Misunderstood, Misinterpreted and Mismanaged:

Voices of Students Marginalised In A Secondary School

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PhD Thesis

'I, Lucy Jane Wenham, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.'

Abstract

With the relentless increase in the number of converter academies, the already fragmented secondary school system is fracturing still further. Since branching points, partitions and choice are all known to contribute to inequalities, the urgency to fully understand the roots and effects of marginalisation has never been greater. What can be done to pre-empt vulnerable/socially disadvantaged students from becoming marginalised and disengaged? What are the implications for best practise within schools and the ramifications for system structures? This ethnographic study addresses the experience of marginalisation of a small group of secondary school students. It seeks to give a voice to these students as a way of understanding the triggers, causes, effects and consequences of disengagement from mainstream education. The student participants in the research have all spent some time removed from the mainstream classroom setting in a withdrawal-unit, most commonly following a period of sustained low-level disruption. The research is primarily based on semi-structured interviews, with some additional participant observation, as well as small group or one-to-one teaching undertaken by the researcher within this unit. The data gathered is analysed through a process of grounded theory and the categories emerging from this indicate that there is a range of factors which students perceive as fuelling their marginalisation within the secondary education system. Some of these factors are associated with system structures, issues of transition, groupings and pathways. Others stem from their experience in the classroom or relate to labelling and issues of identity. While several piecemeal interventions are noted, to really take the students' experience seriously, I argue, entails moving beyond reforms and adaptations, to think about education differently. What is needed to tackle and eradicate this marginalisation, is a radically comprehensive education system structure, with 'the social' at its heart, where critical pedagogy is realised.

Impact Statement

The findings of this study are intended to contribute to the body of knowledge in educational research and to support, contradict, inform and fuel future thinking. More directly, in relation to policy and practice in education, the study offers some new ways of understanding and tackling marginalisation. It provides arguments in support of a more fully comprehensive education system, the need to return the social to the fore and advocates the use of critical pedagogy. This research can impact work in all these areas through disseminating outputs in scholarly journals, academic conferences and collaborative work.

Furthermore, the findings from this thesis are directly applicable to professional practice in secondary education, to teaching, teacher continuing-professional development and initial teacher education, as well as having implications for education policy-makers to consider. Impact could be brought about through disseminating outputs in professional publications, through delivery at professional training events or teacher training sessions.

While elements of a more fully comprehensive system - such as all-through schools and late subject specialization – may be difficult to achieve; many elements advocated here can nevertheless be taken on board by individual teachers or groups of professionals to significant effect. Appreciation of the importance of the social and affect - for more vulnerable students in particular - can start to make an impact one classroom at a time, as can a greater advocacy of critical thinking, problem-posing education and encouraging students to confront and critique all aspects of their experiences. Through such informing, debating and collaborating with teachers, if this research makes even a small contribution to classroom teaching, the benefits to quality of life for potentially marginalised students in the future are clear.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Abbreviations

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
AfL	Assessment for Learning
APS	Average Point Score
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
COPE	Certificate of Personal Effectiveness
CRT	Critical Race Theory
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
FSM	Free School Meals
EBacc	English Baccalaureate
EBD	Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
EP	Educational Psychologist
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
KS	Key Stage
LEA	Local Education Authority
OIS	Overlapping Intake Schools
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SES	Socio Economic Status
SpLD	Specific Learning Difficulty

For Simon

'Children have fewer rights than almost any other group and fewer institutions protecting these rights. Consequently, their voices and needs are almost completely absent from the debates, policies, and legislative practices that are constructed in terms of their needs'

(Giroux 2011, p109).

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Stephen Ball, for his support, for his critical - yet always insightful - feedback and crucially for his setting of standards and for always pushing me further. I feel I have come a long way on my circuitous route from teacher to researcher and from scientist to social scientist, a journey that was made all the more thought provoking thanks to his input.

Over the years the changing group of PhD students with the same supervisor have met to read, discuss, present and share. This has been a source of intellectual inspiration, mutual support and friendship and I would like to thank them for their camaraderie.

Friendships - old and new - have sustained me and provided warmth, humour, support, diversion and encouragement mostly in the right places.

This research would not have been possible without the (anonymous) research participants. They were my inspiration.

Chapter 1 Motivation: Educational Inequality is on the Rise Accompanied by Increased Instances of Marginalisation.

This research is an ethnographic study of marginalised students based in one secondary school in England. It has at its core a concern for the experiences and perspectives of those students who pass through the on-site withdrawal-unit that operates in the school. Some flourish there and reintegrate with mainstream fulltime timetables, others engage successfully but do not return to all lessons and a few end up subject to further interventions, alternative provision or exclusion from school. Their experiences, opinions and stories are sought to shed light on what it is to be a marginalised student within the secondary education system.

Before I outline the study, I will address why it is that I feel this research is relevant, timely and necessary. In order to do this, I will review some pertinent aspects of the state of play in the education system in England as it stands, albeit in its eternal state of flux, and draw on some relevant literature to consolidate my motivation: namely that educational inequality is on the rise and this is accompanied by increased instances of marginalisation.[1]

Firstly, in what sense is it that I am asserting that educational inequality is on the rise? There are many meanings of inequality in education - inequality of opportunity, inequality of experience, inequality of outcome for instance - some of which lend themselves readily to being quantified and each of which can be viewed across different phases of education and compared and contrasted for different sub-groups of students. While government ministers regularly argue that their evidence shows that overall levels of school performance are rising and the gaps in attainment between students of different social backgrounds are closing, albeit very slowly, this is not the case for those students referred to as the 'long-term disadvantaged', the attainment gap at Key-Stage 4 between

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[1] Marginalisation can take many forms and the sense in which it is used here will be returned to in 1.10

these students and others is actually widening and their levels of performance are in decline:

> *'for pupils who were FSM-eligible on almost every occasion the school census is taken (90% or more of the time), their attainment, relative to the national average, has actually been falling. This is the group that we're going to refer to as the long-term disadvantaged.'* (Education Datalab 2017).

Key Stage 4 attainment by amount of time eligible for free school meals
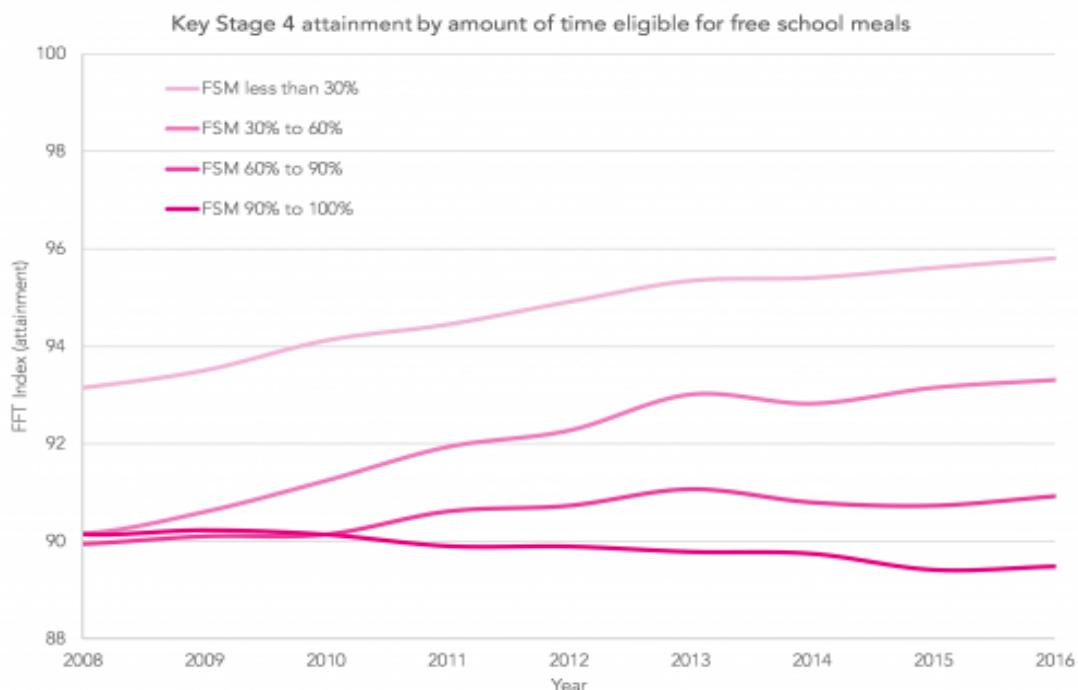
(Education Datalab 2017).

Table 1: For the 'long-term disadvantaged' the attainment gap at KS4 is widening

It is the plight of long-term disadvantaged students with which I am concerned here and more specifically the experience of those students who spend parts of their educational careers on the margins of mainstream schooling. My argument here is that previous and on-going educational reforms produce arrangements for schooling which contribute to or create marginalisation for some students and consequently produce and indeed lead to an increase in inequality in terms of the performance and school outcomes of these students compared with their mainstream peers.

1.1 Significantly Increasing Competition in the School Market Place

With the recent explosion in the number of converter academies, the already fragmented secondary school system is fracturing still further. The education market place is being made more complex and fuzzy by the proliferation of schools with greater autonomy and of greater diversity and in some parts of the country competition between providers is rife.

For decades now the secondary school sector has had a variety of schools, not only those over-seen by the Local Education Authority (LEA), the Community and Voluntary-Aided Schools, but also the Foundation, Specialist and Grant-Maintained Schools. There are Local Authorities where selection by ability remains in the form of Grammar schools and, as ever there is the small but persistent Independent sector. More recently the Sponsored Academies were established under Labour and provided a springboard for the Coalition's dramatic introduction of Converter Academies, as well as Free Schools, University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools.

It is quite simply the sheer scale of these most recent changes that make them significant here.[2] My point is that this disarticulation and diversity makes the system increasingly difficult to navigate for parents and students, and creates more points of differentiation and potential inequity. There is a plethora of research, which indicates that branching points, partitions and choice contribute to inequalities (Allen 2007; Ball 1993/2003a/2003b; Burgess and Briggs 2006; Gibbons and Telhaj 2006; Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Green *et al* 2006; Kulik and Kulik 1982/1992; Slavin 1990; Orfield 2013; Tomlinson 1997; Wilson 2011). It is likely that this recent expansion of diversity and autonomy will also have dramatic consequences in these terms. If inequalities are to be minimised, interventions should be in place to assist those students most likely to be

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[2] 'The first schools converted to academy status in September 2010. On 1 September 2015 a total of 3,420 schools had done so. The majority of converters (54%) were primary schools. The 1,393 converter secondaries represents 41% of all current state funded secondary schools, 55% if sponsored academies are included' (Bolton 2015, p3).

disadvantaged and marginalised by such changes. It is in this context that, I suggest, there is an urgent need to understand and address the issue of marginalisation.

Evidence in support of the argument that rising inequality results from increasing choice and competition between schools is plentiful. I will briefly draw on some diverse sources to substantiate the argument that increasing the diversity of provision, just as the expansion of the academies programme is doing at this very moment, invariably seems to lead to greater inequality and more instances of marginalisation.

1.2 Market Policies Leaving an Opening for an Increase in Inequalities

In the broadest sense, Ball reminds us that market policies, while they may not directly decrease equality, certainly do not prioritise such concerns.

> *'The values and incentives of market policies being pursued and celebrated by the states of almost all western societies give legitimation and impetus to certain actions and commitments – enterprise, competition, excellence – and inhibit and de-legitimise others – social justice, equity, tolerance. The need to give consideration to the fate of others has been lessened in all this' (Ball 2003a, p26).*

This means that, in a market-driven system, the focus is in practical terms detached from concerns of equality, although market theorists claim that choice is a mechanism to achieve greater equity, and thus, at the very least, the way is laid open for inequality to increase.

How might inequality increase then, as a school system becomes more market-orientated? Through what mechanisms might socio-cultural differences between families feed into differences between schools, or be a factor in a child's educational success or failure? In short, as a school system becomes ever more competitive, by what means are some students disadvantaged and marginalised and who is more susceptible to such processes?

1.3 System Characteristics and Educational Inequalities

Many salient works have debated the inroads made by marketization and choice, into ostensibly more comprehensive education systems, as well as examining educational inequalities themselves (Benn and Chitty 1996; Blossfeld and Shavit 1992; Ball 1993/2003a/2003b/2007; Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Gorard and Fitz 2000; Gorard *et al* 2001; OECD 2013; Orfield 2013; Tomlinson 1997). There is such general agreement here that as the market form expands, existing educational inequalities are likely to be compounded, that evidence could be drawn from any of these sources, although each may stress different features or proffer alternative remedies.

Let us turn to one seminal work, which neatly summarises education system characteristics that are identified as effecting inequalities. In their study, Green *et al* consider the issue of comprehensive schools and inequality across many different countries, grouped by regions, one of which is a group of English speaking countries including the UK and the USA. They consider which may be the most significant factors related to equalising educational opportunities, commenting:

> *'in terms of educational system factors, what the more equal countries have in common, which is absent in the less equal countries, are the structures and processes typically associated with radical versions of comprehensive education: non-selective schools, mixed ability classes, late subject specialization and measures to equalize resources between schools. That these features should work towards lowering educational inequality should be no mystery' (Green et al 2006, p138).*

This succinctly highlights features related to greater educational equality and some basic systemic arrangements as probable causes of educational inequalities. Factors that contribute to unequal resources between schools, including, of course, the selection of pupils by schools will be germane. As will such within school factors as ability grouping and early pathway selection. It follows then that an expanding market system, such as that in England, that is moving further away from a (only half-heartedly realised) comprehensive model of education will be likely to exacerbate existing inequalities and introduce new

inequalities as competition intensifies. How is it that these elements of a market driven education system would influence inequalities?

1.4 Market Policies, Middle-Class Advantage and Social Segregation Between Schools

There are many facets to the emerging education market in England, one fundamental one being how families express a preference for and are subsequently allocated a secondary school place for their child. Families may base this decision on all the evidence available to them, including local reputation, inspection reports and school visits. They may also have differing concerns and priorities to consider when making such a choice (Vincent *et al* 2010). In an environment where schools must compete for pupils, league tables provide an additional way for schools to be judged and compared. This augments the means by which parents can make choices between secondary schools for their child. Of course the degree of real choice open to a given parent may vary considerably and is itself an issue for heated debate. Nevertheless, parents do make a choice on application to secondary school, albeit for many a fairly notional one. Unsurprisingly, some parents are better able to utilise the full range of information available to them, than are others or see such information as more relevant in choice-making, than others; these tend to be the middle-class parents with greater volumes of relevant social and cultural capital. Thus, with competition between schools and the employment of league tables, any existing gap between those more and less well-equipped to play the system – through the use of Appeals for example - necessarily widens. The model of choice and competition, in itself privileges particular interests and values and inclinations.

> *'Choice policies both require and form 'responsive and anxious consumers' but this expectation elides the vast differences amongst parents in the possession of the necessary resources and inclination to engage with education and care systems in this fashion. Middle class parents may not all share all the characteristics of the atomised self-interested chooser (Reay et al 2007), but through their plentiful and relevant resources of capital, they have a degree of freedom open to them to choose a logic of choice – that is to shape their choice making to suit their values and beliefs' (Vincent et al 2010, p295).*

> *'increased competition among schools and moves to decentralise school finance can enhance attainment, but can raise inequality because the richer parents are better able to take advantage'* (Machin and Vignoles 2005, p219).

Indeed this taking advantage can of course go beyond simply exploiting their socio-cultural capital, to utilising their actual capital. In terms of increasing their chances of a place in a good secondary school, this could take the form of moving near to the better schools (Gibbons and Machin 2008; Gibbons *et al* 2013), or boosting their child's performance with private tuition (Ball 2007).

> *'Differences in wealth in particular are associated with opportunities such as the ability to buy houses in the catchment areas of the best schools, or to afford private education, with advantages for children that continue through and beyond education'* (National Equality Panel 2010, p398).

At the same time that some parents seek to choose the 'best' school for their child, schools are seeking to achieve the best league table position they can. Schools are acutely aware of the effect their league table rankings and Ofsted rating may have on application figures and that the number of pupils on role feeds directly into their funding.[3] As the number of different market players increases, securing a high-ranking position in these tables becomes ever more competitive and the bases of competition more obscure. Both league tables comparing value-added or raw attainment metrics will encourage schools seeking to maximise output performance to adopt internal procedures and arrangements that prioritise one sub-group of students over another, in order to maximise their chances of a higher ranking (Gillborn and Youdell 2000). With the Coalition government's move away from a value-added metric towards a raw attainment measure,[4] a focus on improvement and progress is eschewed, in favour of concentrating on unadulterated high attainment.

> *'use of raw attainment metrics may entrench existing social segregation between schools. It also provides an incentive for*

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[3] The competitive edge is however, muted in areas of shortage of school places.
[4] This raw attainment metric has taken different forms: the percentage of students attaining the EBacc; or five A* to C grades; or five A* to C grades including Mathematics and English.

schools to cream-skim the pupils who are more able or easier to teach' (Allen and Burgess 2010, p26).

So there are two features that go hand-in-hand to consolidate the middle-class advantage, both of which are associated with the use of raw attainment metric league tables: from one perspective the middle-class parent is better able to effectively manipulate the information available and gain a place at a good school for their child; from the other the school is eager to acquire just such a middle-class pupil who is more likely to be a high-attaining, compliant student, easy and cheap to teach. Clearly an over-subscribed school with a good league table ranking will be best-placed to benefit from such moves, so in an exact parallel with the way in which the already privileged parent is best able to play the system and benefits from competition, the already advantaged school similarly is best placed and correspondingly benefits – a 'spiral of improvement'.[5] These two features combine to intensify social segregation between secondary schools.

Similarly, in considering Ofsted ratings - as opposed to league table rankings - Greany and Higham (2018) in their analysis of Ofsted inspection data and school composition, note '*the co-influence of Ofsted in shaping both parental choice and competitive practices by schools'* (Greany and Higham 2018, p16).

1.5 Statistical Evidence Indicating Middle-Class Advantage and Social Segregation Between Schools

So the case being made is that in a market driven school system, not only is equality not a first-order priority[6] but also in actuality there are mechanisms whereby the middle class and the more successful schools are both able to entrench their advantages. If this is so, is there data to back up such claims? Where is the statistical analysis to add weight to this argument? Is there hard data as evidence that such mechanisms are indeed at work?

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[5] Ball, personal communication, 19th December 2013.
[6] Market theorists however, claim it may be a second-order consequence (Sahlgren 2013, Croft *et al* 2013).

In their statistical research, Burgess and Briggs (2006) analysed the actual records of whether or not pupils attend a school rated good or better by Ofsted in relation to their socio-economic standing, indicated by Free School Meal (FSM) status. Their findings are unambiguous.

> 'In a typical LEA in England a child from a poor family is half as likely to attend a good secondary school as a non-poor child' (Burgess and Briggs 2006, p23).

This would indeed seem to support the case that there is some middle-class advantage in play. Naturally there are always finer points to be debated, for instance whether or not the FSM indicator is an appropriate measure of socio-economic ranking, or perhaps whether these findings stem from the use of catchment areas in admissions policies rather than middle class manipulations or different working class preferences (Vincent *et al* 2010). There is unarguably some inequality of opportunity evident from this data. In terms of establishing an argument that increasing marketization will worsen the state of play, it is pertinent that they also note:

> 'FSM-eligible pupils have a lower chance of attending a good school in an area where choice is high than in an area where choice is low' (Burgess and Briggs 2006, p20).

So it would certainly appear that greater choice does indeed diminish the chances of already socially disadvantaged students attending a more highly rated school. How much does this matter in itself? Does attending one school instead of another really have much effect? Does the school a pupil attends actually impact on their attainment?

> 'Schools do matter, in that a significant proportion of the variance of pupil attainment can be accounted for by school and teacher effects' (Machin and Vignoles 2005, p218)

Has this school effect been quantified then? Gibbons and Telhaj (2006) actually investigated the size of any peer group effects on pupils' progression across the first phase of secondary school. They found only small peer-group effects on increased attainment variation at the end of Key-Stage 3, and quantified the between school effects as much more substantial:

> *'peer-group effects could account for, at most, some 0.6% of the variance in pupil progression over this period. By comparison, general school-specific factors… account for about 13% of the variance in pupil progress between age-11 and 14 in our data'* (Gibbons and Telhaj 2006, p19).

So it would seem that the school a child attends will impact on their likely progress and thus the fact that increased choice and marketization makes it less probable that a child from a low-income home will gain a place at a good school, will almost certainly feed into widening educational inequalities.

1.6 Academies Evidence

Thus far, in shaping the argument that rising inequality results from increasing choice and competition between schools, the research drawn upon has been purely that of the academic community. Whilst in many circles, it is just such peer-reviewed research that would be sought to make a strong case, not everyone holds these academics in such high regard. There is a strand in right-wing circles, evident within the government and given a voice in the media, which persists in deeply distrusting the educational establishment, which they disparagingly refer to as part of 'the Blob' (Gove 2013; Kelleher 2013; Seldon 2013; Woodhead 2013). Whatever one's feelings in this matter, in order to reinforce the case being made, it would be just as well to seek affirmation amongst other sources. Before turning to evidence from Ofsted then, as far as academies are concerned, one such source would be the Government commissioned report into the programme.

PricewaterhouseCoopers was appointed by the previous Labour Government to report annually on the state of their Academies Program. These Sponsored Academies were small in number and set-up in place of failing schools with the intention of pouring money and resources into areas of great social deprivation. The purpose was, the government claimed, to help those in the most need:

> *'Academies will break the cycle of underachievement in areas of social and economic deprivation'* (DFES cited in Gorard 2009, p102).

Even with this program, however, things did not seem to be progressing as intended as noted by the House of Commons Select Committee:

> *'The Select Committee also worried about whether 'the good results achieved by some Academies may come at the price of excluding those children that are harder to teach and reducing the proportion of children in the school from deprived backgrounds (whom they were originally intended to serve)' (Beckett 2007, p80).*

These concerns are acknowledged in the Academies Evaluation report prepared for the DCSF:

> *'… changes in the pupil profile are interesting in their own right, since a key focus of policy debate to date has been the extent to which Academies are meeting the needs of all pupils in their locality and, in particular, pupils from the most disadvantaged backgrounds' (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2007, p9).*

If the pupil profile of these schools had changed as they reopened as academies and established themselves as a 'different' school, then surely some of those originally served by the previous school, presumably many of the most vulnerable, were no longer on roll. Were they really the more disadvantaged pupils and what had happened to them?

> *A '… pattern becomes apparent when the proportion of pupils eligible for FSM and the changes in this proportion over time are examined' (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2007, p14).*

Whilst the proportion of students eligible for FSM has decreased by one percent in England overall and similarly for overlapping intake schools (OIS), the fall in this percentage in these academies is six times larger.[7] These academies may possibly be improving results in their schools, but even if they are, it is no longer for the same sort of cohort, as children from more affluent backgrounds are

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2002	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Academy / predecessor school average	42	40	38	38	36
Overlapping Intake Schools average	24	24	24	24	23
England	15	15	14	14	14

(PricewaterhouseCoopers 2007, p14).

gradually replacing disadvantaged students. This is compounded when we consider the changing academic attainment profile of the cohort that is admitted to these academies:

> *'… change in the average Key Stage 2 APS for Phase 1 and Phase 2 Academies between 2002 and 2006. For ten out of the 11 Academies their APS has increased over this period. Also, the average change for these Academies is higher when comparing to both the OIS group of schools and to schools in England'* (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2007, p22).

So not only were students from more affluent circumstances replacing disadvantaged students in these schools, but also students with a higher score at the end of primary school were ousting their less high attaining peers. These findings are independently verified elsewhere, for example, by Wilson (2011), who finds:

> *'There has been a distinct and robustly estimated rise in intake ability among Academies as soon as they have re-opened under their revived status and a significant drop in the number of new pupils from deprived social backgrounds, patterns of change that did not occur in predecessor schools and that have not shown up in non-Academy control schools'* (Wilson 2011, p67).

Interestingly, Machin and Silva (2013) take these issues a step further. They discuss this analysis by Wilson and build on similar work by Machin and Vernoit (2011), having noted that neither of these earlier works consider whether or not any increase in achievement in the academies is distributed evenly across the cohort, or achieved by boosting the weakest, dragging the middle across the crucial thresholds, or by extra enhancement at the higher end of the attainment spread. In other words, for the pupils who do have a place within the academy, is there an equal chance of improvement for the whole attainment range, or is there also educational inequality present within the school? In terms of investigating any increase in results associated with a change to academy status then, they find that:

> *'irrespectively of whether we rank pupils by the school or national ability distribution, the effects of academy conversion are insignificantly different from zero – and possibly negative for later conversions – in the bottom 10% and 20% of the ability distribution,*

> *suggesting no beneficial effects on tail students in academies'*
> *(Machin and Silva 2013, p9).*

So for those pupils who are within the academies, any improvement is indeed not fairly distributed across the cohort. The great majority of higher attaining students (and perhaps those on the C/D boundary, referred to previously) will experience some benefit but there is a 'tail' who do not. These lower-attaining pupils benefit less than their peers, if at all, and in fact may even be worse off after academy status comes in (Machin and Silva 2013). This can be related back to in-school resource allocation decisions which are in turn related to competitive and performative pressures in the education market place (Ball *et al* 2000/12; Gillborn and Youdell 2000).

Clearly, one way or another, as far as the first phases of the academies programme is concerned, the most disadvantaged students appear to benefit least; namely those from poorer backgrounds with lower test scores on entry. If these pupils overcome the odds and make it into the academies, they flourish less than their more high-attaining peers and if they are no longer catered for by the academy, then this begs the question: where have they gone?

Certainly, it is of significance to consider how the within school inequalities, such as those found in the newly reopened academies, come into play in practice, within any type of school. However, before focussing on this it is worth turning briefly to consider exclusion from school. Whether or not it is clear that academies are utilising this route to tinker with their student profile, exclusion could nonetheless be another possible source of educational inequality.

There is some relevant data from the government statistics for permanent and fixed-term exclusions indicating that sponsored academies do make use of permanent exclusion more than other schools.[8] This leaves room for the fact

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[8] For all 133 sponsored academies open by January 2009, the percentage of the school population receiving permanent exclusions is 0.31. By comparison, the permanent exclusion proportion for state funded secondaries in general was lower at 0.17 (Department for Education 2010, from Tables 1 and 14). This relative picture for sponsored academies (0.32) and state

that these academies may indeed have been utilising exclusions, as well as changing the nature of their new intake, to tweak the profile of their cohorts. However, it is by no means clear, since the individual level data on who these excluded students were, is not given. Perhaps there were more exclusions from right across the socioeconomic and attainment spectrum of students.

1.7 Evidence on Exclusions

Is there any evidence that schools, of any sort, are acting outside the established frameworks for excluding students from school? This is pointedly addressed by another source from outside of the world of academia, the schools inspectorate. In a report into children missing from education, Ofsted noted that:

> *'Even where the local authorities' policies and processes were clear, with an appropriately strong emphasis on safeguarding, if schools chose to disregard them this could quickly result in children and young people becoming lost to the system. Officers in all the authorities surveyed gave examples of schools which had not followed the agreed procedures for excluding children, putting them on part-time timetables or taking them off roll' (Ofsted 2010, p17).*

Surely there is no clearer indication that some pupils are being marginalised than a phrase such as 'lost to the system'. Phenomena such as reduced-timetables plainly sideline individuals from the mainstream school experience, while quite simply being removed from the school roll would negate taking part at all. If such tactics were being used without exception in all authorities that Ofsted surveyed, it is not unreasonable to conclude that such practices are widespread. Recent research finds similar concerns still present; in contemplating the *'group of pupils who leave state education at some point between Year 7 and Year 11'* (Education Datalab 2018), researchers note:

> *'this is a vulnerable group of pupils. Compared to those who complete secondary education in a mainstream school, pupils in this group are more likely to have been eligible for free schools*

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funded secondaries (at 0.17) persists in 2015/16 (Department for Education 2017, from Table 13).

meals, have special educational needs, and have had lower attainment at primary school' (Education Datalab 2018).

They go on to suggest that some of these students have: *'been off-rolled - encouraged off the roll of a mainstream school in an informal exclusion in which the school's best interests have trumped the pupil's'* (Education Datalab 2018).

The point has already been made that in a climate of ever increasing competition, schools may seek, where they are able, to recruit the more compliant, middle-class, higher achieving pupil who is more likely to aid them in their quest for a higher league table ranking, over and above a poorer student with lower baseline data, producing what Ball calls an *'economy of student worth'* (Ball 2010, p163). Bearing these pressures in mind, it seems probable that any student that falls foul of unofficial exclusions is most likely to come from this already disadvantaged position. Once again it is probable that it is the low attaining, FSM child who will be marginalised by this state of affairs (Education Datalab 2018).

1.8 Government Evidence on Exclusions

While it is obviously difficult to find figures on unofficial procedures, is there any data available that relates official exclusion rates to the background of the students being excluded?

The most recent government data that is readily available online, considers exclusions by pupil characteristics, noting:

> *'Pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals (FSM) were around four times more likely to receive a permanent or fixed period exclusion than those who are not eligible' (Department for Education 2017, p5).*

Pupils identified as having special educational needs are also more likely - when compared to those identified as not have such needs - to receive fixed-term and permanent exclusions (Department for Education 2017). This latest set of data includes a table also found in previous reports, recording exclusions by the deprivation level of a school. These tables indicate a clear trend that as

the deprivation level of the school falls so does the proportion of the school population receiving exclusions (Department for Education 2015; Department for Education 2016c; Department for Education 2017). This would indeed imply that there is a possible link between deprivation and exclusion albeit at the school level.

It seems then that it is the more deprived students that are disproportionately subjected to exclusions. Is there further individual level data that can be drawn on?

In an insightful study, Daniels (2010) followed 193 students over two years, from their permanent exclusion from secondary school. He acknowledged that while the reasons listed for actual permanent exclusion were more often than not related to assault on staff or students, there was frequently an extended period of disruptive behaviour prior to this:

> *'the most common reason for exclusion (both permanent and fixed period) was persistent disruptive behaviour. It would seem reasonable to suggest that… whatever it is that drives permanent exclusion is a fairly durable feature of English schooling' (Daniels 2010, p40).*

This latest available government statistics for permanent and fixed-term exclusions also show a similar picture (Department for Education 2017).

Who then are these children who exhibit persistent disruptive behaviour? It seems unlikely that they will generally be the children of the middle classes whose parents are likely be more adept at intervening at an earlier stage to pre-empt such drastic outcomes, and should it come to exclusion, would doubtless be better able to make a convincing case at Appeal. It would seem logical then that it is the same students who are likely to suffer at this final stage of rejection as have lost out in terms of school placement. While any student can become entangled in a one-off disruptive incident, it is this idea of persistent disruptive behaviour that is more likely to remain unchecked when families are less present, less involved, less able to support their child's education and less able to play the system. Hence, the children from households with lower levels of

appropriate socio-cultural capital, the perpetually disadvantaged lower socio-economic strata, are those most likely to be over-represented amongst excluded pupils.

There is another feature, which has not been explicitly mentioned as yet, which is the element of race. When it comes to exclusion, there is consistent evidence (Department for Education 2017; Gillborn 2008; Runnymede Trust 2010; Youdell 2006) that racial groups are not represented proportionally in the fixed term or permanent exclusion data:

> *'the burden of exclusion falls disproportionately on children from Black groups' (Runnymede Trust 2010, p5).*

1.9 Within School Inequalities – Sub-cultures, Teacher Stereotyping, Ability Grouping and Pathways.

Turning to focus on within school matters, and recalling the illustration of a 'tail' within the academies, who do not benefit from the positive effects of academisation (Machin and Silva 2013); how is it then that such inequalities can be created or exacerbated inside the school itself?

Many studies have considered in detail within school factors, for example, the trilogy by Hargreaves (1968), Lacey (1970) and Ball (1981). Theses detailed ethnographic studies found that even within different types of schools, there are mechanisms at work, which reinforce the structure of advantage and disadvantage. These go beyond parental capitals, or lack of ability to play the system, to include other facets such as student sub-cultures and attitudes as broadly pro or anti school. This polarization thesis, namely the concept that students grow to become either pro or anti school, is arguably the most influential finding from these ethnographies. The research finds that when a student experiences repeated devaluation, criticism and negative responses to their performance and behaviour, they are likely to look elsewhere, and develop alternative sources of self-esteem, turning away from the establishment, the school authority and the teachers. This acceptance can be found in the anti-school sub-culture and so such a student is drawn ever more into this anti-

school, antagonistic, defiant group. Contrastingly, a student who starts out feeling valued, will be drawn ever more into the pro-school, compliant sub-culture, in order to reinforce their sense of self-worth. Thus the effect is polarizing. Through this process of searching for belonging and self-esteem, existing divisions in the students population are exacerbated.

There is another mechanism evidenced from this trilogy, through which in-school inequalities may be widened and which is a recurring theme in much of the literature about ability grouping[9]. This is the issue of teacher attitudes, expectations and stereotyping, be it in terms of race, class or gender. The role of teacher bias, conscious or not, also most frequently works to favour the compliant, the high achieving and the middle class over the more defiant, the lower attaining and their peers from further down the socioeconomic spectrum[10] (Hargreaves 1968; Lacey 1970; Ball 1981; Gillborn 2008; Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Mac an Ghaill 1988).

These features are yet again likely to be exaggerated and intensified within a competitive market system, where pressures are on the schools to prioritize examination performance over other concerns, and most specifically where league table ranking is linked to pupil recruitment and budget maximization.

Factors associated with increasing educational inequalities, it appears then, can be related to different parts of the wider school community, parents, students or teachers. Are there, in addition to these individual and social-relationship factors, organizational mechanisms that can feed in to making a contribution?

Two structural mechanisms of educational inequality, which occur within a secondary school, are ability grouping and pathways selection, most notably at the end of Key-Stage 4. Indeed, such division of students within a school mirrors the between school differences on a smaller scale, and so the same

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[9] The term 'ability grouping' is used in much research and its use here should in no way be taken as condoning the idea that students have inherent differing abilities.
[10] The issue of teacher attitude will be addressed further below.

concerns exist. Within the school setting, all of the individual pupil characteristics and home background factors which may have hindered or helped in gaining a place at a good secondary school also come into play inside the school at key points of decision-making over grouping and routes. Middle-class families are best able to apply pressure to ensure that their children are placed in the academic track or higher ability groups, have access to good teachers and can partake of beneficial initiatives such as Gifted and Talented funding (Hargreaves 1968; Ball 1981; Gillborn 2008). In discussing such middle-class adroitness at the key transition points in the education system, Ball notes:

> *'At these points of crisis and potential failure the deployment of relevant capitals is crucial to the maintenance of trajectories' (Ball 2003a, p19).*

So in terms of tracking or pathways selection, middle-class skills and resources can have much the same impact in terms of generating inequalities as they do when exerting pressure on between school matters. In this way educational inequalities are widened as, having already secured a better school for their children, the middles classes turn their attention to securing the best track, set, teacher and so on.

Then there is the issue of ability grouping *per se*. Can this feed into inequalities? When streaming or setting occur, the placing of students in a given group will inhibit or increase their chances of attaining higher grades, perhaps even limiting the possible grades when different tier papers are prepared for (Gillborn and Youdell 2000). Indeed any issues of equality of access to the same curriculum, for example if different groups are offered GCSE equivalent vocational qualifications, will also be germane.

The argument in favour of ability grouping speaks of excellence at the top end and support for the lower end. Any argument against ability grouping, no matter what the kind, is recurrently one of inequality. How reasonable a charge this is, has drawn much attention. Grouping pupils by ability within schools, can take various forms, such as setting or streaming. These arenas have been tackled in the literature over many years, in various settings, with two papers standing out

as salient. The first is a detailed review of the field covering 29 prior studies of streaming and setting at the secondary school level, heavily focussed on the UK and USA. It finds no significant changes in attainment for any ability level as a consequence of ability grouping. It does conclude, in addition, that such groupings are indeed detrimental to educational equality:

> *'because lower class and minority students are disproportionately represented in the lower tracks' (Slavin 1990, p473).*

Here the role of teacher stereotyping returns.

The second seminal paper on ability grouping combines 52 separate works in the area. It concludes, as Slavin did, that ability grouping has little effect on the performance of any students, but goes on to add that this only holds true where the groupings merely have access to differing pace. If the actual content of the programmes of study are amended for the different groups, the performance gap widens (Kulik and Kulik 1982). Specifically, with no effect found for the lower groups, an accelerated curriculum for higher groupings inevitably creates a route to success at the top and widens educational inequalities. This runaway success at the top end is precisely what is desired by many parents ambitious to secure advantage for their children. In a subsequent paper, Kulik and Kulik (1992) build on their work and address policy issues, most notably the support for ability groupings from aspiring parents and the fact that politicians wish to keep these voters on side, and conclude:

> *'The harm would be relatively small from the simple elimination of multilevel classes, in which high, middle and low groups cover the same curriculum… If schools eliminate grouping programs with differentiated curricular, the damage to students achievement would be greater' (Kulik and Kulik 1992, p73).*

So again it is access to different material that is seen here as definitively embedding advantage for the accelerated, top groups.

Aside from the increase in inequalities that results from different curricula, the other hugely relevant conclusion from this literature is that it is through the, albeit perhaps unconsciously biased attitudes of teachers, who place students

into these ability groups, as well as the much more open interference from the middle-class parents, that educational inequality in terms of socioeconomic classes, ethnicity and gender, is exacerbated.

Gillborn has published extensively on educational inequalities in particular with reference to race and his work strengthens these arguments, reinforcing the notion that system structures themselves perpetuate inequalities. He argues that these system structures favour the white elites, who largely set them up, and who are best able to manipulate them to their advantage (Gillborn and Gipps 1996; Gillborn 1997; Gillborn and Mirza 2000; Gillborn 2008).

> *'The reality is a situation where the perspectives and interests of White people are constantly enforced over those of minoritized groups' (Gillborn 2008, p182).*

Evidence to date shows that educational inequalities in England by the end of compulsory schooling are most marked in terms of socioeconomic status. Next come concerns over racial inequalities, which have less than half the size of the socioeconomic attainment gap; finally, at less than half the size again, gender issues persist, favouring girls. Clearly many students fall into more than one of these disadvantaged groups, and disadvantages intersect and compound one another, making it difficult to disentangle and accurately identify factors for their underachievement (Demack *et al* 2000; Gill *et al* 2002; Gillborn and Gipps 1996; Gillborn and Mirza 2000; Haque 2000; Gillborn 2008).[11]

There is, it seems, much evidence indicating that there is a relationship between the presence of ability grouping and increased educational inequalities. In a related issue of whether or not ability grouping influences pupils' liking for school, Ireson and Hallam (2005) acknowledge that:

> *'Stratification tends to legitimize difference and pupils may sense that they are valued for their academic achievement while other*

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[11] Undoubtedly all these inequalities are worthy of attention, but it is the sheer scale of the socioeconomic gap that makes it my particular emphasis here. Redressing socioeconomic injustices in the education system, as the persistently greatest contributing part of the problem, would have the greatest impact.

aspects of development and non-academic achievements may be undervalued, with potentially negative consequences for those who fall behind' (Ireson and Hallam 2005, p 308).

This fits in with the spectrum of student attitudes, from compliance to defiance, already touched upon and found across several ethnographic studies. These divergent sub-cultures were not only evident within different types of secondary school, a Grammar, a Secondary Modern and a Comprehensive, but in addition, where ability grouping was present, different distinctive student attitudes were seen to dominate within different ability groupings, with the students in the lower groups predominantly exhibiting the anti-school traits (Hargreaves 1968; Lacey 1970; Ball 1981). Since there is an over-representation of students from poorer families in these lower groupings, presumably such negative consequences will feed into socioeconomic educational inequalities (Hallam 2002a/2002b; Ireson and Hallam 2001/2005).

Many academics bemoan the persistence of ability grouping in the English education system.

'It is extraordinary, and saddening, that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, at a time when evidence informed policy and practice is very much the vogue, that we are witnessing a wholesale return to the social barbarisms of grouping by ability, like setting and formal classroom grouping, in both secondary and primary schools' (Ball 2003a, p9).

Is it chiefly the set that a student is in, that has such impact on attitude, progress and attainment? Surely the particular teacher effect may be as great. In relation to the varying effects of different individual teachers, Machin and Vignoles (2005) highlight that there certainly are notable differences:

'some teachers achieve consistently better achievement scores from the children they teach than do others' (Machin and Vignoles 2005, p219).

This is no great revelation, but it is seen as hugely pertinent to issues of setting and teacher allocation as already noted. So here is yet another means of widening the educational divide.

If the research shows that ability grouping has such detrimental effects for so little, if any gain, why is it making such a clear come-back in the face of this evidence? Predictably the answer lies at least in part with the political mood and the attempts by political parties to appeal to the interests of the middle-class parent voter. To compound this, schools are also trying to attract the very same families in the hope of improving their market position, be it with regards to league table rankings, or the social nature of their cohort.

> '*Ability grouping is not about its educational value, it is about politics, school markets, class-interests and social advantage' (Ball 2003a, p11).*

So as the education market expands, ability grouping look set to stay, or even to grow and with this comes the accompanying escalation of inequalities.

1.10 Marginalised Students, Sensitising Concepts and Perspectives

> '*A sensitizing concept… gives the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances… sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look' (Blumer 1954, p7).*

In discussing the vague nature of concepts in social theory, Blumer noted that *'the concepts of our discipline are fundamentally sensitizing instruments. Hence, I call them "sensitizing concepts"'* (Blumer 1954, p7). He argues that since such concepts appear differently within different specific contexts, they cannot provide particular notions, but rather can only act as more general guides.

> '*We have to infer that any given instance in our natural empirical world and its content are covered by one of our concepts. We have to make the inference from the concrete expression of the instance. Because of the varying nature of the concrete expression from instance to instance we have to rely, apparently, on general guides and not on fixed objective traits or modes of expression' (Blumer 1954, p8).*

What sensitizing concepts might I deploy when I am thinking about my data? What can I take from the existing literature, in its particular contexts, which may guide my approach and suggest directions along which to look for my analysis?

I have already encountered many such sensitizing concepts, which may be informative for my work, when I contemplated my motivation and researched some issues pertaining to educational inequalities. The influence of peers, the development of student sub-cultures and the related issues of identity, self-esteem and belonging may be enlightening. Ideas of teacher-student relationships and stereotyping may also arise and student background and family capitals will doubtless feature. Then there is the structural setting. The ability group a particular marginalised student is in for a given subject may be a pertinent point; their being placed on a certain pathway or their options allocations may emerge as points of friction.

In addition to such concepts unfolding from the educational equalities literature, I will now look to add further sensitising concepts, drawn from literature more specifically related to marginalised students. Even a cursory glance at the literature on marginalisation, shows that there are many different forms of marginalisation; concerning issues of SEND, race, gender, class, literacy, to name but a few. Within this literature the concept of marginalisation used differs and the social groups to whom it is applied varies. Nonetheless, these diverse yet concrete examples in their distinct settings can act as conceptual resources for my own research and in the coding of my data.

Here then, I will discuss some papers from the extensive marginalisation literature, consider the definition of marginalisation in each particular context, and contemplate the sensitizing concepts presented, considering whether they echo those already found or augment my repertoire. These sensitizing concepts may stem from factors contributing to marginalisation or indeed from strategies the literature presents to address or tackle marginalisation.

Te Riele (2006) specifically advocates the use of the term 'marginalised' in preference to other commonly used terms such as 'at risk', as she observes that there is a deficit discourse all too readily associated with much of the terminology and labelling, whereby the problems to be fixed are located within the individual and their specific background. There are the noteworthy sub-concepts here then of *labelling, blame and expectations*. She asserts that the

term 'marginalised' leads to a consideration of the idea of marginalisation from something or by someone, which allows more naturally for the examination of school, structural or societal factors as well as individual or group characteristics. Thus, the concept of marginalisation here is very much seen as stemming from the interweaving of a complex mesh of factors. These factors effecting marginalisation touched on here, from a structural or individual position, have broadly already arisen from the literature on inequality. Nevertheless it is worth stressing some factors, which, despite being present in some of the literature on inequality, have not explicitly been noted here – namely *mental health factors and depression, pregnancy and broader health issues*.

Other works also stress the critical role of teacher attitudes and the dangers of an entrenched culture of deficit-thinking, one notable case being that of Simone (2012), who made an in-depth multiple-case study of how school leaders can try to employ strategies to address deficit-thinking, within their own institution, amongst their own staff. This research was set in an American context and it was the non-white students, the non first language English speakers and those from a lower socio-economic strata, who were considered marginalised, being over represented in lower attaining groups, frequently viewed in a negative light by their regular teachers and subject to lower expectation. The suggestions arising as to how to redress marginalisation resulting from such deficit-thinking include the need for fair access to the curriculum, to involve parents and to retrain staff so that they have a greater awareness of the consequences, and the pervasiveness of deficit-thinking. This, it is argued can only be done through open dialogue, where all voices are heard and staff are free to air their concerns. Only then can deficit-thinking, prejudice, stereotyping and a blame culture begin to be recognised, fully understood and subsequently dismantled. There is also acknowledgement that standardised testing and the pressures associated with a market place underpinned by these test scores, do not prioritise tackling deficit-thinking. Hence we see many of the features from the inequalities literature emerging again here. The notions of understanding the power imbalance between teachers and students, which can perpetuate deficit-thinking, as well as the need for deliberate dialogue, being heard and creating

space to be heard are worth explicitly reiterating.

In later research, related to working with marginalised youth, Te Reile (2010) moves beyond the desire to avoid blame and a deficit discourse, to emphasize the need for a definitively positive framework. She puts forward four strands for a teacher to implement, to move towards what she terms a 'philosophy of hope', namely:

> *'a positive culture, focusing on possibility, establishing a community of hope, and critical reflection' (Te Reile 2010, p41).*

These are elements to bear in mind then, as is the idea of hope. Certainly the need for a positive environment, where all students feel respected and valued, and the ability for students to be allowed to be critical of diverse perspectives, permeates the literature. Osborne (1996) noted these features, amongst others, in his study on culturally appropriate pedagogy for students 'we have marginalised', in which he synthesised seventy interpretive ethnographies, all of which were in multi-ethnic classroom settings. He drew out several commonalities from many of these studies, to provide speculative starting points for practice and pedagogy aimed at reducing inequality and marginalisation, with greater inclusion of all students. His position is made clear:

> *'I assume that quality schooling for all is a necessary condition for an ongoing participatory democracy. I also assume that democracy is internally under threat when it continues to escalate inequality and divisions in society. Statistics clearly indicate that the vast majority of students from non-Anglo cultural/social groups in Western nations are not receiving quality education and that inequality continues to expand rather than contract' (Osborne 1996, p286).*

The marginalisation he is discussing then is in relation to students from minority ethnic groups, in Western nations. He is also explicit as to his particular choice of terminology and asserts:

> *'I use the term students from marginalized and normalized groups in preference to current buzzwords like ethnic minority, at risk, linguistic minority, culturally different, and linguistically disadvantaged because they all appear neutral and objective and because they mask the process, historical and current, of the exercise of power' (Osborne 1996, p 288).*

He goes on to stress that these groups have in fact been marginalised over time by the Western nations in which they now reside. He emphasises that their cultures and traditions have been misunderstood, misinterpreted and denigrated and that they are seen as lesser and in need of civilising:[12]

> '...the dilemmas we face today in schooling all "our nations' children" were created and are being created currently by distorted images and understandings of how the dilemmas originated. As a society, we pushed these people to the margins and came to see that as their normal condition' (Osborne 1996, p 288).

Alongside the cultural, and societal contexts already emphasised, the historical setting is highlighted here also. Osborne is careful to place the blame for the marginalisation of these groups of students, with the society at large and to lay no part of it at the feet of the individuals. This does not mean, however that ideas of withdrawing, disengaging and rebelling are not touched on. There are several additional sub-concepts to emerge in this comprehensive research, which may be potentially useful, such as issues surrounding *self-esteem linking to the valuing of a students identity, culture, language and family background*. There are many references by Osborne also to *social relationships*, be it between teacher and student, parent and teacher or student and student. Issues of teacher expectations as well as *warmth* are pertinent, as is the need to be conscious of the implications of particular pedagogies and teaching styles, for example individual competition versus group work, or the use of the singling out of a student, for performance, praise or reprimand. Explicit notions of racism as oppression are also highlighted. Unsurprisingly, since Osborne draws from such a breadth of publications, many of these themes appear elsewhere.

In his paper, which gives a voice to marginalised African Americans students, Howard (2002) notes:

> 'Issues such as race, resistance and power have become more pervasive as students have articulated their views of schooling' (Howard 2002, p428).

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[12] This is along similar lines to Edward Said's idea of 'otherisation' (Said 1978).

The findings also echo the importance of creating a supportive, respectful, cohesive student community within the classroom found by Osborne, as well as the need for warmth and caring in effective, culturally sensitive, teacher student relationships:

> *'Culturally connected caring as an ethic in teaching can include explicitly and implicitly showing affection, emotional, and nurturing behaviour toward students and as a result may have a positive influence on students' desire to learn' (Howard 2002, p436).*

While the students often admire a strict teacher with firm discipline, this is not always the case and only holds true when used intermittently and accompanied by clear evidence of caring about the students, their academic progress and their broader well-being. This links back to the ideas of teacher expectation and stereotyping then, as an effective teacher is seen here as one who not only cares for the students but also has high expectations for all of them. Student motivation and engagement were linked to this effective teaching characteristic:

> *'A number of students spoke of the correlation that existed between teacher's display of care and concern about them and the levels of effort they were willing to put forth for teachers' (Howard 2002, p436).*

Zyngier (2008) debates the definition and purpose of the concept of *student engagement* and considers whom it is that benefits and who is marginalised or excluded from this purpose. The marginalisation he is discussing then is in relation to students disengaged from education, in particular those who leave early, dropping out.

> *'It has been too simplistic to define engagement in terms of deficiencies arising in the students. Historically the disengaged were those whose appearance, language, culture, values, communities and family structures were in contradiction to the dominant (white, middle class) culture that schools were designed to serve and support' (Zyngier 2008, p1774).*

He contrasts three different views of the concept of engagement, which he calls instrumentalist, social constructivist and critical transformative engagement, considering who is the beneficiary and who is marginalised in each case. Instrumentalist engagement is equated with willingness to follow the classroom

rules; here the activities and decisions are teacher-led and those marginalised are more often than not of lower socio-economic status or from minority groups. The idea of social constructivist engagement involves shared decision-making and elements of student choice; here too, he notes, that the approved choices are still frequently those that benefit the students from the white middle-class professional backgrounds. Indeed, he notes:

> *'Shared decision making is an illusion for students if they are not able to question and interrupt their own marginsalisation' (Zyngier 2008, p1772).*

Critical transformative engagement, as distinct from individual student-centred activity, he defines as that which:

> *'perceives student engagement as rethinking these experiences and interests increasingly in communal and social terms for the creation of a more just and democratic community and not just the advancement of the individual. All students should be able to see themselves as represented in a curriculum that challenges hierarchical and oppressive relations that exist between different social groups' (Zyngier 2008, p1772).*

He acknowledges that while such a concept of engagement may indeed result in no groups being marginalised, it cannot readily be achieved by merely tweaking the status quo. A greater rethink about practice and pedagogy is required. In this research then, the sensitizing concept of engagement, which has been touched on previously, is detailed and developed in ways which could prove illuminating for my own analysis.

Interestingly in considering the marginalisation of the disengaged in Australia, namely those at-risk of leaving school early, many of the other sub-concepts that are touched on by Zyngier again resonate with those raised by Osborne, when considering marginalisation of ethnic minorities. Respecting student identity is echoed, as is empowering students and imbuing them with a sense of self-worth. Social relationships are addressed, noting the need for them to be respectful, culturally informed and openly questioning. Overt prejudice by class, race and gender remain pertinent.

Explicit issues of race and racism emerge elsewhere in the marginalisation

literature. Anyon (1995) found that outright racism was rife, according to the students in her research, not only from white teachers but also it transpired, from many of the black teachers. This observation, she sought to illuminate by putting forward the possibility that:

> *'some black educators, as products of past racial (and perhaps class) discrimination and exploitation, may have internalized beliefs about their students that mimic attitudes held by the white dominant society but that work to the detriment of children of color from poverty backgrounds' (Anyon 1995, p71).*

She also saw the racial and sociocultural inappropriateness of the curriculum, the materials and their implementation, as a major barrier to improving attainment for marginalised students. This was amplified by the fact that nearly all the students in her research spoke a local, non-standard English, black dialect.

> *'The texts are written in standard English, a dialect that, because of their extreme marginalization and isolation from the mainstream, almost none of the students speak' (Anyon 1995, p78).*

The sensitizing concepts of racial and sociocultural backgrounds are not new, but the emphasis on the effects of difference or similarity of backgrounds between teachers and students is noteworthy, as is the emphasis on speakers of non-standard English.

Racism is situated resolutely as a focal point of research taking a Critical Race Theory (CRT) approach (Fernández 2002; Gillborn 2008). The marginalisation here is seen integrally as one of race (frequently compounded by class) as CRT sets out to:

> 'prioritize the social categories of race, gender, class, and sexuality and recognize them not only as social constructions but also as categories that have material effects on real people' *(Fernández 2002, p46).*

Fernández (2002) examines in depth one Latino student's experience of education and resistance, in the Chicago school system. Issues arising here focus on how marginalised students make use of their own agency to resist their oppression and marginalisation. When it seemed to them as if teachers did

not care about their learning and had low expectations of them; they would truant rather than stay in class, where content was minimal and pace slow. Frequently, they would attend daytime social gatherings with other truants, finding cultural acceptance and belonging:

> *'The "daytime" scene is not only a sight for youthful pleasure but also a space in which to find both a sense of identity and community' (Fernández 2002, p56).*

This is reminiscent of the anti-school sub-culture already noted and other accompanying themes are present, namely low-expectations, stereotyping, self-esteem, unequal access to the full curriculum and ineffective discipline structures. The poor quality of provision for additional English language support for speaker of other languages is a permeating sub-theme worth noting explicitly.

The centrality of the experiential knowledge of the marginalised person is another key facet of CRT, which directs the researcher to:

> 'capture the stories, counter-stories, and narratives of the marginalized people... who are often the objects of our educational research and yet are often absent from or silenced within this discourse' *(Fernández 2002, p46).*

CRT sees such counter-storytelling by marginalised students, as offering alternatives to the dominant narrative of the white, middle-classes (Fernández 2002; Gillborn 2008).

Franzak (2006) similarly argues for the need to listen directly to the voice of the marginalised adolescent, specifically for her research, the marginalised adolescent reader. In a review of the literature surrounding adolescent reading, she echoes a preference for the term marginalised over other, more deficit-laden terms, as well as reiterating the fact that marginalisation is socially constructed. For her, *'the term marginalized readers refers to students who have experienced difficulty with school-based reading for a variety of reasons'* (Franzak 2006, p211).

The influence of the individual teacher on their students' growth, personally as well as academically, is emphasized:

> *'teachers have enormous impact on the development of school reading identities. Thus what it means to be a struggling reader in one classroom may be different for the same individual in a different classroom'* (Franzak 2006, p236).

Franzak relates current literacy learning theories, with practice in the classroom, as well as with policy. It is recognized that while clearly policy is influential in terms of classroom practice, also practice plays a part in the implementation of policy, as each practitioner interprets the policy from his own stance, as well as for his unique classroom context. Thus Franzak argues that *'marginalized adolescent readers are products of theoretical and policy concerns as much as they are the result of individual learning abilities'* (Franzak 2006, p210). This linking of the macro and the micro levels, considering the interplay of policy, theory, pedagogy and a teachers individual classroom practice, in particular how a policy preference for a particular pedagogy can feed into the marginalisation of certain students, is worthy of further consideration.

Franzak interrogates some different approaches to reading pedagogy, in terms of which students are most likely to be marginalised in each case, recognizing that each definition of reading proficiency is necessarily accompanied by an associated definition of failure - the marginalised reader. Highlighting that reader response pedagogy values the interpretation of the individual reader, she notes that there is more room for an inclusive approach within such teaching, while critical literacy goes further in actively seeking to draw attention to the dominant discourse, debate its very nature and consider multiple perspectives. She argues that even though some marginalised readers can have difficulty making meaning from a text for themselves and being the kind of active reader needed for these approaches, teachers can make explicit and model the tactics that active readers use, allowing progress to be made within an accepting, culturally inclusive environment. The marginalised readers will need to be able to identify with the successful learners, seeing their own sociocultural characteristics in evidence, in order for this to be successful.

Other, more prescriptive pedagogies, such as strategic reading, more readily fit within the neo-liberal consensus which is influential in education policy today and which prioritizes standardized testing as a necessary component of an education market, thus leaving little room for diverse sociocultural contexts, individual interpretation and a more critical approach. The marginalised readers within such an approach, have an over representation of students from lower socioeconomic strata and minority backgrounds; those that are more likely to be sidelined by the dominant discourse and white, middle-class hegemony (Franzak 2006).

Other concepts for assisting marginalised students noted by Franzak have appeared before, such as the idea of positive teacher-student relationships, where the teacher knows each individual student and values their unique sociocultural context. She emphasies that even marginalised readers may have a wealth of non-school literacy to draw on and that valuing and making links to this sociocultural knowledge can unlock stalled progress. In addition acknowledging the importance of student agency is key. Indeed allowing some freedom to choose texts that are perceived as relevant and meaningful by the marginalised readers can help engage and motivate, which will facilitate progress.

> *'Listening to adolescents' voices, we hear clearly the call for increased choice, which can also be understood as a call for recognizing their agency' (Franzak 2006, p228).*

Again, the voice of the marginalised student features here and was similarly central in the CRT literature. Indeed, placing the voice of marginalised student at the heart of the research is also fundamental in ethnography and so it will be pertinent to consider literature explicitly debating concerns in this arena[13]. This, while being illuminating for my research, provides no further sensitizing concepts.

Selecting one student's narrative, as an illustration, a white working class boy from a single parent family, where there were drug and alcohol issues and no

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[13] See Appendix C for a brief review of some literature on utilizing the voice of the marginalised.

history of higher education, which sensitizing concepts emerge from the data to suggest directions along which to look?

He recalls primary school as a happy time where, despite an awareness that he was behind in reading, he felt helped and supported. He traces the start of his difficulties back to the start of secondary school, from which point he considers that he was left to struggle alone. As the years progressed he was placed in the lowest set for English, removed from some lessons for extended episodes for anger issues, subject to fixed-term exclusion, assigned to a vocational track, removed from school on a full-time college placement and only permitted to take two GCSEs.

Permeating this narrative are many of the sensitizing concepts already identified. The structural setting clearly throws up issues of primary-secondary transition, ability grouping, pathway allocations and access to the curriculum. Student background and socio-cultural capitals, issues of SEND and literacy also feature. Present too are the influence of peers, student sub-cultures, issues of identity and self-worth. Teacher-student relationships and respect, expectations and labelling appear. The inappropriateness of the curriculum, lack of engagement, repercussions of particular pedagogies and teaching styles, in particular the use of individual competition and the singling out of a student for performance also emerge.

1.11 SEND and Segregation Versus Inclusion: A Note on the On-site Withdrawal Unit

The student participants in this research - as will be detailed in the following methods chapter - have all spent some time in an on-site withdrawal-unit, having been removed from the mainstream classroom setting for at least some part of normal daily practice. Students are directed to this unit in the first instance for many different reasons, perhaps stemming from a range of SEND, following a one-off incident or resulting from a period of prolonged low-level disruption.

This physical removal, spatial separation and classification in being assigned to

the unit - and the attendant inequality of experience - raise parallels with the wider segregation debates within special education literature. Whilst the students in this research more often than not remain on-site and some may mix with their mainstream peers at break times or in the mainstream classroom for other parts of the day, there is nevertheless a definite element of separation, segregation or exclusion - echoing the segregation debate surrounding special school provision, albeit on a more local, partial and smaller scale.

It is for this reason that a note on the mainstream debates relating to SEND and segregation versus inclusion are pertinent here.

Inclusion within the mainstream education system for all students with SEND - or perhaps more realistically the continuous striving for more fully inclusive practice - requires attention and doubtless change on many levels, encompassing structure, practice and attitude. In terms of wider structural issues and the increasingly marketised backdrop of the English education system, there is recognition within inclusion literature of the effects of competing policy pressures and that competition and the standards agenda may potentially push against the inclusion agenda (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson 2006; Florian 2008). Nevertheless this does not mean that progress on inclusion is stalled in the current system, just that it must be considered with care, and much can still be tackled at other levels also.

Florian (2002) neatly states a set of conditions at the school level that are necessary for inclusion policies to be implemented effectively. These are:

> *'an opportunity for pupil participation in the decision-making process, a positive attitude about the learning abilities of all pupils, teacher knowledge about learning difficulties, skilled application of specific instructional methods, and parent teacher support'* (Florian 2002, p41).

Further work fleshes out and considers just such specific instructional methods or inclusive pedagogies, which attend to *'individual differences, while avoiding the stigma of marking some students as different … the inclusive pedagogical approach focuses on everybody in the community of the classroom'* (Florian &

Black-Hawkins 2011, p820).

Given that the withdrawal-unit is the setting from which this research begins - located as it is in a very real sense between inclusion and segregation - ideas that emerge interconnect with many of these inclusion concerns.

The conditions for successful implementation of inclusion, their incomplete realisation or indeed their absence, will be seen to have considerable overlap, interaction and commonality with several emerging aspects of the lived experience of the marginalised students in this research.

1.12 The Emerging Use of Critical Pedagogy

In grappling with the data analysis, ideas, links and associations with critical pedagogy are raised repeatedly in what follows, so it is worth noting at the outset and commenting on the sense in which I draw from these ideas.

Critical pedagogy (Freire 1996; Giroux 2011; Smyth 2011) starts with the problem of oppression and inequality and is seen as a pathway to greater social justice. It has at its heart the idea of raising individuals' own awareness of their situation - of critical consciousness (Freire 1996; Freire 2014) - empowering them to see potential threats, hazards, and vulnerabilities in their lives, as a necessary step towards action and transformation. An approach to education that is centred on such awareness raising, aims to enable students to have a more complete understanding of their situation in all its messy intricacies and crucially to empower them to see their own agency and the possibility for change. Here such an approach to education would likely encompass students' greater understanding of aspects of their own marginalisation in particular and indeed this is the broadest sense in which I will draw upon these ideas later.

Whilst such far-reaching aims of critical pedagogy are ambitious, and their success would likely require input across entire setting - all classrooms, departments, pastoral teams, support staff - there will nevertheless be elements within individual settings, here at the level of the classroom say, that promote or

inhibit such overarching goals. In an individual classroom, elements which *'expand the capacities of students to think critically and teach them how to take risks'* (Giroux 2011, p6) tend to support such higher-level critical pedagogy goals. Developing critical thinking and promoting risk taking may be realised in a classroom context through practices such as creating an environment where asking questions is encouraged, where all forms of critique are promoted, or where learning is designed so that the whole approach is through posing problems as opposed to merely imparting information. Such problem-posing approaches necessitate students '*producing and acting upon their own ideas - not consuming those of others*' (Freire 1996, p89). Some such practices at the classroom level will also be seen to emerge.

1.13 Summary

I have drawn on a range of research, analysis and data to support the argument that increased marketization and competition between schools, seems likely to be increasing and exacerbating tendencies toward inequality already present in the system, leading to an increased likelihood of marginalisation of the most disadvantaged, vulnerable and least well resourced students.

More biddable, middle-class students not only start with the advantage of a background with greater volumes of the right sort of socio-cultural capital, but as we have seen, this also interweaves with schools being pressurised to maintain and compete for good standing in the league tables. The focus on a particular metric being reported publically pushes schools, albeit reluctantly, to prioritise some students over others in the way in which opportunities and resources are allocated. Throughout the school this may be evident within setting policies, tiers of entry decisions and pathway structures and 'interventions' aimed at raising GCSE performance.[14] In addition, some schools, acutely aware of their fragile position in the market place, may bend admission and exclusions policies, be it through utilising an interview process, or exploiting the managed move or reduced timetable options, and time and again the same students are

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[14] mentoring, tutoring, study weekends, attention in lessons etc.

likely to be the 'beneficiaries'. Consequently, those students who are underprivileged from the outset find their educational chances further inhibited and the likelihood of their marginalisation increased.

The various indications of such an increase in marginalisation generated the kernel of the idea for my research, since it is now surely more crucial than ever that not only should the roots of marginalisation be better understood, but also that efforts currently in place to support and reengage marginalised students are examined. As a teacher within the mainstream secondary school arena for fifteen years, working over a period of considerable disruption in schools in challenging circumstances, I had been in turn frustrated, fascinated, inspired, angered, and amazed by the experiences of many of my students. This had drawn me in more recent years, to take every opportunity to work with the more marginalised students, which left me in a position where I already had access to and relationships with, many side-lined young people, and so consideration and practise came together to prompt this research.

> *'Personal experiences may provide motive and opportunity for research' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p23).*

In the following chapter I will discuss the study, methods and my analytic approach. Afterwards there follows four results chapters, looking at different aspects of the marginalised students experiences that arise from analysis of their accounts in light of the sensitizing concepts. Lastly, these ideas are pulled together and some conclusions indicated.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Motivations and Overview

The research reported here is an ethnographic study in a London secondary school setting, which sheds light on instances of disengagement by giving a voice to marginalised students. The student participants in the study have all spent some time removed from the mainstream classroom setting to work in an on-site withdrawal-unit, most commonly following a period of sustained low-level disruption. The research is primarily based upon a set of semi-structured interviews, with additional participant observation, as well as some small group or one-to-one teaching by the researcher within this unit. The data gathered is analysed through a process of constructivist grounded theory. Social processes - grounded in and emerging from the data - constitute the outcomes of the research and form the substance of the following chapters.

Hammersley (1992), in discussing the outcomes of research, asserts:

> *'Judge the validity of claims on the basis of the adequacy of the evidence offered in support of them' (Hammersley 1992a, p69).*

In this chapter I will explain the thinking behind my choice of methods, opening this up for scrutiny and also to defend this process as a reasonable form of enquiry. I will discuss how I carried out my ethnography in practise, describing decisions I made and the rationale behind them, as well as detailing practical and ethical issues arising and how they were dealt with. Subsequently I will outline how I approached analysing my data and the elements I drew from constructivist grounded theory, as well as illustrating in some detail how I applied these techniques in practice. It is through this transparency and elaboration of my research process, that I wish to demonstrate the soundness of my research and go some way towards justifying the validity of my emergent findings.

Before I give the details of my research process, methodology and methods, I will first situate these within my wider thinking and philosophical assumptions.

'Researchers do have an obligation to examine the philosophical assumptions on which they operate, at least now and again, to reflect on those that seem questionable, and to seek to resolve any inconsistencies they find among them' (Hammersley 1992b, p201).

Thus the following section considers my stance on ontology - the nature of reality - and epistemology - the nature of knowledge and how we know what we know. I believe this is necessary in order to demonstrate coherence in overarching thinking.

2.1.1 My positionality - ontological and epistemological stances

'Justification of our choice and particular use of methodology and methods is something that reaches into the assumptions about reality that we bring to our work. To ask about these assumptions is to ask about our theoretical perspectives. It also reaches into the understanding you and I have of what human knowledge is, what it entails, and what status can be ascribed to it... These are epistemological questions' (Crotty 1998, p2).

What philosophical stances and assumptions about truth, reality and human knowledge, do I bring with me, which underpin my research? What can I draw from academic literature to support the particular combination of my perspectives and subsequent choices of methodology? Certainly, if a fundamental goal of my research is the acquisition of knowledge - which I believe it is - then addressing my assumptions about the nature of this knowledge and hence what can be researched and 'found' must be germane.

'Is there objective truth that we need to identify, and can identify, with precision and certitude? Or are there just humanly fashioned ways of seeing things whose processes we need to explore and which we can only come to understand through a similar process of meaning making? And is this making of meaning a subjective act essentially independent of the object, or do both subject and object contribute to the construction of meaning? Embedded in these questions is a range of epistemological stances, each of which implies a profound difference in how we do our researching and how we present our outcomes' (Crotty 1998, p9).

My ontological stance - my perspective on the structure and nature of reality and truth - is most fittingly described as that of a realist, so in terms of the physical world, physical laws and the nature of physical reality then, I believe

that there is a world that is objectively knowable. I arguably remain close to my scientific roots and to positivism in this regard[15].

> *'Positivist theory seeks causes, favors deterministic explanations, and emphasizes generality and universality' (Charmaz 2006, p126).*

This summary fits broadly with my understanding of scientific research[16] and my stance as regards the physical world. Thus, I assume the existence of 'brute facts' (Searle 1995), facts that are independent of human existence. In contemplating what might constitute 'social reality', Searle reflects on the idea of truth and facts. Whilst acknowledging that many researchers have made the case that: *'all of reality is somehow a human creation, that there are no brute facts, but only facts dependent on the human mind'* (Searle 1995, p 2), he nevertheless asserts: *'I want to defend the fact that there is a reality that is independent of us'* (Searle 1995, p 2).

This is a sentiment I can whole-heartedly embrace, fitting as it does with my realist stance. Indeed, I find I agree with Searle as far as the physical world and his so-called 'brute facts' are concerned but diverge from his stance as soon as any social realm is considered[17]. I must look elsewhere then to find research that resonates with my personal stance more fully. I may well be comfortable with my realist stance in the physical world but I need to locate my stance differently as related to the social world, social meaning and knowledge.

Where the social world is concerned and the nature of meaning and knowledge my epistemological positionality - my perspective on the structure and nature of

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[15] I studied theoretical physics in a previous PhD and taught mathematics for 15 years, so have heavily scientific roots.

[16] For science and scientific research that touches on the quantum theory many-worlds interpretation, or notions of complexity, for example, clearly universality and determinism may well be called into question, even within the physical realm. Broadly however, within everyday laboratory experimental conditions, these matters rarely raise their heads and so for me, the scientific stance - associated here with a positivist approach – regularly dominates.

[17] I do not agree with the premise, which he later asserts, that there can be objective reality *'which exists in part by human agreement'* (Searle 1995, p 2). It is not that I have any difficulty with the idea of consensus and broad human agreement – in particular within a localised context – but rather that I would see such consensus, not as revealing an existing objective reality but merely highlighting an agreed norm.

knowledge – fits most readily with a constructivist stance. This has by no means always been clear to me and my thinking has evolved as I have been exposed to a wider range of research and ideas in these matters and reflected on my stance, accepting and rejecting different viewpoints with differing degrees of ease and conviction along the way.

Initially, as I started my journey in sociological research, interpretivism seemed a good fit. I still find the notion that individuals interpret the social world around them differently and that their own experiences, culture, context, values and preconceptions cannot help but impact on this, eminently reasonable. Thus, within this paradigm, social life is a process and the way the world is understood, indeed interpreted, by different individuals not only varies between them but also evolves and changes for each individual over the course of their life. An interpretivist researcher finds what they find in that context and does not try to elaborate beyond that sphere. Charmaz (2006) summarises an interpretivist approach to theory neatly:

> *'Interpretive theory calls for the imaginative understanding of the studied phenomena. This type of theory assumes emergent, multiple realities; indeterminacy; facts and values as linked; truth provisional; and social life as processual' (Charmaz 2006, p126).*

I was very comfortable with this interpretivist position for the social world, in particular as although it allows for differing interpretations and thus alternative realities and ambiguous truth, there is nothing to say that there may not be some overlapping interpretations and broad agreement and thus some traces of universally accepted facts and truth could remain in the social realm. I began considering my research and moving forward in this light.

It was more latterly and in fact very gradually that I found the ideas of constructivism creeping into my accepted ways of thinking. I read some research papers with this stance, in particular around the concept of identity formation and subsequently identified what seemed to be illustrations of discursively constructed identities emerging from my data. Whilst I found myself attracted to these ideas, it was with an ever-present sense of unease.

> *'A constructivist approach places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data' (Charmaz 2006, p130).*

In this move from interpretivism to constructivism then, it is not simply that individuals form different interpretations of social actions and interactions but that these interactions are also formative, feeding into, shaping and constructing social concepts. This seemed to me to be a step further away again from any notion of universal truth then, as Crotty (1998) asserts, in constructivism there is:

> *'no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed' (Crotty 1998, p8/9).*

Constructivism, since it is predicated on the assertion that all human knowledge is socially constructed, or co-constructed, can make no simple claims regarding objectivity and truth, or similarly regarding generalizability. All knowledge is contextual.

What was at the root of my discomfort with these ideas? Why did I find them less palatable than an interpretivist stance? Reading the arguments put forward by Bridges (2003) helped to crystallise my concerns. He claims that educational researchers are:

> *'inexorably driven to observe some sort of distinction between truth and falsity and that in their published work they are centrally concerned to affirm the truth as they see it' (Bridges 2003, p71).*

I felt an affinity with this statement and suspected that my unease centred on this drive to affirm the truth in some shape or form and that perhaps with moving to a constructivist stance I may find this ever messier, more slippery, less tangible and, in short, harder. I also felt an empathy with the wider nature of this paper, where Bridges (2003) makes a case that despite many constructivist researchers eschewing the language of truth, they perhaps cannot escape truth so entirely.

> *'If all they are denying is the possibility or desirability of either essentialism or certainly, then they may distance themselves from a particular and rather restrictive notion of truth' (Bridges 2003, p86).*

Indeed, he proceeds to consider different concepts of truth and how they may lend themselves more readily to different epistemological standpoints. He suggests that it is truth as consensus that fits with constructivist thinking and *'effectively turns the truth or falsity of a belief into a matter of social agreement'* (Bridges 2003, p77).

This locates the nub of the concerns I have when attempting to wholeheartedly embrace constructivist thinking. Is my research seeking truth and if so what concept of truth? Might I have to abandon, or reconsider, my search for truth and knowledge if I adopt a constructivist stance and if so why might this pose a problem? Here Lakomski provides a helpful insight:

> *'The point of preferring one set of methods over another is to believe that the chosen set will lead to knowledge rather than mere belief, opinion or personal preference' (Lakomski 1992, p193, quoted in Bridges 2003 p80).*

With Bridges' *'more subtle and complex notion of truth than some others on offer and one seen as provisional pending further disruption'* (Bridges 2003, p87) I can allay some of my concerns and start to acknowledge how some element of constructivism could enter my accepted thinking and influence my stance, necessitating some amending of meanings within my quest for knowledge through research, without fundamentally negating this goal. Indeed, there is another extract from Bridges, which I find particularly comforting:

> *'In one sense post-modernist writing is not so much occupied with the denial of the discourse of truth as disinterested in it. Post-modernist writing is focussed, rather, on the 'disruption', 'deconstruction', 'rupture' or 'bafflement' of this and other forms of discourse… and on trying to force a space for new questions about identity, humanity, agency' (Bridges 2003, p86).*

In summary, I feel a strong affinity for the following quotation:

'The existence of a world without a mind is conceivable. Meaning without a mind is not. Realism in ontology and constructivism in epistemology turn out to be quite compatible' (Crotty 1998, p10/11).

Indeed, this is where I currently find myself located – I am a realist in terms of ontology and broadly an interpretivist in terms of epistemology, while accommodating forays into constructivism, in particular where ideas of identity are concerned. In this chapter, then, I will proceed to elucidate my methods, bearing in mind this stance on methodology.

'An epistemological issue concerns the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline' (Bryman 2012, p27).

A choice of epistemological stance, then, relates to what types of knowledge there are and hence to the sorts of problems that can be formulated and the types of questions that can be asked and answered by research. This will necessarily influence my choice of methodology, shaping the research throughout as well as directly impacting the interpretations that can be considered to be consistent:

'Epistemology bears mightily on the way we go about our research' (Crotty 1998, p9).

2.2 The Study: Ethnography

2.2.1 Why an ethnographic approach?

The increase in instances of student marginalisation provided the germ of the idea for my research but what approaches were available to me and how should I move forward? There are many pertinent concerns, which could be addressed through research into marginalisation. What can be done to pre-empt individual students from becoming marginalised and disengaged? What measures have shown success with reengaging these hard to reach students? What are the implications for best practise within schools and the ramifications for system structures?

Rather than taking these questions as my initial focus however I intended to start by encouraging students who have experienced marginalisation to speak for themselves, articulate their experiences and share their stories. I would then use these accounts to ascertain the more pressing areas of concern (as regards practices in schools that impact on inequalities of experience) and the most relevant issues to pursue further within my research. Indeed, it seems to me that the marginalised students themselves are in a unique position to shed light on the possible sources of marginalisation and that their stories and narratives will enable a better understanding of disengagement and disaffection and hopefully point to some effective interventions. This is the reason for my placing the students at the heart of this work, and for selecting an ethnographic approach, to give them a voice.

In discussing the, at least initially, somewhat open-ended nature of ethnographic research design, Hammersley and Atkinson note the typical practice of this type of researcher:

> *'They begin with an interest in some particular area of social life. While they usually have in mind what the anthropologist Malinowski… called 'foreshadowed problems', their orientation is an exploratory one. The task is to investigate some aspect of the lives of the people who are being studied, and this includes finding out how these people view the situations they face, how they regard one another, and also how they see themselves' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p3).*

This aptly describes my standpoint and in this regard, my particular area of interest lies in education, specifically in the experiences of students marginalised in the secondary school phase, while my foreshadowed problems might be the possible mechanisms already suggested as contributory causes of such marginalisation.

Interestingly, in seeking out the first-hand experiences of the students, I am very much in keeping with some current trends in policy debate:

> *'It is time to get back to basics – to think seriously about what the purpose of education is, and what it means to be educated, what schools are for, and concomitantly and crucially, who should decide*

these things. Such a profound rethinking needs to move beyond the views of self-proclaimed 'experts' and policy entrepreneurs and those with established interests. To hear what parents, students and teachers have to say about what they think education should be for… To do this, we need to establish forums and opportunities to speak, in which all speakers are taken seriously and their views collated' (Ball 2013, p25).

Categorically, the principal aim of research is the production of knowledge, but perhaps this research will simultaneously fit in with the sentiment expressed in the above, and present just such an 'opportunity to speak' and to be taken seriously, for a few of the most vulnerable, disengaged and hard to reach students within the mainstream education setting.

2.2.2 Marginalised students ethnographic research overview

The ethnographic style of research varies in its approach but generally encompasses the attempt to elicit and make sense of participants experiences within their normal context, taking an interpretivist stance, with the belief that actions are intrinsically linked to an actor's social and cultural meanings. This being the case, it is desirable for the researcher to come to know the context of the research very well indeed by spending time there; both its rules and processes and more importantly its values, discourses and norms and by extension, and of particular relevance here, its boundaries, what is acceptable, or considered *normal*. This learning of the culture is an integral part of an ethnographic approach and so a good deal of time will be spent 'in the field', covertly or overtly, depending on the particular role the researcher adopts.

'Through our methods, we first aim to see this world as our research participants do – from the inside' (Charmaz 2006, p14).

Commonly used techniques deployed in this type of research are interviews, conversations or participant observation, all as part of the engagement with and immersion into a specific socio-cultural environment. Since the priority is to gain in-depth insight, there is also likely to be a fairly narrow focus on a small set of people, a single site or a few specific cases (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

This research is an ethnographic study based in the context of a secondary school setting, in London. The role the researcher plays is nominally an overt

one, of both being a teacher and a researcher.[18] The student participants are selected from, or perhaps more accurately also self-select from, among those pupils who have spent some time 'removed' from the mainstream classroom setting, to work in an on-site withdrawal-unit. This may stem from EBD or specific learning needs, or perhaps most commonly, follow on from a period of sustained low-level disruption. Again the difficulties of sampling and the selection of participants will be addressed further later.

The one certain way then, in which all the students in this study are marginalised, is through being physically removed from the mainstream classroom, for at least some part of their learning. This spatial separation and classification in being assigned to the unit - and the associated inequality of experience - is my initial definition of marginalisation in relation to the students who speak. What transpires from listening to their accounts is that there are many other ways in which they perceive that they are marginalised and the analysis of these perceptions forms the backbone - and the chapters - of this thesis. They perceive marginalisation as arising from transitions, and through grouping by 'ability', allocation to sets and curriculum pathway decisions as well as through their experience in the classroom. Equally some feel additionally marginalised through labelling and the impact of this on their learner identity. Just as this is not relevant to selection for taking-part in the research in any way, neither are any of their other characteristics, such as their race, gender or socio-cultural background, or whether or not their own attitudes feed into their marginalisation. In other words, the only common factor initially taken as given between the students in this research, and the sense in which they are initially considered marginalised, is through spending time in this withdrawal-unit.

These participants were interviewed as part of the initial phase of the research using semi-structured interviews to collect experiential accounts. Additionally some participant observation was used, as well as some small group or one-to-one teaching by the researcher within this unit. The researcher kept a reflective journal and other documentary material was collected. The main reasons for

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[18] The subtleties of this dual role in practise will be returned to later.

undertaking the participant observations and the teaching, centered on immersing myself within this unit. Firstly, I wanted to better familiarize myself with the setting, learning the culture, its values, discourses and norms - as is usual within ethnographic work. Secondly, I also sought to no longer be seen as exclusively a mainstream teacher, to become at least in part accepted into this group, to be able to establish relationships and thus to identify potential participants for interview (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

> *'Think of ways you can reach these individuals, gain their trust, and obtain solid data from them' (Charmaz 2006, p15).*

There is the prospect of further phases of the research, including follow up interviews with the original participants, and a later interviewing of teaching assistants, in order to access their perspectives on emergent themes. The inclusion of the teaching assistants and their viewpoints will compliment the primary reliance on the student standpoint. Many researchers emphasise the need for this balancing of perspectives (Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Lacey 1970; Mac an Ghaill 1988).

2.2.3 Dealing with issues arising

- The teacher-as-researcher, researcher-as-teacher role.

This research was carried out in a secondary school setting where the researcher has been a member of teaching staff; an Advanced Skills Teacher within a core subject area. This particular teaching role means there is space within the timetable for mentoring of staff but also for out-reach and in-reach work. As this core subject was seen very much as a priority, in-reach was seen as the optimum path and so it was perfectly in line with the school development plan and the job responsibility, to spend time working with students in the withdrawal-unit. Research and practise fortuitously coincided then and this facilitated the forming of relationships with students who had been removed from the mainstream classroom setting, some of whom the researcher had also taught previously. However, to be an effective researcher it is important that the complexities of the researcher-teacher duality are recognised and the potential for influence, be it on the behaviour and accounts of those in the field, or on the interpretation and analysis of the researcher, are reflected upon and analysed.

It is essential to be self-critical and reflexive, that is to recognise the role of your own socio-cultural position, prejudices and opinions and to try to account for these throughout the research process, as opposed to trying to minimise or eliminate them. I intend to embrace reflexivity head on then, since:

> *'by including our own role within the research focus, and perhaps even systematically exploiting our participation in the settings under study as researchers, we can produce accounts of the social world and justify them without placing reliance on futile appeals to empiricism, of either positivist or naturalist varieties' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p18).*

There are many ethnographic works in education, where the complex influence of the researchers possible role in a school setting are struggled with, debated and addressed (Hargreaves 1967; Lacey 1970; Ball 1981).

- Access and gate-keepers.

As a teacher within the school, in some sense I already had access. This is misleading of course on several counts. Firstly there are very real issues of permissions and consent that must be obtained for the project to be ethically viable, which is often a revealing process in itself. There is usually some formal structure, hierarchy or administration system that dictates who to approach for official permission; in the case of a school this would tend to be the Head Teacher. Permission was obtained prior to starting any research in the school from the Head Teacher and the Senior Deputy Head Teacher. When the more formal stages of the research were about to commence, for instance the first interview was scheduled, further reassurance of current permission was sought and gained from the Senior Deputy Head Teacher.

Even once official establishment permissions are granted and others instructed to comply, this does not mean that productive access will be forthcoming. The dynamics of the environment and the subtleties of the social relationships, mean that who complies readily and who does not may in itself reveal crucial information about the field.

There will be individuals who may hold no official say in granting permissions but who could make the research all but impossible, should they choose to, as they hold the key to 'practical' access. One such in this case is the person in charge of the withdrawal-unit. She is held in high-esteem by many of the marginalised students who pass through her care and could facilitate or hinder the progress of the research, most obviously through her open endorsement or rejection, but also even simply through her attitude towards me in front of the potential participants. It will be necessary to nurture and maintain a productive relationship there.

Some students too will hold sway amongst their peers and while they clearly have no official, institutional power over the actions of their peers, influence is rife. The Head Teacher and others in authority then may be the explicit gate-keepers, but there will be many teachers, teaching assistants, support staff and pupils who will also, albeit informally, act as gate-keepers.

> *'Knowing who has the power to open up or block off access, or who consider themselves and are considered by others to have the authority to grant or refuse access, is, of course, an important aspect of sociological knowledge about the setting'* (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p50).

Then there are ideas of access relating to the issue of my changing role and whether or not those around me would now treat me differently, when my researcher interests were known. Would I be regarded with scepticism and no longer be privy to the same confidences? Would there be shifting loyalties; could my new function elicit previously withheld opinions? This is a recurring issue throughout many ethnographic research projects (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

- Selection of the setting and cases: sampling and use of key respondent.

The context of the specific secondary school and its withdrawal-unit in particular, form the setting, as a starting point, since this is the place to encounter a regular, yet changing, core of students who are on the fringes of the mainstream classroom experience, having been removed or absented themselves from at least part of the normal daily practice. The decision as to

whom to select as the cases is more problematic. Of course, *who* is not then the only other choice to be made and there are issues of *when* and *how* to be considered as well. An attempt should be made to come to know this setting at different times, since the ebb and flow of the academic year may impact on the withdrawal-unit environment, who is there, for what reason and to what purpose.

There are many practical issues, obstacles and concerns to be taken into account when considering whom to sample.

> *'In the early phases, which cases are chosen for investigation may not matter greatly. Later on, it may come to acquire considerable importance' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p34).*

Within the qualitative analysis approach for social science put forward by Strauss (1987), as the initial data analysis progresses, the issue of further theoretical sampling stems from these analytical processes:

> *'The basic question of theoretical sampling is: What groups or subgroups of the populations, events, activities (to find varying dimensions, strategies, etc) does one turn to next in data collection. And for what theoretical purpose? So, this process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory' (Strauss 1987, p39).*

It is important to bear in mind that this sort of sampling is utterly distinct from that used in quantitative research and is not subject to the same rules, as regards, for example, being representative of the population in a categorical manner. Categories, like age, year group, gender and race may transpire to be pertinent or not. In this style of research, and in this study, participants are seen instead very much as holistic individuals, not easily summarised by a set of such characteristics (Charmaz 2006; Glaser and Strauss 1968; Strauss 1987). Qualities that are significant to group students may emerge. Some research utilises different member-generated, or observer-generated categories for grouping the participants (Ball, Maguire and Macrae 2000).

Initially, none of these concerns are paramount and which, if any, need to be addressed further will be reviewed as the research develops. Finding willing

participants for interview, who are then reliable enough to follow through with the arrangements, is troublesome. As a starting point, volunteers were sought for interview, after informal discussion in the withdrawal-unit amongst small groups. From then there was some snowball sampling, with individuals suggesting their friends and peers. Also use is made of a key respondent, a popular and sociable girl, who was eager to assist in contacting further participants.

- Consent and interview structure.

The best approach to take in terms of structuring the interview, as well as gaining informed consent from the participants and their families, required considerable thought and both ended with some form of compromise. That is a compromise between what may be theoretically best practise in terms of research design and data collection, and what could be achieved within the constraints of time and ethics (Alderson and Morrow 2004; Kvale 2008).

Initially I had hoped to conduct unstructured interviews, or as near to unstructured as I could while remaining largely within the broad topic of educational experiences. This would allow for the participant to dictate the flow of the conversation and tell their story as they saw fit, taking circuitous routes, twists and turns, and veering off on tangents could be revealing and informative. On reflection, and after several informal forays into similar conversations with some students, I realised that many of the very students who were likely to be of particular interest, suffered from low self-esteem, could be inarticulate and often had difficulties expressing themselves. The likelihood of obtaining much fruitful data using such open-ended techniques seemed remote. Indeed, I felt that such interviews might make them feel uncomfortable and pressurised, as opposed to free and empowered. Offering prompts and encouragement, or even sharing personal experiences seemed to put the students more at their ease and make them more forthcoming. With this in mind, I decided that semi-structured interviews were the way forward, with a framework of questions that essentially asked them to recall their educational experiences and tell their story chronologically, from primary school through transition to secondary, settling in, progressing through Key-Stage three, to options choices and beyond. If they

started to feel comfortable and began to talk freely, they could still be allowed to follow their own path (Kvale 2008).

A somewhat parallel progression occurred, in terms of selecting cases for interview, when I considered the matter of informed consent. I had hoped to interview any willing participants, at various stages within their schooling, to obtain a range of data across different year groups, which may have been a factor of significance. I am however, focussing on students from the withdrawal-unit, who have been marginalised to some degree and unsurprisingly, many of their parents, carers and guardians are notoriously difficult to contact, let alone to elicit support from. So again, by the very nature of the focus of the research, limitations and constraints came into play.

> *'It is common today, in some countries, that research in schools, especially that focussing on the students, requires parents consent for their children to be included in the study. Thus, it is necessary to send home consent forms with the students and (as far as possible) to restrict the focus of inquiry to those whose parents have agreed'* (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p52/3).

It is difficult at the best of times to arrange consent from parents, but with my particular focus on marginalised students, this obstacle was magnified. After much deliberation about the ethical issues surrounding informed consent and with reference to several ethics committees' standards, I decided to restrict my interviewees either to those whose parental consent was forthcoming or to those who had turned sixteen, an age that is commonly put forward as that at which a young person can give informed consent for themselves. This being the case, many of the participants were no longer enrolled at the school at the time of interview. This was a pragmatic solution that hopefully will not have a negative impact on the research and perhaps there may even be some benefit to interviewing some older students, as Howard (2002) noted, when interviewing students about effective teachers:

> *'Given the degrees of maturity and complex insights that older students have of their schooling experience, their interpretations of teachers are desperately needed in the professional literature'* (Howard 2002, p441).

In terms of some students not merely being older, but also no longer being enrolled at the school, it is pertinent that in research by Fernández (2002), one student reflecting some time after the event, on his time in school, acknowledges the benefit of hindsight:

> *'I've analyzed the way the school was (run), the way things were done and why. And so, you read and you've learned, "Damn! That was tracking!" or "That was vocational!"… back then, I just thought everybody was lazy and didn't wanna go to class' (Fernández 2002, p59).*

Some of my interviewees also offer insights having had additional time following school, for further reflection.

Despite limiting myself firstly to those with parental consent and then to older, post-16 interviewees, it should be noted that, even for these older students, where contact with a parent, carer or guardian was made, that their permission was sought nevertheless, as this seemed the most ethical approach[19] (Alderson and Morrow 2004).

- Recording of interviews.

I made the conscious decision to record all my interviews, despite the possibility of participants finding this inhibiting and this was for two fundamental reasons. Firstly as:

> *'using a tape recorder allows you to give full attention to your research participant with steady eye-contact and gives you detailed data' (Charmaz 2006, p32).*

This ability to focus on the participant, I consider to outweigh any detrimental side-effects from inhibitions due to recording. Personally, I feel this is particularly true for this generation of young people who are so at ease with recording devices, familiar as they are with selfies, camera-phones and social media. Additionally, no form of alternative to recording, such as note-taking, could come close in terms of preserving the detail of the interview.

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[19] See Appendix A for consent form and prompt questions for interviews.

The second core reason I chose to record my interviews, links to this attention to detail and concerns how I would treat the data afterwards.

> *'Transcribed, tape recorded interviews make it easy to see when your questions don't work or force the data' (Charmaz 2006, p32).*

Indeed, I feel strongly that as a beginner researcher in particular, having this chance to see if I had used leading questions, persuasion, suggestion or any form of direction to bend the data towards some conscious or subconscious, half-awakened connection to a favoured sensitizing concept, or preferred rationale, seemed crucial as part of my tackling reflexivity head-on. Researchers:

> *'are obligated to be reflexive about what we bring to the scene, what we see and how we see it' (Charmaz 2006, p15).*

2.3 The Study: Constructivist Grounded Theory
2.3.1 Supplementing an ethnographic approach

> *'In a very real sense, every piece of research is unique and calls for a unique methodology. We, as the researcher, have to develop it' (Crotty 1998, p13/14).*

Although it was evident to me at an early stage that an ethnographic study would suit my needs, I had to give considerably more thought to the most suitable approach, or approaches to draw from, when analysing my data.

> *'it is by no means a matter of plucking a methodology off the shelf. We acquaint ourselves with the various methodologies. We evaluate their presuppositions. We weigh their strengths and weaknesses. Having done all that and more besides, we still have to forge a methodology that will meet our particular purposes in this research. One of the established methodologies may suit the task that confronts us. Or perhaps none of them do and we find ourselves drawing on several methodologies, moulding them into a way of proceeding that achieves the outcomes we look to. Perhaps we need to be more inventive still and create a methodology that in many respects is quite new. Even if we tread this track of innovation and invention, our engagement with the various methodologies in use will have played a crucial educative role' (Crotty 1998, p14).*

I found myself drawn to grounded theory, which can fit well alongside ethnographic approaches. Indeed: *'Grounded theory methods encourage using both ethnographic and interviewing approaches'* (Charmaz 2006, p28). My main reason for coming to grounded theory in the round, is succinctly summarised with: *'Grounded theories start with data'* (Charmaz 2006, p3).

After all, I had chosen an ethnographic approach so as to give marginalised students a voice and allow their voice to dictate the way forward. Pairing ethnography with grounded theory, which eschews existing theory at the outset, instead starting with data and considering what may emerge, seemed the right fit. Naturally, in coming to the data with a whole variety of sensitising concepts, as well as my own presumptions, perhaps rather than neatly emerging from the data, analysis takes place in a messier exchange between data, sensitising concepts and the researcher's preconceptions, hunches and prejudices.

Furthermore, a significant appeal of grounded theory is that it offers a means whereby ethnographic research - which can remain largely descriptive – may be subject to analytic scrutiny, something I would be very open to.

> *'Grounded theory methods move ethnographic research toward theoretical development by raising description to abstract categories and theoretical interpretation' (Charmaz 2006, p23).*

Although I came to grounded theory fairly readily, it remained unclear for some time which precise form and variation, particular elements and exact implementation I might select. Indeed, there is a range of research that states that it draws its analysis from some version of grounded theory, while varying considerably in stance and technique.

After careful consideration of some of the twists and turns within the grounded theory research community, I built my analytic approach to scrutinizing my data, on a process of qualitative analysis, based on principles underpinning the original grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1968) and revised later by Strauss (1987), and subsequently Charmaz (2006). It is the version of constructivist grounded theory put forward by Charmaz (2006), which most

heavily influenced my thinking and which is most closely aligned with my approach here.

2.3.2 Towards settling on constructivist grounded theory

> *'Stated simply, grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data, to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves' (Charmaz 2006, p2).*

Glaser and Strauss's book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967) laid the foundations for grounded theory research. They have a particular interest in researching social processes, within social settings and in this work, they set out systematic guidelines for analysing qualitative data, in such a way that theory could emerge from this data, through this ever-deeper systematic analysis. I find their approach appealing in several ways. For the ethnographer and the teacher-researcher in me, who prioritise authenticity, integrity and treating the participants' involvement with respect, the overwhelming attraction is that the entire process stems from the data. The participants remain at the heart of the research. Moreover, there are two additional and significant factors drawing me to this approach. Firstly, the systematic guidelines appeal to that part of me which seeks a clear structure for my work, and secondly, the centralisation of the examination of social processes aligns with my desire to consider links and relationships within my analysis.

> *'Ethnographers can make connections between events by using grounded theory to study processes' (Charmaz 2006, p23).*

Interestingly for me, Glaser had a background in quantitative research, within a positivist paradigm, from Columbia University, while Strauss, who had studies at the University of Chicago, had been exposed to traditions of ethnographic fieldwork, set firmly within an interpretivist paradigm. Perhaps I have some affinity for these differing backgrounds, seeing parallels between their coming together and working through elements of my own internal struggles.

At the time when Glaser and Strauss's book came out, they were aware of some decline in usage of the traditional qualitative sociological methods, in

favour of a more fashionable quantitative trend. Their aim was, at least in part, to reinvigorate the flagging reputation of qualitative research; to demonstrate that qualitative research could be more than observation, case-study and story-telling; that it could not only be just as analytically rigorous as the quantitative methods which were in vogue, but also that it could go further and generate new theoretical concepts – something which even the majority of the quantitative analysis struggled to do. Indeed much of quantitative research at that time focussed on validating or rejecting existing theories, through the testing of measureable predictions and hypotheses, made from competing theoretical models. Thus grounded theory, with its focus on creating new theoretical ideas, certainly made ambitious claims for qualitative research. It was these claims of analytic rigour, as well as the possibility of generating new theoretical concepts, which once again struck a chord with me.

> *'Glaser and Strauss intended to construct abstract theoretical explanations of social processes' (Charmaz 2006, p5).*

While Glaser continued to advocate their original form of grounded theory, Strauss (1987) later deviated somewhat from their original approach, emphasising verification over discovery and allowing for more flexible qualitative analysis of research where the procedures are less stringently applied and the researcher is more free, for example to record interviews, discuss the data and supplement the data analysis process with experiential data (Strauss 1987). This relaxing of the rigid application of the rules in favour of more flexibly applied broader guidelines sat more readily with my evolving positionality and I was drawn closer to the work of Strauss over that of Glaser.

In fact, the version of grounded theory I have found to fit best with my current positionality is that outlined by Charmaz (2006). She advocates a more constructivist version of grounded theory, finding the versions by Glaser and Strauss and the later modifications by Strauss, to be too positivist for her position.

> *'In the classic grounded theory works, Glaser and Strauss talk about discovering theory as it emerges from the data separate from the scientific observer. Unlike their position, I assume that neither data*

nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices' (Charmaz 2006, p10).

An additional rationale for my preferring the constructivist version is that taking a constructivist approach to grounded theory methodology in fact may: *'better align the methodology with social justice-oriented research'* (Keane 2015, p427).

2.3.3 My analytical approach

'I view grounded theory methods as a set of principles and practices, not as prescriptions or packages... I emphasise flexible guidelines, not methodological rules, recipes, and requirements' (Charmaz 2006, p9).

'Researchers can adopt and adapt them' (Charmaz 2006, p9).

In this section I intend to make clear my particular analytic approach, drawn and adapted from grounded theory, so that my research can be readily scrutinized.

In essence, the steps I took can be broadly described by the following sequence: free writing, initial coding, clustering, memoing, focussed coding and diagramming, as well as some theoretical sampling. As I illustrate and elaborate on what I mean by each of these terms, it should become clear that this is neither a linear nor a fixed structure. In some instances, I may have looped around in a cyclical fashion, repeating the memoing, focussed coding and diagramming stages in particular. Furthermore any distinction between the phases of memoing, focussed coding and diagramming is somewhat artificial as these interweave and co-evolve as I move forward with my analysis.

- Freewriting.

As a starting point to analyse an interview, I listened again to the audio and reflected on it in an open, unstructured, *ad hoc* manner and produced a piece of freewriting which could take the form of fragments of thought, connections, memories, associations, feelings, concerns, notes, questions or indeed any

form of passing thought. The benefit to such a free, unrestrained start is that it is less intimidating than some more structured openings may be.

> *'Freewriting liberates your thoughts and feelings. It… may save you hours of staring at a blank screen' (Charmaz 2006, p88).*

The freewrite served a second important purpose also, as something tangible that could be returned to at any point in the analytic process, in particular when it may stall and falter, to refresh the situation, breath new life into a flagging process and to stimulate further ideas.

> *'Study these freewrites because they may contain seeds of a great memo' (Charmaz 2006, p89).*

- Keeping Track

As an organisational aid, for each semi-structured interview, after I had transcribed the audio file, I converted the document into an excel spreadsheet file so that as I advanced through analytical stages it was simple to keep track of exactly where extracts but also the codes, social processes and diagrams had emerged from, by making reference to the row number.

	A
4	LWE: And do you remember enjoying Primary? Was that a fun time?
5	B: Yeah it was alright. Everyone got along. Yeah it was fine.
6	LWE: And so Year 6 for example when you are coming towards the end of
7	Primary, SATs and things, did you like all the subjects equally? Were you better
8	at one than another?
9	B: I found it difficult. I had to have like some assistance with like the SATs and
10	stuff so when it was the real SATs exams I did have to have assistance, I had to
11	have the teacher sit there and read the questions to me, so I found that quite
12	embarrassing at that time because everyone else didn't have it but I did.
13	LWE: So was that in the same room?
14	B: Yeah.
15	LWE: Oh, that's a bit strange.
16	B: And I didn't like...Yeah.
17	LWE: So was that ... did they give that an official name? Like did they you were
18	dyslexic or did they say there was some particular...
19	B: No not really. I just found it difficult. When I'm was reading the question it
20	wouldn't go into my head and I would like write something different and it
21	wouldn't relate to the question so ...
22	LWE: So you found the help actually really useful?
23	B: Yeah and I got quite good marks from that as well and I think if I didn't have
24	the teacher there then I wouldn't have got the good marks that I did.

This is in line with advice from Strauss, where he recommends that the researcher:

> *'Note the techniques that facilitate quick scanning and sorting later in the research process… Sometimes the relevant lines of the interview or other document are referred to by page' (Strauss 1987, p68).*

I could then begin my more structured analysis through coding within these spreadsheets.

- Initial Coding

> *'Coding is the first step in moving beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytic interpretations' (Charmaz 2006, p43).*

Initially I coded my data, interview by interview, choosing to code the entire interview even when the discussion strayed from the topic of education. This was done not only for completeness but also out of respect for the words and thoughts of the participants and as:

> *'Coding full interview transcriptions gives you ideas and understandings that you otherwise miss' (Charmaz 2006, p70).*

In accordance with the practice put forward by Glaser (1978) and taken on board by Charmaz (2006), I coded by gerunds. This is done to keep the analysis active and thus hopefully more readily highlight any emergent social processes.

	A	B
4	LWE: And do you remember enjoying Primary? Was that a fun time?	
5	B: Yeah it was alright. Everyone got along. Yeah it was fine.	getting along
6	LWE: And so Year 6 for example when you are coming towards the end of	
7	Primary, SATs and things, did you like all the subjects equally? Were you better	
8	at one than another?	
9	B: I found it difficult. I had to have like some assistance with like the SATs and	finding it difficult
10	stuff so when it was the real SATs exams I did have to have assistance, I had to	helping
11	have the teacher sit there and read the questions to me, so I found that quite	sitting together
12	embarrassing at that time because everyone else didn't have it but I did.	being embarassed
13	LWE: So was that in the same room?	
14	B: Yeah.	
15	LWE: Oh, that's a bit strange.	
16	B: And I didn't like...Yeah.	not liking
17	LWE: So was that ... did they give that an official name? Like did they you were	
18	dyslexic or did they say there was some particular...	
19	B: No not really. I just found it difficult. When I'm was reading the question it	finding it difficult
20	wouldn't go into my head and I would like write something different and it	reading
21	wouldn't relate to the question so ...	not relating
22	LWE: So you found the help actually really useful?	
23	B: Yeah and I got quite good marks from that as well and I think if I didn't have	helping suceeding
24	the teacher there then I wouldn't have got the good marks that I did.	

> *'During initial coding, the goal is to remain open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by your reading of the data' (Charmaz 2006, p46).*

After my initial coding[20], as a next step in analyzing a particular interview, I grouped these codes in cluster diagrams.

- Clustering

Producing cluster diagrams was a first pass at the coded data, a means of creating a path through the material, to illuminate connections between codes, highlight prevalent codes and provide a visualization to suggest possibilities for moving forward. Clustering '*offers a diagram of relationships*' (Charmaz 2006. P86).

Clustering is by no means unique and clustering the same group of codes, codes from an extract, or codes from an entire interview, in several different ways, to see what may emerge is customary. A cluster diagram is again a tool that may – or may not - facilitate analytic insight, perhaps revealing dominant central codes, or groups of similar or contrasting codes. These dominant codes, or groups of similar codes, could then form the basis of memos.

> '*Through clustering you gain control because you create an image of the piece before delving into writing about it… Clustering can give you a preliminary sketch of the memo you need to write*' (Charmaz 2006, p87)

I began my analysis of each interview then by utilizing the processes of freewriting, initial coding and clustering and found that freewriting, clustering, or both generated some initial ideas for the next analytic stage, that of memoing.

- Memoing

> '*Grounded theorists write memos to serve analytic purposes*' (Charmaz 2006, p80).

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[20] Strauss defines coding as '*the general term for conceptualizing data; thus, coding includes raising questions and giving provisional answers (hypotheses) about categories and about their relations. A code is the term for any product of this analysis (whether category or a relation among two or more categories*' (Strauss 1987, p20). I take this on board and in fact see the distinction between - and precise definition of - a code and a category as ambiguous at best, thus I use the term code, where perhaps others may sometimes use code and other times category. I see these as analytical tools that form part of my process but which would not remain specifically labelled as a code or a category in the final theorizing and hence I see the overarching term code as fit for my purposes.

Indeed, for me, it is undoubtedly within my memoing, that I undertake most of my analytic work. Initially my memos were drawn from one interview at a time – stimulated by emergent thoughts, perhaps from freewriting, or dominant codes, perhaps made evident through clustering, or similarities and differences coming from the freewrite, the clustering or both.

> *'Writing memos prompts you to elaborate processes, assumptions and actions covered by your codes' (Charmaz 2006, p82).*

I was determined to keep close to my data and so each memo is titled by a code and consists of those extracts of data, coded with this particular code.

> *'When you bring raw data right into your memo, you preserve telling evidence for your analytic ideas from the start. Providing ample verbatim material 'grounds' your abstract analysis and lays a foundation for making claims about it' (Charmaz 2006, p82).*

Within the memo, each extract is then commented upon and this is the opportunity to evaluate data, consider emergent processes, critique, reflect, query, raise questions and debate implied meanings. This grounding of the layers of analysis within the data is central to grounded theory techniques.

> *'Note also in all memos how the data are drawn upon, are interwoven with, and inform the analytic content of each memo' (Strauss 1987, p110).*

Strauss notes that many initial memos may be practical reminders, *'bright ideas'*, *'fumbling around'*, and *'thinking aloud'*. Yet as the analysis moves forward, later memos:

> *'Focus on emerging major categories and their relationships with each other… struggle with whether to choose one or more core categories; integratively summarize previous memos and coding' (Strauss 1987, p109/110).*

Certainly, as I progressed with memo-writing, I found more and more often that later memos were pulling ideas together from previous memos. Not only did I find this, within the analysis of one interview but also after I had three or so interviews behind me, I found that threads, codes, ideas, comparisons and contrasts cut across the interviews and thus some memos began to draw from

different participants to consolidate and flesh out the same concepts or processes.

> *'Including verbatim material from different sources permits you to make precise comparisons right in the memo. These comparisons enable you to define patterns in the empirical world. Thus, memo-writing moves your work beyond individual cases'* (Charmaz 2006, p82).

- Focussed Coding

Focussed coding is inherently embedded within much of my later memoing.

> *'Later, you use focused coding to pinpoint and develop the most salient categories in large batches of data. Theoretical integration begins with focused coding'* (Charmaz 2006, p46).

Indeed it could be argued that many of my later memos, drawing from several different interviews, are best described as elaborations on central codes and core emergent processes, considered and revealed through just such focused coding.

> *'Through focused coding, you can move across interviews and observations and compare people's experiences, actions and interpretations'* (Charmaz 2006, p59).

Any attempt to disentangle where memoing, focused coding and diagramming begin and end within my research analysis would be an onerous and unnecessary task.

- Diagramming

The technique of diagramming emergent processes features heavily within my memoing and is deeply interwoven with this memoing and with the focussed coding.

Diagramming, as with so many tools, serves several purposes within the increasingly complex layers of analysis, from succinctly representing a feature of the data, through making gaps in the data evident, providing a framework for integrating ideas emerging from the data, to acting as an on-going summary of

relationships, flows and processes emerging from the analysis of the data. Diagrams are:

> '*Records of questions, blind spots, and gaps, as well as increasingly complex syntheses of the data. This visual "story" of the thesis process is a useful organizational tool' (Strauss 1987, p179).*

As I move on through the process, more integrative diagrams are evident.

> '*An integrative diagram helps to give a clearer picture of where you have come from in the research after all that data collecting, coding, and memoing. It puts together into a larger pattern, however provisional, a lot of otherwise scattered material – or scattered sense of those materials – into a sense that this project "has really gone somewhere"' (Strauss 1987, p185).*

- Theoretical Sampling

Taking a grounded theory approach, allows (indeed rests upon) the flexibility for ongoing data analysis to direct the way forward, that is interim analysis is fed back into further data collection, a process which may be repeated a number of times.

When further data was needed to compliment the existing material, and try to move towards a denser, more complete picture, then I used theoretical sampling to indicate where to turn next to seek the pertinent data swiftly. This happened on a couple of occasions when I sought out participants who were more likely to be able to shed further light on some early emergent processes (Charmaz 2006; Strauss 1987). Emergent analytic frameworks were adapted and refined over time, through this reiteration of feedback.

2.3.4 A memo to illustrate my analytic approach - 'not helping'

What follows in this section is a replication of a memo resulting from analysis of Charlie's interview, and stems from the code 'not helping'.

Since 'helping' and 'not helping' feature so heavily I will start with one only 'not helping' first in this memo and write a later on 'helping' to contrast.

> *14: 'Year 5 I think that was that time but and then… Then when I moved up and they just… They just never helped me really…'*
> *(Coded 'not helping')*

This is the first reference to not being helped however it sheds no light on process or context really. There is merely the idea that, having been helped in primary, he was not helped in secondary 'as he moved up'.

> *67: 'But I mean at... At Welford High it's just… they didn't give me no help really...'*
> *(Coded 'not helping')*

Nothing to add here.

> *70: 'I just… It was just like really classes… coz my… I gotta admit it was a bit my temper... coz where I couldn't read and they wouldn't help me I got stressed. And like that why I didn't pass English. Coz they said you can have help… like reading the questions but we can't help some other way and then I was like "ok", then when it got to it like they didn't help me… so and then I was like "well I need help I can't read this" and they was like just get along with it so then I just got stressed, ripped it up and walked out.'*
> *(Coded 'being angry' 'not being able to read' 'not helping' 'asking' 'needing' 'not being able to read' 'being left to get on with it' 'getting stressed' 'ripping up' 'walking out')*

There is part of a process here.
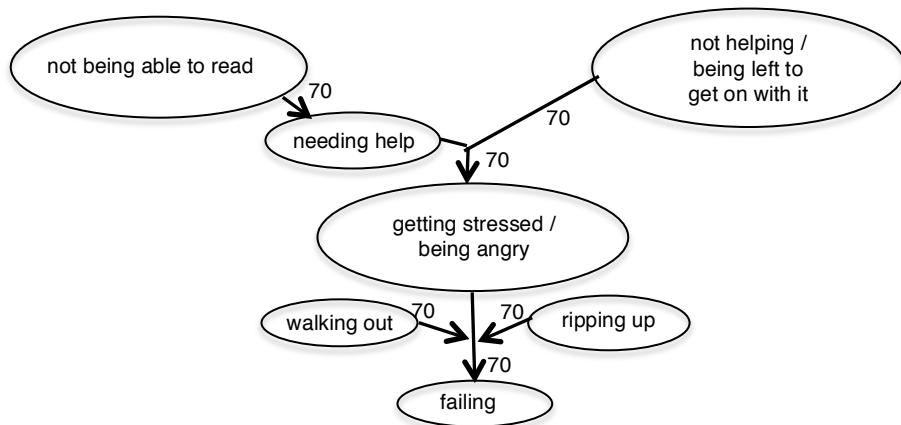
So not being able to read something implies a need for help, when this is coupled with not being helped, it leads to stress, anger and then walking out and failing. (The 'not being able to read' code itself would merit a memo on its own if all instances are not covered here).

85: 'Yeah. School... School didn't help one bit, I've gotta admit.'
(Coded 'not helping')
Statement on his view with no elaboration of a process here.

99: 'Miss Chang yeah…. like I didn't really get no help and then I went down and down and then I had I think it was like one or two lessons with you… and then like and then you got me to know it all and I got a C.'
(Coded 'not liking a teacher/lesson' 'not helping' 'failing' 'helping' 'learning' 'succeeding')

Is the only real part of the diagramming (after comment 70 above) corroborated by this extract. Perhaps the code 'failing' is too extreme here. Perhaps 'going down' would be an intermediate step on a possible path to failure.

There is an element of:
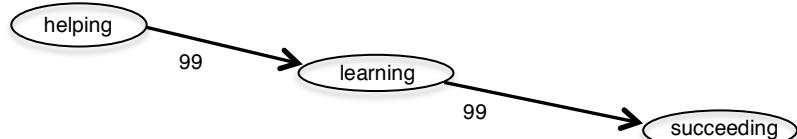
Within here also as part of a different branch.

146: 'Yeah I did go to Maths a bit but and then... like… I don't know it just went…. I just drifted away like… coz where English.... that just went out of the window... I was getting no help… I used to go Learning Support…'
(Coded 'attending' 'drifting away' 'truanting' 'not helping' 'attending LS')

So getting no help perhaps led to it 'going out the window' and him 'drifting away' as well as going to learning support.

(This is difficult. I know about the school system and that he goes on to talk about a member of staff, Ms. Thyme, who helped with low-attaining English students, dyslexic pupils and those with other SpLD. Here the data states he went to LS as a follow on but there is no 'so I was sent to LS for help' explicit statement. Let's carry on with the 'not helping' code to see what emerges).

(Actually <u>NOT</u> this code <u>BUT</u> 155 states *'I went in there for English and I had Ms. Thyme, I think it was'* so he is clear himself in that extract that he was withdrawn to LS for English).

Diagramming becomes:
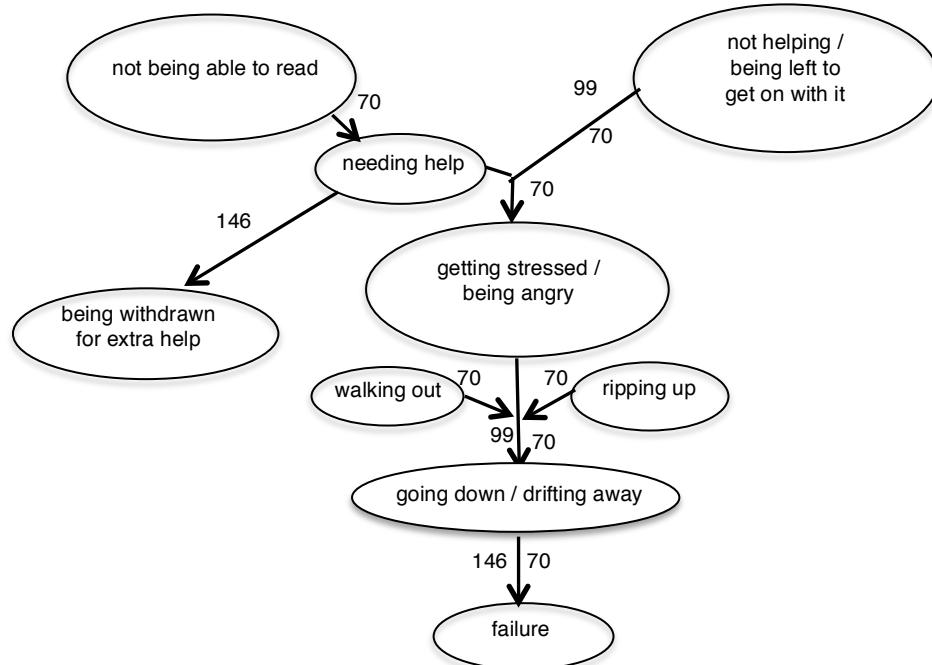
159: 'Thyme yeah her… and she always come in like gave me a bit of paper… walked off… like yeah do that… I don't know what to do…'
(Coded 'not helping' 'not knowing what to do' 'being stuck')

This actually refers to what should have been extra help in LS. This is an illustration of a situation in which he was left not knowing what to do. Being given work to do and being left to get on with it 'do that' indicates this code in fact (add code?).

Diagramming becomes:
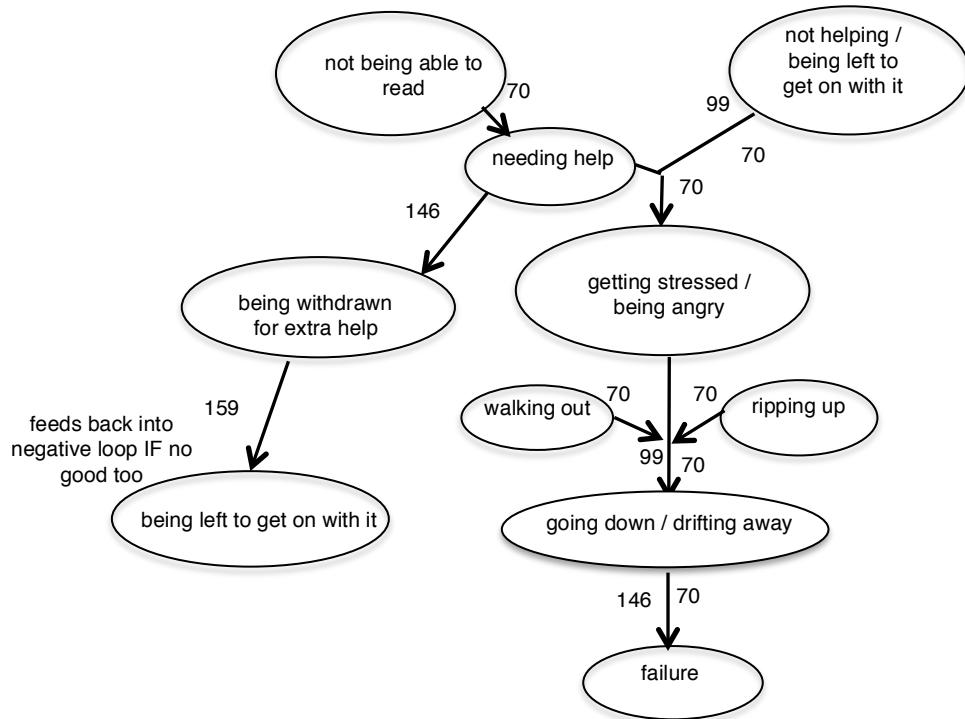
175: 'Yeah she did the Maths… she read the Maths questions for me... And then Ms. Rose was gonna do the English one… but… she was err busy I think… so they didn't have no-one with me… and then that why there was only two in the…. two people and they was like you can't get help coz they was just other people…'
(Coded 'helping' 'not helping' 'not helping')

Is there a hint at lack of available staffing or lack of available resources feeding into not being helped perhaps? The choice of 'only two' could support this.

179: 'And they were like well we can't help you coz we gotta like check everyone else…'
(Coded 'not helping' 'checking/monitoring')

175 & 179 are referring to support with assessments this final remark also seems to support that the invigilators were too busy monitoring to offer help.

311: 'It's quite helpful but aint because how I see it... I could have just not went college and still got everything I would have had and got now… like if I didn't go college like… I could have probably been better off coz I would have got a job and I would have started working and already built myself up to be like… like some of my mates I see they've already been at a company and they're like earning over a grand now…'
(Coded 'helping' 'not helping' 'not attending' 'being better off' 'working' 'improving' 'learning')

This is a different process <u>conjectured</u>, hypothetical here.

```
not going          getting a          starting work          building up          earning more
to college   311    job        311    younger        311                311
```

This is also him reflecting on his friends, a select portion of them presumably ('some') and speculating what may have happened. It is interesting in as much as it reflects on his feelings about his own experience and what might have been but it is not an attempt at recounting events and is hence <u>speculation.</u>

> *369: 'Wrong kind of stuff I think... yeah... because errr well we aint really had no help yet... we're just talking about alcohol and everything but…. to be fair I don't need that really… I want to sit down like, write down... they're talking about… like... all like different bits'*
> *(Coded 'not helping' 'talking' 'not needing' 'wanting help' 'writing' 'talking')*

This relates to college English classes as does the next extract with the 'not helping' code.

> *375: 'It's not really helping me coz we're just listening and copying off the board… So I'm no getting no knowledge into my head...'*
> *(Coded 'not helping' 'listening' 'copying' 'not learning')*

There is something here that *'just listening and copying off the board'* does not help him learn. The word *just* may be crucial as it could imply that in combinations listening and/ or copying could have a role to play. After all in 369 he states that the *'just talking'* did not help and that he wanted to write. It is hard to extract exactly why he was not learning and did not find this helpful from these extracts then.

> *420: 'Yes. Like some teachers they would like… they wouldn't even… they just write something on the board and you gotta figure it out… and like they don't tell you what you gotta do…. Like everyone else… some people would know but others… like me and that… I don't know and I can't and I don't want to like say coz it's embarrassing… but yeah some teachers was just like… I don't know how to like put it in like… (laughs)'*
> *(Coded 'being left alone' 'not helping' 'not knowing what to do' 'being stuck' 'not asking' 'embarrassing')*

The summary diagramming (after comment 159 above) speaks to this in part then ➔ the 'not helping / being left to get on with it' feeding into 'being stuck / not knowing what to do' is corroborated here. There is another thread, not wanting to say *'coz it's embarrassing'*. This was a feature for Donna see Book 1 diagramming p24/25. So here for Charlie we have:

```
  ( embarrassing to ask ) ———420———▶ ( not asking )
```

So diagramming:

```
                              feeds back into              ( lack of resources /
                              negative loop IF no               staffing )
                              good too                      175  \  179
  ( not being        70                                            ▼
    able to read ) ──▶ ( needing help ) ──420──▶ ( embarrassing   ( not helping /
                                                    to ask )        being left to
                          │ 146                        420           get on with it )
                          ▼                         ( not asking )  70 / 420
                    ( being withdrawn                         70       99
                      for extra help )                        420
                          │ 159                                 ▼
                          ▼                              ( being stuck /
                    ( being left to get on it )           not knowing
                                                          what to do )
                                                               │ 70
                                                               ▼
                                                        ( getting stressed /
                                                          being angry )
                                                          70      ( ripping up )
  ( going down / drifting away ) ──99──▶                         ( walking out )
                                  146          70
                                                ▼
                                            ( failing )
```

Example of Overview Diagramming for Complete Interview:
From Analysis of Charlie's Interview
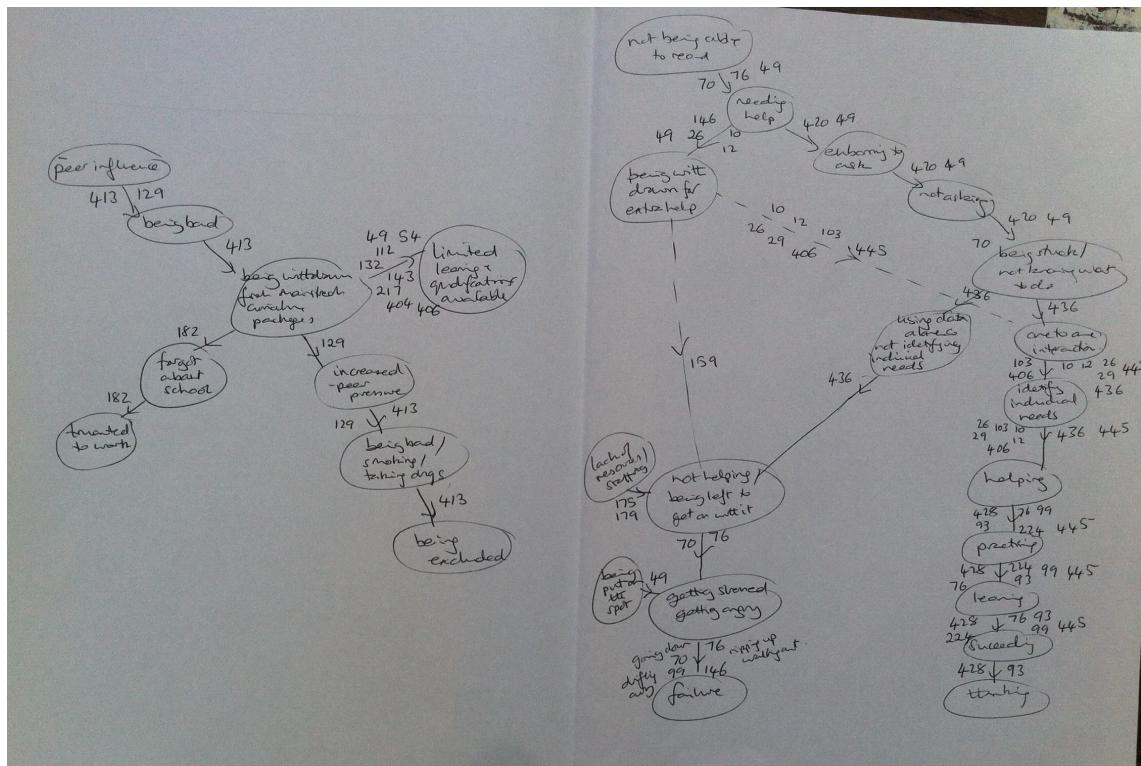
Further Example of Overview Diagramming for Complete Interview:
From Analysis of Eliot's Interview
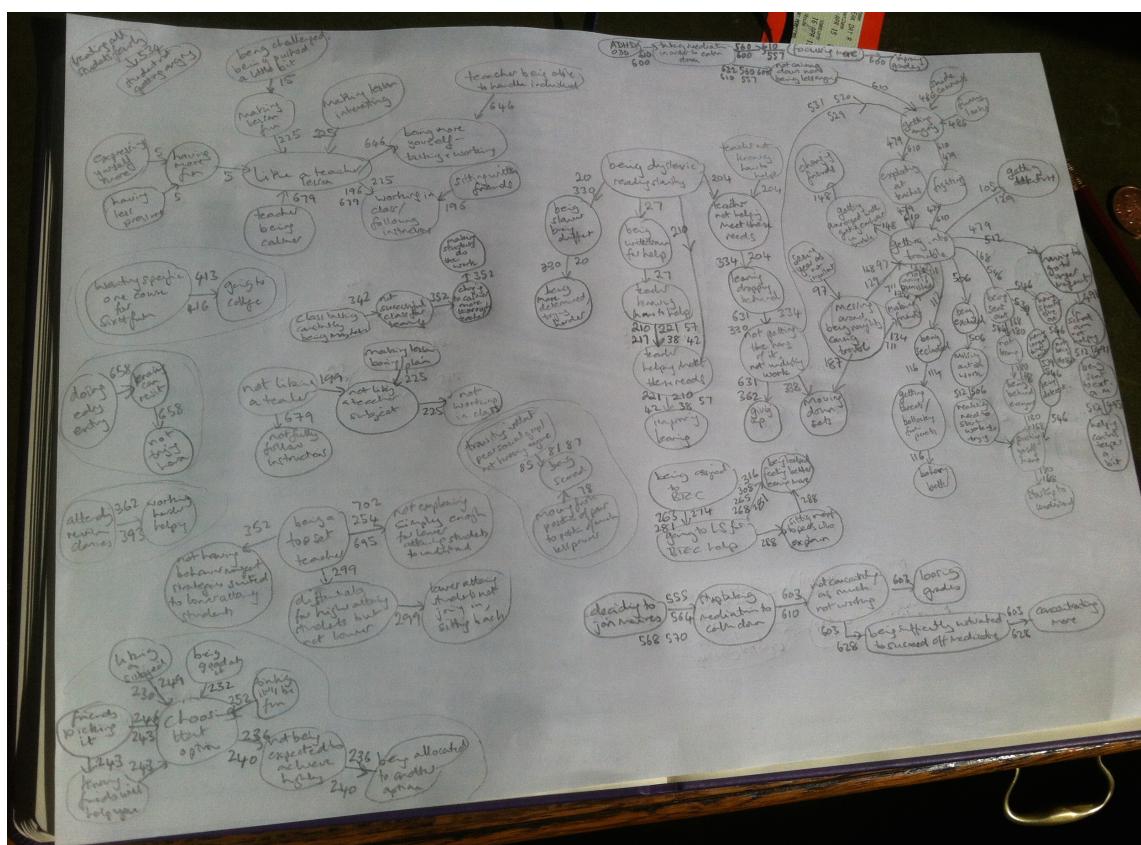
2.4 Moving Forward

The following four chapters stem from this analysis, drawing from the larger 'big codes' or categories. The first results chapter relates to transition from primary to secondary school, the second then moves on to consider structural concerns surrounding groupings, options choices and pathways. The remaining chapters move away from structural concerns to hone in on the day-to-day experiences of schooling. The third results chapter covers aspects of the effective classroom - the students likes and dislikes - and the fourth zooms in further to consider some more individuals concerns and personally perceived barriers to successful engagement and learning.

Since the voices of the students form the heart and soul of this work, I will largely organise the chapters to once again emphasise this, with data extracts and associated analysis and discussion being presented prior to a direct engagement with the literature. Subsequently the literature will be used to extend the discussion of the themes and issues identified in the analysis of the data. This is not intended to suggest any fundamental partition between the data analysis and the literature, but rather to foreground the voices of these marginalised students.

In a final chapter I will consider general implications for policy and practice, both in terms of some small interventions and specific measures as well as some more broad, sweeping and comprehensive - if more distant and speculative - solutions.

Chapter 3: Transitioning

3.1 Going from Big Fish to Little Fish

> *ELIOT: Well at first I was scared. Coz I was like… coz like when you're in primary school and you're in Year 6 you're the big fish in the little pond. And then you go in high school you're the little fish in the bigger pond.*
>
> *DONNA: I was quite attitudy. Coz obviously you're going from the top of the school to the bottom, you still think you've got that attitude like but it's weird.*

Both Donna and Eliot articulate that transition is about moving from the top of one school to the bottom of another – a change of status or power then, perhaps. Indeed whether like Eliot this manifests itself in being scared as you take on the role of the *'little fish,'* or as with Donna, the attitude derived from having been at the top of the primary school carries over into the start of the secondary school, there is clearly a disjuncture, a shift and change – *'it's weird'.*

Moving on from primary school to secondary school has long been acknowledged as a potentially harrowing time for many students. Indeed, the very existence of a spectrum of measures to try to smooth this transition point – from open evenings, open days and induction days through secondary school staff visiting the feeder primary schools to transition summer schools to name but a few - illustrates how widely this transition is recognised as potentially hazardous.

Although some students are excited and thrive, there are nonetheless others for whom the experience is fraught with apprehension and stress. Students may be anxious about change, fearing the unknown and this may frequently be fuelled by the abundance of anecdotes as to what the big school is like and just what it is that is rumoured to go on there. Indeed, there is a wealth of literature, from across the academic and professional arenas, addressing just such issues surrounding this transition point.

Here I will first narrate what has emerged from my research in relation to transitioning, not only drawing on processes that arise repeatedly across the experience of several individuals, but also making reference to more detailed personal stories, where apposite, in order to flesh out a fuller picture. Only after seeing what has emerged from the data, will I subsequently interlink my findings with reference to salient literature, showing where there is consistency and broad agreement, where there is greater friction and where there may be an illuminating instance or fresh perspective

3.2 Emergent Themes
3.2.1 Anxiety - due in part to not knowing anyone in the secondary school

> *ELIOT: Well at first I was scared.*

With this succinct extract, Eliot articulates an emotion, which was common amongst several of his peers, namely that transitioning from primary school to secondary school is frightening. He elaborates:

> *ELIOT: I was a bit scared of everyone, everything else because I don't know who else was going there. There was very few people from my school going, so.*
> *LWE: Really, but you were at?*
> *ELIOT: East Welford. Ed and that lot, I knew 'em but I didn't talk to them.*
> *LWE: OK. So it wasn't your friendship group coming?*
> *ELIOT: Yeah. The only one I really knew and like were mates was Earl and we weren't in any of the same classes so I was like, I'm gonna have to meet loads of new people that I don't know and don't talk to.*

Here then there is evidence of an emerging process within the data. Eliot states that the reason for his being scared was that he was not transitioning with friends; he would have to meet, talk to and get to know new people.

It is also interesting to note that here mere familiarity with peers does not seem to help in lessening any apprehension, since Eliot is clearly dismissive of one group 'Ed and that lot' who he knew from primary school. They were transitioning with him but were not peers he talked to. He makes a clear distinction between this, perhaps mere recognition, level of knowing someone and that of being '*mates*', with the one person he '*really knew*'.

In fact this one friend that was going to the same secondary school as he was, turned out not to be in any of his classes, so in effect he had no one to hand at secondary school with whom he was already friendly. When in class then, it would be as if he had transitioned alone.

This reason for fearing the move from primary school to secondary school, that of not transitioning with friends and not knowing anyone, is echoed by both Donna and Charanjeet:

> DONNA: I was petrified. I didn't know anybody at all at like St Marys, coz like it was like two hours away from me.

> CHARANJEET: I umm… didn't know anyone in like Year 7 and it was hard coz that's high school and that's when you need to know people.

Both girls in fact say that they knew no one at all in their secondary school at the start of Year 7. The fear is palpable in their choice of words, with Donna using the word 'petrified' and Charanjeet stating 'it was hard' and talking about a 'need' to know people.

Donna suggests a possible explanation as to why she did not go to the same secondary school as any one she already knew. This she sees as a matter of distance, as she attended a secondary school that was a long way away from her home and her neighbourhood primary school. Perhaps this added dimension of having to travel a greater distance, in to presumably less familiar territory, fed into her anxiety also.

In this extract from the early stages of the interview with Devina, while she may arguably be considered to be less forthcoming, more hesitant and perhaps to require greater prompts, the same underlying point is nevertheless once again evident - that one possible cause, which makes moving to a secondary school scary, is not knowing anyone.

> LWE: Did any friends come with you? Did you come here alone?
> DEVINA: Nah, I come here on my own.
> LWE: Was that a bit scary?
> DEVINA: Yeah it was a little bit coz I didn't like know anyone.

LWE: You didn't know a single person in the whole school?
DEVINA: No.

3.2.2 Lack of anxiety - due in part to knowing people in the secondary school

The idea that moving to a secondary school is frightening, in part because of not knowing anyone there, would seem to suggest the corollary that it would be less alarming, if an individual did know other people there, prior to starting. What indication is there then, that knowing people in the secondary school - whether they are peers coming together from primary, neighbours and local friends from the area or people in years above - does indeed mitigate some of the fear of transition and even perhaps lead to some positive anticipation and excitement about the impending change?

In terms of transition, Bradley states *'I weren't really bothered'* and in discussing this, he makes reference to knowing people for a variety of reasons, peers from primary - *'there was a lot of us'* - other peers from football outside of school, older siblings and many of their friends.

> *BRADLEY: I got three elder sisters that all come here… I knew people like my sisters mates who were in the older years and I knew quite a few people.*
> *LWE: So it wasn't a big deal at all.*
> *BRADLEY: It wasn't a big deal no.*
> *LWE: And then in Year 7 you were in the same form as a whole bunch of people you already knew?*
> *BRADLEY: A few people. As well I played football with a few people in my form which I never knew they was going to come to my school. So outside school it was from football I knew people that went here.*

Bradley clearly felt that he knew many people in secondary school, in the years above and transitioning with him, even other people who turned out to be in his year who he already knew from football, even though he had not known they would be there. It is clear from this extract that he did not feel particularly anxious about the start of secondary school and it is also clear that he knew many people. There is thus some indication that these things may be linked but he does not explicitly articulate this himself.

So is there an instance where the link between knowing people in secondary school and minimising anxiety at transition is made more overt?

> *LWE: Was it quite scary coming to secondary or easy?*
> *EDDIE: It was all right coz I still had friends from primary school that came and they knew people from other schools so we all just kind of just got along from there.*

In this remark Eddie asserts that it was *'all right'* coming to secondary school because he had peers from primary school transitioning with him and that in fact they knew different people who were also starting at secondary school with them, so he would presumably have a readily available set of friends and friends of friends to talk to. This would indeed seem to support the statement that knowing people at the secondary school does make transitioning easier. It is however worth noting that, while Eddie does make his statement in response to being asked about whether or not it was scary coming to secondary school, he could conceivably be referring to the first phase of being at the school, rather than specifically to any lessening of apprehension prior to starting. Are there further remarks to draw from, which could be clarifying with regard to this ambiguity?

> *LWE: So you weren't worried about coming up to secondary or anything?*
> *DENE: Nah. It's coz obviously I knew everyone. Pretty much, nearly everyone. Coz of my brother. Coz my brother was here.*
> *LWE: So in fact you were confident?*
> *DENE: Yeah. I didn't mind coming here.*

Dene is clear that knowing people was why he was not worried and *'didn't mind'* about coming up to secondary school. Through his brother he knew what he felt was a substantial proportion of the student population in fact. The essence of knowing people at secondary school and so feeling fine about attending is clear from Dene as it was from Eddie. Again, as with the remark made by Eddie, it is conceivable that Dene is referring to how he felt day-to-day at the start of attending secondary school as opposed to whether or not he felt any less anxious prior to starting, although it could clearly be argued that both would relate to smoothing transition albeit in slightly different ways. Does knowing people in the secondary school merely make the first few days and weeks more

bearable, or does it go further in lessening anxiety prior to starting at the secondary school? Chris adds more clarity to this:

> *CHRIS: I kind of felt it was quite comfortable, coz everyone was saying that going to big school would be all scary and that but I had my brothers here, I had two brothers here and a cousin as well…*
> *So I felt quite confortable really and there was quite a lot of people coming from my primary school to here that I knew.*
> *LWE: Including some friends?*
> *CHRIS: Yeah of course, so I didn't find it that scary at all.*

This then illuminates a case where knowing people, in Chris's case older siblings and other family members, as well as peers from his primary school, does indeed lessen, or in this particular instance remove, any anxiety prior to starting.

Is there anything to be gleaned from considering whom the individuals talk about knowing on coming to secondary school? Eddie mentioned friends from his primary school, Dene talked about his older brother who opened up a vast social network, while Chris has older family members and peers. Is it significant that he mentioned the older family members first and only afterwards brought up the peers? Is there something here to imply that, in terms of diminishing fear, the presence of family is more significant than friends, or perhaps that knowing older students already in the secondary school is more significant than peers due to start at the same time?

> *LWE: How did you feel about coming to secondary?*
> *BETHANY: Dunno. It was quite scary…. but my sister was here as well so.*
> *LWE: Your sister was how much older?*
> *BETHANY: Three years older.*
> *LWE: So it wasn't as scary for you maybe as some then?*
> *BETHANY: No.*
> *LWE: A lot of people from your school probably came right, from Greylodge?*
> *BETHANY: Yeah coz it's just down the road.*
> *LWE: Did you have a close friend in your form from before?*
> *BETHANY: Um. Yeah. I had a girl in my form from like…. We was in Year 1 together all the way up to Year 11, so.*

Bethany indicates that her sister being at the secondary school lessened her fear. She refers to her sister spontaneously but mentions peers only after being

prompted; this despite the fact that it emerges that she has kept one close friend as a classmate right through the entirety of primary and secondary school. Does this also imply that the presence of siblings looms larger in lessening anxiety than that of peers? If indeed it did, would there be any way to tell if it were family that was of greater significance than friends, or knowing existing secondary school students as opposed to transitioning concurrently?

> *LWE: Did a lot of your friends go with you from primary school?*
> *FELICIA: No only like five of my friends but I knew all the older girls there coz I went to an all girls school. So I knew all of the older girls there, so it was fine… and they went to my primary school as well and then they obviously went to secondary school. Yeah they obviously went (laughs) yeah they obviously went to secondary school and then I joined them after.*
> *LWE: So it was easy? It wasn't frightening?*
> *FELICIA: No. It wasn't no. Like one of my best friends... she went to a different school but we started the same secondary school together and she lived next door to me so we went to school there and back with each other and everything, so it was fine. We was in most of each others classes.*
> *LWE: And so you were quite happy starting secondary?*
> *FELICIA: Yeah.*

Felicia is another student who looks back on transitioning without memories of being frightened. She in fact has no siblings and makes no reference to any family members in terms of transition. Hence she only recounts the effects firstly of knowing older students whom she knew previously from her primary school, from the years above, and secondly of having friends who are transitioning with her. It is interesting to note that Felicia is dismissive of the number of peers transitioning with her, as *'only like five of my friends'*. Whether or not this could be seen as a small or a significant number of friends to progress with into the same secondary school, is neither here nor there. What is important is how it felt for Felicia and she plainly emphasises the importance of knowing older students, when it comes to feeling fine about starting school, as opposed to what she perceives to be a small number of peers. She does go on to explain that her anxiety was also diminished by having one particular great friend and neighbour in many of her classes, with whom she could travel to and from school together. This friend was clearly a source of reassurance and a

significant individual for Felicia, yet she did not come to mind until after the older girls had been mentioned.

Felicia's remarks clearly support the broad concept that knowing people at secondary school reduces feeling anxious about transition. There is also some suggestion from Felicia's extract – as perhaps from both Bethany and Chris – that conceivably anxiety is more readily diminished by knowing older students already present at the secondary school, compared with the benefit of transitioning with friends.

Can knowing people at secondary school go further than merely diminishing anxiety and actually help students feel positive about this transition? Faye certainly seems to think so.

> *LWE: Do you remember how you felt about coming up to secondary school?*
> *FAYE: I think I was excited at the time… because both my brothers were here.*

There is then some evidence to demonstrate not only the process that not knowing people in the secondary school is one cause of anxiety on transitioning, but also that knowing people can diminish, or even remove, this anxiety. Furthermore, there is some, perhaps more tentative indication, largely inferred through implied meaning, that knowing older students, who are already present in the secondary school, be they friends or family, has a greater role in diminishing fear than transitioning with friends.

This is not to downplay the hugely supportive role that peers can and do play in smoothing transition for particular individuals. Charanjeet is an illuminating case in point here. For her, the transition from primary to secondary came at a personally very challenging time. The contrast between attending a secondary school where she knew no one and then moving to a school where she already knew many people, including her best friend, is stark.

> *CHARANJEET: In primary school like I think Year 5 and that… I was going through… a hard time and I kind of got like an eating disorder so in Year 7 I stopped going. I was in hospital a lot so*

whenever I did go… I umm didn't know anyone in like Year 7 and it was hard coz that's high school and that's when you need to know people and then like obviously Chelsea was like my best friend so she was like "just come here"… coz like with an eating disorder like the other half of stuff is like being depressed and that… and I knew like I wouldn't be depressed here so I moved here in Year 8.
LWE: And then you had Chelsea in your form?
CHARANJEET: Yeah.
LWE: So that was a good start?
CHARANJEET: Yeah that was fine. I knew like loads of people here are from my primary school so I… I knew loads of people here.
LWE: So actually you were happier when you started here?
CHARANJEET: Yeah. I like this school.

3.2.3 Effects of formal transition measures

Faye makes direct reference to formal transition events and to attending the secondary school prior to starting there. She had been to see her older siblings perform.

> *LWE: So you had been to the school already?*
> *FAYE: Yeah when there was Christmas concerts and stuff and the boys were in them.*

This extract is from a more general conversation about not worrying about transition, so is there some implied meaning here, that being more familiar with the buildings and the layout may well have fed into lessening anxiety about starting secondary school? Despite mentioning the *'concerts and stuff'* as part of this particular conversation, Faye does not overtly make any such claim. She does however go on to make more definitive claims about the benefits of the more formal transition measures.

> *LWE: Do you remember the beginning then? Like your form and like the start? Was it scary or…?*
> *FAYE: Not that much really coz we had the induction day so you met people in your form already so I sort of already like talked to them and got friendly… a bit like friends with them before… and the summer school and everything.*

For Faye then, the ability to begin to form friendships at the induction day clearly diminished her anxiety. She mentions, on the same point, that she also attended the *'summer school and everything'*, so was it the induction day alone that helped her in forming friendships? Perhaps it was the effects of these

events combined, which fed into reducing her worries about transitioning. Certainly, Eliot has a different take, when discussing the benefits of just attending the induction day.

> *ELIOT: So at first I was nervous but I mean on the induction day I got to meet all of them. They were all quite all right but they just like… I was still nervous coz I just didn't know anyone.*

Here Eliot makes specific reference to meeting his new peers at the induction day. While there may be some indication from the phrase *'so at first I was nervous but …'*, that Eliot had expected the induction day and meeting his new classmates to go some way towards quashing his fears, he is clear that he nevertheless remained nervous. He still attributed this to not knowing anyone, so evidently he did not feel that at the induction day he had been able to forge friendships. Perhaps for him, this type of relatively short one-day encounter is simply not substantial enough to really get to know anyone in order to plausibly reduce the anxiety of transition. Certainly, it may take some people longer than others to feel comfortable with new people and to feel the beginnings of a friendship emerge. It is possible that a day was an ample length of time to spend with new people and to start to really get to know them sufficiently that it could play a role in lessening the anxiety of transition for Faye, whereas for Eliot more time would be needed.

3.2.4 Lost in Transition

When discussing with marginalised students it is perhaps not surprising that the issue of SEND should arise. There are two cases here where the individual student themselves instinctively connects the issue of their own needs and the issue of transitioning from primary school to secondary school. There is a wealth of detail in the data and later chapters will touch on different aspects of SEND from different angles. Here the focus is on transition, so it is through this lens that the issues are viewed.

Faye clearly sees the fact that she never received a statement of SEND at primary school as a significant contributing factor to making her later education more difficult.

> *FAYE: In primary school we tried to get me statemented. Well I didn't but my mum did but they wouldn't. So I think, if I was, it would make everything a bit more easier. Like the whole part of school and they would probably actually like take a bit more notice and actually be like 'oh actually she does have a problem' like and not just think yeah…*

It is Faye's opinion then that had her primary school given her a statement of SEND *'it would make everything a bit more easier.'* There would be a greater recognition of her having a particular problem and associated needs. This she relates broadly to *'like the whole part of school'*, however, as she continues, Faye specifically mentions moving from primary school to secondary school.

> *LWE: And no one tried again later on or…?*
> *FAYE: No. I should have been statemented and my mum was annoyed but it didn't…*
> *LWE: For your condition?[21] Not for your learning?*
> *FAYE: Yeah. And for me. For me it just made the fact that like… I don't really know coz I didn't get much involved but it would just make lots easier, like at secondary school, when I did the transfer from primary to secondary school and everything…. and make it all a bit easier.*

Faye herself connected the lack of a statement with having a harder time not just at secondary school but in particular also at transition. What then is this connection for her, between not having a statement and having a more difficult transition? From the earlier passage it can be seen that she has a sense that her condition, her '*problem*', was dismissed and not taken notice of at secondary school. Is this acknowledgement of her condition what she sensed was lost in transition? For Faye then, is transition the disjuncture, which fractured any continuity in terms of a general understanding, appreciation and acceptance of her condition across her school community?

After many years in the same primary school, was it indeed the case that her condition was known and then at transition, without a formal statement of SEND, she would have to start again in terms of explaining her condition and

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[21] Faye has a syndrome, which increasingly limits her mobility, resulting in being labelled as having 'disability' needs. She is also on the SEND register for learning needs. See Appendix B.

having her needs recognised and met? Is there anything else, in her own words that touches further on her attitude to transition? Certainly, she moved from a small primary school, with only one form entry per year group, to a secondary school with in excess of twelve hundred students.

> *FAYE: We had a really small Year so it was… we were all quite close.*

Her statement that at primary school, in her year group *'we were all quite close'* offers an impression of security and familiarity. Potentially this could imply that her needs were indeed known, respected and met. Moving into the less familiar, the less known, at secondary school, with so many new faces, staff and students, necessarily means getting to know many new people. This would be the case, presumably, in varying degrees, for all students although those from smaller primary schools may perhaps feel it more acutely. Possibly Faye felt this more acutely for two reasons however; not only because she came from a tightknit primary school but also because she felt conscious of having to explain her SEND all over again.

Through Faye's eyes, transition was harder for her without a prior statement of SEND in place, presumably since she would have to explain, inform and share these additional personal details with others herself. This knowledge was lost in transition. It would be down to her to claw back any recognition for her condition and perhaps, from her remarks, she never felt she managed to do this to any great effect. Thus, there is a sense in which she in part blames transition for her subsequent difficulties at secondary school. Prior to the move, she had felt comfortable and known. Subsequently, she never quite recovered that position of acceptance.

For a student in possession of a statement of SEND at transition, their individual needs should at the very least have already been communicated to the pertinent staff. So to some extent then, Faye makes a very credible point, that the extra challenge confronting individuals with additional specific needs, at transition, would surely be somewhat alleviated through having a statement, since some staff would be informed from the outset.

Charlie's story has many similarities with Faye's.

> *LWE: Can you tell me anything you remember about primary?*
> *CHARLIE: Well I got... I was getting help with my English and that... like one-on-ones.*
> *LWE: What age do you think that was?*
> *CHARLIE: Year 5 I think that was that time but and then... Then when I moved up and they just.... They just never helped me really...*
> *LWE: In Year 6, you got help too or...?*
> *CHARLIE: Yeah. Well it was like the end of Year 6 and they was like clocking on that they was like thinking I was dyslexic and then... when I got to Year 7, there was no records or nothing so...*
> *LWE: Is that what happened? You had to start again. They like lost the information or something.*
> *CHARLIE: Yeah and then I didn't get tested til Year 11 and that.*

Here Charlie makes it explicit that he thinks that something was literally lost at transition, stating *'when I got to Year 7, there was no records or nothing'*. It is however possible that he was actually never tested for dyslexia in primary school, so no official record would exist, but in his recollection his teachers were at the very least suspecting, *'clocking on'*, in Year 6 that he may be dyslexic. He also recalls receiving extra help in primary school, showing that there was formal recognition of some additional learning needs, with him having one-to-one support with his English work. He contrasts this starkly with secondary school, saying that once he had moved up to secondary *school 'they just never helped me really.'* Even if no records were lost then, at the very least the knowledge that he may require extra help, at least in English, did disappear.

This echoes what Faye noted. For both Faye and Charlie, they felt that after some time within the same primary school, their specific learning needs or other SEND were established and known, even if they were not deemed sufficient for a formal statement. On moving to secondary school this knowledge and insight was lost. Both individuals thus blame transition as a substantial contributing factor in their future difficulties in education. Indeed, Charlie reiterates this.

> *CHARLIE: Well I think... If I go back like from Year like 5 into 6, if they got me tested then... I think my life would have been different from til now... Coz where they've only tested at the end of Year 11... now I've hit college they ain't got the proof, they don't know if I've been tested... like I don't even know if I've got... been tested*

*coz they said to me "you need to get proof that you're dyslexic"...
And err... They only found out like in Year 11 and I think that my
mums got the papers somewhere but... if they test me before I
think that would've changed everything... Coz like they would have
given me more help and everything yeah.*

Here he overtly blames the lack of an early diagnosis of his dyslexia for his later
educational trajectory. He thinks that had he been tested in primary *'my life
would have been different'*. He reasserts this strength of feeling later also with
the phrase *'I think that would've changed everything'*. It is the additional help,
which he never received at secondary school, which he believes could have
made the difference. He does not mention transition explicitly in this fragment
but coupled with his remarks from the previous extract, it is evident that such an
early identification could only have fed into more help later, if this knowledge
was not lost at transition. There is a case to be made from Charlie's story also
then for an early diagnosis which stays recognised across transition, so again
perhaps a formal statement of SEND would help with this.

There is one final extract in which Charlie talks about transition and the decision
as to which secondary school to go to. It also reaffirms that for him transition
can be partly blamed for his subsequent travails. He in fact changes his mind as
to which school to go to and he sees his choice of secondary school in the end,
as a mistake. The point of transition could hardly be blamed more clearly, than
by being labelled as a mistake, in his words '*I did the wrong idea'*.

*LWE: So you arrived in Year 7. Were there lots of people from your
primary here or… did you have any friends here?
CHARLIE: Yeah that's why. I was gonna go Meadowcroft. And I
had it arranged from May and…. they was like ah 50 people was
going Welford High… and me and one other so….
LWE: Oh wow what Primary were you at then?
CHARLIE: Greylodge.
LWE: You think 50 people from your year came?
CHARLIE: Yeah more than 50 came coz they said… they had like a
little ruler thing... it was like so far 50 people's going to Welford
High, 20s going this one, 10... Monkston was the only like 3 or 4
was...
LWE: So you changed because more people were coming here?
CHARLIE: Yeah and... I think I did the wrong idea.
LWE: Really?
CHARLIE: To be fair, yeah.*

Faye and Charlie evidently blame the disjointedness of transition for the subsequent loss of their needs being known at secondary school.

3.2.5 Labelling by association with siblings

Charlie changed his mind as to which secondary school to go to, based on realising where the rest of his year group from his primary school was going. How big a factor this is in an individual decision would be extremely hard to determine. Given that transitioning with friends can lessen the anxiety associated with this move, it probably does play a role and is a consideration for many. Whether it is any sort of deciding factor is another matter. This is much clearer when it comes to the familiar practice of following family members to the same secondary school, in particular siblings.

> *DENE: My brother was here.*
>
> *CHRIS: I had my brothers here, I had two brothers here and a cousin as well.*
>
> *BRADLEY: I got three elder sisters that all come here.*
>
> *BETHANY: My sister was here.*
>
> *DONNA: My cousin and my sister went there.*

Certainly then it seems that many individuals do end up following older siblings to secondary school. Is there much to illuminate why? Eamonn talks of gaining a place because of his sibling already being at the school. Certainly many admissions policies, including that at Welford High, explicitly refer to siblings as a part of the admissions criterion.

> *EAMONN: And the only reason I got in here was coz of my brother.*

So perhaps younger family members follow their siblings to secondary school simply as they are more likely to gain a place at a school where they already have a sibling on role. There is an additional plausible explanation alluded to by Faye.

> *LWE: So you never thought about going where everyone else was going?*

FAYE: No. I could of but I chose not to really coz Bill and Clive were here so it was just easier.

For Faye then, despite the fact that most of her primary school peers were going to a different secondary school, it was nevertheless *'just easier'* to go to the school that her two older brothers attended. Alfie makes explicit one way in which siblings all being at the same school makes things easier.

ALFIE: So we all like went together, like purely coz mum would have to get us to school. She can't physically get us to two different schools.

This is a common sense justification for wanting to keep siblings together at the same school, for the practicality and ease of transportation, whether this is older siblings escorting the younger ones to and from school safely or parents on a school run. For Alfie's mum, this would make taking her children to and from school easier.

In terms of lessening the anxiety of transition, knowing others in the secondary school, in particular older students, who are already established there, can play a positive role. Combine this with the fact that following siblings to the same secondary school can be easier in terms of convenience and transportation and it seems very positive indeed to follow in the footsteps of your older siblings. Are there other aspects to being in the same environment as older family members? Bethany explains how she did not want to be like her older sister and arguably in fact learnt from her sister's mistakes.

LWE: Did you find it easy to settle in?
BETHANY: Yeah. I found it all right. I had a few problems with some girls but it was all right.
LWE: Girls from other schools or?
BETHANY: Well girls from our like primary school who like come up with us but as soon as they come up to secondary school it changed. Like they all started to like get bad attitude and follow the other crowds and stuff. So I didn't want to be with that crowd because my sister used to be with that crowd and I remember what my mum used to be like with her so I didn't want to be like that either. So I tried to come away from the wrong crowd.
LWE: So they were trying to get you to do naughty things with them?
BETHANY: Bunk... Smoke.

LWE: So how hard was that to say no to?
BETHANY: It was quite all right. I didn't really care. I'm not bothered like with my older sister she's bothered… she's worried what other people think of her, whereas I don't care what other people think of me.

At the start of secondary, Bethany made choices in her own life, drawing from her sister's experience and the way their mother had reacted previously. Was it easier for Bethany to draw these parallels and learn from her sister's mistakes because they were in the same secondary school? Was it because she was being drawn into the periphery of the very same crowd that she recognised similarities with her sisters past? Would she have been less able to identify with and perhaps even less aware of what her sister had been up to, if they were at different schools? These questions are impossible to address with any certainty. It is clear though that for Bethany, following in her sister's footsteps in terms of attending the same secondary school, did not mean that she went down the same path socially as her sister. On the contrary, she made her own decisions and it could be readily argued that she had benefitted from knowing about her sisters experiences – she choose not to make the same mistakes, not to care too much what other people think of her and not to follow the crowd. For Bethany then it seems that there was no negative effect from following her sister to secondary school. Is there ever a potential downside?

Bethany's extract imparts her own thoughts, opinions and choices when it comes to being like her sister or not. When viewed from the perspective of other people at school, is there any impact on an individual from following their siblings to secondary school? Eamonn brings up the noteworthy idea of being expected to be similar to his brother.

EAMONN: My brother was just really smart. My brother has always been smart. They always thought I'd follow in my brother's footsteps. Where I was more the naughty one.

He is not explicit as to whom it was that had labelled him by association with his brother but he is clear that he was presumed and expected to be like him. Arguably being expected to be *'smart'* may not be the worst label to be stuck with but any label necessarily comes with an added pressure to either live up to

this expectation or perhaps to shake it off through active resistance in a quest to be seen otherwise. Would Eamonn have been just as naughty had he not followed his brother to school? If left to his own devices and not labelled by association, would he have taken a different path? Was his being '*the naughty one*' fuelled in part by trying to get out from under the expectations of being like his brother - a deliberate act of resistance? Whether or not this was indeed the case, the labelling in itself is likely to have had some sort of impact on Eamonn's on-going identity formation and self-perception.

Alfie has a story rife with labelling by association with his older siblings and his brother in particular, as he followed them from school to school. This has had a profound effect on his educational trajectory in many ways and is hence worth examining in some detail. Alfie has a sister who is several years older and a brother in the academic year above him. The three siblings went to the same schools. His brother had been excluded from two primary schools and each time he was '*kicked out*' this meant all three of them starting afresh at a different school. Thus for Alfie these issues frame not just his transition from primary to secondary but additionally his transfer between different primary's and different secondary's.

> *ALFIE: When I was in Year 3 we got moved to another school coz he basically got kicked out of primary school… First day of my second primary school my brother knocked a kid out so we immediately went to a third one… In the third one he seemed to settle down and we all seemed to like get on with it.*

As early as Year 3 then, Alfie's education is tangibly impacted by the actions of his older brother. Alfie was taken out of one school and moved to another – twice - as a direct consequence, not of his own behaviour, but of that of his brother. In recounting his changeable time in various primary schools, Alfie speaks of practicalities and facts. There is little embellishment in terms of feelings, possible impacts or expectations. Despite it being evident from the exclusions that his brother must have entered each subsequent primary school with some reputation and baggage, even if only among a select few members of staff, there has been no mention thus far of Alfie or his sister being tarnished by this, of any labelling by association or assumptions about them being just like

their brother. Perhaps this did not occur; perhaps if it did Alfie himself was sheltered from it or perhaps any memories of such things have since faded. In fact there is no mention of how these moves affected Alfie at all. Later this does begin to emerge as a subject when he talks about his journey into and through secondary school.

By the time that Alfie was due to transition into secondary school himself, his older brother had been excluded from one secondary school and in addition, his sister had also '*had an altercation with a teacher*' since starting at the closest secondary school to their home, Ashtonville, and subsequently moved to Our Saviours, a religious school much further away. Since his mother still preferred to keep her children together where possible, Alfie did not follow the majority of his peers to Ashtonville, but rather followed his sister to Our Saviours.

> *ALFIE: But we got through to Year 6 and then my sister was at Our Saviours school but she'd previously been to Ashtonville school; my brother was, I think he was in-between schools when I started school because he'd been kicked out of one and was waiting for a place in another. And then I went straight to Our Saviours coz my mum didn't want me going to Ashtonville.*

Alfie believes that he would have gone on to his nearest secondary school '*two minutes round the corner from us*', as was the common practice from his primary school, had his sister not already had negative experiences there. So it was as a direct consequence of following his sister that he ended up transitioning without peers; Alfie knew people already at the secondary school then but only through his sister so they were students who were quite a bit older than he was.

> *ALFIE: Well when I went to the school no one from my primary school went there. I didn't know anyone, so immediately I started hanging around with my sister's friends and she was 4 years older than me. So all of them were a lot older than me and they were into drinking and all that sort of thing and in Year 7 that's bad, it's a huge scary thing. So I kind of grew up a lot quicker than I had to coz I weren't willing to try like interacting with people.*

Here the affects of following his sister emerge then. Alfies reluctance to interact with new people in his year meant that he socialised with his sister's friends.

The emotional impact of spending time with older students and being exposed to their antics is palpable when he summaries – *'it's a huge scary thing'*.

After no more than a term at Our Saviours, Alfie was so unhappy that his mother agreed that he could transfer to the local school where most of his primary school peers now went. The fundamental reason for his unhappiness, he conveys as not fitting in with the religious nature of the school. He does not blame the fact that he followed his sister for his unhappiness, despite mentioning his unusual social group. He also goes on to mention in passing that the other students in his year were not the sort of people he would socialise with but this too he links with religion. He is clear that he is at odds with being at a faith school and this is the reason for his desperate desire to move. On moving school however, rather than leaving any association with older siblings behind him, in fact, Alfie then found himself at the same secondary school as his brother, instead of his sister. This would have profound consequences on his educational experiences. Alfie is convinced that the reason that his mother finally gave in to his repeated requests to move school was because he would be joining his brother.

> ALFIE: She ended up moving me to Ashtonville coz my brother had just got into there.

Starting at Ashtonville was very different to his first secondary school, as this time he not only had many people in his year group whom he already knew but also many others from the locality.

> ALFIE: I remember starting at Ashtonville I knew near enough everyone in the school… from primary school and several years above I knew all of them as well so I was very well know before I went into the school.

There seemed then to be potential here for a positive start at the new school, he had friends in his year group already and so felt comfortable with his peers. However as Alfie progresses into his second secondary school, almost immediately the impact for him, of his older brothers behaviour and reputation, begins to emerge.

> *ALFIE: Within the first week I was put into the isolation unit… coz they thought that I was going to be disruptive, not because I had been disruptive. Because they thought I would.*

Alfie elaborates on the usual purpose of this isolation unit.

> *ALFIE: If you'd done something bad enough, you'd get isolation for a day and you'd be in one room for the whole day. They'd have little sections.*

Alfie is adamant that his being put into isolation was far from a justified punishment, that he had not done anything wrong but that there was an assumption that he might. When seen in the light of subsequent events, it is extremely probable that this was the first sign that Alfie was being labelled by association. From the off, he was expected to be a bad seed just like his brother. Although the focus here is on transition and moving schools, it is worth pursuing this thread of Alfies story further up the secondary school trajectory, as he sees what follows as stemming from his being pigeonholed on arrival at the school, which in turn is inherently linked to following his siblings.

For what remained of Year 7 and through Year 8, Alfie continued through school in an unremarkable fashion, now and then getting into some minor trouble but essentially attending class in an unremarkable way. Despite this, Alfie is insistent that there was a sustained, unswerving, already entrenched concern from staff that he may cause trouble and was one to watch.

> *ALFIE: I weren't a huge troublemaker when I was younger but it was more a fear of the school thinking that I'd be a troublemaker.*

Alfie felt very strongly that all his experiences at Ashtonville were coloured by being associated with his brother.

> *ALFIE: It was a known fact at Ashtonville that I was treated differently purely because of who I am and who I am related to… if I hadn't done anything and something had been done, my name would be brought up.*

Things came to a head dramatically when Alfie reached Year 9, at which point his older brother was excluded after a series of incidents, including significant acts of vandalism and starting of fires.

104

ALFIE: That's when he got shipped off and that's when they upped the anti on me coz they thought I was going to do something that bad as well… Within a week I had several meetings with the Head Teacher basically saying, "don't even think about trying to follow your brother" basically and it was kind of like, why are you pinning me out like that?

LWE: You weren't thinking about following your brother at all?

ALFIE: No, I was like what an idiot. What's he doing he's got himself kicked out of school, what's he doing? And they were like "you're gonna do the same". I was like don't tell me I'm gonna do the same. If you keep telling me it, then I'll go out and do it sort of thing.

Arguably, such meetings with the Head Teacher could be seen as preventative measures, without any enduring labelling thereafter, to try to determine whether or not Alfie had any thoughts about following in his brother's footsteps. In Alfies recollection however it does sound as if there was a definitive expectation that he would try to do this. It is interesting that Alfie recalls an awareness that if he were to be persistently labelled in this way, he would feel an urge to live up to such expectations - this links with the idea that labelling would likely impact on-going identity formation.

What happened next in Alfies education is remarkable. He was put into the isolation unit for a prolonged period. This, he recalls, as once again being a consequence of concerns about what he may do, as opposed to concerns about anything he himself had actually done – a clear incidence of being labelled by association.

ALFIE: I spent the whole of Year 9 in there. From start to end. They wouldn't let me out of the room… I was in there the whole year coz they constantly thought that if I was allowed into class that I would cause problems.

This was an extremely unusual occurrence, to be withdrawn from lessons completely for such an extended period and in particular when he had done nothing to bring this about. Clearly he was not happy and as he goes on to assert, neither was his mother.

ALFIE: My mum argued all the time to try and get me out of there, but also she knew that while I was in there, there weren't gonna be a chance of any trouble happening.

This second remark is interesting. Was Alfies mother also buying into this labelling by association on some level?

Eventually, in Year 10, Alfie was allowed to return to some lessons. Alfie reflects with hindsight on his educational trajectory and in particular his time in the isolation unit and unquestionably roots his difficulties in following his siblings and being labelled by association.

> *ALFIE: I look back at it and think if I could do that all again I would do so many things different and like when I was moving from Our Saviours to another school, I would have said to her "look put me anywhere but where somewhere they've been and just make sure I haven't been where my brother and sister have been" and I'd be able to get a fresh start… That was a huge problem for my whole life that I was associated with my brother and sister.*

Alfie at least feels that some lessons have been learnt for his younger sister. She was never sent to a school where the two oldest siblings had been, precisely to avoid labelling by association.

> *ALFIE: Everyone knew I was my sister's brother and my brother's brother and that used to cause problems and that's the main reason why Fern is at this school… Coz if she went to Ashtonville, it'd be a case of "oh here's another Batchelor, they're going to be a little shit. They're going to do this…"*

3.3 Setting the Scene: Selecting from the Transition Literature

There are many facets to transition, debated and analysed within the literature, which seemingly go well beyond the issues that arise from the data here. Why are some elements, which may be so well documented elsewhere, not apparently present here? Indeed, considering what is missing can be just as illuminating, if not more so, than merely considering what is present.

For illustration, as noted previously, there is a significant body of literature dedicated to ways in which transition points, including moving from primary to secondary school, may contribute to widening educational inequalities, in particular within the current climate of parental choice and marketisation (Allen 2007; Ball 1993/2003a/2003b; Burgess and Briggs 2006; Gibbons and Telhaj

2006; Green *et al* 2006; Orfield 2013; Tomlinson 1997; Wilson 2011). More often than not these make reference to parents deploying cultural and social capitals to navigate the system, noting that those with higher levels of these pertinent capitals will be best places to secure a successful transition for their child. This is first and foremost about securing a place at a good school, or perhaps at their preferred school, which for reasons of belonging and socio-cultural context, may not be the same thing at all (Reay and Ball 1997). Such concerns, although doubtless present for some participants, are not overtly raised here. Recall that this research draws primarily from student interviews and their experiential recollections. There is at most an occasional acknowledgement by the interviewees that they did or did not get their first choice of school, or that they took up an option to be better informed about the school prior to starting, but in their telling of their own stories, these matters are never explicitly connected to their parents competences nor their cultural or societal context. Unsurprisingly, the focus for the child is much more centred on their own state of mind, levels of anxiety, fitting in and making friends. System structures, parental capitals and admissions procedures are not to the fore. Had additional aspects, such as parental or teacher interviews say, been a part of the data collection process, it is possible that a fuller picture of some of these aspects may have been forthcoming. As it stands, drawing from student's accounts, they remain at best peripheral.

In fact, the sorts of issues raised here and the comments made, not surprisingly, are much more in keeping with other literature on transition that also draws heavily from student's voice, experiences and recollections (Jindal-Snape and Foggie 2008; Measor and Woods 1984; Pratt and George 2005; Zeedyk *et al* 2003). It is largely within the context of just such literature then, where there are similar themes debated, that the findings of this research can best be situated, compared and contrasted.

Zeedyk *et al* (2003) found that the students in their transition survey expressed concerns first and foremost over social matters such as bullying and friendships, or logistics such as finding their way around, summarizing:

> *'Children's most pressing concerns appear not to be the academic ones' (Zeedyk et al 2003, p73).*

This is reinforced by findings from Topping (2011). In his comprehensive review of 88 papers on transition, he looked at the perception of teachers and students and also discovered divisions along similar lines:

> *'Pupils (and parents) are preoccupied with short-term, personal, socio-emotional issues. Teachers are preoccupied with longer-term, institution-led, attainment issues' (Topping 2011, p280).*

The work focussed on transferring friendships by Pratt and George (2005), is another case in point which has at its heart the student's voices and finds that the students themselves do indeed prioritise different aspects of transition when compared to the foci of much of the research, literature and even the priorities of the schools. Whilst acknowledging there are concerns over school factors, they nevertheless note:

> *'By far the greatest issue for both the boys and girls focused around friendship' (Pratt and George 2005, p18).*

They go on to echo the fact that while students may focus on peer concerns, for a long time much research into transition prioritised the organisational over such matters of friendship:

> *'research into primary school transfer tended to concern itself with the organisational arrangements, for example assessment procedures and selection, with the importance of friendship within this process of transfer being marginal to concerns of academic attainment and curricula demands' (Pratt and George 2005, p17).*

Perhaps vast swathes of such literature on transition then, which is focussed primarily on the academic, at the expense of the social will be unlikely to be as pertinent here. It will have less to offer in terms of situating this research and its emergent themes, predominantly of a social nature, within current research thinking.

However, not all research agrees as to this current skewing of the more organisational and academic aspects of transition, over the social concerns, or indeed more importantly on the existence of this binary split. Perhaps then there

remains a need to search more subtlety through the wider literature on transition, in order to meticulously situate these research findings.

Indeed, Galton *et al* (Galton, Gray and Ruddock 1999/2000/2003; Galton, Morrison and Pell 2000), in their large body of influential work, suggest that, while there has been in their view considerable progress in tackling issues surrounding transition in the past couple of decades, schools need to redirect their attention in fact away from the social aspects of transition, back towards the curricular and academic dimensions, by which they mean careful consideration of pedagogy as opposed to administration and data. They note this against the backdrop of their priority, namely to maintain academic progress and enthusiasm. Their seminal works then, highlighting as they do the pedagogical, are again at first glance, perhaps unlikely to impact heavily on contextualizing the emergent themes here. However, they more broadly acknowledge that there is a need to find a balance between the social and academic priorities, as being happy and socially well-adjusted after transition will feed into enjoyment and academic achievements, just as curricular continuity and academic support will. Moreover, they acknowledge the academic support that can be drawn from productive friendships and that this is an aspect of having a healthy social network, which is often overlooked when considering adjustment at secondary school. In other words, they recognize that any attempt to divide the aspects of transition cleanly into the academic and the social may not be as clear-cut as sometimes considered. This reopens the possibility then, that some transition literature located essentially in the academic aspects of transition, may nevertheless have something to add to the discussion on the more social themes emerging from the current research. Care is needed.

West *et al* (2010), in their large and detailed longitudinal study into transition in Scotland, choose 'school concerns' and 'peer concerns' as their terms for overarching categories when dealing with their own data. However, for West *et al*, there are, not two but three, such overarching areas of research, when they discuss the wider literature. As an illustration, while they acknowledge there has

been some excellent UK research into transition, they bemoan the inconsistency of emphases, clearly breaking the literature in to three strands:

> *'The research has also lacked continuity, the focus over the last two decades switching back and forth between pupils' experience of transitions (e.g. Measor and Woods 1984; Chedzoy and Burden 2005), the widely documented post-transfer 'dip' in educational attainment (e.g. Nisbet and Entwistle 1969; Galton, Gray, and Ruddock 1999) and curricula and pedagogic continuity (e.g. Galton, Gray, and Ruddock 2003; Morris and Pullen 2006)' (West, Sweeting and Young 2010, p22).*

The seminal ethnographic study into transition by Measor and Woods (1984), refers broadly to the 'formal' and the 'informal' factors which may impact transition, with the former denoting anything from school statistics and policies, to curricular and pedagogical matters, while the latter referred to social and peer group concerns. This has much in common then with West *et als* choice of 'school concerns' and 'peer concerns'. Whatever the terminology, from the perspective of the child, in this research, while some school factors have been mentioned, the overwhelming emphasis has been on the social or informal arenas.

Wherever the position of the pendulum - in terms of prioritizing the structural, organizational, curricular and academic over the social or vice versa - and whatever the attempts at compartmentalizing the research – into two or three arenas say - the key point is that the issues raised by the students themselves, as is the case in the current research, consistently emphasise the social and thus this will be much more pertinent when trying to ascertain where the current work sits within the body of academic research work.

Here then I will consider only what the salient literature has to say on the matters emerging from my data, so there will inevitably be a skew towards the social elements, albeit also taking care to draw from literature rooted largely in academic concerns yet having something to offer on social themes – indicating where there is some consensus, where there is more tension and where there may be an elaborative case or a new slant.

There have been five broad themes which have emerged from the data relating to transition: *anxiety* - due in part to not knowing anyone in the secondary school; *lack of anxiety* - due in part to knowing people in the secondary school; effects of *formal transition measures*; '*lost in transition*' – blaming the disjointedness of transition for the subsequent loss of their needs being known at secondary school; '*labelling by association with siblings*' - following family and the impact this can have on starting at secondary school. The remainder of this chapter will be structured around these themes, this time placing the ideas and processes seen to emerge from the current research within the setting of present academic thinking on these matters.

3.3.1 Anxiety - due in part to not knowing anyone in the secondary school: Situating the accounts

The first process seen to emerge from the data was that not only is transition a time of stress and anxiety, but also that one possible cause, which makes moving to a secondary school so scary, is not knowing anyone. Transitioning without peers, into an unfamiliar environment, perhaps also without having siblings or knowing any older students, is more stressful than it would be if you knew people already there, or starting alongside you. What does the literature have to say on this matter?

> '*The prospect of moving on to secondary school would make some children worry, for example about: leaving behind old friends and teachers; dealing with new people older and bigger than them; bullying; getting lost in a larger school, or having to cope with more homework*' *(Evangelou et al 2008, p19).*

Measor and Woods (1984) describe transition as a 'status passage' and acknowledge that with all the change associated with transition - the changes of location, the change in status from top of one school to bottom of another, many different new peers and teachers, adjusting to new systems, procedures and expectations – one source of strain is that with so many new aspects to come to terms with, students mourn the loss of the familiar (Measor and Woods 1984; Tonkin and Watt 2003). Certainly, transitioning without peers would contribute to

such a loss of the familiar, so this emerging process then sits neatly alongside these other established research findings.

Indeed, the underpinning idea that transition is a time of stress and anxiety for students also permeates much of the literature:

> *'The anticipated experience was painful, stressful and created feelings of anxiety' (Pratt and George 2005, p18).*

> *'Several pupils reported general feelings of fear or anxiety' (Humphrey and Ainscow 2006, p324).*

> *'It seems there is almost always a considerable period of stress and worry,' (Zeedyk et al 2003, p68).*

Lucey and Reay (2000) argue that these difficulties – feelings of anxieties and loss - are in fact an integral part of change and growing up; that to access greater autonomy it is necessary to relinquish some security. Thus, they see a positive side to moderate anxiety at transition, in spurring on coping mechanism, while nevertheless acknowledging the potential negative side that too much worry could be overwhelming and hinder progress. Negative side effects of transition – whether they are feelings of apprehension or a drop in self-esteem, enjoyment and positivity - will be felt by nearly all students to some extent, but thankfully:

> *'for most students these decreases are fairly small and short-lived' (Anderson et al 2000, p326).*

It is particularly worth noting however, that transition is also well documented as a disjuncture that some students are less able to navigate successfully, and for whom the negative effects of transition may not only be more acute, but may also be more likely to linger.

> *'They do, in fact, feel marginalized - neither welcomed, respected, nor valued by others. There are few rewards in the system for them. They do experience a sense of rejection by the mainstream community' (Anderson et al 2000, p329).*

Transition then, for some students, can aggravate a negative attitude towards school or perhaps for some even trigger it. As with so many aspects of school,

the students who are at-risk of finding transition especially challenging include particular ethnic and religious minorities, speakers of other languages, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, lower-attainers and students with 'additional needs' of a 'learning' or 'behavioural' nature (Anderson *et al* 2000; Evangelou *et al* 2008; West, Sweeting and Young 2010; Graham and Hill 2002; Scott *et al* 1995; Berndt and Mekos 1995; Wade and Moore 1996). This resonates with the research findings here. There were four students who emphasized being scared and not knowing anyone: Eliot, Donna, Charanjeet and Devina. All four are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds - albeit to varying degrees - and also have 'additional needs' established prior to transition[22]. Donna has 'behavioral issues' and is the only one of the four, at the point of transition, who would not be identified as having been a 'low-attainer'. Eliot has 'additional needs of a learning and behavioral nature', including being medicated for ADHD. Charanjeet has 'additional learning needs' and as she related, some health and mental health concerns which also doubtless exacerbate these learning needs. She is also from a non-white background. Devina has 'additional learning needs' and has also already exhibited significant challenging behavior at primary school. For all four then, there will be composite effects at work also. The literature then recognizes that these students will be at greater risk of having a tougher transition, with perhaps more sustained negative effects later on also.

The literature further notes that there is an additional way in which students from these already at-risk groups, may be identified as even more likely to falter and suffer at transition, which relates to their family background and which again resonates with these four individuals. For many students from these groups, their parents may also lack the necessary social and cultural capitals to take advantage of support and help smooth transition for their children.

> *'Given the need for supplementary support for students across transition periods, student background attributes can be expected to have a significant impact on the effects of transition periods. The*

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[22] See Appendix B for table of student data.

resiliency of the student during the period of transition may depend not only on his/her own coping mechanisms, but also on the level of social support available from external sources' (Rice 1997, p10).

Rice (1997) goes on to highlight two crucial factors which may paly a role in smoothing transition - parental input and social support. In terms of the four students here, who mentioned being particularly anxious and alone, their parental support is complex. As already stated, they all come from lower socio-economic households, so there could already be question marks as to the levels of relevant social and cultural capital, stemming from the parents, which could be helpful in supporting their children through a smoother transition. In addition, one family has an older brother with very 'complex needs' who unsurprisingly takes the parents focus away from the younger children; another has such a fraught relationship with their child that they have sent them to live with their grandparent for periods of time; a third has is a single parent family with intermittent drug and alcohol concerns. Evidently, parental input, which Rice sees as one possible crucial factor in smoothing transition, will be less forthcoming for our four individuals, whose parents do not have the right forms and volumes of capital. They would then indeed be at greater risk of a difficult transition. Thus again, the findings sit neatly within the existing research framework in this aspect also.

From the perspective of an individual student, their parents skills in this area are not only beyond their control – they are a given – they likely also will not be paid any attention whatsoever by the student, so it seems probable that they will be more preoccupied by forms of social support, an area over which they have some input and involvement. This is what was found here; the four individuals do not refer to their home backgrounds. Indeed the literature also repeatedly finds that students themselves, when discussing transition, stress over and above other concerns, the importance of having friendships, fitting in and belonging (Evangelou *et al* 2008; Humphrey and Ainscow 2006; Lacey 1970; Pratt and George 2005).

Several researchers mention also the fact that while at primary school there remains a somewhat familial atmosphere and relatively strong relationships are

established between teachers and students. These connections and understanding can prove a vital source of additional social support for some, undoubtedly including those vulnerable students who struggle to find ample support from home. In the move to the larger, more impersonal secondary school with many more teachers per student, it is probable that such strong teacher-student bonds will not be forthcoming. Here again then a source of social support is diminished for all, but is likely to affect those from fractured families more deeply – arguably three out of four of the students emerging as particularly anxious in this research. Such students in turn then will likely place ever more significance on the friendships they have, as the teacher support dwindles and any family support is unreliable. Hence not knowing anyone in the secondary school may impact them more profoundly than other students, with stronger family support (Anderson *et al* 2000; Jindal-Snape and Foggie 2008; Measor and Woods 1984).

Galton *et al* (1999) also acknowledge that transition may cause greater anxiety and be tougher for students who are not progressing with the majority of their peer group, who lack their social support, and they observe that this is regrettably becoming more common place as parental choice increases.

3.3.2 Lack of anxiety - due in part to knowing people in the secondary school: Situating the accounts

The next point seen to emerge from the data is intrinsically linked to the process already discussed - that not knowing people in the secondary school is one cause of anxiety on transitioning. It was additionally seen from the data that the other side of this process also emerged - that knowing people can diminish, or even remove, this anxiety. Additionally, there was some, possibly more speculative indication, mostly deduced through indirect meaning, that knowing older students, who are already established at the secondary school, could be more significant in lessening anxiety than transitioning with peers. Bradley, Dene, Chris, Eddie, Bethany and Felicia all mentioned knowing people at the school, either having siblings at the school, knowing older students prior to starting, transitioning with peers or some combination of these. They also

indicated that they were perhaps somewhat anxious but not unduly so, or in a few cases not anxious at all, and this they attributed, with varying degrees of assertion and in varying amounts, to knowing people in the secondary school. What does the literature have to add here?

As one part of a detailed longitudinal study, Evangelou *et al* (2006) surveyed children prior to their transition.

> *'Many children (40%) answered that staying with friends and/or siblings was the first most important thing for them when they first started thinking about which secondary school they wanted to go to'* (Evangelou et al 2008, p16).

Students fear being lonely, not being accepted and being bullied. Furthermore having continued friendships does indeed contribute significantly to diminishing anxiety by providing the comfort of familiarity as well as peer support (Measor and Woods 1984; Topping 2011; Zeedyk *et al* 2003). So the literature reinforces the finding here also.

Kurita and Janzen (1996) specifically looked into the role of social support in mediating the stress of transition. They noted that, while prior to transition parents were deemed to provide the most emotional support, afterwards emotional support from peers became just as significant. This hints at the changing and increasingly important role of the friendship group as the students are growing up. They take this further. In fact, the most conclusive result from their study was that social adjustment over transition was strongly linked to peer support, in terms of help managing problems. So, having companionship and others to socialize with was not sufficient then in terms of smoothing transition. More was wanted from these peers, in terms of a more sophisticated friendship, which could offer help in handling difficulties. Again this potentially profound affect of having solid friendships on the likelihood of a smoother transition, sits well with the findings here. What the six students who felt less anxious have in common is their perception that at transition, they already knew people. This is important as we saw in the last section that there are some students who may be more at-risk of experiencing a difficult transition than others and some of these six also fit into some of these categories – four are from a lower socio-

economic background, three have 'additional learning needs', three are 'low-attaining' and one is from a non-white background. In these regards, then, they overlap considerably with the students from the previous section, who had a much more anxious transition. Arguably, however their parental support is less overtly complex than three of the previous group of students. Nevertheless, it would be foolish to claim some sort of clear distinction along any of these lines, between the two groups of students, the first who had a much more anxious transition and the second who had a much less anxious transition. The only regard in which they can emphatically be seen from the data to differ, is that the first state that they did not know people in the secondary school at transition, while the second state that they did. It is deeply relevant then that the research by Kurita and Janzen (1996) finds that the role of social support in mediating the stress of transition, is considerable.

Measor and Woods (1984) offer some insights into why friendship looms so large at this time of transition. They argue that having friendships over transition and making new friends in secondary school is particularly important, as it is through interaction and comparison with these friends, that the students continuously re-evaluate themselves and construct on their own identity as they move from the familiar, safe environment into the new and unknown secondary school.

In their research into resilience and self-esteem impacting transition, Jindal-Snape and Miller (2008) also offer some insight into why strong and supportive friendships may not only seem so key to students at this challenging time, but also why some students may crave this even more than others. They discuss coping and resilience and link this to self-esteem. For them self-esteem is very much a two-pronged construct, following the work of Mruk (1999), one aspect stemming from self-competence and the other from self-worth. This neatly offers some psycho-social rationale for many research findings into transition already noted, as well as insights into the current findings. They remark that, while positive self-competence likely results from previous successes, self-worth is more an internal reflection of how others perceive you and likely results from sustained high quality positive relationships. They argue that both these

facets of self-esteem are essential for coping well with challenges, such as transition, yet many students may be strong in one area and weak in the other, leading to subtle and interesting differences. Clearly those who are 'low-attainers' or have 'additional learning needs' are more likely to have had less experience with success and suffer from a more negative sense of self-competence. There are several students who would fit this description within this current research. Similarly, those who have a history of fewer supportive relationships, fractured family ties or challenging home environments, are more likely to have a lower sense of self-worth. Again, examples can be found within the current research fitting this description. This may go some way then, towards explaining why some students, those identified as having 'learning needs,' being 'lower-attainers', or coming from more 'challenging backgrounds', have all been noted to be more at-risk of deeper and more lasting adverse effects from transition. All the more reason then, for the impact of knowing people or not in the secondary school, to have a significant impact for such individuals. At transition, when facing change and uncertainty, self-concepts are called into question and stress may emerge. Students will want to do what they can to hang onto positive aspects of self-esteem and so a focus on sustained positive relationships may loom larger for those with a dearth in other areas:

> *'Whereas those with a healthy self-esteem may cope with the rigours of transition, and benefit in terms of academic and personal growth, those without may emerge from the process uncertain about their worth, less confident about their ability to cope with the challenges that lie ahead of them—and possibly with the seeds of disaffection already sown'* (Jindal-Snape and Miller 2008, p226).

Research by West *et al* (2010), has more to offer about different facets of transition not always pulling in the same direction. They recognise that many of the groups often seen as most at-risk of a negative transition, may indeed suffer in terms of school related concerns but the peer realm might be very different:

> *'Paradoxically, for particular groups of pupils conventionally regarded as difficult or disadvantaged, navigating the informal system of peer relations may be easier than for their more advantaged counterparts'* (West, Sweeting and Young 2010, p45).

They go on to clarify their findings that:

> *'those regarded by their primary teachers as more aggressive, who were already disengaged from primary school, who had a friend in secondary, and who came from a lower class background were more likely to experience a positive transition'* (West, Sweeting and Young 2010, p45).

This is broadly applicable to the findings here, where six students who knew people in the secondary school, recalled not being overly worried about transition, despite evidently falling into potential at-risk categories. They drew considerable reassurance from these existing friendships, gaining from social support, as a substitute for other 'capitals'.

There was another related strand to the findings that emerged from the data - the idea that knowing older students could be more significant in reducing anxiety, than merely knowing peers. Is there anything within the literature to further shed light on this tentative emergent process?

While there is a plethora of research into transition touching on peers, the field is sparse when it comes to any mention of older student's, with a few exceptions. Rice (1997) considers among other factors, whether or not a student having older siblings has any impact on their adjustment at transition – albeit with a smoother transition defined more narrowly in terms relating to student attainment. She argues that there may be differing effects from having older siblings, remarking:

> *'On the positive side, a student with older siblings in particular may be more familiar with the sorts of changes that accompany the transition, and thus might experience less anxiety during the transition. Conversely, students from large families may receive less supportive attention from parents during times of need, such as a school transition. They have to share whatever supportive parental resources exist in the household with their sibling'* (Rice 1997, p11).

Rice (1997) in fact found no significant effects of having older siblings on student attainment over transition, although this could be due to the opposite effects of the above elements. She was focused on attainment and also only on older siblings. Following from her argument above then, there is room for

knowing older students, who are not siblings, actually having a positive impact in principle, since they could provide exposure to the ways of secondary school, without dividing parental attention. Also reduced stress and worry need not feed directly into higher attainment and yet could be considered beneficial. This would fit with the indications here, that knowing older students already surviving in the secondary school – whether siblings or friends - feeds into reducing anxiety over transition. Certainly older students already established at the secondary school are in a position to provide first-hand insights, or 'hot knowledge', about the school from their own insider experiences, which can be seen by some students as more revealing and trustworthy than the official information, or 'cold knowledge' stemming from the school say (Ball and Vincent 1998).

Another weighty piece of research into successful transitions, which makes reference to older students, is the substantial longitudinal study by Evangelou *et al* (2008). They found that having older siblings, had a strong positive correlation with having a successful transition, which for them was broadly defined to include a range of facets from social adjustment, through increased interest in schoolwork, to curricular continuity. They also noted that the perceived behaviour – in terms of friendliness - of older students in the school was a significant factor for how welcome, safe and accepted the prospective or new students felt. This was linked to fear of bullying and hence anxiety. Research by Chedzoy and Burden (2005) supports the idea that concerns about potential bullying from older students is a significant worry for many students contemplating transition, with about half the students expressing this fear. This offers further explanation then for the finding here that knowing older students reduces transition anxiety.

Several authors (Evangelou *et al* 2008; Zeedyk *et al* 2003) note that greater advantage ought to be taken of the benefits which can be drawn from building social ties with older students, through the explicit construction of mentor or buddy systems, to smooth transition.

> *'Secondary schools could involve older children to help Year 7 children settle and this strategy may alleviate children's and parents' worries' (Evangelou et al 2008, p55).*

This suggestion is echoed elsewhere, to enhance social support and well being over transition, particularly for those students with less consistent and effective family support:

> *'There should be a system of providing non-stigmatizing secure attachments in secondary school, especially for children who come from unstable families. This might be possible through the buddy system' (Jindal-Snape and Foggie 2008, p16).*

Galton, Gray and Ruddock (1999/2000/2003) saw an evolution in transition measures between the first and second phase of their detailed study. One feature, which is pertinent here, which they saw starting to emerge, was the use of some buddy systems, where Year 7 pupils were connected to Year 6 pupils prior to starting at the school. They also noted some use of adult mentors from the secondary school, in particular for those at-risk, who made contact and started to build a connection with individuals that could be developed after transfer.

On an overtly positive note, some studies do empahsise looking forward to secondary school and the excitement and hopeful feelings that many students also express, even if they may be accompanied by apprehension (Lucey and Reay 2000; Chedzoy and Burden 2005). This resonates with Faye looking forward to transition.

3.3.3 Effects of formal transition measures: Situating the accounts

In touching on more formal transition measures, for Eliot a relatively short one-day encounter was simply not sufficient to really get to know anyone in order to plausibly reduce the anxiety of transition. For Faye it seems, reassuring friendships did begin to form at such events. She was also already comfortable with the school layout, from participating in summer school and through attending events in which her older brothers had taken part.

Formal transition measures are intended to reduce concerns and help smooth transition and there is research to indicate some success in this regard. While earlier research into transition frequently emphasized that the experience was indeed traumatic and stressful for many students (Nisbet and Entwistle 1969; Delamont and Galton1986; Measor and Woods 1986) much of the later work painted a toned down picture of the intensity of this anxiety, arguably due in part to the intervening implementation of formal measures designed to smooth transition – from information booklets to talks, visits and open events (Galton, Morrison and Pell 2000; Evangelou *et al* 2008).

Lucey and Reay (2000) looked at primary school children who were in the process of anticipating their move to secondary school. They offer an explanation as to why formal transition measures may diminish anxiety for many, noting:

> *'We would suggest that their value lies in bringing the largely imagined world of the secondary school into the `known' experience of the Year 6 child' (Lucey and Reay 2000, p202).*

Their suggestion then, also confirmed by Measor and Woods (1984), is that as children become more aware of what is actually in store for them, what the secondary school is in fact like, they can dispel some of the frightening myths that abound, thus lessening their anxiety. Visits to the secondary school and similar formal transition measures feed into this.

Evangelou *et al* (2008) gathered data as to the kinds of formal transition measures students participated in and whether or not they were seen as diminishing anxiety. They found a range of measures including their teacher discussing the upcoming transition with the class, a teacher from the secondary school visiting the primary school to meet and discuss with prospective students, and visiting the secondary school for open days, and open evenings, usually including tours and opportunities to meet students and teachers. All of these various options for getting to know the secondary school before were deemed to feed into having some small positive impact in terms of easing concerns for prospective students. It is worth noting here that although the

majority of students felt welcome at the open evening and open day events, only two percent saw this as an opportunity to make new friends (Evangelou *et al* 2008, p19, Table 4.6). This arguably fits with Eliot finding such short opportunities insufficient to start to form new friendships in any way that would significantly ease his anxiety about transition.

Anderson *et al* (2003) looked at how to plan for a more successful transition, in particular for those most at-risk of failing to do so. They concluded that the many measures in place - such as information evenings and even longer open days, or shadowing days - were not nearly sufficient to address the needs of the more vulnerable students at this difficult time, again fitting with Eliot's stance. They detailed the need for a much more extensive, comprehensive and tailored program *'for helping students, particularly those at-risk of failing to negotiate the environmental demands associated with systemic transition'* (Anderson *et al* 2000, p336). They also bemoaned the prioritizing of information and school concerns at many of these formal events, at the expense of the social and emotional aspects of transition, in agreement with other research (West *et al* 2010).

Humphrey and Ainscow (2006) investigated the effects of a more substantial transition project - the Transition Club - lasting five days, with a remit to address the social and emotional as well as the academic needs of participants. It was also deliberately targetting pupils traditionally at-risk of struggling with transition, specifically those who were lower-attainers at the end of primary school. Through this significant intervention, they found that the pupils valued the chance to develop new friendships prior to starting secondary school.

Several researchers concur that the formal measures aimed at smoothing transition are frequently criticized for being too short and clumped together as transition approaches. To further reduce anxiety, they advocate starting measures earlier, spacing them out and not rushing the process (Measor and Woods 1986; Zeedyk *et al* 2003; Jindal-Snape and Foggie 2008). On this note, in the short space of time between the first and second phase of their research into transition, from 1999 to 2003, Galton, Gray and Ruddock (2003) began to

see some emergence of more extended pre-transfer induction activities aimed at smoothing social transition, alongside a growth in the number of longer initiatives aimed at curricular continuity. Such more substantial intervention, with a broader focus to include the social, may arguably have worked better in supporting Eliot.

3.3.4 Lost in transition: Situating the accounts

Faye and Charlie see transition as the disjuncture, which fractured any continuity in being known – in terms of a general understanding, appreciation and acceptance of their individual needs. They consider that on moving to secondary school this knowledge and insight was lost. They also believe that had their needs remained known across transition – perhaps via a formal statement of SEND – they would have received early support in secondary school as opposed to being left to struggle alone. Both individuals thus blame transition as a substantial contributing factor in their subsequent educational difficulties.

Anderson *et al* (2000), in a discussion of how to help students to make a successful transition, note that *'students with academic deficiencies, for example, would need substantial tangible support'* (Anderson *et al* 2000, p333). They elaborate that insuring that the right support is in place to target particular 'deficiencies' is crucial and should consist of summer school input and be in place from the beginning at the new school. For such appropriate support to be set up, the communication between the primary and secondary school would have to be effective, as well as consisting of accurate and sufficiently detailed information.

Evangelou *et al* (2008) considered the precise nature of information passed on at transition, finding this to be rather *ad hoc*. Typical information which was made available routinely comprised attainment data at the end of primary school for the core subjects and while in examples of good practise, much more information was made available - incorporating anything from attainment across all areas, through attendance figures, or SEN and EAL information, to social

skills - still all too frequently, all that was offered was the much more minimal attainment data.

As part of their work on transition of students identified as at-risk of struggling with the process, Jindal-Snape and Foggie (2008) interviewed children, parents and teachers and concluded there were concerns over communication and the transfer of information at this crucial time.

> *'Lack of communication between primary and secondary was further highlighted by almost all the practitioners and parents. There was a view that although primary and secondary were passing and receiving information, it was not always complete or accurate'* *(Jindal-Snape and Foggie 2008, p11).*

Furthermore, secondary teachers expressed that this lack of detailed information hindered their ability to provide appropriate support to their new students and individual parents concurred, noting that the required support was not in place for their child. Accurate and detailed information is needed then, in particular to provide support, and all too often this is lacking. This seems to closely echo Faye and Charlie's accounts.

Furthermore, there are frequent references made in the literature to a 'fresh-start' approach, taken by secondary teachers. It is argued that while this may in part stem from dealing with missing or incomplete information, it may also stem from secondary teachers lack of trust in the information provided by their primary colleagues, whom they believe have different priorities and so draw different conclusions about student's abilities and needs (Evangelou *et al* 2008; Galton, Gray and Ruddock 1999/2000/2003; Galton, Morrison and Pell 2000). Either way then, this would entail a real loss at transition, exactly as Faye and Charlie recount.

In order to smooth transition in a personalised manner, in particular for those most at-risk of being overwhelmed, Jindal-Snape and Miller (2008) stress the need for both academic and social information to be successfully conveyed from one institution to the next:

'Information passed on at transfer should include more than details of academic attainment. Information needs to be provided about personal and social factors, in order to alert secondary schools to individuals who may, for a variety of reasons, be more vulnerable when they move on' (Jindal-Snape and Miller 2008, p229).

There is recognition here that for a smooth transition, a full and complete picture of a student needs to be passed on to the secondary school, taken seriously and made use of when considering not only learning and teaching practises but also pastoral support systems. In this light, Faye and Charlie would seem justified to consider their experience of transition – where they consider information was not transferred successfully - as detrimental to their initial experiences of secondary school. Nevertheless, as Faye and Charlie moved through their time at secondary school, could this not have been overcome?

A term after transitioning, Chedzoy and Burden (2005) find that although most students enjoy having a variety of teachers and consider them friendly, they observe:

'A significant number of students did not feel that many of their teachers knew them properly' (Chedzoy and Burden 2005, p 15).

Similarly Tobell (2003) - who emphasizes the need to feel known and understood by teachers as a critical part of a productive learning environment - notes that transitioning from primary to secondary school means an increased number of teachers, and so less chance of forming these productive strong relationships with staff. This would all seem to indicate that being known by teachers at secondary school is a slow process at best, with no guarantees, so if it is being known and having their individual needs understood, which is what Faye and Charlie see as lacking over transition, it is plausible this situation could endure.

Are Faye and Charlie unusual then in blaming transition for some of their more sustained subsequent ills? Is there any other evidence from the literature that transition may indeed trigger longer-term difficulties, which do not fade? Here Faye and Charlie are reflecting on a transition process several years afterwards. On this note, even in research with a specific focus on transition,

when data may be collected in the first few weeks of the secondary school, after one term or at the end of the first full year, several researchers suggest that accounts obtained later in the transition process may be more reflective, revealing more deep-rooted concerns than the earlier post-transfer accounts. They argue that some concerns, of a more personal nature, such as friendships and fitting in, do not start to be articulated until a year on (Measor and Woods 1984; Tobbell 2003). Similarly, West *et al* (2010), in their longitudinal study, have more to say on lasting effects from a difficult transition. While they found that self-esteem issues generally dissipated after the first year or so in secondary school, longer-term transition effects could remain for a small minority. They found a strong relationship between later instances of depression and a poor transition. Additionally, they found later anti-social behaviour and lower educational attainment, can both stem from having a difficult transition in terms of the formal, or school, aspects with the antisocial behaviour arguably forming part of a defence mechanism against school tensions. They sum up:

> *'The impact of the primary–secondary transition goes beyond immediate post-transfer anxieties to have a much more significant, longer-term effect on pupil well-being and learning' (West, Sweeting and Young 2010, p46).*

So there is indication from the literature then, that there may be, for some individuals, genuine sustained educational and well-being concerns that have their roots at least in part in a difficult transition. This offers much to shed light on the stories from Faye and Charlie, suggesting that it is feasible that transition could be in part to blame for problems several years later at school.

3.3.5 Labelling by association with siblings: Situating the accounts

The data already discussed shows that knowing others in the secondary school, in particular older students, who are already established there, can play a positive role in lessening anxiety. Thus it may often seem very positive indeed to follow in the footsteps of older siblings. Alfies account paints a contrasting picture. He is continuously returning to the idea of being expected to be similar to his siblings – of being labelled by association with his brother in particular - from which it seems there is no escape for him. His account is unequivocal in

conveying that he feels association with his brother labelled, stigmatised and categorized him, with very real consequences for his own educational experiences as well as for his permissible learner identities.

Teacher labelling and stereotyping is raised by several researches as a contributing factor both in pupils adopting certain attitudes in school and in these students greater marginalisation, yet this is more often than not discussed in relation to issues of prejudice in terms of individual categorization - race, class or gender for example – as opposed to being more explicitly connected to family members (Gillborn 2008; Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Mac an Ghaill 1988; Simone 2012; Slavin 1990). In terms of feeling confined by teacher opinion, this extract typifies research findings in this area:

> *'Students can also feel that their image and habits are held in place by their teachers – who have files and memories in which their behaviours, and, indeed, their characters, are indelibly recorded'* (Galton, Gray and Ruddock 2003, p86).

Alfie certainly sees the labelling in association with his brother as '*indelibly recorded*', since he recounts being repeatedly excluded from mainstream classes and kept apart from the bulk of his peers, regardless of how well he behaves. He is certainly stereotyped and marginalised – explicitly by being removed from class at the very least – as a result. Nevertheless there is more to his accounts that the literature touched on thus far does not speak to. While much of this work considers the constraints and importantly the effects of such labelling on attainment, it mainly either bypasses or plays down the role of individual agency in resistance. Here Alfie, while largely unable to avoid the bias against him, is articulate and active in unsettling, rejecting and resisting whenever he can.

There are two threads in the literature that resonate more closely with Alfies greater agency and shed light on his account. Both will recur as being apposite again in subsequent chapters and will thus only be briefly touched on here.

Firstly there is the existence and maintenance of an anti-school sub-culture, initially laid bare in a trilogy of ethnographic studies in secondary schools

(Hargreaves 1968; Lacey 1970; Ball 1981). This research finds that students who feel under-appreciated seek recognition elsewhere, developing an anti-school sub-culture, in defiance of the values of school leadership – which predominantly extols the social and cultural capitals of the white, middle class. Unsurprisingly, the anti-school sub-culture students tend also more often than not to be the lower-attaining, the confrontational and the ostracized students. Alfie clearly has nothing to gain from complying with school rules and values as he has already been labelled a 'troublemaker' and essentially cast out, so his seeking solace, belonging and respect within the anti-school sub-culture would hardly be surprising. Indeed, he conveys that if he is repeatedly told he is like his brother and indeed is punished in advance as such, then he may as well live up to this reputation – neatly articulating that he will in effect be forced to turn to the anti-school sub-culture if he is repeatedly refused any sort of acceptance by the school establishment.

Secondly there is Youdell's body of work of a post-structuralist nature focussing on identity formation in education, rooted in the work of Foucault and Butler and with issues of agency and resistance to the fore. This concerns the idea of a constitutive subject, who is perpetually not only being defined through discourse but also being formed and reformed through it (Youdell 2006; Youdell 2010). This intrinsically links with the idea that labelling would impact on-going identity formation. Youdell examines identities that are constituted within schools, explicitly considering: '*the parameters of good and bad students and acceptable and unacceptable learners*' (Youdell 2006, p101). Furthermore, she is concerned with how *'discursive networks that frame schooling'* render some student identities meaningful and intelligible, whilst others are considered less so. At the extreme, there is then:

> *'The possibility that some subjectivities may be so incompatible with school discourses of students and learners that they may be rendered impossible' (Youdell 2006, p101).*

She suggests, following Butler, that '*it is this threat that leads the subject to accept a constitution as the Other – this other is still intelligible and, therefore, human*' (Youdell 2006, p100). Alfie contests and resists the labelling by

association with his brother repeatedly, yet in his shifting identities he may indeed accept such labelling as other fleetingly, so as to remain intelligible while within the confines of the isolation unit.

In this first empirical chapter issues of marginalisation associated with transition have been considered, demonstrating that marginalisation has a history, often a history marked by significant moments or events. It is also, in complex ways, situated in social relations – families, friendships and teachers. This history and the social relations are complexly and often very specifically inter-related. This interweaving with the social will recur. In the following chapter, the focus will be on structural elements within the secondary school - groups, options 'choices' and pathways - which impact issues of marginalisation.

Chapter 4: Groups, Options 'Choices' and Pathways

DONNA: I was put in middle groups and lower so you just feel like, well I know this, there is no point in me doing this. I'm not learning anything new.

DENE: I just picked the easier way.

ELIOT: I chose GCSE but they ended up putting me back into BTEC.

CHARLIE: Well yeah, yeah they put me in college really.

This chapter looks at emergent themes that touch on the structures within the school, which lead to divisions and groupings of students, whether in the form of 'setting', or 'ability groupings', or the 'choice' or allocation to different subjects, courses or pathways. Each time the students are partitioned in this way, it opens up the possibility of different experiences, different opportunities and different impacts on their futures.

In this chapter, I will again interweave the narration of what has emerged from my research in relation to groups and setting, options choices and pathways, with positioning these findings with reference to salient literature, showing where there is consistency and broad agreement, where there is greater friction and where there may be an illuminating instance or fresh perspective.

It will become evident that - with this chapter even more so than with the others – what is not said may be as significant as what is said. Indeed, as has been noted elsewhere, the nature of my data is a problem in its own right, the haziness, the inherent vagueness and the sometimes inarticulate accounts. Thus hints, asides and glimpses then become all the more important but must of course be treated with care. The analysis is highly tentative by nature. Here, not only will such faltering allusions be to the fore as ever, but significantly there may also be as much to be timidly intimated by what is missing – by what may arguably be seen as the startling absences.

4.1 Setting the Scene: Selecting from the Grouping, Options 'Choices' and Pathways Literature

Taking seriously the caveat that possibly what is unsaid may speak volumes - that absences may be illuminating - drawing any boundaries, however permeable, around what literature is directly relevant and what is less so, becomes significantly harder. I will nevertheless - with a broad sweep of some of the literature from related overarching arenas - try to make a first stab at attempting to discern what may perhaps be salient, from the research around grouping, options choices and pathways. Then as specifics of the data are grappled with, I will repeatedly return to the literature – that which is touched upon and indeed that which is conspicuous in its absence – so as to at least loosely situate the emergent ideas.

There is a vast amount of research across these areas. The literature on ability grouping, setting, streaming, tracking and pathways alone is plentiful.

Much of the research into groupings and pathways specifically focuses on educational inequalities. For example, by exploring circumstances from across different countries, Green *et al* (2006), explicitly consider education system factors which are related to more equal educational opportunities, and in terms of within school factors, they emphasise two, namely:

> *'Mixed ability classes, late subject specialization' (Green et al 2006, p138).*

Arguably then, this positions Welford High as exhibiting within school factors related to less equal educational opportunities; 'setting' or 'ability grouping' occur throughout the school in several core subjects and there is subject specialisation from age 14 – as is typical for the wider context of English secondary schools. Moreover, as will become clear, there are some additional instances within Welford High, albeit of a less all-pervading nature, where pathways diverge and a few students are split away from the main student body.

Green *et al* (2006) draw from international statistics to make their case, which is largely one of correlation. Research highlighting such statistical realities then, between say different groupings or pathways and various measures of educational inequalities, can certainly provide a pertinent backdrop for Welford High, yet it may be unlikely to link more fundamentally with articulated emergent processes. Any process that emerges from individual student narratives of their own experiences would not be expected to be one of statistical relationships. Of course, that is not to say that individual reflections on personal experiences would not provide illustrations which support or conflict statistical research findings.

Along similar lines, other parts of the literature on groupings and pathways can also be seen as providing background insights. Research which is focused on the merits or otherwise of different versions of ability groupings, in terms of attainment outcomes, is a case in point (Kulik and Kulik 1982; Kulik and Kulik 1992; Slavin 1990). As interesting as this may be, this research is unlikely to be germane to any of the processes which have emerged, stemming as it so often does from comparisons of attainment data across classes, schools or cohorts. Each interviewee here is commenting and reflecting on his/her own unique experiences and thus is not in a position to make such comparisons, having only personally been exposed to one trajectory.

There are many other facets to the literature that will likely lie outside the parameters here, in that they go well beyond situating the emergent processes within the research literature. As a further illustration, bear in mind:

> *'Ability grouping is not about its educational value, it is about politics, school markets, class-interests and social advantage' (Ball 2003a, p11).*

It is unsurprising then, that ideas concerning ability grouping are present within literature on markets, choice and inequality (Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Green *et al* 2006; Orfield 2013). However, vast swathes of the content of this marketization work are not evident in any of the emergent processes here, which stem from students perspectives. The students in their musings, rarely

connect ideas of market pressure with ability grouping, just as they do not mention other wider societal factors such as over-arching power relations. For the most part, their focus tends to be closer to hand. Nonetheless, in occasional asides some traces of awareness of the school-level ramifications of these wider issues of markets and competition are tangentially alluded to, suggesting that for at least a few students these issues are perhaps partially present.

Another strong element in much of the grouping literature is inequality by for example socioeconomic status, gender or ethnicity (Demack *et al* 2000; Gillborn and Gipps 1996; Gillborn 1997; Gillborn and Mirza 2000; Haque 2000; Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Gillborn 2008; Osborne 1996). This again may relate to observations from large data sets, illustrating where different categories of students are to be found. The students do not talk about themselves in terms of these categorizations or labels and so once again, whilst this literature is crucial for a complete picture of background concepts, it is not central to the emergent processes. Nevertheless it is worth noting that with two-thirds of the interviewees eligible for FSM[23], this section of the literature would identify such students - those from a lower socioeconomic background – as at greater risk of being allocated to lower 'ability groups' and being entered for less prestigious qualifications and consequently at greater risk of being lower-attaining.

A further issue relating to student characteristics and their categorization in terms of background factors, is that of parental characteristics – in particular the body of work pertaining to middle-class white elites being better able to exploit their appropriate capitals to the advantage of their children, as well as the idea that working class parents may have different preferences (Ball and Vincent 1998; Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Gillborn 2008; Hargreaves 1968; Reay *et al* 2007; Vincent *et al* 2010; Machin and Vignoles 2005). In terms of groupings and pathways, this includes middle-class white parents applying pressure and playing the system to ensure that their children are not only placed into higher

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[23] FSM is a readily available statistic within schools and is used as a proxy for poverty. See Appendix B for student data.

sets, but are also allocated to their preferred options choices for GCSE. This necessarily implies similarly ensuring that they have access to the more prestigious qualification - say a GCSE as opposed to a BTEC - and are not assigned to less desirable, more restrictive pathways. Such parents are heavily involved, playing a key role at the heart of such course choices and decision-making processes. Indeed, parental capitals come into play more than ever, at the key branching points in the education system such as options choices.

Gillborn (2008), who writes prolifically about educational inequalities, in particular in terms of race, notes:

> *'The reality is a situation where the perspectives and interests of White people are constantly enforced over those of minoritized groups' (Gillborn 2008, p182).*

He argues that some system structures - including groupings and pathways – perpetuate educational inequalities, and favour the white elites, who largely set them up, and who are best able to manipulate them to their advantage. Similarly, Ball (2003a) underlines that this middle-class ability to manipulate the system, through utilising their appropriate capitals, has particular impact on how students are divided, allocated and grouped.

> *'At these points of crisis and potential failure the deployment of relevant capitals is crucial to the maintenance of trajectories' (Ball 2003a, p19).*

It may not be hugely surprising that the participants from Welford High do not overtly talk in terms of their parents adeptness or otherwise at playing the system but it is notable that in fact they barely make mention of their parents at all. Indeed, it is the ideas within this literature pertaining to parental capitals and parents' ability to deploy these capitals effectively or not, which will be most noteworthy by their absence right across the discussions of groupings, options choices, and pathways. This sits in stark contrast to similar accounts across the literature from more affluent, middle class parents. I will argue that, rather than this stemming from its lack of relevance, it is precisely this elusive spectre - merely the asides and glimpses of the occasional shadow of a parent – that will be noteworthy.

Another facet to middle class advantage from the literature, which again has implications for groupings and pathways, stems from the school being incentivised by market and league table pressures. In order to maximise their position in the league tables, schools may favour and prioritise higher-attaining, compliant, low-risk students (Allen and Burgess 2010; Gillborn and Youdell 2000). These school factors combine with the parental factors, to entrench middle-class advantage. Once again, the emergent processes from the students here do not have such market pressures to the fore, so while this literature is evidently not unrelated to concerns of grouping and pathways, and is likely to have some indirect relevance to situating emergent processes within the literature, it is also unlikely to be central.

The matter of teacher attitudes, expectations and stereotyping, be it in terms of race, class or gender, is another feature from the literature that relates to groupings and pathways. Slavin (1990) argues that ability grouping is damaging to educational equality:

> *'Because lower class and minority students are disproportionately represented in the lower tracks' (Slavin 1990, p473).*

This, the literature argues, stems at least in part from elements of teacher stereotyping, consciously or otherwise, working once again to advantage the white middle-class over their ethnic minority peers and those from further down the socioeconomic spectrum (Gillborn 2008; Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Mac an Ghaill 1988; Simone 2012; Slavin 1990; Taylor, Francis, Craig, Archer, Hodgen, Mazenod, Tereshchenko and Pepper 2018). Here again there is important background material, yet while the students in the current research do touch on teacher attitude[24], this is not explicitly mentioned in relation to grouping or pathways. Also when they mention restrictions to their options or being assigned to a particular pathway, again they make no mention of teacher bias being a factor. This is not to say that such teacher attitudes could not have been so engrained, as to be taken-for-granted by the students and thus not

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[24] This is a significant feature of Chapter 5.

mentioned. Yet, as the students are largely mute on this matter, again this literature remains more peripheral to the articulated emergent themes.

Finally, there is the issue of which teachers teach which groups, courses and pathways – an integral part of how schools enact policy and bend under external pressures in particular from the standards agenda (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012). The literature that contemplates how schools allocate resources, including staff, notes that within the ever more competitive system, market pressures combine to effectively prioritise some groups, courses and routes over others (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012; Gillborn and Youdell 2000). The classes which are likely to have the greatest impact on key statistics – those monitored in the league tables or specified as areas for improvement by the latest Ofsted report – are thus not only likely to be subject to targeted interventions, extra help and resources but also, more often than not to be entrusted to the more experienced, capable teachers, while those newer to the profession or deemed less reliable, are given the lower sets, or less crucial courses, to teach. The GCSE C/D borderline groups[25] would be the first priority for many schools in terms of attending to their place in the league tables, but for some the higher groups may have been flagged by Ofsted as needing special attention.

> *'A focus on some students, as strategically productive, means the relative but systematic neglect of others and patterns of uneven access to expenditures and efforts at school' (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012, p81).*

So once again, circumstances combine to exacerbate the plight of the students in the lower sets and the less prestigious courses – as we shall see this is where the students in this research are often to be found.

Moving forward, I will intersperse examining the students' narratives in relation to grouping, options choices and pathways, with returning to the literature, to

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[25] More recently, with the new qualifications and grading system, the Level 4+ (or Level 5+) statistic is highlighted by league tables – moving the focus to the Level 3/4 (or Level 4/5) borderline groups.

consider what this has to say on the matters emerging from the data. I will remain alert to what is missing and not said, as well as considering the intimations, hints and asides, which make up so much of my data.

There are three broad themes which emerge from the data relating to grouping, options choices and pathways: setting by behaviour; reasons the students give, which influence their decision-making process when selecting particular options; and limits on choice, allocation and assignment. Additionally there are two concerns, which 'emerge as absent' from the data, if an absence can be said to emerge! Most notable by their absence are parental involvement and strategic decision-making.

The remainder of this chapter will be structured around these broad themes, alternating deliberations concerning the data, with placing the ideas seen to emerge within the setting of present academic thinking on these matters. In addition to returning to the literature already considered, I will be drawing from other research, which resonates as illuminating for what has emerged. It is no surprise that research of an ethnographic nature in schools and research which puts the students perspective front and centre will be most likely to fit readily with overt processes which emerge from the current study.

4.2.1 Grouping and setting – setting by behaviour

Welford High has some subjects taught in form classes, which are 'mixed-ability', while the core subjects, namely English, Mathematics and Science group students in 'ability groupings' or 'sets' from different points in Year 7. Departmental procedures assert that the initial allocation of individual students to particular 'sets' is made on the basis of attainment data, drawn from in-house assessments, external prior data or some combination of these. Subsequently movement between 'sets' would occur at fixed points within each academic year, as a consequence of attainment data resulting from the latest summative assessment.

These practices were not always clearly understood by students as illustrated by Bradley's circuitous response to whether or not he had stayed in similar 'sets' for English as he progressed through the school:

> *BRADLEY: You are all mixed in yeah I think Year 9... and 10... Year 9 we was all mixed together then Year 10 we sort of... but then Year 11 they put me down again, so... I don't know.*

So for some individuals the procedures of setting were perhaps opaque. For others, while the formal procedures may, or may not, have been clearly understood, they were more concerned with the belief they were placed into inappropriate 'sets'.

> *DONNA: I was put in middle groups and lower so you just feel like, well I know this; there is no point in me doing this. I'm not learning anything new.*
> *LWE: So you felt that you were in sets that were below your ability?*
> *DONNA: Yeah definitely.*

This feature from Donna of feeling under-estimated, sits in contrast to Bradley's opinion:

> *BRADLEY: I was with people probably my level. They were probably a little bit higher.*
> *LWE: Do you think you might have been in the wrong group?*
> *BRADLEY: No. Coz I was in the lowest one. So I couldn't go any lower.*

Whilst Donna feels that she should have been placed in a higher group, Bradley evidently feels he ought to be in the *'lowest one'*. Indeed his use of language seems accepting, perhaps indicating his place embedded deep inside this system of ranking, with all its implicit assumptions pertaining to 'ability'. Where these perspectives would sit relative to anything that could be deduced from the data is neither here nor there. Indeed whether or not these perspectives relate more to Donna and Bradleys confidence levels and self-esteem – while interesting in its own right – is also not immediately germane here. All that can be drawn from these extracts – with the focus of seeking emergent processes – is that some students feel inappropriately allocated to groups, whilst others do not. Since the participants neither elaborate further on why they think this may occur, nor bring up much more that directly speaks to this issue of being

appropriately, or inappropriately, allocated to a particular 'set', no emergent process can be inferred. This does not mean, however, that no processes emerged which touch on 'setting', merely that they did not touch on allocation being perceived as appropriate to their 'ability level' or not[26].

There is nonetheless further overt mention of grouping from some participants and this makes it clear that while several of the interviewees are in lower groups across the curriculum, others are in middle groups or a mixture of lower and higher groups, while a couple are in fact from exclusively higher groups.

> *FAYE: I was in a low group.*
>
> *BRADLEY: I was in the lowest one (referring to English grouping).*
> *BRADLEY: Ms. Chan's class I was in. It was the higher one (referring to Mathematics grouping).*
>
> *DONNA: I was put in middle groups and lower.*
>
> *ELIOT: Yeah I was in the mid sets. The only sort of things I was top for was a little bit of Maths.*
>
> *CRAIG: I, we, was always in like the top sets.*

What is interesting is that a common theme emerges which is supported by extracts from across the board. This emergent process is that of 'setting by behaviour' – the idea simply being that the badly behaved students are placed in lower groups with the better behaved students placed in the higher ones and that set changes also result from student behaviour. This creates sink behaviour groups where little learning takes place. Faye alludes to this at first in this extract:

> *FAYE: I was always in a low group, with naughty people… yeah and I was always in the loud group… yeah and I didn't get much out of it… like coz I guess everyone else around you doesn't do much so you just don't really do much and the teachers always trying to… like calm down…*

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[26] The next chapter draws heavily on references to ability, understanding and learning as well as difficulties surrounding these, however this is done without any direct mentioning of ability groupings or 'sets'.

Here we begin to see from Faye that she associates being in a low group with being with naughty people, in a loud environment, where not much work is done and the teacher is preoccupied with *'trying'* to control the class. This is evident again in another extract, where Faye elaborates on why she thinks it was that she did not get much out of being in low sets as well as making it more explicit that she reasons it was precisely because she was in the bottom sets that she was with naughty people:

> *FAYE: I just didn't find I learnt anything. She focussed more… coz I was in the bottom sets, I was with the naughty people, so she seems to focus more on the naughty people… or on specific people and because I'm quiet… I just sit there like 'I need help'.*
> *LWE: So you do feel that sometimes when you are in the lower groups there's a lot of bad behaviour?*
> *FAYE: Definitely. Yeah, so throughout, until about Year 9 maybe... when they started to get serious... like a bit more serious… I moved up out of the naughty group… because there were still some really loud people in our group and stuff but I think they started to split it up more, so I moved up a couple of groups and then the ones below seemed to be the ones that had all the naughty…*

Here when Faye is asked to confirm the connection she has drawn between being in low sets and being with badly behaved students, she responds unequivocally with *'definitely'*. She notes that she is a quiet student and goes on to mention moving up *'out of the naughty group'*, in fact moving up a couple of groups and again makes the point that the lower groups *'seemed to be the ones that had all the naughty…'*. Faye also connects the fact that the teacher was preoccupied and focussed on the louder people as a reason for her not being able to learn. She stayed quiet, not asking for help and not knowing how to progress, while the teacher concentrated on some of the others, those more vocal students who did readily attract her attention. In this way, she connects her inability to learn in low groups with the prevalence of loud, poorly behaved students present there and the fact that the teacher has to spend time dealing with their behaviour.

What can be seen from other interviews to shed light on this process?

ELIOT: I was in the mid sets. The only sort of things I was top for was a little bit of Maths… So I was in the higher groups for Maths and then I got put down to yours coz like I just kept misbehaving.

Eliot states that he was moved down on the basis of his persistent poor behaviour. If for Eliot the reason for moving down sets is entirely as a consequence of his misbehaviour, then it would seem that for him also setting by behaviour is seen as the only consideration, with no mention being made of attainment data or relative performance, the factors acknowledged by the school procedures as pertinent to making 'set' changes. There is another passage from Eliot which at first appears to allow space for a role for 'understanding' and thus perhaps for attainment in 'set' changes.

ELIOT: At that point my Maths and Science was going pretty good it was just my English that was letting me down so… I know I needed to push that a little bit more. In Year 11… I tried pushing it but I wasn't quite keeping up… with Controlled Assessments, coz everyone would be writing 4 or 5 pages, I'd be only writing 2 coz I didn't know how to put everything into wording… so they put us lot in to a smaller class for the people who didn't quite understand it, to help us.

Eliot seems positive then about the motivations for these group changes. He recognises an intention to help the students who were struggling. This could be in line then with the acknowledged official procedure for 'set' changes. Notice this is not necessarily a reference to moving down 'sets', merely moving to a smaller group, which may have been a lower group, considering the comment *'for the people who didn't quite understand'* but it could have been a new set or indeed some sort of Year 11 intervention. As Eliot continues however, the notion of help disappears and the process of setting by behaviour emerges again.

LWE: So they re-grouped it?
ELIOT: Mixed and match. So say like there was someone from top set who wasn't doing well they'd put them in there. But there wasn't really a lot of top set people in there. So they sort of like it's C, D, B area they were all put in there. And then like it didn't really work well because some of the people in there they always talked, they never stopped talking, like Eddy and that lot. So when it got there it was just constant mayhem and the teachers didn't know quite how to deal with it.

There is still room here for some element of this set changing to have been instigated through identifying a student who *'wasn't doing well'*, but whether this was a factor or not, the result is again portrayed by Eliot, not as a set where support is forthcoming for those who are seen to struggle, but rather as a place of continuous chatter, of *'constant mayhem'* no less, where once again the teacher was struggling to handle the situation and which in short *'it didn't really work well'*.

It is also worth noting that the final remark here – that the teachers did not know how to handle the situation - could be a reflection of the more capable, experienced staff teaching the higher group and also being likely to have stronger behaviour management skills (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012; Gillborn and Youdell 2000). If this is what is hinted at, it is not made more explicit. Either way, it does not detract from the fact that the students are articulating that poorly behaved students are present in lower sets as well as being moved down on the basis of their poor behaviour.

Setting by behaviour was not only noted by students within the lower sets, but was more widely acknowledged. Consider this extract from interviewees Chris and Craig who were in the 'higher sets' for all subjects:

> *CHRIS: I think they just… if you're in a higher set they probably tolerate bad behaviour a bit more knowing that you're going to get good grades coz it does reflect on the school dunnit?*
> *CRAIG: But you don't really get people in the top set that...*
> *CHRIS: No you don't really get too many people…*

Chris appreciates that attaining good grades will reflect well on the school. This then is one of the occasions when an implicit understanding of how market policies may play out in practice can be seen. This shows some level of awareness of extrinsic motivations for grouping decisions (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012; Gillborn and Youdell 2000). Nevertheless, it is how he continues which is pertinent here, in terms of building the 'setting by behaviour' argument. He suggests that, in light of this positive contribution the students will make to the school results, perhaps some poor behaviour may be tolerated more readily in 'top sets'. Craig counters this by noting that there are not really these people

in 'top sets', a point which Chris immediately concedes. There seems to be a mutual acknowledgement here that bad behaviour does not take place in 'top sets', although the incomplete sentences do leave room for ambiguity from this extract alone. Greater clarification is forthcoming in another extract.

> *LWE: Did you have any lessons… where you feel that it was less controlled?*
> *CRAIG: DT… Nah I don't know…. Nah not really. I, we, was always in like the top sets and it's just like for people that are there to... get a good grade.*
> *CHRIS: Yeah.*
> *CRAIG: Didn't want to fucking mess around so.*

For Craig then, the 'tops sets' were there '*for'* those students who did not want to *'mess around'* but rather just wanted to '*get a good grade'.* This may illustrate rather naïve thinking – that messing around is a simple matter of individual choice, of wanting to behave or not, making it seem easy. Even if this thinking is of a somewhat superficial nature, Craig maintains that in his experience of 'top sets' he did not really have any lessons where there was poor behaviour and a lack of control by the teacher. This then is the flipside of poor behaviour in the 'lower sets' with the recognition that the 'higher sets' do not have this poor behaviour. The use of the word '*for'* suggests an understanding that these groups are directly aimed at students who do not want to behave badly, but who focus only on doing well.

So poor behaviour is prevalent in lower sets and largely absent from top sets. Furthermore such poor behaviour will get a student moved down to a lower set and good behaviour will not only get a student moved up but additionally fits within the 'top set' ethos. Setting by behaviour has emerged from across several interviews as a common perception from the students' perspective. This is in stark contrast to the staff perspective and to official departmental policy, which links allocations to 'sets' with attainment data, as opposed to behaviour.

4.2.2 Setting by behaviour: Situating the accounts

Official departmental policy at Welford High links allocations to 'sets' with attainment data and states the mechanism for moving between sets as stemming from the relative performance between students, drawing on the

latest summative assessment data. This is not how the students see this. What emerges from the data here is that, from the students' perspective, 'setting by behaviour' is the reality.

Explicitly, poor behaviour is seen as widespread in lower sets and as mostly non-existent in top sets, as well as crucially being the reason for moving a student down. Meanwhile in the other direction, quiet, well-behaved students move up out of loud groups and the top set is a place specifically designed to cater for those who do not want to misbehave but instead want to do well. Thus 'setting by behaviour' emerges from across several interviews as a shared student perception of the means by which students are allocated to – as well as move between - ability groupings.

There are two large sections of the literature on ability groupings which I will reflect on here and use to situate this emergent process: firstly research concerning teacher-stereotyping; and secondly research directly concerning behaviour and ability grouping, including the body of work illuminating pro-school and anti-school student subcultures.

In terms of the teacher stereotyping literature, the predominant theme there concerns teachers stereotyping students by race, class and gender. Indeed this is seen as one means by which ethnic minority, lower-class students come to be over represented in the lower groupings (Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Gillborn 2008; Simone 2012; Slavin 1990). This literature then could be argued to represent 'setting by prejudice' or perhaps 'setting by stereotyping', resulting from some teachers having a deficit model of non-white, lower-class individual students. How does this fit with the 'setting by behaviour' emergent theme then?

Here there are two points to note. Firstly, much of the teacher stereotyping literature unsurprisingly comes from teacher interviews whereas here it is the student voice that is present, so highlighting different sides to any issue would not be surprising. Secondly, there is a case to be made that while these issues could go hand in hand they need not. For example if any part of the deficit model associated with lower-class, ethnic minority students relates to

assumptions about poor behaviour, lack of concentration or being a negative influence on others, then it is easy to see an argument where prejudice about certain groups of students originating from their background characteristics goes hand in hand with labelling a student as badly behaved. In this way 'setting by behaviour' and 'setting by stereotyping' would have considerable overlap. The details of individual teacher judgements, bias and labelling would need to be delved into in greater detail to see how far this parallel could be drawn. It is alternatively also conceivable that teachers may stereotype students - by background characteristics of say race, class and gender – and simultaneously yet independently be biased against students they label as badly behaved. There need not be a strong overlap and connection between these prejudices. 'Setting by behaviour' need not go hand in hand with teacher stereotyping by background characteristics. In fact, from the student comments in the current research, some students describe their own behaviour as poor and indicate that this is why they moved down, whilst others repeatedly describe the behaviour of their peers as poor – there is no need for any biased or prejudicial labelling on behalf of a teacher – indeed the individual is self-acknowledged, or peer-acknowledged as badly behaved and moved down. This is what the data is indicating from the student perspective here.

Clearly there is a huge potential for considering the possible linkages and interweaving's of 'setting by behaviour' and teacher stereotyping by background characteristics. Yet the fact remains that in this research the students never overtly connect teacher stereotyping and ability grouping. Nonetheless, it is worth emphasising again that it is feasible that such teacher stereotyping or bias, could have become naturalised; that is to say that it could be so profoundly accepted by the students that it is not declared. Despite this possibility, the emergent theme of 'setting by behaviour' remains the student perception of how the system works.

Turning away from deliberating over teacher stereotyping, to considering research directly concerning behaviour and ability grouping, starting with the body of work illuminating pro-school and anti-school student subcultures, at least has the advantage of stemming from the students themselves. In this way

there may be expected to be a greater fit with processes emerging in the current student-centred research.

A trilogy of ethnographic studies set in different types of secondary schools - a Grammar, a Secondary Modern and a Comprehensive - found divergent sub-cultures across the student body (Hargreaves 1968; Lacey 1970; Ball 1981). Such subgroups have been found in subsequent research (Abraham 1989). Students who felt appreciated within their school developed a pro-school sub-culture, embarking on an upwards spiral of positivity. Unsurprisingly, these students tended to be those whose social and cultural capitals aligned with those of the school leadership – namely primarily the white, middle-class – these were also more often than not simultaneously the high-attaining and the compliant students. Meanwhile those who felt under-appreciated sought recognition elsewhere, developing an anti-school sub-culture and thus embarking on a downward spiral. Where ability grouping was present, the distinct student sub-cultures were seen to dominate within different ability groupings, with the students in the lower groups principally displaying the anti-school traits. How does the emergence of these diverse student sub-cultures fit with the process of 'setting by behaviour'?

Since both processes may end up with poorly behaved students occupying the lower sets, what is worthy of emphasis here is the sequence of events. Where the pro and anti-school sub-cultures are concerned, the students feel valued or not and develop a compliant or defiant attitude as a consequence. In the emergent process here of 'setting by behaviour', the bad behaviour comes first and results in moving down. Similarly a compliant, quiet student will consequently be moved up out of the naughty group. Once such students have been within the system for some time, whether a student was first moved to a low group and then subsequently joined in with the dominant anti-school sub-culture, or alternatively a student was poorly behaved from the outset and this resulted in their being moved down, may be difficult to ascertain. Both processes will likely end up with the compliant students dominating in high groups and the defiant students over-represented in the lower groups. Nevertheless, as described by the students themselves, these are not at all the

same processes. Indeed anti-school sub-culture is concerned with how students react to the way they feel treated and thus has student agency to the fore – a student decides to become badly behaved and embrace any accompanying effects such as moving ever further down the ability groupings, in order to gain the benefits of being accepted as part of the anti-school group. 'Setting by behaviour' is not about how the students react at all, but rather is how the students perceive staff implement setting within the school.

Thus 'setting by behaviour' is distinct yet fits alongside the literature relating to polarisation of students through the development of pro and anti-school student subcultures.

Since 'setting by behaviour' has the consequence that poorly behaved students end up in lower sets, this process also fits alongside much of the literature on grouping and behaviour, which finds a less conducive learning environment, more distractions and more incidences of poor behaviour in the lower sets (Abraham 1995; Eder 1981; Venkatakrishnan and William 2003). Indeed 'setting by behaviour' could illustrate one other mechanism through which this may come about.

There is one last body of literature worthy of attention as it comes to mind when considering behaviour and learning and how they inter-relate, and could under certain circumstances, be considered to be connected with groupings. Since the New labour governments of 1997-2010, the incessant quest to improve schools results spawned a focus:

> *'On the role of behaviour in shaping possibilities for learning. This iteration of policy was rendered as Behaviour For learning (see for example* www.behaviour4learning.ac.uk *or the Sir Alan Steer reports on behaviour, Steer 2005, 2008, 2009) and refers to attempts by schools to raise achievement via a sustained effort to ensure a 'safe and secure' learning environment for all children (DCSF 2009)' (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012, p100).*

It is worth noting here that such policies blur the boundaries between behaviour and learning, eliding the two so that to some extent behaviour becomes a surrogate for learning. In this sense Behaviour for Learning could be deemed to

connect to the emergent process of 'setting by behaviour' here, where it could also be readily argued that behaviour and learning are intertwined. However, the implementation and enactment of such polices in schools tends to aim to improve behaviour in all groups, moving towards behaviour conducive of an engaged learning environment for all. Hence, it is not this policy area alone but rather the interplay of this policy with the standards agenda, which may be germane. As has been noted, the standards agenda may lead to prioritising some students and groups over others. The groups not deemed to be pivotal to improving results may be neglected in comparison to those groups which are perceived as the key classes and in this way, just as teaching, learning and attainment may all suffer, behaviour too may deteriorate as attention is turned else where. Thus there is a possibility that Behaviour for Learning and the standards agenda, could indeed combine to produce some sets – of less strategic value to the schools standing - where behaviour slides. It is likely then that these groups could be the lower sets and so once again there is a case to be made that poor behaviour is more likely prevalent in low sets.

Whether it is the compounding effects from the standards agenda and the Behaviour for Learning policies, the presence of pro-school and anti-school student subgroups, or indeed simply research documenting behaviour in different groups, the consequences of each have much in common with the consequences of 'setting by behaviour'. Yet, 'setting by behaviour' is distinct as a process, notwithstanding such similar effects. It is the mechanism the students cite as being the means of their allocation to and movement between sets.

4.3.1 Options choices – reasons given which influence the decision-making process

Grouping in to 'sets' is not the only way in which the students at Welford High could be exposed to different experiences. The other substantial means through which divisions between different groups of students occurs is when options are chosen and then different pathways embarked upon. Generally, this will occur in time for the start of the GCSE programme, which is then delivered over the last

two years of compulsory schooling. Prior to making their decisions, all students are issued with information leaflets, outlining the course options available, summarising their content, detailing the assessment structure and noting the qualifications available. They are also all invited to attend an 'options evening' where each department in the school has a stall, displaying the courses they offer. The students and their parents can ask questions and discuss particular options in more detail with the relevant teachers.

As with all decision-making processes, some individuals find choosing their options an easier task than others. For some it is relatively straight forward, recounted as an easy task, with little pressure from or conflict with parents.

> *LWE: Was it easy to choose what to do?*
> *FAYE: Yeah. I already knew what I wanted to do.*
>
> *LWE: And that was easy? And people at home agreed?*
> *CHRIS: Yeah definitely.*
> *CRAIG: Yeah, pretty easy yeah.*
>
> *BETHANY: My mum always said to me 'you can pick whatever you want', like she's not going to pressure me into doing anything.*

Clearly this remark from Bethany can be viewed in several ways – from a possible supportive, caring response, where her mother is fundamentally wanting her daughter to like her chosen subjects, through a somewhat neutral, hands-off approach, to perhaps a lack of guidance at a time when it may be desirable. As one of the rare references made to parents in discussions surrounding options choices, it is worth noting that this is low pressure, light touch involvement on behalf of a parent at the most, which sits in marked contrast to the active, very present middle-class parenting at such times found across literature in that area (Macrae and Maguire 2002; Ball and Vincent 1998).

For others, the way through is less clear, decisions are difficult or they feel unsure.

> *EDDIE: It was quite hard to choose at first yeah.*

ELIOT: Some of them were obvious that I was going to choose like P.E. But the rest of them was like pick and mix. I didn't really know what I wanted to do…

CHARANJEET: I don't know why I picked Travel and Tourism.

This final remark from Charanjeet seems indicative of *ad hoc*, unclear decision-making – something that pervades much of the data surrounding options choices.

For several students, there are difficulties choosing between subjects or in some option blocks, when there is a limited choice or a selection of choices where none appeal in particular.

CHARANJEET: I wanted to do Drama but you can't do French and Drama.

EDDIE: ICT was probably the hardest one coz I didn't know which one to select from Business or stuff like that.

BRADLEY: Drama probably was the only one that I picked and I weren't… I liked it but it wasn't... I think it was there coz I had to pick one more. It was either Spanish and something else and I thought "well, I'd rather do drama than..."

So, irrespective of whether or not they find the decision process easy, what rationales do the students offer for making their selections?

BETHANY: I didn't really think about it like what I was doing in the future I think I just picked the subjects that I'd liked.

BETHANY: I just looked at the subject and I thought 'oh that sounds good I think I'm gonna do that'. I didn't actually think 'oh that's what I'm gonna do in the future' coz I didn't really think about it like that.

Just as with Charanjeet then, Bethany demonstrates an approach to decision-making which is murky. There is also a short-term attitude coming through here, with more of a focus on the immediate liking of her choices, as opposed to what may be beneficial for later study or employment. Longer-term, more strategic choice making seems lacking.

Another point to highlight, which permeates many – indeed nearly all - of the quotations surrounding options choices, is the preponderance of the word 'I'. As noted above, Bethany acknowledged that she was very much left to her own devices when it came to making these choices, with parents remaining in the background. There is almost no mention made of parental input by others and equally there is no use of the word 'we' to suggest tangentially that others were inputting into the decision-making process. This does not definitively mean that their parents played no role but it is does once again sit in stark contrast to the literature concerning middle class choosers.[27]

When it came to choosing options, for GCSE, just like Bethany, several students state a prime reason for choosing subjects was simply to pick the subjects you liked, enjoyed and found interesting.

> *BRADLEY: I picked ones that I enjoyed doing and I didn't pick ones that I weren't going to enjoy.*
>
> *DENE: The ones I liked doing, the History, the Geography…*
>
> *EDDIE: I know I wanted to do Drama and Geography coz I enjoyed Geography and Drama.*
>
> *CRAIG: Coz I thought it was fun.*
>
> *CHRIS: It was obvious the subjects I wanted to do. I picked Art Graphics, coz I was into drawing and things so I just wanted to do that.*

There is an absence of longer-term planning in all of the above. They articulate the prioritising of enjoyment and there is no mention of considering requirements for subsequent courses or careers. Indeed, there is almost no

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[27] It is worth noting here that I did not ask in interviews explicitly about parental involvement at this point or any other in most cases. This was a deliberate decision based firstly on allowing the students to decide what was relevant in telling their story and secondly so as not to make any of the interviewees uncomfortable. My knowledge of many of their home circumstances, an awareness of some of their parents levels of engagement with the school – or lack thereof – as well as in a couple of cases their extremely complex and challenging home circumstances, such as parental addictions and instances of neglect, led me to believe that this line of enquiry may not only appear intrusive but also be difficult for the individual and bring about a shutting down of the dialogue.

allusion to such concerns in discussions of options choices anywhere in the data.

Chris begins by talking about the subjects he enjoys, his *'obvious'* choices, however he swiftly moves onto another key reason he has for selecting options:

> CHRIS: I picked the lessons I was good at really. The things I thought I'd do best at. That's what I picked.

Choosing a subject that a student feels able to succeed in is a recurring consideration, with individuals saying that they pick the options they feel they are already doing well in and are *'good at'*.

> CHARANJEET: I was really good at French so I knew I'd definitely take French.

> DENE: The stuff like I knew I could do.

> ELIOT: Coz I'm all right at it.

> FELICIA: Looking for easy subjects.

In this last remark from Felicia, there is an alternative rationale given which may or may not be related to being good at the subject, namely that of seeking out the easier options. For an individual a particular subject may seem easy if they are doing well in it so there could conceivably be a connection, or overlap here, but there is nevertheless an additional important point being touched on, which is that there may be some choices which have a reputation passed down amongst the student body for being easier to do well in.

> FELICIA: Yeah coz I thought it would have been easy, like it's an easy subject to get it over and done with.

In discussing her reasons for choosing Drama as an option, Felicia elaborates on why it is that she considers it to be an easy option. She believes that as it consists of practical assessments and course work, with no final written exam, she would be able to get it out of the way before the main Year 11 exam period. Dene also mentions being swayed by the reputation a subject has, in terms of how easy it is considered to be.

> *DENE: But then you just did like the easy ones that people said were easy like ICT, people say that's quite easy so… I just tried to like… pick the easy way. I didn't want to pick the hard way. The stuff like I knew I could do. I just picked the easier way. So it's easier when you come to school and you think it's not too hard to do it.*

Eliot makes some selections based on ease but his reasoning as to why he would find Music easy is specific to his particular set of circumstances and not based on general reputation at all.

> *ELIOT: I was like it should be easy coz like Eric was in there and I was good mates with him at the time so I was like 'he'll help me out'.*
> *LWE: Oh, OK. So you did pick partly based on friends?*
> *ELIOT: Yeah a little bit. The only one that wasn't really chosen on friends was P.E. That was it… I was definitely going to do it.*

Eliot then makes a link between a subject being easy for him and having certain friends in the class who he could work with and receive help from. This is then not about simply having friends to talk to in the same group, in terms of a social connection, but in fact perhaps a rather considered, insightful decision that some friends are also able to help him progress in his work. When asked, he then reveals that all bar one of his subjects are at least in part chosen with thought given to what his friends are choosing - this may be for social or work reasons, or perhaps both. There is some further mention made by others, of the influence of the choices friends are making:

> *FELICIA: Some of them were what my friends were doing as well.*

> *DENE: I always did P.E. just because the boys that we all hanged round in a group was all doing it so you just did it.*

Felicia does not elaborate further but it would be disingenuous to presume that this choice is wholly for social reasons. What is to say that she is not also looking for academic support from her peers, for students who would help her with her studies in class, in a similar way to Eliot? Could this be something which again is naturalised for many students and thus rarely articulated? And for Dene, could there be an element of effective teamwork with friends inherent in his statement?

On another note, it is possible that there is some influence from gender in this remark by Dene. He makes the same choice as his friendship group - a group of boys – so this is also the boys' subject choice. A similar acknowledgement of some role for gender stereotyping of subjects is evident from Charanjeet, when talking about what design-technology subject to select:

> *CHARANJEET: Textiles it was easy choosing that, coz all the other ones like… boys subjects… I didn't want to do that.*

There is one other reason for choosing a subject offered, only from Eddie, which is simply to try something new, to make a fresh start in a subject.

> *EDDIE: Media… that would have been a new thing… so I thought yeah, I'll do media, a new thing.*

Here the reasons the students give, which influence their decision-making process when selecting particular options have been considered. What emerges is a mixed picture covering: liking a subject, being good at a subject, believing a subject to be easy, following friends - whatever the underlying reasoning may be, picking the gender stereotypical option and trying something new.

One other notion to emerge from this data – through its absence – is the apparent lack of a parental role, which is heavily present in some other decision-making literature, focussing primarily on the children of middle-class parents. Lastly, there are also hints – once again perhaps about what is not said more so than what is - about the sorts of non-strategic, short-term, decision makers the students may be. There are then, these absences here, which will also be contemplated in the next section.

4.3.2 Reasons given which influence the decision-making process: Situating the accounts

The nature of the data here - concerning decision-making processes – often exhibits an inherent fuzziness, perhaps even more so than in other parts of the, nevertheless hazy, data. Thus, what I identify from the data, aside from the

drawing together of some rationales the students do articulate for their choices, is more about what is not there – the disquieting absences.

On one level then, what emerges is that the students here noted several factors which they saw as influencing their decision-making process, namely liking a subject, being good at a subject, believing a subject to be easy, following friends, picking the gender stereotypical option and trying something new.

Moreover, on another level, it is worth underscoring here the two features of the data, which might have been expected, and have been evident in other research, yet which are broadly missing elements here: the active role of the parent; and strategic, long-term choice making. What, if anything, can be tentatively inferred then, through consideration of these absences? Indeed, what can be intimated from the lean mentioning of these matters, from these meagre trimmings of the data?

Firstly, any references made to parental input were cursory, with parents allowing their child free reign over the choice process or exuding only minimal influence and apparently offering little or no guidance, alternatively - and most commonly – the parents simply received no mention. Secondly, their decision-making is *ad hoc*, blurry, not strategic - planning for the future, considering careers or later alternatives was also notable by its absence. Indeed, Bethany – as one of the few who touch on these matters at all – in fact sums up both of these aspects neatly:

> BETHANY: My mum always said to me 'you can pick whatever you want', like she's not going to pressure me into doing anything.

> BETHANY: I didn't really think about it like what I was doing in the future I think I just picked the subjects that I'd liked.

How do these findings sit within literature regarding options choices and pathways?

The apparent lack of a significant, active, parental role within this data, sits in contrast with literature focussing primarily on the children of middle-class

parents; parents laden with appropriate capitals, who are networked and able to access *'hot knowledge'* (Ball and Vincent 1998). This literature emphasises that such parents play an active role in their children's schooling every step of the way, inserting themselves strategically as needed to apply pressure to ensure their children gain every advantage: access to the higher sets and the more prestigious qualifications, places on their chosen courses, the most effective teachers and more. Furthermore, there is recognition within the literature that such interventions on the part of these middle-class parents are all the more prevalent at branching points, at moments of significant divergence between student trajectories – such as options choices, starting Sixth Form or embarking on Higher Education (Ball and Vincent 1998; Ball 2003a; Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Gillborn 2008; Hargreaves 1968; Reay *et al* 2007; Vincent *et al* 2010; Machin and Vignoles 2005). The apparent paltry, hands-off, or even non-existent parental role for the students in this research here is far from the active, middle-class role alluded to elsewhere. Is this then a reflection that here we are not dealing with the middle-classes able to utilise the appropriate capitals, play the system and have a very effective and present role? Is this 'missing' parental input - in particular at these crucial decision points - one of the possible factors feeding into the impending marginalisation of some the students within this research?

Moving away from the parental element then, what more can the options choices literature offer to shed light on the findings here, in particular as regards strategic decision-making – the other feature notable by its absence in our data?

While there is considerable literature on options taken, access and pathways followed by different sub-groups of students, often with a comparative focus - of say academic versus vocational, male versus female, white versus minority, higher versus lower socio-economic status (Lee 1993; Greenhalgh *et al* 2004; Rice 1997) - there is less written on how the students set about making their choices. Once again it will likely be literature with student voice at the core, which will resonate in situating the emergent perspectives seen here.

Some writing on choice making which is germane draws from the students stand-point, concerning choices on leaving school and on entry into Higher Education (Ball, Reay and David 2002; Hodkinson, Hodkinson, and Sparkes 2013; Lee 1993; Macrae and Maguire 2002). In terms of the work by Ball *et al* (2002), despite dealing with Higher Education choices from the perspectives of ethnic minority students, they outline what they term a *'contingent chooser'* (Ball *et al* 2002, p336), an idea that may be helpful here. Such an ideal type, the contingent chooser, is set in contrast to an ideal type termed an *'embedded chooser'*. The contingent chooser, amongst other considerations, is more likely to use minimal information and have minimal social support. Explicitly then, for such contingent choosers, *'parents are 'onlookers' or 'weak framers''* in the choice process and *'choosing is short term and weakly linked to 'imagined futures''* (Ball *et al* 2002, p337). This resonates with the findings here, both in terms of minimal or no parental input as well as *ad hoc* choice making. Certainly, the remarks from Bethany above would fit readily within the framework for contingent choosers. Such choosers were also found to be predominantly those without family who had experienced Higher Education and largely also working-class (Ball *et al* 2002). Again this would echo our choosers in the main here.[28]

Similarly other authors recognise that many students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are likely to have minimal information and support, when making options choices and that this in itself is a factor through which greater choice can lead to greater educational inequality, in terms of attainment outcomes, since unsuitable decisions are more likely to be made:

> *'While for students with plenty of school and home guidance this additional freedom can be very fruitful, for others lacking such support mechanisms… without proper guidance, the pattern of courses taken may be quite inappropriate' (Rice 1996, p9).*

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[28] See Appendix B.

Further research chimes with these findings, that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may likely have short-term reasons for their choices, noting that they are:

> *'Less likely to recognise the implications of their choice and therefore might not choose wisely' (Lee 1993, p141).*

Without detailed information and guidance, and thus with less of an eye on their future and the implications of their choices, these students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, the more contingent choosers, will inevitably turn to more short term benefits when making their decisions; to the subjects they like the look of, already enjoy and succeed in and to the influence of their friends, all factors that were evident from this research. Indeed, wanting to be in the same classes as your friends is seen as a natural choice for many:

> *'Freedom to choose courses may give students the ability to take classes with friends' (Rice 1996, p18).*

Rice goes on to suggest that following your friends may be unwise, yet in this research there is one overt instance when a student – Eliot - wished to be in the same class as his friend not merely for social reasons but for academic support. I would argue then that this is an instance where following friends may be a wise strategy in terms of the individual's future educational trajectory. Furthermore, I would suggest that it is conceivable that this one ever so slightly more strategic element which is observed, namely choosing a subject that you know particular friends are choosing, so as to be able to access academic support in-class from them – could perhaps be a way of making up for the dearth of support from other elements, such as from home, which are so much more visible and to the fore for middle-class choosers. With this in mind, it could be interesting to investigate further individual students motivations for wanting to be with their friends, to consider if it is indeed feasible that this is a compensating tactic, deployed consciously or otherwise.

Is there anything in the literature that deals with the other emergent factors from this research which influence choice, namely believing a subject to be easy, or

picking the gender stereotypical option? Lee (1993) notes that minority and lower-SES students, in general:

> *'Would avoid courses with strong academic content, courses that demand work at home and frequent evaluation, and instead select less rigorous alternatives' (Lee 1993, p141).*

Lee offers two explanations for this, firstly that less socially and academically advantaged students shy away from selecting the more academically demanding courses in comparison to their more advantaged peers and secondly that the families of these less advantaged students are less likely to have access to pertinent information on the consequences of the choices. Certainly, this selecting of the *'less rigorous alternatives'* resonates with the emergent process in the current research, of choosing a subject that the student believes to be easy. And as had already been noted, parental input and longer-term strategic choice making are both notable by their absence.

There is also literature to be found which speaks to the idea of picking the gender stereotypical option, even the specific reasoning seen from Charanjeet of avoiding the bulk of the design-technology subjects, which she perceives as boys subjects. This perceived gender specific nature of several subjects is reflected in overall figures for subject choice (Buckley and Smith 1991; Roger and Duffield 2000).

In summary, in terms of reasons given for choosing options - namely liking a subject, being good at a subject, believing a subject to be easy, following friends, picking the gender stereotypical option and trying something new – these tentative emergent themes, or emergent possibilities if you will, are all present in the literature. Selecting the less demanding option, which is believed to be easy, as well as using only minimal information, or 'cold knowledge', and only considering the short-term implications, fit within the common behaviours in the wider literature, for students from lower socioeconomic status, whose parents have not experienced Higher Education, as well as the less strategic or contingent chooser. This near-sighted, less informed choice making goes hand-in-hand with the other feature of this data – the absence of significant parental

input. Thus it is more through what is not said that the interesting features creep in – mere hints of parental shadows and almost universal non-strategic decision-making. Are these missing elements contributory factors to the subsequent marginalisation of these non middle-class students here? Is this stemming - in no small part - from their behaving in line with so many others from lower socio-economic backgrounds?

The one possible exception to the almost universal non-strategic decision-making is seen in Eliot's attempts to find peer support in classwork, through selecting options alongside particular friends. Might this been seen as a compensating tactic and considered as strategic? It would be interesting to investigate such motivations further.

Before moving on to consider pathways, it is worth emphasising the body of evidence which recognises that greater student choice - in terms of choosing courses - leads to enhanced social stratification in terms of educational outcomes (Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Kulik and Kulik 1992; Lee 1993; Rice 1996):

> *'The availability of a wide variety of curricular options, and the exercise of choice of those options, acts to disadvantage minority and lower-SES high school students' (Lee 1993, p141).*

Here, the students in this research exhibit the behaviours of typical choice makers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, whose parents have not experienced Higher Education. These choices may feed into their potential restricted or lower attainment, underachievement and greater marginalisation.

In reflecting upon the options choice process, there has been as yet no consideration of whether or not these students are allocated to their preferred options. Indeed, the particular set of subjects that an individual embarks upon, could bear little or no relation to their stated preferences. This leads naturally to the consideration of subsequent course allocation, to any limits imposed on an individual's choice, and to assignment to more restrictive pathways.

4.4.1 Pathways – limited choice, allocation and assignment.

Some individual's note that they recall being given all the options they wanted:

> *FAYE: I got everything.*

Yet for others this is not the case. Eliot recounts that he is not given a place in a Music class but is allocated to Resistant Materials instead.

> *ELIOT: So I was like all right I'll do Business, I'll do Music, but they knew I wasn't going to do well in it so they moved me into Resistant Materials, even though I'm terrible with tools.*
> *LWE: So did you start Music and drop that or you didn't get it as an option?*
> *ELIOT: No, no. I didn't get it coz they knew if I wouldn't be able to do well in it coz I obviously didn't show any like…*

He states the reason he does not get a place in Music as stemming from the fact that he is not expected to do well in this subject, the implication perhaps being that he is instead allocated to a subject where he would be expected to have a better chance of doing well. This once again shows a possible glimpse of the awareness of extrinsic decision-making – the idea perhaps alluded to here being that the school has a strategy of maximising performance outcomes – the driver is this, rather than the needs of the students and this will impact the allocation to groups (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012). Thus he could be conceivably allocated to an alternative option in which he might flourish. Eliot continues to indicate that he considers his chances of being successful in the alternative option of Resistant Materials, as unlikely since he sees himself as *'terrible with tools'* and thus unsuited to the large practical elements within this course. A school strategy of maximising performance may go well beyond trying to help each student maximise their own performance – to prioritising some students over others. This would be to the detriment of those who are deemed less likely to impact positivity of the data, even if targeted for additional help. Here then there could be an instance of Eliot being sidelined to make space for a higher-attainer within the Music class. He could possibly also have some awareness of this more divisive element of extrinsic decision-making but the extent of his awareness remains hidden, suffice to say that he knows students likelihood of success – of attaining a high grade – will impact their allocation to options choices (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012; Gillborn and Youdell 2000).

What is of particular note and of greater clarity from these remarks is that Eliot recalls that he does not get his first choice of Music. This idea that some students get everything they ask for while others do not is again apparent as we move beyond the timing of options choices and allocations.

> *CHARANJEET: History, I wish I never picked that… I got Year 9… In History… I got that… but then it just got harder and harder… but I did ask like… in Year 11 they let some people swap… and I really wanted to swap for Media because had I done Media I would of easily got like Distinctions… but they didn't let me so now I'm left with like an E in History… which annoyed me but…*

There is a sense of injustice coming through alongside the annoyance in this extract, where Charanjeet feels that while some people are allowed to swap, she is not, notwithstanding the fact that she asked.

So one person may get all the options they ask for while another may not. One person may be allowed to swap to another option at a later date while another may not. This is how it clearly appears to particular students, who are interpreting their circumstances. The students perceive that there is different treatment. Are there further instances, concerning course allocation or alteration, where the perception of different treatment arises? Eliot chose Business Studies GCSE and despite starting off down this track he is moved to a BTEC course at a later stage.

> *ELIOT: I chose GCSE but they ended up putting me back into BTEC.*
> *LWE: And was that better do you think?*
> *ELIOT: Yeah. Coz in BTEC the courses are like, not simpler but, they still challenge you a little bit but it's just a little more understandable… I felt better in BTEC.*

Despite the fact that Eliot seems to be quite content with this move, there remains the sense that it is not his choice but rather something that is imposed upon him *'they ended up putting me back into BTEC'*.

So there are instances emerging where individuals either do not get their first choice of options in all areas, are not allowed to change their options at a later stage or are reallocated to alternative qualifications. These are all illustrations of

issues and adjustments confined to a part of their education, perhaps just one element of their wider programme of study. There are more sweeping instances which emerge.

Bradley and Charlie both report being sent to college. For Bradley this is a regular slot throughout the final two years of school, where he goes to study a Level 1 Construction course. This is then arguably an option choice; although unlike the in-school choices, it necessitates missing some lessons for other subjects and so could have a more far-reaching impact.

>*BRADLEY: I went every Monday in Year 10, 11 I think it was.*

Charlie, while also being sent to college for the same course, makes it explicit that he is *'put in college'*, so this is then not an option or a choice for him but rather an allocation.

>*CHARLIE: I think it was like…. Year 10 I think it was and then they was like "ah you can go college"… Well yeah, yeah they put me in college really coz... there was a couple of us and some of us didn't go and I was like yeah it'd be better.*

There is an intimation that the reason that he may be assigned to the college route is because he had been truanting - this would then be an extreme version of 'setting by behaviour' – 'pathway allocation by behaviour'! Charlie has much more to add about his experiences in the later years of school, relating to pathways. In terms of options choices, he is not only sent to college but also is simultaneously assigned to COPE[29].

>*CHARLIE: I got put into COPE... You know Learning Support?*

What is interesting here is that he elides COPE with Learning Support even though one is a course, so then an option or perhaps part of a pathway, while the other is a support unit – a blurring of boundaries and distinctions. He talks

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[29] The Certificate of Personal Effectiveness, a nationally recognised qualification outcome of the ASDAN programmes, see e.g https://www.asdan.org.uk/training/**cope**

about his allocation to COPE, to Learning Support and to college, very much in the same breath.

> *CHARLIE: Most of it I was in COPE… like they put me in that... just there… and for most of it and then Year 10 come and that was... I was college most of the school days.*
> *LWE: Yeah. So you were hardly here.*
> *CHARLIE: No yeah I just only come in for….*
> *LWE: How much did you go to college do you think?*
> *CHARLIE: I went every day and that… Year 10 and 11.*

Here Charlie recalls being at college every single day in Year 10 and 11 and otherwise, for the parts of the day that he is back in school, he is only in COPE, *'just there'*. Where he recalls spending his time becomes clearer through further elaboration:

> *CHARLIE: Coz I was like… school wasn't really… I didn't have lessons to go to… they literally just said you're in COPE all day that's it.*

Here he talks about only going to COPE and not having any other lessons to go to. These fragmentary recollections may seem confused or contradictory, for example when taking this statement together with his prior assertion that he was in college every day, but when his remarks are unpicked as a whole a coherent picture does emerge. It appears that he is allocated to a college course and when in school ends up spending all his time in the Learning Support Unit and not attending other lessons. He talks about this as being *'in COPE all day'*, seemingly as this was taught by the Learning Support staff in the same space – the Learning Support Unit - but the course itself was not timetabled for all the time he was in there. For much of his time in the Learning Support Unit, he recalls not having work to do, being bored and in fact wanting to go to lessons.

> *CHARLIE: We didn't have nothing to do that's why… we were just sitting there just like watching films on the computer… and like sometimes I would… did like want to go and go to my class and that coz it's better than just getting bored.*
> *LWE: But you weren't allowed to go to other lessons?*
> *CHARLIE: Nah. I was like I wasn't allowed in the other ones. Coz what they said I could go to err… college and then I'd just go to English and Maths…*

Additionally, he initially leaves this Unit to attend Mathematics and English classes, the only two GCSE's he is entered for. However as time passes he stops attending first English and later Mathematics too, which is how he ends up confined to the Learning Support Unit only, when not at college.

> *CHARLIE: Yeah I did go to Maths a bit but and then… like… I don't know it just went... I just drifted away like… coz where English... that just went out of the window… I was getting no help… I used to go Learning Support.*

> *CHARLIE: Then from Year 11… it just went… well GCSEs really… but then we was all getting up to them but I only had two to do... so they said I couldn't do nothing else…*

Charlie then is assigned to a pathway consisting of a very restricted set of possible qualifications – namely Level 1 Construction from his time in college and then a COPE qualification with GCSEs in Mathematics and English from his time in school. Are there further illustrations of alternative pathways to which any of the participants are allocated?

Devina recalls being removed from the mainstream timetable at the start of Year 9, a full year before options choices would commonly start. She is in fact allocated to a group designed for poor attendees and those perceived as in danger of increased truancy and perhaps even falling off role. Again then here is an instance of extreme 'setting by behaviour' - 'pathways allocation by behaviour' once again where the poor behaviour noted as a possible trigger, is truancy. She talks openly about her absenteeism in Year 8:

> *LWE: Did people notice that you were truanting, or did they not really notice? Was it easy to get away with it?*
> *DEVINA: Oh no, no. They noticed but like in the end they just got fed up of like chasing after me and that so… like taking me back to lessons… coz once they took me back I'd just like walk out again so they just got fed up and just started giving me detentions and I wouldn't go to the detentions so they didn't give me detentions so they just kicked me out for the day and I'd come back in three days later or something and I'd do the same… carry on, yeah.*
> *LWE: So then they kind of made this Year 9 class right?*
> *DEVINA: Yeah.*

The Year 9 pilot truancy-intervention group is taught as one class across the core subjects, thus remaining outside the main student body, which is put into 'ability groupings'. There is some appreciation from Devina that persistent truancy may result in assignment to this group but this is part of a more fuzzy understanding of the group's basis.

> *LWE: How did they tell to you about it?*
> *DEVINA: They just said it's a group for people who like don't understand things and that…. So yeah like people who like… they wanna like… it was all different kind of thing, like people who didn't wanna learn, people who wanted to bunk off school, people who just... would go to… like go to lessons but would mess about and that… so it was… then they just put all them kind of people into one group… so.*

As Year 9 progresses, Devina is subsequently guided towards a college placement together with COPE, as her only options outside this group, which is kept together until the end of compulsory schooling. Although Devina does not like being allotted to this group or see it as a constructive learning environment, she nevertheless admits to getting used to it. There is a sense of resignation and of her succumbing to her lot.

> *DEVINA: I just thought it was rubbish... I just thought it was just silly but then like once you get... get used to people… like the people around you… you start to realise right, OK, it's alright... it's not that bad... Like everyone just messes about and that but... The thing is when you want to learn, they'll mess about and when they want to learn, you'll mess about, kind of thing so you can't really learn.*

There may be some indication of naïve thinking here; that behaving well simply stems from wanting to do so or not, an individual choice unimpeded by context. Certainly it seems that to *'mess about'* is a commonplace occurrence for all of the students in this truancy-intervention pilot group at some time or another and that the environment is not conducive to learning.

Participants have differing experiences of the later part of secondary school in particular, with some facing more restricted options and greater limitations on choice. Charlie and Devina especially experience extreme constraints placed on their educational trajectories, through allocation to pathways where the possible qualifications are more drastically reduced and the majority of their time is spent

segregated from the bulk of their peers. It appears that for these two participants, their previous behaviour – explicitly in part stemming from their persistent truancy – fed into their allocation to these severely restricted pathways and thus placed significant limitations on their subsequent learning opportunities. In this sense then behaviour deemed undesirable and subsequent attempts to manage this behaviour, again have a very real interaction, overlap, blurring and confusion with subsequent learning opportunities.

4.4.2 Limited choice, allocation and assignment: Situating the accounts

Individual students unmistakably have differing experiences of secondary school, in part due to limitations on choice and allocation to more restrictive pathways.

In terms of limited choice, which impacts only some elements of their wider programme of study, instances emerge where individuals do not get their first choice of options in all areas, are not allowed to change their options at a later stage or are reallocated to alternative qualifications. On a slightly broader note, Bradley and Charlie both report being sent to college. College placement is arguably an option choice; although unlike the in-school choices, it necessitates missing some lessons for other subjects and so could have a more far-reaching impact. Nevertheless such allocations and assignments need not permeate all aspects of the wider educational programme of study.

Two participants, Charlie and Devina, have more extreme constraints placed on their educational trajectories, through allocation to pathways where the possible qualifications are more severely restricted and the majority of their time is spent segregated from the mainstream classes.

Charlie is not only sent to college but also assigned to a pathway consisting of a very limited set of possible qualifications – namely Level 1 Construction from his time in college and then a COPE qualification with GCSEs in Mathematics and English from his time in school.

From the start of year 9, a year before options choices would generally start, Devina is removed from the mainstream timetable and instead assigned to a pilot truancy-intervention group, a group designed for poor attendees and those perceived as in danger of increased truancy and perhaps even falling off role. This group is taught as one class across the core subjects, thus remaining outside the main student body. She is subsequently guided towards a college placement together with COPE, as her only options outside this group, which is kept together until the end of compulsory schooling.

The illustrations of greater restrictions on choice here, such as not getting their first choice of options in all areas, or not being allowed to change options at a later stage, will potentially compound any consequences from inappropriate choosing, considered previously and feed into enhanced social stratification in terms of educational outcomes in the same way (Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Kulik and Kulik 1992; Lee 1993; Rice 1996).

What is even more relevant here is the detail within the literature, which highlights several pertinent features, in terms of considering not just greater limits on choice, but also specifically touches on being assigned to alternative qualifications or placed on alternative restricted pathways.

There is ample evidence from the literature, that it is not the placing of students in a given option or group *per se*, which inhibits or increases their chances of attaining higher grades, rather it is the subsequent exposure to different curricula. If a group studies an alternative curricula or for a different qualification – say a foundation as opposed to higher tier of examination entry, or a BTEC as opposed to a GCSE – then there is a clear divisive impact, in terms of lower educational attainment (Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Kulik and Kulik 1992). In terms of exacerbating educational inequalities, this is then directly connected to the evidence that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be placed in groups following the foundation tier and on the more vocational BTEC courses (Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Boaler, Wiliam, and Brown 2000; Boaler and Wiliam 2001; Lee 1993; Slavin 1990).

Indeed, Lee (1993) notes that only some groups of students have a coursework element in their programme:

> *'Resulting in students from families of lower socioeconomic (SES) levels and minority groups being much more likely to be exposed to less demanding and less academic courses of study' (Lee 1993, p128).*

This notion of a more coursework based, vocational course being the less academic path of study is taken further by Davies (2003), who observes that the term vocational:

> *'Frequently also implies 'of lower educational status'' (Davies 2003, p3).*

Not only are students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds more likely to be placed in these groups, since they frequently have only minimal information and guidance, they are also less likely to realise the implications from the outset, and thus less likely to resist or complain if the pace is inappropriate for them, or indeed if there is a cap on the qualification or grades they can access. Indeed, some students only realise such a cap exists in the lead up to their final examination (Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Boaler, Wiliam, and Brown 2000; Boaler and Wiliam 2001; Lee 1993; Slavin 1990).

The illustration in this research of being moved from the academic GCSE to the more vocational BTEC is thus extremely likely to play a role in the student's further underachievement and increased marginalisation.

Undertaking a college course as a part of their wider programme of studies, where students spent there time studying a vocational BTEC qualification, can arguably be seen as an extension, or augmentation, of being moved from GCSE to BTEC within a particular subject option, with all the associated stigma and drawbacks. Recall that, at Welford High, the college course necessitates missing some lessons from other subjects and thus is more than just another vocational option. Three students – Bradley, Charlie and Devina – followed such a college placement.

In highly pertinent research into the experiences of several students, undertaking a vocational course at college as part of their studies over the last two years of compulsory schooling, Davies (2003) notes that while such an option is seemingly open to all:

> *'In practice it tends to attract those described by their school as middle or low achievers' (Davies 2003, p2).*

In fact, she goes on to observe that such vocational college placements are in effect:

> *'Largely aimed at disaffected youngsters' (Davies 2003, p2).*

Certainly, Charlie and Devina both talk about their truancy and attendance issues and all three who were directed towards the college courses have self-described as lower-attainers and as being in lower sets.

It is also relevant to note the warning:

> *'Might there, though, be a danger of students finding themselves channelled into vocational areas deemed suitable by more powerful others, rather than students choosing for themselves' (Davies 2003, p16).*

Indeed Bradley, Charlie and Devina all report being sent to college, albeit with varying degrees of persuasion, cajoling and direct allocation. While Bradley felt it was one recommendation which was highlighted to him and that he subsequently chose to take up, both Charlie and Devina saw no element of choice. This was the pathway allocated to them.

Charlie and Devina did not just feel this way about their college placements, this was a much wider issue, pertaining to the more harsh constraints placed on their educational trajectories, through allocation to pathways where the possible qualifications were severely limited and most of their time was spent detached from the mainstream classes. This can be seen as yet another step further along a more vocational, less academic route, starting with being moved from GCSE to BTEC in a particular subject option, moving along to being sent to a college placement for part of your wider programme, through to this sort of

dictated provision which permeated their entire programme of study, drastically constricting their access to learning opportunities and qualifications.

There is research evidence which indicates that course allocation and pathways, feeds in more heavily to future performance, than background characteristics and relevant capitals:

> *'Student course taking and track placement are actually the most powerful predictors of academic achievement, far outdistancing the effects of personal background and a wide range of student attitudes and behaviours' (Lee 1993, p127/8).*

Thus, the sort of pathway assignment experienced by Charlie and Devina, impacting as it does across an entire programme of study, dictating and thus restricting the number and type of qualifications available, is not only a substantial divide but also likely to have a significant effect. Such allocations are of course forms of sidelining and marginalisation in themselves, as well as being liable to feed into an ever-widening gulf between these individuals and their peers. Each time students are sorted and divided there is the potential for exacerbating inequalities and such a cleaving off of particular individuals onto alternative restrictive pathways is likely to be a key factor fuelling their subsequent further marginalisation. [30]

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[30] The reason I have kept my focus on choices at 14 – as opposed to also at 16 or later for which I do still have some data – is that the most marginalised will likely have already fallen off the radar and disappeared from formal educational trajectories. Indeed attainment at 16 is a significant factor in limiting later educational options. This means that students who had previously already had limitations placed on their educational trajectories, within their last two years of compulsory schooling, are likely to be further disadvantaged at this juncture. Any of the illustrations given by participants in this research - such as being entered for foundation as opposed to higher tier in a subject, taking a BTEC as opposed to a GCSE qualification, or indeed having more severe and far-reaching restrictions placed across their wider programme of study - could restrict their performance at 16 and thus feed into an increased probability of further compounding limitations and restricted possibilities at the end of compulsory schooling. Neither Charlie nor Devina, who had experienced the most dramatic constraints on their pathways in the last two years of compulsory schooling, would feature when considering educational pathways after year 11. Indeed Devina became pregnant during Year 11 and set about being a young mother as opposed to carrying on with any education at that point. Charlie, with one GCSE pass, had very limited possibilities within the education system and progressed on to a succession of short-term jobs, which did not require any formal qualifications.

All of this is about which classroom or setting students find themselves in, by choice or allocation. The next question is how they experience the classroom? This is the focus of the following chapter.

Chapter 5: The Effective Classroom - Likes and Dislikes

DEVINA: I think it's like the relationship… For me to have that relationship. For them to have a laugh with me and to help me learn.

BRADLEY: Coz if you go into class and the teacher drills it into your head and you've got to be quite and all that, and you're sitting there for a whole hour and it goes slow, writing you're writing, you're writing, but if you're having a laugh and that, time flies. That's a good lesson and you do your work.

ELIOT: I never did like him… It's coz I don't understand him. He like… when it got to it, I was just like 'you make no sense'. So instead of doing the work… I' d just like mess around in his lesson.

This chapter looks at emergent themes that touch on the vast range of things that mean a student may like or dislike in a lesson - what it is in the way a lesson and the learning are structured, managed or delivered. The social and affect are present and entangled with ideas of 'good lessons' for these students even in the above taste of this data - with relationships, 'having a laugh' and not liking the teacher interwoven with learning. The social and affect and will be seen to suffuse almost all aspects of the analysis here. While there is a broad literature on the sociology of affect (Berger and Luckmann 1991), literature concerning students classroom experiences, learning and pedagogy all too frequently have less of a focus on the social and emotional. For the students here, affect and the social are inextricably linked with almost all aspects of their learning experiences.

Why it is that liking or disliking a lesson should be important is also a thread that permeates these considerations. It becomes ever more clear that liking the teacher, their learning environment and their teaching approaches has ramifications which go far beyond simply being happy in the lesson. Indeed, not liking the teacher, or the learning environment will be seen to feed into individual students ostracism, withdrawal, increasing anxiety levels, frustration and lashing out, in other words into various forms of marginalisation. Hence these concerns go right to the heart of this research.

5.1 Setting the Scene: Framing the Emergent Processes on Students Likes and Dislikes

In marked contrast with the last chapter, where what was unspoken, absent and inferred was perhaps more telling than what was actually articulated, the foci here – the likes and dislikes as regards the teacher, the classroom environment and indeed the learning and pedagogy - are much more firmly carved out by the students themselves. It emerges that in these matters – far from being indifferent to or lacking awareness of what makes effective teaching and learning – they know what they like and what they want, they are outspoken and indeed oftentimes insightful and eloquent. In deficit models blame is laid squarely at the feet of the marginalised, who are presumed to lack aspiration, exhibit at best naïve thinking and possess limited volumes of the relevant capitals needed to navigate their educational journeys. The students here will be seen to fly in the face of this. They are passionate, thoughtful and aware when it comes to so much of the day-to-day matters of their own educational experience, what they respond well to, what they like and most crucially what supports and what hinders their learning.

In this chapter, I will again interweave the narration of what has emerged from my research with previous studies, highlighting where there is agreement, where there is tension or conflict and where there may be a particularly illuminating fresh perspective.

The emergent processes I identify are grouped within three overarching themes: behaviour management and control, relationships and finally learning and pedagogy. Throughout the social and affect permeate, as does the fact that these students are insightful, critical and reflective about their learning, in sharp contrast to deficit-thinking.

Behaviour management and control is comprised of two sub-sections, the first of which, 'not too hard, not too soft but just right', covers the students preferred approaches to behaviour management and what they feel to be the drawbacks of other approaches which are often a feature of the lessons they do not like.

The second sub-section 'the sound of silence' draws attention to the perceived specific downfalls of a silent classroom, a vehement dislike for a few individuals here.

The relationships section begins by considering the benefits of feeling known, understood and respected, common elements within their preferred learning environments. Subsequently 'the fun factor' addresses the idea of enjoyment, fun and laughter as parts of positive lessons and naturally contrasts this with the negative effects of boredom. Lastly, there is a note here regarding the detrimental effects of high staff turn-over and the significant benefits for many of these students when there is consistency of staffing.

Learning and pedagogy hones in on the favoured, preferred approaches to the teaching and learning itself, revealing detailed, astute, awareness of teaching structures and strategies that help and hinder their progress. They appreciate clear modelling, prefer learning broken down into manageable sized chunks and want the teacher to be able to cater for their individual needs, valuing more personalised help in the classroom – indeed this is almost a perfect rendition of 'good teaching' as seen by professional and academics (Coe, Aloisi, Higgins and Major, 2014).[31]

Before turning to these core findings, it is worth taking a moment to acknowledge that the different subjects within the school curriculum may well have differing appeal for each individual, as suggested by Bethany and Eamonn below. This is orthogonal to the other more wide-ranging issues of liking lessons that follow.

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[31] Arguably this is also a near perfect definition of child-centred or 'personalised' learning, in the sense of 'personalising learning' or tailoring education to individual needs to improve learning (Miliband 2004; Miliband 2006; Campbell, Robinson, Neelands, Hewston and Mazzoli 2007; Sebba, Brown, Steward, Galton and James 2007). However 'personalised learning' as an expression has been used and co-opted by government and the market place and thus there is contention and ambiguity as to its meaning (see e.g. Hartley 2009).

One noteworthy division, where Bethany and Eamonn differ is between the subjects seen as academic - of which English, Mathematics and Science would be the most obvious examples - and those seen as more creative or practical – Art, Drama, Design and Technology and Physical Education for instance. Some students are naturally drawn to the creative subjects they see as less high pressured, whilst others prefer the core subjects irrespective of the increased pressure, as they see these as the most useful for their futures.

Charlie recognises that he much prefers all the practical subjects, singling out physical education and design and technology in particular.

> *CHARLIE: I enjoyed that coz that was hands-on... That's how I am.*

In bemoaning the pressure associated with lessons in the core subjects – where she sees the teacher as mostly concerned with the latest test scores and preparing for public exams - Bethany highlights in contrast that she prefers the more creative subjects precisely because the pressure is absent.

> *BETHANY: It's more like creative and it's more laid back… if there was a subject then you could choose whatever you wanted to do and then you could just create it.*

Moreover then, Bethany values choice, freedom and creativity in addition to the more relaxed atmosphere. Eammon it appears feels the opposite of Bethany, seeing little point to Art and Drama.

> *EAMONN: I can't stand acting I just think to myself, 'You're making a fucking fool of yourself, for what?' A grade. And where is Drama ever going to get you in this world? There's too many people that want to do it… Art. Where is that ever going to get you? R.E. I didn't see the point in R.E. unless you was gonna be a priest or something like that, that's the only time you want to do R.E.. Everyone said it was an easy grade. What's the point? What's the point in getting an easy grade when you can go and do something that you know is going to give you a challenge.*

He in fact is looking for subjects that he feels will 'get him somewhere' in terms of enhancing his employability, as well as not shying away from the more challenging – perhaps also more pressured – subjects.

Whilst these more subject specific features, illustrating the differing appeal of certain subjects for an individual, may be enlightening in a general sense, they are tangential to the other more wide-ranging issues of liking lessons that follow.

I will instead now turn to the more wide-ranging factors influencing whether or not a student likes a particular learning experience; those that in principle could be more readily amended, altered or tweaked that have emerged from the students' own experiences and narratives.

5.2.1 Behaviour management and control: Not too hard, not too soft but just right.

> *LWE: Do you think there are things teachers can do - in terms of learning - that help people learn more?*
> *FAYE: Control the class.*

When describing a lesson they like, a class they consider to be effective and within which they can learn, or indeed simply a teacher they like, the students – just like Faye - frequently turn straight to issues of effective control and discipline. They are vocal and articulate in these matters and repeatedly affirm that they desire the classroom to be under control, well managed and calm. These concerns with control are to the fore and intrinsically entangled with liking a lesson or teacher, so much so that liking a teacher is bound up with more readily accepting their authority. This, as we shall see, is not simply about a teacher being strict or a classroom being silent – far from it. Rather it is interwoven with issues of fair treatment, mutual respect, effective relationships and knowing the students – affect and the social abound - and then using all of this to go on to teach them in the ways they find effective.

Starting from the issue of control then, what is it that the students say they prefer in terms of behaviour management implementation, which is indicative of a lesson they want to be in, where they can learn and enjoy the experience?

Bethany confirms that for her control is key to liking the lesson:

> *BETHANY: Teachers, some teachers like they do make the lesson much better to be in because they've got the right structure and the right control with the class, so you feel like "oh I like to be in this class", but some teachers you think... "yeah, I don't really want to be here".*

In terms of liking a lesson and the tone the teacher sets, Alfie also likes calm and control but he elaborates on what that means for him. For Alfie, what makes him respond positively to authority and so forms a vital component of a lesson he actually likes to be in, is centred on the character of the particular teacher managing the classroom and the way in which they enforce their authority.

> *ALFIE: It matters on who is doing it… on how they are, as in how they can speak to you, how they can communicate to you, how they can calm people down and get them to calm down and sit down.*

This indicates a nuanced understanding of authority and control, appreciating that how it is exerted may be crucial to whether or not it is effective, which goes beyond the consistent application of clear rules and policies. It is deeply social. Eliot also indicates some understanding that authority does not simply stem from applying sanctions and punishments. In discussing one of his favourite teachers whose lessons he likes, he acknowledges that she rarely if at all makes use of punishments but nevertheless has effective control with near full compliance from the class. He also makes reference to the teacher's personal qualities, citing her calm manner as pertinent to effective control:

> *ELIOT: But in there she don't normally punish people, she just tells them to shut up and they normally listen because she's so… coz like… she's calmer than all the others. So when she says, we do.*

In fact for Eliot, if he likes a teacher it is always in part as he sees them as understanding and reasonable and so accepts their authority more readily - affect and the social again. In generally describing teachers whose lessons he likes, he summarizes that *'they can be strict but they are fair'.* Devina also hints at fairness and being given a chance.

> *DEVINA: She'll talk to you like an adult not like the other teachers…*
> *Like she'd give you a chance and if you blow that chance, then that's your own fault kind of thing, but she gave you a chance.*

Bethany also evidently desires a controlled environment but favours teachers who are friendly in conjunction with being authoritative.

> *BETHANY: I preferred Mr. Parish because he used to get on top of everyone for work but everyone used to treat him as a friend… like he was good. And then Mr. Shah… everyone used to just muck about.*

Bradley also notes that the teachers he likes best have a similar immediate command of the class but for him it is the capacity to allow the students to have fun which is the required counterpart, for him to respond positively to their authority.

> *BRADLEY: But Ms. Boone was quite a good teacher as well. Everyone joked around and then when she told you to do your work, you done it.*

Bradley elaborates on this control within an enjoyable environment, which makes up his preferred classroom settings and in doing so he contrasts this with the set-up lead by more serious teachers, whose authority it seems he would be likely to challenge.

> *BRADLEY: She was up for a joke and a laugh and she let us talk and joke around with each other. I don't know I think with other teachers they either be really serious and that's when you start arguing with the teacher coz they want you to be really serious, or some of them are really just like "I can't be bothered" and then like no-one learns, but I don't know but when we, like even like Brandon and that, we all was all talking but when she told us to do something we all actually done it but then when she set up the other bits, the other part of the lesson we was all talking.*

Bradley here is describing a teacher who he sees as commanding authority from all students – illustrated by *'even like Brandon and that'* referring to the peers he considers most likely to be disruptive and disobedient. He accredits this effective authority in part to the fact that talking and joking around are permitted at times in the lessons, at transition points between activities, and then when attention is asked for it is forthcoming. Bradley in contrast, not only indicates that too strict and serious an environment may not work for him - indeed may lead him into confrontation - he also touches on teachers who he sees as not bothering.

Other students, when discussing their dislikes in terms of teachers and lessons, echo both of these features – disliking too much and too little control. This is then very subtle and complex, a set of inter-related and somewhat paradoxical concerns which would seem to demand of teachers' considerable social skill and patience over and above basic classroom management techniques.

In terms of disliking too much control, Devina and Faye emphasis that for them when a teacher is only strict, continuously shouting or uncaring, they also do not like the teacher. Eliot, in discussing a teacher he dislikes as harsh, perhaps hints at what might even be construed as bullying on the teachers part.

> DEVINA: They don't have to shout at people all the time.
>
> FAYE: I didn't like my first English Teacher. She was really mean.
>
> ELIOT: Either she would take the… hell of the mick out of you or she would just punish you.

Much of this once again seems to rest on some kind of personal social relations between student and teacher – affect again – but also obfuscated by more technical classroom management approaches. Felicia expresses a similar sentiment to Bradley in terms of being drawn into conflict with overbearingly strict or mean teachers. She illustrates how she gets drawn in to a competitive tit-for-tat when confronted by such a teacher:

> FELICIA: I don't like any teachers taking me for a mug. I'll feel like I have to say something… Ms. Shorthose. Can't stand her. Cannot stand her. Like if I'm in the classroom, and I say something, she'll just try and answer back. I don't like it when people try and answer back to me. Coz it feels like they're trying to compete with me. So I have to say something. Then we'll just have an argument.

Felicia is adamant that she will only respect teachers who show her respect:

> FELICIA: I just don't like it when, I'll go and speak to a teacher and they'll be like 'Oh yeah but she's a teacher, blah, blah, blah'. It's like, no, if they want respect from me, I'm going to give them respect as long as they give it back to me, like I'm not trying to respect them just coz they're a teacher.

She elaborates that for her it is these teachers who expect respect for just being teachers, who she sees as sticking together and seeing themselves as

on an opposing side to the students, that are the teachers she dislikes and whose authority she will not tolerate but will instead rail against.

The picture emerging from these marginalised students then is that whilst they certainly like and prefer a teacher with command of the classroom, they do not like what they perceive as strictness alone, without some other crucial accompanying qualities being evident from the teacher – calmness, fairness, a sense of humour, being respectful and friendly, have all been suggested as mitigating characteristics in this regard. It is worth reiterating here that all of this has come to light through discussion of teachers they like and lessons they enjoy not in response to questions about discipline. For these students then it would appear that on a spectrum of control, too strict is deemed unpleasant. Do those students with a more smooth or longer-lasting educational trajectory similarly dislike excessive strictness or do they feel differently? Might it be that this sensitivity to levels of control fuels the marginalisation of some individuals? Certainly, whatever their emotional response, it seems improbable that the bulk of the more compliant students would respond as Bradley and Felicia do when exposed to a strict teacher – one lacking in mitigating qualities - exerting their authority. This passionate dislike for unmitigated strictness, leading to probable disagreements and conflicts is certainly one plausible means through which students may repeatedly get into trouble and this could lead in some cases to their marginalisation in terms of withdrawal or exclusion.

For Devina a teacher being too strict, inflexible and not listening has lead to frustration, to giving up and on more than one occasion to her even absenting herself from class - another path towards greater marginalisation in terms of participation and attendance then.

> DEVINA: But I just… gave up on it… I didn't like it… I think it was coz it was quite hard actually... and I tried explaining to them that I don't know how… and they was just like telling me off and that and I was getting frustrated so I just walked out.

In terms of disliking too little control - which has already been disparaged by Bradley as just as negative as too much control - other students also mention

poor control and teachers not caring or not being bothered as reasons for disliking certain teachers and their lessons.

> *CHRIS: If the teachers aren't…. strict or they don't have control it's not really a lesson you want to be in, kind of thing.*

> *CHARLIE: Teachers just talk to you like…. They just don't care really.*

> *FELICIA: It's like the teachers don't care anymore… it's like they've given up on us… they just went 'forget it' like. They don't care.*

So what are the rationales, if any, for not liking classes where there is insufficient control?

> *BRADLEY: But some teachers, like Ms. Hanson, she just let everyone sort of do what they want. Not do what they want but she didn't have as much control of the classroom. Same as R.E. he didn't really.*

There is perhaps a justification hinted at here with the observation that, since the teacher was not able to impose control and make the students do as they wished, students were essentially free to do more or less as they chose. Bethany takes this further, clearly making the link between teachers not caring, not bothering and the development of a hectic environment where little if any work takes place.

> *BETHANY: The class and the teacher. Didn't like that. It was just such a bad environment in there, I couldn't work… and personally I'm easily distracted as well and so I didn't work as hard as what I should of done so… It was manic… it was just mayhem. The whole class and I mean the whole class was just… they all played up… like there wasn't much control, like she would sit on the computer while everyone else was just running wild… and someone would be running down the corridor and she wouldn't even care.*

Several students are vocal about disliking weak, ineffective discipline, chaotic environments and disorder. There are repeated assertions relating disliking such slack discipline because it creates an ineffective working environment. This is fundamentally interconnected with a lack of respect for the teacher, which is again inherently tied up with disliking the teacher, the classroom environment and consequently the lesson.

CHARANJEET: Mr. Shah. You ain't gonna learn anything with him.

ALFIE: Things like, with our R.E. lessons, it was like constant arguments. There was no teaching involved… The work just wouldn't be able to pick up and start. Coz it wasn't able to start, it genuinely felt like the teacher had just said "I don't care anymore".

CHRIS: Definitely got more work done coz if you had a stricter teacher then people wouldn't mess about so much… like Mr. Khan was kind of a push over. Like you could do things and get away with it.

There is a shared perception of strictness, in as far as can be gleaned from across the students here, with agreement about who is strict and who is not, as well as the consistent disrespect for lax discipline. For Craig, too little control and the associated unproductive working environment, meant that he would either attend solely to cause trouble or simply not bother to attend at all.

CRAIG: There was like certain lessons that I just wouldn't go… Mainly the reason was probably coz the teachers… there was basically no point of even going. It was just… you just go there to like cause manic and not get any work done so I'd just…. There wouldn't be no point in going really… no control over the class yeah.

In addition to disliking lessons where there was a lack of control because it led to an ineffective working environment, Bethany is clear that for her there is an additional explanation, that it allows space for bullying to occur in class. In elucidating why she hates one of her classes, Bethany recounts:

BETHANY: I used to get picked on for being the gullible person… and I used to get wound up about it… but I used to just get really angry about it and I used to just flip… coz it used to just go on and on and then the whole class, well most of the class would just join in then and I used to just get really angry coz they liked to see me get angry and they used to think it was a laugh. So yeah.

Bethany makes a case that there is space for bullying to occur in a classroom where there is weak control on the part of the teacher, consequently greater control is desirable then for no bullying, for a safe environment, as well as for a better learning environment.

Could too little control factor into some students marginalisation also? In a different way to the excessively controlled environment, where some students might possibly become marginalised through pushing back against this authority, here the ineffective working environment may likely mean less academic progress and attainment and thus fuel academic under-achievement and marginalisation. Additionally Craig in absenting himself may fuel his marginalisation and perhaps Bethany is marginalised in the under-controlled environment, in terms of being picked on and ostracised by her peers. Clearly whilst these would each feed into different types of marginalisation they may nevertheless feasibly each factor into divisions, separations or rifts between individual students and their teachers or their peers.

Is there a happy medium, a perfect middle ground, where there is sufficient control for a productive learning environment as well as to leave no room for students to be bullied by their peers in class, yet not so much as to awaken defiance in other students?

Eliot arguably describes just such a balanced classroom environment:

> ELIOT: When I was in her classes I was always, not jumpy but I was more… myself than I was in any other class. Coz she can handle me unlike the other teachers. They can't. So I knew I could talk a little bit more in there but she knew I would get the work done.

Eliot claiming that he can be himself is indicative of being in an environment, which works for him - where he feels safe to be authentic - one again of nuanced control where the teacher is able 'to handle' him yet also trust that he could balance talk and work appropriately – so once again control with mitigating qualities on the part of the teacher.

For Eliot this environment where he felt most able to be himself is one in which some talking was permissible - the classroom was evidently not silent.

5.2.2 Behaviour management and control: The sound of silence

Just as in the last section, where it was the students themselves who had so frequently jumped straight to matters of control, even when asked about broad likes and dislikes, here they themselves brought up the idea of talk as germane.

Bradley is animated when describing classes he likes and enjoys, where talk is an inherent feature in the classroom.

> *BRADLEY: I still done my work and still chatted a little bit.*

So Bradley and Eliot both note that a feature of the classrooms they like is that talk is permissible. Bradley expands on this point, contrasting the enjoyable, more lively classrooms where talk is allowed, with the tedium of enforced silence:

> *BRADLEY: Coz if you go into class and the teacher drills it into your head and you've got to be quiet and all that, and you're sitting there for a whole hour and it goes slow, writing you're writing, you're writing, but if you're having a laugh and that, time flies. That's a good lesson and you do your work.*

Bradley does not like a classroom where you have to be quiet all lesson, articulating that this is simply because it is not enjoyable and time drags. This, he is clear, is not about doing the work or not as he is contrasting two environments where the work is done. It is simply that in one, the work is achieved within an atmosphere that he much prefers.

In considering one teacher he did not like, who presided over just such a silent classroom, he notes:

> *BRADLEY: She was a nightmare. Grumpy, miserable. Weren't fun to be in. The classroom was just like silent coz everyone was just like… (shrugs).*

In fact through his tone and body language, Bradley makes clear that the students in this particular silent class are lethargic and uninspired, perhaps then even being reluctant to join in if there were a possibility of any form of talk.

For him, in that classroom, the negative atmosphere played into torpor, perhaps triggering or at the very least sustaining the silence.

Whether the silence comes about through strict enforcement on the part of the teacher, or arises from a lacklustre, dull or even negative tone set by the teacher; this is characteristic of a classroom Bradley and Eliot dislike.

Donna, by far the most vocal, articulate and passionate about the issue, first touches on silence when contrasting a class she enjoys with what it is not:

> *DONNA: You didn't sit there awkwardly… like the whole class is silent and that.*

The seed that her dislike of silent classrooms may stem from is hinted at here, namely that it is awkward. She returns to the same idea of awkwardness within a silent classroom, when explicitly talking about why she does not like them:

> *DONNA: It gets really awkward and then you're embarrassed to go "right I need help". You get that attention where people are thinking, "what does she need help with?"*

For Donna, the silence is considered awkward as it means that if she were to ask a question, to ask for help or clarification, the other students would be more likely to hear, bringing her not only a sense of embarrassment but also unwanted attention and even judgements about her abilities. There is feasibly an implication here for learning, if help is not being sought. There is another extract that again pertains to a reluctance to speak up in a silent environment because of worries about any impact on her reputation:

> *DONNA: It's really embarrassing though, especially when you are looked at as being one of the popular-ish people and people know that you are quite smart. It is embarrassing to go, "I need help. I have no idea what I'm doing. I don't know what this means. I can't pronounce this word" etc.*

In addition to a silent classroom not being conducive to speaking up, a further detrimental feature emerges when Donna describes another silent classroom environment she finds horrible:

DONNA: Ms. Yates I had. She was very strict so the class was always silent and she'd put you on the spot going "right you read out this now' and you just get like "I can't do that". You were just put on the spot and then you'd freeze. It's horrible. And the class is too silent so when she does give people work to do and stuff and you have no idea where to even start, you are really embarrassed to go "right I need help," so you just sit there and you don't do anything. It's, It's… I don't know. I suppose it's the embarrassment that I'm scared of I don't like people thinking, "Well she needs help".

In this extract Donna is revealing her fears and speaking openly and passionately about her uncomfortable experiences – the negative affects. The potential for humiliation by being asked to do something you cannot do, is present in the silent classroom, on top of the fear of asking for help. This silence for Donna fuels unhelpful worries and apprehension then, as well as the more direct impact on learning stemming from not seeking help when needed. For Donna is this one means through which she could become academically marginalised? Does this silent classroom impinge on her progress, with the anxiety and not seeking help both playing into barriers to learning? This is a recurring issue for Donna and this doubtless speaks to how deeply she is disturbed by a silent classroom.

This silent classroom described by Donna seems to reflect a particular teacher-centred learning environment, where the teacher tightly controls the selection, pace and sequencing of pedagogic activities in the classroom. Charlie's silent classroom may imply a similar teacher-centred learning environment. He also dislikes silent classrooms, particularly echoing Donna's sentiments about the embarrassment of asking for help, albeit in a less verbose manner.

CHARLIE: Like some teachers they would like… they wouldn't even… they just write something on the board and you gotta figure it out… and like they don't tell you what you gotta do... Like everyone else… some people would know but others… like me and that… I don't know and I can't and I don't want to like say coz it's embarrassing…

For Charlie any potential exacerbation of being marginalised in terms of learning, through not seeking the help he needs when in a silent classroom, is compounded further by his reactions to the situation:

> *CHARLIE: It was hard coz like in class I didn't speak up and when I got… like they said "oh could you read that" I couldn't so I got the hump.*

He in fact found this combination of being stuck and yet fearful of asking to be so frustrating and the potential humiliation so overwhelming that it would trigger feelings of anger - negative affects again - and more often than not, spawn a confrontation with the teacher, some similar disruptive behaviour, or indeed end with his simply walking out. In this way for Charlie the silent classroom held arguably even more risks in terms of becoming marginalised then – through not seeking help when needed, through feelings of anxiety and through his response of anger leading to disruptive behaviour and consequent sanctions.

Reasonably the eternally silent classroom could be considered as merely another illustration or incidence of being only strict, of control without mitigating qualities on the part of the teacher. Be that as it may, the silent classroom held so much sway for some individuals that it merits some particular attention.

Eliot and Bradley dislike silence, finding it constraining and tedious, which is at the very least unlikely to nurture a desire for learning, and may possibly fed into disaffection, disengagement and despondency with learning. Donna and Charlie have more severe reactions – a paralysing fear of being put on the spot, called-out, shown up, shamed or humiliated. This silent environment evidently causes negative affects - great anxiety - as well as a reluctance to seek help both of which may feed into academic underachievement and that is even before the possibility of triggering anger issues is factored in.

5.2.3 Behaviour management and control: Situating the findings

Behaviour management and control emerged as a significant factor for many students, when considering features of lessons they like or dislike. The students are clear in their aversion of extremes, articulating the perceived downsides of a classroom with too much or too little control. Whilst they frequently state that they want the classroom to be well managed and calm, there is a nuanced appreciation of how control is enforced. Again the emphasis seems to be on the social relations of learning, which rests in part on personal qualities, social skill

and interpersonal affects. What emerges is a picture of the kind of authority they respond to, namely authority where the control is exerted together with mitigating characteristics on the part of the teacher – these could be calmness, fairness, a sense of humour, or being respectful or friendly. Henceforth this will be referred to as 'nuanced control'.

These concerns around a strict, well-controlled environment, an effective system of classroom management and discipline within the classroom and what has sometimes been termed 'behaviour for learning' (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009), are long established as pervasive across the education sector and permeate a substantial section of academic, professional and government commissioned literature (Powell and Tod 2004; Shaughnessy 2012; Shortt, Cain, Knapton & McKenzie 2017). As an illustration, one of the core beliefs underpinning the government commissioned Steer Report into pupil behaviour and school discipline, states:

> *'Poor behaviour cannot be tolerated as it is a denial of the right of pupils to learn and teachers to teach. To enable learning to take place preventative action is the most effective, but where this fails, schools must have clear, firm and intelligent strategies in place to help pupils manage their behaviour' (Steer 2005, p2).*

While this wide-ranging report and the subsequent iterations reporting on progress in implementation, recognise that preventative action is preferable and that issues surrounding behaviour are complex and intrinsically interwoven with good teaching – whatever that might mean - one overwhelming message in terms of classroom practice is nevertheless about consistent application of overt strategies to control behaviour, in the form of rewards and sanctions (Steer 2005; Steer 2009). This could broadly fit then with the desire of the students here for firm, effective control. Is there any closer fit, for instance, is there any reference within these reports to the 'social' of control - the manner of implementation of this control, or the notion of mitigating characteristics on behalf of the teacher, which may make the enforcement of rules more palatable, diminishing the likelihood that any students would wish to resist the teacher's authority and not comply? Could such 'nuanced control' be part of what is inferred by preventative action? In terms of elaboration on the detail of what

preventative action may look like in the classroom, there is recognition in these reports that some students may have more complex needs and require additional provision to assist them in improving their behaviour and adhering to policies - perhaps in the form of pastoral support, deployment of learning mentors or agreed tailored responses (Steer 2005; Steer 2009). Moreover, there is a recommendation that all schools:

> *'Identify those pupils who have learning and behavioural difficulties, or come from communities or homes that are in crisis, and agree with staff common ways of managing and meeting their particular needs' (Steer 2009, p72).*

So again this may be directly pertinent for some of the students here, those who struggle to comply. Nevertheless, despite all of these caveats surrounding managing particular needs and hence perhaps tailored implementation, no explicit mention is made of the teacher's characteristics or manner, the interpersonal or the 'social' of control. The emergent idea of 'nuanced control', at the very least enriches and supplements the caveats surrounding blanket implementation of policies mentioned within these reports. Thus 'nuanced control' as the approach favoured by the students here - with the social at its core - could be considered as a particular case of an agreed common way of managing students with more complex needs.

More recent government advice reinforces and emphasizes the need for robust approaches to discipline and behavior in schools, noting that schools: *'must ensure they have a strong behaviour policy to support staff in managing behaviour, including the use of rewards and sanctions'* (Department for Education 2016a, p3). The emphasis on consistent implementation of a clear, firm policy is foregrounded, in order to *'regulate the conduct of pupils'* (Department for Education 2016a, p4), whilst the references to preventative actions are absent from this main document (Department for Education 2016a). The social is erased. A remaining gesture towards recognition of the role of preventative action can be found in a supplementary paper, within a discussion of checklists for effective behaviour strategies, where one suggestion is: *'making sure all adults in the room know how to respond to sensitive pupils with special needs'* (Department for Education 2016b). Similarly in a recent review

from the governments appointed 'Behaviour Tsar', there is reiteration of the need for consistent application of a firm behaviour policy: *'Schools must be careful to publicly and consistently apply consequences to students' actions'* (Bennett 2017, p41). These propositions seem to lack the complexity of the students' perception and experience of behaviour management.

Here once again control and rules are front and centre, with adaptive, preventative measures to cater for diverse needs arguably more of a grudging after thought, which ought to be minimised: *'Rules and values that fluctuate too much confuse what the school stands for. Exceptions may be permitted, but they must be exceptional'* (Bennett 2017, p37). Bennet recognizes that some students with more complex needs are at greater risk of falling foul of the rules: *'Those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autistic spectrum disorders or learning difficulties, are much more likely to break the school rules than other students'* (Bennett 2017, p41). He even acknowledges that: *'It is important not to sanction where help is the appropriate response'* (Bennett 2017, p41). Yet he returns time and again to the vital importance of compliance and the need to absolutely minimize any variations or allowances: *'It is unacceptable to accept misbehaviour from any student who is capable of modifying their actions'* (Bennett 2017, p41).

The idea emergent here - 'nuanced control' - sits outside and goes beyond the bulk of the more narrow latest government advice, where the social is essentially eradicated. In terms of the supplementary material on possible behaviour checklists, and grudging acknowledgement from the 'Behaviour Tsar', 'nuanced control' may be one concrete way - preferred by the students - to flesh out in practice a means of responding to sensitive pupils, pre-emptively adapting practice to cater for their needs.

A greater acknowledgement of the social and space for individual differences can be found, when turning to the academic literature concerning behaviour management in the classroom, in particular when the pragmatics of policy enactment are considered (Maguire, Ball, and Braun, 2010; Ball, Hoskins, Maguire and Braun 2011; Ball, Maguire, and Braun, 2012; Maguire, Braun and

Ball 2015). Indeed across this substantial project Maguire *et al* look at policy enactment across several secondary schools in England, considering as one illustration how behaviour policies are implemented in actuality. Despite all the governmental advice relating to consistency, these authors, in taking a policy sociology approach, argue that not only are issues of enactment heavily context dependent but also the sense making by different policy actors will additionally vary considerably even within broadly similar contexts. *'The professional dispositions of various members of staff seemed to provoke differences in understanding and pedagogy in the field of behaviour management'* (Maguire, Ball, and Braun 2010, p159). If this is the case then even if there is a semblance of consistency sustained in terms of numbers of rewards and sanctions issued, there is certainly variety in understanding, which is likely to affect the classroom environment, and tone set by the teacher. Furthermore:

> *'There was a pragmatic recognition of the need to establish and maintain order and control, but for some policy actors there was a need to enact discipline in a more holistic and student-sensitive manner – an enactment that was being practiced somewhat differently in different 'parts' of and places in the school'* (Maguire, Ball, and Braun 2010, p161).

This is what the respondents here also indicate from their experience. So there is difference and variety not only in understanding but also in interpretation, sense making, and ultimately in delivery in the classroom. Such a holistic, student-sensitive approach is certainly closer to the ideas of 'nuanced control'. When different teachers implement policy across a school:

> *'What emerges, then to be enacted in practice at the classroom level, is a bricolage of disciplinary policies and practices, beliefs and values'* (Maguire, Ball, and Braun 2010, p166).

Indeed, this recognition that values and beliefs are in actuality playing a role and feeding into the variety of enactments, certainly resonates with the personal characteristics inherent in 'nuanced control'.

Just as the notion of a strong behaviour policy is prevalent across the range of literature, so is the accompanying idea that where there is weak discipline and a

lack of control, learning and attainment suffer (Bennett 2017; Powell and Tod 2004; Steer 2005; Steer 2009; Department for Education 2016a). Indeed a core rationale for the emphasis placed by policy makers on behaviour, not to mention the coining of the term behaviour for learning, stems from this widely accepted association. The students here disliking weak discipline, as it is not conducive to a constructive learning environment, are in line with this thinking then although of course they do not value strictness *per se* either. Similarly the ideas that such an ineffective learning environment may allow space for bullying and fuel their academic under-achievement are echoed within much literature (Steer 2005; Steer 2009; Department for Education 2016a). The only arguable exception to echoing the literature connected to an uncontrolled learning environment, comes from the one student here who simply truanted altogether rather than attend such a lesson – certainly a route that could play into their further marginalisation. Similar decisive action from the student seems not to be present within literature on behaviour policy and its enactment, nevertheless, as will be evident later in this chapter, students absenting themselves from undesirable learning experiences more broadly is evident within wider literature.

Whilst a lack of effective control in the classroom is certainly acknowledged as not desirable, too strict an environment does not seem to come under such scrutiny within much of the literature.

In terms of the downsides of an overly strict environment – where authority is imposed without 'nuanced control' - some of these marginalised students here recognise that they would be liable to contest or defy such authority, probably leading to sanctions and this could lead in some cases to their marginalisation in terms of withdrawal or exclusion. It is the manner in which the policy is enacted that is triggering their reaction and thus in part producing their marginalisation.

There is evidence that when schools are enforcing a new set of policies, including crucially a new behaviour policy, greater use is made of sanctions in the short-term, arguably disproportionally affecting those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Beckett 2007; PricewaterhouseCoopers 2007;

Wilson 2011). Increased use of many forms of sanction, inequitably applied in this manner, may thus provide room for greater marginalisation in terms of withdrawal and exclusion, for instance, to creep in again. Although this downside of too strict an environment is acknowledged then, the subtleties surrounding downsides of a silent classroom raised in the data here - lethargy, disengagement, anxiety, fear and humiliation - remain absent.

The silent classroom, as described by Donna in particular, appears to realise a specific version of how learning takes place – a teacher-centred environment, with strong-framing and visible pedagogy, where the teacher controls the selection, pace and sequencing of pedagogic activities in the classroom (Bernstein 1971; Bernstein 1975). As far as silence in a classroom is concerned, within the literature much mention of silence is in contrast to the value of talk - whether as a means of student learning or a means of a teacher gauging that learning. There is for instance research concerning how to deal with silent students who do not participate in discussion (Townsend 1998), how to interpret student silence (Schultz 2009), or exploring silences on the part of non-native speakers (Tatar 2005). There is additionally some research into how different types of silence can indeed be used effectively in the classroom (Alpert 1987; Ollin 2008).

This literature then concerns itself with dealing with, interpreting or reflecting on student silence, breaking that silence or using limited staff and student silence as effective features of learning. There is an absence within this literature of the potential negative affects of a silent environment, such as those so keenly articulated here – namely producing unease and anxiety in case they are asked to speak out, or are shown up in front of the class, and consequently being reluctant to seek help even if needed. There is - within literature based around student anxiety - a long established link between anxiety and lower academic attainment (Newbegin and Owens 1996; Wood 2006). This message here that such anxiety is a side effect - albeit perhaps unintended - of an over strict, nearly permanently silent classroom environment, means that it will likely feed into under-performance and thus certainly merits a hearing.

Viewed through the lens of this powerful emergent notion of the potential damage of a silent classroom, the associated fear of humiliation, the anxiety and the reluctance to speak up or seek help, the following assertion may surely be thrown into question: *'Directing students to behave in a specific way is often mischaracterised as an act of oppression. This is both unhelpful and untrue.'* (Bennett 2017, p23). For several of the students here, they certainly appear to experience something that could conceivably be termed oppression, within these silent classrooms.

5.3.1 Relationships: Feeling known, understood and respected

In making it clear that they prefer teachers who have command of the classroom yet crucially exert 'nuanced control' - these marginalised students have already intimated several personal qualities which may be desirable in a teacher they like and in whose lessons they can learn – calmness, fairness, a sense of humour, being respectful and friendly, have all been suggested as such mitigating characteristics. Thus far these characteristics of a likable teacher have emerged as wanted in order to make their authority palatable. The 'social' of control matters greatly. Similar characteristics, amongst others, emerge when liking a teacher and their lessons are discussed more broadly.

> *DEVINA: I think it's like the relationship… For me to have that relationship.*

> *FELICIA: I have more of a connection.*

> *FAYE: I get on with Ms. Williams as well so… and she sort of knows like that I get a bit upset at times and stuff so. I've got a good like relationship with her and stuff, so.*

The undertone of being respected permeates much of what is discussed here in terms of the teacher having a positive relationship and effective connection with the student, which also for Faye necessarily includes being known. This idea of being known and understood, is echoed by Devina and Felicia:

> *DEVINA: She understood where I was coming from.*

> *FELICIA: Just understanding people. People that understand you…*
> *it's like they're more understanding. Like… don't jump to*
> *conclusions.*

Felicia is not simply talking about a teacher understanding her but in fact more generally having an understanding, empathetic temperament. If a teacher is not jumping to conclusions, maybe they are listening to what the student has to say before making any judgements, again a nod to consideration and empathy. Felicia speaks more specifically to empathy in another extract, as does Alfie:

> *FELICIA: They understand both sides of the story, so they can look*
> *at it from both point of views.*

> *ALFIE: It's also being able to see it through other people's eyes.*

Faye also highlights similar qualities of compassion in the teachers she likes:

> *FAYE: I think they are just sort of like caring people as well.*

Dene, who has fraught relationships with many members of staff and is frequently sent out of the classroom, walks out or truants, states that there are only a few members of staff whom he likes. He asserts that they are the teachers who make an effort to know and understand him, who take this interaction beyond the confines of the classroom to form a bond.

> *DENE: When the teacher's getting on with you… they put more*
> *effort in than anyone else… Like after lessons or if you see them*
> *out in the playground at lunchtime, they bond with you then. Like do*
> *stuff with you while you're at lunchtime.*

He is clear that he responds in kind to this effort by trying harder and working more for these teachers, precisely *'coz they put effort in with me'.*

He advocates that all teachers ought to make this extra effort to build connections, in particular with the less well-behaved students they teach:

> *DENE: Just put more… I know they do put a lot of effort in… but*
> *with the ones that were naughty, put more effort in with them*
> *ones… Try and bond with them more I think… Coz I think if you've*
> *got a bond it's better… coz then you're not like walking to lesson*
> *like towards… making it really long to get to lesson, just be there in*
> *a flash and enjoy it.*

Dene connects a positive relationship with the teacher with making the students not only more eager to attend their class but also to like it more once they are there. There is a hint here at a sense of why liking a teacher may be important for learning. Faye makes explicit the crucial link between liking the teacher and working well:

> *FAYE: I think… it was good coz I liked my teacher… I get on really well with him and yeah it was sort of like… it wasn't too bad coz it was relaxed but it was… but you worked… so it was quite nice.*

Certainly the picture emerging is that these students are far from indifferent to their relationships with their teachers. They express repeatedly that they like those teachers with whom they have a better relationship or a bond; those who have made the extra effort to get to know them and build this connection. They are also clear that such teachers are more often than not caring, understanding and empathetic by nature, which perhaps also relates to the importance for them of self-esteem, safety and confidence, in turn related to respect.

Liking the teacher is a feature of a lesson they enjoy and so too is working. Whilst several students' mention doing their work as an integral part of a lesson they like, three are explicit that their preferred teachers are those who manage to get the work out of them in just the right way:

> *ELIOT: Coz she's a little bit calmer, but she's more thorough. She actually made us do the work.*

Eliot views this diligence on the teacher's behalf as an extremely positive thing and is glad that he is pushed into achieving. Felicia equates a good lesson with getting on with the work, yet recognises that she may need cajoling in order to do this:

> *FELICIA: It's good. I like it. It's easy to get on… and Miss like she don't push you too much, like she pushes you to the perfect level, like she don't say 'Felicia come on', like she don't nag me. She only nags me when I need to be nagged.*

Once again the underpinning established relationship - the social and affective - with this teacher is key, meaning that the teacher knows when and how to push this particular student to greatest effect and significantly also when to step back

to facilitate learning. Eamonn mentions the perseverance of his favourite teacher, echoing a preference for a teacher who pushes him or 'makes' him do the work.

> *EAMONN: Ms. Hanson helped me loads and it just kind of happened. I think the fact that she would persevere with me and make me do it. Other teachers just give up and she made me do it. She would make me do it. She'd just helped me a little bit more and persevered a bit more. So it just all fell into place one day.*

So these students find that when an affective, positive relationship is established with their teacher - a bond emerging out of efforts to get to know them on the teachers behalf - they not only enjoy the lessons more but also are more likely to respond to this teacher and to work well in their class, in part as they are more content and in part as these more understanding teachers often know how to handle them effectively so as to elicit work from them. Liking the teacher - the social and affect - is a feature of a lesson they enjoy and this it appears is intrinsically bound up with working well. Donna summarises this neatly here:

> *DONNA: I had Ms. Bush. When I had her I was going to my lessons, I was doing my work, because she'd sit there, she'd like socialise with you until you felt more comfortable in the classroom.*

Bethany in talking about positive relationships with teachers notes that this may sometimes extend to the wider inter-personal relationships across the whole class, which have their roots in the relaxed tone, cultivated by the teacher.

> *BETHANY: It was like more relaxed in there coz everyone used to get along so I used to actually do quite a lot of work in Art and I used to stay behind, I wanted to stay behind after school for Art but with others I didn't really want to stay behind.*

In this case what began with liking a teacher, progressed through to liking the whole class and the relaxed environment, which meant that Bethany was happy to attend after school classes, something that becomes increasingly common place higher up the school in preparation for examinations and so can feed heavily into academic attainment. Once again then, liking a teacher - the social and affect - is deeply intertwined with working well, learning and attaining.

These positive relationships, where the students feel known, understood and respected have benefits far beyond simply being happier in the lesson.

> *EAMONN: When I hate something, I don't put much effort in. When I love something I give it a hundred and ten per cent.*

Eamonn makes a clear link between liking a lesson and putting in more of an effort. When he does not like a lesson, or does not bond with the teacher, he will not try as hard, sometimes taking this non-compliance further.

> *EAMONN: I couldn't stand it. I hated it… and I used to play up.*

> *ELIOT: But like with another teacher, we don't really like 'em, so if they say it, we don't fully do it, we're just like… OK.*

Eliot similarly will not comply with instructions from a teacher with whom he does not have a positive relationship. For Donna, a positive relationship with the teacher has more far-reaching effects, feeding directly into whether or not she attends or truants a lesson.

> *DONNA: Depending on who my teachers were I'd go to my lessons.*

Bradley also relates disliking one lesson so much that he turned his back on it completely, truanting every lesson with that teacher over the course of a year.

> *BRADLEY: I really didn't like it. I really didn't enjoy it. It's like I didn't think about it or anything, just ignored it.*

Evidently where the students feel known, understood and respected, such positive relationships feed into a range of benefits for these individuals students, from better attendance, through more compliant behaviour, to putting a greater effort into their work and trying harder, as well as of course enjoying the lesson more. This is an upward spiral of success where students are more likely to attend, comply, try harder and presumably thus do better. Should these positive relationships be absent, the triggering of the reverse downward spiral of disengagement, becomes ever more likely – inducing discontentment, disengagement, frustration, misbehaviour, and even truancy – and presumably factoring into underachievement and academic marginalisation. Relationships - the social and affect - matter.

5.3.2 Relationships: The fun factor

The idea of an understanding, compassionate teacher who makes an effort to get to know their students and thus knows how to motivate and cajole the individuals effectively has emerged so far as the overarching picture of the teacher these students prefer and from whom they can learn. Here we begin to see that there is another – not unrelated – factor, which emerges repeatedly and so deserves specific consideration: the sense of a lesson being *'a laugh'*, fun, enjoyable, engaging and above all not boring.

Bradley brings up the simple idea of personally preferring more lively teachers:

> *BRADLEY: She's loud ain't she? Bubbly and everything and we all enjoyed going to her lessons.*

He states this preference for the more vivacious teacher, which for him is a marked contrast with the personalities of the teachers whose lessons he does not enjoy:

> *BRADLEY: They was all quiet teachers and quiet people.*

Bradley continues to elaborate that he likes lessons where the teacher exhibits a sense of humour as it makes the lesson more entertaining, a sentiment echoed by Devina.

> *BRADLEY: I mean if the teacher has a laugh and a joke and makes everyone else happy and joke around. If the class is fun, if the class is enjoyable.*
>
> *DEVINA: I think she made it fun, like she used to smile a lot.*
>
> *BRADLEY: Maths. Coz I enjoyed the lesson, the people in the class were fun and happy as well, she was a good teacher and everyone enjoyed coming to her lessons.*

Here Bradley - in talking about why Maths is probably his favourite lesson - again mentions enjoyment and fun but bound up with this, there is also the idea of being a good teacher, a likely nod to learning then. Certainly in his opening quote at the start of the chapter, Bradley saw *'having a laugh'* and *'you do your*

work' as both being features of *'a good lesson'*. Other students mention having fun and link it more overtly to working well and learning.

> *DEVINA: For them to have a laugh with me and to help me learn.*

> *ELIOT: Likability really. If they can make their lessons fun and interesting then you're more likely to work but if they make it boring and like plain, you're going to feel bored and you're not going to bother.*

Devina does not link the fun factor with working hard directly but she does recognise enjoyment and learning as two necessary features of the lessons she likes. Eliot makes an unequivocal link between a lesson being fun, enjoyable and interesting and his working well, in precise juxtaposition to a dull lesson in which he is not likely to engage or make an effort. Faye has clearly switched off in less engaging lessons despite not intending to do so.

> *FAYE: I think when teachers explain things they should get you involved… like don't just sit there and they're like 'mer, mer, mer'… coz that's just really boring. I just don't listen coz you can't. I try to and switch off. You switch off and you're like 'Oh God what did they say?" But yeah… if they have a bit more of a character and they're not so like boring. It helps a bit more when they're a bit like I guess more… not excitable but a bit more like energy. Yeah. It helps.*

Faye paints a clear picture of the danger of students disengaging and being turned off by less dynamic, more monotonous teachers. She once again states a preference for the more gregarious, energetic teacher personality and crucially links this unequivocally to engaging more with the lesson.

Chris, while less focussed on the characteristics of the teacher, is nonetheless similarly adamant that a fun-free, dull, boring lesson is undesirable and not conducive to working.

> *CHRIS: The work was boring as well so… and it just wasn't fun to do so that's why you kind of messed about.*

As with the impact of positive relationships more broadly then, this idea of a fun, engaging lesson as opposed to a dull boring one, is similarly inherently entwined with more compliant behaviour, more successful engagement and likely better learning. Again for the students in this research, this may have impact on

attendance also, with a fun lesson being one they are more likely to attend and a boring one providing impetus for truancy.

> *DEVINA: I think the most lessons I went to was… coz like… it was quite fun... I enjoyed it.*

> *BRADLEY: I went to it coz it was quite funny and I enjoyed it and he joked around and everything.*

> *DEVINA: Sometimes I'd just get bored because they'd be saying the same things over again…. like you know when they do it for a week you just get bored of it… like oh OK I know it… so then you just get bored and go off and go to the back of the field and sit there with everyone talking and that.*

Is there some hinting at taking this even further, at something additional, within this last remark by Devina? The idea that a boring lesson is not conducive to learning is one thing but Devina inverts this, noting that for her not learning anything new is boring in itself. Chris and Donna seem to share this sentiment.

> *CHRIS: I don't like sitting around just wasting time it's boring.*

> *DONNA: I'm not learning anything new. It's boring.*

It becomes increasingly clear that these students want an environment in which they are more likely to work well and that indeed they want to be actively engaged and to learn. This leads naturally to the next sections, the consideration of aspects more specifically related to teaching, learning and pedagogy, which feature in the lessons these students prefer. Before moving on to consider aspects of pedagogy however, one last noteworthy factor intrinsically bound up with relationships emerged repeatedly, the idea of consistency of staffing.

5.3.3 Relationships: Consistency of staffing

> *DENE: I got along with her from the beginning really anyway.*

Building effective - and affective - positive relationships, as the students have made clear, takes effort on the teacher's part and this in turn takes time to establish. When these students do manage to establish a good relationship or bond with a member of staff early on in their time in secondary school, this on-going positive relationship seems to provide a much-needed hook, a thread of

consistency, which feeds into more regular attendance and engagement and facilitates staying on track, in just the same way each positive relationship they have with a teacher can. For some individuals, it is these consistent, long-standing relationships established from the outset, which hold more weight and influence on their educational trajectory.

> *FELICIA: Because I've known Ms. Ford ever since I started this school, we grew together kind of thing and so did me and Ms. Twombley.*

Felicia – like Dean – built her formative, most influential and constructive relationships with members of staff near the outset of her time at the school. She talks about *'growing together'* along with these members of staff. She is clear that for her knowing someone for a long time is crucial as it takes time to build up trust - the social and affect again.

> *FELICIA: I had Mr. McManus when I first started… I had a really good relationship with Mr. McManus, he was like a dad to me. Like he was just… he was perfect but then… I had Ms. Holmes but she left and then I had Ms. Abbas.*

Felicia, in this discussion of the succession of form tutors she had since starting school, clearly still pines for the first, formative, strong relationship that she had with her original form tutor. Whether after a teacher they like leaves, they are less willing to start again, or whether perhaps as the students progress up through the school they are less inclined to seek these relationship is not clear. What is clear is that when the long-standing connections are lost, they are rarely replaced with similarly strong bonds with new staff.

A recurring feature for these students is that staffing changes, teachers come and go, and the consistency of relationships is broken.

> *DEVINA: I liked English when Ms. Pickett was teaching it but then when she left I thought, what's the point.*

> *ELIOT: So they moved us in Year 9 and that's when I ended up getting Ms. Holmes, but she left… and then we got Ms. Walker.*

> *FELICIA: I don't like any of the other teachers here like, I don't like them. All the good teachers have left.*

Naturally, this idea of consistency of staffing, so as to maintain the strong relationship throughout a student's time in the school, is not entirely distinct from the other facets of positive relationships previously touched on. Feeling known, understood and respected have already been noted as inherent elements of a good relationship with a teacher. This extract from Felicia illustrates why this is so heavily interwoven with permanency.

> *FELICIA: Coz where we have that relationship, it's easier for her to say like whatever she wants to say to me and I can say whatever I want to say to her back and know that we didn't mean it and whatever. Whereas if I was horrible to another teacher, they'd be like 'right just get out. I don't want you in here', but Ms. Ford… she knows not to push my buttons like that and I know not to push hers either. So we talk to each other with respect. I'm never horrible to her anymore. I used to be but not anymore… Coz one time she gave me advice and then from that advice she gave me, I just respected her much more.*

The 'social' is rife here – such a relationship rests on being known as a 'person' and individual to the teacher rather than a more formal, narrow teaching and learning exchange. Arriving at a position where the teacher knows how to speak to a student in just the right way, is aware enough of who they are to not wind them up and indeed has been in a position previously to offer advice, all takes time to generate.

The difference that it can make to these students experiences - between having a teacher they like and one they do not – is becoming clear. Positive relationships between these students and their teachers and in particular those bonds with longevity, do have a tangible effect for these marginalised students.

5.3.4 Relationships: Situating the findings

For the students here, what emerges is that relationships with their teachers clearly matter. They like those teachers with whom they have a better connection or a bond; those who have made the extra effort to get to know them and establish this rapport. They are also clear that such teachers are more often than not caring, understanding and empathetic by nature. The students find that when such an effective - and affective - positive relationship

exists, they not only enjoy the lessons more but also are more likely to attend, to comply and then crucially also to work well, since often it is these more supportive teachers who know how to elicit work from them. Liking the teacher - feeling known, respected and understood - is a feature of a lesson they enjoy and this it appears is intrinsically bound up with academic engagement.

There was an extrapolation of the desirable teacher qualities noted by several students, for whom a sense of fun and enjoyment was also important in liking a lesson and they saw that this was often associated with a teacher being dynamic and energetic, as opposed to quieter, humourless and dull. This preference for certain teacher qualities is echoed across a variety of literature:

> *'Beynon (1985) has also looked closely on the development of teacher and pupil relationships. Like Measor and Woods (1984) Beynon found that judgments about one's teachers, based on initial classroom encounters, had more to do with the teachers' personalities than the quality of their teaching. Teachers who treated you `like a proper person'' were well regarded' (Galton, Morrison and Pell 2000, p351).*

Here then the idea of being treated properly and respected is seen as a trait of the preferred teachers. Other research notes that the impact of such positive teacher qualities can be substantial: *'Certain characteristics of teachers have a significant influence on whether students like school'* (Hallinan 2008, p282). Hallinan elaborates that it is teachers who care about their students, show respect and use praise and positivity, that increase students' liking of school, elucidating why this matters, noting: *'by providing social and emotional support, teachers increase students' liking for school, which, in turn, improves students academic and social outcomes'* (Hallinan 2008, p282). So for Hallinan the idea of liking teachers who are respectful and positive is recognised to have impacts beyond merely a greater liking of school, extending to improved learning and attainment. This echoes the findings here where academic engagement is also greater when the students like their teacher. Similar specific teacher qualities which are again recognised to feed into greater academic success are found elsewhere within the literature. This time ideas of support and fairness are highlighted, again fitting alongside emerging characteristics - of caring, understanding and respect - found here:

> *'Young people who feel connected to school, that they belong, and that teachers are supportive and treat them fairly, do better' (Libbey 2004, p282).*

Stepping back from particular teacher characteristics and considering positive relationships more generally, there is a larger body of literature suggesting that, from a young age, positive student-teacher relationships play an important role in a students later educational success, not only in terms of their liking of school, but also their successful integration and fitting in and furthermore their academic attainment (Furrer and Skinner 2003; Gest, Welsh and Domitrovich 2005; Hallinan 2008; Hawkins, Guo, Hill, Battin-Pearson and Abbott 2001; Ladd, Buhs, and Seid. 2000).

> *'Students who experience close relationships with teachers and peers within a supportive school community report more positive feelings about school and achieve higher levels of academic and behavioral competence' (Gest, Welsh and Domitrovich 2005, p281).*

Gest *et al* (2005) then also see that where there are strong relationships, students have a greater liking for school, improved academic attainment and additionally that this goes hand-in-hand with more acceptable behaviour, echoing even more closely with the findings of greater compliance which emerges here.

There is other research indicating that the student-teacher relationship plays a pivotal role in maintaining successful educational trajectories for students at-risk of marginalisation for behavioural issues (Hamre and Pianta, 2001). This echoes the views of the students in this research who place so much store in effective, established, positive relationships with their teachers. Are strong relationships even more crucial then only for particular students with behavioural needs, or perhaps also for students from complex backgrounds, or with a variety of learning needs? On this note, research by Anderson *et al* (2004) is particularly salient in terms of considering a broader category of at-risk students. This research examines the workings of one intervention project, fundamentally anchored in building positive relationships and targeted at students deemed at-risk of school failure. They found the quality of the relationship between the student and the adult undertaking the intervention,

was associated with a range of improvements, from attendance to academic engagement: *'Positive, supportive relationships with adults are associated with good outcomes for children'* (Anderson *et al* 2004, p 95). They emphasise why this is so particularly crucial for some students from more fractured, complex backgrounds: *'For many students in our schools, relationships with school staff are among the most salient and influential relationships in students' lives'* (Anderson *et al* 2004, p 96).

It is interesting to note that their focus is not limited to students at-risk of marginalisation for behavioural reasons but much more broadly those at-risk of school failure. This then may indeed encompass the entirety of the students within the current research and speak to why they stress strong long-lasting bonds as so imperative.

The literature has less specifically to say in terms of the extrapolation of the desirable teacher qualities noted by several students here, explicitly regarding a sense of fun on the teacher's behalf as an important feature in liking a lesson. Where student voice is present there are some similar declarations to be found. In his research, Abraham (1989) found that his students - interestingly from a lower socioeconomic background - stated that: *'they liked teachers with whom they had 'made a lot of progress', who 'you could have a joke with but then get down to work''* (Abraham 1989, p71). This fits neatly with students raising a fun factor here and equally wanting this in conjunction with working well. Is it pertinent that his students, like the majority of the students in this research, are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds? Desiring such a 'fun factor' may carry more weight for students from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

The final emergent idea seen here relates to consistency of staffing. Indeed if relationships - an established bond, respect, being known and understood - underpin liking a teacher, a lesson and indeed school, as well as feeding into greater compliance, more diligent work effort and thus higher academic engagement and attainment, it is not hard to see that staff turn over may interrupt this positive spiral. Indeed it has been noted from the literature, chiming with findings here, that these established relationships may also be

particularly influential for those from more disadvantaged backgrounds or with greater needs, so presumably staff changes may also impact these vulnerable students more acutely. What does the literature have to say about staff turnover and its impacts on students?

There is considerable literature confirming that teacher retention is an ongoing and indeed a rising concern, in particular in the secondary sector in England (Des Cleyes 2017; Foster 2018; Lynch and Worth 2017). There is also work noting that stable staffing is vital for student success (Guin 2004). A further study into teacher turnover having detrimental effects on student attainment, found that student progress was inhibited by high levels of turnover and of particular relevance here, that this was especially evident within lower performing schools (Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wyckoff, 2013). This would seem to indicate then that consistency of staffing is not only a factor, which has an impact on student performance but also which may indeed effect some students and some schools disproportionately. These studies observing links between staff turnover and impact on student attainment are based around younger (elementary school) students, whilst similar studies around older students are lacking, perhaps as the social is deemed increasingly less important as the students grow older. Interestingly, there is an indication in the research here within secondary school, that the younger students may more readily seek and form deeper bonds with their teachers, whereas the older students start to withdraw from new staff, having seen the departure of teachers with whom they had established connections. The implication is then that younger students across the board seek, value and benefit from strong teacher relationships and that these naturally fall away as students grow older, yet crucially remain most significant for students from complex backgrounds, with greater needs.

Gausted (1998) who explored 'looping' – when a elementary school class has the same teacher for two consecutive years - found that students in looped classes gained in confidence and flourished, benefitting socially, behaviourally and academically. Again this fits with the ideas of consistent staffing and established bonds having far reaching effects. Students with specific learning

needs are particularly suggested to benefit from the more established supportive looped environment. While it is widely accepted that looping is suitable for use with younger students and that older students may benefit instead from more variety, she notes: *'Opinions differ regarding when the advantages of variety outweigh the benefits of stability and indepth relationships'* (Gaustad 1998, p1).

My own research certainly indicates that the marginalised students value established bonds well into their teenage years and in fact throughout their schooling, and may suggest that consistency of staffing and precisely '*the benefits of stability and indepth relationships'* continue on for many vulnerable students for much longer than previously recognized*.*

5.4.1 Learning and pedagogy: Modelling, breaking down the learning and adapting to meet individual needs

> *DONNA: He was a good teacher; I liked him.*
>
> *ELIOT: I never did like him… It's coz I don't understand him… when it got to it, I was just like 'you make no sense'. So instead of doing the work… I'd just like mess around in his lesson.*

In these remarks Donna and Eliot are typical of the attitude emerging namely that these students want, prefer and like what they regard as a good teacher, that is one from whom they can learn. Equally, if they cannot learn from a teacher, they do not like them. Personal characteristics such as compassion and humour have already emerged as desirable, as have making the effort to form a bond and getting to know the individual students. As will become clear here, these students are also just as certain and vocal about what this term – a good teacher – means for them, when it comes to approaches, structures and styles of teaching, learning and pedagogy.

Bradley does not like being given a large task, finding it overwhelming and daunting.

BRADLEY: You start at the top and then you think "yuck" and then you get about half way down and you think "oh bloody hell I've got ages left"… it's too big basically.

He much prefers a lesson structure where the work is broken down into more manageable sized parts, each of which is explained one at a time.

BRADLEY: Break it down..."Let's do this page first and when you've done this page come back to me and then we'll go over the next one".

FELICIA: If I don't understand something she will like break it down for me so I can understand it perfectly and I just won't have any problems.

Felicia states that it is not just the ability to break down the learning but the capacity to do it in just such a way as to make it accessible to her, which is paramount. Devina also mentions being given the work in several parts and there is the idea that the teacher will be assessing formatively in the lesson itself and using this to decide how to tailor the subsequent work to meet the individuals needs.

DEVINA: She made it really easy. She'll… like once you've done the easy bit she'll give you the hard bit to see if you can do it, so if you struggle on that then she knows where you're at, kind of thing, so then she knows what she needs to aim at for you.

Here then is an emerging picture of an ideal type teacher who not only breaks down the learning but also is able to accurately assess where individuals are at and how to help each of them progress - features of 'good teaching' appearing bit by bit here then. Bradley also recognises the merits of a teacher who is responding to the learners in front of them, adapting the teaching to reiterate and focus on points of confusion or misconceptions:

BRADLEY: She done something, then as soon as someone didn't get it she'd pull that one bit out and do it, and then go back to the other ones and everything.

Bethany also greatly values the breaking down of learning but additionally recognises that for her having several examples, illustrations or models to follow is also beneficial.

> *BETHANY: When things are broken down then I understand it and when they've got an example then that's when I understand it as well. But when it's just like "Oh this is what you need to do. Get on with it", I'm just "hmm dunno what to do"… So when it's broken down and I've got a few examples then I'm OK.*

Eliot expresses similar ideas, emphasising clear explanations from the outset as well as the tailoring of these explanations for the individuals in the lesson.

> *ELIOT: So she always explains it to us before she starts the lesson and she would explain it to me properly, the way I could understand it.*

So an ideal type teacher from whom these students can all learn would make use of clear modelling and examples at the outset, break down the learning into manageable chunks, formatively assess the students work during the lesson and adapt the subsequent teaching to address where they are at, to meet their particular learning needs and to tackle misconceptions - 'good teaching' in a near full description then. Charlie adds to this not moving on too quickly or jumping from one topic to another but rather taking more time, going over things again and helping the student to embed their learning and thus be better able to remember it.

> *CHARLIE: Well that was good coz she like she worked at like say… whatsit... she like didn't go on to one thing and then to another thing… like we would spend like the whole time on one thing and that would be in our mind so next week we would tell her and we knew it. Not like them they would… like… Maths say they would like be doing times tables and then move onto like... the pyramid or something… Then they'd move onto the area or they won't give us a chance to knowledge something else...*

Having a teacher whose approach to pedagogy is as desired, a teacher from whom a student feels that they can learn, not only makes the learning more accessible but also thus feeds into greater academic progress.

When students feel that the learning is inaccessible, unclear, incorrectly pitched, or goes over their heads, in short where they feel they can not achieve, they are likely either to stop trying and give up, become frustrated and perhaps act out, or indeed truant.

CHARANJEET: I was definitely like the least smartest in the class so I was just like why am I here?... So you just got out-smarted by them so I just gave up then.
EDDIE: I think I would always talk in quite a lot of lessons... but I wouldn't like talk all the time, constantly. Some lessons where I felt I could actually achieve in I did concentrate more in.

BRADLEY: Didn't really go to a couple of them, or most of them to be honest. Because I found, I didn't like it and I was struggling.

Learning, self-esteem, confidence and behaviour are inter-twined here – both in positive and negative senses.

5.4.2 Learning and pedagogy: Individual help and seating arrangements

In addition to the clear modelling, the breaking down of learning, the formative assessment and adaptation in the room - these students also repeatedly return to the idea of a teacher who 'helps' them, in particular in an individual, personalised way.

CHARANJEET: He helped everyone… I think if he couldn't get round to help everyone he did after school classes.

Charanjeet illustrates that this particular teacher made an effort to help each student in the class, even putting in extra provision after school if he felt that he was not able to achieve this in the time. There is some hint of recognition here then that it may be challenging for a teacher to help every one in class every lesson, yet the emphasis is that this teacher usually managed to do so. This is in fact precisely what she is crediting him with and why she cites him as a good teacher.

Receiving individual help was certainly highly valued; whether from a teacher assistant in the room such as Bethany refers to, or in the form of personal written feedback and direction as to how to progress, as mentioned by Faye.

BETHANY: When I had the teacher to help me… that really helped me, like she used to just read through it like and she said, she'd ask me "do you understand this" and if I didn't understand it she'd read through it again and she would explain, like why, like what the question is saying.

FAYE: She actually writes in it like 'you need to include this and that, and do this'… I find it more helpful when you can see it and then you can like… and then like you can tell like what you need to work on and stuff.

In terms of a classroom teacher helping them within the whole class setting itself, other students perceive different means through which this was achieved. Interestingly the seating arrangements are a recurring theme.

DEVINA: Different people used to be at different levels so she would just help the people who were on one side, like who don't understand it. Like she'll put them... On the table... And the people who do understand it will go to this side and the people who are like 'I'm all right with it' will go there and the people who just does not understand will go in the middle. So then she could help.

Devina appreciates this grouping of students and their arrangement in the room as a means of facilitating the delivery of effective support to small groups of students. Again for Eliot, seating is key. He also values being deliberately positioned and paired with another student, to receive the similar help they required.

ELIOT: She would actually focus on us. She would set the work for the people who know how to do it. She would set the work for ten minutes and then for the ten minutes she would put us both together and she would help us. Yeah and that helped a lot. I still weren't perfect at it but we got the hang of it.

Other students mention teachers circulating during the lesson and taking the time to sit by individuals to offer more individualised help. This positioning of the teacher – sitting beside them - when offering this help, appears to be significant to the students, underlining the importance once again of the social relationship.

Firstly Donna contrasts a teacher who leaves them to get on with it with one who has a range of approaches to encourage learning and engagement, from bringing students up to present their work in front of the class, to circulating and monitoring books, to sitting by individuals for more personalised interactions.

DONNA: Ms. Wang, so she'd put the work on the board and she'd go "right get on with it." Where as Ms. Woods, she'd put the work on the board; she'd make people come up and do it on the board, she'd come sit with us make sure we do it, make sure it was in our books. Yeah. There's a big difference there… Whereas in Ms. Wang's you're like just left there and you think, "well I don't know what that is".

Donna feels strongly that there was no better way to receive help than through the teacher taking the time in the lesson to come and sit beside her and interact in a individualised way, so much so that she raises this several times.

DONNA: And if you needed help she'd quite happily come sit next to you and she'd help you. It's one-on-one.

DONNA: Like if I need help Sir will quite happily come sit with me on the other side of the room. Just me. And show me what I need to do and then make me do it. So he knows I'm understanding it properly.

In these last extracts she is explicit that this help is from a teacher being right next to her and that it is only for her - *'just me'* - highlighting again the tailored, individualised nature. The form of interaction is changed, allowing more readily for being personally pushed and monitored. Similarly Bradley values that individualised input with the teacher taking the time to sit beside him and help him individually.

BRADLEY: Well with me I liked it with someone like Miss sitting there and she'd go through it with you and then you'd do that bit and you'd say "what have I got to do next?"

Charlie also thinks that the good teachers make the time in the lesson to circulate and stop beside each student to have a personal interaction, and he is clear as to why he thinks this is so vital, so that the teacher is able to accurately assess their students and know where each individual is at.

CHARLIE: Like give us one-to-ones… like to know… See where you're at.

He contrasts being known as an individual in this way, with teachers who he felt never took the time to get to know his specific needs and that he felt had no idea of his level or even that he was struggling.

> *CHARLIE: Like they never did that… they didn't know so… they just thought I was just a normal… that I knew how to spell and everything.*

Seating arrangements emerge again for Charanjeet, who appreciates that students are grouped not only to better receive help from the circulating teacher, who can target a few of them at a time, but also so that they can support each other and work together with their peers.

> *CHARANJEET: In the lesson he made us sit in groups so we could help each other… and then he would come round to the groups. I think he had a good method of teaching.*

Eliot notes that he works more in some lessons with particular teachers he likes but also where he is seated in an effective pairing, expanding the valued and important social relationships then.

> *ELIOT: Yeah it was teachers and combinations. Like in her class I always worked coz I liked her and I was always working with Ethan.*

Eliot elaborates on preferring being seated with peers with whom he can discuss the work and from whom he can seek help. He also touches on another feature of the lesson arrangements, which is needed for this peer support to be effective – namely that the students are working on the same tasks. This appears in tension with individualisation then.

> *ELIOT: Because I didn't quite fully understand it, they was always next to you, so you ask them and they would tell you. They wouldn't obviously give you the answer but they would just explain it to you so it was… it helped a lot in there coz everyone else was doing the same thing.*

Craig and Chris sit together in Mathematics and find this not only makes it more enjoyable but also spurs them on as they want to out do each other and hence they find this pairing hugely beneficial to successful learning.

> *CRAIG: If I'm coming to Maths and I know that I'm sitting next to Chris, I know I'm going to have a great time.*

CHRIS: I think I was quite competitive, especially in Maths like against Craig, almost like. He was probably a little bit better than me at Maths but I was always trying to be the top person in the class but I never was. So having your friends there is quite good coz sometimes you want to be better than them, so you do better… Well if you have friend there that aren't really interested in the lesson then of course they're not going to bring out like the competitive side of you… but if you do have people who are enjoying the lesson and that and who are good at the lesson then you might think 'Oh I want to be better than him. I want to be top of the class' so you do do better at that lesson I guess.

So what is emerging here is that in addition to the desirable practices – the clear modelling, the breaking down of learning, the formative assessment and adaptation in the room - these students like teachers who successfully manage to help them personally during the lesson, in particular those who layout the classroom to facilitate supporting certain small groups, those who plan in time to come and sit with them as individuals and offer individualised support and those who utilise effective peer pairings or groupings as further support. A word of warning is evident again, when individuals do not feel that they receive the help they need:

CHARLIE: I just drifted away like… coz where English... that just went out of the window… I was getting no help.

The importance of these additional elements, which facilitate more tailored, individualised help and support, echoes the findings throughout this chapter, with the consequences reaching far beyond merely liking a lesson.

5.4.3 Learning and pedagogy: Situating the findings

The students identify a range of classroom practice, as features of the lessons they prefer and which they see as helping their learning. These are clear modelling, breaking down the learning, formative assessment and adapting subsequent teaching to address misconceptions and meet their needs and embedding learning. Furthermore, students value individual help within the lesson and repeatedly link this to seating arrangements. They like teachers who layout the classroom to facilitate supporting particular groups, those who take time to sit with them as individuals and provide extra one-to-one support and

those who exploit successful peer pairings or groupings to provide additional support.

In recognising that appropriate pedagogy is an important element of liking a lesson, as well as a factor in being able to learn, and indeed that successful learning is intrinsically inter-connected with enjoyment of a lesson, the students in this research show insight into their situation, many elements of which are echoed in the literature.

In a review of research into what makes great teaching, several features were drawn out from a wide range of academic research, which had strong evidence of impact on student outcomes. The most significant two aspects found were pedagogical content knowledge and quality of instruction. They include within pedagogical content knowledge, in addition to content knowledge, a facility to understand student approaches and specifically to tackle misconceptions (Coe, Aloisi, Higgins and Major, 2014). In terms of quality of instruction, the use of questioning in the classroom and associated formative assessment is seen as integral, and:

> *'Specific practices, like reviewing previous learning, providing model responses for students, giving adequate time for practice to embed skills securely and progressively introducing new learning (scaffolding) are also elements of high quality instruction' (Coe et al 2014, p2/3).*

The detail resonates with the factors raised by the students here - clear modelling, breaking down learning, formative assessment, addressing misconceptions and embedding skills each appear in this review (Coe *et al* 2014). A subsequent report for the Department for Education precisely into supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, notes:

> *'The most popular strategies, and those that schools considered to be the most effective, focused on teaching and learning, especially: paired or small group additional teaching; improving feedback; and one-to-one tuition. These strategies are all supported by evidence of effectiveness in the Sutton Trust/Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Teaching and Learning Toolkit' (Macleod et al 2015, p8/9).*

This resonates with more individualised support and tailored feedback then. Indeed the merits of each element raised by the students here are echoed more widely in the academic and professional literature - modelling and breaking down learning, or simply scaffolding (e.g. Bruner 1978; Bruner and Haste 1987; Bruner and Haste 2010); formative assessment (Black and Wiliam 1998; Clarke 2008; Wiliam 2011); reviewing topics and embedding learning (Bjork and Bjork, 2011).

Interestingly, there is also some pertinent literature that underscores the crucial role of effective pedagogy for engagement, noting that inappropriate teaching and delivery, in particular an unsuitable choice of pedagogic approach, may be sufficient to alienate and marginalise some individuals, triggering much of the persistent low-level disruptive behaviour in the classroom (Maguire 2009; Maguire, Ball, and Braun 2010). This fits neatly with the marginalised voices here.

It is noteworthy that what the students outline is a counsel of good teaching – not just for them. It is significant that these students – moreover these marginalised students – are clearly able to see the same factors that the professionals and the researchers find. This would indicate a clear grasp of their own learning environment, needs and preferences and certainly not fit within a deficit narrative, where ignorance, disinterest and lack of awareness are some of the characteristics most commonly assigned to marginalised students at the fringes of the educational mainstream. It is worth underlining that the students here are identifying features of good teaching and enjoyable lessons, which more often arise in the research literature and in 'official' documents and the training and development of professionals and practitioners. Little if any of this draws from a student voice perspective. Even more threadbare is the literature drawing on the voices of marginalised students, to shed light on what constitutes an effective classroom for them. That students themselves and in particular marginalised students are as insightful about effective teaching as the experts is profound.

What remains unaddressed then is that the students - in valuing individual help within the lesson - repeated refer to seating arrangements, appreciating teachers who manipulate classroom layout to assist supporting groups, either by planning in time to come and sit with individuals or small groups or alternatively by employing effective peer pairings or groupings to offer further support. They recognise that for peer support to be most beneficial the students ought to be covering the same topics. There are really two elements here, firstly the layout of the room to facilitate teacher support or paired or group work; and secondly the benefits of either greater teacher time or of effective peer support, so arguably the advantages of learning from others.

Firstly what does the literature say about classroom layout? There is research into impacts of different elements of the schools environment, with the classroom as only one small part of this and seating arrangements one small part of the classroom environment (Higgins, Hall, Wall, Woolner and McCaughey 2005). Nevertheless, there is some research into classroom seating arrangements - finding that rows are appropriate for individual tasks and lead to greater on-task work (Galton 1999; Wannarka and Ruhl 2008); or emphasising students inclined to low-level disruption benefit most from increased on-task time in rows and suggesting there is less opportunity for off-task behaviour (Hastings 1995; Wheldall and Lam 1987). Other literature conversely notes downsides to rows, observing areas of the room less attended to by the teacher (Moore 1984); or the ineffectiveness of rows in facilitating group work, for which a horseshoe is recommended (Marx, Fuhrer and Hartig 1999; Galton 1999).

The students here highlight the need for the teacher to make their way around the classroom to interact easily with individuals and specific groups, rather than emphasising rows, grouped tables, or horseshoes *per se.* Certainly then, they would not wish to be in any less monitored zones if rows were the arrangement. The students are raising an issue related to classroom layout and the positioning of the teacher, certain individuals, particular pairing, or specific groups, which whilst it may overlap and combine with a variety of seating arrangements perhaps, is more about them being able to access support from

the teacher and particular peers. On this note, Bonus and Riordan (1998), when considering seating arrangements, explicitly factor in teacher student proximity and peer relationships. They too find the greatest concentration with rows but recognise that U-shapes have the benefit of being better able to hear each other and whilst the most off-task behaviour occurs with clusters of three, this arrangement enables sharing of resources in addition to being able to hear each other and is thus seen as the best arrangement for facilitating group work. The students in the research here - in repeatedly referring to seating arrangements – are highlighting those arrangements that facilitate effective peer support and those which allow a circulating teacher to cater for the needs of individuals or small groups more readily. Use of clusters of three arguably achieves this, provided the student-trios are thought out. These considerations thus link seating with effective peer support and group work leading to consideration of the missing element so far, learning from others.

What does the literature say about the benefits of either greater teacher time or effective peer support and group work, all aspects of learning from others and considered desirable by the students in this research? This is well established within literature on social constructivism and learning, which emphasises the central role of social interaction in the development of cognition (Vygotsky 1978). The learner develops their knowledge, makes sense of new events and information and pushes the frontiers of their capabilities, precisely through interaction with others. The idea underpinning social constructivism is that a student can more rapidly develop their learning - expanding their zone of proximal development as it is called - through social interaction with more knowledgeable others, as opposed to trying alone. It is again well established that this supporter need not be a teacher and may often be a peer. Hence, whether it is greater interaction time with the teacher, or a classroom set-up to allow greater peer-to-peer support, social constructivism would maintain that there would indeed be a positive impact on learning (Vygotsky1978). There is also literature promoting discussion as a component of active learning for deeper understanding (Bonwell and Eison 1991; Swan 2001).

As a final point, one student here noted that in order to learn effectively from peers in the classroom, for them to help you with your work, it was necessary that they were doing the same task. This is arguably a contentious matter, since differentiation or even 'personalisation' have long been heavily promoted as an aspect of good teaching, where teachers tailor a range of the tasks and activities to meet diverse individual needs (Algozzine and Anderson 2007; Miliband 2004). This need not necessarily however preclude students from being seated with those of a similar level, who are more likely to be working on the same task and thus they could still learn together.[32]

Arguably, the insights into classroom layout to facilitate supporting particular individuals or groups, be it through employing successful peer pairings or groupings or to provide additional teacher support, once again speaks to the central recurring idea that relationships matters – a theme which permeates much of this chapter and indeed previous ones. While the ideas of social constructivism and effective discussion to enhance learning are well established in the literature, less is made of exactly who it is that is facilitating the learning. Here these students are clear that it matters enormously who it is. It matters greatly which teacher it is and that they have an established bond with this teacher - a teacher, who is by nature empathetic, respectful, and even humorous, utilises 'nuanced control' and their preferred pedagogical approaches. Equally, when talking about working with peers, this once again is not about working within any combination or grouping, but rather about the specific individuals within these groups. They must be paired or grouped with great care to facilitate effective combinations. This is only feasible if the teacher making the decisions knows in detail each individual, their needs and their relationships with each of their peers. There is indeed little within the literature, which hones in on these specifics. Again this highlights the absence of the

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[32] It could be argued that the use of setting would also make the likelihood of more students working on the same task more probable also – although caveats as to the implications of setting for marginalised students have been noted already in earlier chapters.

'social' from the literature and its technicised and compartmentalised approach, lacking the complexity of the students' accounts.

The following extract from the Department for Education report into supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils does at least recognise that in addition to the fact that high quality staff are needed to support the more disadvantaged pupils, staff who have existing knowledge of the students are best placed to help.

> *'Deploy the best staff to support disadvantage pupils; develop skills and roles of teachers and TAs rather than using additional staff that do not know the pupils well' (Macleod et al 2015, p10).*

It seems there is an appreciation then - echoing what the students in this research assert – that there is no short-cut or substitute for an established, effective teacher-student bond.

So far in this thesis I have sought to identify some of those school-based factors, which contribute, in different ways for different students, to their exclusion from the mainstream classroom and referral to or requirement to attend the school withdrawal-unit. In the final empirical chapter I will consider the students' account of their experience of what they perceive to be more personal factors which feed into aspects of their marginalisation as well as some of the contingent factors (mental health, family circumstances) that they see as contributing to or precipitating 'problems' at school. This will involve a consideration of some of the processes of classification and labelling (like Dyslexia, ADHD, EBD) to which these students are subject.

Chapter 6: Barriers to learning and how they are occasionally overcome

BRADLEY: I find it hard reading something, thinking of it and then getting it from my head down to the paper. That's when I lose it.

ELIOT: I'm basically like a bad dog. I'm just disobedient. I don't normally listen a lot… Yeah I got into quite a bit of trouble for fighting.

FELICIA: I had really bad anger problems.

EAMMON: Started having problems… with family and things like that… and it just used to get too much for me.

This chapter looks at emergent themes that touch on a few more of the specific barriers to learning, engaging or cooperating which some individual students face, in addition to the wider reasons that mean a student may be more likely to dislike a lesson covered in the preceding chapter. There are several, oftentimes overlapping, factors that obstruct successful participation and learning for some of the young people reported here; factors which distract and frustrate and about which they evidently feel passionate.

6.1 Setting the scene: Framing the emergent processes on barriers to learning

It is noteworthy that all bar one of the participants was at one time or another on the register of special educational needs (SEN) at Welford High, with over half recognised as having more than one such need.[33] While the barriers emerging below - learning needs and dyslexia, emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD), anger issues and ADHD, mental health, family breakdown and depression - may not precisely mirror the students SEND categories, the connections are very clear. Indeed, this may come as no surprise, since arguably one fundamental purpose of a register of needs is to identify and address barriers to learning.

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[33] See Appendix B.

When discussing the performative[34] practices within a school, explicitly then primarily those of students and teachers, Youdell observes that:

> *'These performative practices tend to constitute student identities within the terms of enduring and predictable categorisation'* (Youdell 2006, p177).

The broad umbrella sections are thus deliberately entitled SEN and EBD to lay bare linkages to just such categorisation; this in no sense should be taken as condoning such categorising and labelling, nor as minimising the associated dangers and pitfalls, all of which will emerge through the analysis and are also then situated within the literature. Indeed there is much to be fleshed out in the detail, the poignant first-hand telling of student experiences and the timely nature and effectiveness, or otherwise, of interventions and attempts to address, diminish or indeed overcome these barriers.

6.1.1 SEN: Learning needs and dyslexia

There is a common thread, which emerges from the accounts of several of the students with whom I spoke, relating to their own early realisation that they were floundering in many lessons and in particular with underpinning matters associated with literacy.

> *EAMMON: I struggled at everything, could never actually get a high level or nothing. I was always… like being told… from a young age I'd always found writing and things harder. Maths was always something I could do like that (clicks his fingers) but when it comes to English or something like that I always found it harder, could never read.*

> *FAYE: For me it's… like spelling, reading and I'm not very good at writing like sort of essays and stuff so I find that like really difficult, like that part.*

> *CHARLIE: Say like if someone gave me like a sheet of paper to read…. like some words like I could not pronounce them … or like I*

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[34] Here 'performative' practices is in the sense defined by Judith Butler; *'identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo. In its very character as performative resides the possibility of contesting its reified status'* (Butler 1988, p520).

can't read them… The spelling is my worst thing…. I cannot spell too.

BETHANY: I just found it difficult. When I'm reading the question it wouldn't go into my head and I would like write something different and it wouldn't relate to the question.

Reading difficulties, writing errors and trouble with spelling all feature then. While Bethany mentions writing something different, Charlie and Charanjeet are more explicit when describing their writing idiosyncrasies.

CHARLIE: But I mean sometimes say I'm writing like letters and that I'll write them back-to-front or numbers I'll write... say I was write 540 sometimes I do 450 but and then I'll realize after that I've done it wrong.

CHARANJEET: In English I definitely realized it coz I was quite good at English… but when you write stuff and Miss used to say "read it over" I would put my d's into g's and like… just… add some word that… Yeah and stuff like that and then I realized it… I wouldn't get stuff and everyone else did.

Despite these students own recognition of their difficulties where reading, writing and spelling were concerned, which they saw as having a direct, negative impact on their achievement more widely, formal testing of their needs and the potential diagnosis of dyslexia were not always considered by the school. When such action was taken, the resulting information was not always utilized to put support in place, and sometimes when it did lead to effective intervention, this was very late in coming, stemming as it did from testing at a significantly later point in their school trajectory than when they themselves first noticed or reported being aware of their difficulties. Charanjeets narrative encompasses many of these concerns and articulates the frustration and sense of hopelessness at a diagnosis coming so late in her schooling.

CHARANJEET: They didn't tell me I had dyslexia or anything. It's only til... end of Year 10 I went and got myself tested for it. Coz… since like I think Year 4 and all these years I knew in lesson like I didn't understand stuff which other people did understand. And like in English I would write stuff down differently and stuff. I realized it… so when I got myself tested in… like the middle of Year 10 I think, I just felt 'oh all these years I could have actually been getting help.' Yeah. Because I knew like everyone's getting serious about GCSEs now I should get tested for it… coz I thought maybe I'd get

some help or something… But I just gave up in the end because when I realized I had it I thought I'm not going to get anything out of it now, there's like a year left of school, so.

For Charanjeet this late formal diagnosis of dyslexia – which she herself instigated by approaching the SENCO - clearly made her lose hope of having sufficient time left in her compulsory schooling to redress her underachievement. She continued to feel behind her peers in many classes, such as History, which she discusses below, where she self-identifies as *'the least smartest'*. This hints towards a sustained impact on her learner identity throughout the time her needs had gone unidentified and unmet. Latterly, on a more constructive note, she did nevertheless go on to benefit from some specific interventions.

> *CHARANJEET: I did just give up. You just got out-smarted by them so I just gave up then… I was definitely like the least smartest in the class so I was just like why am I here? I didn't get it. Like they were getting everything and I wasn't so I asked like… For a few lessons if I could be with Laura and John… they helped me with my coursework so much I got a B… which I never of thought would happen.*

Laura and John, Ms. Ford and Mr. Vickers respectively, emerge repeatedly throughout this chapter. They are the two Teaching Assistants who together run the on-site withdrawal unit. This unit works with students who are removed from some of their mainstream lessons for a variety of reasons – most commonly to address learning needs, to access greater support with specific subjects or tasks, or to provide a period of respite after a one-off incident or more commonly following a period of sustained low-level disruption. As will become palpably obvious, and as is typified here by Charanjeet, many of these marginalised students see this unit as a safe haven, a place where they not only feel valued but also receive support and crucially where they feel they can actually 'achieve'.[35] They see the unit as a place where previously held negative learner identities, created in part through their struggles in the mainstream

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[35] By 'achieve' here I mean being able to access and complete tasks and have a sense of having satisfied the teacher's expectations.

classroom, could be to some extent contested and a more positive self-image as a learner re-created.

> *CHARANJEET: It is different. They help…. They relate to you more. There's not one teacher I don't like. I love school like… but Laura and John they relate to you more and they understand a lot more where... I think a teacher has to umm.... think about everyone's needs like the smart people and everything but Laura and John just understand where you're coming from… I just think teachers don't… They don't give the less like... intelligent people enough time.*

There are two points to draw out from this extract. Firstly, in terms of learner identity it is implicit here that Charanjeet sees herself as one of the *'less intelligent people'* - a critical self-perception emerging from her educational experiences to that point. Secondly, for Charanjeet the contrast between Laura and John and the mainstream teachers is tangible. There are unsurprisingly echoes of the characteristics appreciated in teachers they preferred - being understanding, empathetic and helpful – yet perhaps magnified, arguably by the fact that Laura and John both have the temperament and the capacity to cater for the needs of these marginalised, under performing, students, or both. They are of course in a different setting, away from the larger groups in a class and away from many of the associated performativity pressures bearing upon the subject teacher.

Bradley's story has much in common with Charanjeet's experiences. He was not diagnosed as dyslexic until after the end of compulsory schooling, despite being acutely aware himself, much earlier, that he struggled with and was frustrated by literacy issues.

> *BRADLEY: Well I only found that I had dyslexia last year so that might have been one of my problems. I didn't know. It's not that I didn't know that I had it or anything but I just found it really difficult to sit there and learn… to read a lot. It just didn't… it got on my nerves, that's what it done… But a lot of it's to do with your memory. Coz I find it hard reading something, thinking of it and then getting it from my head down to the paper. That's when I lose it.*

In Bradley's case, reading was not an issue in itself and indeed this could have masked the other comprehension difficulties he was experiencing, perhaps making them less evident to the teacher.

> *BRADLEY: They made you read and that but I'm fine with reading. That's what my dyslexia woman said I was pretty good… I would read around the class it wouldn't bother me… and I'd easily read the book in front of everyone, it was just I didn't like doing the work and that (voice fades).*

With phrases such as '*it got on my nerves'* and '*that's when I lose it',* there can be no doubt that Bradley was frustrated by his difficulties in understanding in many lessons, so much so in English, that he absented himself almost entirely from these classes for the last two years of compulsory schooling.

> *BRADLEY: Didn't really go to a couple of them, or most of them to be honest (nervous laughter and fading speech). Because I found, I didn't like it and I was struggling. I found it hard… I really didn't like it. I really didn't enjoy it. It's like I didn't think about it or anything, just ignored it… I used to sit in the playground.*

He removed himself from the situation that he found so uncomfortable. He truanted English regularly and became adept at working the system so as not to be sent back to the classroom. When he was seen truanting, staff would confront him.

> *BRADLEY: They'd say "go to your lessons" and then they go, "if you are not in your lesson by the time I walk back again then I'll ring your mum" or what ever and then you used to walk off and then when they walked past you'd go back out and sit there again!*

For Charanjeet and Bradley then, despite being acutely aware themselves of their struggles across many lessons, formal recognition of learning difficulties – here dyslexia - was late in coming. In the meantime, this lack of diagnosis and associated support left its mark, leaving them floundering in class but also having an insidious impact on their self-perceptions, self-esteem and well-being. Such an impact and its effects are evident in the way that Charanjeet refers to herself *'the least smartest'* as if it were an established, clear cut fact and Bradley felt so demoralised by English class he avoided the subject entirely, so as not to have to confront these feelings.

Charanjeet did eventually find effective support, as well as a sympathetic, encouraging environment, in the withdrawal-unit. Effective interventions were available at Welford High, even if access to them was not always straightforward or timely. Bradley also benefitted from time spent in this unit, although his route there was more convoluted. His truanting of English lessons was only one of the ways he reacted to difficulties in the classroom. He was chatty, distracting and somewhat disruptive and occasionally confrontational in lessons. In other words, he exhibited many typical behaviours subsumed under the umbrella of 'emotional and behavioural difficulties', the focus of the next sub-section. He ended up in the unit after being removed from classes for these behaviours, rather than being sent to access learning support. Irrespective of their journey there, Charanjeet and Bradley both found support in the unit that catered for their needs more effectively than the classroom had done. Bradley succinctly summarises this time in the unit as *'nice'*.

How do other accounts compare to those of Charanjeet and Bradley? Eliot did not have any official testing for dyslexia, although he reasons that this was because his family knew he was dyslexic so there would be no need for further validation: '*We never had it tested because my mum knew I had it so there was no point in testing it.'* Eliot had several mainstream classes where he felt that the teachers were not able to meet his needs, and where he was left to struggle as best he could, echoing the experiences of Charanjeet and Bradley. The first extract typifies his experiences:

> *ELIOT: There was me and Eric in her class and… both of us are dyslexic and she couldn't quite help us coz she didn't know what to do so she carried on with the whole class, so eventually me and Eric started dropping behind.*

> *ELIOT: I didn't quite fully understand it, so I gave up a little bit. I was just like… I didn't really do much in the class; I just gave up.*

> *ELIOT: I knew I was behind and I just felt like a right idiot.*

In these latter remarks there are further similarities with the experiences of Charanjeet and Bradley, the lack of effective support, deterioration of effort and falling behind which bring with them the production of an identity with untoward

consequences for the student in terms of self-perception and the perception of others, and all that follows. Where Charanjeet labels herself *'the least smartest'*, Eliot calls himself *'a right idiot'*. Interestingly, prior to what he found to be unhelpful classes in secondary school, Eliot recalls finding expert personalised help to meet his needs in primary school, through a mixture of one-to-one sessions and small group withdrawal:

> *ELIOT: I had special classes in Year 4 and 5 coz I couldn't read as fast as everyone else and I wasn't as quick with my Maths.*

He is adamant that these early interventions were extremely effective for him:

> *ELIOT: Yeah a lot, a lot coz I read a lot better than I used to then… It was special techniques, they cover up some letters for you and then you have to read around the letter. So if like 'the' you'd miss the 'h' and then eventually you would get used to the letter being missing. Because then you get used to 'the' with the 'h' when it's not there, which I thought helped me a lot because I sometimes can't read the big words because a lot of the letters move, so… They stop covering it up and eventually it becomes easier.*

He clearly recalls valuing these interventions by his primary school and so, after being left to struggle again in the early part of secondary school, he was quick to spot and appreciate the skill set of one of his Year 10 English teachers, which he saw as another positive turning point:

> *ELIOT: Coz she worked with dyslexic people before… So she knew the techniques of how to help us and we started getting it back.*

As touched on where Bradley is concerned, the school labels some students as having EBD in conjunction with their literacy based learning needs and Eliot is another such student, whose story we will return to later. He too latterly benefitted from spending time in the withdrawal-unit.

Bethany – who explained her difficulties with reading, understanding and interpretation – is another example of a student struggling in the mainstream classroom who subsequently found effective intervention and support within the unit. Specifically, she was pleased to be changed from GCSE to BTEC for her Physical Education qualification and then to be able to access what she saw as

the 'right' sort of support she needed from Laura and John, in order to complete the course successfully. This reflects the experience of the majority of students from Year 9 and above who were referred to this unit, many successfully undertook BTEC coursework with the help available, instead of being in the mainstream classroom studying for and struggling with GCSEs.

> *BETHANY: I found it really hard with the theory side of P.E. so they moved whoever found that hard, to go to BTEC… we'd still done like sports. We done tennis and all the stuff like that but then we'd go into Laura and John and do the coursework that we needed to do… I wanted to go into Laura and John because I found it really like much easier in there... I don't know like I think it was maybe coz there was only a few in there.*

Devina, like Bradley and Eliot, was considered by the school to have learning and behavioural needs. She had very mixed experiences of schooling but did find effective intervention at an earlier stage in her educational trajectory, being taken out of some of her mainstream classes from Year 8 onwards. At that time there were distinct units to cater for learning needs and behavioural needs respectively, which were subsequently amalgamated into the unit run by Laura and John. Devina initially spent time in the behavioural support unit. She speaks just as highly of the help she received in the there as the others do about the unit that superseded it.

> *DEVINA: I just loved it. I'd always wanna be in there. I think it's coz I talk to them and can like have a laugh with them… I think the unit helped me… Especially Nuala she helped me a lot as well.*

Again common threads about positive relationships, being able to communicate, open up, relax and have fun contribute to the reasons for being so contented in the unit. Devina also benefitted from another intervention, which is yet to be raised by the other students – that of in-class support from one of the Teaching Assistants from the behavioural support unit. She was considered to have sufficiently challenging needs, to warrant such targeted, personalised intervention.

> *DEVINA: I loved Nuala coming to lessons coz I would actually sit there and do my work with her coz like, I think like in Textiles I think that's the only reason I did Textiles coz she was in there. If she wasn't in there I wouldn't do it… I think it's like coz she was my*

mentor and she like she understood where I was coming from. Like everything I told her, like my secrets and that, she understood. So I think that's where the friend relationship thing come. I could trust her, yeah.

It is noteworthy that for Devina the positive effects of her experiences in the unit could be transferred into the mainstream classroom, as long as she were accompanied by the Teaching Assistant from this unit, with whom she had already established a strong bond and whose job it was to work with students labelled as EBD. This relationship could support engagement and learning beyond the confines of the unit itself.

Charlie, who has one of the more complex educational trajectories, found some curricular interventions a welcome relief from struggling within the mainstream classes. He is another student not entirely sure about when - or even whether or not - his status as dyslexic ever became official or remained mere supposition: '*I don't think I've been fully tested.*'

Like Eliot, for Charlie there is a recollection of strong support in primary school – '*one-on-ones with the teacher and we was going like out of class*' - followed by languishing in less supportive, larger classes across the early years of secondary school.

> *CHARLIE: I don't know it just went… I just drifted away like... coz where English... that just went out of the window… I was getting no help.*

> *CHARLIE: I used to go Laura and John… That was good coz I did Sports Science…*

So Charlie also spent some time successfully undertaking coursework within the unit, which he neatly summarises as *'good',* in marked contrast to the tone of the preceding extract, and his sense of disengagement and hopelessness. The further effective intervention that is unique to him in these narratives, is that he reflects positively on spending time off-site at alternative provision arranged for him once all internal options were considered exhausted. There he was supported by a member of staff well-practiced in catering for literacy learning needs and dealing with students labelled as EBD.

CHARLIE: Best thing… was in Year 9…. when I went YMCA… Yeah, me and Carl went… And there was the lady there…. And she helped me and Carl in our English and other stuff… It was split up in different days so say like Monday and Tuesday we would do a bit like cooking and that but and then we would like play a game of pool and have fun and then go back English… and then like on the Friday we have like… a whole day of cooking... I think I got kicked out of school to be fair.

CHARLIE: She helped us like… I gotta admit I gotta thank her.

Again, his desire to thank the member of staff who had worked with him is testament to how much he valued her support and interventions. This intervention – albeit of a more drastic form than most – certainly went some way towards rebuilding some supportive, constructive learning experiences for Charlie to reflect positively on. So there is an interesting paradox in all of this whereby 'labelling' can have positive consequences in terms of help and support, which in turn may allow some kind of re-labelling of the self. Where the student is seen as an object, shallow with no depth in the mainstream classroom, these alternative provisions - be it the YMCA or the withdrawal-unit – allow a shift from object to subject; from being a passive - but reactive - subject of a label, to some kind of more active involvement in making a learner identity for oneself. Moreover, being in this new context where they are differently perceived by the staff there and are away from the critical judgements of the classroom, also feeds into constructing an identity of a learner who can achieve.

There is an important corollary to these discussions around literacy learning needs and dyslexia, and how these barriers are occasionally overcome, which relates to memory and consequently examination participation and performance. Bradley – at the outset of the chapter – emphasises that his learning needs and associated frustrations are intrinsically bound up with issues of memory. Eddie reiterates this.

EDDIE: I did do the work but… in lessons I knew everything and I got along but I think when it just came to exams, my mind just went blank. I just couldn't remember nothing… I just don't feel comfortable with the exams.

For Eddie not liking exams is fundamentally linked with being unable to remember, with *'going blank'*. Feelings of discomfort ensue, leading to negative associations with all future tests, indeed with examinations *per se*. Eliot echoes the complaints of problems surrounding memory and recall, whilst Devina reiterates experiencing similar negativity:

> *ELIOT: Remembering is hard… But like when it came to remembering it, I would remember some of it but not all of it.*

> *DEVINA: I hated exams absolutely hated them… I think I got nervous so that's why I think like…. I hated them coz I thought like 'I'm gonna fail this completely' so… coz I messed up quite a lot… I don't think I'm gonna get back up.*

Bradley, Eddie, Eliot and Devina – four students labelled by the school as having learning needs – all bring up difficulties surrounding remembering, attendant anxieties, the fearful anticipation of impending tests, or a wider loathing of any examinations. What appears to be happening for these students is that their difficulties - associated with literacy and dyslexia - mean that examinations are a point of particular stress. The frustrations they feel when confronted with work they cannot access are compounded in an environment such as an examination where no help is on offer. Such frustration can readily lead to anger and behavioural outbursts. It is worth noting that these four individuals are in fact all additionally labelled as EBD by the school[36]. Charlie, another student labelled with this span of needs, illustrates his level of exasperation in examinations and the ensuing reaction:

> *CHARLIE: I did the first one and then the second one come and then I just got stressed and ripped it up and then I got a U I think.*

Thus Charlie illustrates neatly the links between learning difficulties, frustration, behavioural outbursts and underachievement.

Charanjeet and Faye, who are not labelled as EBD, also talk about the downsides to examinations. Charanjeet completed her coursework to a B grade

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[36] See Appendix B

with Laura and John yet *'the exam brought me down to an E… so I just don't like exams.'*

Faye, in line with Eddie, also found it hard to perform well in examinations, struggling to put her thoughts into words, although she felt that her capabilities were evident in her classwork.

> *FAYE: Like I don't find that I am as good in tests than I am in any other… like what I write isn't always what it seems to try and come across like… I find it difficult to put things in words sometimes… but I find that with a lot of things it shows in your work that you do… and they don't really look at that. Like throughout as well.*

Her reaction to the examinations may not be as visible as Charlie's, where his walking out is ascribed by the school to his behavioral needs, yet there can be no doubt from the following extract that she too was affected emotionally:

> *FAYE: It's annoying. It's horrible coz it's like I thought I did really well and it's like, you didn't.*

In summary then, in terms of addressing literacy learning barriers and dyslexia, there have been some successful interventions. First and foremost is working within the unit, where success is attributed to the positive relationships established through the mitigating characteristics of the staff, together with it being a small, safe space with easily accessible support, at a distance from the distractions and pressures of the mainstream classroom. Interventions from appropriately skilled staff - expert in working with dyslexia or building relationships with students labelled with EBD, or both – are also recognised as effective inside and outside the mainstream classroom. In terms of interventions based around structural curricular changes, switching to a more continuous assessment based qualification emerged, which fits neatly with the significant final point, namely that examinations present a substantial barrier and a considerable cause of anxiety for those with literacy learning needs and dyslexia. Qualifications with a larger component of practical work or continuous assessment, with a smaller or non-existent examination element, are one way to circumvent this additional barrier.

Issues of learner identity have also recurred. Being left to flounder without effective support to meet their more specific needs, leads to the construction of an identity with negative consequences for the student; a learner identity as a slow-learner, a struggling dyslexic thus they label themselves *'less intelligent'* or *'idiot'.* There is then a paradox where subsequently being formally labelled as dyslexic or SEN can be redemptive, in particular if it means effective interventions and time in the unit. Where their needs have consequently been better catered for, a sense of their own capacity to achieve as a learner may perhaps begin to re-emerge.

As has also been clear here, the institutional division between 'learning needs' and 'EBD' is forced and artificial, with several students failing to fit neatly under one assigned label, instead having needs that straddle the clear interplay, and compounding relationships between the two, and doubtless similarly belie attempts at any further binary classifications. When literacy learning needs and dyslexia go unrecognised or unaddressed, the ensuing frustrations for the student in many instances become a catalyst for incidents of behaviours. These behaviours are then identified by the school as related to 'EBD' – which define the student and their 'needs' in very particular and limited and limiting ways.

> *CHARLIE: It was hard coz like in class I didn't speak up and when I got… like they said "oh could you read that" I couldn't so I got the hump… I gotta admit it was a bit my temper… coz where I couldn't read and they wouldn't help me I got stressed.*

For Eliot the trigger for his anger similarly lay within irritations with the work.

> *ELIOT: Like nine times out of ten it would be the work. But then if I like, in mainly English I would get annoyed coz I like didn't quite fully understand the work.*

He reflects that if left to tackle work he could not access *'I'd probably have eaten the paper! Probably end up eating it out of boredom or pure frustration'.*

Here then such inter-relations between 'learning needs' and 'EBD' serves to illustrate the multifaceted, tangled and intricate nature of the trajectories of

these students; the complex 'package' of their experience and reaction that makes up what may be better termed their *'moral careers'* (Goffman 1959).

6.1.2 SEN: Learning needs and dyslexia - Situating the accounts

Where do these findings sit in relation to the research literature? What does the literature have to say firstly as regards literacy learning needs and dyslexia going undiagnosed for prolonged periods, and the resultant impact of these unmet needs on the possibilities of learner identity? Secondly, what does the literature say about the outcomes of the interventions seen here - working within the unit, working with appropriately skilled staff and more structural curricular changes such as decreasing examination elements.

It should be noted initially that since the experiences reported here are from a mainstream school setting, relevant research that may help to situate these findings would thus likely come under the umbrella of inclusive education, as opposed to say special education. Although it should be kept in mind that the terms 'inclusive' and 'special' education, the boundaries and interplay of each, their respective merits and pitfalls, are by no means uncontested or uncontroversial (Allan and Slee 2008; Armstrong and Barton 2008; Slee 2008).

Slee (2008) recognises the prospect that schools effect students differently and that student identities are intrinsically interwoven with this. Indeed, in his research into inclusive education, Slee notes:

> *'The interaction of schools as socio-political artefacts with differential impacts on a range of students the consequence of which is their sponsorship or marginalisation of different student identities' (Slee 2008, p108).*

This relates to the question of whether labels and identities are merely positive or negative in their effects, since here there have been illustrations of negative effects in the mainstream classroom, yet also the suggestion that being formally labelled as dyslexic or SEN and consequently spending time in the unit, is a case of a marginalised identity which can be positive.

Drawing from Goffman's work (1959) that focuses on the presentation of self, casting the trajectories of these students as a 'moral career', captures not only the constructed and fluid nature of identity work but also provides the notion of doing 'moral work' to present an altered self. For Goffman the moral aspects of career are:

> *'The regular sequence of changes that career entails in the person's self and in his framework of imagery for judging himself'* (Goffman 1959, p123).

This is apposite here in particular as the students accounts of their 'moral careers' - encompassing moving from the classroom environment to the unit – detail many changes in their sense of self.

Moreover, in terms of identity formation and how individuals are constructed as social subjects specifically within education, there is a salient body of work of a post-structural ethnographic nature. This draws heavily on work by Foucault and Butler among others, which pertains to the notion of a constitutive subject, who is continuously not only being defined through discourse but also being formed and reformed through it (Allan 1999; Allan 2007; Youdell 2006; Youdell 2010). Of particular relevance is the assertion that *'children with special needs are defined in relation to normality by their very label'* (Allan 1999, p21) and since such labelling is overt, it is thus all the more likely to feed into on-going identity formation.

Allan considers that it is *'important to examine how the discourses of the present construct the identities and experiences of pupils with special needs and how individuals have resisted and contested these'* (Allan 1999, p13). In her research into pupils with special needs in mainstream schools, she found illustrations of *'transgressive practices which enabled them to resist attempts to label or exclude them and to seek alternative identities and experiences'* (Allan 1999, p3) albeit temporarily or partially (Allan 1999; Allan 2007).

This analytic stance can shed light on the findings here. Where students have been left to struggle without effective support to meet their needs there have

been impacts on their engagement - with remarks concerning knowing they were behind, giving up, drifting away. Being considered an academic failure in the classroom feeds into the construction of their learner identity, with negative consequences for their self-perception, evident through descriptions of themselves as *'the least smartest'*, *'a right idiot'*. Illustrations of transgressive practices, where students endeavour to refuse being cast in these learner identities, could be Bradley eschewing the experience altogether by truanting lessons where he struggled; or Charlie tearing up his examination paper and students happily transferring to a less exam-focussed course so as to resist the identity of an examination-failure. The idea of transgressive acts could be taken further to include students embracing or even seeking opportunities to attend the unit, where they have the chance to try to build a more capable learner identity for themselves; precisely then - to '*seek alternative identities and experiences'* (Allan 1999, p3). This is also where the paradox lies, as these students resist the 'slow-learner' and 'failure' identity of the mainstream classroom, yet seem to welcome and embraces the formal labels assigned to them, if it means access to intervention and time in the unit. Indeed some individuals asked for greater time in this unit and arguably others played up in class until they were sent there – resistance of one label in part by embracing another.

Youdell (2006) - in her research into student subjectivities - examines *'students' navigations and shifting constitutions… across moments and settings'* (Youdell 2006, p136). She considers illustrations of such change, contemplating their weight and longevity. This analysis can further inform why it is that working in the unit is so effective. In moving to the different setting of the unit, there is an increased likelihood of shifting constitutions. Certainly, in marked contrast to the previous frustration, hopelessness and despair indicative of so much of their time in the mainstream classroom, the unit experience is summarised as '*nice*', '*good'* a place they '*always wanna be.*' This positivity it appears goes hand-in-hand with getting help, doing work and learning, with a sense of increased academic success. So this change of setting is a catalyst for fashioning a new identity, one of a more capable learner, at least within this moment and within

this space, away from the performativity pressures of the classroom (Ball 2003c).

In the wider setting of the whole school then, that is not to say that there is any escaping from the accompanying influences associated with being excluded from the mainstream classroom, since *'to be excluded is to be disempowered, to be constituted as 'other' and outside of a 'normal' frame of reference'* (Barton 1997, p232).

Other literature offers insight into the success of the unit. Of crucial importance are the positive relationships established with supportive teachers who not only show respect and encouragement but also have a *'predisposition towards students' capacity to develop'* (Ekstrand 2015, p11). This Ekstrand (2015) argues includes the belief that failing or disengaged students can improve. As is repeatedly made clear in the data here, John and Laura certainly appear to possess just such characteristics and in particular respect for and a belief in the students and their capabilities. Allan (2007) similarly emphasizes the central role of this type of 'committed' teacher for 'good inclusion', as well as the skills they would need to both understand the students' complex range of needs and also cater for these appropriately. She then notes the implications for building this capacity in teacher training and education.

The students certainly feel that particular teachers are appropriately skilled in meeting their needs – John and Laura included. It is equally clear that many other classroom teachers are considered to not possess such skills, or at least to not exhibit them, perhaps in part due to other performativity pressures present in the mainstream classroom which take precedence. In relation to developing staff in these regards, Slee (2008) makes a damning observation. In commenting on funding arrangements, such as those allocated in connection with the process of statementing in the UK, he notes:

> *'As the funding model is applied to an individual student, there is no expectation that schools and teachers are becoming more capable of teaching diverse populations' (Slee 2008, p111).*

He further explains that all too often this funding is used to employ additional staff in support roles to sit with a statemented individual, displacing the teacher and perhaps thus even narrowing their role. In the light of Slee's observation about funding structures, it may seem unlikely that more classroom teachers could be further trained in this way and thus ever more probable that the students here would seek to spend greater time in the unit, where the staff are suitably skilled.

A final note in this section pertains to the futility of attempts at discrete categorisation, illustrated by the convoluted entanglement between learning needs and EBD. This is connected both to the complexity of identities, their multifaceted, shifting and transitory nature - as argued above from a Foucauldian perspective – and also, and fundamentally, to the limitations and dangers of utilising binary labels or categories, such as, learning needs/not learning needs, EBD/not EBD and disability/ability. These caveats and provisos were flagged at the outset of this chapter, when the choice of subheadings mirroring such categorisation was noted. Youdell (2006) in warning against *'the endurance of normative discourses that reproduce and proliferate hierarchical binaries that act to privilege and exclude'* (Youdell 2006, p181), recognises that binaries persist, albeit sometimes in different guises, but that is not to say that their resistance and disturbance are not a source of great interest. Whilst Allan (1999) similarly in her research notes *'the oscillations, uncertainties and ambivalences, which disturb the binarism usually associated with special needs (for example included/excluded; normal/special; able-bodied/disabled)'* (Allan 1999, p1), Bhabha (2012) more definitively discusses *'a movement away from a world perceived in binary terms'* (Bhabha 2012, p14). In considering the dangerous nature of the SEN label in particular, Barton (1997) notes that - as it creates a SEN/non-SEN binary – such labelling necessarily positions some students as other than, or more precisely less than, normal. Nevertheless such terminology, labelling and categorisation are prevalent within the education system, accompanied by the associated baggage, only a tiny portion of which can be glimpsed here. In light of all this, the inconsistencies seen here should also be reiterated. The students frequently resist, reject and shun the classroom labels – slow-learner; low-achiever; examination-failure – yet paradoxically in

doing so they oftentimes embrace a more formal SEN label in order to gain access to the unit and the safety of exclusion in this different redemptive setting. These various interrelated labels, from slow-learner to formal SEN, are therefore neither solely positive nor entirely negative for these students.

6.2.1 EBD

Some students labelled by Welford High as EBD, resist this labelling and see themselves as no different from the vast majority of students, whereas others have arguably somewhat taken on this identity, albeit to varying degrees, for some perhaps even to the point of pride:

> *EDDIE: I wasn't naughty but I wasn't the best of students either.*
>
> *EAMMON: I was more the naughty one… I used to bully a lot. I used to be the top. No one used to touch me… I'm one of those people I'm a proper wind up merchant. If I know I can wind someone up I would do it. And I would do it until I know that they've had enough... Started a few fights.*
>
> *CRAIG: Oh yeah I got in tones of trouble. Yeah... Good days… They were the best!*

Whereas many learning needs go unrecognised, with students keeping their head down or simply falling below the radar for extended periods in the mainstream classroom, this is almost never the case with students labelled as EBD. Indeed they are in fact nearly all labelled as such precisely as a result of disruptive, confrontational or aggressive behaviour exhibited at school. Going unnoticed may not be an option then, but being noticed – as will become clear - is not the same as being understood or helped.

There is a range of behaviours exhibited by these students many - like those mentioned by Craig, Dene and Eddie – which are forms of persistent low level disruption:

> *CRAIG: Just ruining a classroom…. You just go there to like cause manic and not get any work done.*
>
> *DENE: Being silly yeah… Talking through lessons… It was just normally me being the class clown.*

> *EDDIE: It was probably just winding up the teachers really. Don't know why… Just trying to impress people really probably.*

Other students relate incidents involving some more extreme behaviours:

> *FELICIA: I was talking back to the teachers. Like I would swear. I would say horrible things.*

> *EAMMON: I used to walk out at times. I used to swear at teachers and things.*

> *ELIOT: I'm basically like a bad dog. I'm just disobedient. I don't normally listen a lot… Yeah I got into quite a bit of trouble for fighting.*

> *DONNA: I started pushing my luck with teachers… I love the attention I'm not gonna lie I'm a massive attention seeker. Not so much in a way where I want sympathy and stuff but in a way where of "Look at me I'm funny"… I bit Mr. Johnson... (Laughs).*

Aside from the tireless chatter and lack of work effort which constitutes a large part of persistent low-level disruption, further disobedience often took the form of talking back and swearing at teachers, with aspects of physical violence also evident in some cases. Eddie wants to impress his peers, while Dene and Donna share a perhaps related desire to entertain and be seen as funny, yet Donna takes this further. These behaviours can be seen as another form of resistance to/avoidance of the frustrations of learning failure, attendant boredom and estrangement and the negative labelling by teachers and fellow students, which results. This suggests EBD are contingent on experience, displayed rather than possessed.

What consequences were there for these actions then and were any of these perceived by the students to be effective?

> *EDDIE: Think in Year 8 I was quite naughty. Think I had 200 points in Year 8… I did go on … what's it called? You come into school but you don't have any lessons. You got to do like… it's like a detention all day or whatever. Yeah, seclusion.*

> *FELICIA: I'll be put in seclusion or get a phone call home or a letter home, yeah.*

> *CRAIG: Getting excluded…. Getting suspended and all that stuff I dunno… I got sent home for a few days sometimes like… And then you'd have them other things that weren't as bad and you'd go in other classrooms for the day.*

Here several aspects common to many school behaviour policies are evident – a points system is in operation and parents are contacted and involved, as well as the use of internal and external short-term exclusions. Eddie feels that for him the particular combination of punishments – points and subsequent seclusions – was effective in terms of making him conform more consistently with the school rules, even if it took a second seclusion to bring this about.

> *EDDIE: After… coz I think I had like two of them, something like that, so I think after the second one yeah, I think it did kind of help… it's really boring coz most of the time you just sit in an office by yourself.*

He makes the case that not wanting further tedious seclusions was a factor in his change of behaviour:

> *EDDIE: Year 9 I did a lot more work compared to Year 8 coz I got most improved student in Year 9 I think, coz I went from 200 points in Year 8 to having no points in Year 9.*

For other students, there is little recollection, or mention made of these punishments having much effect or at least not positive. Bradley is a case in point, however he does note other tactics that were deployed which he did feel helped him to stay out of trouble and begin to engage more with learning. Following repeated minor issues in his Design and Technology lessons, the Head of Department made the decision to take him out of this class, remove him from his friends and place him with an established teacher with strong discipline.

> *BRADLEY: I had Miss Brewer and then she didn't want me in her class because obviously I was talking and the usual, put in with a stricter teacher sort of thing, so I was put in Miss Platt and she sort of straightened me out a little bit.*

This is not the only time that Bradley recalls being separated from his friends:

> *BRADLEY: We had to split up into two groups and luckily they separated me and Ben. Don't know whether they done it on purpose.*

He is astute enough to appreciate that this may well have been a deliberate tactic on the part of the teachers and despite reiterating on many occasions how great a friendship he has with Ben, he describes this separation as positive. He repeats regularly that he wants to be removed from some distractions, since he knows that he does not have the self-discipline to simply stop the chatter. Chris likewise acknowledges the advantages of separating those with a tendency to become embroiled with each other:

> *BRADLEY: It's coz I knew I would just sit there the whole lesson and not do anything apart from talk… Because they were my friends and they were all my closest friend who were in my class.*

> *CHRIS: Coz obviously if you are with a group of friends that you always mess about with… if you split them up you are less likely to mess about.*

Bradley is appreciative of teachers with stronger discipline and wants to be '*straightened out'*, again recognising his own tendency to be readily led astray or likely as not to instigate distractions should the opportunity arise. Along the same lines then, Bradley hugely valued being sent to the unit, where despite recognising that '*in there probably more the majority of them are people teachers have kicked out because they are talking and the other classes want to learn so probably them types of people',* the atmosphere is one he finds conducive to learning. Bradley despite acknowledging that he frequently did not settle in mainstream classes is somewhat haunted by the way one teacher, a teacher who had him removed from his class and sent to the unit, described him:

> *BRADLEY: I started in the lesson and then I don't think the teacher could handle me. That's what his words were to Ms. Ford… His words were "I can't handle Bradley talking all the time in lesson and not doing his work". That was his thing. I remember them words.*

He subsequently went to the unit every time this class was timetabled throughout the remainder of his time at school, which was more than a year '*I*

was in there all the time. Every time we had that'. He not only preferred his time there but also found it possible to work, describing it as:

> *BRADLEY: Nice, coz it's more relaxed and you can have a chat yeah. It weren't more... everyone's got to sit there and do work it was a bit more relaxed and had a bit more of, not fun… I got it done coz I passed it but yeah. I liked it a bit more than the lesson.*

Bradleys moral career has much in common with several other students, in terms of being disruptive in mainstream class, albeit to differing extents, and then making their way to the unit - whether by arrangement with a specific subject department, by senior leadership mediation, or via a pastoral route. Finding the unit conducive to learning, a place where they would start to achieve and indeed not play up is a common thread for all those interviewed.

Dene repeatedly found himself in trouble in many of his classes, for *'being rude and stuff. Disrespectful.'* The tone with which he discusses these class teachers in the first extract below sits in marked contrast to his subsequent admiring descriptions of Laura and John:

> *DENE: I think it's just when I was rude from the beginning. I didn't bother, didn't care, didn't respect them enough… Trying to be funny… and then I'd just keep on being naughty and silly til they kicked me out.*
>
> *DENE: They was alright. They were good yeah. It was lovely in there. Always wanted to go in there. Just because you got more stuff done there… Just any work really. Whatever you was behind in, they'd help you with… They just put a lot of effort in. Don't ever stop... And then coz there's not a lot of people in there when we are in there, they … there was them two and there was only like four people in the class, so you had more help when you wanted it.*

Dene and Bradley's responses to their time in the unit epitomise those of the other students. There is a clear desire to be there, to take advantage of the accessible support and to achieve. What there is no sign of is lack of engagement, lack of effort or poor behaviour, all of which are commonplace when these same students recount being in the classroom. Explicit facets of being away from the performativity pressures of the classroom come through with the mention of the more relaxed atmosphere and the small group-size.

Eammon made a similar turn around '*I used to play up. Then one day they all got sick of me. Kicked, all kicked me out and went to the withdrawal-unit.*' He found himself spending the majority of each day assigned to the unit, where he successfully focussed on completing pieces of coursework and starting BTEC units. Subsequently he credits this time as having a significant far ranging effect, noting that he '*changed loads… stayed out of fights, things like that.*' He proudly recalls a remark by Laura and John '*they said 'We can't see what the problem is.''* So in the complex package of experiences and emotions that make up a moral career at school, such change of context can make a decisive difference.

Donna disliked her classes so intensely that she displayed some extreme behaviours in an effort to be removed, or simply absented herself. Consequently she also found herself spending considerable time in the unit '*I'd be in there for at least three a day… And the other time I'd be on the field or something.*'

> *DONNA: I liked it coz you get to socialise as well as doing your work… There's less people in there so it's not too loud and stuff. Like if I need help Mr. Vickers will quite happily come sit with me on the other side of the room. Just me and show me what I need to do and then make me do it. So he knows I'm understanding it properly… Me and John get on really well.*

Despite not liking mainstream classes, Donna also liked being in the unit, found that she received support and managed to work there. The behavioural concerns arising elsewhere were absent in the unit; again indicating that such behaviours are demonstrated - rather than possessed - and illustrate resistance to the classroom experience and labels. Eliot similarly notes '*I shut up in there and I started working more.*' He has a simple explanation for why the students who are so troublesome elsewhere remain calm in the withdrawal-unit:

> *ELIOT: No-one actually really gets angry in there coz they're fair to everyone… they can be strict but they are fair.*

In addition to exhibiting these mitigating characteristics noted already in preferred teachers, he also makes it clear that he appreciates just how hard Laura and John work:

> *ELIOT: They helped me out through the whole time… Both of them just go around helping everyone. They're always walking round helping people. They don't really get a chance to sit down.*

Felicia also knows that she struggles to conform to classroom rules, stating '*it's distracting in the classrooms. It's just bad. Like it's bad.*' She too finds it '*easy to get on*' and achieve in the unit, valuing the relationships and the support with learning in the same breath:

> *FELICIA: It's good. It feels like being at home really because like Ms. Ford she's like a mum to all of us… like we could just sit down and talk about problems; whatever and she'll always just give us the perfect advice. And she can like… if I don't understand something she will like break it down for me so I can understand it perfectly and I just won't have any problems.*

Not only does she value Laura's approach, she also appreciates that Laura is consistent and unswerving in her efforts, unlike her regular class teachers, most of whom she feels have long since stopped trying with the EBD students.

> *FELICIA: It's like the teachers don't care anymore… it's like they've given up on us. Not Ms. Ford though. But it's like other teachers; they just went 'forget it' like. They don't care.*

This reflects the unit being a space removed from the performativity pressures of the classroom, as well as matters of scale. The unit is a relatively small space where staff-to-student ratios are much higher in comparison to a classroom, facilitating students being better known as individuals - with needs, foibles and problems – and thus better managed and responded to.

Felicia was at one time permitted to return to certain lessons, however she stayed in the unit instead. This was because Laura wanted to keep her there, where she considered Felicia had the best chance to progress.

> *FELICIA: Coz I'm in the withdrawal-unit for most of my lessons coz before… coz I got kicked out in Year 10 of most of my lessons. So Ms. Ford spoke to me and she was like 'I'm just going to keep you in here'. They want me back in there, but Ms. Ford don't, like she says to me 'just stay in here'. Coz I get a lot done in here.*

Felicia recounts just how effective Laura is in getting the best out of her, including exploiting positive student relationships to encourage engagement.

Accordingly to Felicia, Ms. Ford knows these students and their interpersonal dynamics so well that she can pinpoint exactly who to call on for assistance so as to get another student to refocus. Felicia recounts one such intervention by a friend of hers, yet instigated by Laura:

> FELICIA: She helped me… we had a heart-to-heart… she was talking to Ms. Ford about my English and she was like 'Oh Felicia needs to get it done as well', so then she sat down with me and we spoke… she kind of got it through into my head. Coz I always listen to her like… She doesn't bunk. She don't, like anytime if I tried to bunk, like before like in Year 10 if I tried to bunk, she told me not to and whatever and she'd drag me to my lessons. Like she was a good influence.

In addition to the unit, some students found help and guidance that they valued from the pastoral team, from Form Tutors or Heads of Year. The relationships with Form Tutors however, were primarily established and developed within registration time, and some of these individuals found punctuality a challenge.

> FELICIA: I had a really good relationship with my Form Tutor; he was like a dad to me… Like he was just … he was perfect.

> FELICIA: I'm not a morning person. I mostly come in late. Most of the time I'll come in at like 10 O'clock or 11 O'clock

> DENE: I didn't really come in. Yeah. Early enough for Form. I'd just always come in late.

The relationships with Heads of Year, who could be more readily accessed throughout the school day, were more often cited as powerful positive influences.

> DENE: They always helped… They were always there.

> FELICIA: My Head of Year, I have a strong connection with her… I'd go sit in Ms. Twombley's office sometimes… I love Ms. Twombley.

Donna credits two of these individuals with stopping her being permanently excluded from the school, which incited a greater respect and an attempt at more compliance:

> *DONNA: I wasn't meant to still be here. Ms. Twombley and Mr. Jones like they kept me in school… so I had a lot more respect for them teachers. Started going to a few more lessons, not a lot.*

Donna has a chequered moral career since being labelled as EBD. When Donna was permanently excluded from a previous school, she had initially been refused a place at a Pupil Referral Unit *'coz apparently I'm not safe to be around other kids. I thought it was a load of bollocks.'* Despite the fact that she and her mother disputed this labelling, Donna spent the majority of an academic year out of school, which she found frustrating.

> *DONNA: I'd wake up half-two, three-ish and go out with my mates, come back really late. Just the same every day. I was bored. I hated it. With a passion I hated it.*

After securing a place at Welford High, Donna briefly settled well then gradually as she grew in confidence her behaviour became more challenging as she pushed the boundaries and sought attention, leading to a fixed-term exclusion for biting a teacher.

> *DONNA: I've no idea why… It's just one of those things you do in the moment and then as soon as you've done it, its like "shit" (laughs)…. Yeah it's not good… I started to get myself worked up and that so…. It's one of those things that you do when you are in the moment and then you are like "why did I do that?"*

After returning from exclusion *'I did it again.'* By this stage there was under a year left of compulsory schooling, so the pastoral team, aware of the unlikelihood of someone with Donna's history finding another school to take her, worked to keep Donna in school, primarily within the unit, drawing on her positive relationship with John. Donna's case illustrates the pastoral team and the Teaching Assistants working together to intervene and support a student categorised as EBD.

Dene and Felicia see as the most influential and effective the support from members of the pastoral team and from the Teaching Assistants, and they similarly put them together under one umbrella, setting them up as distinct from classroom teachers.

DENE: Ms. Twombley, Mr. Singh and Jane and John and that.

FELICIA: Teachers… it's like they will stick on the teacher's side because they think that the teachers are a team and the students are a team. Like it shouldn't be like that. Ms. Ford and Ms. Twombley, they understand both sides of the story, so they can look at it from both point of views.

These non-teaching staff not only specialise in forming relationships with all students, but are also better placed to do so, with time set aside as part of their remit. Felicia's extract also speaks volumes about how she sees the staff as against, counter to and even in conflict with her and her peers. The classroom teacher's priorities swayed by performativity pressures, appear to her as diametrically opposed to meeting the needs of all students.

6.2.2 EBD: Situating the accounts

What more does the literature have to add regarding EBD – about such needs not being understood or met and any impact of this labelling on learner identities? Equally, is there anything further to say about the success of the effective interventions seen here - working in the unit and with pastoral teams?

Just as with the term inclusion, the use and meaning of the term EBD, over the twenty plus years since its inception[37], has been contentious, variously being considered a medical model of maladjustment, loosely used to encompass children exhibiting difficult behaviour, or considered as a learning difficulty; ranging from pathologising the individual, through considering social factors to being largely a matter for school discipline to tackle (Cooper, Smith and Upton 2002; Jones 2003; Galloway, Armstrong, and Tomlinson 2013).

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[37] The term EBD first appeared in policy documents in the early 1990's, where children with EBD were stated to always have special educational needs. A range of intertwining factors from the social, psychological and biological was stated as causing pupils' EBD (e.g. DfE 1994).

On several occasions here the messy interplay between learning needs and EBD is highlighted. This is typified by Eliot's remark: '*I would get annoyed coz I like didn't quite fully understand the work.'* Research into student absenteeism, notes that avoidance and in particular truancy is often *'an indicator of unsatisfied educational needs'* (Ekstrand 2015, p13). The frustrations ensuing from not having learning needs met, of being left to languish unsupported in the classroom, is a trigger for both truancy and for EBD outbursts seen here. Social psychology research suggests that students with issues relating to self-esteem – in particular in terms of self-competence – may be vulnerable in mainstream classrooms. That is, *'when the demonstration of some kind of competence is called for, such individuals may feel threatened and employ various avoidance and/or denial strategies'* (Jindal-Snape and Miller 2008, p224). The authors go on to note these strategies will probably include an assortment of anti-social behaviours, some of which may even be extreme. Evidently, in order to effectively address where unmet needs lead to incidents of negative behaviour, teachers need to be able to correctly interpret the resulting behaviours, identifying underlying roots, so that they are then able to employ approaches to help re-build self-esteem and facilitate learning (Jindal-Snape and Miller 2008).

Where behavioural difficulties arise, while categorising is often swiftly instigated, as has been seen this by no means implies that individuals then have their needs catered for in the classroom. Their needs may not always be to the fore. Indeed:

> *'When a pupil is misbehaving and preventing others from learning, procedures must exist for dealing with the situation and this may include the temporary removal of the pupil from the classroom. The interests of the class must be seen as paramount by the school and the disruption cannot be allowed to continue'* (Steer 2009, p12).

This stance from Steer fits with observations from many researchers, who note that school priorities - and in particular the pressures in a mainstream classroom in an ever more competitive marketised system - are frequently about control, conformity and assimilation to the end of performance improvement, and the EBD student is seen as a threat to the achievement of performance goals and swiftly dealt with through discipline procedures (Allan

1999; Slee 1996; Jones 2003). The application of such procedures reflects what is seen here - from point-systems and detentions, to exclusions. Galloway *et al* state:

> *'Behavioural units, withdrawal and guidance centres, nurture groups, tutorial classes… were all used to remove troublesome and disruptive pupils speedily from mainstream classes' (Galloway, Armstrong, and Tomlinson 2013, p112).*

Whilst the naming of different locations may vary, the role for the teaching assistants and pastoral teams within these environments holds. As seen here, away from the classroom, such staff work to understand and address the students' conduct, in marked contrast to the classroom teacher who is focused on other priorities (Ball 2003c). Similarly, Steer in his reviews, recognises the essential function for non-teaching staff in particular where the more emotionally needy, vulnerable student is concerned:

> *'Schools should review their pastoral systems for pupils to ensure all pupils have someone that knows them well and who is able to support them with their learning and development and, through effective monitoring, ensure that any needs are quickly identified and addressed. The use of Learning Mentors and other staff with similar roles to support vulnerable pupils is valuable and should be extended where possible' (Steer 2009, p9).*

Indeed, this succinctly portrays the preferred learning environment of the unit, described by the EBD-labelled students. Furthermore, in specifically discussing developing pupils' emotional, social and behavioural skills, Steer also advocates *'arranging additional small group support for pupils who need it'* (Steer 2009, p78). This naturally begs the question: who decides who 'needs it', and why? Here teacher stereotyping, labelling as EBD, the pressures of performativity in the classroom and the prioritising of performance goals all rear their heads once more. These matters aside, the unit nonetheless arguably fulfills this remit. There is a further point made in this report which evidently does not fit with all accounts reported here; namely that following just such interventions: *'in most cases the pupil is subsequently able to rejoin the class'* (Steer 2009, p12). There have been illustrations here where these EBD students have been kept within the unit and well away from the classroom, even after attempts have ben made to return them. While Steer (2009) seems

to indicate that these interventions would make a smooth return to the classroom feasible, Laura and John appear to feel very differently, indicating the necessity to maintain the withdrawal in order to maintain the benefits. Some of these students find themselves unable or unwilling to manage in classrooms; Cooper *et al* (2002) underscore factors that go to the heart of why this is the case here:

> *'All effective approaches to emotional and behavioural difficulties require teachers to value pupils and to respect the pupil perspective… all approaches involve a commitment to providing pupils with positive rewarding experiences of schooling rather than negative and punitive experiences' (Cooper, Smith and Upton 2002, p6/7).*

While this aptly describes the unit experience, it is decidedly not the case for these students in the performative classroom.

In considering the construction of EBD, Jones (2003) nods to matters of identity formation, noting the *'stigma implicated by labels'* (Jones 2003, p150). Galloway *et al* (2013) more specifically point to the social identity of any child assessed as having EBD as having *'a powerful history of stigma, being associated with undesirable personal and social characteristics'* (Galloway, Armstrong, and Tomlinson 2013, p112). Furthermore, whilst acknowledging the complexity and multiplicity of identity, they note that that which is: *'acquired via a special, particularly an EBD, label is likely to be one of the most deeply felt and all-encompassing identities'* (Galloway, Armstrong, and Tomlinson 2013, p116). Crucially, Youdell (2006) also discussing the label EBD, reminds us of the constitutive nature of such labelling and the discourse on which it draws: *'These various designations are not descriptions of objective facts about the way that students are, rather they are constitutive of the student in these terms'* (Youdell 2006, p125). Here there are illustrations of EBD labels being acutely felt – Bradley remembering the teachers words about him; Felicia seeing teachers as opposed to students like her; truanting to eschew the classroom experience altogether. Additionally there are clear indications that EBD is performative as opposed to inherent, since time after time the students do not demonstrate such behaviours in the unit.

Clearly with such an influential, profoundly felt label as EBD, significance abounds for the Foucauldian analysis already drawn upon (Allan 1999; Allan 2007; Youdell 2006; Youdell 2010). This suggests that some students are constituted within restrictive and negative learner identities such as are associated with EBD, just as for those labelled with any special need more broadly. However, we can also think about how these identities may be shifted, transformed and recreated (as well as, at the same time perhaps formalised) in a redemptive environment such as the unit, again going some way to explaining the effectiveness of this intervention. When Allan (1999) found illustrations of transgressive practices where individuals tried to resist imposed identities, crucially she found that such practices could be in either direction, transgressing out of, away from, discarding and refusing the SEND identity, or in fact perhaps more surprisingly transgressing into this identity, not only wholeheartedly embracing it but also taking it to further extremes. For instance she recounts the case of one student who claimed greater disability than that which was ascribed to her, in order to receive additional help and support, which she enjoyed. This is enlightening here. At the outset, when looking at the EBD labelling, there are examples of responses across this spectrum, with some students refusing the labels addressed to them – '*I wasn't naughty'* - whilst others embrace with pride the attention garnered from their actions – '*I got in tones of trouble. Yeah…. Good days… They were the best!*'; '*I love the attention I'm not gonna lie I'm a massive attention seeker'*. These behaviours can be seen as a form of resistance also then, as an illustration of transgressing further into this EBD identity. Whilst Allan's 'disabled' student acted in this manner to access support that she enjoyed, these students here similarly like the reactions and attention from staff and peers. Furthermore there are many illustrations of students playing up to ensure matters are brought to a head, exemplified by Dene's remark '*I'd just keep on being naughty and silly til they kicked me out'.* This equally fits with ideas of transgressive acts moving further into an identity to trigger some support, here to gain access to the unit. Shifting to a different space facilitates the reconstruction of a new learner identity (Youdell 2006). Such consideration of student resistance, emphasises the agency of the student, their rationality and more strategic, tactical forms of behaviour that are oriented towards ends – exclusion from the classroom and

referral to the unit. This is then both a form of resistance and shows a degree of planning and control over their moral career.

Further research into EBD highlights the impact of teacher perceptions and stereotyping, crucially noting '*the labelling is often done on the basis of teacher assumptions and beliefs rather than actual behaviour*' (Galloway *et al* 2013, p115). This again supports what is seen here that EBD are contingent on experience, performed or assigned rather than innate. The authors go on to note that '*in the longer term teachers' perceptions of pupils can create a self-fulfilling prophecy and the pupils can react by adopting the deviant identity assigned to them*' (Galloway *et al* 2013, p115). Here the authors appear to be positioning the student as a more passive recipient of teacher perceptions and prejudice, with bad behaviour as the playing out of EBD labels, where the student has no agency and assumes this identity. This argument then would be distinct from the more active, strategic student role that fits well with the data here.

Before honing in to consider more specific aspects of EBD - 'anger issues' and 'ADHD' - in the next section, it is worth emphasizing here there are clear indications that EBD are performative as opposed to inherent and that this is plainly expected to hold drilling down also. As will become clear, there are even greater pressures that come to bear when considering these particular refined EBD categories, as tensions from increased 'medicalization' emerge (Conrad 2008). Conrad deems medicalization to be '*defining behavior as a medical problem or illness*' (Conrad 1975, p12) and in contemplating the increasing medicalization of deviant behavior he considers how '*certain forms of behavior in children have become defined as a medical problem and how medicine has become a major agent for their social control*' (Conrad 1975, p12). He has widely researched such morphing of social behaviours into treatable medical disorders, as well as the shifting nature and increasing scope of such medicalization (Conrad 1975; Conrad and Potter 2000; Conrad 2005/2008).

Jones (2003), in considering how the EBD child is constructed, argues it is precisely the pressures from resource allocation, which '*favour the*

categorisation of the pupil population according to some indices of individual differences (e.g. with/without EBD)' (Jones 2003, p149). This EBD labelling in order to apportion limited resources fits with allowing only a few students' access to the unit. It also crucially raises a flag in terms of spurious rationales for attributing labels to individuals – something to be even more wary of next, where these pressures to label are compounded by pressures from medicalization.

6.2.3 EBD: Anger issues and ADHD

Focusing on Welford students who were identified with more specific anger or attention deficit issues and who received targeted intervention for these needs, brings to light further potential sources of in-school and out-of-school specialist support. There is an in-school mentor at Welford High with a specialism in dealing with anger-management issues and several of my participants received intervention from him, usually through a short series of one-to-one meetings. Dene who went *'a couple of times but not a lot',* considers that these sessions were really to cater for students who were oblivious to what they were doing, unaware that their behaviour may be considered inappropriate:

> *DENE: He was just for… the ones that needed it more, if you know what I mean? That were just, like clueless what they was doing. Like we knew we was doing it, but them ones were the ones that didn't know they was doing it… Nah. I didn't really have him that many times. Only a couple of times here and there. It was alright.*

In stating that he is 'deliberately naughty' Dene once again illustrates transgressing into this identity, in order to reap the benefits of being the *'class clown'* as well as to gain access to the unit. While Dene considers this anger management intervention fine, he does not see any real benefit. This is unsurprising in light of the fact that he does not wish to alter his behaviour.

Eliot similarly started off with some of these in-school sessions with little or no impact in terms of his classroom behaviours and he was judged by the pastoral team to need more expert input; '*so they put me in a proper anger management one.'* He was sent to external counseling for more personalised 'help' to cater

for his particular needs - '*had to go to anger-management coz I kept exploding at teachers. I used to get into fights like every day… I just felt more angry in Year 9 and 10. I don't know why.*' He found these sessions more useful and felt that he consequently made more of an effort in class.

> *ELIOT: I was in anger-management and I was trying to buckle down on my work. I was still getting into trouble but I was still doing all the work. I was trying to catch up. Then when it got to Year 10 anger-management had finished. She said I should be fine. I wouldn't explode; I wouldn't get annoyed with the work any more.*

He felt that he received help in becoming more aware of 'triggers' and 'the warning signs' in his own behavior, as well as 'learning techniques' to apply when he became frustrated by work or angry with other people. In his recounting of this experience he embraces this language of 'anger-management'.

> *ELIOT: A snide comment, if you look at me funny I'd get really… I'd snap quick. I used to get annoyed quickly for some reason. I don't know why… My eye twitches sometimes when I get really angry. So that's how people know when I'm kind of annoyed. Yeah it's like 'Oh God. He's winking.'*

> *ELIOT: You can't fully control your temper but it's helped quite a bit. I don't snap as quick anymore.*

Felicia used to loose her temper easily; she was seen as reacting before thinking, becoming argumentative, confrontational and aggressive and she too was sent to out-of-school counselling specifically for anger-management.

> *FELICIA: I used to go anger-management, like I had really bad anger problems. So like anything, anyone could just tick me off and I would just say horrible things that I don't mean. Like I don't think before I speak sometimes when I'm angry, so I say horrible things and then like obviously a couple of hours later I'll think to myself 'that was proper bad'.*

She also asserts that for her anger-management counselling 'helped', giving her some 'strategies' to apply in the moment if someone 'triggers' her anger - '*count to ten in my head or just ignore them, or I'll just walk out of the classroom*' - but she also thinks that maturing played a part in being better able to cope: '*I feel more in control now coz I've matured now.*' Felicia - evidently

taking on the language of 'anger-management' also - is clear that although she now has 'tactics' to apply, where her process is not understood the situation may still escalate. For example if a member of staff does not appreciate that she is leaving the room to remove herself from the 'trigger' and to calm down, they may follow her out which *'will just tick me off even more.'* She finds that her only recourse then is to go to the unit to see Laura or John, or go to the pastoral team offices, in other words to go to where her 'issues, tactics and behaviours' are better known and understood. In these ways she makes sense of herself and her behaviour in terms of the discourse of 'anger-management', she becomes a managing subject, carefully monitoring and organising her behaviour – a form of mundane self-government.

Eliot recounts his experience of being medicated over the first two years of secondary school for his ADHD. Here not only does Eliot adopt some language of 'anger-management' but there is also an apparent acceptance of many facets of 'medicalization' seeping into his remarks.

> *ELIOT: It didn't help. Not a lot. I would concentrate more but it didn't stop my anger level… it did help focus more. It did help focussing but it just didn't help like with the other things. I still got distracted easily but I concentrated on the work still. It was weird coz it was meant to calm me down. It made me focus more but it didn't calm me down.*

Eliot offers a further explanation of this mixed response, where his focus on work improves but his temper may nevertheless flare up regardless of having the medication or not.

> *ELIOT: Like coz normally you have to take it everyday but I wanted to see, my mum and dad wanted to see how well it would work on 'on' days and days off. So, and I didn't know and they kept giving me these fake ones and I didn't realise, and some days I'd be really bad and they would get two phone calls home and no work would be done. That's like when I hadn't taken them. And then on the next day they would give me the real one. I would have better work; I'd probably come home with a few merits in the book as well.*

Eliot is convinced that for him this medication helps with concentration and focus in class on the work in hand but finds it frustrating that it does not appear to tackle the anger and lashing out.

> *ELIOT: So they realised the medication was working but the only problem was they would get phone calls home sometimes because I'd had fights or because I'd exploded at a teacher... It's weird because it's an anger tablet... It's meant to make you calm down but it didn't. It was stupid.*

Eliot then muddles through in the classroom with a combination first of medication to help him pay attention for longer, more consistent periods and second of techniques gleaned from the borough counseling, yet all the while he still finds his anger can – and does - flare up. Set against this messy, complex picture for Eliot in the classroom where he states *'I'm basically like a bad dog. I'm just disobedient;'* it is important to remember that juxtaposed to this, in the unit he notes '*I shut up in there and I started working more.*' Moreover, he is the one who states that *'no-one really gets angry in there.'* It would seem then, just as with EBD more widely, for Eliot – in spite of his embracing of medicalization and the language of anger-management - his ADHD and anger issues are also contingent on experience, since the associated behaviours are not exhibited in the unit, where he is calm, compliant and more focussed on his work.

6.2.4 EBD: Anger issues and ADHD – Situating the accounts

The view that the badly behaved child – in particular in the more severe cases seen in this section - has developmental deficiencies resulting in EBD may be *'more appealing than regarding the miscreant child as wicked or sinful'* (Jones 2003, p149). Slee (1996) suggests the emergence of a greater number of students being classified as having ADHD may be related to parents in particular wanting to view their child as damaged or impaired, as opposed to nasty; however against a backdrop of increased 'medicalization' (Conrad 2008), it is no surprise that 'cases' are on the rise nor that medical specialists still consider '*ADHD is under-diagnosed and under- treated'* in the UK (UKAP 2013, p1).

With addressing this perceived under-diagnosis in mind, these medical specialists make a link between fixed-term exclusions and potential testing for ADHD. Their argument is this:

> *'Whilst many children will be temporarily excluded from school once for poor behaviour, and will be suitably chastened by the experience, children with untreated developmental problems like ADHD cannot properly moderate their behaviour without the right support, so they are very likely to be excluded more than once'* *(UKAP 2013, p1).*

They thus recommend that '*all children who receive two fixed term exclusions from school are screened for ADHD'* (UKAP 2013, p1). Interestingly, two-thirds of the students in this research in fact had two or more fixed-term exclusions on their record at Welford High; Eliot, Dene and Felicia and also a further seven individuals, all labelled as EBD on the SEND register.[38] In terms of the individuals in this research then, if such assessments were mandated, it would not only be Eliot that was 'assessed' for ADHD but a further nine individuals. This proposition then certainly seems to fit with the idea of increasing medicalization in particular as a means of social control (Conrad 2008).

Eliot describes his own behavior in a way that fits readily with that portrayed by the literature:

> *'The term attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is shorthand for saying that, as a matter of statistical probability, individuals who are excessively fidgety are also likely to be impulsive and inattentive, and less likely to be lethargic and withdrawn'* *(Jones 2003, p154).*

Eliot's account of his behaviours and his experiences of intervention, indicate his broad acceptance of medicalization and the language of anger-management. This is not uncommon. Students, parents and teachers adopting such 'expert' terminology as a 'common language' permeates research into similar interventions (Sofronoff, Attwood, Hinton, and Levin 2007).

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[38] See Appendix B.

Eliot and Felicia - embracing the language of anger-management - claim some 'benefit' from the counselling sessions, citing awareness of 'triggers' and 'strategies' to apply, as tangible examples. As has been discussed in relation to EBD more widely, the school views greater compliance from the students and the minimization of any distractions from performance goals, as beneficial. Hence corporeal control such as that seen here - from the re-emergence of behaviourism to medicating students for greater compliance - now frequently features within repressive education practices (Saltman 2016). There is some 'benefit' for the school then as Eliot and Felicia are doubtless more 'manageable' after their sessions, however, whether or not this will feed into any greater benefit for them – in terms of re-building self-esteem, or increasing the likelihood of academic attainment - remains unclear.

How does Eliot's story - where he is categorised as ADHD and subsequently given support in the form of anger-management sessions, counselling and medication - fit with research recommendations? How typical is his 'treatment' for this 'medical condition' and how pervasive is such medicalization of ADHD?

For school-aged children the medical advice as to the most appropriate treatment for ADHD depends on the severity and complexity of the symptoms. For the more moderate cases, counselling for the student – usually in the form of cognitive-behavioural treatment - and parental training are seen as preferential, with medication only offered for the more severe cases and still underpinned by the psychological components (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health 2009; Atkinson and Hollis 2010). Although medication may not be proscribed lightly then, a comprehensive meta-analytic review of the effectiveness of a variety of such interventions designed for ADHD, found that parental training and student counselling appear more effective when combined with medication than without (Purdie, Hattie and Carroll 2002). From this research then, the medicalization of ADHD seems inescapable. Whilst Eliot made no mention of any parental training that is not to say that it did not occur. Otherwise then his treatment indeed appears to tally neatly with the expert medical advice as to what is most effective for 'severe' cases, combining

counselling - which in his recounting of strategies does sound as if it incorporates cognitive-behavioural elements - with his medication.

Given the ubiquitous nature of such medicalization, what does the research say about the experience of being medicated? In recounting his experiences, Eliot notes that although the medication helps with focus he nevertheless found that he could still become angry, explode and get into fights while on the medication. In terms of what the medication is targeting and any downsides or limitations it may have, some medical research indicates that although the medication may cause headaches and psychological side-effects, like not feeling quite yourself or feeling anti-social, it frequently '*helped to control hyperactivity, increased concentration, improved grades and helped behaviour*' (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health 2009, p63). Eliot seemingly may agree in part but is sceptical at least as regards improved behaviour, since he is frustrated by the fact that he does not see the medication as diminishing his anger. This could perhaps be related to the aforementioned side-effect of feeling less sociable, yet the same research makes another pertinent observation, stating that even after effective interventions ADHD students should be monitored for '*any residual problems such as anxiety, aggression or learning difficulties. Treatment plans should be developed for any coexisting conditions*' (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health 2009, p368). The recognition in the research of the overlapping nature and disarray of many individuals' issues as well as that medication may not tackle anger issues, reflects Eliot's experience.

The final element to touch upon is the skill set possessed by the regular classroom teachers. Here there are a few teachers, in addition to the teaching assistants and pastoral team, who are seen as more suitably skilled at supporting students labelled as EBD, however the majority are not. Research in this area – still clearly heavily rooted in the pervasive medical model - repeatedly identifies this scarcity of suitable skills, the need for training and a sense of what the subsequently well-trained classroom teacher should offer, in terms of tailored behaviour management interventions:

> *'Consequences or contingencies for ADHD children generally need to be more immediate, powerful, tangible, and frequent than those that teachers often use in their everyday work with other children in the classroom'* (Purdie et al 2002, p67).

Additionally, 'educational interventions' are recommended, such as creating a suitable learning environment, one which is well-managed, where seating plans are employed with ADHD students at the front, noise is minimal, and tasks are broken up (Purdie *et al* 2002*;* National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health 2009). These so-called 'educational interventions' are then still very heavily focused on control, compliance and behaviour management. Still, more training for teachers would likely increase the use of these approaches, since currently:

> *'Teachers in England are not systematically trained to use these classroom management and teaching strategies'* (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health 2009, p33).

Crucially, in their review of the effectiveness of various interventions for ADHD, Purdie *et al* (2002) move beyond mere control to focus on educational outcomes. Although they note the 'effectiveness' of medication, psychological interventions and classroom behaviour management techniques in terms of improving behaviour – be it hyperactive, inattentive or impulsive in nature - they find little evidence of the much-heralded idea that educational attainment is raised as a consequence. Indeed they find that the interventions with the greatest impact on attainment, are educational interventions like those mentioned but even then the effects are small. It seems then, that even with more training for teachers, behaviours may improve – a benefit for the school in terms of control – attainment may not.

It is important to reiterate that within the wider context of ever increasing medicalization, whilst Felicia and Eliot make sense of themselves and their behaviours in terms of the discourse of 'anger-management', becoming self-governing individuals, vigilantly examining and systematizing their behaviour (Dean 2007); their accounts nonetheless illustrate that their behaviours are contingent on experience - not inherent - since the associated behaviours are not exhibited in the unit.

6.2.5 EBD: Mental Health, family breakdown and depression

> *EAMMON: I'm not aware of what I do… if someone upsets me that much.*

For Eammon this sense of making unwitting responses was interwoven with a spell of incidents including self-harm and threatening behaviour:

> *EAMMON: I walked into school with my hand cut right open, pissing out with blood… And did not notice… I had blood dripping down my hands where I had punched the railing… and it split my knuckle here open and it was just pissing out with blood and I did not notice, did not feel it. Nothing.*

> *EAMMON: Mr. Cutter… I remember coming up to me and saying why am I late with a really snobby attitude and I was really pissed off… and I said to him 'if you don't get out of my face in 5 seconds I will knock you clean out in front of everyone.'*

These incidents unsurprisingly triggered some out of school anger-management counselling support. Unlike Eliot and Felicia who found that they acquired some techniques to anticipate and thus often preempt their bouts of anger, Eammon felt this is not what he needed. He is adamant that he was not acting unreasonably since he knew what had triggered this phase of outbursts and considered himself to be justifiable furious – there had been problems at home that had led to the break-up of the family and he apportioned blame squarely and voraciously with one parent: '*My mum and dad just split up. Everything had just come out… I couldn't stop myself. It needed to come out.*'

> *EAMMON: I got some counselling. It didn't do me no good at all… school recommended it. I went… they were really nice and that. I went three times and just thought 'I can't do it'… The woman was lovely and she was very understanding and all that. The thing was it done me no good. It was just shit. Sitting in a room for an hour talking… and I did not see the point of it. I knew what was going on. I didn't need people to tell me what was going on.*

Despite these interventions then Eammon found himself often emotional, frustrated and angry in school, which he saw as a direct result of the family breakdown. In the short term when he felt overwhelmed he would truant, take himself away from people and smoke at the back of the field.

> *EAMMON: Started having problems… with family and things like that… and it just used to get too much for me and I one day was speaking to a mate about it and he said 'you ever feel like that, come up here and just have a fag'. One day it did get a bit too much and I did and it just seemed to take the edge off me for that short while. It just felt like I could forget about everything. Like I sat at the back of the field one day, I was that pissed off I smoked 40 fags in a day, that ain't natural but I smoked… I just sat at the back of the field and smoked.*

He found at this time of family turmoil that sitting in the regular classroom surrounded by his peers could feel confining and was not something he handled well, often getting into trouble, so he would truant frequently in this phase. Aside from truanting, the only other solace he found was in going to the unit and talking to Laura and John; '*I spent the whole day in the withdrawal-unit one day. I was that pissed off and they actually didn't want to let me out.*' Eammon had tried to keep his family matters to himself and so became even more frustrated when he felt that his family was trying to encourage school involvement.

> *EAMMON: They tried to bring it to school, that was the thing; they kept trying to bring it to school. They kept trying to get Ms. Twombley involved, they kept trying to get Mr. Singh involved and the thing is I did not never see why they needed to do that. It was a personal matter. You do not need to get other people involved and I kept thinking to myself: 'Why are you doing it? Why are you doing it?' I had them running round school one day looking for me and I sat in the withdrawal-unit and then I got took into the office and John made me a cup of tea and I asked why I was like it… They listened. They helped me understand like a lot more.*

In addition to this effective intervention of being listened to and finding help in dealing with his family situation from Laura and John, Eammon acknowledged that the pastoral team and Ms. Twombley in particular intervened with the teaching staff on his behalf.

> *EAMMON: Coz Ms. Twombley at the time said to all my teachers, sent them all an email, if Eammon looks pissed off leave him, let him calm down. One teacher didn't listen to that.*

Almost without exception then, once his classroom teachers were made aware of the situation, they could make allowances, for example by letting him leave the classroom if he said he needed to. Eammon by and large then ceased to fall

foul of the behavior management policies and to this extent the emotional barrier, whilst being far from overcome, was at least not compounded.

For Eammon then family breakdown was a factor external to school which impacted significantly on all aspects of his life at the time including on his wellbeing and attitude to school. While some of these external factors may be short lived the repercussions, as illustrated through Eammon's narrative, may nevertheless be extensive. Eammon is not alone in mentioning family breakdown as having a drastic effect on his attitude at school and his behavior in the classroom.

Charlie also brings up the topic of his family circumstances when discussing school, mentioning his absent father and the resulting stressful home circumstances. He sees his tracking down his father and having some renewed contact with him as another factor distracting him from any interest in his school work, although he also admits that by this stage he was assigned to alternative pathways and in mainstream lessons so rarely that he already had little to loose.

> *CHARLIE: Like my dad's left me… like I don't see my dad really… Well he left when I was three and then I met up with him when I was fifteen again… I rang him up. I found a number. I got in touch and I called him up and… I was like "Hello I'm your son". And then we met up and then started chatting and we was going alright for six months and then just went again….*

Devina who arguably has an extremely marginalised educational trajectory from a young age – being assigned to a truancy intervention pathway from as early as Year 9 – pinpoints the change in her behaviour as coinciding with family trauma when her father moved away. She recounts '*I was really close to him and then he just moved.*' She emphasizes how much this effected her, noting '*I stopped talking.*'

> *DEVINA: I think that's where it all… Like when I started being like really bad coz I was like I don't give a shit anymore.*

Devina quickly began exhibiting a range of difficult behaviours so much so that she was identified and targeted for this truancy intervention group in a matter of

months. This intervention did address her truancy and she formed strong bonds with the Teaching Assistants from the withdrawal-units who regularly worked with this group. Nevertheless, she found that the emotional upset sparked when her family situation was mentioned did not subside and that she would become emotional and frequently confrontational, ending up in trouble once again.

> *DEVINA: Like I used to hate people talking about my dad coz it would really upset me, so, yeah when they used to talk about it I was just… my face would go all red, I would just walk away… they'd just mention it. They'd be like 'oh your dad moved to another country' and I was like 'yeah' and that would upset me.*

For Alfie, family instability came in different chapters. His father had left before he had started primary school and he recalls a positive relationship with his stepfather, however '*him and my mum broke up.'* This unsettled him, impacting his emotional wellbeing at secondary school, and was compounded by the further adjustment when '*my mum became a lesbian.'* For Alfie also, when other students mentioned his home circumstances – in particular his mothers sexuality – this triggered emotional upset and getting into trouble at school.

> *ALFIE: See the only thing that I found hard about it was school… I'd be like I don't really want to talk about how my mums a lesbian sort of thing and then outside I'd have arguments… here and then I used to have arguments with people coz they'd be like "Oh your mums a dirty lesbian"… Yeah, the students knew, I was 100% the students all knew that my mum was a lesbian.*

For these students then, the difficulties between their parents, the absence of a parent, or indeed their intermittent role in their child's life, created instability and upset, fuelling emotional difficulties which permeated into their wider well-being and attitude at school. For some there is the added dimension of fellow students mentioning their home circumstances, which produces further emotional upset.

For Donna, turbulence came in the form of being thrown out of home, albeit temporarily:

> *DONNA: I moved for a couple months to live with my nan coz my mum kicked me out coz she'd had enough of me.*

This she found unsettling and while it helped heal family relationships, it nevertheless contributed to a greater lack of focus on schoolwork.

Thus far these students have named facets of changing family circumstances as external factors which impact emotional well-being and attitude to school. This also raises the question about the limits of possibility within the institution of the school, what school is responsible for, issues of communication and of joined up services. For Charanjeet and Faye, the external factors are health related, impacting mental health and feeding into depression.

Charanjeet had an eating disorder, which resulted in considerable time out of school at the start of secondary and she felt that she missed out on forming vital friendships, which fed into her accompanying depression.

> *CHARANJEET: I was going through a hard time and I kind of got like an eating disorder so I stopped going. I was in hospital a lot so whenever I did go… I didn't know anyone in like Year 7 and it was hard coz that's high school and that's when you need to know people… coz like with an eating disorder like the other half of stuff is like being depressed and that.*

She moved school in Year 8 to Welford High as her closest friend from out of school was already there and this, together with a sympathetic form tutor and pastoral team, she identifies as playing a part in helping to meet her complex emotional needs and aid in her gradual recovery. Indeed, she states positively: '*I knew like I wouldn't be depressed here… I knew loads of people here… I like this school.*'

Faye has a syndrome, which increasingly limits her mobility, resulting in being labelled as having 'disability' needs and coping with this in itself can impact her mental well-being and feed into depression. She resists this overt labelling and values her privacy, keeping her physical and mental condition largely to herself.

> *FAYE: Coz I go on and off like, I'm happy and then I'm down. But no-one here like really knows that much coz I never seem… like you can't really tell, unless I like told you.*

When physical symptoms escalate or injuries compound the situation she can struggle to cope and become further depressed. She recounts events after being in additional pain, '*so I just wasn't really coming in that much and like coz of that I got all like down and annoyed'* further summarising '*I got really down and like I got basically depressed.'* As the situation escalated - '*like a couple of days, I just couldn't get out of bed'* - her mother sought counselling via her doctor, as well as informing the pastoral team at school. On her return, Faye recounts what she sees as the first time her form tutor and the pastoral team began to appreciate the gravity of the impact on her:

> *FAYE: I was just up in form and Miss came and she just asked me if I was alright and I just burst out with tears, she took me down to medical and I sat there and I just was crying. But I don't think they realised just how bad it gets… so it's just like they didn't realise how much it affected me.*

Faye also then had some counselling arranged via the school. Despite acknowledging that '*I think it was alright when I was actually in the room, it's fine,'* Faye found having sessions within the school problematic because of the location.

> *FAYE: I think because I was here and I saw her… I don't really like being at school. I don't like school… but at that time I really hated it like… and I just didn't want to be here and I think at the time… coz I was here and… I'd just like sometimes cry here and everything…*

Faye similarly found the classroom environment surrounded by her peers somewhere she did not wish to be when she was low. The reason for this was twofold, in part as she was wary of victimisation for her condition – '*people were taking the mick'* - and in part as she felt misunderstood: '*I find it really hard to talk to some people coz they don't get it and they don't understand… and that's why I choose to sort of sometimes not talk to people coz they don't get it but they try and like help… But it doesn't help.'* At this stage, so as to ensure that she would come in to school at all, it was agreed between home and school that Faye should spend the majority of the day in the unit. Faye was already much more comfortable in this environment, away from the majority of her peers, within a small group and with Ms. Ford, with whom she had an established, supportive effective relationship.

How was it then that Faye had initially made her way to this unit? Despite Faye having recognised 'disability' needs, there are several illustrations of when these needs went unmet for prolonged periods and it is as a result of one of these instances, that she originally attended the unit. The lack of understanding or catering for her 'disability' needs broadly takes two forms; firstly subject specific elements which went unaltered and secondly the location of classrooms which were likewise unchanged.

Faye came up against what she considers the most sustained exclusionary circumstances in her physical education lessons, noting '*what they do here, I can't really do.*' She elaborates:

> *FAYE: For like three years, I just like stood at the side… she knew that I couldn't do stuff and she knew that I would try stuff that I could do but… after a bit I just got fed up.*

Faye knows that the teacher appreciated that something different was required to include Faye in these sessions as illustrated by her promises to Faye's family:

> *FAYE: It was funny coz at parents evening she would tell my mum 'Oh she can do some coaching or I'll put something in place' and when I was in lesson she never did anything. Nothing at all and I just stood there at the side and it wasn't until… no one ever said anything or did anything until I walked off one day. I was fed up. I was standing in the mud, it started to rain and I thought I'm not going to stand out here so I walked off.*

This action according to Faye, led to her being assigned to the unit for these lessons, '*I first came at the end of Year 9 for P.E.*'.

Having chosen GCSE Drama and being '*really excited to do it';* Faye dropped it '*because she wasn't including me in the lesson'.* Her sense of exclusion here echoed her previous experiences in P.E., where practical subject elements were not altered to cater for her needs.

> *FAYE: Like practical… Or the games when you're up on chairs and stuff … and I can't do that… Or down on the floor. So she's just like 'Just go sit at the side'… she was just like 'Just go'. And like all the*

games I couldn't do coz she never did it so I could do it… And I was fed up and I just thought… 'I just don't want to be in here.'

Once again the solution found was further time in the unit. So for P.E. and Drama, it had been the lack of adaptation of the practical elements of the subject, which had resulted in Faye feeling excluded. For two other subjects, it was quite simply the location of the classrooms for the groups she was allocated to; '*I had to go upstairs… but I had to wait for everyone to go up… and then go up.*'

> *FAYE: It's upstairs and I just don't go… or if I can't, I just don't… It's not painful as much as it's just difficult and I don't like doing it when people are there and stuff so yeah. It's just… it annoys me coz they go on about how 'inclusion, we like to include everyone' and then I'm just like, no… it's not… it's rubbish.*

Faye found having to go up the stairs arduous and awkward and with large numbers of students around she felt not only unsafe but also self-conscious. This resulted in avoidance, impacted her attendance in class and further undermined her desire to go to school. Once Faye was spending more time in the unit she considered she had somewhere safe and welcoming on-site to go to if she felt unable to face the stairs and the lesson and additionally found an ally in Ms. Ford, who liaised with the departments on her behalf, pushing for her to be moved into a group based on the ground floor. Ms. Ford succeeded in achieving these changes, albeit only briefly in the case of Science, towards the end of Year 10.

> *FAYE: And then Year 11… it was funny… after summer, it went back upstairs again and it's like, did they think that I just magically healed over the summer? And like it took them… until about Christmas to move them downstairs and that was until Ms. Ford said 'You're not going until they do it'… Missed science for half a year.*

Faye did find a place where she felt understood - in the unit with Ms. Ford - but this did not alter the fact that she felt alienated and excluded from a large proportion of mainstream classes.

> *FAYE: Inclusions rubbish. They go on about it but… it's rubbish. I've never felt really included.*

Reflecting on her experiences, in particular that when she had walked off and created a scene, or when Ms. Ford had applied pressure, changes had come about; Faye conjectures that, *'coz like I'm quite quiet',* since she largely kept her head down, eschewing attention, this contributed to her needs remaining unmet. Faye offers two ways round this, firstly *'screaming and shouting around'*:

> *FAYE: I think, in a way if I was naughty and that, I think a lot more stuff would have happened for me… they would have done more.*

She knows full well that would not have been in her nature and offers a simple, effective solution which could likely have pre-empted her lack of inclusion: Ask the students, check in with them individually and consider their needs.

> *FAYE: I guess make sure every student is alright. Like coping. Like no ones ever come round and actually asked me like 'is this alright?' Or anything. Or someone with like disability or a learning difficulty, or someone who just doesn't enjoy school and they know, they should… think of them… but they just don't.*

6.2.6 EBD: Mental Health, family breakdown and depression – Situating the accounts

For Eammon, Charlie, Devina, Alfie and Donna it was some facet of family upheaval, tension or breakdown, which caused distress, triggering emotional difficulties and thus - despite being factors external to school - inevitably filtered into all aspects of their lives, affecting their well-being and attitude at school. This emerged in several different ways, from a diminishing focus on schoolwork, through truancy, emotional outbursts, arguments and fighting, to self-harm or ceasing to speak. Charanjeet and Faye discuss their own health related circumstances as external factors, which created barriers as well as being inextricably interlinked with depression.

Some understanding and support was once again found in the unit, from teaching assistants and pastoral teams, to a greater or lesser extent for all these students. One illustration where pastoral teams intervened with the main staff body on behalf of these students and to some effect, is through granting blanket permission to exit a classroom situation which became confining and

over bearing, Such interventions, while not in any way resolving the underlying difficulties, went a considerable way in curtailing confrontations and thus limiting further falling foul of school behaviour policies.

The common thread for all the stories here is the impact of external factors on emotional well-being and mental health, perhaps also feeding into depression. Firstly, in terms of situating within the literature then, the medicalization backdrop is also present for these arenas of EBD - mental-health and depression – arguably reflected in the rush for counseling as a 'treatment' for a 'medical condition' (Conrad 2008). Nevertheless with external social factors explicit here, what other slants and perspectives can the literature offer?

Before turning to mental health research, there is a fundamental point to address, from research into education and the working class, which highlights *'the powerful dynamic between emotions and class inequalities'* (Reay 2017, p155). This research reveals:

> *'The complicated combinations of guilt, shame, anger, fear, defensiveness, empathy and conciliation that are generated in response to class inequalities in education' (Reay 2017, p155).*

Five out of the seven students citing impacts on their wellbeing from external factors are eligible for Free School Meals - a proxy for socio-economic status[39], so in light of Reay's research, such students may already be under greater emotional strain resulting from class inequalities in education, even before fluctuations in external factors are considered.

Research more directly focused on mental health services, suggests that adolescents have high rates of mental health issues, yet whilst the government has commissioned research and pledged greater support for mental health in schools (Marshall, Wishart, Dunatchik, and Smith 2017) provision and funding remain patchy at best:

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[39] See Appendix B.

> *'Despite the evidence showing that young people aged 12–25 years have the highest incidence and prevalence of mental illness across the lifespan… their access to mental health services is the poorest of all age groups' (McGorry, Bates and Birchwood 2013, p30).*

Moreover, recent research bemoans the exacerbating effects of funding cut backs (Webb and Bywaters 2018), whilst others acknowledge the specific impact this is having on schools:

> *'Cuts to services combined with a rising tide of mental ill-health mean that secondary schools are being forced to pick up the pieces. In 2016, 90 per cent of secondary school headteachers reported an increase in rates of mental health problems such as anxiety and depression among their pupils over the previous five years' (Thorley 2016, p1).*

When emotional difficulties arise in schools, mental health language is frequently reached for over social considerations, once again demonstrating the extensive nature of medicalization:

> *'When EPs, teachers, and others seek to understand EBD, inevitably their main sources of information are the mental health discourses' (Jones 2003, p153).*

Issues of mental health in particular for children are very much to the fore in recent debate, with the medicalization backdrop tangible:

> *'There is a crisis affecting children and young people's mental health in England, with three children in every classroom experiencing a clinically diagnosable condition' (Thorley 2016, p1).*

There are some examples of access to counselling support at Welford High, yet neither Eammon nor Faye found their counselling interventions particularly helpful. Nonetheless, some research suggests that school-based targeted interventions can reduce the symptoms of anxiety in adolescents, in particular when cognitive behaviour therapy is a feature (Neil and Christensen 2009). However, other research indicates that child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) *'provide delayed and heavily restricted access to services for a small subgroup of people with severe and complex disorder, whose developmental and family needs are not met in a holistic manner'* (McGorry, Bates and Birchwood 2013, p30). Plausibly it is this lack of holistic consideration

that was missing for Faye and Eammon. The insubstantial, nominal nature of provision is echoed in other research, where diminishing budgets are in part blamed and the school is left to cope:

> *'Despite the growing number who require help, cuts to the funding of both NHS and local authority 'early intervention' services, which can prevent emerging mental health problems from escalating further, mean that increasing numbers of children are unable to access appropriate and timely support'* (Thorley 2016, p1).

That seven students raised issues of mental health from such a small sample – could be seen to fit with the growing prevalence found in this report. The report also bemoans the inconsistency of provision of school-based early interventions for mental health matters, indicating again the lack of a more holistic approach, insufficient funding, a shortage of high-quality services to access and the fact that standards of school counselling provision are not monitored. The report nevertheless recognises that schools are in a strong position to support mental health for their students and that good practice can occur, in particular when school-based interventions *'facilitate a wider culture within schools that values mental health and wellbeing'* (Thorley 2016, p2). The fact that some individuals at Welford High accessed in-school counseling – for any aspect of mental health, for family breakdown matters, depression or anger-management – and more crucially found a sympathetic ear amongst Teaching Assistants and pastoral staff, indicates some small successes within the practice at Welford High, and points to a culture within the unit that indeed values mental health and well-being.

Faye's story, her syndrome, mobility issues and her experience of exclusionary practices are in several respects distinct from the other individuals' experiences. Whilst the barriers connected to mental health and depression do indeed substantially overlap with others here, it is the physical aspects of her condition - her 'disability' - which are raised in terms of additional barriers. Compounding the medicalization backdrop for Faye, is the inherent 'ableist' nature of the school (Hehir 2002; Storey 2007) since *'ableist assumptions influence the education of children with disabilities'* (Hehir 2002, p3), undermining their educational attainment.

'From an ableist perspective, the devaluation of disability results in societal attitudes that uncritically assert that it is better for a child to walk than roll, speak than sign, read print than read Braille, spell independently than use a spell-check, and hang out with nondisabled kids as opposed to other disabled kids, etc. In short, in the eyes of many educators and society, it is preferable for disabled students to do things in the same manner as nondisabled kids' (Hehir 2002, p3).

This sentiment can be detected across aspects of Faye's story. She mentions fearing victimisation for her condition and feeling misunderstood, as well as subject specific elements of curriculum and pedagogy, which were not adapted to allow for her participation and inappropriate roomings, which likewise went unchanged. The devaluation of disability and the ableist design of the curriculum and facilities are evident. Indeed, if institutions and curricula were genuinely designed for all at the outset, interventions and adaptations would not be necessary for Faye to join in. All too often schools:

'Attempt to retrofit the child with inappropriate interventions after they have failed in school, rather than design the instructional program from the beginning to allow for access and success' (Hehir 2002, p28).

Pivik, McComas and Laflamme (2002), in their research into barriers into inclusive education for students with disability needs, summarise the barriers they found under four themes: the physical environment; intentional attitudinal barriers; unintentional attitudinal barriers and physical limitations. These align very directly with Faye's reflections: the classroom being upstairs would fall under the physical environment; fearing victimisation would fall under intentional attitudinal barriers; and feeling misunderstood would fall under unintentional attitudinal barriers. Interestingly subject specific elements which Faye was unable to participate in, could fall under physical limitations since it is here for Pivik *et al* (2002) that students touch on the lack of understanding of their various conditions. Perhaps a better fit would be under the physical environment however, as here the related explicit example of failure to adapt gym equipment to cater for students needs is mentioned. What is remarkable is the consistency of the specific issues picked up by Faye with those found in this wider research. The authors justified the need for their work at the time, in part, as they note:

> *'No studies were found where students with disabilities were asked about their opinions of accessibility and inclusion within an integrated school setting' (Pivik et al 2002, p99).*

Perhaps there is still then insufficient research where the students own voice is foregrounded and heard. Certainly Faye is facing the same unresolved matters some years later. With this in mind it is worth recalling that Faye herself offered one simple suggestion as to how to proceed - asking the individual how they are coping. Clearly for Faye this in inextricably linked with being known, valued and understood.

For Pivik *et al* (2002), their students offered three sorts of approaches to overcoming barriers; social/policy changes, environmental modifications and institutional resources. Much under social and policy changes - such as *'providing suggestion boxes at schools, including individuals with disabilities in the planning of renovations or expansions'* (Pivik *et al* 2002, p103) – would likely be unnecessary if Faye's idea of regular dialogue and being asked, listened to and known were in place. As for environmental modifications and resourcing, Faye herself did not focus on altering the environment; nonetheless her issues with stairs and the need to move groupings and locations would surely have been circumvented by the provision of lifts in those areas. Lastly, there are a few details and specific suggestions from Pivik *et al* (2002*),* from which Faye already benefitted at Welford High – namely being allowed extra time to move between classes and having access to a laptop when writing is difficult. Once again in acknowledging the presence of these helpful elements, it is worth recalling that Faye nevertheless identified a remarkably similar range of barriers as this wider study, implying that there are still many adjustments and changes needed if she – and others like her - are to be listened to and to feel included.

> *'Inclusive education is about responding to diversity; it is about listening to unfamiliar voices, being open, empowering all members and about celebrating 'difference' in dignified ways. From this perspective, the goal is not to leave anyone out of school' (Barton 1997, p233).*

In this final empirical chapter I have considered the students' accounts of their experience of what they identify as more individual factors feeding into aspects of their marginalisation. I have also considered some contingent factors - mental health, family breakdown - that they see as contributing to or precipitating 'problems' at school - including consideration of some of the processes of labelling to which these students are subject.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

7.1 Listening to the Marginalised

> *ALFIE: We knew that… no matter what we said, it aint going to change much… Someone would just overrule us and tell us to be quiet.*

This study gives a voice to a small group of students who for a variety of reasons are required to spend time in a school withdrawal unit away from the mainstream classroom setting; students who, like Aflie all too often feel that their voice is not heard. What emerges through the telling of their lived experiences, is the breadth and diversity of ways - from the blatant to the inadvertent, the miniscule to the looming, the inter-personal to the structural - through which they make sense of their tangled, intricate, oftentimes deeply-individual marginalisation, as they navigate schooling day-by-day. These detailed stories of marginalisation reveal *'the continued necessity for school ethnography that can access the everyday micro processes of schools'* (Youdell 2006, p176).

7.1.1 Keeping limitations in mind

Throughout this thesis many caveats, notes of caution and potential fragilities have been alluded to and it is worth reiterating the most pertinent here as well as noting some further limitations not identified previously. It is important to do this prior to moving forward to pull together my findings, so that these can be judged and considered appropriately.

The nature of qualitative research *per se* means that the data is site specific, providing information and accounts from a particular - in this case very localised - context and any attempt to draw conclusions beyond this setting must be viewed with a healthy scepticism. This ethnography primarily draws its data from semi-structured interviews with one small group of students who have spent time in one specific withdrawal unit in a particular secondary school in London, England. Again by its very nature the research was time limited – both in the sense of the period over which data were collected, but also in terms of my presence and participation in the work of the unit. Any claims beyond this

time and context have to be made very cautiously. However, the extent to which my account reiterates or relates to other research does suggest that the processes and experiences identified in this case do have a general relevance beyond the case. Care is taken in relation to each of the main issues within student experience to situate these issues within the context of that other research.

Furthermore, the hazy, messy nature of the data where hints and glimpses - and even absences - are drawn upon mean that the analysis presented is tentative by its very nature. As a novice and developing researcher in particular, self-criticality, advice seeking, reflection and revisiting the data and the arguments time and again is essential, as is careful consideration and application of robust analytic techniques. I made many initial errors in judgement, took many a wrong turn and even saw what - on reconsidering - was not there. Nonetheless, what is presented here is hopefully a plausible and convincing analysis, even if lapses and missteps may remain. The presentation of the details of the analytic process undertaken, the method of grounded theory, is intended to go some way to addressing concerns over reliability, as does the heavy use of extracts to support the emerging ideas throughout. These are made available for alternative readings.

Ultimately the claims I make for the research are based on care, rigour and depth rather than representativeness and scope and scale.

With the note of caution in trying to extrapolate deeply personal experiences beyond the setting, moment and individuals involved, it is nonetheless important to consider what general implications there might be for policy and practice, if measures were put in place to tackle the issues of marginalisation raised by the students themselves. In other words, I will explore some *'fuzzy propositions and generalizations'* (Bassey 1999, p11), mindful of all the uncertainty and haziness this entails.

This chapter then will revisit the four broad themes that comprise the results sections - transition, groups, options choices and pathways, the effective

classroom and barriers to learning - initially to summarise instances of marginalisation as well as factors that the students identify as working to pre-empt or mitigate such side-lining, then to explore some possibilities for tackling the assorted, messy, multi-dimensional nature of such lived marginalisation. Some small interventions and tangible measures will be suggested at each stage as well as some more extensive, holistic and far-reaching albeit perhaps more removed, tentative and intricate solutions.

Whilst these ideas emerge from the interplay between the data analysis, my personal predisposition and the sensitising concepts, and the stories of these marginalised students, it is worth stressing at this point *'the damage that an unfair and hyper-competitive education system inflicts on all children, and the emotional fall-out for them and their families across social class difference'* (Reay 2017, p174). Measures, which address issues of marginalisation, may in fact benefit the everyday experience of schooling for a breadth of students then.

What might an educational system look like if the experiences and accounts of these marginalised students were taken seriously and their voices were listened to?

7.1.2 Towards tackling transition issues

Transition is a time of potential stress and anxiety, which can be eased through knowing other students in the secondary school. Transitioning with peers is reassuring but knowing students who are already surviving in the school – older students in years above – does even more to reduce anxiety. Some formal transition measures, such as open evenings, open days and summer schools, also serve to make transition smoother and less worrisome. For vulnerable students at greater risk of a difficult transition, such measures ought not to be short-lived. Those starting well in advance of transition and of a longer duration after transition, with a remit covering the social, as opposed to prioritising the procedural and academic, are more likely to effectively support all students. Setting up buddy-schemes, where older students from the secondary school are

paired with the new intake – perhaps even instigating meeting in advance of their arrival – may alleviate some transition stress.

Faye and Charlie consider that transition is a breaking point, a rupture in their being known and understood by teachers. Prior to transition, they recount having their individual SEND not only understood but also effectively catered for in the smaller primary school setting. After transition they feel that they are left to struggle without proper help and support and consequently find it difficult to cope with the demands of the classroom. They blame transition for this loss of understanding of their needs and see this as something never regained, viewing transition then as the branching point at which their educational trajectory - or moral career - veered off towards an ever more marginalised future at secondary school. As part of 'being known', Faye and Charlie desire recognition for who they are as individuals; they wish to feel understood for who they are and to have their needs catered for effectively once again. They suggest that formal statements of SEND may have prevented their subsequent travails. Certainly transition from one institution to the next could be smoothed through the timely and effective transfer of accurate, complete and broad information on every student – with the social and not only the academic front and centre. This would need to be trusted by the secondary school staff and used effectively to prepare and plan appropriately for the new arrivals. In secondary school, with the introduction of more subject specialist staff, students have a greater number of teachers, that makes the dissemination of information and the forming of the strong student-teacher relationships, at best a slower process. Thus, there may be some merit in this regard of advocating smaller schools (Vander Ark 2002; Davies 2005; Benitez, Davidson, Flaxman, Sizer and Sizer 2009).

However, 'information' can also be dangerous. Alfie is adamant that his labelling by association with his brother was instrumental in his immediate, sustained and drastic marginalisation. Tackling such labelling sits along side challenging all matters of labelling, stereotyping and prejudice and as such is no small task. Incremental steps towards addressing Alfie's particular experiences of marginalisation, of a more organisational nature, could include careful monitoring of rationales for the withdrawal of students from mainstream classes

as well as frequent reviews. There are echoes in Alfie wanting to be known for who he is, rather than as part of a family with 'history', which resonate with Faye and Charlie's desire to be known. These concerns will recur.

There is of course one simple way to tackle issues of marginalisation, rooted in transition, which is simply not to have a transition. All-through schools, catering for students for the entirety of their compulsory schooling, in particular if they are not overly large so that students can more readily be known, ideally by all staff, would go a significant way to addressing the concerns found here with one structural change.

7.1.3 Towards tackling groups, options choices and pathways issues

Various concerns connected to dividing, sorting and splitting the student body, whether through grouping, options choices or pathways, are articulated by the students but in particular: setting by behaviour; reasons the students give, which influence their decision-making process when choosing options – where parental involvement and strategic decision-making are notable by their absence - and limits on choice, allocation and assignment.

Setting by behaviour is the mechanism the students cite as being the reason for their allocation to and movement between sets. Thus, badly behaved students dominate in lower sets, effectively creating sink groups where little learning takes place, whilst in top sets students largely behave well and there is a more conducive learning environment. Whilst the mechanism of setting by behaviour is distinct, this echoes wider research which either documents behaviour in different groups, explores the presence of pro-school and anti-school student subcultures within ability groupings, or considers compounding effects from the standards agenda and the Behaviour for Learning policies (Hargreaves1968; Lacey 1970; Ball 1981; Ball, Maguire, and Braun, 2012).

Mitigating setting by behaviour might involve careful scrutiny of group allocation, to ensure the process reflects the purported policy – that decisions surrounding allocation to and movement between sets are based solely on recent, accurate,

summative assessment data. Concomitantly more time, attention and resources could be devoted to avoiding the 'sink group' effect, where little learning takes place. First responses here could incorporate greater enforcement of behaviour policies and monitoring of learning and progress in all groups and appropriate interventions based on these. There are also issues related to who teaches which group and the possibility of allocating the more experienced teachers to the lower sets.

Once again, there is a simpler way to tackle issues of marginalisation, rooted in sets, which is simply not to have any 'ability grouping'. Teaching in 'mixed-ability' groupings across the curriculum and throughout compulsory schooling, would go a significant way to addressing the concerns found here with one structural change.

In terms of options choices, the reasons the students give, which influence their decision-making process - namely liking a subject, being good at a subject, believing a subject to be easy, following friends, picking the gender stereotypical option and trying something new – are all evident in the literature. Crucially – in terms of issues of marginalisation - the lack of significant parental input, short-term decision-making, like, selecting the less demanding option and all the while drawing from token information only, echo the contingent, less strategic choices, which within the wider research are typically exhibited by students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, whose parents have not experienced Higher Education (Ball, Reay and David 2002).

Steps towards addressing marginalisation stemming from such non-strategic decision-making, may likely cover widening access to information, perhaps through targeted leafleting or parents events including one-to-one strategy meetings and input from 'choice advisers' (Exley 2013). Naturally many schools incorporate such measures as part of the lead up to options choice, nevertheless, as the literature reveals, many middle-class parents seek ways to ensure advantage for their child at school. Their input does not limit itself to such branching points and many work relentlessly to ensure access to the best teachers, greater resources, more prestigious subjects and qualifications. Even

a targeted, well planned and resourced intervention program to address disadvantage in decision-making, would have to confront this on-going input from these already advantaged parents (Ball and Vincent 1998; Ball, Reay, and David 2002). There is a further, subtle and difficult yet arguably more ambitious option, which would entail raising these students own awareness of the inequalities that can occur through less-strategic, short-term decision-making, so that they themselves are better informed and further empowered to affect their own futures. Raising students' own awareness will recur.

As an aside, while considering ways of making choices more strategic, Eliot's attempts to find peer support in classwork, through selecting options alongside particular friends, is arguably a hint at a possible exception to the almost universal non-strategic decision-making. If this were a strategic, compensating tactic, it could be worthy of consideration and subsequent exploitation as a means of addressing elements of marginalisation through lower-attainment. All students, or perhaps those at greater risk of lower-attainment, could be matched with friends to pro-actively, deliberately facilitate peer support. Here the social is again to the fore.

Once again, there is of course a simpler approach that may go some way towards tackling issues of marginalisation, rooted in non-strategic decision-making surrounding options choices, which is to reduce and or delay any such selection. Late and minimal subject specialisation – perhaps at 16 as opposed to 14 years old - would go some way to addressing the concerns found here with one structural change.

Limits on choice, allocation and assignment see some students assigned to subjects or courses they have not chosen, others are ushered or allocated to college placements. I discussed two individuals in particular, who experienced more extreme restrictions on their educational trajectories, through allocation to pathways where access to qualifications are drastically reduced and the majority of their time is spent isolated from the bulk of their peers. The literature reflects that such different treatment, in particular as regards limiting access to curriculum and qualifications - only being allowed access to a lower tier of entry

for an examination, a vocational course, or a limited number of examinations – is a significant factor in fuelling marginalisation and educational inequalities by outcome (Boaler, Wiliam, and Brown 2000; Boaler and Wiliam 2001; Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Kulik and Kulik 1992; Lee 1993; Rice 1996; Slavin 1990).

As with options choices, the inequalities opened up through these divisions are most easily addressed through minimising the use of any such disruptive measures, keeping the students studying together as much as possible and for as long as possible - a shift in priority so that policy and practice is driven by the principle of ensuring that all students stay in the system to the end. Measures which could be implemented, in addition to less options choices and late or no subject specialisation, might include: replacing the two-tier GCSE system of higher and foundation entry by one level; removing the academic and vocational divisions with new courses perhaps taking elements from both predecessors; entering all students for the same number and type of examinations; reducing the role of examinations *per se* limiting them in number, or delaying some to a later point - eliminating examinations at 16 and keeping only those at 18 say - or examinations could be eliminated altogether and replaced by elements of references, portfolios or transcripts.

7.1.4 Towards tackling the effective classroom issues

Emergent themes related to the key features of an effective classroom, which indicate a student may like or dislike a lesson, touch on behaviour management and control, relationships and aspects of learning and pedagogy. The social and affective are complexly entangled in the idea of 'good lessons' for these students: within behaviour management and control the manner of delivery and who it is that is enacting the policies are crucial; the relationships section speaks to the social but it is the force with which this is expressed which is noteworthy; equally the elements of learning and pedagogy preferred are also imbued with the social, with the importance of teachers knowing the students individually as a recurring theme, accompanied by the idea of personal, one-to-one help. The social and affect thus pervade almost all aspects of the analysis here.

Moreover, these preferences as regards the classroom environment, student-teacher relationships and indeed learning and pedagogy, are determinedly, resolutely and assuredly articulated by the students. Far from being indifferent, lacking aspiration or indeed awareness of what makes effective teaching and learning – as a deficit model contends - these marginalised students are perceptive, forthright and articulate when it comes to their own educational experience. This is a significant finding.

Behaviour management and control is a substantial factor for many students, when considering lessons they like or dislike. The students are clear in their aversion to too much or too little control, with the former likely to provoke defiance and confrontation and the latter leaving space for bullying and victimization. They care profoundly about the manner in which behaviour policy is enacted, desiring a well-managed classroom but crucially enforced with 'nuanced control'. Again the emphasis is on the social relations of learning, inextricably interwoven with personal characteristics, social ability and interpersonal affects. The students respond to authority, where the control is exerted together with mitigating characteristics on the part of the teacher – such as calmness, fairness, a sense of humour, or being respectful or friendly - explicitly then they respond to 'nuanced control'.

Efforts to address marginalisation and inequalities stemming from too much or too little control in the classroom then, from authority wielded in a manner less conducive to engaging these marginalised students, should promote the wider application of nuanced control. Marginalised students valuing of nuanced control, with the social at its core, at the very least suggests that the more recent government and policy emphasis on blanket implementation of robust behaviour management policies, accompanied by the downplaying of the need for caveats and subtleties, variations and exceptions, is moving in the wrong direction to successfully engage these marginalised students. Variations in the implementation of behaviour policy ought to be fully embraced and returned to centre stage, including the use of preventative measures, such as alternative agreed ways of managing students with more complex needs. Nuanced control

may be one way - preferred by the students - to flesh out in practice a means of responding to sensitive pupils, pre-emptively adapting practice to cater for their needs. Explicitly re-empowering teachers in this way, allowing them to select from their repertoire of professional and personal qualities and characteristics as they see fit, to mitigate, alleviate and make palatable to all students their application of behaviour policies in their own classroom, through use of discretionary nuanced control, may be part of creating a learning environment likely to keep a greater proportion of the student body not only in the room but also on-side, on-task, engaged and learning.

Whilst employing nuanced control as part of their repertoire may be only a small, or even negligible, shift in practice for some individual teachers, for others it would require taking back responsibility for the how and why of any imposition of a reward or sanction, in contrast to applying rules which are beyond their control, and would also be related to more general differences in the interpretation of learning, good teaching and acceptable classroom behaviour. There would need to be a more significant modification in tone for some government documentation, some school policies and a greater trust and autonomy placed in the hands of the classroom teacher.

Indeed, since research into policy enactment (Ball, Maguire, and Braun, 2012) already notes that values and beliefs are feeding into the variation of enactments, might it not be shrewd to acknowledge and embrace this and build in space at the outset within the policy for greater individual interpretation and indeed for 'nuanced control'?

Once again, a simpler approach to ensure potentially marginalised students are not alienated by behaviour policies enacted in a way that provokes defiance or victimisation, would be to employ nuanced control as a universal. This would entail informing policy-makers and teachers of the value of nuanced control for inclusion, providing training in a wider range of behaviour management skills and subsequently allowing the individual classroom teacher greater discretion to enact the policy more flexibly, adapting to context, circumstances and individuals.

One other feature of classroom control - the silent classroom - is a fervent dislike for a few individuals here. There is an absence within literature on student silence, of the potential negative affects of a silent environment, such as those so keenly expressed here. The specific concerns about a silent classroom - the fear of humiliation, the associated anxiety and reluctance to speak up or seek help - loom large for some marginalised students. Thus, too much control, in this particular form of the strict, nearly permanently silent classroom, fuels academic marginalisation both through not asking for and accessing academic support and through increased anxiety levels. Once again, an appreciation of the value of nuanced control and a greater use of this subtle, complex approach - with respect and the social at its core - would reduce the occurrence of overly strict, silent classrooms, certainly those where a reluctance to ask is interwoven with fear of humiliation.

The relationships section links overtly with the social and affect and the weight given to these matters by the marginalised students is very clear. Relationships with their teachers matter hugely. They like those teachers who make a determined effort to know them and build a connection. Such teachers they see as considerate, supportive and empathetic by nature. Where such an effective - and affective - positive relationship is present, these marginalised students are less likely to truant or to be defiant and are in fact more likely to apply themselves to the learning, in particular as these more understanding teachers know how to elicit work from them. So liking a teacher has ramifications far beyond the mere enjoyment of the lesson. Feeling known, respected and understood, is intrinsically bound up with academic engagement. For some there is an additional desirable teacher quality that feeds into their engagement - a sense of 'fun'. These students more readily engage with a lively, humorous teacher as opposed to a quieter, more sombre one.

In all this discussion of strong, respectful, relationships, being known and understood, some staffing consistency is an essential component. Such relationships take time to establish and older students who see staff come and

go - in particular those with less stable adult relationships *per se* - may become increasingly wary of allowing new staff to get to know them.

Any attempt to tackle issues of marginalisation that are related to a lack of feeling known, respected and understood by teachers, must bring the role of the social and affect back into the centre. For marginalised students effective, respectful, supportive, established and sustained relationships go to the heart of an effective classroom and lay the groundwork for effective learning. It matters who the teacher is, in terms of their personal characteristics, as well as how well they know and relate to their individual students. As with advocating nuanced control, to value and promote effective teacher-student relationships such as those preferred here, would require a corresponding emphasis in teacher training and staff development, as well as trusting these professional teachers in the classroom to best enact policies to suit their students.

As far as consistency of staffing is concerned, recruitment and retention[40] are high on the agenda at many schools in the present climate already and are interwoven with measures, which may support developing and sustaining relationships - smaller schools, greater teacher-student ratios and smaller class-sizes. Secondary schools may consider placing greater emphasis on continuity, keeping teachers with classes from one year to the next. This is already recognised as beneficial for many primary school students and the marginalised students here, in valuing sustained relationships, would also benefit from keeping as many of the same teachers as possible as they move up through the school - be they form tutors, teaching assistants or subject specialist teachers. The more continuity, the greater the chance a bond persists.

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[40] Teachers, in terms of experience and specialisms, are spread increasingly unevenly across the system, as are the rates of teacher turnover. The chance of having and keeping a well-qualified or experienced teacher or specialist in a shortage subject to teach your children depends on where you live. The Social Mobility Commission noted that schools in deprived areas often struggle to recruit teachers and often lack high quality applicants. Secondary teachers in deprived areas are also most likely to leave. There is much more stability in affluent areas (Social Mobility Commission 2017).

The students identify a range of classroom practice, in terms of teaching and pedagogy, as features of the lessons they prefer and which they see as helping their learning. They value clear modelling, learning being broken-down, formative assessment and the adaptation of subsequent teaching to address misconceptions and meet their individual needs, as well as time to embed learning. Additionally these students value individual help within the lesson and like teachers who facilitate this, either by making successful use of effective pair and group work, or by making time to sit beside them and provide extra one-to-one support directly. Hence these marginalised students demonstrate a perceptive and thorough awareness of approaches that help and hinder their progress, moreover what they note tallies neatly with ideas of good teaching as recognised by teacher trainers and policy makers. It is important to acknowledge the substantial nature of this finding, since it belies any attempt to cast these students within a deficit model. They are passionate not indifferent, aware not oblivious, eager to progress not lacking in aspiration. They know what they need to access learning and progress - and are appreciative when they find it. They are also all too aware when it is absent.

Tackling issues of marginalisation that can be related to good teaching, in terms of aspects of pedagogy perceived as such by these marginalised students, would be in lock-step with many measures already in place to raise the quality of teaching as seen by the school leaders, school inspectors and policy makers then. The only element that may be contentious is that of receiving more individual, one-to-one support. While direct, more personalised input from the teacher may be recognised as beneficial by most practitioners, there is likely to be a tension between prioritising such support and the pressures of performativity, accountability and the market place (Ball 2003a; Gillborn and Youdell 2000). The students here advocate peer-support and group work as a means to provide more individualised help, circumventing this tension at least in part. Such a stance would not be as universally revered by practitioners, leaders or policy makers, some of whom eschew this more student-centred, social constructivist approach to learning, in favour of a more teacher-centred, direct instruction stance. In order to tackle issues of marginalisation stemming in part from insufficient one-to-one support,

promotion of weakly-framed, student-centred learning is needed. This may require a shift for some teachers, schools and policy-makers.

In considering issues associated with the effective classroom, the social and affect again must be acknowledged as key. Whether in terms of behaviour management, teacher-student relationships, or pedagogy and learning, these marginalised students know their own minds and are clear as to what constitutes effective learning for them. From authority enacted with nuanced control, through being known, respected, understood and having sustained teacher-student bonds, to recognising good teaching when they see it and valuing teachers with a more weakly-framed, student-centred approach, the students navigate their educational environment in all its messy, convoluted, interwoven complexity. In so doing, they carry with them high expectations of the good teacher as someone who can enact rules within a positive personalised social relationship.

7.1.5 Towards tackling the barriers to learning issues

Several barriers emerge from the student accounts as more specific, detailed inhibitors of their learning, here grouped under ideas of learning needs and dyslexia, emotional and behavioural difficulties, anger issues and ADHD, mental health, family breakdown and depression. These umbrella terms are selected in part to consciously mimic students' SEND categories so as to highlight some effects of such categorisation. For instance, on the one hand, the possible impact of undiagnosed, unrecognised and unmet needs on learner identity in the mainstream classroom and, on the other, attempts to shake-off and resist such identities, are pervasive recurring themes.

Learning needs related to issues of literacy and dyslexia, are raised as a source of frustration by several students, who recount being left to struggle, flounder and stall while unsupported in the mainstream classroom; as well as articulating the associated feelings of inadequacy, hopelessness and academic failure and the consequences for their own identity, self-esteem and well-being. In contrast, fruitful interventions that at least in part address literacy learning

barriers and dyslexia are working in the withdrawal-unit, and working with appropriately skilled staff and curricular changes that reduce examination components. The success of working in the unit is ascribed to the positive relationships founded on the mitigating characteristics of the particular staff, combined with its being small-scale which in turn facilitates access to support. Equally, the unit is a step removed from the performativity pressures and disruptions present in the mainstream classroom. Working with appropriately skilled staff in the unit and beyond, those practiced in meeting a range of literacy learning needs for example, is similarly extoled as beneficial. Transferring to a less exam-heavy course, to a BTEC from a GCSE for instance, also alleviates some of the perceived difficulties, stress and worries associated with examinations, which are a considerable barrier for those with literacy learning needs and dyslexia.

Tackling issues of marginalisation stemming from learning needs associated with matters of literacy and dyslexia would rest heavily on sufficient and timely access to appropriately skilled teachers and other professionals (again this support may vary between schools and sorts of schools). Where this is lacking capacity needs to be built, prioritised and permitted to function in this area. In order to achieve this, an adequate supply of suitably trained and effective teachers needs to be present in each school, then these staff need to be in a position to deploy such skills effectively - arguably this may require some let up or relaxation in performativity pressures and greater, more equal priority given to engaging these struggling learners. These balancing acts are subtle and complex and influenced by a plethora of policy agendas, market pressures and leadership priorities. Nevertheless space for teachers to perform this role and greater freedom empowering them to do so, ought to be enhanced, if these issues are to be addressed. Indeed, greater provision of suitably trained staff to work in support units may facilitate this. Employing suitably skilled teaching assistants within such a facility should not be at the expense of up-skilling mainstream teachers to meet literacy learning needs and support with dyslexia however, since effective mainstream classroom practice in this regard is recognised as valuable and can indeed pre-empt the need for access to a support unit.

Downplaying, downsizing and limiting the role of examinations through taking qualifications with larger elements of project or coursework and continuous assessment, with a reduced examination element, is another way to circumvent this additional barrier in part. If such qualifications were introduced only for those with literacy learning needs or dyslexia however, greater divisions and inequalities would open up, even as some individual stresses were reduced. Once again these matters are a balancing act. In an inclusive environment aimed at reducing inequalities as well as anxiety, any change in qualifications ought to apply to all students equally. A reduction in the number, weight and emphasis on examinations in favour of increased continuous assessment across the board is preferable then. This goes almost precisely in the opposing direction to the change emphasised within the current new GCSE system.

The students here labelled as EBD - by and large as a consequence of distracting, confrontational or aggressive behaviour displayed in the classroom - cite such labelling as another hindrance to their engagement and progress. There are many illustrations of unmet learning needs in the mainstream classroom, and the associated frustrations, humiliations and stresses, triggering incidents of poor behaviour. Such EBD behaviours can be seen as a form of evading these frustrations of learning failure, as well as the resultant tedium, marginalisation and the damaging labelling by teachers and fellow students. This indicates EBD are dependent on experience, performed as opposed to innate.

Many of the students subject to such EBD labelling, when excluded from the mainstream classroom and assigned to the unit, find this unit a redemptive environment, conducive to learning, where they start to focus. There is a clear desire to be within this less high-pressured, more relaxed, intimate environment, to access help and support and to achieve. The behavioural concerns arising in the mainstream classroom are absent in the unit; again indicating that such behaviours are exhibited rather than possessed. Moreover, within the intricate array of experiences and emotions that constitute a moral career at school, a shift of setting can fuel change. As with literacy learning

needs, the success of the unit is seen as underpinned by the characteristics and skill set of the particular staff, here in terms of the effective relationships they form with the students labelled as EBD. Pastoral teams are similarly valued in this regard.

Tackling issues of marginalisation stemming from learning needs associated with such an EBD label, would comprise, again, sufficient and timely access to appropriately skilled teachers - this time teachers skilled in forming relationships with students who exhibit EBD behaviours. Equally matters of capacity building in this area, where suitably trained staff are available and empowered are again paramount. The success of the unit also stems from it being a small space, with high staff-to-student ratio, where students are better known, away from the performativity pressures of the mainstream classroom - creating greater access to similar units would likely afford similar benefits to those articulated by the students in this research. Even with an abundance of similar units with suitably skilled support staff - whether teaching assistants, mentors or pastoral in nature - impact on behaviour in the mainstream classroom may be unaffected, as seen here. In fact several students display disruptive behaviours in the mainstream classroom, embedding themselves further into their imposed EBD identity, precisely to trigger access to the unit. If the desire were to reduce or eliminate such behaviours in all settings, a more ambitious, messier path would advocate attempts to make the mainstream classroom more like the unit.

Accounts from students additionally considered as having 'anger issues' or ADHD, raise issues of in-school and out-of-school counselling for anger-management, as well as the effectiveness of medication. Set against the backdrop of the medicalization of behaviour, these students embrace the language of anger-management, in order to make sense of themselves as managing, self-governing subjects. Despite this ADHD and anger-issues are also seen by those so labelled to be contingent on experience, as the attendant behaviours are not displayed in the unit, where again the suitably skilled staff know these individuals and their idiosyncrasies, and students are better managed and responded to. Whilst there is arguably some success from

counselling sessions and medication, in terms of the students better managing their own behaviour and becoming more compliant, such success is limited and does not seem to extend to improved educational outcomes for the individuals. In terms of addressing behaviours associated with anger-management and ADHD labels, partial benefits may result from use of counselling. Tackling in-class behaviours, seen as undesirable by the school, is a piecemeal solution, which ignores the point that such behaviours are not exhibited in all environments - the unit for example. A more extensive attempt to tackle these added extreme behaviours, as with the exhibiting of EBD generally, would aim to reproduce the effectiveness of the unit, where such behaviours do not arise.

In terms of external factors which impact mental health, emotional well-being and hence attitude to school, students raised issues of changing family circumstances, as well as more specific health related matters interlinked with depression. Clearly such external factors reaching beyond school raise concerns about joined-up services between schools and other service providers, inextricably linked with the changing role of the Local Education Authority (Greany and Higham 2018), as well as boundary issues and questions as to the extent and limit of possibility, provision and responsibility within each organization.

Family disruption and strain can trigger anguish and emotional upset that extend into wider aspects of the students' lives, impacting their well-being and attitude at school. This is seen here in waning concentration in class, in increasing truancy, aggressive and confrontational behaviour, and even in self-harm and becoming an elected mute. Teaching assistants - within the unit and beyond - and pastoral teams provide understanding and support, including acting as a buffer and intervening with the main staff body on behalf of these students. A tangible intervention that is appreciated, is allowing the students to leave the classroom and seek out these support staff if they feel overwhelmed.

Tackling external factors that are damaging to emotional well-being is beyond the scope of the school but efforts can be made to minimize their impact within school, through better recognizing and catering for these students' emotional

needs. When students feel emotionally vulnerable, they ought to be able to remove themselves from situations that they find constraining or exacerbating and then have a safe space to go to, where staff are understanding and supportive. A wider school-culture that values and promotes mental health and well-being is also desirable.

From Faye's account, her experience of additional barriers, although similar in terms of emotional difficulties, well-being and depression, still also have distinct aspects related to her 'disability'. Issues of medicalization and the 'ableist' nature of the school abound and are notoriously difficult to address. Embracing Faye's own simple suggestion of asking each individual labelled as having learning needs or a disability, how they are managing, regularly checking in with them and listening and responding to their perspective, would ensure greater knowledge, understanding and appreciation of individuals, which she sees as vital. This would then at least raise matters of exclusionary practices - whether within curricular areas or as a consequence of the ableist nature of school design.

Issues of learner identity recur whether students are labelled as having learning needs, EBD, or a disability. Being left to struggle without their needs being met, as well as being labelled in itself, both feed into the construction of an identity with negative consequences for the student; a learner identity as withdrawn, reluctant, a non-participant; as a slow-learner; as a low-attainer; a truant; a trouble-maker or simply an *'idiot'.* Where such labelling opens up the possibility of time in the unit, paradoxically it can be redemptive. While some students resist these labels, others embrace or play out this identity, precisely in order to trigger this effective intervention, to be sent to the unit, since there they feel their needs are known, they are respected and understood and as such they can begin to constitute themselves differently, as an engaged and capable learner.

Tackling the negative consequences of identity issues stemming from labelling as SEND *per se,* or from having unmet needs in the classroom, is complex, convoluted and challenging but would require: improvements in meeting a

range of needs within a mainstream classroom; ready access to a redemptive environment such as the unit; attempts to remove the negative consequences associated with the use of categorisation; a reduction or elimination of the use of such special needs labels. Raising the students' own awareness of identity issues may empower them with greater agency to impact their own identity. This would then need a greater awareness of the intricate, fluctuating nature of identity and the vast array of factors which may influence on-going identity formation but also crucially comprise raising awareness of possibilities of resistance, means to unsettle, disturb, reject and rework their own identity.

7.1.6 Key elements of findings of interest to practitioners

Table 2: Some Key Finding for Classroom Practitioners	
Emerging from transition	For practitioners dealing with transition
	• Start transition measures early and extend for longer periods
	• Ensure all transition measures have for a social as well as an academic remit
	• Obtain and utilise information from primary school, covering social as well as academic details
Emerging from groups, settings and pathways	For practitioners dealing with group allocations and options packages
	• Minimise or eliminate the use of ability groupings
	• Where ability grouping remains closely monitor the process for allocation to and movement between sets
	• Where ability grouping remains consider allocating more experienced, effective teacher to the lower sets.
	• Facilitate more strategic, longer-term decision making surrounding options choices
	• Minimise or eliminate the use of alternative pathways in particular any with restricted access to the full range of qualifications
Emerging from the effective classroom	For classroom practitioners
	• Make use of nuanced control to engage all students and to avoid unnecessary use of sanctions
	• Use silence in the classroom only periodically and with care
	• Take every opportunity to better know your students as individuals and show them respect

		• Make regular use of the range of 'good teaching' techniques - modelling, breaking down the learning, scaffolding, providing feedback and embedding learning through regular review.
		• Take every opportunity for AfL, to better know where each student is at with their learning, employing a weakly-frame social-constructivist approach, making use of one-to-one interactions and carefully constructed effective groupings as well as seating arrangements with allow for these.
	For practitioners dealing with staff allocation	
		• Keep teachers with the same class both pastorally and academically as far as possible from year to year, to facilitate sustained bonds
Emerging from barriers to learning	For practitioners, pastoral teams and support staff and those dealing with whole school ethos and strategy	
		• Ensure learning needs are known met in the mainstream classroom, pre-empting the display of EBD behaviours
		• Should EBD behaviours be displayed, ensure learning is accessible before deploying sanctions
		• Facilitate more fully-inclusive practice through designing and planning classroom activities which are accessible to all students
		• Ensure each students needs are known and met by regularly asking individuals how they are coping - consider an individualised mentoring system
		• Utilise pastoral and support staff to intervene with mainstream teachers on the students behalf when external factors impact attitude to school
		• Create a whole school ethos where well-being is valued and prioritised as well as providing counselling and links to external services as needed

7.2 Moving Forward in Tackling Marginalisation by Taking the Voices of the Marginalised Seriously

If the more point-by-point responses, adjustments and interventions outlined above are pulled together the result is, a piecemeal collection of measures tailored to tackling marginalisation. Each response may go some way towards tackling a potential source of marginalisation and in that sense is worthy of

consideration. Nevertheless, with the introduction of any measure comes unforeseen, unintended side-effects - pressure to prioritise one issue may mean another is neglected - as well as the messiness of enactment in practice, and the likelihood of a range of understandings, interpretations and implementations. When a range of measures is enacted, these issues are compounded as diverse priorities cut-across one another, perhaps pull in different directions, compete for time and resources, confuse, clash and conflict. A collection of small point-by-point measures then are extremely unlikely to have the intended results and in such messiness, the usual suspects tend to benefit and loose out (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000).

A more far-reaching, coherent strategy is needed to tackle these issues.

7.2.1 Structures

In terms of pulling out the more all-encompassing approaches, that would address the marginalisation found here, some system-wide and structural elements emerge - all-through schools, teaching in 'mixed-ability' groupings across the curriculum, small schools, late and minimal subject specialisation, no academic and vocational divisions, no two-tier GCSE examinations, delaying, reducing or even eliminating the role of examinations *per se*.

These measures reduce the need to sort, sift and separate students - thus minimising the need for a practice that triggers considerable marginalisation. They essentially read as a list of education system structures from a more fully comprehensive education system (Green, Preston and Janmaat 2006).

Equally making the mainstream classroom more like the unit - in terms of being removed from the pressures of performativity - is certainly aided by reducing or eliminating the place for examinations. Additional steps that reverse some in-roads made by marketization - the removal of league tables and a revisiting of the role of school inspections and Ofsted for example - would thus also be desirable.

In terms of classroom pedagogy, greater use of a weakly-framed, student-centred, more social constructivist approach to learning, utilising peer-support, collaborative learning and group work is advocated to tackle issues of marginalisation stemming in part from insufficient one-to-one support. This indicates a greater empowering of teachers as professionals who oversee these weakly-framed, more diverse and responsive classrooms (Bernstein 1971; Bernstein 1975). This is at odds with the current 'Govian', content heavy, tightly controlled and objective-led curriculum in England today, which is both strongly classified and strongly-framed. Indeed this research would indicate that such strongly-framed, less flexible pedagogic approaches, as Bernstein suggests, are exclusionary, fuelling greater marginalisation.

7.2.2 Relationships, the social and affect

Throughout the accounts, underpinning and permeating the emergent themes here, it is evident that for these marginalised student relationships matter.

Even before they start to recount their experiences of secondary schooling, the social is crucial in smoothing transition from primary school. Whether in terms of reducing anxiety through knowing other students at the school, formal transition measures needing to include a social remit, or remaining known for who they are, in all their idiosyncratic messiness, the fundamental role for effective relationships is seen time and again.

Once in secondary school, this central importance of interpersonal connections does not dissipate for these marginalised students. They respond to teachers who know them as individuals and with whom they have a bond, an established effective relationship of mutual respect. These preferred teachers are then able to use this knowledge to adapt and respond to cater to each individuals needs, be it through a flexible approach to behaviour management employing nuanced control, or through more personal, one-to-one pedagogic support.

Where these relationships are absent students recount routes to marginalisation of one form or another - some find themselves unable to access learning, become anxious, loose confidence, struggle, falter and fall-behind in the classroom, some drift further away through increased apathy or truancy and others fall-foul of behaviour-management policies, are removed from lessons or excluded. Whatever the resulting form of marginalisation, being known, understood and respected by their teacher may have circumvented these events.

Relationships, student-teacher bonds that persist, repeatedly underpin the accounts here. Relationships matter - perhaps all the more for those at-risk of marginalisation or for whom adult relationships are lacking, fragmented or intermittent.

7.2.3 Awareness raising

One significant conclusion from listening to these marginalised students is that they show themselves to be aware, insightful and lucid when it comes to reflecting on their own day-to-day educational experience, leaving virtually no room for a simple deficit model.

Moreover, in matters of on-going identity formation, these marginalised students resist, unsettle and confound attempts to label them and the negative consequences which ensue - labels such as a slow-learner, unsuccessful, incapable, a failure. The students seek out other experiences and senses of self, resisting, shifting and contesting these labels as best they can in order to salvage their sense of self-perception and morph the course of their on-going identity formation. Some seek extra support from peers in order to progress, some absent themselves from the classroom so as to escape the repressive environment, others transgress further into such identity-labels in order to trigger extra support or to access a redemptive environment - like the unit. Whatever forms the resistance takes; such actions show an awareness of the possible negative impact of labelling as well as demonstrating their own agency.

Despite these robust outcomes - the articulate, perceptive voices and the numerous instances of resistance and agency - there are further occasions when such insight is partial at best or resistance is less effective or even thwarted. Elements of marginalisation ensue. The most glaring instance of limited or missing awareness surrounds groups, options choices and pathways where strategic decision-making and parental involvement are conspicuous by their absence. A clear example where resistance was essentially fruitless is Alfies story, where he struggled to little avail to avoid being labelled by association with his brother.

I want to finish this thesis by trying to think differently about education in relation to the experiences examined. Rather than a programme of reform, of tinkering, I want to suggest a way of addressing marginalisation that begins with and builds upon the students' own awareness of their predicament and the risks they encounter at school and with the problem of inequality rather than the processes or consequences of inequality. That is, I want to propose a form of educational experience that is centred on raising awareness and empowering students to see 'the bigger picture', bringing them to a position of more complete understanding of their situation in all its complexity and enabling them to see the possibility for things to be otherwise:

> *'A deepened consciousness of their situation leads people to apprehend that situation as an historical reality susceptible to transformation' (Freire 1996, p66).*

This raising of awareness - or of critical consciousness (Freire 1996; Freire 2014) – may create a greater sense of agency and greater possibilities for action.

> *'It is only as they rethink their assumptions in action that they can change. Producing and acting upon their own ideas - not consuming those of others - must constitute that process' (Freire 1996, p89).*

There is a tradition of literature and research on critical pedagogy and raising critical consciousness, rooted in work by Freire (1996), with authors such as Giroux (2011) and Smyth (2011) offering applications and reinventions of these

ideas in a Western context. These authors support problem-posing education and critical pedagogy as a path to greater social justice and equality:

> *'Problem-posing education, as a humanist and liberating praxis, posits as fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation' (Freire 1996, p67).*

This study heads in the other direction and so closes the loop. What is notable here is that by starting with listening to and taking seriously the voices of students marginalised in the secondary school system in England, ideas of awareness raising and critical pedagogy follow. In seeking to reduce marginalisation - and in this sense also to increase equity and social justice - this study finds that raising of critical consciousness is required.

In discussing critical pedagogy, Giroux neatly summarises the concerns found here - issues of agency and identity:

> *'… the necessity to provide the conditions that expand the capacities of students to think critically and teach them how to take risks, act in a socially responsible way, and connect private issues with larger public considerations. What is more, critical pedagogy foregrounds a struggle over identities, modes of agency, and those maps of meaning that enable students to define who they are and how they relate to others' (Giroux 2011, p6).*

This makes very clear how germane critical pedagogy is to addressing the issues of marginalisation recounted by the students in this study.

What is needed to tackle this marginalisation, is a radically comprehensive education system structure, with the social at its heart, where critical pedagogy is realised.

Appendix A:
Interviewee Consent Form and Prompt Questions

Interviewee Consent Form

I am studying for a research degree at the Institute of Education, University of London. The current focus of this research is *to explore the factors which have helped students engage with or disengage from mainstream education*. By participating in this interview, you will provide data which will be of great value in better understanding these issues.

Voluntary Participation

All participation in this research is voluntary. If you choose to participate you may change your mind and withdraw from the interview at any time. If for any reason you decide not to continue, the data you have already provided will not be used.

During and After Interview

The interview is of no fixed length and you are free to go into as much or as little detail as you wish. During the interview, you will be asked questions relating to your personal experiences within the education system, your time at school, what you enjoyed and did not, what you found engaging or not. Particular focus will be on what you perceived as helping or hindering your participation in and performance at school. If there are any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so and we will move on. The interview will be recorded and later transcribed. This is to help ensure that your responses are represented as accurately and openly as possible.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

The research will be written up for my Doctoral Thesis and could also be used in publications and presentations. Anonymity and confidentiality will be retained throughout.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions, comments or concerns:
lwenham@ioe.ac.uk

....

Voluntary Consent of Interviewee

- I have read the above and give my voluntary and informed consent to be interviewed by Lucy Wenham for this research.
- I give permission for the interview to be taped.
- My anonymity and confidentiality will be respected.
- I reserve the right to withdraw from this research at any time.

Signed: Name: Date:

....

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR SUPPORT WITH THIS RESEARCH

Dr Lucy Wenham

Prompt Questions

Phases in chronological order

Use prompts at each phase covering perhaps

Best memory/Worst memory/Engagement/Attendance/Behaviour/Groupings/Levels

Who/what did you feel **helped you** to **engage**?

Who/what did you feel **hindered you** from **engaging**?

What do you remember about **Primary School**?

What do you remember about **starting Secondary School**? **Transition**?

What do you remember about **KS3**?

What do you remember about **Options/GCSE choices**?

What do you remember about **KS4**?

What do you remember about **Post 16 choices**?

Final Summary Question as interview drawing to a close:

Who/what did you feel was the key factor that helped you to engage?

Who/what did you feel was the key factor that hindered you from engaging?

Year Group	Pseudonym	Gender	FSM	Ethnicity	EAL	SEND*	Family Members experienced HE	Fixed-term exclusions from Welford High (0, 1, 2+)
Oldest Cohort	Alfie	M	Y	White British	N	Y (SEN/EBD)	None	2+
Next Cohort	Bradley	M	Y	White British	N	Y (SEN)	None	0
	Bethany	F	N	White British	N	Y (SEN)	None	0
Next Cohort	Charlie	M	Y	White British	N	Y (SEN/EBD)	None	2+
	Craig	M	Y	White British	N	Y (EBD)	None	2+
	Chris	M	N	White British	N	N	Brother	0
	Charanjeet	F	Y	Asian	Y	Y (SEN)	None	0
Next Cohort	Devina	F	Y	White British (Traveller)	N	Y (SEN/EBD)	None	2+
	Donna	F	N	White British	N	Y (EBD)	None	2+
	Dene	M	Y	White British	N	Y (EBD)	None	2+
Next Cohort	Eamonn	M	Y	White British	N	Y (SEN/EBD)	None	2+
	Eliot	M	Y	White British	N	Y (SEN/EBD)	None	2+
	Eddie	M	Y	White British	N	Y (SEN/EBD)	None	2+
Next Cohort	Felicia	F	N	Afro-Caribbean	N	Y (SEN/EBD)	Father	2+
	Faye	F	N	White British	N	Y (SEN/D)	Brother	0

* SEND: In this column the terms Specific Educational Needs (SEN), Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) and Disabilities (D) are noted if this was present in the individual students records, at school action or school action plus at any point in their time at Welford High. None of the interviewees ever had a statement of SEN, or an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan.[1]

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[1] For information on EHC replacing statements of SEN see e.g. http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Childrenwithalearningdisability/Pages/Education.aspx

Appendix C:
A Review of Some Literature on Utilizing the Voice of the Marginalized

Fielding warns against the array of motivations held by those making use of the voice of marginalized groups, including students. He warns against what he terms accommodation, and accumulation, noting:

> *'If accommodation is primarily about the defusing of potentially disruptive perspectives by processes of redescription and ideological incorporation, accumulation aspires to similar ends through a deepening knowledge of those who need to be managed or marginalized; here attentiveness to the standpoint of the researched rests upon desire to control, rather than empower'* (Fielding 2004, p 298).

Appropriation, he warns, uses both accommodation and accumulation to perpetuate the view the powerful group holds of the marginalized group. Thus it is '*the validation of the dominant group's position and the consolidation of its power*' (Fielding 2004, p 299).

He then debates the many pitfalls that can befall even the most well intentioned academic utilising student voice, outlining ways in which a researcher may unwittingly further marginalize, rather than further empower their subject. He expounds on the ease with which the intention of speaking *for* a group, could readily become supplanted by speaking *about* a group and indeed the ease with which the perspectives of the marginalized, are supplanted by that of the researcher. Indeed he goes much further, noting that with editorial decisions, the influence of the researchers perspective is ever present. In order to eschew the possible dangers of disempowerment, he advocates inquiry with the student as co-researcher, or even researcher. While this is his preferred way forward, he acknowledges that this may not always be possible and proffers at the very least, a set of reflective questions that the researcher should carefully consider, to minimize the risk of disempowering the researched. These directly pertain to issues of accommodation, accumulation and appropriation as well as the researchers relative position of power over the researched and their openness to criticism. Fundamentally, the researcher must reflect on these concerns and

consider whether or not their work will finally empower the researched (Fielding 2004).

Cruddas provides an excellent example of students as co-researchers, in her study of marginalized young women with emotional and behavioural difficulties. In fact this work is particularly pertinent for me, as it not only provides an illustration of good practice regarding giving voice to a marginalized group of students, but also tackles issues of barriers to learning and participation. These barriers are categorized as emotional and relationship problems, academic and health issues and stereotyping. There is also some discussion of how to overcome such barriers, where two strands are identified as key: The need for a safe space to deal with social and emotional issues; and the need to be heard (Cruddas 2001).

Bragg emphasises the need to listen to all student voice, including those that may appear at first to be contradictory, unhelpful or offensive. Her research stems originally from her days as a beginner teacher, grappling for the first time with the complex nature of teacher-student communication, interactions and relationships.

> *'I want to make a plea to take our time with the anomalous, to allow what doesn't fit or produces unexpected reactions in us to disrupt our assumption and habitual ways of working – because I believe that it is from these that we may, in the end, learn the most' (Bragg 2001, p73).*

There is a considerable volume of literature on student voice, the motivations, the structures, the circumstances and the attitudes that can inhibit or encourage the range of voices. This should also be kept in mind, not only when carrying out the fieldwork but also when analyzing the data (Bragg 2001, Cruddas 2001, Fielding 2004, Johnston and Nicholls 1995, Lincoln 1995, O'Loughlin 1995).

Appendix D:
Extracts to Illustrate the Use of a Reflective Journal

An extract revealing the powerful emotions that are stirred up through the ethnographic process and interviewing students, having come to know the context as both a teacher and researcher:

> *'Each interview makes me feel somewhat morose afterwards, thinking of a child having been let down, neglected, side-lined, not noticed, upset at the very least. And yet there is so much to be inspired by, as these students are so far from self-pitying it is impressive. And they are determined to move forward so often and to achieve professionally, academically, socially, or in terms of happiness - it is heart-warming. So it is simultaneously soul-destroying, heart wrenching and tragic as well as uplifting, inspiring and heart-warming. How often can you say that? Certainly in no way is this dull. Utterly thought-provoking is an apt description in summary.' (Thoughts after the fourth interview; extract from Reflective Journal 8th Feb 2013).*

An extract demonstrating first-thoughts when contemplating some data and attempts at grappling with the tentative nature of much of this data but also doing so against the ever-present messiness, which is the interplay of emotions and reflexivity, of self-doubt as a researcher and trying to read the data in light of sensitizing concepts and researcher hunches.

> *'The parts about how there may have been more help if he had treated people with more respect and not been so rude from the start fit with the idea he has that that he should have tried harder - there is a lot of self-blame in that sense which my instinct told me was him trying to be grown-up and now take responsibility for his silliness before - but any which way I find it frustrating, upsetting and just sad when this feature arises. Interesting for some analysis but here not really part of this as does <u>not</u> place blame externally so wouldn't affect school environment - am I missing a trick? Is it <u>secondary cause</u> - like <u>blaming yourself</u> means you <u>do not ask</u> for what you may be entitled to - so is there an indicator that ensuring students knew what support/help/expectations/rights they may have is key so that they do not <u>over</u> blame themselves - I'm rambling now - but looking through all interviews for this insecurity/self criticism/ self blame - low expectation / accepting of label perhaps - identity stuff with labels/blame/status etc could be interesting - not implied in text by 'coz' etc but implicit - hmm - give this idea some thought.' (Reflecting on Interview with Dene; extract from Reflective journal 19th April 2015).*

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