participants who cited experience of using the data proactively and individually, spoke about the way it allowed them greater understanding and immediacy of insight into pupils feelings:

“It speeds up the process of getting to their heart probably” (73)

In particular, they spoke about how it alerted them to any underlying issues that were not evident from the outside.

“we just find it’s helpful information that it’s providing us about a pupil that we can’t see through our daily contact” (5)

Most participants used the phrase “*going under the radar*”, especially in the context of pupils who hid difficult feelings. Some spoke about difficulties teachers would regularly face getting pupils to open up when they were prone to hiding their feelings, or as previously described displaying ‘polar low self-disclosing’ biases..

Some teachers referred to the tool as providing them with an “early warning system” to alert them to pupils at the early stage of experiencing difficulties.

“it can act as an early warning system, erm sometimes we’ve had, the data comes back and you go “Oh my goodness, hello, this is somebody we’ve missed that would have gone under the radar we need to focus in on that now” (33)

Many of the participants spoke about the benefits of being alerted to “blue pupils”, or “over-regulators” (Walker J, 2015e) and referred to them at risk of going “under the radar”. These are pupils whose data do not necessarily evidence a polar bias (shown as red on the AST tracking chart) in any of the AST four factors, but whose “blue” results indicate a composite risk of over-regulation and who are capable of a sustained pattern of conscious and effortful self and social monitoring. Often these are pupils who are hard workers, and do not draw

attention to themselves (Walker J, 2015e). The AST model highlights that these pupils are at risk of eventual burn-out or a sudden depletion of self-regulation (Walker J, 2015e).

“It would be so easy to miss the ones who just keep their heads down and keep going” (33)

“It helps you not let the blue ones slip through the net, it helps you realise that you need to put time into the ones that look like they’re fine as well as the ones who are clearly not..” (17)

“it’s just helpful to know who the girls are that could fall into riskier behaviour and like with the over regulators especially umm they’re the type of girls that I think would be really easy as pastoral staff to just put to the back to the back of your m.. like if you didn’t have the data I mean, you’d be like “Oh they’re getting on great I won’t bother sitting down have one-to-ones with them, or I won’t bother doing X-Y-Z” but I think that actually for me that’s like super helpful, just like with girls just to make a super generalisation, because umm it puts them on your radar and I think that’s really important.” (46)

Participants spoke about how they valued the ‘diagnostic’ aspect of the data, diagnostic refers to its capacity to reveal a range of social and emotional concerns and risks for the individual according to their assessment scores, without being clinical or labeling.

“you know you will come across some people when you think “I just don’t get this, I don’t understand what’s happening here” and you know as much as you can of the back story and you get feedback from other teachers and you still just can’t quite make sense and it’ll be the last piece of the puzzle that says “actually this is what’s going on.” (33)

“Nowadays I can look at the data and I can just go straight to the heart of the problem.” (73)

“suddenly having a tool that said “Well you think something’s wrong, this is what’s wrong and here let’s think about what we can actually specifically targetedly (Sic) do to try and help and then let’s review it to see if it worked,” (17)

Some participants spoke about how they valued the benefit of being able to focus on everyone. They appreciated the fact that the pupil data gave them information about every pupil. One teacher described this by using the example of the “80/20 rule”:

“ .. you know I think that’s (sic) what excited us about AST is that umm you know one spends 80% of one’s time dealing with 20% of the house and I don’t think we went into it thinking that we were going to learn a huge amount more about the 20% that we dealt with but it was more about the 80% that, umm you know, so in a sense you know, House Parenting and my previous experience of pastoral work is a lot of it is reactive whereas the idea of rather than just waiting for a crisis to happen is to try and have an early warning system and put in some sort of prevention umm has been what’s excited us about it and the more

we've understood about how to look at the results umm you know we're all sort of sold on it in that way, but I suppose without it going over the top on it you know, it's not the be all and end all, but we do find it a very valuable tool in doing our pastoral work." (5)

Another referred to this need to focus on everyone and said in their opinion those most in need were often not those *"jumping up and down in front of you waving a flag.."* (33)

One participant said the data gave them *"a good excuse to have a conversation with everyone"* (73).

Several of the participants spoke about the usefulness of referring to data regularly. 'Regularly' would tend to mean anything from daily to weekly, depending on the participant. One said they looked at it daily, especially in advance of meetings with pupils, routine or otherwise. One said:

"it's been helpful for me to kind of go on and just like reference it because it helps me frame the way I might chat to them kind of thing." (46)

All except one participant spoke about the value they had found the data gave them in guiding their pastoral response in any given pastoral situation. Some cited how they had tried to help "blue pupils" learn from making mistakes, and others talked about how knowing whether pupils had a tendency towards polar biases of low trust of self versus high trust of others, guided their response.

“...if you’ve got one who has presented as incredibly needy, who is knocking on your door every night and there’s always another problem or something else she wants to discuss and they come back as “very low trust of self, very high trust of others” you’re probably then going to start working towards her not being able to come and knock on your door every night because actually that’s not helping her, that’s just reinforcing the way she’s feeling so actually you then need to start working on skilling her up to be able to umm think through process and work on some of those little tiny issues without running to an adult first every time...” (33)

“...in highlighting the high trust of others and the low trust of others really informed how I would support them...” (17)

Participants spoke about the value of having AST screening twice yearly which enabled them to track and monitor pupils’ development following the impact of any strategy or Action Plans had been put in place, to help those identified as at risk:

“it’s given us an effective way of tracking whether the strategies we’ve been using are actually effective,” (33)

One participant spoke about a 90% improvement in scores for 24 children who were put on Action Plans over the course of the year.

“There is value because there is an impact and a measurable impact, we are helping pupils in their biases improve them.” (86)

Five participants (all of those who had been using it for more than one year) said that using the tool and having access to the data, was a time saving feature, in that it enabled them to pre-empt potentially more time-consuming 'reactive' scenarios later on down the track.

The three participants who did not refer to any time saving benefits were those who had only been using AST for one year. One said:

“so by getting tutors involved in being proactive over some of the things that are developing in a young person’s life in terms of things, erm is actually preventing our work load from getting out of control.” (5)

Another spoke about being enabled to *“have conversations which probably down the road reduces the workload”*. (73).

Other benefits of the pupil data mentioned were; as a tool to aid disciplinary situations (73), and as a relational builder with pupils (12, 46, 17, 73, 86). Participants also spoke about how having access to the data helped them build relationships with parents, as it could evidence a greater understanding of their children (mainly through using data to aid report writing).

“My experience was that they hugely valued it because they saw that I understood their child and in some depth”. (73)

Several participants referred to the benefits of being able to compare the 'generalised scores' with 'contextualised scores' (generalised meaning how the pupil would respond "generally" out of school, at home for example, and contextualised which measures response within the school environment) (86, 73, 33). All participants except one spoke about the benefits of having a common tool that other colleagues could work collaboratively with, and in particular many referenced the benefits of using "AST language" together (to be discussed in next section). Several teachers referred to it as a useful "common framework" (5, 46).

"it's sort of consolidated the information into one place," (33)

Two participants referred to the 'non-static' aspect of the tool, with "no-right or wrong answers", which does not label, and one commented on the level of sophistication;

"I think it's utterly brilliant". (73)

4.3 Practical User Experience

The practical user experience theme emerged from discussion of issues such as ease of access to data, training, other AST resources, AST language, Action Plans, technology, practical impact on time (as opposed to the previously discussed perceived time saving benefits of having access to the data), importance of habitual usage and the subject of sharing data, with pupils, parents and colleagues. All of the above issues were discussed by all participants, sometimes with an emphasis on either the positive or the negative aspects and occasionally with some suggestions for improvement. .

4.3.1 Ease of access to data

Some participants referred to “ease of access to data”, one of whom described it as “easy to access” (5), two described accessing it *regularly*, and one spoke about “*getting used to dealing with data*” (33). One described it as underused in his school (86), and did so in the context of staff not being ‘in the habit’ of using it.

4.3.2 Satisfaction with training

Every participant except one commented positively on the standard training days (this may have been because of an error by the interviewer who omitted to ask about the training in this interview). Words and phrases such as “*very helpful*” (46), “*very, very thorough*” (33), “*excellent*” (5), “*really helpful*” (46), “*really good*” (86) “*it made perfect sense to me...*” (73). One participant commented:

“the morning was very, very useful but the afternoon was more a sales pitch when they (the staff) would rather have had actual Action Plan planning”. (86).

4.3.3 Other web-based resources

“Other web-based resources” were mentioned, in the context of supporting resources offered by Steer, namely the AST Platform, customised to each participating school, with different levels of access according to the AST trained staff member’s nominated responsibility within the school. Participants referred to this as “the web-site” and four referred to it, all positively, saying it provided “*helpful follow up*” (5) (specifically the online videos), “*did everything for you*” (33), offered “*very good guidance sheets*” (73) and has got “*better and better and better*” (5). One participant commented on the rapid evolution of

the web-site saying it had improved, but that for a time users had found it hard to keep up with the changes and developments. Another participant commented on a “useful” section which contained information on how to talk about AST to the pupils (46). The subject of ‘technology’, which is related to the subject of “web-based resources” came up negatively, as several participants (all from the same school) had experienced technical “glitches” whereby they had had problems accessing the platform or had “lost” Action Plans that they had been working on, via the platform.

4.3.4 The Steer consultant

The Steer consultant is the Steer representative and main point of contact for teachers. The consultant will compile reports based on the data once the assessments have been completed and visit the schools to help them understand the results as well as propose suggested guidance. The consultant was alluded to positively by some participants, and one in particular said:

“The Consultant is great and it is a unanimously felt opinion,” (12)

4.3.5 AST Language

All of the participants from one school and one from another spoke about the benefits of using “AST Language”, a way of speaking that is unique to AST and its theory, and which is used to share and understand information about pupils. They spoke about finding it helpful when talking amongst themselves, for example in staff meetings, and some from one school cited the universal use of the language amongst all staff as an indication of the level of embedding AST had in their school as well as a way to effectively work together as pastorally.

“We’ve all tried very hard over the last year that when we give out notices or information about pupils to the staff we’re using the language of AST” (17)

“they’re now used to the language when we’re discussing pupils in a staff meeting, for instance, they will use AST languagebecause the rest of the staff now understand what that means, that immediately helps, umm, to explain what’s going on...” (33)

One participant spoke about using the language with pupils, which he thought they liked and said it *“built understanding”* (73).

4.3.6 Action plans

Action plans (APs) are written via the platform, on approximately 10% of pupils who are considered “Priority Pupils” as a result of the Steer Consultant’s analysis of the data from the bi-yearly pupil screenings, sent in the form of the Consultant Report. The Action Planning process on the platform includes a section that encourages teachers to consider why the pupil might be displaying polar biases (with suggested reasons) and also to consider potential behavioural risks further down the track if these “extreme steering patterns” are not corrected. The Steer guidance notes suggest that the writing of APs should take approximately 10 minutes per pupil, and are based on a bank of pre-provided suggested goals and signposts. The Steer guidance notes state that APs should include low-level, small, specific strategies, that open conversations and that are essentially about encouraging “interactions” rather than “interventions”.

Participants were asked “how user friendly” they found the action planning process. Responses were divided into two themes; one on the practical ease of use, and the other on the more complex subject of working with colleagues on creating and implementing APs. The latter was coded “division of labour between staff” and was rooted in a bigger emerging theme of “ownership of APs”.

In terms of ease of use, those participants who had been working with AST longer commented on how initially the process was not straightforward; one used the word “clunky” (73), some described the selection of lists as “confusing” (46) and “overwhelming” (33) but all of these commented that the process had been in constant development over the last few years, and was now much improved. Two participants commented that in their school, tutors had struggled to come up with their own “strategies” to help pupils, and so the more experienced users had come up with a document for guidance, outlining some basic suggested strategies, appropriate to different polar biases. Some participants mentioned that they thought the latest version of the platform might include such suggestions. One participant spoke about the act of “having to write” an AP, as a more useful motivator than the AP itself (73), as he said that it made him get around to doing something he was already doing. Another participant said they would like to see some kind of an automated review reminder to prompt reviews of APs (46). Two of the more recent users both said they found the APs easy to use. (86, 12)

The issue of ‘division of labour between staff’ generated more input, and had been problematic for some participants. The three schools each had different approaches to the question of ownership of APs. One school used a system whereby tutors were

responsible for writing the APs. At another school, the House Master wrote the APs and the tutors would have access to the data and were invited to set targets for pupils, in order to help implement them. In the other school, the House Parent and the tutor wrote the APs together.

Participants from one school talked about the difficulties they had experienced when the onus was on tutors to write them. One participant explained that the difficulties were owing to the fact that tutors did not necessarily need to write APs regularly and as a result, even though they were responsible for less pupils, it took them much longer to do the APs and to get around to doing them:

“we can’t quite decide whether it’s better for the House Parents to write all the action plans and then to share them with tutors and for them then to implement them, or for tutors to write the action plans and to share them with err HPs and umm err and to action them, so you know, we felt that in terms of dividing up the work and in terms of implementing it, it was best to put as much of the onus into the tutor who has up to 12 tutees whereas a House Parent has a house of about 70, erm, but umm I think there is concern by some HPs about the quality of the end product of the action plans, and also just sort of somehow getting round to it, and so there’s a feeling that maybe, erm it, you know, HPs will prioritise it more, will actually get it done, so it will be in the system sooner and erm it just mentally felt a big job for a tutor whereas once you’ve done one or two it’s actually very quick erm to then do others umm and so providing that the tutor with the action plan, even though they haven’t got the ownership of it, er is actually

more logistically, means that the actual pupil benefits more, that will actually implement it, and be of value to the pupils more,..." (5)

One spoke of the frustration of having to spend time "chasing" tutors to do their APs, and another said:

"I think getting tutors to actually put the time into the APs is the challenge." (17)

At the second school, the House Master wrote the APs and the tutors would have access to the data and were invited to set targets for pupils, in order to help implement them. At the third school, the House Parent and the tutor wrote the APs together.

4.3.7 Impact on workload of teachers/participants

On the issue of time and impact on the workload, all participants felt the initial learning curve required an investment of time which initially was a felt increase to workload but with regular usage, this lightened:

"it's habit forming and you have to be using it regularly in order to get comfortable with the language and what the data looks like and you know where to find everything on the web site" (33)

As previously stated, those who had been using AST longer felt it reaped time saving rewards, because, as one said; *"you will have less catastrophes happening" (17).*

The more recent adopters saw the time invested as a necessary part of their pastoral role.

(46, 86, 12)

4.3.8. Sharing data with pupils and parents

Regarding the issue of sharing data with pupils and parents, different participants held different views. All from one school were able to speak positively about the experience of sharing historical data with Year 13 pupils before they left school, some referred to 'discretionary' sharing before.

“but more often than not with an upper sixth former it's been a very positive experience.” (5)

The most recent user from this school spoke at length about the difficulty they felt about not being able to share data more freely with younger pupils.

“the tricky thing about it is not being able to discuss the data with the pupils,” (46)

This participant did talk about referring to it at times, in a pastoral context, without going “into detail with them” (46), but commented that they would like to be able to work more collaboratively with younger pupils when using the data, especially regarding the writing of APs. (Most teachers will refer to the data online, when they are preparing to see a pupil, if they feel it might provide some useful background or aid understanding of a particular behaviour or situation).

Regarding this participant's views of not being able to share the data with the pupils more freely, the same participant said:

"I don't actually see why that would be problematic and I think that that would be helpful for the pupils to be able to feel more like their data was being used for something helpful. I think that the problem with that is obviously hugely at staff discretion to work out who is mature enough to handle the chat and who is not, I mean I think I would trust all the HPs at School 1 to use that discretion wisely, umm, but I can see why that hasn't been encouraged thus far." (46)

A participant from another school took a more liberal approach to sharing data with pupils and said he encouraged pupils to come and review the data with him, and "talk openly" with him about it (73) on the basis that he felt the pupils need to see the answers for themselves.

"I hate surveys where pupils have done a survey and they don't get any answers to it." (73)

Regarding sharing data with parents, most participants exercised a discretionary policy and some were able to talk positively about times this had been useful. One participant said he would like to share data with parents "to involve them more" (86).

Key to the overall user experience for all participants was the successful integration within the school's pastoral system. This will be discussed in the next section; "Perceived challenges to using AST effectively".

4.4. Perceived challenges to using AST

A group of perceived challenges emerged naturally from the data, and these were divided into the following subsets; staff resistance, pupil resistance, complexity, cost, time and importance of integration into existing school pastoral system.

4.4.1 Staff resistance

Staff resistance was a recurring theme and had strong associations with: perceived impact on workload (time and APs), successful integration into existing school pastoral system, as well as the complexity of the tool itself (to follow). There were also comments that staff resistance could have repercussions on pupil buy-in. The main issues participants attributed to staff resistance were problems of understanding, plus the time investment required to facilitate understanding and usage. Staff are introduced to the system by the AST lead practitioner teacher. New staff are introduced to it as part of their induction, with presentations and training usually taking place on INSET days. They are commonly offered specific training, either by attending Steer hosted training days or from experienced teacher users in school, throughout the year. All participants except one touched on these areas. Participants from one school all commented on the difficulty of getting staff to engage fully with APs. One of these participants suggested that there were issues of ownership around APs, or the responsibility for managing pupils' APs (writing, implementing and reviewing). This school had also introduced ongoing staff AST training sessions as opposed to one-off sessions.

“.. you do meet resistance on “this is going to take so much time, this is going to be so complicated”” (5)

“.. and some of them I think misunderstand it, and they think it’s like a personality profiling, they still think that no matter how much we say that to them, rather than tracking tool, umm, and I find that frustrating,” (46)

One participant spoke about the importance of having a lead member of staff who was able to champion the tool:

“We frankly have had that challenge a little bit here in terms of umm the sort of the busy role of the Deputy Pastoral, they struggle to bring it in, umm, you’ve got House Masters who haven’t got time, necessarily, to learn about it, they’ve all been on the training, some of them are naturally sceptical and therefore don’t buy into it”, (73)

Another from a different school said how important they felt it was that there was a core of senior staff who supported it:

“ but I think because the HPs are quite into it, people have seen that and quite respect that and think it’s something worth getting on board with,” (46)

Two participants referred to the negative impact staff attitude can have on pupils, as staff presentation of the usefulness of the data can impact the pupils’ attitude when doing the screening.

“when the House Master doesn’t buy into it, therefore, doesn’t sell it correctly when they’re doing the survey you just waste time and you just get nonsense data.” (73)

4.4.2 Pupil resistance

Some participants referred to the problem of pupil resistance to doing the bi-annual screenings. One attributed this to a question of time-tabling during the development phase, and says pupils objected to having to complete the assessment in their free time, which was subsequently changed. Another referred to the challenge of keeping pupils positive about it and recognised the continued responsibility of the school to continually educate the pupils on the benefits of doing AST; he said that this was sometimes done in PHSE lessons.

“they (pupils) moan about having to do it (laughs) from time to time but I think we’re getting better at explaining why we do it and how it helps.” (17)

Another participant said he felt owing to the short history of adoption (one full year), the pupils had not been able to experience any benefits yet, and therefore he felt it could be seen as just one more survey or demand on the pupils.

4.4.3 Complexity and Time

Most participants referred in some way to the issue of the complexity of the tool itself and this was generally in the context of staff resistance.

“It’s a very hard thing to sell to sceptical people because they’re not willing to invest the time in it, so I think it is absolutely fabulous but it’s a hard thing to explain.” (73)

This same participant also made positive comments about the sophistication of tool.

“It’s so clever, I mean it’s so clever”. (73).

Some qualified this issue by saying it was an issue of “perceived complexity” to teachers. (33)

4.4.4 Cost

Two participants brought up the issue of cost. One cited cost as being a possible reason for limiting uptake and said it was the main reason (combined with the complexity of the theory) that the school was not sure if it could continue using it.

The other participant commented on the fact that it was possible the cost limited uptake, and said other schools, particularly state schools, would benefit, and if more schools were using it the data would be more valuable.

“It’s something that people are missing out on, and I think that’s a real shame”. (86)

4.4.5 Successful integration into existing school pastoral system

Participants all expressed some opinion on the way AST had been integrated into their existing school pastoral system, with comments ranging from the fit with the school pastoral ethos, to the practicalities of conducting assessments and training of staff. There was general recognition that full integration was fundamental to its success as a pastoral tool. It was felt that this integration often depended on its introduction to staff and their acceptance of the changes required to their ways of working . One participant saw the size of school and large number of staff as a potential challenge to integration and said it was “a hard thing” to integrate into the school as there were so many people to convince of its value, and to keep on board.

“Umm it’s just one of those things that dealing with a big school and a big staff body it’s very hard to get them to understand.” (73)

Another participant (86) spoke about the importance of giving teachers time to write and review APs (if necessary taking them “off timetable”).

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study has endeavoured to gain insight into teachers' experiences of using AST as a tool to support proactive, targeted pastoral care, and, based on these findings, seeks to consider how AST fits in the bigger picture of helping meet demand for improving mental health care provision for children and young people in schools. The following discussion will be ordered accordingly, firstly discussing summaries of the findings of teachers' reported experiences, and secondly, considering the place of AST in the bigger picture of improving mental health care provision in schools.

5.1. Teachers' experiences of using AST

A summary of the category of findings described as "Attitude towards AST as a tool to support proactive, targeted pastoral care" is a good starting point regarding discussion of teachers' reported experiences of using the tool. Shorter summaries of the two other categories, "Practical user experience" and "Perceived challenges" follow.

Of the 7 teachers interviewed, most volunteered information about experiences of times when they said they had been able to use AST data to support proactive, targeted pastoral care in ways that they expressed as beneficial, both to the pupils and to themselves as teachers with some pastoral responsibility towards those pupils. They said that these times had allowed them to act preventively in the pupils' interests. There seemed to be

agreement on the pastoral benefits that AST provided in terms of: focussing the teachers on the issue of pastoral care in general, alerting them to potential 'at risk' pupils who they might not have otherwise noticed, providing an 'early warning system' (especially with polar low-self disclosing pupils and over regulators), allowing them a greater emotional understanding of all pupils, enhancing teacher-pupil relationships, as well as providing a useful diagnostic with reviewable action plans. The fact that they gave examples of times they felt they were able to provide individuals with preventive support, as well as report a better emotional understanding in general of their pupils, provides insight into the duality of benefits not usually seen in other school based approaches or interventions. As previously stated, school practices are generally divided into two distinct but overlapping areas of central importance, social and emotional wellbeing and mental health problems, which are delivered via universal programmes or targeted interventions (Kidger et al, 2010, Weare, 2015, p.3). It is a reminder of Best's (2007, p.252) formally cited definition of "proactive and preventive pastoral care" as the balance between early identification and prevention with ongoing wellbeing. There was a strong emphasis on the relational aspect of the tool, and teachers spoke about ways they felt it had enhanced their relationships with the pupils, parents and with each other as a team of pastoral workers. Positive relationships between pupils and teachers have been evidenced as a factor promoting resilience and wellbeing. (DFE, 2018). This also sits with Best's cited opinion that the relational aspect is fundamental to the pastoral task of the school (Best, 2014, p.176). However, nowhere in the findings was there any suggestion that the AST provided a substitute or replacement for relationships. Rather, it was presented as a relational enhancer and, based on the findings, it can be understood that its success in this depended on the pre-existence of relationships, built on mutual respect.

The findings evidence that the theory behind the tool seemed to impress the teachers interviewed, with words such as “sophisticated” and “brilliant” used to describe it. Many spoke about the greater understanding the theory had allowed them to have on pastoral issues in general, and one referred to the dual focus it allowed, on both the individual and the school culture. Some said it had changed their understanding of pastoral care. All demonstrated at least a basic understanding of the theory, and there was consensus on the requirement of a minimum understanding to enable effective use by teachers. This indicated a critical stage of necessary teacher ‘buy-in’ as it was felt that a workable understanding required investment in terms of time and application. Teachers had been encouraged by positive anecdotal evidence from other user teachers or representatives from Steer, or by promotion from a strong leadership team who believed in the effectiveness of the tool. Some spoke about their difficulty explaining the theory to colleagues and this implied a challenge to whole school adoption. Key factors that appealed about the theory were the ‘revealing’ and the ‘non-labeling’ feature; ‘labeling’ pupils being something teachers were evidently and unsurprisingly wary of. The implication being that teachers recognised AST was not the same as some diagnostic screenings used in schools, nor was it a profiling tool. It must be noted that the teachers seemed to ‘trust’ the data produced, which is an indication of their acceptance of the theory and the methodology of the tool; a few referred to the inbuilt algorithms that allowed a detection of ‘fake’ respondents, and proceeded to give examples of how they had chosen to respond to pupils in those instances.

The findings illustrate a clear difference in attitudes between teachers who had recently adopted the tool and those who had been using it longer-term. The short term users, those who had been using it for only one year, were yet to see the long-term tracking benefits, and voiced concerns about pupil perception and ways to “sell it” to pupils. One teacher wanted

to be able to share the data more openly with pupils, while another thought it might be considered as “just another survey” and felt the pupils had nothing to show for the assessments they had sat. (On the subject of sharing data with pupils, there was mention of ‘discretionary sharing’ which alludes to the important issue of responsible usage of the data). It was evident that teachers saw an increase in the value of the tool the longer it was used. The findings evidenced a correlation between long term usage of AST and a sense of greater pupil and teacher acceptance of the tool. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the long term users spoke positively about being able to look back with pupils in Year 13 at their historical data, and some also alluded to instances where they had felt the interaction AST data had allowed them represented key moments in the pupils emotional development. Thus the importance of a long-term perspective for effective use of AST must be deducted from these findings.

Following on from the theme of long term perspective, findings from the category “practical user experience” evidenced a general belief in the importance of ‘regular’ usage in order to get maximum benefit from the tool. Words such as “habit” and “practice” implied that regular usage made using the tool easier to use and permitted better integration into the school system. Conversely, some teachers referred to colleagues’ problems that resulted from irregular usage, such as forgotten passwords and difficulties writing Action Plans.

The findings from the category of “perceived challenges to using AST effectively” can best be summarised under the theme of “successful integration into the school”. The main issues that emerged were: resistance from colleagues and pupils, cost and time implications. One teacher saw the challenge of integration into the school as relative to the size of the school, saying the bigger the school, the bigger the challenge. Many teachers reported that they felt

the successful integration depended on strong commitment from an influential leadership team. This was evidenced by one of the pastoral head teachers sharing ways that his school had tried to embed AST more in the school system, such as timetabling teaching time for assessments to be done, giving teachers time off from their lessons to enable them to work on Action Plans. As previously stated, the evidence suggests that long-term usage is one of the most effective ways to embed AST into the school.

A recurring theme regarding integration into the school system was the question of 'ownership' of pupil Action Plans. This touched upon a wider theme of teacher responsibility for individual pupil pastoral care. Several participants who were boarding House Parents/Masters spoke about the problems they experienced working with colleagues on Action Plans. Most often these were cited as frustrations they felt when they had to chase colleagues to write the plans 'properly' as well as to do follow up reviews. The issue of ownership of the plans relates to the school's organisational approach to assigning pupils an individual pastoral lead teacher. In the case of boarding schools, there is the case for the head of the pupils' house to be the pastoral lead but the schools represented tended to allocate the task of 'caring for the individuals' to the pupils' 'tutor', allowing for smaller group management. The findings suggest that this proved problematic as tutors were generally academic teachers who obviously had many other responsibilities, and there is an implication that sometimes focussing on Action Plans (APs) was not a priority. Those teachers represented in the sample who had House Parent jobs (some were academic teachers as well) felt they had the competence and focus to write APs quickly and efficiently, and some said they preferred to take responsibility for this. Ultimately, the theme of teacher responsibility for individual pupil pastoral care is a universal one and a challenge that every school faces, whatever the approach adopted. Best (2007) referred to this when, citing the

example of self-harm he called for a recognition of the challenges that schools are now face in dealing with mental health problems, given that they were not set up primarily as institutions to manage these. He said that the pressure ultimately falls on teachers who are forced to extend their remit beyond the classroom, but how this is managed is often subject to the resources available. It is clear that teachers are in turn entitled to strong organisational support, such as training and their own emotional health support. Kidger et al's (2010) conclusions on their study of teachers' views on supporting student health and well-being endorse a whole school approach to emotional health with a focus on teachers' needs. There is the argument that teachers with pastoral care responsibilities in boarding schools may require even more support. Therefore, the findings on perceived challenges to using AST effectively would indicate that the successful adoption of a tool such as AST requires a school to invest additionally in teacher support, allowing them time to learn how to use the tool and to use it, training and emotional support where necessary.

All the participating teachers expressed pride in their school's focus on pastoral care, and all recognised that part of their teaching role included fostering pupils' pastoral development. It may be surmised that, as *volunteer* participants, these teachers took an active interest in the subject of pastoral care. Initial difficulties with recruitment (to be discussed in "Conclusions") could indicate that such an active interest is not the norm, or that other teachers are facing too many other pressures on their time to be actively interested, and willing to participate in research.

As the responsible organisation behind AST, Steer has formulated an accreditation standards system for schools using AST. This system of standardisation emphasises Steer's recognition of criteria that schools need to fulfil in order to work with AST in the best

way possible. It recognises the need for: quality and consistency of AST training, the quality of data security and ethical use of the tool, the quality of AST action planning, implementation and review and the quality of integration of the AST data within the wider school system. This former category includes sections on the importance of understanding and acceptance of AST amongst pupils, parents, academics, external welfare contacts and SEN departments. In order to receive full accreditation schools need to consistently demonstrate meeting the specific criteria over a period of time, from the initial launch of the tool to the full roll-out to screening all pupils. Out of the three schools participating, one had received the full accreditation standard.

5.2 AST's place in the bigger picture of improving better mental health care provision in schools

The critical review in Chapter 2 of this study described recent government policy calling for a “whole school approach” towards better mental health care provision for children and young people. It also painted a fragmented picture of the many different interventions and approaches currently used in schools, and referred to the unnatural distinction that exists between universal preventive approaches and targeted interventions for mental health problems. It reviewed definitions of good pastoral care with its emphasis on the balance between early identification and prevention with ongoing wellbeing, and whole school approaches that are born from relationships. It questioned how far this was being delivered in schools in the current climate of medicalisation and interventions.

More recent policy developments seem to be pushing this tendency further. In November 2018, the government (DfE, 2018) updated its guidance on mental health and behaviour in

schools in a policy development to support schools and colleges to promote good mental wellbeing in children. This updated guidance includes schools' responsibilities in relation to mental health and also contains information about how to identify behaviours that may be linked to a mental health problem. Some critics have warned against the potential dangers of teachers giving out amateur diagnoses and of medicalising normal childhood emotions; one government advisor spoke out about schools trying to "overreach their expertise" and trying to do the job of the trained experts. (The Daily Telegraph, 2018). Thus the challenge facing schools to improve better mental care provision using preventive and proactive whole school approaches is even greater. There is a space for more low level pastoral care tools in schools, ones that signpost teachers and guide pupils, predicting and improving mental health risks before they are evident symptomatically; tools such as AST.

All tools cost money. A critical factor in the adoption of AST by schools is the question of cost as well as the required investment of resources. Given the high costs of the support Steer offers, it is not surprising that the majority of adopters so far have been independent schools, with yearly costs to schools ranging from £17.50-£24.50 per pupil ([www.https://steer.global/prices](https://steer.global/prices), 2019). The researcher was not in a position to investigate costs in detail as the study was based on teachers' experiences of using the tool, but can only cite opinions voiced. As previously stated, all 3 participating schools were independent schools and the issue of cost was raised by two participants. This should be considered against the background of evidence of a sharp increase in spending by independent schools for provision of pastoral care. A recent HMC survey (www.HMC.org.uk, 2015) reported that 46% of 65 secondary schools surveyed said that their changes had presented an increase of over £50,000 in their budget and with 12% putting that figure at over £100,000. The same survey also cited 83% of schools surveyed now offered in-house counselling services. The

Chair of the HMC's Wellbeing Working Group, Chris Jeffery, applauded these schools for their rapid response to the rise in pupils' mental health needs, and acknowledged that their independent status had allowed them to act fast, without having to wait for "national frameworks or political buy in."

The Partnership for Wellbeing and Mental Health in Schools advice for schools and framework document "*What works in promoting social and emotional wellbeing and responding to mental health problems in schools*" (Weare, 2015) was based on international research, systematic reviews and trials of interventions and evaluations of recent work in schools. It advocates approaches that engage the whole community and adopt whole school thinking, identify and intervene early and that take a long term perspective. It also recommends promoting the wellbeing of staff and tackling staff stress and prioritising professional learning and staff development. It recommends connecting "appropriately with approaches to behaviour management" (p.11) and claims that appropriate responses to behavioural issues "look more deeply to see the whole child behind the behaviour, focus on their positive characteristics and understand and address the underlying meanings, attitudes and feelings the behaviour represents". There is a call for clear pathways of help and referral and the recognition of the need to help all students with predictable change and transitions. Interestingly, the advice discourages "mass screenings" but this is in the context of "where a school may have concerns" (p.6), implying that the type of screenings referred to are medicalised diagnostics or profiling tools. In advocating a whole school approach, the advice recommends an approach that "encompasses and mobilises the totality of the school experience to promote wellbeing and address mental health issues." (p.5) and says that there should be a culture of "talking about emotions and feelings, mental health and wellbeing". (p.5). It cites research that evidences the importance of climate and ethos as

being one of the key determinants of wellbeing and mental health in schools (p.5). Based on the research of this study, it is clear that schools working with AST clearly match most if not all of the recommended criteria.

It must be noted that there was a consistent view amongst participants that AST does not claim to be the “be all and end all” to school pastoral care, but that it provides an additional piece of the school pastoral jigsaw, informing and sitting alongside other pieces of the jigsaw.

In the same way, it may not be an option for all schools, but it would seem to be a strong piece in the mix of ways forward towards improving better mental care provision in schools.

In addition, if, as Best (2014) claimed, the relational aspect is fundamental to the pastoral task of the school, AST would seem to be a tool that reflects the heart of good pastoral care.

Roffey (2012) cites evidence to support the notion that relationships in school built on “expectations and interactions that promote trust, respect, value and collaboration” impact the quality of the learning environment, and the wellbeing of students and staff.

The teachers interviewed were working with AST in the context of existing relationships with pupils, they ‘trusted’ the theory and the methodology, and they demonstrated long term commitment in their willingness to support its use in their schools.

Chapter 6.

Conclusion

The research presented offers insight into some teachers' experiences of working with AST as a tool to support proactive, targeted pastoral care. The findings evidence that these teachers felt strongly that AST was a helpful tool in the pastoral mix and that it does indeed help them to support pupils proactively and in a targeted way. They were able to cite examples when they felt this was the case, and also voiced a collective opinion that the tool had enabled them to preempt potential pastoral crises from happening, by helping pupils to steer themselves away from risks to their mental health and wellbeing. These teachers demonstrated, knowingly or unknowingly, that good pastoral care rests on building positive relationships both with pupils and each other, and the findings suggest that AST is a tool that can enhance such relationships. The teachers also demonstrated a high level of commitment to the tool, with a belief and trust in the data and methodology it uses, and a willingness to apply themselves to understanding it and using it efficiently, despite its sophisticated and complex theory. It was evident that application required training time, perseverance and regular usage, and that the writing, implementing and reviewing of Action Plans also required time and focus. They needed to exercise professional judgement when working with the data and also with pupils and with each other.

The findings show that schools using AST were demonstrating a long-term view in their approach to improving pastoral care provision for their pupils as the tool, and that they were apportioning a significant emphasis on the importance of pupil pastoral care in their schools, through the weighty investment, financial and other resources, required. The findings suggest the need for a balanced perspective on pupil and teacher care, and showed that

there was sometimes room for greater organisational teacher support when using AST, in the context of the whole school approach to the school.

Regarding the issue of considering AST's position in the bigger picture of improving better mental health care in schools, the findings suggest that AST sits comfortably in the mix of pastoral care tools for schools as a viable and effective approach, that matches most if not all of recent recommendations for what works best in promoting wellbeing and responding to mental health problems in schools (Weare, 2015).

Study Limitations

This study represents a fascinating journey for the novice researcher. It allowed her great insight into the world of pastoral care in independent schools, as well as a privileged view into the workings of the sophisticated and impressive tool that is AST. The ethical permissions process was extremely challenging, given the potentially sensitive nature of the research question and the stringent criteria required to gain ethical approval. It was a lonely journey at times, as the researcher felt caught between the complex requirements of the ethics committee and the commercial sensitivities that surrounded the relationships between Steer and their clients, the schools. There were also challenges to recruitment, and the fact that the initial call for volunteers to participate from the first sample group of schools selected had to be widened, would evidence the reality that even teachers from schools who market themselves as investing significantly into providing better pastoral care face huge pressures on their time and availability. However, the researcher was greatly encouraged by the exchanges she had with those teachers who volunteered to participate in the research; their dedication and commitment to providing better pastoral care was heartwarming, and indeed affirmed the purpose of this research.

The results of this study would suggest some recommendations in the fields of both proactive and targeted pastoral care in schools and better mental health provision health in schools.

Firstly, it recognises the need for more evidenced based evaluative research on pastoral care tools currently being used in schools. Weare (2015) refers to recent large scale evaluations that have been carried out on various universal social and emotional learning programmes as well as targeted mental health interventions in schools, with evidence of positive impact, but there is an absence of similar evidence based research evaluations on more pastoral care promoting tools, especially those that claim to be proactive and targeted, such as AST. This study presents a minor contribution to the evidence base advocating pastoral care promoting tools as a valuable part of the mix of possible ways forward for schools in this area, but it would benefit from other supporting research, especially quantitative.

Secondly, this point leads naturally on to the recommendation of the need for all schools to revisit the general concept of pastoral care in education, especially as meanings of pastoral care have become “increasingly diffuse” (Calvert, 2009, p.276). With the call for whole school approaches to be adopted in schools in the context of the provision of better mental health care, schools could benefit by revisiting the concept and finding and agreeing on a shared understanding of what it means. As previously noted, most definitions have a sense of seeing the pupil as a ‘whole person’ (Best, 2007, p.250) with a focus on the value of positive relationships surrounding that pupil. On the basis of that understanding, there is a strong case that the delivery of integrated pastoral care in schools (that is not separated from the academic) could help tie together the many fragmented approaches that currently

make up a whole school approach. It may even represent a shift away from the current medical and interventional trend in approaches towards a promotion of the more positive wellbeing aspects of mental health, universally aspired to and once a given in the context of mental health in schools. This study presented the voices of teachers who were intentionally involved in the delivery of strong pastoral care, and it would seem they considered this as integral to their job as teachers. The findings would suggest that they regarded this aspect of their job as less of an onus but more of a privilege.

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