Literacy, gender and underachievement through the eyes of five boys with identified literacy difficulties within the secondary curriculum

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Abstract

This research sought to understand the perspectives of five Year 9 boys experiencing literacy difficulties in a mainstream secondary school in Devon. The research explored the individual experiences of literacy in their fluctuating experiences of the social world around them. It used a semi-participatory, partly visual and case-study methodology to explore what it means to be a boy with literacy difficulties in this singular context at two data collection points. The boys were also experiencing difficulties with managing their behaviour and the study has explored the juxtaposition of the performance of masculinity, behaviour and special educational needs in literacy to reach conclusions which aims to develop greater understandings of the highly individualised experiences of boys with literacy difficulties. This study highlights this by contributing to the current discourse on literacy difficulties, labelling and behaviour by identifying that despite the participants here starting with similar profiles, their experiences of literacy difficulties was vastly different. This study further contributes to current discourse on the performance of masculinity by shedding light on the keen awareness that some boys have of the performative aspect of their fluid gender identity. Implications for practice are focused on teacher awareness of the individual experiences of literacy difficulties including how language is used to create, challenge and support hegemonic masculine identities. A whole school shift in culture is required for long term understanding of individual experiences and an opportunity to support students in a more individualised way.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Accompanying Material

Appendices 1 – 6

Appendix 1	Participant Consent Form
Appendix 2	Parental Consent Form
Appendix 3	Ethics Certificate
Appendix 4	Ethics Application Form
Appendix 5	Participant Instructions
Appendix 6	Semi-Structured Interview Schedule
Appendix 7	Example of Coded Transcript

Abbreviations

SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan (replaced Statements of Special Educational Need in 2014)
FSM	Free School Meal (pupils eligible for funded meals in school as a result of low household income)
SEMH	Social, Emotional and Mental Health

Chapter 1: Introduction

> "He's a cheeky chap but really a nice boy but struggles a bit with the writing, but when I think about Sam, my God I dread teaching him, he's such hard work."

These types of staffroom conversations which have taken place over the decade that I have now been teaching have led me to want to understand, what gets boys labelled by teachers as cheeky but nice boys compared to a nightmare? What happens in the way these students respond or interact with school to create such an imbalance of opinion when in reality the focus of a teacher is to serve the children? The boys involved in this conversation a few years ago got me thinking as both the boys being discussed had similar profiles in terms of literacy difficulties and behaviour issues and yet they had been labelled by teachers in such different ways. I wanted to understand from the boys' perspective what it was like to experience our school and the possible attitudes from staff and peers alike in their experiences of literacy.

The purpose of this study is to gain an insight into the experiences of year 9 boys' with literacy difficulties. I adopt an approach which is interpretivist and uses thematic analysis through semi-participatory case study research to enable an exploration of the experiences of the boys situated within my own secondary school where I have taught for ten years.

My interest in this topic first began when I started training to be a secondary school history teacher and I noticed the consensus within the school of stereotypical gender beliefs regarding approaches to history study. By that I mean, the view that boys like war the most and girls like social history. We planned curriculum study around these views, trying to establish a 'balance'

between assumed 'boys' and 'girls' preferred topics. As I moved through my career I felt that students perhaps did not reflect these stereotypical views in the way that we as teachers believed they did and I questioned whether we should be continuing to enhance these views as some girls were passionate about understanding the use of heavy artillery in World War One and some boys were carefully considering the implications of the introduction of the Welfare State post World War Two. It became easy to notice only those students who conform to gender stereotypes and therefore conform to/with our own assumptions about stereotypes and overlook those who perhaps challenged these views more. This led to my Masters in Education thesis which focused on the extent to which student preferences reflected gender stereotypes in history study. Interestingly, the participants in this study felt the stereotype existed but that it did not apply to them, that they were outside of this stereotype, somehow untouched by dominant expectations. This led my research interests to develop into the wider role of gender stereotypes in an attempt to understand the achievement divide between boys and girls in my own setting. As my career progressed I changed role to be an Assistant Headteacher and Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) which is the role that I continue to hold. This increased my awareness of the overrepresentation of boys within Special Educational Needs (SEN) registers and on the receiving end of sanctions in the school. I became interested in the reasons for the overrepresentation of boys in this group and in particular the growing body of research around the performance of masculinity and how this can be used to either enhance or challenge gender stereotypes. This and the apparent underperformance of boys with SEN at national level led to this research being started. It led to me being interested in exploring the boys

personal experiences of their SEN in order to better understand how to support them in the school.

The National Context

Since the 1980's there has been a growing concern for the performance of boys in national tests in comparison to girls. Particularly at GCSE level where boys are annually outperformed by their female counterparts. In the Progress 8 measures from the GCSE grades in the summer 2018 outcomes boys were outperformed by girls by 0.47 of a grade. This shows that boys on average are performing at nearly half a grade below girls across 8 curriculum areas when they had the same starting points at the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6) suggesting that the gap is not only present at the end of Key Stage Two but the gap increases by the time boys and girls sit their GCSE exams at the end of Year 11. This suggests that boys are at an educational disadvantage compared to girls.

Further to this issue of boys performing poorly, boys are also over-represented within SEN data by quite some way. For those students requiring additional support that can be met within the notional school budget with in-class adjustments and some out of class interventions, there are 14.9% (across both primary school and secondary, aged 4-16) of boys who require the SEN label of SEN Support. This is in contrast to 8.4% of the total population of girls requiring the same level of support. When looking at the highest level of need, those students afforded an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) the numbers are similarly weighted towards boys with 4.4% of boys having an EHCP compared to 1.7% of girls (DfE 2020b). This shows a disproportionate number of boys receive labels of special need.

Alongside the overrepresentation of boys within SEN registers there is an even greater overrepresentation when looking at exclusion and behaviour data. The statistics for the 2017/18 academic year show an 8% increase in exclusion in general in both fixed term and permanent exclusions in comparison to the previous year 2016/17 (DfE 2019). Boys are in receipt of a significantly higher exclusion rate in comparison to girls with boys making up 7.23% and girls 2.83% respectively. Those on SEN Support also make up 10% more of the excluded population above their non-SEN peers, indicating an overrepresentation of boys with special educational needs in exclusion data. This suggests that something is happening within schools to result in higher levels of poor behaviour from boys who have special educational needs and as such this research aims to explore this within a specific context.

My Context

This study takes place in a large co-educational secondary school in Devon. The school is situated on the edge of a large town which is growing and has two other secondary schools within 2 miles. The catchment is semi-rural with just over two-thirds of the students coming from within the town boundaries and the rest coming from the extended rural valley. Some of our students live a 45 minute bus ride away from school while others live a 2 minute walk away. I have been teaching at this school since 2010 when I began my teaching career there firstly as a PGCE (trainee teacher) student on my second placement and then as a teacher of history. The school is part of a growing Multi-Academy Trust and the trust is taking a leading role in Teaching Schools and Research Schools within the area giving high status to evidence informed practice and a desire to improve the outcomes of students (Teign Teign School 2020).

The school is similar in its SEN Data and exclusions data to the national picture with boys being significantly overrepresented in comparison to girls. Alongside this the gender performance gap at GCSE level for Progress 8 scores is slightly above national data with a gap in the 2018 outcomes of 0.60. Throughout my career to date there have been regular and repeated attempts to tackle this issue from adjusting the curriculum to be boy friendly, to prioritising the marking of boys' work, to boy only revision sessions, and despite the continued efforts the gap in boys and girls achievement does not seem to be closing through the attempted acceleration of boys progress, again mirroring the national picture with efforts to minimise the gap being unsuccessful.

Overall the problems identified here show a national picture which is replicated in my own setting with boys performing worse than girls as well as an overrepresentation of boys in special needs and exclusion data. All of this goes to indicate that boys with special education needs and difficult behaviour are likely to achieve poorer outcomes at GCSE level and thus impact on their future education and economic potential. This study aims to explore this group of boys in more detail and from their own perspective in order to gather a greater understanding of their experiences of having a special education need, in this case a literacy difficulty, and also being seen as frequently misbehaving at school. It is hoped that a better understanding will lead to opportunities for wider discussions to tackle this overrepresentation and poorer outcomes.

Research Questions

The national and personal context of this study as well as my post-structural views of gender have led to the following research questions being addressed in this research:

1. How do boys with identified literacy difficulties talk about literacy?

2. How do boys with identified literacy difficulties talk about their own struggles with literacy?

3. How do boys with identified literacy difficulties talk about behaviour in the classroom?

4. How do boys with identified literacy difficulties articulate their perceptions of any relationship between gender and literacy?

Structure of the Thesis

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to set the wider context for the study. In chapter 2 the literature review sets out the theoretical principles behind this project which informed my thinking and analysis. I review the studies which have sought to explain gender differences in attainment before addressing gender as a post structural concept which is fluid and multiple. I consider how this perspective of fluid gender identity has been shown to be visible in the boys achievement debate. I also explore the identification of Special Educational Needs including defining and labelling literacy difficulties before considering the current literature on behaviour and exclusion as a potential result or cause of educational difficulties. I then identify the Space Between these three key areas and identify the questions that this research aimed to address.

In chapter 3 the methodology which informed my study is set out. I provide a rationale for the study and examine my position within the research as both teacher and researcher. I detail how my research fits within the interpretivist paradigm and uses a photo elicitation technique designed to give the boys a voice. I justify the methods used to explore the experiences of boys with literacy difficulties and introduce the participants and the strategy used to select them,

focusing on their individuality. Finally, I outline the thematic analysis using NVIVO software (1999).

In chapter 4 the findings are presented in a thematic approach using direct quotes from the participants in order to retain the voice of the participants as far as possible. I consider the similarities and differences of the responses and highlight the commonality but also individuality in response to the interviews. Those findings which elicited considerable differences between the boys were used to build case studies for the discussion in chapter 5.

The case study comparison which underpins the discussion in chapter 5 is built on the key comparisons between the participants understood within the context of wider empirical and theoretical work. I discuss how the contrasting experiences of the boys is situated within the literature of behaviour, SEN and the performance of masculinity by using the findings to illuminate the boys' personal experiences in negotiating the various aspects of their identity. A focus on variability and difference between participants is a key characteristic of this chapter with the deliberate intention of avoiding any presentation of the sample as somehow homogenous as a consequence of their gender and eschewing a common declaration that 'boys will be boys'.

In concluding my thesis in chapter 6 I outline the key findings of the project, limitations of the study as well as options for future research. I set out my key contributions to knowledge and identify the key implications for understanding perspectives of literacy difficulties within the year 9 male population. I also reflect on how my own practice as a teacher is likely to change as well as how my knowledge of research has changed as a result of this project.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

For the past 20 years there has been considerable emphasis on the underachievement of boys' in comparison to girls in secondary schools in the UK. Statements in the media over the last twenty years, such as "Is school biased against boys?" "Boys are being failed by our schools (Clark 2006)" and "GCSE day sees record results… but boys fall further behind as gender gap hits record level (Reporter 2011)" suggests to the world that there is a significant problem in boys' achievement in relation to the performance of girls and that schools are responsible for creating this problem, particularly at GCSE level in England, although it can also be seen in standardised tests in Key Stage 2. This is not only a UK issue, as seen in the 2018 PISA report which compares outcomes for 15 year old students across the globe. Here they reported that in the 2018 cohort "girls significantly outperformed boys in reading – by 30 points (Schleicher 2019:p.31)." This is not a new phenomenon as a 2016 study of 33 cohorts of children, in 33 different countries, born between the mid-1960's and 1984 found that "women in most Western societies have surpassed men in their educational attainment (van Hek, Kraaykamp et al. 2016:p.273)." Pertinent to the situation in England is GCSE outcomes which suggest under the Progress 8 measure that boys are outperformed by girls by 0.47 of a grade across 8 different subject measures (Ofqual 2018). These data suggests boys are outperformed by girls but the cause of this performance deficit is highly contested. Blame has been apportioned to school practice, dominant masculine stereotypes, gender stereotyping within and outside of school, and natural strengths and weaknesses.

Alongside the general gender performance differences there is an additional issue with male students who have been identified as having a Special Education Need that comes under the category of SEN Support (previously School Action Plus under the SEN Code of Practice, 2010 but now SEN Support under the SEND Code of Practice, 2014). Of those students identified as SEN Support there is a disproportionate number of boys represented with 14.9% of boys receiving the designation and girls at 8.4% (DfE 2020b). Further to this disproportionate representation this sub-category of boys make even less progress that their non-SEND male peers suggesting an even greater level of disadvantage as judged by educational outcomes. Of those children identified as needing SEN Support, 37.7% of those have a moderate learning difficulty or a specific learning difficulty (DfE 2020b) suggesting that the highest proportion of students on SEN Support are those with literacy difficulties of some form, whether that be with a formal diagnosis of dyslexia or a Specific Learning Difficulty as identified by tests conducted within the school setting. As well as this 23.4% identified as SEN Support have Speech, Language and Communication Needs (DfE 2020b) which most often have a literacy need associated with them also showing that literacy needs are very prevalent amongst students identified as requiring additional support in school. The Progress 8 measure which is currently used to assess performance in UK schools measures the outcomes of 8 qualifying subjects at GCSE level against their prior performance in Key Stage 2 tests. If a student has a Progress 8 score of 0 then this means the student has achieved expected progress throughout their secondary school career and reached their target grade across a range of subjects. In the UK currently (2019 results) students on SEN Support achieve an average Progress 8 score of -0.42 (DfE 2020a) meaning, on average, they score almost half a grade below their expected progress across all

8 subjects. Within this there is a further gender imbalance with boys on SEN Support achieving a Progress 8 score of -0.56 compared to girls needing SEN Support achieving -0.22 (DfE 2020a). This raises questions around the significance of the literacy difficulty that the majority of these students experience and the apparently limited impact that support in school (in line with the SEND Code of Practice, 2014) has on the educational outcomes of secondary students with additional needs.

This literature review sets out understandings of gender from a theoretical perspective before looking at achievement. The theoretical section will address the constructs of gender from an essentialist perspective, a socio-cultural perspective and finally a post-structuralist view. Through these lenses a review of the literature on achievement will be sought with particular focus on the achievement of boys with SEN designation, literacy problems and behaviour.

Gender Theory

Introduction

The understanding of gender can be seen to be split into three developmental sections. Partly, this is due to the shifting nature of theory from essentialist, social-constructivist to post-structuralist theory such as in historiography as thought changes and shifts with reinterpreted notions of identity theory.

In essence, most of the literature around gender theory, but also in studies conducted to try and understand or fix the performance gaps, can be seen to be underpinned by one of the three key schools of thought. Here I briefly explain each school of thought before using this as a lens through which to review the literature on boys underachievement, literacy, SEN and behaviour.

Essentialist

The essentialist view of gender considers that boys and girls are innately different and that their biology is the primary cause of differences in approach to different events and that people exist in a binary measure of boy or girl. As well as the neuro-science and biological differences of being a boy or a girl essentialists "portray gender in terms of fundamental attributes that are conceived as internal, persistent, and generally separate from the on-going experience of interaction with the daily socio-political contexts of one's life (Bohan 1993:p.7)."

In education studies this is often seen in empirical studies whereby boy or girl is identified as a potential cause for a variety of different outcomes. Often, it reports statistical differences which goes to enhance this essential view of what being a boy or being a girl entails in an education setting.

What this view of gender does not consider though is the extent to which nurture has played a role in the construction of gender. There is not enough evidence to

suggest that biology alone has given a vastly different experience or meaning to what it means to be a boy or a girl.

Socio-cultural

The socio-cultural or social constructivist school of thought suggests that gender is, in the same way as truth, a construction "based upon and inextricably intertwined with the contexts within which it is created (Bohan 1993:p.13)." It is based on an understanding of truth as being a part of "multiple perspectives, several consensual truths, many of which may be possible valid constructions (Freud 1994:p.38)." Freud goes on to argue that constructions of gender are "not located within inherently different persons but in the social construction of *gender relationships* within a socio-political power structure that is moreover supported by individual attachments and loyalties (Freud 1994:p.45)" suggesting that cultural concepts influence understandings of gender within a particular setting.

In the context of educational research this may be suggestive of the 'typical' behaviours that teachers may see in references to being a boy or being a girl in the context of a secondary school classroom in the UK. The concept of typicality will be considered in more depth later.

Regardless of whether one views masculinity as the result of nature or of socio-cultural constructions, what results is the view of boys as a homogenous group. Much of the literature trying to 'fix the problem' of boys' underachievement or 'fix the schools' that currently do not meet boys needs suggests that boys are being treated as a homogenous group (Jones 2011). As a result of this view the post-structural theory of gender has evolved from this rejection of gender as a homogenous set of values, regardless of whether that is caused by biology or a social construction of what it means to be a boy or a girl.

Most identifiable in the field of post-structural work on gender is Judith Butler (Jagger 2008). She argues that the socio-cultural explanation of gender is in fact as fixed as the essentialist version:

> "On some accounts, the notion that gender is constructed suggests a certain determinism of gender meanings inscribed on anatomically differentiated bodies…When the relevant "culture" that "constructs" gender is understood in terms of such a law or set of laws, then it seems that gender is as determined and fixed as it was under the biology-as-destiny formulation. In such a case, not biology, but culture, becomes destiny (Butler 1990:p.11)"

The post-structural version of gender identifies gender as fluid and multiple. Jones summarises that post-structural theory suggests that "individuals negotiate multiple gendered possibilities, but that this is not only true between individuals but also within individuals…they were also perceived as endlessly performing or re-performing their own gender identity in multiple and varied response to different social influences and expectations (Jones 2011:p.170)." In a classroom situation for example this may be the multiple ways in which adolescents respond to members of staff, instructions and their peers throughout the school year, week, day or even within the same hour of a single lesson. This view suggests that any research conducted within this frame only identifies the construction of the performance of the students at that particular moment and thus at any given other moment, whether that be years, hours or minutes later may evoke a different set of responses. It is through this lens that the views of the boys in this study are being sought.

<u>Summary of Theory</u>

It is through these three key understandings of gender that the majority of educational research is situated. The fundamental understanding of beliefs that a researcher holds about gender influences how they conduct, interpret and present the findings. Significant amounts of research have been conducted to try and address some of the 'problems' with boys' achievement identified in the introduction.

The next section of the Literature Review focuses on Achievement and Gender and in particular tackling the underachievement of boys. Further I seek to explore the literature connected to school literacy, Special Educational Needs and Behaviour before situating my study in the space between these key areas of research.

Achievement

Definitions

In this study I seek to explore the views of boys who are identified as underachieving and as having a special educational need. As a result of this focus it is important to address some key definitions before taking on this project. In particular the definition of achievement, underachievement, and low achievement need to be clarified before identifying a definition of special educational needs.

Achievement, Underachievement and Low achievement

Achievement in a secondary school context refers to the grades achieved by individuals in formal assessments in a variety of subjects. In this case the formal assessments are teacher assessed classroom-based tests at the end of a unit of work or period of time. For students to be seen to have 'achieved' in these tests then they must have reached a pre-determined target based on prior data. This previous data, in a secondary setting is the Key Stage 2 teacher assessed frameworks in English reading, mathematics and science (Standards and TestingAgency 2018). This is then used to predict a linear route of progression throughout secondary school resulting ultimately in GCSE examinations being sat. For students to be seen to have 'achieved' at GCSE level the target now is for predicted progress to be achieved across 8 qualifying curriculum subjects. If a student reaches the score of 0 in the Progress 8 measure then they have made linear progress and reached their targets. If a student results in a negative score then they are perceived to have underachieved, whereas a positive score suggests they have overachieved.

Whilst the debates around the Progress 8 measure will continue there are some questions to be raised about identification of underachievement in this way. This mechanism uses the common discrepancy model as defined by Mahony (1992):

> "school performance, usually measured by grades that is substantially below what would be predicted on the basis of the student's mental ability, typically measured by intelligence or standardized academic texts (p.54)."

However, what this does not take into consideration is wider contextual factors and the knowledge that learning is not a linear process (Smith 2003). This prediction and discrepancy model assumes that all learners move through a curriculum learning at the same rate as one another and making similar levels of progress regardless of the starting point. Combined with this is the confusion of *low* achievement versus *under*achievement. Those students who achieve very low grades can have excellent progress from their starting point and therefore be classed as positive progress learners (overachieving) and those with very high grades can be seen to be underachievers if they have not reached the predefined targets, regardless of context. Jones and Myhill (2004) summarise: "Low achievers and high achievers are those children whose performance is seen to match their ability, whereas underachievers are those whose ability is not reflected in their performance (p.532)."

Whilst there are issues with the application of a label of underachievement (further explanation for this will come later in this chapter) for the purposes of this study, underachieving participants have been selected using the discrepancy model.

Special Educational Need (SEN)

In the UK the government has published the 2014 SEND Code of Practice which is the guiding legislation that all schools, children's services and healthcare providers must follow in order to meet their legal obligations to support children with special educational needs and disabilities. In the Code of Practice SEN is defined as:

> "xiii. A child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.
>
> Xiv. A child of compulsory school age or a young person has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she:
>
> - has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or;
>
> - has a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions."
>
> (DfE 2014:p.15-16)

Under this definition any child who is not meeting age related expectations and needs intervention as a result can be identified as having a special educational need. There is a "common understanding that it involves something 'different from' or 'additional to' that which is generally available to others of similar age in schools (Florian 2014:p.10)." However, this definition is incredibly broad as 'all' who need additional support could be most students at some point in their school career however, there is the suggestion that the need should be prolonged for over one year at least. Alongside this there is categorisation of need which falls

into four categories: Cognition and Leaning, Communication and Interaction; Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) and Physical difficulties. These categories are then broken down further to identify specific category of need such as Autism Spectrum Disorder within the Communication and Interaction category. Norwich (2014) identifies that this categorisation can be problematic as it identifies need based on label rather than a need based on the individual and thus provision can be apportioned using the label rather than the needs of the individual. He proposes a three tier approach to identifying needs which identifies common needs arising from the label as well as needs affecting all students and those affecting the specific individual.

The definition of special educational needs and labelling can be seen to be problematic in and of itself. For the purposes of this study special educational needs are those students who have been identified in school as requiring additional support which is additional to or different from their peers of the same age and at a prolonged time of over one year. In this study participants are identified as having Literacy Difficulties, most commonly found within the Cognition and Learning category however, a full discussion of the application of this label is discussed later in the chapter.

Achievement and Gender

Gender in the secondary school classroom

Whilst there are many empirical studies which consider gender from an essentialist viewpoint as a simple dichotomous variable reporting data that simply contrasts the performance of boys and girls as homogenous groups, there is a growing understanding of gender from a post-structural perspective, one of diversity and multiplicity whereby masculine and feminine are seen as complex

and multiple concepts which are continually shifting and endlessly renegotiated (Hearn and Morgan 1995, Mac an Ghaill 1995, Jones 2014). From this perspective researchers expect to see a variety of 'masculinities' being played out in different social situations, including schools.

In contrast to this essentialist and post-structuralist view of masculinity is the concept of masculinity being restricted by socio-cultural expectations of what it means to be a boy in a secondary school. This creates a culture of normative stereotyping whereby boys have a cultural set of expectations to follow (Bohan 1993). This has resulted in many cases of teachers describing boys as 'typical boys' or 'lads' and this being used to describe a particular set of behaviours (Bleach 1998, Francis 1999). Askew and Ross (1988) argue that there is a stereotypical view of masculinity which is perpetuated by the media and cultural attitudes whose "view of men represents them as being tough, strong, aggressive, independent, brave, sexually active, rational, intelligent and so on (Askew and Ross 1988:p.2)" and it is this dominant masculine identity that is so influential on outcomes, often resulting in boys trying to perform normative masculinity in the school environment. One construct of this is the notion that it is not 'cool' to work at school which results in boys taking a more hands-off approach and having an air of nonchalance about exams or assessments (Bleach 1998, Burns and Bracey 2001). Alongside this issue of 'coolness' it has been argued that this is often underpinned by a lack of confidence or low self-esteem. Terry and Terry (1998) argue that this low self-esteem often exacerbates 'laddish' behaviour, particularly bullying or taunting other boys who do wish to do well as they state "it is common for boys not to be able to show interest in class or complete homework effectively because of taunts (Terry and Terry 1998:p.120)." This suggests taunts about academic work such as 'boffin' or 'teachers' pet' are

problems for boys perceived to step outside of accepted gender norms, additionally a generally accepted broader issue is the reference to boys' being positioned as 'gay' as a result of wanting to work hard in school. Epstein (1998) argues that the term 'gay' and being labelled effeminate by their peers could be one representation of the dominant stereotype resulting in boys avoiding a studious approach to school work (Epstein 1998). Kehily (2001) supports this and suggests it is the main reason why boys disengage from school as homophobic insults within a group of male friends leads them to "regulate interactions among boys and produce a social hierarchy for the public appraisal of masculinities (Kehily 2001:p.121)." In order to fit this predefined role, one of the key aspects of this is avoidance of being labelled as effeminate as this is likely to result in the application of the label of being 'gay' (Askew and Ross 1988, Epstein 1998, Roulston and Mills 2000, Smith 2007). Epstein (1998) argues that non-masculine interpretations of students often leads to other students having an effeminate view of them and therefore abusing them along homophobic lines. Askew and Ross (1988) argue that this is connected to sexism within the classroom and that "boys are under unnecessary pressure [from their peers, and occasionally, teachers] in school to conform to masculine stereotypes which result in damaging expectation from both teachers and other boys (Askew and Ross 1998:p.72)." This potentially contributes to a lack of confidence amongst boys and Pickering (1997) argues that many boys attempt to hide this through "the common view … that having a laugh or mucking about is what boys do well, and school work does not come naturally to them [and as a result] positive attitudes to, and success in, schooling are at odds with the development of masculinity (Pickering 1997:p.37-8)." The microcosm that is the secondary school environment can be seen to have a significant role to play in the development of individuals' identities. There

are clear suggestions that the creation of a dominant form of masculinity within the school system has an impact on boys' engagement in the curriculum however, this does raise the question of where this version of masculinity originates in the first place.

Smith (2007) argues that that boys are routinely complying with hegemonic masculinity in order to protect themselves within the peer group but he argues that this type of behaviour is learnt rather than innate and thus can be challenged through a shift in societal expectations of what it means to be male and masculine. Part of the building block of this normative masculinity is that boys and men can be (or should be) effortlessly intelligent and thus the development of the view that it is not 'cool' to work hard in school. Skelton (2001) suggests that this can be challenged through "the development of an appropriate gender equity [program which is] based on gender as relational [and] which incorporate[s] notions of difference and agency, and which recognises the insights provided by both feminist and masculinity perspectives (Skelton 2001:p.176)." Skelton goes on to explore how bright boys can challenge this hegemonic view of masculinity by 'repackaging' it in order to be successful in mixing both academic progress and also peer acceptance (Skelton 2001). However, there is a limitation to this perspective as many of the boys that Skelton judged to be 'successful' were those who were academically outstanding, suggesting that, to an extent, they could perform the ideal of 'intelligent boy' with far less effort than their peers. There were no examples of students with Special Educational Needs, including literacy difficulties, that also managed to cope successfully with being engaged actively in the curriculum. This suggests that it is easier for those boys who are deemed to not face learning difficulties to negotiate the challenges of hegemonic masculinity. The notion of 'effortless intelligence' was identified as high stakes by

Jackson and Dempster (2009) as they found that "apparent effortless achievement continues to be regarded as the pinnacle of accomplishment (p.352)" therefore marginalising those boys for whom educational achievement does not come as easily. It could be said that boys with literacy difficulties or those who are low achieving are already at a disadvantage in comparison to their peers when performing hegemonic masculinity, as those students often lost peer recognition before they were able to gain it through other 'typically' masculine ways such as being good at sport (Adler, Kless et al. 1992).

A significant risk of being unable or unwilling to perform the preferred expectations of hegemonic masculinity is marginalisation in the school community. Reichert (2001) argues that for boys, "being valued at school depends upon running fast, acting cool, being good at things…boys quickly learn the behaviours and the attitudes which will earn them rewards (and spare them the negative sanctions) of the curriculum (Reichert 2001:p.43)." This clearly emphasises the risk of negative sanction and thus boys try to 'fit in' with the masculinity which is considered the norm in that environment leaving those who don't fit in to try to negotiate their own position within this. This also becomes a significant challenge if the boys in question are not academically capable of fitting the norm of being good at something without really trying. The boys in my own study may not be able to demonstrate effortless academic achievement but may still perform approved masculinity within a secondary school context.

This suggestion of students' expectations of what it means to 'be a boy' means that students are under pressure socially as well as academically in the school context. The hierarchical nature of masculinities means that boys are constantly trying to conform to expectations and avoid labels of homosexuality or identification as 'not normal' (Hearn and Morgan 1995, Mac an Ghaill 1995,

Kehily 2001, Smith 2007). The complex negotiation of roles that boys have to perform in school make engaging in a literacy curriculum an additional negotiation that some boys find challenging.

Combined with the social expectations of the classroom, students are under a considerable amount of pressure to be able to read and write to a set standard of age-related expectations throughout their school careers. These are used to write text books and exam papers and so, those students who are unable to reach these levels are at a significant disadvantage in later life. There is a considerable amount of research on challenging literacy practices within school, particularly focusing on boys' repeated failures to read at the same level as girls. Many researchers consider motivation to be a factor in supporting young people learning to read and that the interplay between socio-cultural factors and motivation causes certain behaviours within the classroom that are designed to 'protect' the boys' image (Atkinson 2009). This behaviour has been termed 'laddish' by Francis (1999) who claims that this term evokes notions of a group of men who are involved in "having a laugh, alcohol consumption, disruptive behaviour, objectifying women, and an interest in pastimes and subjects constructed as masculine (Francis 1999:p.357)" therefore showing that the performance of hegemonic masculinity can have a negative impact on outcomes in examinations. In Francis' study she found that 67% of students agreed that 'laddish' behaviour disrupted learning regularly suggesting that the impact of dominant forms of masculinity affects engagement within the classroom and thus engagement in the literacy curriculum.

However, by focusing solely on the role of hegemonic gender norms there is an assumption made that all boys aim to fit this role. Not all boys are able to, or want to, fit with this version of 'typical masculinity' and it potentially highlights how a

post-structural model of gender and identity may bring to the fore the experiences of boys as individuals within the system. Despite some shifts in the understanding of gender there have still been numerous studies conducted to try a 'fix' the problem of boys' underachievement.

Attempts to solve the problem of underachievement in boys

In educational research over the previous few decades there has been a distinct move to research which attempts to 'solve' the problem of whatever it is investigating. In this case, investigating male underachievement has been heavily funded in order to solve the gender difference in attainment. There are issues with the notion of 'solving' the problem from a theoretical perspective as it suggests that all boys, in all contexts, learn in the same way and that the 'solution' put forward by the research would fix all boys and their underachievement. The literature around fixing the problem of boys' underachievement therefore does lean towards the essentialist model of treating boys as a homogenous group but also suggests some social-constructivist influence if we take the view that cultural constructions of hegemonic gender can be equally as homogenous as essentialist ones.

In terms of addressing underachievement a frequent area of research is within reading and engagement and the notion of getting more boys involved by using boy-friendly strategies and adapting the curriculum to suit the stereotypical preferences of boys' literacy. This is supported by many researchers (Wragg 1997, Majzub and Rais 2010, Senn 2012). Senn writes from the perspective of a US 1st grade teacher whose job, as she describes, depends on her ability to get children reading and writing at a very young age. She argues that "when teachers look at literacy from a boys' perspective, then they can begin teaching in ways

that will motivate boys to want to read and write (Senn 2012:p.220)" The identification of boys' perspective is highlighted as finding those materials which appeal to stereotypical boys' preferences such as action, fast cars, mystery and portraying boys in a typically 'cool' way. This suggests therefore that the purpose of 1st grade teaching is to engage boys by whatever means necessary and suggests the exclusion of 'other' boys' preferences creating a potential divide in the classroom and even in the first grade (when children are aged 4 or 5) enhancing and reinforcing gender stereotypes in connection to literacy. Throughout the article Senn suggests that the range of material must incorporate typical boys' literature about sports, action, heroes and humour in order engage and encourage boys to read. International research conducted in Malaysia, in an attempt to challenge boys' poor performance in literacy tests, suggests that the best way to overcome this is to allow boys to control the materials being read and ensure that the activities fit with boys' preferred learning styles which are mostly kinaesthetic and focused on activity (Majzub and Rais 2010). However, these suggestions fit very much with the stereotypical view of male readers and therefore learners and potentially acts to reinforce the perceptions of hegemonic masculinity and teach boys what is considered to be acceptable forms of masculinity within the classroom. Alongside this potential flaw there is a growing body of literature around learning styles being perpetuated as a myth of education and at best, a waste of time, but at worst, potentially damaging to the learner by preventing them from being able to learn effectively (Coffield, Moseley et al. 2004, Pashler, McDaniel et al. 2009, Rohrer and Pashler 2012, Kirschner 2017).

Moss (2007) found that when boys are given free choice of reading material they often select non-fiction as a first choice. She argues this selection may not be because boys desire to read non-fiction but as a result of the fact that it is harder

to identify the level that the student is reading at with a non-fiction text. Therefore one can hide if they have reading weaknesses because, in contrast, fiction books clearly show if the book is aimed at weaker readers through the layout, images and size of the text in the book. This attempt to hide reading difficulties could suggest that boys are trying to mask their struggles with reading and therefore present themselves as effortlessly achieving. There are others who suggest that by allowing boys to select rather than challenge stereotypical choices of fiction or non-fiction reading material that we are (as teachers) in fact supporting the development of stereotypical masculinities (Rowan, Knobel et al. 2002) and working to consolidate an agenda for celebrating 'typical' masculinity and what it means to be a man. The Department for Education have published several guidance reports pertaining to this and they argue that attempting to make the curriculum 'boy-friendly' exacerbates gender stereotypes. Not only that, in Ofsted inspections making the curriculum 'boy-friendly' has also been shown to not have the desired effect of improving boys' outcomes (Batho 2009, DfE 2009).

Hall and Coles (2001) argue that the focus on reading material in schools is perhaps a fallacy as they believe the biggest barrier to boys' engagements in literacy practices is schools' narrow definitions of what constitutes literacy. They argue that vernacular reading habits are vital but currently undervalued and that it is not about 'what' type of book that boys are reading but about recognising the value of all reading as the narrow definitions of literacy in schools "unintentionally undermines[s] many young readers, but particularly boys, inhibiting their development towards the confidence and mastery that are necessary if a reading habit is going to be sustained (Hall & Coles 2001:p.219)."

There is clearly a developing argument around the use of 'typical' or 'non-typical' texts in order to support boys' literacy practices. The question really is negotiating

these two practices. In schools it is important to engage the learner in the task at hand and there is the risk of using non-typical texts that this will put off the reader and cause dis-engagement and therefore a potential lack of progress. Equally concerning is the use of 'typical' texts as they then re-emphasise stereotypical versions of masculinity and prevent acceptance of all versions of masculinity. This dilemma is explored by Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) who argue that this tension means teachers need to 'strategically deploy' texts which cater for boys' stereotypical interests but "simultaneously [take] boys forward to critically examine their reading habits and practices (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003:p.243)" therefore trying to generate interest and progress simultaneously. This study was primarily conducted with lower school (age 7 to 10 years) readers which, the authors suggest, gives teachers the best opportunity to challenge the normative masculine practices being developed in the students but without removing all available choice. The issue arises when transferring this to a secondary school setting. If culturally accepted texts are developed from a very young age it will become more challenging to encourage boys to experience a broader range of texts therefore making the English classroom a more challenging arena for encouraging boys to engage in literacy and reading. By secondary school a student has potentially experienced 11 or more years of cultural expectations and definitions of masculinity which could therefore be likely to impact one's preferred reading choices.

This raises important questions about the role of education in socio-cultural scenarios. Should we, as educators, be working to exacerbate male stereotypes in an attempt to narrow the achievement gap? Quicke (1998) argues that continually playing into the stereotyped preferences of male pupils potentially risks restricting girls' progress in order to support boys, and that this is morally

unfair on the outcomes of girls when restricting their outcomes in order to narrow the gaps in achievement between male and female students. Although again, this makes assumptions that there are such a thing as boy and girl preferences. The research appears to suggest there is more to understandings of gender in the school context than the simple boy/girl dichotomy. Pinkett and Roberts (2019) present an argument that an educator's role is to challenge hegemonic masculinity. They claim in '*Boys Don't Try?*' that rather than promoting typical views of masculinity they, as English teachers, should be challenging it. They give the example of teaching Shakespeare's *Romeo and* Juliet and state: "By concentrating on the fight scenes [those sections expected to engage more boys in a romantic text], you are asking boys to concentrate on one obvious, traditionally masculine, aspect of the play. Doing so narrows boys' access to wider and deeper emotions (p.17)."

So, as a teacher, selecting texts and assignments which challenge normative masculine values could help to develop wider reading and writing practices and tackle hegemonic masculinity and yet this does not necessarily answer the question of boys' underachievement through the selection of boy-friendly strategies. Whilst boy-friendly strategies will improve the outcomes of some boys there is a group of boys potentially marginalised by this practice. The understanding of gender as a fluid concept also suggests that generalised programmes or strategies to 'fix' the problem are unlikely to have the impact desired as they suggest boys (or whichever group is being 'fixed') act and react as a homogenous group. Applying a post-structural lens to these solution oriented papers suggests nothing will 'work' as a single fix all process (Biesta 2010).

Self-esteem, belonging and boys

Self-esteem in learners has been seen to be a cause of underachievement as well as a consequence of underachievement and has been identified as a more holistic method to approach underachievement in boys.

Holland's (1998) study conducted with Year 8 (13/14 year old) boys suggests that the biggest problem was that boys had unrealistic views of their progress and success. She argued that the boys in her study all suggested they wanted highly paid jobs requiring significant skill sets but they did not recognise that their current academic performance was likely to limit those choices. She stated that "it was interesting to note the boys' unrealistic yet undaunted self-confidence (Holland 1998:p.177)" and suggests that by telling boys that they are underachieving and being upfront with parents, alongside identification of underachievers within school, this would begin to tackle the issues. However, this position does not consider the dangers of damaging students', but boys' in particular, self-esteem with regards to encouraging engagement in the literacy curriculum. In this study there was little discussion of the possibility of the boys' undaunted self-confidence potentially covering up low self-esteem and belief.

In a study conducted in Northern Ireland, Galbraith and Alexander (2005) found that poor self-esteem can affect students' approach to the subject and therefore, programmes that are designed to improve reading should also consider running a programme alongside this to support the development of self-efficacy. They suggest that self-esteem and self-efficacy can be used in combination to improve and predict outcomes. Pajeras, Johnson and Miller (1999) demonstrated through their study of writer self-belief that self-efficacy predicts a students' outcome in a writing test when ability was controlled therefore supporting the view of Galbraith and Alexander. They showed that girls generally considered themselves stronger

writers compared to boys and thus outperformed them. Whilst both of these studies were conducted on elementary level students (6-11 years) in the US educational context it is interesting to consider the role of self-esteem on students' approaches to tasks and the sense of 'self-fulfilling' prophecy for those students with little self-esteem and self-efficacy. These two ideas demonstrate the impact that self-esteem could potentially have on students in a secondary classroom. The dangers of being identified within the school context as a 'poor reader' can have significant impact on children's self-esteem and belief. Hall (2010) argues that by using an identity lens we can observe that in some cases struggling readers (in US schools identified as those reading one or two years below the grade they currently attend) have to make a difficult choice between improving their reading or being socially positioned in a negative light. Teravainen-Goff and Clark (2020) identify that the relationship between poor literacy and poor self-esteem appears to be reciprocal: achievement influences wellbeing and wellbeing influences achievement (p.67-8)" thus making it more challenging to look at 'solving' the problem from a singular solution focused approach. This adds to the literature around boys' underachievement and the performance of masculinity and suggests that in some cases boys are choosing overtly masculine performances for social acceptance but potentially to also hide a literacy difficulty where this is also present.

Terry and Terry (1998) believe that low self-esteem can form part of a cycle of students opting-out of education and potentially result in exclusion or poor behaviour. They argue that this is commonly the cause of harassment towards others and thus them being labelled as bully's because "boys who suffer from low self-esteem as learners are likely to harass and bully those who wish to do well (Terry and Terry, 1998:p.120)." Targeting boys' self-esteem issues could, they

suggest, interrupt the downward spiral. However, Galbraith and Alexander (2005) found this to be untrue as there was a requirement for both self-efficacy and reading intervention to be used simultaneously in order to improve boys' engagement and prevent exclusion. This suggests then, that it is not self-esteem alone that influences students' outcomes in tests or in their general approach to school. This point is developed somewhat by Van de Gaer et al (2006) who conducted a study in Flanders which looked at those students placed in the lower 'track' ability grouping. They found that lower track students have "less positive school related attitudes [and] as a consequence an anti-school culture more easily emerges [which] may have an impact on achievement (van de Gaer, Pustjens et al. 2006:p.305)." This is supported by Abraham's (2008) study in the UK that found that "pupils placed in the lower ranks of differentiating systems (between and within classes) are more likely to reject that school's values and develop anti-school attitudes which spurn academic work and lead to worse behaviour (Abraham 2008:p.90)." Therefore, the suggestion of putting lower achieving students together for intervention may be damaging self-esteem and therefore not achieve the intended outcomes of providing students with highly personalised educational support.

As well as setting or streaming potentially affecting self-esteem, Bleach (1998) argues that teachers can have a significantly negative effect on boys' self-esteem which contributes to the likelihood of boys 'opting out' of education. He states that "some teachers view a low grade [in a test or report] as a short, sharp spur to better effort, but it is not always perceived that way by pupils whose self-confidence is more brittle than we think (Bleach 1998:p.45)" which contradicts the notion of being completely honest about a student's likely outcomes in an attempt to encourage engagement if, self-esteem is considered to have a greater impact

on outcome than marking and feedback. But again, this contradictory set of 'solutions' to the boys underachievement problem goes to show that essentialist or socially constructed hegemonic view is not a lens through which this problem can be solved.

The perceived feminisation of the classroom

As mentioned earlier, the nature of the classroom climate could be developed to deliberately challenge hegemonic gender performances (Pinkett and Roberts 2019) but it is argued by some that this may not be enough to challenge the perceived feminisation of classrooms. Moreau (2019) summarises that there are three ways in which arguments about the perceived feminisation of classrooms have emerged. Firstly, the feminisation through a statistical domination of women within the workforce, particularly at primary level. Secondly, the suggestion that schools are becoming more feminised spaces and by that the idea that schools value typically feminine values such as nurturing more so than masculine ones. Finally, the view that teaching is a 'female' profession as it better suits a woman's caring responsibilities such as for her own children. She argues that the notion of the feminisation of the curriculum is problematic in itself as looking at gender from a poststructuralist perspective suggests that this notion to 'solve' the problem of underachievement by 'fixing' the system is flawed as it assumes all male and all female teachers take the same approaches.

Majzud and Rais (2010) argue very strongly from an essentialist perspective that the "feminisation of teaching is related to the under representation of males in the teaching profession [and thus] female characteristics … colour classroom climates and interactions with boys (Majzud and Rais 2010:p.686)." They argue that teacher training needs to have more emphasis on this in order to develop

stronger practitioners of both genders by helping them to recognise the innate differences in themselves and their learners as a particular gender. Wragg (1997) wrote earlier also suggesting that male role models were essential to improving educational outcomes for boys. The lack of role models was also emphasised in the Reading Commission Report (National Literacy Trust 2012) as a significant factor affecting the progress of boys' reading which they support by claiming that 85-90% of teachers at primary school level are female which impacts engagement to read, however they contradict themselves by arguing that boys should not be looked at as a homogenous group as "not all [are] failing (National Literacy Trust 2012:p.6)" suggesting, in fact, that the female nature of primary school classrooms actually helps the majority of boys to have very good literacy outcomes. As well as the impact on the students there is a suggestion that the male teachers who are teaching within a 'feminised' area of the curriculum such as dance, drama, music also face subordination within the school's social organisation of masculinity which implicitly suggests that men carrying out these roles are not 'real' men and thus marginalisation by the entire school community may also affect and reinforce hegemonic gender performances (Roulston and Mills 2000). One may surmise from the contradictory research to date that there is little conviction in the claim that the gender of the teacher matters in student outcomes, although it may have an impact on the reinforcement of hegemonic views of gender. What seems to be emphasised more in order to improve outcomes is the quality of teaching which is contentious in itself as what is good teaching?

An extension of the discourse on the gender of the teacher is whether single-sex classrooms could act as a mechanism for challenging underachievement in boys. A study by Mulholland, Hansen and Kaminski (2004) was conducted to try and

determine whether single-sex classrooms made a difference in an Australian context. They summarised the findings as: "single-sex classes provide opportunities for enhanced academic achievement for both boys and girls in English (Mulholland, Hansen et al. 2004:p.30)." However, whilst this data seems strong for the case of single-sex classrooms it does not consider other factors such as size of the class and the socio-economic make-up of the students within it. It is also an Australian context which would be different compared to a UK context where one could assume that the majority of students experiencing single-sex education are likely to be those as privately funded or faith (such as some Muslim faith schools which segregate on gender) schools and thus experiencing a far wider range of factors which may impact on their educational outcomes. This is supported by a longitudinal study that claims that "single-sex schooling had less impact on many of the outcomes considered here than might have been expected (Sullivan, Joshi et al. 2012:p.155)." They considered outcomes for students at age 30 and whether single-sex classrooms had longer-term impacts on economic stability, health and happiness. This study only relates to 1970's schooling and therefore may not be an effective comparison to today's classrooms. What it does do though is suggest that whilst performance at school age may be affected by single gender learning environments, by age 30 that gap has closed and there is less difference in life outcomes than initially hypothesised. Although for most schools, judged on educational outcomes at age 11 and 16, this outcome is less important although reassuring from a moral perspective that choices made to separate sexes at school does not have a long-term impact on a person's future.

Again, this perceived feminisation suggests the singular roles of males and females, whether teacher or student, within the classroom setting. By trying to

tackle the perceived feminisation it once again raises the role of dominant performances of gender suggesting that significant numbers of students and teachers would be part of an 'other' group who do not fit with the hegemonic performance of gender.

Summary of Gender and Achievement

Whilst there appears to have been a range of attempts to close the performance gap between girls and boys the statistics demonstrate that this has not been achieved in reading comprehension in most countries (Schleicher 2019). Some progress has been made to close the gap in science and maths and, in some countries, boys are outperforming girls in these subjects (van Hek, Kraaykamp et al. 2016). What can be seen through recent literature is how the view of fixing the problem is moving away from a 'quick fix' intervention towards a more cultural shift which aims to challenge the view of hegemonic masculinity to create and shape boys who have a more 'gentle masculine' approach (Pinkett and Roberts 2019). Creating long-term, sustainable change is the only way to protect boys from potentially damaging forms of masculinity which may affect longer term academic outcomes, mental health, relationships and, in some drastic cases, the likelihood of criminal behaviour. 'Fixing' the problem then of boys' underachievement is clearly more complex than initially considered.

Achievement and Literacy

As identified at the beginning of the chapter, literacy difficulties are a common reason for students in England being identified as having a special educational need, suggesting that those who do not reach preconceived standards of being 'literate' may have issues in the future.

The value of being considered 'literate' is not really contested as a concept internationally, particularly when considering the impact on the individual. De Castell, Luke and Egan (1986) state the role literacy has for the individual as well as the society that individual lives:

> "Literacy, it is thought, has both a utilitarian and aesthetic value: Being literate enables us to play productive roles in our own society, and it allows us contact with other minds in distant places and times. It is thus a key element in making individuals beneficial to the economy and society in general, and in enlarging and enriching their experiences and the pleasures they can derive from it (de Castell, Luke et al. 1986:p.vii)."

The offering that literate individuals can bring to society is furthered by Ferreiro's (2000) emphasis on the importance of literate individuals for democracy. She states:

> "democracy…demands literate individuals. The full exercise of democracy is incompatible with illiterate citizens. An advanced degree of democracy cannot be achieved unless literacy is developed well above the level of simple proficiency in spelling out words and being capable of signing ones name (Ferreiro 2000:p.56)

Goodman (1985) emphasises, not only the role of literate individuals in democracy but that in fact, "the functions of literacy [have multiplied] to the point where full participation in society requires that each individual have direct access through written language to information. Full participation in society requires both oral and written language (Goodman 1985:p.389)."

In each of these accounts, despite a differing focus, literacy is seen as something of benefit to both the individual and to wider society. In these accounts literacy appears as something more than being able to perform the function of reading and writing the words on the page. Kalman (2008) argues that literacy is the key not just to education but also enlightenment and maybe it is this 'higher' level of understanding through enlightenment that places value on the role of literacy in society. There is, of course, a far more functional advantage to being able to read and write; for most people, access to services, rights and privileges, such as applying for a driver's license or passport, seeking housing benefit or being on the electoral register, are achieved through literacy. All of these examples, and more, require the access to 'paperwork' and thus a level of literacy is required at this more functional level to Kalman's enlightenment.

Defining Literacy

Social understanding of the value of literacy has affected the definitions of literacy itself. The Oxford English Dictionary (2020) defines literacy in a simplistic way as the ability to read and write however there is a growing perspective which aims to define literacy within its social context thus creating two active definitions of literacy. This is explained by Norris and Phillips who state that "in the English language, literacy is understood in two related but distinct ways. In one sense, literacy means ability to read and write. In the other sense, literacy means knowledgeability, learning and education (2003:p.224)." In schools there is a growing argument that literacy policy is focusing too much on one type of literacy as explained by Hall when she states that "national policies demand that we adhere to one type of literacy, that we assess *the* standards and that we specify *the* single best way of fostering literacy in our schools (Hall 2004:p.2)." This

development of a single literacy means students "may not recognise other literacy skills as they occur in their lives. Certainly, looking at literacy from a more holistic view may be more useful in the context of this study. Frankel, Becker, Rowe and Pearson (2016) updated the 1985 Commission on Reading and state that:

> literacy is "the process of using reading, writing, and oral language to extract, construct, integrate, and critique meaning through interaction and involvement with multimodal texts in the context of socially situated practices (Frankel, Becker et al. 2016:p.7)."

In this definition of literacy there is a process which engages the person with the words suggesting that there is more to it than passing tests, bringing a more moral imperative to the value of literacy. The multimodality referred to here is defined as "making meaning through more than one mode (e.g. printed word, speech, image, music) and acknowledging that language is just one of many possible modes that serve as resources for meaning making (Anderson 2013:p.277)" giving a greater range of communication than just the written word. Singer and Shagoury (2005) in their paper sought to use literacy as a way of creating social activism amongst their students in an American High School and they identified the purpose of the literacy curriculum as "students do not write to complete test or to fill pages; instead, they engage in the pursuit of writing for authentic purposes and public audiences (2005:p.318)." The emphasis placed on engagement again highlights the role of literacy beyond being able to read or write.

The social context of literacy practices has an impact when looking at literacy within an English secondary school setting. Jackson (1993) argues that the social aspects of literacy also take into consideration "notions of power, of culture and

community and of social learning (Jackson 1993:p.3)." Research by Kalman (2008) also emphasises power as she researched marginalised Mexican populations in the USA and found that the design of the curriculum and purpose of learning literacy act to marginalise Mexican populations within the community. She argues that only with a complete rethink of all policies affecting education will these young people be able to challenge their marginalisation. Hall (2016) found that this marginalisation could be seen, not just in those of differing ethnic origin, but also in their identities as poor or good readers and that "students' experiences of reading in school from kindergarten on contribute to their empowerment or disempowerment as readers (2016:p.75)." It may also be seen that marginalisation comes about due to social class with the situated nature of secondary classrooms being built upon a 'hidden curriculum' which includes language, understandings and shared values which are 'chosen' by government or teachers to represent within the system (Davison 2020).

The interplay of power within the social context of literacy adds a further complexity to the definition of literacy. Barton and Hamilton (2000) define literacy practices as "straddl[ing] the distinction between individual and social worlds, as literacy practices are more usefully understood as existing in the relations between groups and communities, rather than as a set of properties residing in individuals" suggesting that literacy can exist within the power relationships and social experiences of a school (p.8).

Literacy has also been explored through situated notions through literacy events. These *events* have been defined variably but generally begin with the definition from Heath (1982) which states that a literacy event is "any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participant's interactions and their interpretive processes (p.93)." Street (2005) develops this model by suggesting

that the cultural aspects of literacy have a bearing on the literacy event and that one should give "greater emphasis to the social models of literacy that participants bring to bear upon those events and that give meaning to them (p.419)." Bloome and Bailey (1992) suggest that in order for literacy events to be classes as *events* (Bloome and Bailey's emphasis) they are referring to "the face-to-face interaction of people in a discourse sequence with a recognised beginning, middle and end. Events, then, are constructed by the actions and reactions of people to each other." This emphasises the face to face aspect of literacy events however, more recent research by Burnett and Marchant suggests that a wider view of the literacy event is essential for it to hold any meaning for educational researchers but that the earlier definition is useful for researchers to "articulate a sociocultural position capable of elaborating on the all-important social interactions that happen around and through text (Burnett and Merchant 2020:p.47). This research bases a definition of a literacy event as an occasion where text is integral to making inferences whilst situated in a social context. This becomes the essential aspect of a literacy event when analysing data for the purposes of this project and whereby literacy themes can be identified as part of the events.

Literacy events can exist throughout a person's daily routines and thus the contrasts between variety of 'literacies' for different purposes leads one to consider the nature of literacy that is taught in schools in contrast to literacy events or understandings that exist in the rest of one's life. Street (2013) argues that there is a clear shift in literacy practice and that these are not reflected in the classroom. Jenkins (2009) describes from his own experience as a 'struggling reader' that a "united front" is required between home and school in order to support the development of home and school literacy practices (Jenkins 2009).

However, this united approach may not be available to some who become disengaged with the school environment before the united front can be generated. Equally concerning is the issue with the lack of engagement from the parents which may prevent the best intentions from teaching staff being as effective.

In this study, for the purposes of the students participating in the study literacy is the act of reading and writing both at home and at school, however for the purposes of analysis a deeper understanding of the social contexts, complexities and power relationships will be used to help situate the key findings.

Home and School Literacy

The situated nature of literacy experience suggests that there may be a difference between the way literacy at school and literacy at home are perceived and enacted. This broader view of literacy practices between home and school is supported by Gee (2004) who uses situated learning to argue that those early readers (young children) are most likely to succeed at reading if they have a cultural experience of reading at home. If the children are not experiencing a 'school version' of reading at home then they are at a significant disadvantage to the rest of the school population, and equally, schools who discount 'home' literacy may be disadvantaged. The two need to work in unison to ensure reading success for young children.

This is a view argued by Jackson who states that "school literacy and the literacy of home are not always the same (1993:p.134)" suggesting that there may be a conflict between these two elements and thus this may affect a students' perspective of what is or is not literacy. She argues that there should be a distinct approach to create a classroom-literacy culture which encourages the overlap of

home and school literacy to develop reading. Hannon (1995) adds a democratic dimension to the importance of creating an overlap of home and school literacy. He argues that literacy spreads from the most powerful in society to the least and that literacy becomes essential for political freedom and access to political ideas. He goes on to state that "school literacy may differ from other forms of literacy in the home, community and workplace that deserve to be taken seriously (Hannon 1995:p.16)." He suggests a shift in teaching literacy and higher value placed on other forms of literacy as being essential to the future of literacy education. He argues that without a shift we may well be causing some young people to disengage from school and making some parents feel as though their version of literacy has less value than that literacy taught in schools. In Jackson's (1993) study the aim was for parents to come into the school and experience literacy events alongside their children to enable greater transference between school and home but if the literacy used within the school is not offering contextual development for those at home then it is unlikely to be as successful. This view is offered by Hall (2004) who argues that in order to support children to develop skills which allow them to access the world in a more useful manner then children must be taught to evaluate the textual world they live in rather than just past tests. She goes on to argue that this criticality is essential in supporting children to become inspired by education. The use of school literacy as a separate concept to life literacy is also suggested to be a significant issue in research conducted in America. Au (1998) found that young people whose language at home was not English and were also from a low socio-economic background were more often than white middle-class Americans opting out of the education system as they found no relevance between what they were learning at school and their options for the future. Therefore the real or perceived relevance of the literacy learning in

school gathers more importance when looking to incorporate home and school literacies together.

Jewitt (2008) takes her concern about the difference between school and home literacy one step further when she explores the link between these differences plus the differences with literacy in the workplace. She argues that the nature of communication is changing and that as a result school literacy with its focus on the 'industrial-print nexus' is no longer as relevant to the modern world as it once was. She argues for a re-think of school literacy to adapt a more multi-modal approach in order to allow young people to succeed in accessing the demands of the contemporary communicational landscape. This was seen in O'Byrne and Murrell's (2014) study which found that allowing American High School students freedom in a blogging exercise saw them use a multimodal format almost automatically. As a result they conclude that "blogging practices identified in this study supported the position that students operated within plural forms of literacy and used media-rich tools not only to construct meaning, but also to communicate and to participate (O'Byrne and Murrell 2014:p.938)." Whilst this suggests that using a multi-modal approach may solve the engagement in literacy issue in many comprehensive schools in the UK the researchers did find that engagement from students was still an issue. Therefore, while multi-modal approaches may hold potentially more relevance to young people's lives, there is still an issue of students engaging in practices that teachers are asking students to engage in. If the approach or task is not considered as relevant to the student then there will be a lack of engagement regardless of the multi-modal approach.

Being able to engage with literacy on a more apparently advanced level than just being able to read the words on the page means that for some students they may struggle to reach that expected level and thus potentially mean that they are

unable to access the higher levels of democracy or engagement in the social world in the way that one would hope. Some claim that this literacy skill is the key to enlightenment of a person and society and that those who cannot meet this singular route to enlightenment it can work to place power with limited groups within society thus marginalising or supressing a range of other perspectives as they aren't represented in the traditional literary way (Au 1998, Jewitt 2008, Kalman 2008). Therefore, from a moral perspective ensuring that all students have access to the world of literacy becomes more important.

What happens then for those students who do not meet this expected level and what is the expected level? Can this really be defined?

Achievement and Special Educational Need (SEN)

Defining Literacy Difficulties within SEN

Definitions for specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia have long been contested (Snowling 2000). Washburn et al (2014) state that "although one, universal definition of dyslexia does not exist, a strong research base suggests that dyslexia is a language-based learning disability and individuals experience difficulty with phonological coding (Washburn, Binks-Cantrell et al. 2014:p.1)." Lawrence (2009) argues that the issue is not just based in phonological coding but a "learning difficulty of neurological or biological origin that is most often characterised by a significant discrepancy between measures of working memory and reasoning ability together with a weakness in the speed of processing information (Lawrence 2009:p.38-9)." Solvang (2007) argues dyslexia is "defined with a combination of a decoding definition and a discrepancy definition (Solvang 2007:p.80)." Snowling (2000) argues that a single definition of dyslexia is perhaps not accurate and instead one should "consider dyslexia as a disorder that carries

with it different levels of description (p.26)." This complexity in definition often means students in schools are difficult to formally diagnose with dyslexia and often get labelled with literacy difficulties. Furthermore, it is difficult to identify from national data sets the differences in outcomes between those students with a 'formal diagnosis or label' of dyslexia compared with those with literacy difficulties. This is because data is compared by national designation (SEN Support, EHCP and no SEN) or by SEN need within the designation categories (cognition and learning; communication and interaction; social, emotional & mental health; and physical difficulties) and not at a deeper level. This means a student with literacy difficulties could be identified as having a cognition & learning difficulty as their primary need and/or a communication and interaction need. Those with formal labels of dyslexia are most likely placed within the cognition and learning category however this is not exclusive to those with dyslexia thus demonstrating the complexity in identifying outcome differences between the two aspects of literacy difficulties.

Yet this definition of literacy difficulties has also been an apparently complex task. Snowling and Hulme (2012) argue that dyslexia and reading comprehension impairment are similar but very different literacy difficulties and need differing intervention as a result. The key to the success of this, they argue, is early identification of the needs however "neither dyslexia nor reading comprehension impairment is a diagnostic entity with clear cut boundaries (Snowling and Hulme 2012:p.33)," again adding to the complexity of definition. In the school where this study is situated there are a high proportion of students with a 'literacy difficulty' but without a diagnosis of dyslexia but the detailed testing required to really understand the difficulties that individuals face is not in place.

Practical issues with 'solving' the problem

The very complexity of literacy difficulties in definition means a complex 'solution-based' body of research has grown and as a result a huge and varied number of interventions have been developed, and in many cases, sold to schools as a mechanism for supporting their students with literacy difficulties (Brooks 2016). Several meta-analysis studies have been carried out (Goodwin and Ahn 2010, Brooks 2016, Major and Higgins 2019) in order to identify those which have the greatest impact on literacy outcomes and they all suggest different interventions to have the greatest impact. Despite this, Klassen found in his study that "the majority of students with Specific Literacy Difficulty [fell] approximately 6 months further behind for each year of additional intervention (2001:p.131)." More worryingly in Klassen's study was that he focused on children with Statements of Special Educational Needs (now known as Education, Health and Care Plans or EHCP's) meaning that there is some additional funding secured through the statutory assessment process making it, in theory, easier for schools to implement and fund intervention. Students identified as needing SEN Support are in receipt of a notional budget of funding which means that schools should fund up to £6000 of intervention to support the individual however, this budget is allocated to schools on a range of factors and therefore the actual amount that comes into school can mean less than £6000 is actually available (McGauran 2015). Combined with the fact that this money is not ring-fenced for SEN Support students (DfE 2014) it can mean that when budgets are squeezed then additional support is not top of the spending priorities. As a result this can make it potentially more challenging to 'catch-up' those students with gaps in their literacy skills. Again, the focus here should be on the end goal and the meta-analysis referenced earlier all focus on pre- and post-test approaches to improvement in

one facet of literacy in order to improve access to the curriculum all round. Horning (2007) argues that for the US College students that she teaches many arrive being 'illiterate' as "they cannot summarise a text accurately, but more importantly, they cannot go beyond summary to analysis, synthesis and evaluation (p.73)." She argues that without these vital skills students are still considered illiterate and therefore struggle to access the literate world in a way that is truly meaningful.

This returns us almost full circle to the question of literacy difficulties as really the only way to define a literacy difficulty is to identify the 'type' of literacy that is valued in the current context and those students who do not or are not able to reach the standards of that situated literacy are those who may be considered to have a difficulty.

Despite the challenges of literacy difficulties and literacy itself the importance of supporting children to become literate citizens should never be underestimated. As Ferreiro (2000) puts it:

> "Literacy is neither a luxury nor an obligation: it is a right. A right due to boys and girls who are to be free men and women…citizens of a world where linguistic and cultural differences are to be considered assets rather than defects (2000:p.61)"

It is from this moral perspective that this research seeks to better understand the experiences of those students who, for whatever reason, find it difficult to access this literate world.

Perhaps one could argue that the shift in the nature of literacy practices and the way that literacy is situated within the social context is a significant factor in students' lack of engagement in literacy within schools.

Boys and SEN

There has been a longstanding disproportionate representation of boys in the SEN system which is seen in the latest data whereby 14.9% of the male population have the designation of requiring SEN Support compared to girls at 8.4% of the female population (DfE 2020b). The figures are disproportionate when considering those with the highest level of need as identified by those students who are in receipt of an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) standing at 4.4% of the male population compared to 1.4% of the female population in comparison.

However, can it really be argued that boys do have more special needs than girls? Skårbrevik (2002) would argue that yes, biology creates a situation whereby boys develop their early language skills at a far slower rate than girls and therefore boys experience frustration with learning in the earliest stages of their careers and thus we see the 'typical' behaviours of boys not coping with the curriculum. Dyson and Gallannaugh (2008) suggest that teachers' interpretations and the system's interpretations of disability are creating the disproportionality within SEN numbers, not just of boys but also of those from low socio-economic backgrounds and ethnicity which creates issues in school as well as when they leave. They suggest that:

> "disproportionality seems to reflect deeper social divisions and inequalities. Ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic groups not only experience different educational and special educational outcomes, but in an unequal society, they also experience different social outcomes in terms of health, employment, income and so on (p.43)."

This suggests that the world is weighted unfairly however, this suggests that men fare worse in wider society and this view would certainly be challenged by the feminist movement. An alternative view suggests that perhaps the overrepresentation of boys is not because there are more boys than girls with special needs but that "the problem is, potentially, one of female underrepresentation (Wehmeyer and Schwartz 2001:p.42)."

Further to the feminist debate is the debate relating to the medicalisation of learning disabilities, particularly evident throughout the labelling of dyslexia debate (Snowling 2000). Hedlund (2000:p.779) argues that there is an "ongoing ideological contest between a biological perspective and a social perspective as to what constitutes disability as a phenomenon." Snowling (2000) predicts that the future of dyslexia labelling will see a shift from the term 'dyslexia' to one of a dyslexia-spectrum which will be based upon molecular genetics suggesting her view is of a medical or biological cause for an impairment identified through social and/or behavioural markers. Snowling and Hedlunds' views go some way to explore the definitions of medicalisation as defined by Conrad who states that "medicalisation describes a process by which non-medical problems become defined and treated as medical problems, usually in terms of illness of disorders (1992:p.209-11)." He argues the key driver for medicalisation is the need to solve or manage a problem through 'treatments' in order to eradicate it. This ongoing debate has led to Elliott and Gibbs suggesting rather fancifully that "whilst the curiosity about the nature and causes of reading difficulties (or dyslexia) cannot and should not be curbed, as a scientific endeavour it is probably as tantalising and forlorn as seeking the philosopher's stone (Elliott and Gibbs 2008:p.487)." Weaved through this debate of medicalisation and definitions of reading difficulties and/or dyslexia is the suggestion that learning disabilities are a social

construct in the first place. Dudley-Marling (2004) proposes "that learning and learning problems dwell in activities and cultural practices situated in the context of social relations rather than in the heads of individual students (Dudley-Marling 2004:p.482)" and that the nature of the label of learning difficulties cannot be applied without others – "it takes a complex system of interactions performed in just the right way, at the right time, on the stage we call school (p.489)."

Contentious discourses therefore can be seen in the identification of special needs and the wider contextual issues demonstrating the complexity of viewing the situation as a dichotomous difference between the representation of boys and girls in special needs is not enough. Neither is the view that one 'does' or 'does not' have a literacy difficulty as the social construction debate is valuable in this area. One of the suggestions here is potentially that the differences seen in individuals is related to behaviour and the presentation of boys in comparison to girls in particular regards to the social construction of the 'accepted' responses to difficulties in school. Certainly, the data surrounding exclusions and behaviour demonstrates similar disproportionate representation of boys.

Achievement and Behaviour

Many secondary school teachers in the UK have a perception of year 9 being the most challenging year to engage in the curriculum. Anecdotally, in my own school this is often articulated by a common feeling that hormones and the options process (whereby students choose early in the term the subjects they wish to continue at GCSE level) have an impact on engaging the year 9 student. The extent to which this is viewed as a wider problem is illustrated by the fact that the Australian government directed the Department for Education in Victoria to engage in research to understand year 9 and present strategies that teachers are

able to use in order to accelerate progress. The research found that there is a considerable lack of motivation in year 9. They attribute this to "the learning activities at school [being] less likely to arouse curiosity and engage (Cole, Mahar et al. 2006:p.1)" in comparison to students in the younger years. They suggest that the curriculum should be designed to engage and encourage students to become lifelong learners in order to challenge the lack of motivation to engage. They advocate "the alignment of curriculum, pedagogy, heterogenous, flexible student groupings, team teaching and time to explore authentic tasks (Cole, Mahar et al. 2006:p.21)" as methods for engaging learners to opt-in to education. Their paper uses an essentialist lens to reach the conclusion that the key reason for boys disengaging in Year 9 is due to biological differences between being a girl and being a boy. At the extreme end of the disengagement of the Year 9 student is poor behaviour and as a result, increased risk of exclusion.

Recently, National Statistics in England reported an increase in the number of students excluded from secondary school on both a permanent and fixed term basis, with a pertinent increase from year 9 onwards. The statistics for the 2017/18 academic year indicate an 8% increase from the previous 2016/17 year (DfE 2019) with the highest frequency of exclusions given to boys over girls. In further analysis it shows that not only are boys most in receipt of exclusions but those who claim Free School Meals made up 10% of excluded students. Those on SEN Support also make up 10% more of the excluded population above their non-SEN peers. These statistics suggest that for those boys who are disadvantaged socially as well as academically they are more likely to experience some form of exclusion throughout their secondary school career.

The statistics (2019) also show that the main reason for both permanent and fixed term exclusions is 'persistent disruptive behaviour' which is in line with research

identifying that that apparently minor but repeated transgressions of school rules are the key reason for teachers feeling a loss of control in their classrooms (Infantino and Little 2005, Little 2005, Clunies-Ross, Little et al. 2008, Browne 2013). The outcomes of poor and disruptive behaviour is not just identifiable with a loss of control but also a resulting loss of confidence from the teacher and, perhaps more significantly, a loss of achievement in the students by impacting negatively on student learning time (Little and Hudson 1998, Lewis, Romi et al. 2005, Clunies-Ross, Little et al. 2008). One common view is that "the high rates of attrition from the teaching profession…have been linked to disruptive behaviour (Jenkins and Ueno 2017:p.125) suggesting that poor behaviour is also contributing to a reduction in the number of experienced teachers remaining in the profession.

As a result significant amounts of research, professional development for pre-service and in-service teachers and therefore, funding, has been directed towards tackling the problem of poor school behaviour. The use of positive reinforcement is a common theme in the literature when trying to tackle persistent poor behaviour. In several systematic reviews of the literature it has been repeatedly found that there are some key components of successful behaviour strategies. These include setting clear expectations, giving feedback on those expectations, praise/acknowledgement for positive behaviour and appropriate responses to poor behaviour (Epstein, Atkins et al. 2008, Simonsen, Feairbanks et al. 2008, Nähri, Kiiski et al. 2015). Browne (2013) found that the behavioural approach of rewards and praise was "the most effective for off-task and/or disruptive behaviour, or generally challenging behaviour of secondary school students (2013:p.139)." Beaman and Wheldall (2000) conducted a review of 30 years of academic research and found that:

"it has subsequently [over 30 years of research] been clearly and unequivocally demonstrated, in a variety of educational contexts and settings, that such key teacher behaviours as contingent praise/approval and reprimand/disapproval may be systematically deployed by teachers so as to increase both academic and appropriate social behaviours and to decrease inappropriate behaviours (Beaman and Wheldall 2000:p.432)."

This suggests that a balance needs to be struck between carrot and stick and yet persistent poor behaviour continues in our schools showing that this balance is indeed hard to strike as a simple interpretation suggests that one could train teachers to strike this balance however, what Beaman & Wheldall also found in their study is that *academic* actions receive the most praise from teachers whereas *social* behaviours receive the most negative attention and as a result "it is the inappropriate behaviour of students that forces teachers to pay attention (p.442)." One could argue that for those students for whom academic success comes at a great challenge due to identified special education needs then the mechanism for receiving adult attention in the classroom is to conduct themselves in such a way that receives negative attention, but attention none the less.

Witt et al (2004) believe that "behaviour is a function of the person interacting with the environment…behaviour problems in the classroom reflect environmental arrangements (p.363)" therefore rather than looking at the behaviour as troublesome it should be looked at the child trying to tell the teacher or the professionals around them something and by failing to look into these cues more closely the likelihood of intervention succeeding to improve behaviour is greatly reduced. There is some assumption here that the communication from students is likely to be an unmet need and yet, when we consider the impact of peer

pressure and the performance of masculinity this also may play a part in students' choices to behave or not. Francis (2000) identified in her study of year 10 and 11 students in London that the most commonly suggested "cause of boys' anti-learning attitude [was] pressure from friends to 'muck about' and 'act hard (p.45).'" The most commonly identified difficulties that teachers faced in the classroom were found to be students talking out of turn, poor attention, off-task behaviour and repeated infringements of rules and behaviour (Little 2005, Clunies-Ross, Little et al. 2008) however, if we view this through Witt el al's (2004) lens it could be that these students are the ones most trying to communicate with us. Comparing to the statistics earlier which show SEN Support students as most likely to receive significant reprimands of fixed term or permanent exclusion for persistent poor behaviour this could suggest that these students are those who find it most challenging to communicate with teachers and professionals about the challenges they face within the classroom.

As such these children are more likely to fall into a cycle of negativity in relation to schooling with a high frequency of academic failures leading to repeated reduction in self-esteem, negative effect on mood and negative attitude towards others (Church 2003, Martella and Marchand-Martella 2015). Over a longer period of time this negative cycle can lead to significant impacts in later life (Church 2003, Hemphill and Schneider 2013), especially on economic outcomes and health outcomes. It is not just negative experiences of the school classroom which may be responsible for poor behaviour choices. In their 15-year longitudinal study of multiple problem adolescents (i.e. those at the severe end of very poor behaviour and engaged in early sexual activity, criminal behaviour, alcohol and/or drug use etc.) Fergusson, Horwood and Lynskey (1994) found that "many children who developed early onset multiple problem behaviours were the offspring of seriously

disadvantaged, dysfunctional and disorganized family and childhood environments (p.1135)." This adds an additional level of complexity to 'solving' the problem of poor behaviour when children are coming to school faced with difficulties in the home environment which impact on choices made in school. They found that only 13% of children raised in "seriously disadvantaged home environments (p.1136)" were problem free teenagers which may help to explain the correlation between FSM children experiencing higher levels of exclusion, both permanent and fixed term, compared to their non-FSM peers. They argue that short-term solutions within the classroom environment, such as using private praise and recognition rather than public (Infantino and Little 2005), will have very little impact as they will not achieve "success in modifying behavioural patterns that have developed over a lengthy period during the course of an unsatisfactory and inadequate childhood (Fergusson, Horwood et al. 1994:p.501)."

This does not mean that attempts to improve relationships within the classroom by focusing on praise are futile but it does suggest that the underlying causes of poor behaviour must be considered when trying to improve the choices of students suggesting that social justice is at the heart of attempts to 'fix' the issue of exclusion. In Browne's (2013) study she found that "there was little evidence that researchers or teachers developed intervention strategies for challenging behaviours based on student needs. Rather, approaches based on the needs of teachers to create an orderly environment within the classroom seemed more apparent (p.140)." This is a keen criticism and one that is considered by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and their recent publication of a Guidance Report for Schools to help improve behaviour. They claim that "every child's behaviour and their motivations for it are complex and unique (Rhodes and Long 2019:p.12)" and that health professionals are currently developing

knowledge of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and how they may impact on a child's long term development and potential outcomes for the future. They report that "two thirds of people have at least one ACE, but the 8% of people in England who have four or more ACEs [they have experienced more than four separate adverse experiences, such as divorced parents, poverty, alcohol dependent parents, abuse etc.] are at an increased risk of a range of negative health outcomes (Rhodes and Long 2019:p.13)" and are more likely to display negative behaviours due to a reduction in protective factors against difficulties in the school environment.

The exclusion statistics (DfE 2019) show that in Special schools (those designed to meet the needs of those students with the most significant special educational need) only 0.07% of the population experience permanent exclusion, significantly below secondary schools. On the other hand, fixed term exclusions in special schools are 12.34% which is higher than secondary school figures of 10%. This suggests that even with highly specialized support which is tailored to the individual need there are still concerns over poor behaviour which alludes to the greater complex factors which influence behaviour more so than a simple choice of the child to follow the rules or not. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) suggest that for "a pupil who has behavioural issues [and] a special educational need, understanding best practice for supporting that particular need may help with their behaviour and thus could be a good starting point for their behaviour support (Rhodes and Long 2019:p.29)" showing that support to improve behaviour for SEN students should begin with a greater knowledge of the need which needs to be met.

In the sample identified for this study (and explained in more depth in Chapter 3) the participants are those who have a significant number of behaviour logs

(recorded behaviour incidents) which range in severity. In some cases the boys represent those with challenging backgrounds which may support the social justice argument of challenging exclusion but in other cases the boys come from settled households suggesting there are possibly wider factors than socio-economic or family stability which underpins a students' misbehaviour.

The Space Between

Navigating these complex worlds can often prove challenging but in some ways go on to demonstrate the difficulties that the students in our secondary schools are facing. Therefore, the issues of masculinity and fitting in are in contrast to those skills required to be good learners and those skills that some students require to overcome their literacy difficulties. The two elements of masculinity and literacy difficulties combined can account for a familiar group of boys whose behaviour is often in conflict to that of the behaviour policy and can lead to these boys becoming marginalised from the school society and thus further encourage poor engagement in school. Despite research into the 'best methods' to tackle poor behaviour in schools there are still considerable numbers of boys with literacy difficulties who are facing school exclusion. Prior to school exclusion schools often implement a whole host of interventions to discourage and prevent the child from engaging in poor behaviour and yet this appears, from the statistics, to not prevent the child from making poor behaviour choices. This study aims to listen to how the boys themselves articulate this experience from their own perspective and that of their understanding of literacy, literacy difficulties and gender identity.

This raises interesting questions which have not been answered by the literature so far around the interplay of boys' underachievement, literacy difficulties and behaviour which this thesis seeks to try and explore:

1. How do boys with identified literacy difficulties talk about literacy?

2. How do boys with identified literacy difficulties talk about their own struggles with literacy?

3. How do boys with identified literacy difficulties talk about behaviour in the classroom?

4. How do boys with identified literacy difficulties articulate their perceptions of any relationship between gender and literacy?

Summary

In this chapter I have identified the key themes of the literature as explored through the lens of gender studies in three key areas of essentialism, socio-culturalism and post-structural understandings of gender. The review has identified gaps in the literature which place the experience of year 9 boys at the heart of the understanding and this project seeks to elicit their voices.

The next chapter sets out my methodological stance and explains and justifies the methods used to address the questions identified as well as identifying how the analysis will be conducted.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Theoretical Standpoint

Researching gender and literacy difficulties at secondary school level creates a complex issue when considering one's paradigmatic standpoint and involves an examination of my own view of gender and truth. The nature of the debate between the two key paradigms focuses on the fundamental understanding of truth that the key positions of positivism and interpretivism have. This, in turn, affects my own understanding of gender and thus the approach to this project. Phillips (2004:p.72) claims that positivists' interpretation of the truth causes them to place meaning onto their research subject and that this meaning must be measurable empirically. On the other hand, interpretivists consider that truth, within the social sciences cannot always be empirical and cannot methodologically remove enough variables to be a truly scientific study. Kincaid (1996) argues that Quine was responsible in the 1950's for setting social sciences on the road of post-positivism and argued that this led to further development into the post-modernist standpoint. Predominantly this focuses on the view of causality as multiple factors, and that the empirical 'data' cannot be solely responsible for the effect. The separation of the two paradigmatic stances leads, often, to a separation of the preferred methodologies selected. Positivist researchers tend to focus on experimental and numerical data collection compared to interpretivism which is generally focussed on interpretations from qualitative data.

The focus on individual perspective is the key aspect to this research and a need to understand the boys' views of their own learning and literacy difficulty. This focus on perspective shows that randomised control tests which fit within the

quantitative field are "not well-suited for addressing the complex issues found in today's culturally, linguistically, and socio-economically diverse classrooms (Klinger and Boardman 2011:p.216)." In order to explore this diversity more thoroughly Kincaid (1996) argues that social constructivism acknowledges that both internal factors, which are distinct, and external factors, such as societal assumptions, have a role and influence on the 'data' that is being gathered by the researcher. In social research, and certainly in the case of exploring the boys' views in this piece of research, one can argue that all factors, both internally and externally, have a role in the boys' understanding and are therefore all valid and important in considering the key questions here. The idea of complexity in the construction of data is explored further by Baert (2005) who supports the multiplicity of human existence and argues that human life is more complex than 'classical natural science' allows for and that it contains inconsistencies and contradictions. He states that "people are able to reflect on their surroundings and regularly act on the basis of the knowledge gained (Baert 2005:p.113)." It is this experience and reflection that this research aims to tap into and therefore an interpretivist approach lends itself most usefully to this purpose.

My view of gender also has a significant role to play when considering any theoretical standpoint. Reducing participants to key characteristics or variables, as per positivist requirements, seems simple enough with 'boy' or 'girl' as the key characteristic, however, if one considers gender as a social construct that is constantly adapting to the specific situation that person finds themselves in (Lown 1995, Fine 2010) then simple boy or girl interpretations are not adequate, on the grounds that there is no single homogenous male or female identity. When considering boys' identity and its formation in response to educational settings one must consider the role of multiple masculinities, whilst at the same time

acknowledging the influence of dominant hegemonic gender norms. Hearn and Morgan (1995:p.179) stated that "the interplay between hegemonic and subordinate masculinities is a complex one, but should serve to underline the fact that experience of being a man are not uniform." Hegemonic gender perspectives are prevalent in modern culture and Askew and Ross (1988) claim that schools add to the creation of gender stereotypes by presenting the view of 'white, middle-class male' which works to have a significant impact on achievement in relation to gender. Measor and Sikes (1992) support this by arguing that schools can play a crucial role in "constructing, defining and reinforcing gender roles (p.13)." These claims suggest that gender should be higher on teachers' agendas however, there are other researchers who claim that other factors such as socio-economic background, culture and sexuality have a more significant impact on boys' approaches to learning than gender alone (Hammersley 2001, Kehily 2001, Lucey 2001). By viewing gender as a social construction that can be influenced by the school setting, one can see that an experimental study alone, that simply compares the behaviour of boys and girls will not offer enough opportunities to explore this in depth, because the simple observation of gender difference has little to offer an understanding of how gender norms are being constructed, again supporting the use of an interpretivist standpoint for my own study. This study is deliberately focused on an all-male sample in order to represent diverse experiences of being a boy rather than labelling a homogenous male experience. My own view of literacy also influences the decision to use an interpretivist approach in this research. Jackson (1993:p.5) argues that "literacy, like any other behaviour, is a socially constructed activity" and is influenced by social institutions such as family more predominantly than cultural membership. Barton (2000) is an advocate of the view of literacy itself as a social event and that all literacy sits

firmly within a context which can be explored. As one of the key aims in this project is understanding the experiences of boys' literacy difficulties while also looking at literacy as a series of events shaped within its context, such as school and home, this leads to adopting an interpretivist model.

Clearly the exploration of masculinities on boys' achievement within a secondary school tends to lean towards an interpretivist approach and certainly at the micro-level of understanding an individuals' experiences of hegemonic gender identities and their own specific learning difficulties this would be an appropriate approach. As a result, this project aims to establish the boys' individual experiences of being year 9 and with specific literacy needs with a broader aim of contributing to the national debate around boys' achievement.

Research Design

The model for this research is set out below and draws on three key features of educational research:

1. Case study;

2. Semi-Longitudinal and;

3. A Semi-participatory design.

Whilst this design is not a perfect example of each of these methodologies it does feature aspects of each which have been selected in order to develop and offer insights into particular research questions. In particular the design aims to give voice to those boys, in my context, whose voices may not be heard and allow them to have some agency over the discussion of their experiences of literacy difficulties.

The case study element of the design of this research is purposely selected in order to strive to catch the close-up reality and 'thick-description' of participants'

lived experiences (Cohen, Manion et al. 2011) within a specific context in order to identify some relationships between phenomena and context (Yin 2014). By choosing a small sample of five boys within the same context (as explained further below) this enables analysis to take place which considers unique patterns associated with that individuals' lived experiences but also to offer converging evidence which considers whether data from one case is replicated in another (Gray 2014). By considering both inter-relational data and contextual data, the case study aspect aims to explore the unique features of interaction within a single instance or experience (Nisbet and Watt 1984). Initially, in this study the location of the school is treated as one case and the five stories are those of individuals within that setting. However, as the process of the research continued and the analysis process began it became evident that there was a grounded basis for analysing some of the participants' ideas in direct comparison to one another leading to a case-study analysis. This iterative process of case-study use demonstrates my intention to hear the voices of the participants involved. The research process changed throughout in order to ensure their voices were at the centre of the research.

A second aspect to this research design is using a semi-longitudinal approach whereby data is sought at two distinct points within an academic school year. Longitudinal study in this research seeks to identify whether there are individual variations within the participants lived experiences over the course of the year (Bauer 2004) therefore considering individual change. This research is situated within a single social context (the case) meaning that using a longitudinal research design can allow the complexity of human behaviour to be explored across time within the same context (Cohen, Manion et al. 2011). A further potential benefit of seeking views from students twice is the increased confidence

in the second round of data collection as participants would be more familiar with the process and with me as researcher (Thomson and Holland 2003). Whilst many longitudinal studies take place over the course of several years, this study aims to complete the data collection within 9 months which has been suggested to be the minimum in longitudinal research design (Soldaña 2003). The focus here is not on the quantity of change or seeking causal relationships for change, but on the lived experiences of the change taking place and therefore 9 months is adequate here.

There is a semi-participatory aspect of the research design which is achieved predominantly through the use of visual methods (which will be explored in more depth shortly) whereby students can select photographs to take and share, therefore having some agency about what data they are choosing for me to interpret and also having a choice about whether to present data in that way or not, giving greater agency to the participants whose voice I want to hear (Thomas and O'Kane 1998). One benefit of participatory design is they "may also allow for both participants *and* their data to 'speak for themselves', to some extent, while at the same time offering unique and highly personalised insights into subjective experience (Aldridge 2015:p.151)." In this case the design of the research was completed without consultation with the participants but the participatory element was in the generation of data.

All three research methods have been drawn upon to create the model below. The purpose is to understand boys' experiences of literacy difficulties and thus a semi-participatory, case-study model with two data points over the course of one academic year gives opportunity to explore the lived experiences in depth.

<u>Model</u>

ROUND 1 - Participant has camera for 5 days including a weekend	Camera collected, pictures transferred to computer and participant looks through them	Interview 1 to discuss photographs - semi structured around themes	Initial data analysis to idenitify themes to discuss in interview 2	ROUND 2 - participant has camera for 5 days including a weekend	Camera collected, pictures transferred to computer and participant looks through them	Interview 2 to discuss photographs - semi structured around themes & links to interview 1

<u>The Structure and Timing of Data Collection</u>

Participants were asked to complete the research cycle twice. Firstly, towards the end of the Autumn term (just prior to the Christmas break) and secondly towards the end of the school year in May. The purpose of completing the research cycle twice was to consider whether the answers to the questions regarding literacy and their own perspectives on gender changed over the course of the academic year. This is particularly pertinent to year 9 students as they approach the options process and the change of focus from Key Stage 3 to GCSE option subjects. The factors influencing these choices have often been contested with the notion of 'traditional' masculine and feminine subjects being shown in sciences and arts respectively (Archer and Macrae 1991, Lees 1993, Francis 2000). Despite this, Archer and McDonald's (1991) study of adolescent girls found that the "girls personal preferences indicted a lack of gender stereotyping in their own choices (p.62)" yet they identified "moderate level[s] of stereotyping in the answers to questions about other girls' likes (p.62) suggesting that contextual factors may play a role in the beliefs around choices for girls as well as an awareness of social stereotypes but a level of resistance to them when making their own choices. By considering experiences over time we can begin to "disentangle which effects are due to individual differences and which can be attributed to be contextual factors

(Zirkel, Garcia et al. 2015:p.11)" and relate this to the experience of the participants as boys. All of this gives a greater opportunity as a researcher to really understand the perspectives of the participants and to assess their changing views. In Vincent's (2013) study of pregnant schoolgirls, she found that the benefits of repeat interviews were numerous. In particular they were useful for "documenting change over time and providing opportunities for participants to reflect on changes as they are happening (p.343)." Of equal significance were the benefits of repeat interviews for understanding perceptions, which was central to Vincent's work and also to my own. She states that "I was also interested in their perceptions of those experiences, whether these changed over time and, if so, in what ways. Repeat interviews were one way of tapping into these less tangible aspects of a person's life (Vincent 2013:p.525)." Furthermore, no single data collection point is likely to define a students' perspective as a fixed idea, instead ideas and perceptions are always in the process of shifting and changing therefore a second data collection allows for the exploration of the change of ideas. This is also true of the second round of data collection however, this study is not aiming to be representative of fixed ideas of boys' experiences of literacy difficulties.

It is clear that a repeat data collection opportunity allows for a greater opportunity to delve into the perceptions and perspectives of the participants, rather than a single snapshot as seen in one single collection opportunity.

Research Tools

Using Visual Methods

One of the key features of this methodology is the use of photographs to support the discussions with the participants. Participants were given a digital camera to use for 5 days which included 2 days over a weekend.

One reason for using photographs is the richness of the data which they allow to be collected. Samuels (2007:p.199) argues that "photographs taken by the subjects themselves are likely to reflect more accurately their world" and therefore, as one key element of this research was to understand the perspectives of the boys' literacy difficulties, using photographs would seem to be an ideal approach. Another element to this is the very nature of images within our society. They permeate the everyday and are interwoven into our identities, especially as the realm of social media continues to grow and young people express their identities through images online (Pink 2004). This growth in the frequent use of images by young people means they are a familiar mechanism for engaging in their world.

Digital cameras may also act to engage the participants potentially more-so than 'traditional' research methods of questionnaires and interviews alone. Shankar-Brown (2011) found in her paper that using photo-journals to engage students in self-reflection was an effective tool for engaging reluctant learners and "enabled students from traditionally marginalised social groups […] to share their voices in the classroom and showcase their strengths, which […] are often disregarded or underutilised in conventional learning formats (p.30)." Whilst Shankar-Brown used the method as a teaching tool the bonus of engaging marginalised students is a valuable lesson for the methodological considerations of this research. The marginalised groups that Shankar-Brown was tackling were those from a poor

background in a US inner city middle school however, it can be argued that students with literacy difficulties can also be on the periphery of education as a result of the traditional mechanisms to engage them in learning being more challenging for them. Thus, using photographs can give these students the opportunities to be seen and heard therefore empowering and building their confidence and helping them to recognise that their voice matters (Kaplan 2008). Equally, for those young people who find it challenging to engage in conversations about their learning and feelings around learning, photographs "can [help to] overcome any awkward silences or any need to maintain direct eye contact in an interview as this can be … intimidating (Cohen, Manion et al. 2011:p.530)."

As a result of participants' literacy difficulties and the fact that these students are often in trouble and at risk of opting out or being removed from education, they may already be intimidated by participation in the research. The photographs may help to remove this intimidation and ensure that language does not act as a barrier to hearing the perspectives of the participants. Shankar-Brown (2011:p.9) found that using photo-journals in research "empower[ed] the participants by allowing their stories to be correctly told without the fear of unfamiliar language." By using photographs, it hands over the control to the participants and therefore they become as simple or as complex as the participant wishes to make them and therefore accessible within their own language abilities.

One of the key things to consider when using images is the "extent to which they are natural, contrived/arranged/posed or staged (Cohen, Manion et al. 2011:p.529)" which can also be affected by the role that the researcher has to play within the construction of images (Pink 2004). Given (2008) argues that the researcher needs to be constantly reflective about what impact one has on the

research participants. For this reason, the participants are given the cameras to use independently and there is no further contact with the researcher until the semi-structured interview takes place. This helps to minimise the impact that I have as researcher on the participant's photographs. The photographs taken were purely of their written work or texts they were reading, with the instruction of any form of reading or writing could be photographed including non-standard texts, so were unlikely to be affected by the issues of staging however, it was useful to explore why participants had selected certain literacy events to photograph and others to not.

A further benefit of using images is that it offers the opportunity to create "visual representations of the impulses, thoughts [and] feelings of the research subjects that would otherwise have remained unexpressed (Dean 2007:p.21)." When Dean conducted her research with Traveller children she found that the photographs gave the opportunity for the conversations to move beyond the traditional researcher-subject relationship. This offers more opportunities to the participants to give greater depth in their responses. Clark-Ibanez (2007:p.173) argues that using photo-elicitation in her research of Inner-City Children "disrupt[ed] some of the power dynamics involved with regular interviews" and gave greater access to information through participants that were empowered. When using photographs to encourage school self-evaluation led by students Schratz and Steiner-Loffler (1998), also found that the photographs allowed students to participate without the exclusion and power issues that language dictates. This is particularly important in this project as all participants know me as Assistant Headteacher of the school they attend, which shows a clear power imbalance. My positionality in this research is explored in greater depth later.

Participants were given a set of instructions about what they needed to photograph (see Appendix 5) which were developed after the pilot project which will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter. I asked participants to take photographs of reading and writing that were difficult, easy, important and so on, in order to develop a series of photographs which would enable the boys to articulate their voices and have agency in the voice they want heard.

Participants were also given the cameras over a weekend and asked to take photographs of aspects of reading and writing at home. Part of the reason for this was to offer opportunities to explore links between home and school. Clark-Ibanez (2008) found that interviews using photographs both at home and at school "provided an ideal way to understand the ways in which children's social worlds outside of school helped or compounded experiences occurring at school (p.112)."

The photographs were followed up with interviews to allow further discussions to take place around the themes and ideas that were generated. Piper and Frankham (2007) argue that this is essential as "photographs, because of their mimetic quality, encourage us to tell singular truths about them, in contrast to interview transcripts, where people move unconsciously between positions, writing and re-writing themselves as they talk (p.385)." Goldstein (2007) suggests a similar issue with photographs in a more direct manner by explaining that "a photograph, under the most technically ideal, well-intentioned circumstance, can never represent reality. I repeat: Every Photograph Lies (p.64)." The interviews work to ensure that the photographs are not being used as the only or 'true' representative of the reality of literacy. The photographs are used as a talking point to engage and encourage participants to discuss and tell their own stories rather than the researcher defining the parameters through predetermined

interview questions. The design intentions here are that the photographs and interviews work together as a dual lens on the boys' experiences. By using both photographs and interviews it gives an opportunity to explore these spaces.

Using Semi-structured Interviews

Given that the purpose of the visual image collection is as a stimulus to discussion, the role of the semi-structured interview is vital. They will be based around the images with each selected image discussed in turn in order to gain an insight into each participants' experience of literacy in school. This will then act as a way-in to the discussion around gender stereotypes and experiences. The lens of social constructivism allows for flexibility in the interview process when the interview is viewed as a "relational encounter where both parties are neutrally influenced by each other and where content and meaning are co-constructed (Vincent 2013:p.343)." My role as researcher will be explored in more depth later in the chapter but the knowledge that the participants already have of me and vice-versa are bound to have some impact on responses and therefore Vincent's view of interviews above is useful when considering the purpose of them in this project.

There are key benefits to using a semi-structured approach to research of this nature which include the flexibility of the research method. Berg and Lune (2013:p.114) argue that this flexibility allows for "both a series of regularly structured questions [which] permit[s] comparisons across interviews and to pursue areas spontaneously initiated by the interviewee." This spontaneity shown by the participant may also be used to the advantage of the researcher by allowing the opportunity to vary the wording of the questions to help accessibility of vocabulary without changing the meaning of the question (Barriball and While

1994) which is an essential aspect of this project as the participants all have literacy difficulties and thus accessibility of vocabulary is a key consideration when designing the interview schedule but also in the interview itself. As well as flexibility to ensure accessibility the semi-structured interview also enable deep exploration of experiences of the participants (Drever 1995) themselves which is the key focus of this research (see Appendix 6). On reflection it was the ability to move away from the interview schedule that allowed for some of the richest data to be collected in this project.

The Sample

Contextual Setting

The research takes place in an average sized (just over 1000 students including the 6th form) co-educational secondary school in the South West of England. The school recently has faced a falling roll as many other schools in the area have, and there are also challenges to progress, particularly with SEN Support boys, as discussed in the literature review. The issue of the gender gap has been particularly pressing and thus the focus of many Professional Development sessions for the teaching staff.

The students at the school represent a wide cross-section of socio-economic backgrounds as well as academic abilities although is of predominantly white British ethnicity. The school is located in a town which has little direct competition from regional grammar schools however, some families opt for their children to take the 11+ examination and this has some consequences for the comprehensive representation within the school. In data terms the incoming students in Year 6 from Key Stage 2 tend to be very close to the National Average in terms of performance and therefore there are few contextual reasons why boys

appear to perform poorly in relative terms to girls. The gender gap in the 2014 GCSE examinations was just above national average and had been increasing over the previous four years, indicating that despite significant amounts of staff training and effort the impact on student outcomes had been minimal.

Sample

In many staffrooms up and down the country there are generally comments made about Year 9 classes and in particular, Year 9 boys, being difficult to engage. Romola Scott (2016), writing from a teachers' perspective online, suggests social media, hormones and the 'wasteland' of Year 9, perhaps referring to the lack of GCSE pressure, as contributing to the lack of engagement of students which teachers are trying to combat. Whilst Scott's view was from an all-girls school, Year 9 in my own setting tends to show a dramatic increase in the number of behavioural issues. This echoes the significant increase in the number of fixed term and permanent exclusions that students experienced in secondary school in national data (DfE 2019). The tracking system for behavioural difficulties showed a significantly higher number of issues with those boys with literacy difficulties than any other category of student in the school. This resulted in speculation that the two issues may be linked and to attempts within the school to understand this in greater detail resulting in Year 9 being the sample group for this research.

Students from year 9 were considered using criterion-based selection methods (Miles and Huberman 1994, Cohen, Manion et al. 2011) which meant that I had "specified in advance a set of attributes (Cohen, Manion et al. 2011:p.229)" that each potential participant had to reach. Potential participants were identified from the central register of Year 9 students with Special Educational Needs and

Disabilities. This was used further to identify those year 9 boys recognised as receiving SEND Support with specific literacy difficulties. It was decided that students who had other needs, as well as literacy difficulties, would be eliminated from the sample list. This was in order to ensure that views were collated only for those participants with literacy difficulties, not further difficulties which may also have an influence on their perspectives. Once this list was identified it was cross-referenced with the number of behaviour 'logs' that each student had received. Logs are given to students for a range of misdemeanours, from forgetting homework to significant violent acts. They work on a scale of logs from 1 meaning low level disruption to 3 which is a serious breach. Those with over 50 logs were approached to participate in the project. 50 logs was chosen as the selection criteria as it is the point that greater support and sanctions are employed by the school in order to try and develop better behaviour in the students. These are also the students who are generally 'known' within the school to have a reputation for being disruptive in lessons and for whom it appeared the deterrent system in place to promote good behaviour was not having an impact on improving behaviour. It was understanding this cross-over between disruptive students and literacy difficulties that this project aimed to explore. All potential participants were given the information and consent sheets (see Appendix 1) and given time to consider whether they would like to participate. This resulted in a sample of five students willing to participate and all were engaged in the project. Although five students opted in to the research they did not all complete both rounds of data collection. Two participants did not complete the full cycle of data collection. One left the school part way through the project to attend the local University Technical College (UTC). The second was excluded from the school

as a result of violent behaviour and now attends a Pupil Referral Unit. An overview of the participants is detailed in Figure 1 below.

Name	Participated in Round 1	Number of behaviour logs at Round 1	Differential* at Round 1	Participated in Round 2	Number of behaviour logs at Round 2	Differential* at Round 2
Max	Yes	52	-1	No – left to attend UTC	N/A	N/A
Rob	Yes	57	-1	Yes	60	-1
Ollie	Yes	61	-4	No - excluded	N/A	N/A
James	Yes	55	-2	Yes	67	-1
Chris	Yes	50	-3	Yes	52	-3

Figure 1: Overview of Participants Details

* Differential refers to the difference between students target grade which is set based on national trajectories from Key Stage 2 outcomes and teacher prediction for Year outcomes in English.

Whilst some participants did not complete both rounds of data collection I felt it was important that they were included in the data analysis and discussion because the purpose of this project was to understand the experiences of boys with literacy difficulties. The experiences of Max and Ollie are just as valid as the other three boys who did complete both rounds of data collection and offer useful insights into individual experiences.

Pilot Project

The pilot project was conducted with two year 8 boys rather than year 9. This decision was taken in order to be able to test the methodology and, in particular, to test the use of photo-elicitation therefore it was considered just as useful to carry this out with year 8 students although both of the year 8 students met the same criteria as the year 9 boys who were identified for participation in the project. This also enabled the potential year 9 participants to be able to participate

in the main project rather than be eliminated having participated in the pilot project.

When given the cameras participants were given one complete 7-day week to take photographs. Participants had minimal instructions to take photographs of reading and writing both at home and at school. This was followed up with the opportunity to select 12 photographs which summed up their week of literacy and then an interview to discuss each photograph. What became apparent from the photographs participants had to select from was that there was a flurry of photographs within the first two days but after that very few and on the last 3 days neither participant had taken any photographs. When asked about this the participants stated that they 'forgot' to continue taking photographs. For this reason, participants in the main project were given the cameras for 5 days over a weekend in order to minimise the chance of participants forgetting to take the images. Throughout the selection and interview process students found it very difficult to select and talk about their images without significant prompting. The process of 'summarising' their week in photographs was a challenge and I found myself prompting to consider literacy that was hard, easy, school based, home based and thus I felt that participants were trying to please me or get the right answers rather than give honest reflections. Participants also commented that they found it difficult to know what to take photographs of and one even commented that they were quite worried about whether they should or should not take certain photographs. Samuels (2007) also found this when conducting research with Novices in monastic life. He identified that a script-less elicitation technique meant the Novices were not able to delve deeper into monastic life. He therefore offered a list of themes for which he wanted the Novices to take photographs to represent. This allowed for a greater range of photographs and

greater value in the interviews. Taking this on board, and facing similar issues in the pilot project here, I adjusted the instructions to follow a set of themes to help with selection (see Appendix 5).

As a result of the pilot project findings the methodology was adjusted to allow for a shorter time period to take the photographs and a list of themes to help frame the discussions in the interview.

Data Analysis

The first stage of data analysis was to transcribe the data generated from the semi-structured interviews. In order to ensure the data was able to be analysed, the conventional rules for transcription were followed (Cohen, Manion et al. 2011). This included ensuring anonymity of participants by using pseudonyms. Through the transcription process the participants were identified as P, varying from PA – PE for ease of identification and to ensure through transcription and coding that the same participants were being compared, where appropriate. In the analysis itself each participant was identifiable with a pseudonym. Hesitations, pauses and inflection in tone were also recorded as part of the transcription process in order to inform the data analysis and enable engagement with the participants on a level of inference as well as what they are saying through words.

One significant benefit of using interpretivist methodology is being able to analyse using more naturalistic methods. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that this naturalistic inquiry gives the research an advantage as the researcher becomes the 'human instrument' and the advantage of "the 'human instruments' is her adaptability, responsiveness, knowledge, ability to handle sensitive matters, ability to see the whole picture, ability to clarify or summarise, to explore, to

analyse, [and] to examine atypical or idiosyncratic responses (Lincoln and Guba 1985:p.193-4)." This flexibility and responsiveness that I brought to the research and analysis offered a strength to the research.

Data was coded once transcribed in order to begin developing ideas, theories and groups of ideas. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) suggest an effective mechanism for this is to repeat the process by "assembl[ing] chunks or groups of data, putting them together to make a coherent whole (e.g. through writing summaries of what has been found) (p.237-8)" which enables description of the findings to be moved towards explanation and then theory generation.

These codes were used alongside memos throughout the coding process. Robson (1993) states that memos are useful for recording the insights, ideas, comments and reflections which pop into one's head when coding interviews and beginning data analysis. These memos were kept separate from the data transcriptions and used to help in the data analysis rather than to become data itself. Cohen et al (2011) argue that memos "are an important part of the self-conscious reflection on the data (p.555)."

The memos and codes were used to develop meaning from the transcribed data using the mechanisms suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) in which they suggest data can be analysed by identifying themes or patterns which may stem from repeated themes and causes or explanations or constructs. I also sought to see plausibility using informed intuition to reach a conclusion by identifying and noting relations between codes. By looking at the data in this way I aimed to build a logical chain of evidence noting causality and making inferences with a view to generating theory and evidence to answer the research questions.

The analysis is illustrated by longer statements representing the views from participants verbatim. Whilst, on occasion this is criticised, in this research the

purpose is to represent the individuals' experiences and by reporting larger statements from interviews I aim to illuminate the experience of the participant. I also feel, as an interpretivist, that it is important to be faithful to the words used by the participants as it is their experience of literacy and gender which is at the heart of this research. The choice of illustrative quotes however, will be informed by the analysis.

The nature of the participants involvement in the study is also reflected within the presentation of findings. In presenting the themes from the interview analysis the views of all students will be included, even those who did not complete both cycles. In reporting change this is only based on those students who completed both cycles although discussions of change arose less frequently than I had anticipated. In two particular circumstances where several boys presented significantly different viewpoints, these have been presented as a comparative case study analysis in the findings and discussion chapter. The case studies form the basis for the discussion as the detailed exploration of singular contextual experiences of literacy difficulty have illuminated the understanding of what it means to be these individuals with literacy difficulties in this context.

Ethical Considerations

British Educational Research Association guidelines (BERA 2018) clearly state that the research experience must do no harm to participants. This is the fundamental 'rule' underpinning all research in the UK. A key element of this is to ensure that "all participants in the research understand the process in which they are to be engaged (BERA 2018:p.5)." As a result, all participants were given consent forms (see Appendix 1) which explained the research itself and they were given time to process whether they would like to be involved. This aimed to

alleviate the pressure that they may have felt to participate as a result of their prior relationship with me as their teacher and senior member of staff at the school.

When designing the consent form, it was important to identify with the fact that the participants had been selected as a result of their literacy difficulties however, the participants were not aware they had been selected due to this. It was therefore vital to ensure that the consent forms were written in such a way as to ensure participants understood the nature of the project, the aims and their expected role clearly. Marshall and Shepard (2006) emphasised the significance of this when researching marginalized youth groups. They found that seeking formal consent caused some issues as the "formality, language and length of such documents [consent forms and information sheets] can alienate some participants (Marshall and Shepard 2006:p.144)." Therefore, careful consideration was given to ensure that participants understood the consent form which outlined all aspects of the project. Consent forms were given to all participants to sign along with an information sheet (see Appendix 2) which went with prospective participants to provide parents with information. The participants were all in year 9 so aged 13 or 14. At this age I felt it was appropriate for the students to be able to state themselves whether they wanted to participate so I have their consent. Parents were given the option to 'opt-out' their child if they did not wish for them to participate. This is different to the standard parental opt-in approach. The opt-out method was chosen to allow potential participants to have agency over joining themselves and reduced the need to chase parental consent forms. Part of the statement of participation involved students assuring me that they had informed their parents that they were taking part in the research and this was emphasized verbally prior to the research commencing. A potential

risk is that the participants' parents may have literacy difficulties themselves which may impact making an informed decision about whether to withdraw their child from the project more problematic. It was not anticipated that this would be an issue with those students who have been identified and then volunteered to participate in the project as the parents were all known to the school as not having literacy difficulties themselves. The central school system holds information relating to parental literacy, if there is an issue, to ensure other vital information is relayed effectively to parents. For this reason, no risks with literacy were identified with parents. To ensure this was the case further, parents were given my contact number so that they could discuss the research with me directly if they needed or wanted to. No parents took this offer up and none chose to opt out their child so I feel that parents felt they were sufficiently well-informed about the purposes of the project.

All participants were given the choice to participate and this research was conducted on a completely voluntary basis. All participants who chose to participate were given the opportunity to withdraw at any point during the study. As there was more than one data collection point in this study the participants were reminded at each data collection point that they had the right to opt out. This alleviated the risk of participants forgetting that they had this right after the initial consent form had been completed several weeks and then months prior to the data collection points.

My position as Assistant Headteacher needed consideration with regards to ethics. Part of the risk was that potential participants may have felt that they had to take part in the research due to my status within the school. This was clearly explained to potential participants during the recruitment process to ensure they all felt that they were able to withdraw from the project at any point. It was also

decided that should the participants get into serious trouble in the course of the research process then another member of the Senior Leadership Team would respond in line with school policy, rather than me, in order to minimize the risk of damaging the research relationship (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009). Participants were made aware of this prior to the research commencing.

A careful consideration of the potential harm to participants was submitted to the ethics committee (see Appendix 3 & 4) prior to the research taking place. Alderson and Morrow (2011) argue that the risk with social research is greater than some anticipate as "social researchers can intrude into people's lives and cause them great distress and embarrassment during the research (p.24)." Within this assessment both the school and home environment were considered alongside the issue of participants' literacy difficulties. The research took place within the school environment that the participants were very familiar with. They were also very familiar with me and therefore that did not present any potential risk to the participants. Students were asked to take photographs within their home environments and this might have presented some risk in terms of potential safeguarding issues that may come to light. If this had happened then the school safeguarding policy would have been used to report concerns and followed up using the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub. This ensured that participants, their families and me, as researcher, were protected from possible harm. There were also clear instructions to participants that they were only to photograph what they were reading and writing and that they should not be taking photographs of people, even if their peers/family asked them to. This minimised the risk of photographs being taken of other students/family members that had not given their consent to participate in the research. If any photographs had been taken of people then they would have been permanently deleted from the camera memory

cards and not been discussed as part of the research. In this project no participants had taken photographs of peers or family and no safeguarding concerns were raised as a result of photographs in the home.

As the participants were students with literacy difficulties there was a risk that participants' self-esteem may have been damaged as a result of indicating their participation was a result of their literacy difficulty. The participants did not know that they were selected due to having a literacy difficulty but they were asked to discuss what they found difficult or easy about literacy which may have brought up uncomfortable topics. BERA (2018) guidelines clearly state that researchers must take all necessary steps to reduce the sense of intrusion and…they must desist immediately from any actions, ensuing from the research process, that cause emotional or other harm (BERA 2018). I anticipated that the nature of the project would build confidence as the aim was to explore their understandings of literacy and gender stereotypes rather than to emphasise their literacy difficulties, thereby giving them a voice that they may not have had before. During the project students' literacy difficulties were not addressed directly but used as a lens for me as a researcher to view experiences of literacy. This aim was to limit the possibility of psychological damage as a result of the research project. If, however, there had been any feeling from the participant, their parents, or staff at the school that the young person's self-esteem had been damaged/was at risk then trained mentors and counsellors were on hand in order to support them effectively. These actions aimed to minimise the risk of possible harm to the participant. Throughout this research project no participants required additional counselling or mentoring support.

Participant confidentiality was maintained at all times throughout the research process. Participant identities were only known by me and the head teacher of

the school (for safeguarding purposes) and this information was stored separately to the data collected. The institution in which the research took place may be identifiable as a result of my own work within the setting however, the participants will remain anonymous within this process.

The security of the data was guaranteed and stored in line with Data Protection, through storage on my personal encrypted hard drive. The encryption holds the raw data, consent forms, photographs selected and voice recordings which may allow identities to be found. The transcripts of interviews were stored encrypted and backed up on the university U-drive with password security. The encrypted data will be stored for a maximum of 5 years and then destroyed. The transcript data does not contain personal details and only contains generic descriptors for each participant. This data will be stored indefinitely and may be used for other research purposes. It was made clear on the consent forms that transcript data will be kept and may be used at a later date to inform other research projects but all details would be anonymous. Photographs that students selected and printed to use as stimulus material were stored in a locked cabinet in the researchers' home until the data collection was completed. As suggested by The British Sociological Association (2017) the participants will remain the legal owners of the photographs they take and hold copyright. The photographs are not published in the project as their purpose was a stimulus to discussion rather than the subject of analysis themselves. At the end of data collection, the hard copies of the photographs were destroyed.

Researcher Role

Using the lens of social constructivism means that I needed to carefully consider my role as researcher in this project. The researcher is vital, in terms of extracting

the information to inform the project but also the role they play on influencing the data. Baert (2005) identifies that the pragmatic research school argues that as a researcher my position should always be taken into account as all knowledge is situated and therefore an objective view cannot happen. As a teacher-researcher with a previous link to the participants it gives even more credence to the interpretivist approach as it really allows for the role of the teacher-researcher to be considered as part of the process and the effect this may have on the participants' responses. Maybin (2013) states "what can be spoken and how it can be said are enabled or constrained by specific sociocultural expectation and interactional dynamic, whether in relation to teacher-directed delivery of the curriculum, interaction and reflection among friends, or the context of the research interview with myself (Maybin 2013:p.394-5)."

The role of the relationship between myself as researcher and Assistant Headteacher in their school was important to consider as part of the ethics and validity as the relationship has the potential to impact upon how participants respond. This is noted previously with regards to participants feeling pressurised to participate in the first place but also in that this may have impacted the responses that participants gave throughout the research. Burgess (1989) argues that a fundamental element of ethnographic educational research is to consider the "relationship between the researcher, research, the process of researching and the results that are disseminated (p.60)" in order to be a reflexive researcher and ensure ethical standards are maintained through respect for the participants. This overlap of roles may present another issue with distrust of the researcher by participants growing as "in an important sense, the moment they become a researcher e.g. in their own institution, they also become an outsider – and may well be treated with the same suspicion and distrust (Bridges, Gingell et al.

2007:p.6)." This had the potential to both damage the relationship that had previously been built with myself and the participants as teacher but also impact the results of the research. However, what is clear is that the relationship needs to be taken into account and reflected upon. Vincent (2013:p.341) found in her study that repeat interviews allowed for a greater "quality of the relationship" between interviewer and participant. She identified that this was especially important with the vulnerable teenage mothers that she was interviewing and found that building a relationship helped to conduct research with "vulnerable populations [and/or] tackle sensitive issues (Vincent 2013:p.352)" which could be seen to be present in this research as I aimed to tap into students' vulnerabilities within literacy. In this study, secondary data collection allowed for further building of the researcher-participant relationship.

Some argue that knowing the participants prior to the research taking place had a potentially negative impact on the validity of the data (DeLyser 2001, van Heughten 2004) as it limits the opportunity for objectivity and could result in researcher assumptions being projected onto the research. On the other hand, others would suggest that this prior relationship is beneficial to the research (Maxwell 2005, Chavez 2008, Ross 2017). They argue that the prior relationship allows for a level of familiarity and comfortableness which allows for open and honest conversation. Throughout this process it has been vital to reflect on my position and to accept that objectivity was not the aim of this project (Greene 2014). In this research my insider status was useful when I was seeking to understand views and perspectives which might have left participants open to feeling vulnerable and therefore being able to quickly establish a research relationship built on the back of a prior teaching relationship added to the quality of data produced.

There was a potential for researcher influence on the analysis of data by potentially projecting my own values and assumptions onto the situation and data (Walford 2001, Maxwell 2005). By considering my own effect on the participants throughout the research I developed the validity of the research. This demonstrates the importance of identifying my own role within the research itself and the contextual impact of that role upon the findings.

There is a clear school of thought that argues that for true validation of the results the respondents should be given the opportunity to view the data analysis (Aldridge 2015). In this case the participants were given the opportunity to view transcripts of the interview if they requested to do so on the initial consent form however, they were not given the opportunity to alter and change the transcripts unless they felt the transcription itself was incorrect. None of the participants requested to view the transcripts during the research, which was not that surprising considering all of the participants had literacy difficulties. The data analysis itself was not made available to participants to change but was available to them to read once written up. Whyte (1993) argues that participant view of the analysis is not completely necessary as "the right of the researcher to publish conclusions and interpretations as he or she feels them (p.362)" is an important part of the research process. They go on to suggest that the practicality of doing this may also be a limitation and the potential for participants questioning the findings and wanting to change them adds a great level of complexity to the analysis as well as being somewhat contrasting with the interpretivist view that all truth is subjective as this suggests there may be a 'better truth' by editing responses. No participants requested to see the data analysis.

Summary

In this chapter, I have explained that my philosophical stance has informed my research design which incorporates semi-participatory methods to elicit individual experience of literacy from the participants. The methods also include a case study element to enable detailed, contextually located analysis. I believe this is the most appropriate method to explore boys' experiences of literacy difficulties whilst considering the ethical implications relevant to this study. I have also detailed the data analysis methods and considered implications and potential limitations of the study. In the next chapter, findings of the study are presented using thematic qualitative analysis.

Chapter 4: Findings

Presentation of Findings

The findings here are being presented using two different approaches in conjunction with the discussion in Chapter 5. Firstly, the data will be presented based on the main themes that were identified from the interviews with each student. Each interview was coded using NVivo software and drawn together to elicit the key themes as presented in these findings. There were several key themes which were referred to by the majority of participants in each case and these were explored in different ways. As a result, a thematic approach seems most relevant in order to draw conclusions of the experiences of the boys and their literacy difficulty as we as of similarity and difference between the students on the major themes discussed.   This also allows for consideration of the viewpoints changing or remaining the same between the two different interview points.

Cross-case analysis will be used more in the Discussion chapter to enable a more in-depth understanding of some of the direct contrasts of the boys' experiences providing the contextualised view of key concepts. By using two mechanisms for analysis it increases the validity of the finding and, as Gray (2014) argues, using "within-case comparisons and cross-case analysis [allows] tentative themes, concepts and even relationships between variables [to potentially] emerge (p.273)." Thus, this process allows for larger themes, ideas and theories to be proposed from the thematic approach and it allows for the coherence and integrity of the participants' responses also to be retained (Cohen, Manion et al. 2011:p.551). This was essential in this project as the fundamental aim was to identify the boys' perspectives of their experiences of literacy.

The data presented here is the result of interviews which were conducted and the photographs taken were used as a starting point for discussion. Not all of the boys did take photographs and some took photographs only at home. Figure 2 below gives details of the photographs taken throughout both rounds of data collection. The implications of photographs being taken, or not being taken, is discussed further later.

Participant Name	Round 1 Photographs taken	Content Summary	Round 2 photographs taken	Content Summary
Max	Yes	Several pictures of an English assessment, some images of magazine from home, *Fast Car*	No – left the school	N/A
Rob	Yes	6 images from in school, worksheets in 2 lessons.	Yes	Some images of home, particularly pinboard.
Ollie	No	N/A	No – excluded	N/A
James	Yes	Mostly magazines from home, *Mountain Biking*	No	N/A
Chris	Yes	1 geography lesson assessment instructions	No – forgot	N/A

Figure 2 – Overview of photographs taken by the participants

Although the photographs proved a useful prompt to discussion, the nature of the semi-structured interview enabled a broader range of topics and themes to be discussed. The themes can be seen below in Figure 4 and an example of the coding process can be seen in Appendix 7.

Main Theme	Codes
Curriculum	Curriculum access
	Curriculum challenges
	Curriculum areas with a perceived lack of literacy
	Perceived value of the topic/subject
	Familiarity of vocabulary

Emotion	Motivation	
	Enjoyment	
	Nonchalance	
	Frustration	
	Dislike	
	Hatred	
	Anxiety	
	Self-depreciation	
	Embarrassment	
	Pride	
	Overwhelmed	
	Resilience	
	Surprise	
Self-Awareness	Comparison to others	
	Important part of literacy	
Peer Relationships & Literacy	Confidence to ask for help	
	Reason for poor behaviour	
	Peer support	
Teachers	Teacher techniques for engagement	
	Teacher support	
	Teacher personality	
	Teacher relationship	
	Value of teachers	
Asking for help	Confidence to ask for help	
	Willingness to ask for help	
	Resilience	
	Silly class	Peer influence
Behaviour	Reasons for poor behaviour	Peer influence
	Changing behaviour	
	Behaviour and guilt	
	Behaviour of the class	
	Peer relationships and behaviour	Peer influence
		Choice
Gender stereotypes	Popularity	
	Nature of boys and girls	
The Literacy of Home	Frequency	
	Type of engagement at home	
	Engagement in home reading	
	Homework	Overcoming homework challenges
		Opting out of homework
		Lack of home support
	Difference between home and school	
	Home role models	
Perceived purpose	Literacy as important	Literacy for communication
		Literacy for helping focus

Figure 4: Identified themes and subthemes from the coding process

The coding process itself was a challenging one with codes identified through a Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) type approach. Whilst Figure 4 suggests the coding process is rather 'tidy,' the coding process was long and needed continual review and reflection in order to give myself the opportunity to "scrutinise and interact with the data as well as ask analytical questions of it (Thornberg and Charmaz 2013)." Thornberg and Charmaz go on to explain that "coding consists of at least two phases: *initial coding* and *focused coding*. However, coding is not a linear process…researchers move back and forth between the different phases (p.156)." In this study initial codes were identified by careful consideration of the transcripts in light of the research questions but more broadly in light of the aim of seeking boys' experiences of literacy difficulties. Once many initial codes were identified themes and patterns began to emerge with similarities and differences driving the development. This enabled the development of codes to be more structured and for themes to emerge. Emergent themes were then used to structure the findings chapter.

Curriculum

Curriculum Access

All of the boys were clear about the curriculum areas that they find most challenging and most accessible. In some cases, the subjects that were discussed as most difficult was expected (Graham 2004, Stock 2017). Rob, Chris and James all commented on English being the subject they found most difficult for reading and writing. This was due to a variety of reasons. Rob commented that in English he "came across things that I find hard to write" and Chris found that English was "probably quite a lot harder" than other subjects. James stated in his first interview that French was the hardest subject however, at interview two he was clear that English was very challenging. He stated that "I just don't

understand anything. I mean I honestly don't understand anything. I had an assessment today and just don't understand any of it." It may well be the case that the English assessment was very fresh in his mind having happened on the morning of the interview and this may have led to such a strong statement of the challenges of the subject and dampened the view of French being the most difficult subject, but recently there has been a controversial shift in the National Curriculum in GCSE English. This appears to have contributed to the view that secondary school English seen a shift 'back in time' towards nineteenth-century British literature being studied as well as more 'traditional' texts which often bring with them an increased complexity which the government describes as 'rigour' (Stevens 2015). There is a growing debate about the potential dangers of this with the risk of an increased gap for disadvantaged and lower attaining students as the new curriculum is based so heavily on cultural capital and prior vocabulary knowledge (Morby 2014) as well as the shift in language around attainment from pass to incorporating, and judging schools on their ability to teach students to achieve, a 'good pass' potentially generating more unqualified individuals (Stock 2017) thereby raising the challenge and the stakes as part of the reforms. This could have influenced Rob, James and Ollie's decisions about English being a difficult subject as the shift in the curriculum could have heightened their sense of being good or weak readers and writers.

Rob found in his first interview that Science was the most challenging subject as "it has much more technical words in it to read." The familiarity of vocabulary was a common theme amongst the participants when talking about the subjects they found easy or difficult to manage. Chris stated that part of the reason that he found English the most tricky was "because well, at the minute we're doing Jekyll and Hyde and they use really old language and that, it's not like modern day

language" highlighting the lack of familiarity with the vocabulary and reflecting the apparent increase in difficulty as a result of the new GCSE requirements. Rob took photographs of the unfamiliar language he was reading in English as part of the second interview and James goes on to explain the challenges of language in the 19th Century poetry he was studying in English:

> "I mean they're just complicated like you have to just, I mean she names these different words and I don't know what they mean and then she like zooms in to different words and you still don't know what it means and then writing about those words…it's just a load of rubbish and I don't know what to do, honestly I don't know what it is or what to do."

James identifies the complexity and goes on to state it's a load of rubbish highlighting the frustration he feels at the complexity of the language he is being expected to understand. Chris also agrees that poetry is challenging as he explains that "we're doing like old ones that have different language." Familiarity of vocabulary seems to influence whether the boys will find a subject accessible or not and also appears to link to whether they feel they can succeed, as shown by James' frustration at being unable to understand the vocabulary being used.

There is a general consensus that English is a challenging subject by James, Chris, Max and Rob however, in the second round of interviews Ollie goes against the grain by claiming that English is the subject that he finds easiest to access in terms of both reading and writing even though what they are studying is considered hard. When pressed on this he explains that it is more accessible "because Miss helps me a lot." This highlights the potential impact that teachers can have on the perception of whether a subject is hard or easy. The role of the teacher will be explored in greater depth later in the chapter.

Despite the general commonality of English being a challenging subject the curriculum area that was most challenging to the participants was Modern Foreign Languages. All of the participants in this study were taking French and it certainly received the most vehement dislike as well as being considered a very challenging subject to access. Ollie explains that "it's just difficult" when talking about his experiences of French. When asked if he had always found languages difficult, he stated "yeah. Like I just don't like languages at all." The suggestion that foreign languages are both hard and disliked was echoed by both James and Chris with James giving the strongest dislike by stating that "I hate French." This does suggest that efficacy of a subject is somewhat linked to enjoyment although the data does not give suggestions of the direction of this relationship, i.e. is it enjoyed because it is easy or easier because it is enjoyed, as well as other factors potentially playing a role, such as the perceived value of the subject (Williams, Burden et al. 2002), so that a valued subject may command more effort. Perhaps if the boys felt that they could achieve in languages then they may have been more inclined to engage more actively and thus develop enjoyment of the subject as they suggest English is very challenging but they do not talk about it with the same level of dislike.

The students' poor literacy levels may contribute to their dislike of the subjects that they find the most difficult or, dislike could contribute to poor literacy outcomes therefore increasing dislike further. This relationship is difficult to establish in a causal sense but, as we'll see, there is some evidence that reducing the literacy barrier, in terms of less reading, increases students' enjoyment of a subject.

<u>Curriculum areas with a perceived lack of literacy</u>

When asked to explore those subjects that were perceived as easy in terms of reading and writing there was a strong consensus that this depended largely on the amount of reading and writing that the boys were expected to complete. Those subjects with a perceived lack of literacy were those that fared best when considering the ease of access of a subject. PE is identified as an enjoyable subject by most of the boys as it's a more practical subject. James explains "I just find it is more fun because you're actually doing something, you're more active than just writing something on a piece of paper so it's just more enjoyable." Ollie explains he likes PE because "I'm good at it and it's good for your health." These statements suggest that enjoyment of the subject may in part be due to feeling that they can achieve in the subject which may be valuable in understanding some of the motivations for the boys in lessons as well as reduced literacy content being a somewhat motivating factor. This also links to intrinsic motivations to complete certain subjects which will be discussed further later.

Maths is also identified as a subject in which it is easiest to read and write in by Rob in his second interview and again, he states the main reason for this being because "there's not as much writing and reading to do." Rob does perform more competently at maths than English by 1 grade so it may be that Rob finds it easier to read and write in maths because conceptually he is able to access the material however his explanation is that less reading and writing is making it easier. This suggests he places some significance on the impacts of his reading and writing skills on accessing the curriculum.

Rob states that music is easiest as "I have to read and write but it's not as much there. It's only in little bits" and this is echoed by Chris to have easy literacy as

he found that "we don't really read as much […] all it is, is like a song so it's easy" which again shows that the amount of reading and writing as well as the familiarity of vocabulary are key factors in influencing the perception of whether a subject overall is perceived as easy in terms of reading and writing.

Perceived value of the topic/subject

As well as the amount of reading and writing there is another influence over whether students felt that they should or could engage in a topic or subject. One of the key motivators, it appeared, was whether the subject was deemed as valuable by the individual. When I asked Ollie about English, he said he would "always try in English" even when given a piece of text which he initially thought would be impossible to read. James also says he tries hard in English as he doesn't mess around there. When asked about this he said:

> "because you have to like, in English you go to a job and they'll ask you what your English, Maths and Science are so I just thought I need to concentrate in English more than other lessons because that's the most important one."

This clear positioning of English being an important subject influences the engagement that James gave to it, even when he found the subject matter or topic challenging. The perceived importance of the subject may have influenced the responses to learning French as other students in previous research have reported that languages is not felt to be an important subject, particularly in the South West of England (Williams, Burden et al. 2002).

When considering their engagement in other subjects both Ollie and James placed less importance on Religious Education (RE). Ollie stated that if he was asked to write two pages in RE "I wouldn't do it" and James stated that "it's only

about beliefs and values isn't it so well, a load of rubbish really." This demonstrates that the perceived value of a subject has an influence on some of the boys and their decision to engage in the curriculum area, even if they find it difficult.

<u>Summary of Curriculum</u>

Exploring each of the areas above in turn it becomes clear that the notion of whether a subject is perceived as hard or easy, in terms of both reading and writing, by the boys is influenced by a wide range of factors. The value of the subject; the familiarity of the vocabulary being used; the quantity of reading and writing expected within the lessons and the perceived difficulty of the subject itself are all influencing factors. What also becomes clear though is how the responses to the questions regarding hard or difficult are often tied up with emotion. The descriptive of 'hate' directed towards Modern Foreign Languages demonstrates an emotional response to literacy. This emotional link was also prevalent throughout many of the discussions had around literacy.

Emotion

Wide-ranging emotions are shown by all of the boys throughout the interviews. These were positive, negative and non-committal but significantly there were marked variations between the boys. There was no clear single type of emotion that was felt by the boys regarding literacy, but the range is indicative in itself. Figure 3 shows the range of emotional responses from each of the 5 participants.

Participant	Emotions reflected in responses
James	Motivation; Enjoyment; nonchalance;
Max	Frustration; Motivation; Enjoyment
Rob	Dislike, hatred; Enjoyment; Anxiety
Ollie	Self-depreciation;
Chris	Embarrassment;

Figure 3: Range of Emotions discussed throughout the interview process by all participants.

One of the key emotional responses from some of the participants was a desire to do well. James commented that:

> "the teacher is important but so is your attitude to the work. If you go to that lesson and say you're not gonna work, then you're not gonna work, but if you go to that lesson saying you're going to work and then try then you're probably more likely to try. So it's probably more you in general and you'll like have to like set a goal for yourself and like, I dunno, have some pride like."

James identifies that his own personal motivation and desire to do well is a driving factor in terms of his engagement in a lesson and thus his ability to do well. This motivation and desire to do well was echoed by Max when he explained that he got frustrated when he didn't have enough warning for an assessment as "I didn't really have much time to revise and we had the assessment today so that wasn't good." Both James and Max expressed aspiration to be engineers and when asked whether his literacy difficulties (which he had identified) may or may not impact his future James responded that "I think it is just what it is." He then went on to describe the GCSE engineering course which he had chosen he said 'I was talking to [teacher] about it and pretty much with the GCSE engineering course most people just look at the practical bit as it's a hands-on subject and you don't need as much of the other stuff with it." So, despite his statement that his literacy difficulties just are what they are, James may have chosen his future options and

career choices on minimising his need to use literacy and positioning what he considers to be a strength first in the practical aspect of the course.

Despite challenges with literacy Max and James were able to express some enjoyment when discussing literacy within school, whereas Rob demonstrated a persistent attitude of dislike towards reading and writing. Max explained that he finds it most interesting and exciting when "you're reading a new book and just trying to get into it. I'm just reading a new book now and it's like, I think it's called 'Shadows', and I like trying to get into it and understand what's going on." In this case the novelty of something new is sparking Max's interest in reading. Rob explains that his current English work on 'An Inspector Calls' has been interesting and despite the vocabulary and linguistic style being challenging he has still enjoyed it. He explained that:

> "it was just, like a bit of a mystery but it's really catchy like you want to know more about what's going to happen cos it's really like, they make it like you don't want to stop reading, you just want to keep going and that's what I really liked."

On the other hand, Rob was very clear about his dislike for reading and writing contradicting his views on 'An Inspector Calls'. When asked "do you look forward to doing reading and writing?" he replied; "No. I just don't enjoy it." I asked if that was in all subjects and he replied "yeah." Clearly Rob was feeling a great dislike for reading and writing in all subject areas whereas Max and James were able to identify at least something or some topic which they had enjoyed in terms of literacy.

Rob, at another point in the second interview, developed his emotional response to explain a level of anxiety relating to his GCSE work which was being introduced into his lessons. He stated that:

"I try not to think that I'm like doing my GCSE's soon so I don't

think about it and so I don't end up getting worried about it. So if

I just don't think about then it like helps me and I feel a bit better."

Me: "So what happens when you do think about it?

Rob: "Yeah it worries me thinking that I don't know what I'm doing

and I'm going to fail."

Rob's growing concern about his GCSE's may be partly responsible for his statement about disliking reading and writing as his feelings of potential failure may impact his ability to feel enjoyment and links to the notion of efficacy being a motivating factor, or in this case, a disengagement factor. This may also have been enhanced in the second interview as time was moving towards starting GCSE courses.

As well as a feeling of potential failure Chris referred to embarrassment around his literacy difficulty. When asked what he would tell teachers to help him more he said he wouldn't tell them anything because "I don't really know, awkward." It was unclear whether the awkwardness came from having a discussion with a teacher about something that worried him or the literacy difficulty itself, but one can suggest that there is perhaps a mixture of both aspects here. The embarrassment and awkwardness expressed by Chris is echoed by Ollie but in a different way. When asked if he had done any form of reading or writing recently that he was proud of he replied "no, not really." This could be fueled by Ollie not feeling that he has achieved anything highly enough to be proud of a piece of writing or reading. The lack of pride and embarrassment in his work could also be another factor which causes Ollie to disengage. He also expressed frustration and a sense of being overwhelmed when asked to write considerable amounts. I asked:

"would it put you off if the teacher said you needed to write two whole pages?

Ollie: "Yeah, kind of. I would probably do one page and then just stop.""

This suggests a lack of confidence in his own ability to produce two pages as directed by the teacher. There is potentially another issue in that Ollie is lacking in confidence and resilience to tackle this type of task that requires a significant length of work. This could have further implications in terms of Ollie getting into trouble for not producing the work required as Ollie has the highest tariff of behaviour logs.

The length of a piece of writing is a source of frustration for Chris who explains that he gets "just a bit annoyed" when he feels as though he hasn't written enough or as much as his peers. This starts another conversation around peer influence on feelings of efficacy towards reading and writing.

Despite these frustrations and anxieties around literacy James appeared at one point to express resilience when addressing his own literacy difficulty. When asked if he would speak to the teacher if he found the topic really hard, he replied "No not really, I just keep on going really." This suggests a level of resilience, to face challenges head on and continue to move forward however, this may also add weight to Chris' statement of awkwardness in that James may feel awkward and embarrassed to explain the difficulties he was facing to the teacher and to avoid identifying himself as different or struggling in comparison to his peers, particularly if that conversation happened in front of his peers in the classroom context.

Summary of Emotion

All of these varied emotional responses go towards suggesting that these boys, for whom literacy is a struggle, react very differently to different material. There is no singular emotional response to literacy as a whole but the contextual experiences of that lesson, that teacher, that content, go some way to influencing the emotional response. What becomes very clear is the awareness that the students have of themselves and their own emotional responses. In most cases the boys are able to identify the emotion they are feeling in connection to the literacy experience. This self-awareness was evident when exploring their own literacy difficulties in more depth and goes on to link strongly to the boys' comparisons of themselves with their peers. Despite this apparent 'neatness' there is clear contradiction in the responses between the boys in terms of expressing ideas and emotions and understanding where those emotions have come from. The somewhat simplistic cause and effect that some boys present is contradicted by those who 'don't know' about their emotions or the causal relationships. It could be that the boys' literacy difficulties are pertinent to the expression of emotions and perhaps their self-awareness.

Self-Awareness

All of the participants were able to communicate a greater level of self-awareness than I had thought when starting this project. An element of my assumptions, which came from previous knowledge of the boys, led me to believe that they would not necessarily be able to explain their own literacy difficulties or the strategies which can be employed to help them however, I was wrong on this account.

James used a similar approach to his peers to identify that he had a literacy difficulty. When asked what level he was working at he stated a 4 and was asked if he thought that was a good grade. He replied; "well yeah but if you look at like everyone else in the class and they're getting like 6's and 5's it's not that smart." James clearly felt his literacy difficulty was best explained through his perceived lack of intelligence when compared with other members of his class. Rob explored his reading difficulty by explaining that he finds both the "amount and the type of words" too complex in some subjects.

Chris found that when writing he can come across situations whereby "I wanna write stuff and sometimes it just doesn't make sense." The suggestion here being that Chris knows what he wants to say and has a clear idea that he wishes to communicate but the mechanism of writing becomes a challenge which prevents the level of communication that he is aiming for. Rob finds that the speed of writing that he is expected to do is the most challenging aspect of writing as "we just do everything so quick so I find it hard to just get everything down." When asked if what he was writing was also complicated and added challenge, he stated "well some of it's complicated but lots of it is speed." So, in the context of the history lessons that Rob was discussing, the speed was the overriding factor in what was making writing difficult for him.

The participants were able to recognise their own difficulties in terms of their experience of them and they were also able to identify tools and mechanisms which they could use in order to overcome the challenges they were facing. Rob was the only participant to explore phonic awareness as a tool for both reading and writing. He stated that "getting the sounds of my letters right" was an important part of literacy and that if he came across a hard word he was trying to read he would "try sounding it out" as well as seeking support from the teacher. Max was

able to identify that he used his planner as a mechanism to help him with his homework as he "can check back in my book and things" so is able to use the planner as a reminder and tool for key vocabulary or lessons. The majority of tools that the students used were predominantly led by the teacher. The interaction of the teacher and student becomes an essential element and the idea of teacher relationships will be explored in greater detail later on. Most of the participants were able to advise the teachers on what they could do to help them.

Summary of Self-Awareness

Whilst the boys did not explain their reading and writing in vocabulary that is perhaps more reflective, what they were able to identify was their own difficulties in relation to their peers. One could also identify phonic awareness and a knowledge of what did or did not make things harder for them. This self-awareness becomes more evident later in the chapter as I explore the role of teachers, both in their relationships with students, and the mechanisms they can use to help the learners access the curriculum. In some cases though the boys are aware that something simple can be done to help their learning. James was asked: "If you walk into your lesson and the teacher could give you anything that would inspire you to read or write, what would that be." James replied; "A pen, because I don't have a pencil case." Sometimes then, accessibility and support are as simple as equipment. James clearly sought to make light of the situation in this context but all of the responses here are complex in that they appear to be affected by other factors. The boys demonstrated some self-awareness of their own difficulties and their emotional responses to literacy were evident. How these factors all tie together is explored further in the Discussion chapter.

Peer Relationships and Literacy

As shown previously James positioned his own intelligence as less 'smart' by comparing his own grades in English lessons to those of his peers. Some of the boys discussed how peer relationships could help or hinder their literacy learning. As expected, there were some concerns raised by the boys about their peers mocking them and this affecting their willingness to ask for help in a lesson. Max said;

> "I've had it with my mates before, they take the mickey and we just joke around, like with [names student], we just joke around with my dyslexia and his [physical] disability and if I just keep on asking how do I spell this or what does this mean it just kind of makes me look stupid."

The acceptance here of a physical disability appears more stable. He does not judge his friend for his physical limitations but fears the judgement of his friends against his own literacy difficulty. This could be indicative of a cultural issue in that physical discrimination has largely been tackled through legislation and education but the same cannot be said for those who face difficulties in learning, especially those that are connected to literacy weaknesses.

The desire to not appear stupid in terms of their literacy was a key feature of several interviews. Chris compared his work to others in the group and said "it just doesn't look detailed to when [another student] is trying to help me out. It just looks... [shrug shoulders]." So, the challenge of identifying what is causing the lack of detail is overridden by feelings of inadequacy in comparison to peers' work. Rob explained that when getting help from friends that "some people I'll go to and some people I won't" suggesting that his positioning within the class and the peer group impacts on his ability to seek support from his peers in

different contexts and this may be fueled by feelings of a lack of intelligence and not wanting to look 'stupid' in comparison.

The idea of peer support is referred to several times. Chris regularly spoke about peers in class helping him with the work. He said that in science, literacy was a bit hard and a bit easy "because if I get stuck and that, like [names student] is sat next to me and she helps me out." When asked he stated that "she helps me automatically." Clearly in this instance the peer support that she is offering is vital in the accessibility of the science curriculum to Chris and appears to come without judgment of ability. He explained that it was moderately hard because she was there to help. Rob also valued the support from peers although he explained that "when I'm struggling with reading and writing they will notice. Sometimes they're not very helpful." I pushed on this and asked, "what would that look like if they weren't being very helpful?" and got the response; "um, like when they struggle too." This was not what I had expected Rob to say in response to the question of peers, as I had assumed a response centered on messing around or comments about Rob himself, but it raises the question of how peers can support one another to access the curriculum and perhaps the seating plans teachers use to generate the greatest opportunity for support without affecting the confidence of students. James takes a slightly different approach when discussing peer relationships and literacy. He didn't discuss how peers could support him or not in the sense of the literacy task itself but more it was focused around behaviour and peer impact. He explains that a reputation of a class clown needs to be upheld for his popularity to continue but that this reputation can hinder his ability to focus in a lesson when he really wants to;

> "Because if you like say anything to your mates and say 'oh I
>
> don't wanna do this I wanna focus this lesson' it's just not

gonna work, you're not actually gonna work. They're just gonna wanna have a laugh and then it carries on going and carries on going until you like don't learn anything at all."

Here, James is suggesting that his peer relationships negatively impact his ability to engage in the learning taking place in the classroom even if he *wanted* to learn and engage. His lack of discussion about access to the curriculum itself is telling of his positioning as someone with social status rather than a literacy difficulty.

Summary of Peer Relationships and Literacy

What is evident here is that the way the students talk about their peers and literacy is in one of two ways. They either talk about the help that their peers can or cannot give to them or they discuss behaviour as a distracting tool for not engaging in learning. Clearly the positioning of the boys within the social group of the class plays a role as shown through embarrassment of being 'stupid' or having a reputation of messing around. It draws in many discussions about seating arrangements which may help or hinder the process of peer support. There is clearly a fine line between the support that a peer offers being very helpful and a comparison of perceived intelligence damaging the confidence of the student. Peer relationships around literacy have a key link to the emotive responses to literacy. The relationships appear to have the power to support student engagement in literacy or to turn them away.

Teachers

What became apparent through both interview stages and very early in all conversations was the role that the teacher plays on the boys' desire to do well in a subject, the feeling that they can succeed and the support methods that a

teacher employs in engaging and supporting learning. The boys were all very clear about the role that the teachers had to play and placed a great deal of significance on the importance of their role in supporting their learning and their confidence as learners.

To Ollie and James the greatest factor affecting whether they were going to choose to engage in a literacy task, especially if it was deemed challenging, was teacher personality. This appeared to be placed as more significant than teacher techniques. Ollie explained that a teacher needed to make learning and lessons fun "because you can get on with your work more." I asked the somewhat contradictory question "If a teacher takes it less seriously then you are more likely to get on with the work?" And got "Yes" as a response. James spent a considerable amount of time in both phases of the interviews explaining the significance of teacher personality on his ability and willingness to behave and focus in a lesson. He stated that "If the teacher is fine and gets you more then, you can almost have them as like a friend or like a person and then you like learn more because you like him." The idea of teachers being friends is certainly an interesting one as generally within secondary education one is told throughout the teacher training program that the students should not see us as friends and we should not seek to be friends with the students but here James is placing emphasis on this as a key indicator as to whether they will be liked by him and whether he will see them as a person. He goes on to explain how, in his opinion, his French teacher teaches in a "grumpy and boring way" which leads him to have a very negative opinion of her;

> "My French teacher, when I just say like 'hello,' and be keen and
>
> when I'm walking in she says, you know like '1, 2, 3, stop,' and I
>
> might say 'oh, you alright Miss,' just as I'm walking in, you know

like I would when I see and meet [headteacher] or [head of house] and then she [French teacher] will just be like, 'that's a warning.' Then I ask why and then she just sends me to the Improvement Room. Because I hate my French teacher and hate being in the classroom, I honestly hate her, like I'm not being funny but I will never like her. Sometimes I just sit there and she'll ask 'James, how do you answer this question' and I won't answer because I honestly despise her."

This strength of feeling is very strong and acts to dehumanise the French teacher in James' eyes. This appears to be based on a perceived lack of respect on both sides of the relationship. He explains how another French teacher has mountain biking in common with him so if his lesson is covered by the other teacher then he appears to do more work. He had talked earlier in the interview about how difficult he found French so I questioned further:

Me: "So, even though the work is, like you said, hard and you 'don't get it,' do you think you would try harder to work in that lesson if you felt that she was nicer to you and took more time?"

James: "Yeah definitely. Like, yep."

This emphasises the role of personality of the teacher over the perceived difficulties of the subject and perhaps an influence of reputation which may affect the teacher to student relationship. James however did explain that it wasn't just the role of the teacher;

"Yeah, the teacher is important but so is your like attitude to the work…It's probably more you in general and you'll have to like set a goal for yourself and like, I dunno, have some pride."

118

This seems in complete contrast to his view of the relationship that he has with the French teacher where it appears that he would be unable to have pride in his work or work to a higher level in that subject as a result of his relationship with the teacher. He does go on to discuss PE in more depth as he claims he has a poorer relationship with the PE teacher, but not as poor as French, but because PE is his favourite subject he wants to do well;

> Me: "So what's more important to you, that you like the subject or that you have a good relationship with the teacher to help you focus?"
>
> James: "I don't know I think they're both the same really, like they're both equal, like you can dislike the subject but if your teacher is actually nice and they're actually teaching you and they make the lessons enjoyable then you'll like that subject more but if you just enjoy the subject and your teacher is like my French teacher then you're not going to enjoy the subject, well like you are going to enjoy that subject because you like the subject but like you're not going to enjoy it as much because your teacher isn't as fun as the rest of them."

James is alluding to an interesting relational dynamic between the role of the curriculum subject and the role of teacher personality in generating engagement and focus from him as a learner. Despite James saying that motivation to do well should intrinsically be generated he placed a significant amount of importance on the role of teacher personality. This is shown through his repeated referral to it and in particular to his dislike of his French teacher.

As well as the significance of teacher personality the participants were able to identify mechanisms that the teachers used in order to generate engagement

from the participants. Rob felt that "writing about something you enjoy and [being] able to write more things you like" would help teachers to make reading and writing more interesting and exciting in school. He also talks about the teacher being able to "change stuff up and makes you have a bit of fun in between" when studying Jekyll and Hyde and this makes it more engaging and fun. Rob is not describing techniques for engaging in the text but is describing breaks in the lesson to "go on about something else and then gets back onto the bit we were on" allowing for a change of pace before proceeding. James mentioned that when he is losing focus a teacher could help him to get back on track and reengage with the lesson without resorting to using the strict behaviour policy. He explains:

> "if [Religious Education and Citizenship] teacher thinks I'm
> about to be naughty or go too far she might come over to me
> and say quietly that I'm pushing it or going too far so that does
> make me pack it in and do some work."

This links strongly to the idea of the teacher relationship being used positively to influence engagement in the learning and positive behaviour in the students however, this only appears to work when the foundation of that relationship on mutual trust is already established. There are also many examples of how the participants identified mechanisms which the teachers were using to support their learning and access to the literacy challenges they face.

The participants were able to identify very clear mechanisms by which teachers could help them with literacy within their lessons. Rob stated that teachers could help by splitting the work up "so there's not so many words so like little bits at a time." The idea of breaking text or work into smaller sections is echoed by Chris when he says, "we just take it out in chunks and then do it like that and do it in

sections." Chris was talking specifically about a large piece of text he was reading in English which was challenging. I asked:

> "What about if they give it to you more spread out? So, the same amount of text, like in the photograph here, but it was on every other line, do you think that would help or do you think it's more about having a smaller amount on each page?"
>
> Chris: "More about having a smaller amount on each page. Like that [points to photograph] and then the next bit on another page."

This shows that Chris needs to feel that the text is in a manageable chunk on one page which suggests that in larger sections the text can become overwhelming for Chris to feel that he can tackle it.

Chris returned to this idea in his second interview where he claimed that "spread out the words more" is a helpful strategy that teachers can use. This is a different emphasis from his first interview where he felt that having sections on different sheets was more useful. It raises questions here about the curriculum subject and whether that makes a difference. In the second interview Chris was talking generically about large paragraphs of text whereas in the first interview he was specifically talking about English literature which was arguably a more challenging text. Either way regarding the layout of text and potential support, what is evident is the emotional response to feeling overwhelmed in these situations.

Max was able to describe a specific way he could be helped with his reading difficulty by printing worksheets onto green paper. He says, "in science my teacher prints it out on green paper so I don't have to use an overlay and I can write without wiggling the overlay around. And I can write on the paper and stick it in my book without using the overlay." This clearly shows Max's appreciation of

the green paper although he has an alternative strategy of using a green overlay when this is not possible. He only mentioned that his science teacher was regularly printing onto green paper and in further questioning he said:

> "she kind of takes into consideration like how annoying it is for me trying to read on white paper and like smaller writing."
>
> Me: "So, do you think teachers need to be more aware?"
>
> Max: "In some aspects, yeah. If you're reading long things or they print it off in small writing then yeah they do."

These strategies are in Max's learning profile so it raises questions about whether teachers are taking these into consideration when they are preparing resources for their lessons or if, later in the academic year, as the second round of interviews were, teachers had forgotten or got busier and assumed that Max is coping and is able to access the materials given.

Ollie talked a lot about how the teacher themselves could support the learning. He said that when he's finding something really hard to read in English he can ask the teacher and "she'll read it to me which is useful." When asked if this was the same in all subjects he said that it's "slightly different [in science]. They show me how it works to help me explain." This demonstrates a visual application of the concept to be useful in science and an auditory method in English. All of these strategies probably crossover at different points in the curriculum but the awareness of the teacher doing them as a strategy to support could be questioned further.

Ollie's ability to explain how he was being supported in English and science differs considerably when he was questioned about French, his least favourite subject:

> Me: "Do you find your teachers give you lots of help to do that [in French]?"

Ollie: "Not really"

Me: "So in a perfect world if they were helping you in every way they could possibly help you…what would that look like?"

Ollie: "Probably help me more."

Me: "So what would they need to do in order to help you more?"

Ollie: "I don't know, I'm not sure."

Ollie's ability to assess and explain the help he is receiving across the curriculum appears to be affected by his relationship with the subject, the teacher and the accessibility or perceived likelihood of success.

Rob articulates that he relies on teacher support and help to access the vocabulary in the lesson the most. He describes how in both English and history he "asks Miss to help me with it" including long technical passages in history which he is required to read. In this particular circumstance he relies on the teacher explaining verbally what the class have read in order to access the work. He says that this is a "useful strategy." This is particularly important when considering the move in pedagogy away from verbal explanations and more towards independent reading and comprehension skills. In this case Rob appears to suggest that the verbal explanation provides a vital way in for him.

Chris explains that his key barrier to accessing the curriculum is his own handwriting skills. He says that one of the most helpful things his English teacher does is "gives us a piece of paper to stick in instead" and that this is particularly helpful when they are taking notes as a whole class such as bullet points. I asked why that was so useful and he stated:

"because sometimes my writing is like really bad and then I can't read it."

Me: "OK so you find your handwriting gets bad and then you can't read it. Why is that so much of a problem?"

Chris: "Because then, just say, we're revising, then you can't really revise then because you can't read it."

Me: "So how often would Sir in English print off stuff for you to stick in your book?"

Chris: "Quite often."

Me: "Do you have any other subjects where they do that for you?"

Chris: "No"

Me: "Would it be helpful if they did do that?"

Chris: "Yeah."

This emphasises Chris' awareness of a key strategy that supports his learning, particularly in his desire to be able to revise but also shows that not all teachers are doing this or perhaps are not aware that this is a simple thing that could provide a lot of support for Chris' learning.

Clearly the students who participated in this study were generally aware of the strategies that teachers use to help them access the curriculum and support them in the face of their literacy difficulty. What is also evident in that in some situations the student does not know what would help, perhaps in this circumstance the subject is deemed as too complex to the student, regardless of what help is given by the teacher. It is also clear that the students may know what helps them in one lesson but perhaps this does not happen in other curriculum areas. It leads to a question about whether students with literacy difficulties are able to ask for help and whether they have the confidence to ask for help.

Throughout both rounds of data collection and from all participants they all emphasised the role of the teachers in being a help or hinderance to accessibility of a subject in a practical sense but also in a personal sense. The individual identification of what works could potentially contribute to the workload of the teacher but also be a valuable mechanism for improving engagement and attainment in lessons. What was emphasized as significantly more important was the personal relationships between students and teachers. Most of the boys showed they would be willing to work hard at a subject that they found hard or disliked if they liked the teacher. That's not to say that a simple 'personality plan' for teachers of difficult classes would be enough as clearly shown here there are significant layers of complexity within that generated by emotional responses to literacy and the perceived value of the subject being studied.

Asking for help

If students are so aware, as suggested above, of the strategies that teachers can employ to support access to the curriculum it raises the question about whether students are telling teachers what strategies help them or, whether they have the confidence to ask for extra help when they are struggling to access the curriculum, or whether they have had support in order for their voice to be heard. Again, this links strongly with the emotional responses to literacy and beliefs around self-esteem and labelling, whether in a formal or informal sense (as will be explored further in the discussion).

Rob expressed great confidence when asking for help as I asked, "do you always ask for help if you need it?" and he replied very confidently, "yeah, every time." Max also talked about confidence to seek additional help by saying he was "fairly

confident, but they don't really take much notice some teachers." As well as his feeling that some teacher do not notice the help required Max also suggests that in some situations "you just don't ask. You can ask, but you just don't. It's not like I'm scared or not confident to ask but you just decide not to in that situation." This implies that other factors are strongly influencing whether Max feels able to ask for help in these circumstances.

All participants in the study were able to name at least one teacher where they felt comfortable enough to ask for help if they got stuck. Ollie stated he would confidently ask "most of them" for help and that in particular his English teacher and science teachers were most accessible to ask for help. Chris said that he would ask "any really" and that they were all pretty much the same when it came to getting help. In the second round of interviews I asked Rob about asking for help and he again expressed confidence in asking for help. I asked if there were any subjects where he felt less confident asking for help and he stated "no, not really" again highlighting confidence.

Despite this perceived confidence when asking for help there were some issues presented by some students. Chris in particular was reluctant to ask for help:

> Me: "Have you spoken to Miss to say that you find it really
>
> hard?"
>
> Chris: "No"
>
> Me: "No, is that not something you would do?"
>
> Chris: "No not really, I just keep on going really."

Whilst this does suggest that Chris has an element of resilience to persist in a task which he finds challenging it also suggests a lack of confidence in seeking support when he really needs it or a desire to hide that he finds it difficult from his teacher and/or peers. This also could suggest the role of the teacher relationship

once again. This was in a particular discussion about French, a subject which Chris finds the most difficult and where he has the most challenging relationship with staff. This is supported further by other participants with Ollie stating that he wouldn't ask his French teacher for help but would his Religious Education (RE) teacher because "[French teacher] is like plain and boring and then [RE teacher] makes it like fun and lets you have a laugh," clearly indicating that the personal relationship that he has with the teacher influences the likelihood of him seeking help and support when he needs it.

There is also a suggestion that the role of the class dynamic has an impact on whether students feel confident when asking for help. This was explained further by Chris:

> Me: "What subject do you find it hardest to ask for help in?"
>
> Chris: "Probably maths because she [the teacher] just always shouts at everyone."
>
> Me: "So you find it harder to get on with the teacher? What do you mean she shouts at everyone?"
>
> Chris: "Well, you can't really answer the question because you're in like a really silly class."

The impact of a 'silly class' on the confidence or ability to get help was also raised as an issue in Chris' second interview but this time the emphasis was on history lessons: "He just doesn't get a chance to like answer people's questions and that because everyone is like messing about." In Chris' maths lesson students are set by ability whereas in the history lesson students are mixed ability. This suggests that the classroom climate in these experiences is not supportive of Chris asking for help but also, in the maths group, challenges the idea that students will

automatically feel more confident to ask for help in a class of similar ability (Sukhnandan and Lee 1998).

<u>Summary of Asking for Help</u>

Clearly the confidence to ask for help stems not just from intrinsic confidence but also a range of social factors that influence the situation and 'allow' students to ask for help or not. This is suggested to be influenced by a silly class but also by the relationship that the student has with the teacher, again highlighting the role of the teacher in accessibility, as well as the curriculum subject or topic itself and the perception of the student about whether there is value in asking for additional help in that particular context.

Behaviour

Rob, Ollie, James and Chris all talked openly about misbehaving in some lessons and their experiences of this. Ollie talked a lot about particular subjects being the cause of his poor behaviour. He describes French lesson as most likely to result in trouble because "I just don't like it and it's difficult." I think it is interesting here how Ollie talks about the subject as both being disliked and difficult and makes the suggestion that the difficulty is perhaps a cause of the dislike resulting in poor behaviour. He felt that the teacher in his French lesson was "shouting and constantly on you all the time" but that the class continue to talk and mess around. When asked why the teacher getting him into trouble doesn't stop him talking and messing around he replied, "because I don't really want to learn French so I don't really care and it just does my head in." Again, this is interesting and points to the perceived value of the subject affecting motivation and thus his choice to behave or not. It does raise the question of whether his low value of the subject is

influenced by how difficult he finds it or a lack of aspiration for languages which is a common feature in our school currently. When asked, "If, in another lesson, something or a task was 'doing your head in' how might you respond?" Ollie stated: "just talk or muck about." Ollie wasn't really able to explain what he meant by a task 'doing his head in' but it suggests that the difficulty of a task influences Ollie's ability to engage and feel successful and therefore he makes the decision to opt out. This is exacerbated by the perception that the subject itself is not valuable or that he does not want to continue studying it. Ollie repeats the same issue in Religious Education by claiming that he "doesn't see the point" and therefore "I don't really do it and just sit there and talk," thereby creating a cycle of conflict with the teacher as well as making it more difficult for the rest of the class to learn therefore increasing his likelihood to get into trouble. The value of the curriculum subject influencing behaviour was also mentioned by James who stated that he messes around the most in art and RE because "I don't find those subjects that important, so I just mess around in them. I mean, it's not a good thing but…I do." So here, James accepts that his behaviour isn't 'good', but he continues to do it as he sees no value in the subject that he is taking. It is interesting to note the similarities in the view of RE as this is a subject that is compulsory in our school and results in a GCSE examination and yet both James and Ollie appear to not care that much about the impact of their current behaviour on the potential outcome. When considering Ollie's reluctance in French, at the time of interview, the options process had been completed and Ollie knew that he was not studying French for his GCSE's. It is often the case that for option subjects it is a challenge to keep students making progress after the options process is complete and students know if they are not taking that subject as a

GCSE option and there are no high stakes assessments at the end of compulsory study at Key Stage 3.

James referenced the idea that he shouldn't be misbehaving in lesson but accepts that he does. This notion of feeling bad or guilt around misbehaving is something that he expresses in both rounds of the interview process and at several points in our conversation and particularly in reference to interaction with his peers:

> Me: "Can you give me an example of one of the lessons you're in where you get distracted by your peers, even though the teacher is doing a reasonable job?"
>
> James: "Music, because [music teacher] is a great teacher. It's just that music isn't really a subject that I want to do so I just mess around in it. The other day we had an assessment on the piano and I just messed about. Which I feel like, cos I had an argument with [teacher] but she's a great teacher and someone you could say hi to outside of school as well as around school. So, I felt a bit bad, you know. Like I'd let her down almost."

Here, James clearly expresses guilt about letting the teacher down and even though he didn't want to study the subject he still placed value on the relationship with that teacher. I went on to ask:

> "So how does that make you feel if you think you've let a teacher down and it's someone you respect?"
>
> James: "I feel bad about it because she might not, you know, like you anymore and wouldn't have your back and stuff. Like you know [another female teacher, head of house] I absolutely love her, she's like my best mate as a teacher, she's an absolute legend."

The fact that James went on to talk about another teacher in such glowing terms when discussing letting another teacher down demonstrates the significant role that the relationship with the teacher has on his approach to behaviour. In the music lesson he didn't enjoy misbehaving, despite continuing to do it, as a result of the relationship he had with the teacher however, the impact of his peers was more significant than the influence of the respect that he had for that particular teacher.

Chris talks about the behaviour of the class affecting his learning. He says that "Miss will try to answer [students' questions] but people will like keep on talking over her so we don't hear." This was repeated in the second round of interviews where Chris was asked:

> "So the group is tricky so it's harder to get questions answered.
>
> So, what does that look like in the class when they're being
>
> tricky, what might they be doing?"
>
> Chris: "Like they mess about like throwing stuff at each other."

Chris does not claim that he has any involvement in the silliness of the group and alludes to it being 'them' and 'they' however at other points he accepts that he can lose focus and mess around a bit. Chris talks about the behaviour of the class as though he was not really a part of the class, as though his actions had no bearing on what other members of the class were doing and suggests he was merely observing this behaviour however, when looking at the behaviour logs received by Chris from teachers it suggests he is at the forefront of some of this silly behaviour, and whilst he may not always start it, he certainly appears to have no qualms about joining in. This again creates an interesting dichotomy in the narrative that Chris is using to describe his experiences in the classroom versus

the narrative that the teachers provide and the positioning of self 'outside' or 'inside' the behaviours being shown.

At times it appears that the participants found it challenging to not engage in poor behaviour for a variety of reasons, especially those around value of the curriculum and influence of peers. There appeared to be a slightly different approach to poor behaviour in the second round of interviews. In this situation Rob found that he needed to take a proactive approach to enable him to concentrate. He states: "I mean I was getting distracted in biology by [names two students] but I moved away." Rob here has decided that he needs to move in science to be able to cope. When looking at the curriculum mapping in science the GCSE curriculum is started in the middle of year 9 to allow enough time to cover all of the content. As a result of this Rob appears to have placed significance on the work he was doing and therefore made a decision to overcome the situation with his peers to enable him to focus in lesson. The notion of behaviour changing throughout the boys' experiences of school was also emphasized by James who described himself as "much naughtier" in year 7 and 8.

> Me: "How easy do you find it to, as you say, try and settle down in comparison to being naughty in year 7 and 8?"
>
> James: "Well, due to that, like being naughty, you sort of set yourself a reputation to be naughty so I don't know, teachers sort of talk about different students and they probably say, 'well, he's bad news' and all that and then you go into their lesson and be good and then you can change their minds."

James suggests that there may be some challenge in changing teachers' minds about a reputation previously earnt but from the way he describes it he suggests that it is possible to change teachers' minds over time. This suggests that James

believed that he held some responsibility for how teachers viewed him and his behaviour and that that he wanted to challenge this reputation he felt he had in order to do well. This highlights again the role of relationships both with teachers and with peers and will be explored further in the discussion.

Peer Relationships and Behaviour

James talked in great depth about the importance of popularity and his position within his group of friends and the rest of the school as well as his reputation. This was not really discussed by the other participants but the in-depth analysis of how James negotiated the role of 'popular boy' was interesting and a little surprising. He describes in great detail how he felt he 'had' to be naughty in year 7 and year 8 in order to make new friends:

> James: "Like, well, if you're popular, like you're in a big group of boys and you're popular then you, well you, kind of like, at the start you have to be like naughty. In year 7 I was like on Amber report [behaviour contract] for the whole year and then year 8 I was messing around and the start of year 9 I was just messing around and now I've started to get more like popular. If you mess around people like you more almost. And then after that you just settle down and do some work"

It is clear here that James felt obliged to be naughty in order to establish himself as one of the popular boys as part of a big group although he suggests that he is beginning to settle down. I wanted to explore the reasons for his decision to settle down and had somewhat assumed it would be the result of approaching his GCSE years and the importance of studying in order to achieve good grades:

Me: "So do you think that'll change as you go into year 10? Would you say your messing around has decreased throughout year 9, increased or stayed about the same?"

James: "Yes, decreased."

Me: " And do you think that will decrease further when you get into year 10?"

James: "Yeah because I'm pretty popular now and everyone knows me so I don't have to prove anything to anyone."

Me: "What do you mean by proving yourself?"

James: "Well it's just stuff, I mean I don't really understand…I don't really know like, you have to be naughty, like you have to be a bad kid cos then people will like you more cos they'll think you're more funny and they like friends that are funny. But then, after a while they just think you're annoying and then you're just annoying every five seconds cos you're just making jokes the whole time, so I've just stopped really now. I only just mess around with my mates and then I get told off because [the school] is a lot more strict than before with like the IR [Improvement Room] room."

James emphasises the changing nature of his peer group as they move through the school. He also recognises the different behaviour system in place which has changed between year 8 and year 9 and states the school is more strict as a result. It is really clear that James places a great deal of significance on the peer relationships that he has formed and wants to keep that friendship group intact as he progresses up through the year groups. James identifies that the influence of the group has had a strong impact on his behaviour, and it was only after his

position had been firmly established that he felt able to change his behaviour and misbehave less. The changing behaviour policy to one he views as 'more strict' is really suggested to be a minor consideration in his changing position.

James identifies himself as often being the 'class clown' and in certain circumstances this is a reputation that he feels he needs to uphold. He discussed how peer relationships encourage and affect him maintaining the role of class clown in certain lessons. He particularly refers to his teaching group. In our school, maths, English and science are set or streamed lessons with all others being taught in the same mixed ability groups. This mixed ability group generally remains the same all year and becomes known as the teaching group rather than the set group. Here James talks about the difference in positioning himself as 'class clown' in his set classes and his teaching group:

> Me: "We talked a little bit about, as you put it, your reputation for being the 'class clown.' Do you think that's something that happens to you in every lesson or do you think you are more 'clown' in some lessons that others?"
>
> James: "In my teaching group that's when I'm sort of the clown and then when I'm in maths, English and science I'm not because I don't mess around in those lessons."
>
> Me: "Why not so much in maths, English and science?"
>
> James: "Well, because they're the most important ones and I'm not in with the same people as I am when I'm in with my teaching group."
>
> Me: "OK, so do you think who you are with changes how you act in each lesson?"
>
> James: "Yeah."

Me: "Would you say that's common for you and other people or just you?"

James: "Well, um like yeah, common for all the like boys, like if you're in a group of boys and they're all like friends, then you're always gonna mess around. That's why I kinda like wanna move teaching groups but they won't let me because they don't wanna like move seating plans and everything."

Me: "Do you think that's the case for all boys?"

James: "Not all boys but like most of them."

James is expressing the challenges of maintaining the class clown position in a number of subjects when perhaps he does not want to as he suggests that he wishes to move teaching groups. He clearly values the position he has as being popular and the clown but recognises the potentially negative impact on his studies. Whilst he sees English, maths and science as the most important subjects and values being able to concentrate there he recognises that he would like to be able to do this in other subjects. This may well be the result of approaching his GCSE studies and recognising that he will need to be able to focus more as the year goes on and the stakes are raised in his studies.

Summary of Behaviour

In this study all of the boys were considered 'high-tariff' students on the school's behaviour monitoring system and yet they all spoke with different understandings of behaving poorly. Some identified themselves at the forefront of misbehaving in order to secure positive peer acceptance and thus the negatives of this, such as perceiving to let certain teachers down, had to be accepted. In other cases the boys identified themselves outside of poor behaviour and poor behaviour being

something which others demonstrated. The process of the boys positioning themselves within the peer structure and in relation to teachers appears to have an impact in whether the students will engage and thus positionality within the social construct of the classroom needs further exploration in the discussion section.

Gender Stereotypes

Most of the boys did not consider there to be a significant difference in the way that boys and girls study or work within the classroom. However, James, who identified himself as a popular boy who needs to be naughty to be popular, did refer to a significant gap between the way girls and boys react in some lessons. In this particular exchange James was talking about English and the studying of poetry in particular. He claimed he didn't really like it but he sat next to a girl which helped him a lot.

> Me: "Do you think there's a difference in how boys and girls react
>
> differently in that English class to poetry?"
>
> James: "Oh yeah."
>
> Me: "Why?"
>
> James: "Because, well, boys just don't understand it as much,
>
> well I mean they could understand it but I just think it's in boys'
>
> nature to mess around more than girls do. So like they just get
>
> on with it and do the work and listen but boys just like to have a
>
> laugh and mess around and that."

James is suggesting that the intrinsic nature of boys and girls affect their engagement with poetry. He begins to suggest boys don't understand poetry as well as girls and then changes his mind to argue that boys could understand it but

their nature prevents them from engagement as they just mess around. James is confidently referring to hegemonic gender stereotypes around boys and poetry but moves away from a certain idea around it being more accessible to girls in the first place. Given James' literacy difficulty, poetry could be fairly complex and difficult for him to feel that he is succeeding in. James however, appears to believe that the nature of boys causes them to mess around more which led to more detailed discussions around the differences in focus between boys and girls and behaviour:

> Me: "Do you think more boys than girls mess around or more girls than boys mess around?"
>
> James: "I mean girls don't mess around. They mess around when they're supposed to mess around like in break times and lunch time, like, I'm not saying that girls don't get in trouble, like they will get in trouble but if you go to the IR [Improvement Room] there will be more boys in there than girls."
>
> Me: "Why do you think that is?"
>
> James: "Because they wanna focus, they like wanna do something with their life and boys just don't really give one, like they haven't thought about in perspective."

James clearly feels that girls are more adept at channeling their behaviour to more socially acceptable times. He starts by claiming that girls don't mess around and then goes on to say girls do get in trouble. It is interesting how James analyses these particular ideas and almost justifies boys' more frequent poor behaviour by claiming it is a part of their nature. He identifies the idea that boys, as a homogenous group, do not put their behaviour into a wider perspective of life and future achievements. He appears to have been able to do this in that he is able to

identify the link between his actions in school and outcomes and therefore his future life chances however, earlier in the interview he claims he needs to mess around in order to continue with his position of popular boy. Here James appears to place his peer position at greater value than his potential future outcomes and almost counters his own view of suggesting boys don't care. When asked why he feels girls have greater focus and want to do more with their life he replied:

> "Because if you like say anything to your mates and say oh I don't wanna do this I wanna focus this lesson it's just not gonna work, you're not actually gonna work, they're just gonna wanna have a laugh and then it carries on going and carries on going until you like don't learn anything at all."

This clearly shows the peer pressure that James faces as a popular boy to engage in messing around in order to maintain his position is quite significant and not something he feels that he is able to resist or put a stop to. James would not risk losing his friendships by resisting the messing around.

He talks with such confidence around this issue that it is clear that he has considered it quite carefully. In this context at least, James views boys and girls as intrinsically different and yet the other participants did not mention this at all or, in the case of Chris, he didn't think there was really a difference in how boys and girls approached lessons. The positionality of the student in the greater hierarchy of the class and year group appears to make a difference to the perspective of the boys in terms of their engagement with learning as well the engagement of others.

I have to admit, that to an extent I expected more of the participants to mention the stereotyped view of boys and girls and their attitudes to learning even if they did not feel that it applied to them and their position directly. It is interesting that only the boy who would position himself as being firmly in the popular group at school would identify so strongly with stereotypical viewpoints and the impact that his peers have on cementing and enacting within the stereotyped boundaries. His use of 'boys' as a phrase when talking about not seeing behaviour in perspective suggests that he sees himself somewhat outside of the homogenous group of 'boys' but that he cannot avoid it as the peer pressure is significant enough to ensure that he continues to fit into that role and position however the other participants appeared to view boys as others and not part of their own identity in such a significant way.

The Literacy of Home

The purpose of this research was to consider the boys' perspectives of literacy both at school and at home. At all points of the research process I reminded participants that they could take pictures of literacy both at home and at school and also when given directives to take photographs I asked for them to take photos of literacy at home. I did not receive that many photographs of literacy at home with students often saying they forgot. It does highlight to an extent the view that literacy mostly happens at school and things which start in school, such as this research, do not easily or often carry on into the home environment in the case of these boys. Despite this there was some engagement in literacy outside of school which they were mostly able to talk about in interview rather than having photographs of.

Frequency and type of engagement in literacy at home

Rob took a photograph of a heart shaped sign in the kitchen which said "You eat what's served, with love" as something that he sees every day. When asked about it he said that there are lots of this type of item in his house. He was fairly nonchalant about the sign and the frequency of others suggesting he does not see them as important literacy events. He showed me a photograph of an app on his phone which he described as "something I find extremely easy to read because I just see it every day like every three hours or something." I asked what it was and he explained "it's just a word on my phone and I send things to my friends every day on it." This was a social media app which allowed group messaging. Rob was clear that he found it easy to read but it was unclear whether he was referring to the content within the app, such as what his friends were sending to him, or the app logo itself. He referred to seeing it frequently which suggests he was talking about the details within the app being easy to read suggesting that the communication that he and his friends have are on a similar level and therefore his literacy difficulty does not have an impact on the social relationships that he is forming through language online. It appears that conversation through social media formed an important part of Rob's experience at home as in the second round of interviews when asked: "do you read outside of school?" He stated: "Erm, not really, I mean I'll read messages that my friends send but that's it" which highlights the importance again of maintaining friendships through social media. This raises greater questions about whether Rob would continue to interact with his friends in the same way if they were using vocabulary that was more advanced than he was able to access or whether this was unlikely as his peers may well be using accessible vocabulary or slang terms.

Reading social media was also mentioned by Max who again, took a photograph of his phone and said, "I just read through things like updates and social media." When asked if he reads predominantly social media or other forms of media as well, he stated: "Err, quite a lot but I'm quite into mountain biking so I'll read quite a lot of reviews for products that I might want to buy." Max said that he engages in reading on his phone every day for approximately one hour. For Max he used his hobby of mountain biking to develop greater engagement in reading outside of school but didn't view it as something which particularly connected to school at all. James was similar in that his interest in cars sparked reading outside of school. He had taken a photograph of *Fast Car* magazine and stated that:

> "well, um, I just go home, see the magazines and read it about bikes and cars and learn more because I want to be an engineer when I'm older so I get car magazines so I can learn about engine parts, about wheels, mods and all that."

For James, it could suggest that he has potentially identified a gap in the school curriculum in that he feels that his ambition to be an engineer means he needs to know greater detail about cars and bikes which are not covered by the curriculum at school. It is interesting how he has identified this gap and feels that he is taking some proactive steps to challenge this, as well as engaging in enjoyable literacy practices outside of school. On the other hand, it could appear that he views these events as less home versus school as his selection of material is brought about by hobby but also perceived value to future education opportunities and he recognises that what he is reading outside of school could contribute to this in a positive way.

Although not traditionally associated with literacy two participants linked reading at home to gaming. Chris was asked:

Me: "Do you read and write at home?"

Chris: "Sometimes yeah. Well sometimes, cos I always play games and sometimes I'll have like the subtitles on so I'll read them."

Me: "OK so you have the subtitles on the games that you're playing so you'll read them along with the game. Is there anything else that you'll read and write at home?"

Chris: "Like, um, like, TV, newspapers sometimes when like when my Dad's reading it. Erm, letters."

These findings indicate a possible distinction between school and social literacies and how young people interact and view the two distinctions as well as how teachers could act to mitigate or draw on and explore differences between the situated literacy experiences (Hannon 1995, Hull and Schultz 2002, Gee 2004, Dickie 2011). It appears that these boys had individual experiences of the relationship, non-relationship or potential for relationship between home and school literacy.

Chris found it quite difficult to talk about the reading and writing that he engaged with at home and was only able to give very infrequent times and examples of him engaging in literacy outside of school. The nature of his response here does suggest he was trying to think of an example rather than it being something that he did on a very regular basis emphasising the challenge that Chris faces in engaging in literacy as he is engaging on a less frequent basis than his peers. Ollie found it even more of a challenge to give examples of reading at home.

Ollie: "I play on my Xbox."

Me: "Does that involve reading and if it does is it hard or easy reading?"

Ollie: "Easy."

Me: "What is it that makes it so easy?"

Ollie: "The words are quite easy and it reads them out too so I

can hear them as well as read them."

Ollie identifies that the key to making it easier for him to read here is for it to be read aloud and also to include vocabulary that is not taxing or stretching for him thus making it easy to read. He initially did not feel that he did any reading or writing at home and that's where the statement of 'I play Xbox' came from showing that he did not automatically see reading as something which happened at home at all as he did not respond without a fair amount of prompting that it may include reading. This leads to its own reflection of how much his response may have been for my benefit rather than a genuine realisation that he reads outside of school.

Clearly each of the participants has a very different level of engagement with literacy outside of school but they do all have interests and hobbies at their core. There has been significant research conducted on engaging boys in the school curriculum by using books or topics which are most likely to interest them (Majzub and Rais 2010, Scott 2016) but here it is clear that even if the topic is interesting they engage on very different levels with different degrees of complexity. It appears that they stay relatively within their comfort zone of language, except perhaps James who sees his reading as an educational tool for his future aspiration. Max was asked whether he found the literacy that he engages with at home harder or easier than the work at school. He replied:

"I enjoy it more [home] but probably about the same [in

difficulty]. It just makes me want to do it a bit more because it

is more enjoyable."

The identification of similar levels of challenge is interesting here as all of the boys reported difficult areas of the curriculum earlier in the interviews. Max's overall view of the difficulty is fairly even, but it could be argued that it is very difficult to summarise all of the literacy experiences of the school day into a very simple harder or easier type of question. Despite this, it does indicate that the view of difficulty changes depending on what is being asked.

The clearest overlap in literacy between the home and at school is in homework. When asking the boys about their experiences of homework it was clear here that they had both varying degrees of support from home as well as varying degrees of desire to complete homework.

Chris felt that he was able to get help in that he would "probably ask my sister or my brother" if a homework task that had been set was particularly difficult. He also commented that it was "quite often" that he required help for completing his homework suggesting that the tasks being set were not at a level that Chris could tackle independently however he generally endeavored to complete them. Rob also commented that he felt the amount of homework had increased over the year and that he would "ask someone" if he found a piece was particularly tricky to read or write although he was unable to be specific about who he would ask in these circumstances. In Ollie's case he would take a different approach to difficult homework:

> Me: "Do you do your homework?"
>
> Ollie: "Yeah most of the time."
>
> Me: "And do you find the majority of the homework tasks set easy or hard?"
>
> Ollie: "Sometimes it's really hard so I don't do it."
>
> Me: "Why's that? Can you give me an example?"

Ollie: "Most of the time they don't explain what you have to do with it."

Me: "So if it's hard then you choose not to do it at that point?"

Ollie: "Yeah."

So in this circumstance Ollie would opt out of completing the homework at all should he find the task too difficult to complete independently. Again, this links back to the relationship formed with the teacher as well as teacher knowledge of the pupil so that they can provide differentiated homework that is accessible therefore allowing students to succeed. It also suggests that the reprimand of detention for non-completion of homework is not acting, in this case, as a deterrent. Potentially Ollie would rather get into trouble than expose or perhaps face his weakness in completing tasks independently.

Parents and Role Models at home

Only Ollie and James really talked about the influence of those at home and for Ollie he demonstrated a real reluctance to engage in reading or writing at home and states that he wouldn't ask for help at home at all if he came across something difficult. When asked why not he stated: "I just wouldn't." This statement could suggest that he is embarrassed to ask for help or it could be that he doesn't have anyone that he could confidently ask for help. Ollie found it difficult throughout the interview to talk about home and had not taken any photographs suggesting that he perhaps is reluctant to let me, as teacher and researcher, see into his home life. Ollie's parents 'traditionally' are reluctant to engage with the school and when they have engaged it has generally been for negative reasons, such as Ollie getting into significant trouble, and therefore they have been difficult when working with staff in the past in feeling that the school are deliberately trying to exclude or

remove Ollie from lessons. In Ollie's case this results in assumptions being made within school about parents appearing to 'not care' about their child's education but these assumptions can be risky as in the case of Parker et al's (2016) research they found that some parents with children who had been excluded multiple times or got in to trouble repeatedly avoided communication with the school as it was perpetually negative and possibly came with it, a perceived judgement of parenting capacity. Since Ollie had arrived as secondary school with a label of 'disruptive pupil' in year 7, this could have been the main theme of contact between school and home over the years of Ollie's education.

This type of home set up with an apparent lack of support for school is different to the engagement experienced by James. When James is getting into trouble at school he explains how his parents react:

> "They, er, like they don't really do anything, I mean they just, they don't really say anything to me, they just say how they're disappointed and that kind of gets you down a little bit more like, knowing that your parents are disappointed in you so like you just…I haven't been in trouble for a long time at school because my Dad's like, nice to me now, like when I'm in school and I'm doing well and they get phone calls from school to say I'm doing well they they're like proud of me but when they get phone calls from school saying I've gone to the IR room and I've sworn at teachers then they get mad at me. Like, they don't really take anything away, they don't ground me, they just don't treat me like they normally do, they don't take me anywhere."

This is a contrasting statement as he claims they don't do anything but that he is not taken out with the rest of the family or where he wants to go and that he does

not like the feeling of his parents being disappointed in him. His statement that his Dad is 'nice to me now' suggests that he perceives the change in this relationship as only the result of him getting into less serious trouble in the months since our first interview. The influence of parents here is suggested to be significant as the feeling of disappointment when in trouble and James' happiness that his Dad is 'nice to him' as a result of improved behaviour could act as a motivating factor for James to continue to improve his engagement at school. This overall suggests the role of parental influences outside of school to be an important motivating factor in the engagement in school. James spoke proudly of a role model who is not part of his immediate family:

> "I've got a role model, I think he's my role model, I would definitely say, my Mum's best friends' son, he's like 20 but me and him get on really well. We've been mountain biking together and we get on really well and he's an engineer. He's got a really nice car and like all my life I've just basically wanted to be like him."

Clearly for James, who spoke of wanting to be an engineer himself, this person has a significant influence on his life both in terms of his desired future and wanting the role model to continue to like him so that they can mountain bike and be friends. This again emphasises the significance of the relationships at home to overcome some of the literacy challenges and appears to give James a motivating factor to work hard.

Summary of home literacy

Clearly the greatest overlap between school and home lies in homework but what some participants were able to articulate is some of the challenges faced when homework was set that was inaccessible thus creating a barrier to their learning.

These barriers to learning can exacerbate the reluctance that the learners already feel towards literacy and run the risk of putting the students off more and thus creating greater behaviour issues within the lessons themselves, particularly by reinforcing the students' sense of weakness or inadequacy.

The range of home support is also clear from the small number of participants who discussed or suggested the support they get from home both in a practical sense and in the sense of engaging in difficult behaviour. The role of parents and role models or positive influences is emphasised here by some boys and clearly has an impact on how the boys engage with school on different levels. The relationships between teacher and student in school are significant but the relationship between parent and child and school clearly also has an important role to play in engaging boys and going some way to explain the experiences when literacy challenges are presented. It may be that this relationship is damaged and/or challenged when poor behaviour is added into the complex mix.

The Perceived Purpose of Literacy

Interestingly the view of literacy as important was almost inherent in the responses that the participants gave. It rarely came up as part of the interview and was to an extent, assumed on all sides to be of value. In retrospect, the focus of the research being on literacy would suggest to the boys that I valued the significance of literacy but also the culture of school from entry at four years old all the way up to GCSE indicates the value of literacy within school but also within society thus reiterating the accepted view of the importance of being literate. The participants were asked to take photographs of an important part of literacy and this was an area the boys struggled to describe or take photographs of something that they considered to be an important part. Certainly Chris echoed the familiar

view that literacy was important "because if you never know how to read and that you won't be able to get a job and that." When asked why else he considered literacy to be important he replied "dunno" suggesting he was rehearsed in the standard statement of literacy being important for a job. Max echoed this view by stating "because you know in life you need to learn to read and write and if you don't…well you're stuffed really aren't you." Whilst Max suggested wider implications of learning to read and write as important, he did take a photograph of a highlighted piece of text as an important part of literacy. When asked why he thought this was an important part of literacy he explained:

> "Because it kind of works on your skills of taking parts of things
> and explaining why you need to do it and why it's in there. It kind
> of links to history a bit because when you take pieces of sources
> and like it's quite important to do it."

Max is recognizing some of the cross-curricular literacy skills that are used in a wider context but suggesting that highlighting develops his literacy skills. He is able to explain the importance of being able to do this in reference to the skills required in the GCSE English and History examinations but not in the wider context of literacy. He viewed an important part of literacy as the part which helps his skills to improve the most which was an unexpected interpretation of the term important and again suggests the value he places on being literate. This highlights further the view of the participants that literacy is largely something which is 'done' and learned in school to apply to school based concepts in order to secure a job in the future. There was no apparent consideration that literacy learning continues after the GCSE exams, it is viewed as a vehicle to employment for both Max and Chris.

Conclusion

There are many different facets to the ideas presented by the participants in this study. In many cases it is a complex and convoluted system of beliefs and mechanisms which see these boys navigate literacy difficulties and poor behaviour. This is interwoven with negotiating masculinity, peer relationships, relationships with teachers and relationships with their parents. The key factor here appears to be the relationships and in many cases it was clear that the relationship was having an impact on the way the student responded or reacted to a particular question.

Masculinity was a research strand that I was interested in prior to this research being conducted. Only one participant engaged with the notion of being a 'likely lad' (Bleach 1998, Francis 1999) and feeling the pressure of being popular but he was crucially aware of the impact that this was having on his education as well as some relationships with teachers. Whilst only one was able to explain this idea clearly there were others who alluded to the notion of masculinity impacting on their behaviour and engagement but perhaps not being able to verbalise these feelings and pressures effectively.

A key concept that came up repeatedly was the relationships that the students had with teachers and the notion of respect and help which is also tied in with the perceived value of the subject being taught. If the value of the subject is perceived as low as well as the student perceiving that the teacher does not help them then the risk of disengagement increased. The students suggested that it was very hard to return from this type of relationship, often using very strong language such as 'hate' to describe the relationship with both teacher and subject.

The relationship with peers was also considered vital in terms of engagement and ability to engage by the peer group giving permission almost to learn or not. It

appeared that in large groups of boys if there was a particular 'culture' of how to respond in certain classroom situations then it was irrelevant what the individual wanted in terms of their own learning in that context. Some participants were popular enough to be able to manipulate the ability to work but in other cases this was almost impossible and ensured that the boys were almost restricted in how they respond. Not all boys respond in the 'typical' manner of boys in silly behaviour. In some circumstances it was the friendship group that had a positive impact on a participants' ability to engage with the students offering each other support and help in challenging circumstances.

Whilst all students viewed literacy to have an important role to play in their education it was generally seen as a vehicle to get any job as employers would seek to confirm the grades. When seeking information about the literacy that students engaged with at home there was a focus on social media and gaming but little identification of 'traditional' reading and writing in any way connected to school unless it was homework. Even in the case of homework some of the participants chose not to engage with this, especially if the task was identified as being too challenging. The participants were able to identify strategies which teachers could use to support their understanding of literacy and access to the tasks presented however, few said that all teachers used these methods consistently. This raises the further question about whether teachers are doing enough to support the learning of students with literacy difficulties. In some cases specific intervention is supporting students to improve their behaviour but this is not having a universal effect and perhaps a greater understanding of these students needs may have a greater impact on engagement.

Some of the participants openly recognised through discussion that aspects of literacy were challenging for them whereas others did not mention it. This

suggested that some had a degree of 'acceptance' and possible value in the label of literacy difficulties whereas others led this to some version of stigmatisation and an essence of avoiding situations which might have resulted in a label being applied. To an extent, the labelling of a literacy difficulty, formally or informally, may have an impact on a students' view of self, thus potentially impacting engagement in literacy support.

What all of the findings do indicate is a highly complex, personal and social experience of literacy difficulties which highlights several key aspects in this complex world. When reflecting on the research questions set out at the beginning of this research it becomes evident that the data produced through the research methods selected is broader than the initial questions. The Discussion chapter focused on these key areas of debate that arose from the generation of data rather than addressing each research question in term allowing for an iterative process of data analysis in order to really understand the perspectives of the participants and their literacy difficulties at that particular moment in their education. As a result the Discussion chapter is presented with three key foci: firstly, the performance of masculinity and how this is used or not to mask, hide, or own a literacy difficulty. Secondly, the labels debate and the participants 'owning' their own literacy difficulty and the possible impact of the label of self-esteem and identity, which could be influencing engagement, or not, with support and intervention. Thirdly a discussion on behaviour and literacy and in particular, the possible interrelationship between literacy difficulties and poor behaviour as a mechanism for hiding those difficulties. Therefore, the key areas of the research questions identified in the introduction are addressed but in a more responsive way to the data generated in order to maintain the emphasis placed on certain aspects by the boys themselves.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The presentation of the Discussion chapter is in three key areas, as mentioned as the end of Chapter 4. These three areas were derived using the data gathered and the analysis of the data leading to key themes which offered direct comparative opportunities as well as a focus on the research questions. The research questions set out at the beginning of this research are addressed but through the key themes rather than answering each question in turn. This helps to give a closer examination of the contradictory factors that are influencing boys' experiences of literacy difficulties and draws attention to the complex social, emotional and educational responses to literacy. In order to see these themes emerging the research questions were:

1. How do boys with identified literacy difficulties talk about literacy?

2. How do boys with identified literacy difficulties talk about their own struggles with literacy?

3. How do boys with identified literacy difficutlies talk about behaviour in the classroom?

4. How do boys with identified literacy difficulties articulate their perceptions of any relationship between gender and literacy?

Each of these questions can be seen to have strands throughout the key focus of the discussion chapter through the analysis of the themes of performance of masculinity; identity and literacy difficulties with a focus on labelling and stigma and finally, a discussion on behaviour and SEND.

Performance of Masculinity

One key finding to come from the research is the awareness that James had of how he felt he needed to perform as the 'clown' in order to receive the following

of his peers and social recognition of being one of the popular ones. This leads to a discussion of how, in this particular context, masculinity is being performed as a carefully constructed aspect on one's identity and in this case appears to follow the dominant forms of hegemonic masculinity (Jackson and Dempster 2009) and appears to take precedence over engagement with literacy. Performance of masculinity has a growing discourse within research (Epstein 1998, Younger and Warrington 2007) and appears to have a significant role to play in the secondary setting as students vie for position within the social hierarchy. Mills (2001) argues that "the desire for manly success, and consequently, societal respect, is also complemented by fear of being one of those subordinated boys/men who provide a means by which other boys/men can assert their manliness" (Mills 2001:p.48-9). In this study James spent a considerable amount of time expressing his own carefully considered position within his class and within his peer group. His identification of himself as a 'popular' boy meant that he needed to uphold this position in a range of classes and it appears to have affected his responses to learning and social relationships in certain situations. This is considerably different to the presentation of Chris whose perspective of school is very different and he identifies as being outside of the popular boys by talking about 'other' boys being responsible for 'mucking around' and poor behaviour. This leads to a really interesting comparison between positionality and how this affects behaviour, engagement and attitudes to literacy and raises further discussion about the performance of masculinity and the role that schools can play in creating the social environments which can either sanction or discourage displays of hegemonic masculinity.

James in particular is clear about his position of popular boy and went to great lengths to explain what that performance entailed. In Interview 1 James was

talking about moving schools for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math's) specialism but was reluctant to do so as a result of his position as popular boy. He stated:

> "Like, if you've got good friends then you don't really want to move to another school. I moved here at the start of year 7 and I'm pretty popular now so I don't want to like start all over again cos it's pretty hard as you almost, when you join a new school, have to get in trouble just to make yourself popular. It's definitely like that here cos I got in a lot of trouble in year 8 and 7 but now I'm trying to settle down and actually do the work."

This indicates how James is aware of the peer pressure to position himself and is also aware of how he is able to manipulate certain situations to his perceived advantage in developing his position as popular. In James' case he is performing as 'naughty boy' in order to gain social kudos and is exceptionally aware of how he is manipulating the situation to suit his needs for social acceptance. Dalley-Trim (2007) identified similar in a Year 9 classroom in Australia. She found that the students in her study "perform[ed] as embodied gendered subjects and, in doing so, position themselves and others as particular kinds of gendered subjects (Dalley-Trim 2007:p.204)." The positioning of others is particularly pertinent here as Chris identified himself as outside of the popular group stating that the popular boys were the 'others.' This adds to the debate around the positionality of oneself against other perceived factions within the class. In a study of popularity in Elementary school classrooms in America, Adler, Kless and Adler (1992:p.173) identified that "boys in the high-status crowd [those with the most popularity] were the 'class-clowns' or troublemakers in the school, thereby becoming the center of attention" which resonates with James' view of his own position. James reiterates

this performance in the second interview by focusing on the position of 'class clown' in order to gain popularity with both boys and girls:

> "I'm kind of like the class clown, like I've always been the class clown and if I stop then everyone's just like 'James, make us laugh or something' and I'm just like, I feel like boys mess around more than girls. Girls will actually do something. I mean I wanna do something but I've got a reputation to make people laugh so you can't really stop. Sometimes I do the work but like sometimes I'll just mess around the whole lesson and just don't listen."

Here James is exploring the notion of him needing to maintain his reputation of class clown and that there is clearly an expectation from his peers in those classes to act a certain way and therefore has a significant impact on his ability to engage in the learning taking place within the classroom. James clearly places a great deal of emphasis on retaining his position as he argues that even though he 'wants to do something' he does not feel that he can in that situation as he has his reputation to uphold thereby impacting his ability and/or willingness to engage in the lesson taking place around him. The apparent 'cool' masculinity, which James is suggesting gains him popularity, has been considered by others and appears to be perpetuated most strongly in the classroom setting (Jackson and Dempster 2009:p.341-2). This strongly suggests that James is actually limited in his choices despite appearing to hold a position of power (Adler, Kless et al. 1992) as a popular boy. Connell (1989p. 295) found that despite power, "to picture this as a marketplace, a free choice of gender-styles, would be misleading" as the power is held by the view of the rest of the peers rather than in the hands of the individual highlighting the role of peer pressure: "It [gender performance] is a collective process, something that happens at the level of the institution and in the

organisation of peer groups relationships (Connell 1989:p.295)," emphasising the nature of the environment as having an impact on the performance of masculinity. The environmental impact is suggested by Connell (1989) to be at an institutional level but Chris suggests that this can be at a much smaller level by having an impact on the classroom space itself, especially highlighted in certain curriculum areas. Chris was asked about his history lesson which he had stated was difficult to get his questions answered by the teacher as the group are difficult and generally more poorly behaved than in some other lessons. He said that the boys were sillier than the girls and that led to the following exchange:

> Me: "Ok, so why, as a boy yourself, do you think that boys are more silly?"
>
> Chris: "To try and get attention or something. To like, try and get popular."
>
> Me: "OK. Do you think that happens more in some subjects than in others?"
>
> Chris: "Well, it depends what teacher we have. If we have a strict teacher, then they won't like do it."

What was interesting here was that although I had suggested Chris was a part of the homogenous group of boys he, in his response, positioned himself outside of this group by using the word 'they.' This suggests that Chris identifies the role that some boys within his classes assume through messing around and he identifies that it has a purpose behind it in terms of gaining popularity or attention. Neither James nor Chris suggested that the messing around may be to avoid the work as a result of it being too difficult for them to access. This lack of consideration of positionality being used to avoid difficult work suggests that the hegemonic view of masculinity that is successful but doesn't work hard is having some influence

here and relationships with teachers as identified as strict or not is more influential in engaging with literacy and learning. In their study of high achieving boys and popularity Skelton, Francis and Read (2010:p.335) found that the "behaviours [shown by these pupils] are rarely excessive: their academic achievement is performed as being relatively 'effortless'" however negotiating this position is actually incredibly difficult and involves a great deal of effort from the student in order to maintain their apparent position through very strongly gendered performances "which again reflected normative, monological productions of 'boying' and 'girling'". This is supported by Jones (2011:p.172) in her work around writing which suggested that "schools have become sites that have amplified rather than challenged gender stereotypes" and this stereotype appears to be projected by both Chris and James.

This is emphasised by James when he talked of 'having' to misbehave in order to perform this popularity act however, Chris identified himself as outside and anecdotally is not a part of James' popular group within school. Adler et al (1992:p.176) found that those boys who "struggled scholastically, who had low self-confidence in accomplishing educational tasks, or who had to be placed in remedial classrooms lost peer recognition," however James manages to negotiate this and maintain popularity. This could be the result of his confidence within his peer group or the efforts, as he described it, of being 'naughty' in earlier years in order to become popular, whereas Chris is outside of this peer group and thus may be losing self-confidence. In his study of teenagers that had been diagnosed with dyslexia Alexander-Passe (2006:p.257) found that "both recognised and unrecognised dyslexics receiving insufficient or inappropriate support can feel devalued at school and turn to deviant behaviour." This can be identified to be the case with Chris as he struggles on a daily basis to follow the rules of the school

policy and faced regular sanctions compared to Max who found that having lots of educational input and support for his literacy difficulty had rapidly improved his confidence and he was able to behave better as a result and found that he wanted to work hard in literacy lessons to be able to get better grades. Chris' apparent opting out of education may well be some evidence to support the view presented here of the impact of low self-esteem.

All of this suggests that James' key priority in this circumstance is the position within the peer hierarchy rather than the work itself or the literacy difficulty. James is identifying himself as the clown rather than the boy who finds the work hard and Chris identifies himself outside of this group and does identify himself as someone who finds the work difficult and is disengaged. The role of the peer group in these circumstances could be the key reason for James and Chris' vastly different experiences and positionality within the classroom and hierarchy of the boys. This raises the importance again of the peer relationship and the influence this appears to have over the boys' mechanisms for engagement in learning as well as the microcosm of school that this hierarchical structure creates. It appears to be incredibly difficult to avoid or challenge this structure and thus it appears that school is reinforcing gender stereotypes that researchers and educators are trying hard to challenge. This is emphasised especially well by Askew and Ross (1988) who researched sexism within the classroom and found:

> "Schools are society in microcosm. Their purpose is to perpetuate
>
> the values and ideologies dominant in society, they are organised
>
> so as to achieve this (p.106)"

The nature of school in itself appears here to contribute significantly to the performance of positionality within the peer hierarchy. Whilst James was able to articulate this performance, Chris was not and therefore they have different

approaches to the process of education and in coping with and experiencing their literacy difficulty. The negotiation of peer relationships and impact of them in engagement can appear here to be significant.

The role that peer relationships has on engagement has been seen throughout the responses to interviews by more participants than James and Chris however, James and Chris have shown a different perspective on their positionality within the peer relationship group. Whilst both present similarly in terms of their literacy difficulty and behaviour challenges it is clear that they experience school, learning and their literacy difficulty in very different ways. When looking more closely at their behaviour records the things they get into trouble for represent their different experiences of schooling a great deal. James is frequently in trouble for 'off task' behaviour, being 'silly' and making the class laugh. He frequently gets sent out of his lessons for fooling around as the descriptions state. Chris, on the other hand, tends to get in trouble for not engaging in the learning enough, switching off from the task and not completing homework. This suggests that Chris' literacy difficulty is more 'obvious' in the classroom as his lack of engagement can potentially be seen to be caused by his literacy difficulty yet James' trouble tends to come from his positioning of 'clown' which may be more difficult to challenge as James places such significance on that relationship.

Evidently the pressure to maintain his cool position whilst appearing to not engage with the work is James' method for getting through education and school and this is different to Chris. However, what is similar is that there is little exploration of their literacy difficulty being a feature of their constructed positions. There is a suggestion here that the 'inside' or 'outside' position of the boys is also influenced by their academic ability however, this is compromised by their literacy difficulties. What this does show is a some-what gendered understanding of literacy

experiences but more-so than this is the identification of the complex social experiences of having a literacy difficulty in school.

Identity and Literacy Difficulties: Labels, stigma and performance

All of the students who participated in this study had identified literacy difficulties and as such had a pupil profile on the schools Inclusion area which detailed the strategies that teachers should employ to best promote progress in the individual student. Not all of the participants were engaging in additional literacy support outside of their usual curriculum, although all were invited, some opted out or behaved so poorly they were asked to leave. The differing attitudes of participants to literacy support led to an interesting comparative opportunity. Of particular note in this case was Rob and Ollie. Rob willingly participated in additional literacy lessons three hours over the course of the schools two-week timetable whereas Ollie was invited but chose not to engage in additional literacy support. Earlier in the academic year, prior to this research commencing Ollie had been told to attend the additional literacy sessions however, his conduct was so poor and it rapidly increased his behaviour logs that the decision was taken for him to be removed from the support group. This is a particular issue in itself which will be discussed more later. The findings of this study presented two alternative viewpoints on seeking additional support and therefore, by extension, acceptance or not of the label of literacy difficulty. This introduces the broader discourse around the benefits or not of labelling and whether labelling affects a students' experience of literacy difficulties. In this case it could be argued that Rob and Ollie demonstrate the two sides of that argument.

<u>Using formal labels</u>

Most of the research around labelling has taken place for those students identified as having a formal diagnosis of dyslexia and a common theme is that labelling has both positive and negative connotations for both the student and their families (Riddick 2000, Burden and Burdett 2007, Solvang 2007). In this study the participants did not have this formal designation of dyslexia although several discussed having dyslexia and used this as a term to discuss the aspects of literacy they found difficult. They did however have an identified literacy difficulty and the debated differences between these were considered in the literature review. In this case both labels are being considered as formal as they have been ascribed to the child as a result of a test which has identified a difficulty in literacy. The notion of a formal and therefore medical label for dyslexia is as contentious as the definition debate in the literature review. Elliot & Grigorenko (2014) argue that there is no scientific definition of dyslexia and therefore those who have achieved a medical diagnosis are based upon very unclear science. They argue that there is a dangerous assumption made when parents and schools are seeking diagnosis in the belief that once diagnosis is achieved it will automatically lead to appropriate tailored intervention to support the student. They argue that the key difference between a diagnosis of Dyslexia and a literacy difficulty is often socio-economic status as they suggest that those parents who advocate most strongly for their struggling child are those with access to the resources to do so. Despite Elliot and Grigorenko arguing for the end of the use of the term dyslexia there are many who seek a medicalisation of the label.

In general, the reported benefits for labelling are focused around access to support and a perceived better understanding of the persons diagnosed specific literacy issue from the perspective of the student, parents and teachers. Riddick

(2000) found that the label was often embraced by children as it "countered the more general negative attribution that they were slow or stupid and [the students] were therefore more positive about the label at both a private and public level of usage (Riddick 2000:p.660)." The positive attributes of labelling are also explored by Lawrence (2009) who states that "it should be emphasised that despite their dyslexia, there need be no limit to dyslexic children's ultimate achievements provided they are given appropriate help and their self-esteem is maintained (Lawrence 2009:p.144)." Lawrence is emphasising the importance of the maintenance of self-esteem as a key indicator of engagement in additional support suggesting the label could be negative without other protective factors. This contrasts with the views of Riddick who suggests the label could be the protective factor as it potentially prevents damage to self-esteem as it legitimises rejection of the label of 'stupid'. Either way, the fragility of self-esteem is an important consideration when ascribing labels to students and the ownership or rejection of the formal label as a result.

Building on the fragility of self-esteem, Taylor, Hume and Welsh (2010) identified in their study that the *definition* of the label being applied had a significant impact on self-esteem. They compared self-esteem scores of those who had a specific label of dyslexia and those who had a generic label of literacy difficulty and found that "the self-esteem scores of the SEN groups [those without specific labels] were significantly lower than those of both the dyslexic and control groups [those with no SEN needs]; the scores of the latter two groups were not significantly different (Taylor, Hume et al. 2010:p.198)." This suggests that labelling in some contexts is more positive when combined with a specific understanding of the nature of the problem which brings that label to it and that those students, similar to Rob and Ollie, with generic labels felt more akin to the 'stupid' label thus leaving

their self-esteem in a far more fragile place and possibly affecting their 'acceptance' and therefore experience of their own literacy difficulty. In this study I was careful not to directly address the participants' literacy difficulties unless they brought it up. This was mostly to avoid damage to students' self-esteem and confidence but also to get a fair reflection of their understanding and experience of their difficulty and whether they viewed it as important enough to discuss when talking about their experiences of literacy. The range of emotions with which the students spoke about literacy suggests that labelling and their own experiences of literacy was not as straight forward as the literature suggests regarding medical labels. The literature can be seen as presenting a polarised debate regarding formal labels as either good or bad, suggesting that the students' experience of this category will fall into one category or the other. There is a need for greater recognition in the literature that students can experience both aspects of this and have a more complex personal relationship with the formal labels being ascribed to them by others. In this case students expressed frustration, embarrassment, anxiety, as well as enjoyment. When referencing his literacy difficulty Max compared his progress to that of his peers and commented that he got "a bit annoyed" when he thought he had not written as much as his peers and Rob stated in consideration of his GCSE's that "it worries me thinking that I don't know what I'm doing and I'm going to fail." These insights could infer that the underlying literacy difficulty contributes to negative feelings of self and therefore induces concerns and anxiety about future performance in high stakes testing. On the other hand, Max was asked whether he felt that what he found difficult about reading and writing would stop him achieving his goals in the future and he replied "it is what it is." This apparent acceptance of his literacy difficulty suggests perhaps it isn't the labelling of the literacy difficulty itself which leads to a lack of

self-esteem but perhaps the comparison that this brings to peers, once again emphasising the role of the peer group in the participants experiences of literacy difficulties. It also highlights the role of positionality within the social construct of the school and classroom environment.

Gibby-Leversuch, Hartwell and Wright's (2019) systematic review paper suggests that children with identified literacy difficulties or dyslexia "thrive when they are accepted and their needs are understood (Gibby-Leversuch, Hartwell et al. 2019:p.14)." In the case of the participants in this study those who made positive associations with receiving support from their peers appeared less concerned about the label itself however in the case of Rob and Ollie it appears that Rob, who felt his needs were understood reflected this more positive association with the label of having specific literacy difficulties, shown by his willing engagement in additional lessons, whereas Ollie did not feel that the generic label aligned with his view of himself and therefore rejected it by refusing to engage in additional literacy support sessions.

Informal Labels

Labels in this study did not appear to only be applied to the literacy difficulties of the participants. Most boys used language which identified themselves as similar to, or different to, certain groups within the classroom and thus gave themselves the labels of inside or outside of the 'popular' group in an informal way. James' repeated commentary around the desire and need to be popular demonstrates the power that this label has along with Chris' explanation of certain boys' decision to misbehave in order to "get popular or something." The labelling of peer groups appears, in this study, to have more power than the label of literacy difficulty and clearly labels are not just being ascribed to literacy but also to social

position in class thus raising the stakes of peer relationships once again. It also suggests that some labels are accepted or rejected more readily than others. The desire to reach the label of popular is seen by some as being vitally important whereas some see this desire as part of the intrinsic motivation of others. This suggests that social cliques or crowds are an important part of the negotiation of secondary school life for boys and impact on a range of interactions and engagement within the classroom. In his study of Year 9 boys Thurlow (2001) found these social groupings or cliques were of less significance in self-identification than age groupings such as The Year 9's or The Year 10's whereas in this study, the notion of popularity is the most commonly discussed grouping. What was valuable from Thurlow's study was the concept of "social type labels function[ed] as identity prototypes (Thurlow 2001:p.331)" suggesting that those who did identify as popular, for example James in this study, already 'knew' what behaviours the label of 'popular' demonstrates and therefore his performance seeks to typify the behaviours associated with popular. This performance of label is more commonly referred to in American High Schools than in schools in the UK. Particular reference to 'cliques' such as "Jocks, Teckers and Nerds" are common and each group receives varying amounts of status hierarchy as a result (Brady 2004). Brady found in his study that in the US setting he investigated that teachers treated students in each of these groups with a differing regard, due to conscious or unconscious bias, and thus as a result this often "served to diminish [the students] sense of engagement…and in its most extreme form, withdrawal from the process of formal education (2004:p.363)." Brady puts forward the potential danger of negative labels associated with social groupings and there could be some suggestion here that perhaps participants in my study felt negatively towards their label and opted out of the help that is put in place after

the label has been ascribed. This certainly appeared to be the case for Ollie who found it very challenging to engage in discussions around his own engagement in learning and what teachers could do to help. He also presented as having withdrawn from education as he was excluded from the school throughout this process. This does suggest that the desire for the label of popular is in some contrast with the label of literacy difficulty and the negotiation of this is carried out in different and complex ways. Perhaps James' desire to be popular has an increased stake as he needs to reduce the impact of the label of literacy difficulty in order to maintain his status amongst his peers and his teachers. In this study most students were aware of the type of help that was given by teachers to overcome the literacy difficulties they face which suggests that the label of literacy difficulty and the help that came alongside that was valued in some way, but not by all of the boys in the study. However, despite the awareness of some of the boys in terms of what teachers could do to increase accessibility they still suggested that self-esteem and peer group appears to be a barrier to accessing help and that the view of the peer group was more important than the improvement of literacy outcomes. Stigmatisation from peers is a common concern of students with literacy difficulties, coupled with this the danger of social exclusion. Certainly the students in this study are concerned with popularity and their position with their peers. Rob manages to find a position within his peers where social acceptance is given as he identifies that his peers help him when he is finding the work hard as they have similar difficulties. However the rest of the participants were cautious to accept too much help for fear of looking "stupid" and therefore damaging the peer group positioning and risking stigmatisation from peers.

This study adds to the current discourse on the role of labelling, self-esteem and stigmatisation and goes some way to further deepen our understanding of the process of experiencing literacy difficulties in Year 9. The protective factor of support and intervention which specifically targets the needs of the individual without damaging their self-esteem is crucial to the ability of the student to engage in the support on offer and have positive feelings about their own abilities. Participants' early experiences of intervention and support predicate their feelings around school and for the future as shown by some engaging in support and welcoming help. In this context some students' continual negative behaviour sanctions added to their lack of 'buy-in' to the school system and thus appear to affect their feelings around school and literacy. This was especially true for Ollie who during the course of this research was excluded and moved to another school. James and Rob on the other hand both felt that they had improved their behaviour over the course of the school year, and between the two aspects of this research, and as a result felt more engaged with learning suggesting self-esteem had increased and supported engagement rather than opting-out. This ties in with Ciarrochi, Heaven and Davies (2007) paper which found that the trait of hope "was the best predictor of grades" suggesting those who feel hopeful about themselves and their futures are more likely to succeed. However, they also found that "self-esteem was a poor predictor of school grades and certain behaviours such as poor behaviour (Ciarrochi, Heaven et al. 2007:p.1174)." This is in contrast to the suggestions above and would not be the expected view as most would view self-esteem as a key component, however you could argue that in order to have hope for the future one needs a degree of self-esteem to believe one can achieve it. Perhaps, therefore, the two concepts are more closely linked and contribute to the acceptance or not of a literacy difficulty and therefore the

experience of having a literacy difficulty in a secondary setting. The participants here suggested the view that in some cases the labelling process can be positive, and in other cases negative, and thus the challenge for schools is evident. If the acceptance of labelling is such a personal matter, can a school function on a case by case basis as to whether the student wants to be labelled or not? Certainly the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (DfE 2014) suggests otherwise with the clear directive that students need to have their needs identified through specific testing and a thorough Assess, Plan, Do, Review format be implemented using the Graduated Response underpinned by the Code of Practice, in order to qualify for additional support within the school and therefore, the additional funding that the school can receive. Perhaps what should really be in question here, more so than whether a student needs a label is: are we meeting students' needs? Perhaps if the focus were on individual need, relationship between staff and student, and peer group dynamic there may be a greater impact on outcome as these appear to be the keys, for these boys, to opt-in or out of educational support available to them and therefore has the potential to improve their experiences of literacy difficulties.

Behaviour and SEND

A common phrase that I found myself using throughout the writing up of this research has been 'Ollie was not able to participate in the second round of data collection as he was excluded during the research process.' Ollie, anecdotally, had always struggled to engage in school and many a staffroom conversation had been had around his tricky personality, his opt-out attitude and, on occasions, his very difficult behaviour. It was the persistence of this behaviour that led to the exclusion however, throughout his time at school he really struggled to engage with the additional help that was on offer to overcome his literacy difficulty that

had been identified at primary school. This identification of SEND in primary school followed by issues at secondary school resulting in some form of exclusion does appear to be a common experience for students with SEND. The DFE recently reported on the 2017/18 academic year figures and reported that, of those students who were permanently excluded, a higher proportion of the total school population were excluded with a designation of SEN Support compared to no SEN identified, at 0.34% and 0.06% respectively. The figures are even higher when considering students' experiences of Fixed Term Exclusions (a short-term exclusion of days or weeks and then returning to the same school). In this case students with SEN support were 6.09% of the population compared to 1.68% of no SEND categorization (DfE 2020b). Of all of these statistics the most frequently identified special educational need when recording exclusions was the Social, Emotional, Mental Health (SEMH) category suggesting that a broader range of factors are at play. Ollie's most common response to questions in interview, when directed towards his literacy difficulty were "don't know" suggesting there were more contributory factors at play than just literacy and this potentially impacted his ability to talk about his literacy difficulties in a developed way. In Ollie's case he was identified on the SEN register as having literacy difficulties and no other concerns and yet on consideration of his exclusion paperwork (that is submitted to the council as a record) it states he also has SEMH problems. The labelling of students who behave poorly has changed since the 2014 SEND Code of Practice was released whereby 'Behaviour, and Emotional, Social Difficulty'' was no longer a category of SEN and the category of SEMH was broadened. This is on the understanding that all behaviour is indicative of an uncommunicated need (DfE 2014). Ollie was predominantly identified as having a literacy difficulty but his poor behaviour throughout his time

at school, on reflection, suggests there was likely to be a SEMH need also. It could be that the literacy difficulty has led to the SEMH need by way of poor behaviour being used as a communication tool. This would be in line with Carroll et al's (2005) study which found that children with reading disabilities are comorbid of disruptive disorders and anxiety disorders and Boyes et al (2016) state that "children with reading difficulties are at elevated risk of both internalising (emotions) and externalising (behavioural) problems (p.263)." Certainly the findings from this project suggested poor self-esteem in the participants and stigmatisation as discussed in the previous section suggesting that Ollie's literacy and SEMH needs perhaps impact on one another. How the school chooses to designate the child's primary need is also something to be considered. Ollie's primary, and only, need as identified by the SEN register was literacy but the research, and his behavioural presentation, suggests he also experienced a SEMH difficulty however, prior to the 2014 Code of Practice Ollie was labelled (at primary school) as also having a behavioural need. This labelling of Ollie as "naughty" or having a behavioural difficulty could have presented difficulties as internalising that label and believing he was inherently naughty can have negative impacts on mental health compared to using language that identified the action he carried out as naughty (O'Reilly 2007). The slight shift in language here can mean that children are internalising labels such as naughty and this could contribute to poorer mental health however in Ollie's case it is difficult to identify whether his literacy difficulty led to SEMH difficulties, vice versa, or both were separate issues but impacting on one another. Either way, the result was a significant literacy difficulty and difficulty engaging in support within school as well as difficulty with maintaining the rules of school and thus Ollie's experience of his literacy difficulty was quite different to that of the other participants.

The exclusion during the research project was not the first one that Ollie had experienced as he had received a fixed term exclusion in Year 7 for violent behaviour toward a peer. There is a growing body of research around the potential harm that exclusion from school can cause from increased chances of prison (Berridge, Brodie et al. 2001, Hemphill and Schneider 2013), psychological distress (Ford, Parker et al. 2018), lost academic time (Brown 2007) and difficulties with transition to adulthood as a result of missed education (McCrystal, Percy et al. 2007). In Ollie's case his first exclusion in Year 7 could potentially have impacted his future chances of success academically and emotionally, limiting the possibility of him overcoming his literacy difficulties and making his experiences of school more negative and therefore resulting in him being less likely to engage in the support on offer. In secondary schools in England the purpose of an exclusion, whether short-term or permanent, is often to shock the child into behaving in an acceptable manner upon their return or transition to another school. Hemphill and Schneider (2013) argue that often it has the opposite impact in that the "negative impacts of school suspension on behavioural outcomes for young people transcend the school environment and have potential to increase the probability of young people engaging in serious offences that impact on the whole community (2013:p.89)." This is further supported by the argument that it is often the most disadvantaged in our communities who are overrepresented in exclusion figures and by excluding students the "exclusion itself adds to those complexities [of their lives]. Whilst it may be a solution for the school, it usually adds to the problems for the family and young person (Arnold, Yeomans et al. 2009:p.172)." The complexities for the young person and families can be seen through an increased risk of psychological distress. A longitudinal study using the British Child and Mental

Health Surveys in the UK found that "there were consistently high levels of psychological distress among those who had experienced exclusion at baseline and at follow-up (Ford, Parker et al. 2018:p.629)" emphasising the potential negative impact on a child's mental health should they experience exclusion.

In some cases this psychological distress or negative mental health can manifest itself in the feelings of belonging, or lack of belonging, that the child experiences in relation to school. In Ollie's case he had very limited connection to school, except for his English teacher whom he repeatedly spoke highly of throughout the interview and interestingly Ollie was never told to leave his English class for poor behaviour. He did complete the work in his English lesson suggesting that the positive relationship he had with his English teacher fostered a sense of belonging and thus positively impacted his behaviour, but in the rest of the school he gave no indication of a sense of belonging. This highlights the individual experiences of literacy that Ollie experienced throughout his school day. In theory, if Ollie's literacy difficulty was challenging him to engage in school then he should have fared worse in English lessons and yet, the positive relationship he had with his teacher maintained his desire to remain in the lessons and appears to have become a protective factor, he appeared to feel accepted within the English lesson despite his literacy difficulty. This again highlights the importance of positive relationships in school and fostering the sense of belonging but in Ollie's case he did not identify that his sense of belonging in English was indicative of his sense of belonging in the school as he did not experience that sense of inclusion in his other subjects.

Craggs and Kelly (2018) found in their study of students who had experienced a managed move (a process where a student attends an alternative school for 6 weeks and then may or may not be returned to their previous school) that there

174

were very high levels of anxiety generated around the move process, in particular the students reported concerns about making friends in the new school and this became the most prominent theme to whether the managed move would work, emphasising the role of relationships as fundamental to the feeling of belonging. In Ollie's case his earlier exclusions, both external and internal, had likely damaged the sense of belonging he had to the school, despite maintaining a sense of belonging in his English lesson. Whilst Kelly and Craggs' work focused on the belonging generated in the new or receiver school there is also potential damage to the relationship with the previous school, particularly if the managed move fails and the student returns to the school which originally 'rejected' the student. In this research Ollie did not return to the school but in earlier exclusions he had returned from managed move exclusions. Ollie's repeated issues with behaviour meant that he was regularly rejected from the school, whether that is on a classroom level, or a whole school level and this repeated rejection, rather than act as a correction to poor behaviour, can exacerbate feelings of 'otherness' thereby discouraging the student from wanting to be part of a community that rejected them. As well as a social sense of belonging, repeated exclusions interrupted his education and learning opportunities which could have exacerbated his sense of not belonging to the academic community thus suggesting that Ollie faced repeated 'attacks' on his sense of belonging within the school. The educational impact of repeated exclusions potentially exacerbates the difficulties that Ollie faces with literacy and upon acceptance or return from the alternative school Ollie may have experienced feeling out of his depth with regards to the learning happening around him again fostering a sense of 'otherness' from a community perspective as well as a learning perspective emphasising to Ollie that his literacy difficulty is experienced as negative.

Brown (2007) found that with the students she worked with in an Alternative Provision in northeast America (for those students suspended) there was often a sense of unfairness around the suspension which "likely fostered ill feelings towards school adults…many students came to Alternative College with a wariness of adults (2007:p.449)." This distrust felt by students towards school adults does not encourage positive relationships which are important for engagement in learning to take place and certainly has been emphasised throughout this research. Ollie was only interested in English because he felt his teacher was there to help him and she broke information down in a way that he understood. However, it is unlikely that just breaking down the information was the only way his English teacher was supporting him but may be the only mechanism that Ollie was able to identify and articulate in an interview setting. There is a possibility that teachers in other subjects were also breaking the instructions or information down into accessible pieces however, the tendency of Ollie to see and accept help in one lesson (due to the perceived good relationship) versus not accepting help in another is also complex and impacts on Ollie's experience of literacy. Ollie's value of the subject being studied may also have an impact as well as a range of contextual factors such as peer dynamics suggesting that 'fixing' the problems may be complex. Fostering a sense of belonging and giving students the emotional connection to want to do well in school appears to be very important when trying to reduce exclusions through the improvement of student behaviour however, is a far more complex and multi-faceted solution than just relationship building.

As well as emotional distress another significant impact of student exclusion is lost time for academic learning (Brown 2007) which goes on to compound the problem of literacy gaps in knowledge this making the students' experiences of

literacy negative. This feeds into the negative self-belief that a student has about themselves and their ability and thus lead to further negative schooling experiences and to "significant disruptions within the school (2007:p.450)." These feelings of failure around literacy which likely existed prior to an interruption of education, are then exacerbated by the interruption to education thus creating a vicious cycle. In Ollie's case the transgressions of poor behaviour grew over time. As he began to show more poor behaviour it resulted in more punitive measures which increased the gaps in his knowledge which led to more poor behaviour. Whilst Ollie's aggressive behaviour incidents were very few the increase in frequency of disruption was very difficult for teachers to manage. Just prior to Ollie's exclusion he spent far more time sent out of lessons than he did in lessons suggesting an impact on literacy competency was likely and therefore impacting his experience of his literacy difficulty. During the time he was out of lessons Ollie was completing work independently in silence, away from his peers and supervised by a member of support staff. This would have further limited Ollie's ability to access the curriculum thus increasing the gaps in his knowledge prior to him then returning to the class and thus the cycle repeats. It also raises the performance of masculinity agenda once more. There is an aspect of the performance of masculinity that identifies as 'naughty boy' (Dalley-Trim 2007) in order to generate peer acceptance and this was explained by James in his interviews however, James managed to negotiate naughty without the wider ramifications of external exclusion and managed to become, as he describes, 'popular' as a result, generating a sense of belonging, whereas Ollie had very few friends, would not describe himself as popular and did suffer the consequences of repeated external exclusion.

Given Ollie's issues with literacy it has been argued that meeting an individuals' needs is crucial to the management of behaviour, but more importantly the growth in his self-belief and potentially his future chances thus interrupting the poor behaviour cycle. There is a body of research that suggests that if individual needs are met effectively then there would be less need for behaviour management to take place therefore optimising the time students spend in the classroom and minimising the emotional disruption of exclusion. This is certainly the view of Arnold, Yeomans and Simpson (2009) who argue that the very high rate of exclusion for students with SEN could be reduced significantly:

> "It is possible that the specific needs of these pupils are not being met. They may not understand the work or simply what is being asked of them, leading to disruptive behaviour. If academic work was set within the capabilities of each child then perhaps fewer behavioural difficulties would be observed. Earlier identification of literacy/numeracy difficulties would also ensure that children's academic needs are met sooner (Arnold, Yeomans et al. 2009:p.168)."

Therefore the notion of meeting individual need becomes even more important when trying to interrupt this potentially damaging cycle which impacts academic learning, mental health and future opportunity. Long, MacBlain and MacBlain (2011) found that in their case study of one disaffected year 10 boy that a holistic response to literacy difficulties and disengagement resulted in the child "perceive[ing] school as a more caring place in which he felt safe (2011:p.129)" and reduced the behaviour incidences. This holistic approach is advocated in UK schools through the DFE's document on Mental Health and Behaviour (2018) which suggests that behaviour should be investigated as the manifestation of an

unmet need using the Graduated Response approach of Assess, Plan, Do, Review in order to firstly, identify the need and consequently put appropriate support in place through both changes to whole class approaches as well as individual intervention where necessary. Martella and Marchand-Martella (2015) argue that "students who are participating in well-structured activities that engage their interests, who are highly motivated to learn, and who are working on tasks that are challenging yet within their capabilities rarely pose any serious management problems (2015:p.329)." Therefore, this body of research suggests that the key to reducing exclusion and generating greater emotional connection and a sense of belonging to school is ensuring needs are met from the outset, or quickly met once identified however, this is a somewhat idealised picture dependent on very uncomplicated students which this research, although a small sample, suggests does not exist. Students who are repeatedly excluded or facing behavioural difficulties over time are highly unlikely to respond to procedural, sometimes mechanistic solutions, however well managed, because if that were the case, the problem would have already been solved. It could be argued in this study that the failure to get Ollie engaged in learning and prevent him from appearing to 'opt-out' of school emotionally contributed to his likelihood of being excluded but this is a highly simplistic view of exclusion and behaviour. It appears to medicalise literacy difficulties in terms of a diagnosis or clear identification of need followed by a plan to remedy this and 'solve' the behavioural problems as a result. What this view does not consider is the complex identity negotiation which is continually being adjusted depending on context and includes but is not exclusive of, performance of masculinity, sense of belonging, relationships with staff, relationship with peers and other contextual factors. Thus the suggestion

that behavioural problems can be solved simply by meeting individuals' learning needs is somewhat flawed, and at the least, an oversimplification of the situation. One aspect of this argument that is simplified frequently is the sense of belonging. Wenger's (2000) communities of practice identified schools as a key community and most secondary schools use the phrase community to foster a sense of unity and purpose to education however, this can sometimes increase alienation as children may not feel that they 'fit' as part of that community of practice, despite actions which are endeavouring to increase inclusion. In Ollie's case he is positioned as 'outside' of the popular boys with repeated impact on his self-esteem in relation to his learning without peer acceptance and thus his experiences of literacy and of the school community is vastly different to James'. How to engage those students who are appearing to 'opt-out' of their education has been a huge topic of research for many years which aims to tackle, in particular, the role of hegemonic masculinities which is deemed, in part, responsible for the poor outcomes of boys. In particular Pinkett and Roberts (2019) put forward a compelling argument that classrooms should be challenging hegemonic masculinity as it presents and promotes a 'gentle masculinity,' in order to overcome the damaging impact of the expectation of masculinity on boys. This, they argue, would create a holistic approach to challenge poor engagement through the building of positive interpersonal relationships as well as building the positive association with school, fostering a sense of belonging and security. They argue that:

> "The key to successful relationships between teachers and male pupils lies in an approach that motivates boys through achieving success and takes careful consideration of boys' feelings. At the same time, we've also found that teacher who do well with boys are

subject experts who have very high expectations of what they can achieve, using "tough love" to ensure that they aren't allowed to adopt a self-defeating anti-work stance (Pinkett and Roberts 2019:p.172)."

In the case of Ollie he talks about his English teacher and how, despite his literacy difficulties, he finds English the easiest lesson to read and write in. He reports that when he finds things difficult she "reads it to him" or "gives him booklets to help" and that he "kind of likes it and want[s] to do well in it." It appears that his English teacher has managed to walk this challenging line of support with very high expectations built on a positive relationship and timely interventions which do not damage the self-esteem of a learner with literacy difficulties. This emphasises the role once again of the relationship that students have with staff as being crucial to the educational outcomes of students who are at risk of opting-out of their education. The significance of this relationship was also emphasised by several other boys in the study, including Rob and James, again raising its profile. The significance of this relationship for excluded children becomes even more significant when considering that "an increasing emphasis is placed on the strength of the emotional bonds between children and their educators as a contributing factor to good quality education and care (Hartas 2006:p.424)" and therefore if the aim is to reduce the number of exclusions in order to secure educational outcomes then this relationship becomes more important still. This was highlighted in 1999 when Pomeroy researched the experiences of excluded students and found that "respectful interactions communicating the teachers' belief in the students' worth are also a key feature of the ideal model of teacher-student relationships (Pomeroy 1999:p.477)." All of the mentions of relationships are focused on effective communication, particularly when looking to reintegrate

the excluded child back into school (Embeita 2019), however despite all of this discourse around relationships with excluded children surely the emphasis should be on the prevention of exclusion in the first place. Building positive relationships with students from the point of transition to secondary school and ensuring good quality and effective interventions are most likely to have a positive impact on outcomes which therefore builds self-esteem which is therefore likely to increase the individuals connection to the school and their desire to work hard (Pinkett and Roberts 2019). But again, it must be emphasised that just relationships alone are not enough. Ollie's positive relationship with his English teacher was not enough to prevent him from getting excluded. There are many more factors at play and thus the experience of literacy is multi-faceted and complex.

The research conducted as part of this project has highlighted the complexities around SEN and behaviour. Ollie's experiences of secondary school and exclusion go some way to demonstrate what happens when the system does not work for a student, although even this suggests a simple 'fix' would change the course that Ollie was appearing to be on. The challenge of relational issues, interventions, belonging, performance and school-wide tensions in policy and practice mean that identifying *the* cause or *the* cure for poor behaviour is too simplistic a view. Biesta (2010) goes some way to explore this through considering the complex contextual factors which indicate whether an intervention will work or not and in Ollie's case a simple view of cause and effect is unlikely to yield the outcomes of a student engaging in school with no further behaviour issues. In order to combat the overrepresentation of SEND students in exclusion data a much deeper analysis on an individual level is vital.

Summary

Here I have attempted to explore the key themes of performance of masculinity, labelling and behaviour as presented by the findings of this study and situate them within the experiences of the boys within this study. What is evident is the complex relationships between these factors as influences on students' experiences of literacy difficulties. The relational aspects of managing peer relationships, classroom expectations, literacy difficulties, labelling and stigmatisation all go some way to show the complex lives that students are living within the construct of the secondary school environment. How each student negotiates these aspects is not uniform and each participant here has placed different significance on different aspects at various points of the study. The highly contextualised nature of boys experiences is the key to understanding their experiences of school and in particular their experiences of their literacy difficulty. The key findings highlight the role that teachers and peers can play in influencing a sense of belonging and exclusion as well as the role of policy of community within the school. Whilst oversimplification of solutions is to be avoided, gaining an understanding of the individuals' experience could go some way to improving the experiences of students with literacy difficulties and thus positively impacting outcomes.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction

This study sought to understand the experiences of year 9 boys with literacy difficulties. It aimed to listen to how the boys themselves articulated their own experiences of literacy and literacy difficulties and how they talked about and experienced behaviour within the classroom. Finally, it sought to identify if the boys had any perception of a relationship between gender and literacy. This concluding chapter explores some of the limitations of the study and opportunities for future research. It presents a brief summary of the findings alongside my contribution to knowledge and potential implications for practice and research.

Key Findings

Whilst many themes were identified throughout the research what became clear was the increasing social complexity within which the boys were existing as well as trying to overcome or cope with a literacy difficulty. The common themes of relationships, access to the curriculum and value of curriculum subject were referred to directly in their experiences of literacy difficulties but also complex social experiences, such as negotiating gender performance and positionality within the social hierarchy, 'otherness,' behaviour, self-esteem, and being labelled add to the challenges and experiences of boys with literacy difficulties.

In relation to my original research questions this study has revealed that these boys talked very little in direct terms about 'having a literacy difficulty.' They were able to identify aspects of literacy they found easier or more challenging but this was generally based on the quantity of reading and writing expected in a school lesson rather than the complexity of the language in most cases. Some of the

boys were able to articulate what strategies they or their teachers could use in order to make the subject more accessible but in general none articulated a belief that their own literacy difficulty would prevent them achieving jobs in the future. This is best surmised through Max's statement of "it is what it is." This apparently nonchalant consideration of literacy difficulties was in contrast to the high status with which they discussed relationships with both teachers and peers, although relationships in relation to literacy were discussed less frequently when talking about home.

Peer relationships were repeatedly referred to as important in their engagement, or not, in literacy at school. They talked frequently about their experiences of behaviour within the classroom with articulate and detailed analysis in some cases of how they perform within the classroom. This was an unexpected finding from this study as James went to great lengths to explain the social pressure to perform the role of naughty boy in order to get peer acceptance suggesting he had a greater understanding of this as a performance than previous literature suggests (Bleach 1998, Francis 1999, Dalley-Trim 2007, Pinkett and Roberts 2019). Interestingly James represents a lived example of the socio-cultural understanding of gender by showing that he had 'learnt' to behave poorly in order to get friends and in his mind, this was successful because he was able to describe himself as 'popular;' thus articulating how social context shapes social behaviour and influences positionality. However, the other participants identified this phenomenon of performance but often believed it was 'other boys' who participated in this performance of masculinity. The ability of the students to analyse for themselves the social conditions and consequences of the classroom environment was unexpected at the beginning of this research.

Another key relationship that the participants spoke of frequently was the relationship with the teacher and, whilst the role of teachers was not being examined directly at the beginning of this study, in relation to both experiences of their literacy difficulty and behaviour within the classroom, the boys repeatedly emphasised the significance of the teacher, not in terms of support necessarily, but in perceived personality traits. Personality was suggested to be more important than the help teachers could provide but findings suggested that the *way* teachers helped them (differentiation and access to the curriculum in practical terms) also played a role. Positive relationships with staff were vital for the boys to engage however, this was also impacted by the perceived value of the subject. The boys, in some subjects such as French, had made a decision that they did not value the subject and so it appeared that whilst they disliked their languages teachers this was predominantly the result of a lack of value for the subject, demonstrating the complexity of the classroom experiences. Some boys also recognised that their experiences of French were difficult as they found the subject difficult which may be influenced by their literacy difficulty.

However, what was apparent here is that regardless of the utmost respect that the boys had for their teacher (for example, James describing his Head of Year as a legend) they still placed greater emphasis on the peer relationships and this appeared to influence their behavioural choices more so than the relationship they had with their teachers. This goes some way to show the importance of peer recognition and acceptance and places positionality as more important than the learning which is set to take place within the school environment.

All boys were selected for the study because they demonstrated some behavioural difficulties however, in most cases the boys did slow the accumulation of behavioural logs or punitive aspects by changing their behaviour

throughout the study. This is potentially the results of the boys moving towards GCSE study and thus the 'stakes' increasing however, this was not directly explored in the 2nd round of data collection. However, for Ollie it appeared that the cycle of poor behaviour had gone 'too far' and resulted in him being excluded during the course of the research. This in itself raised questions around the use of exclusion and the likely impact of this upon learning which is exacerbated by Ollie's learning difficulties thus contributing to a continuing cycle of negative interactions with school and adds to the growing literature on the moral implications of exclusion and the unequal representation of both boys and those with SEN in the exclusion statistics. Ollie then can be viewed as the personal face of a national statistic.

In terms of discussions around gender and literacy there was little discussion on whether the boys felt that they and girls performed differently due to their gender. Most boys said no but James, who displayed and acknowledged hegemonic gender norms influencing his choices, did feel that boys and girls approached literacy and school in different ways. It was interesting to note that only the boy who identified as adopting the performed role of 'typical boy' felt there was an innate difference and yet he explained that he performed the role of naughty boy in order to gain peer acceptance, suggesting an element of conscious choice rather than innate inevitability. This goes some way to supporting the post-structural view of gender in that all the boys experiences were different and fluid and whilst the representations made throughout this study at two data collection points, presents moments and the boys' relating to these moments, they should still be viewed as incomplete, the data cannot explain every aspect of the boys' identities. What it does reveal however, is the complex range of influences that

create the stage for this performance with the experiences of a literacy difficulty being just one of those.

In summary the key findings from this study indicate that boys talk infrequently about their learning difficulty impacting their learning however, they do identify the role of teachers and themselves in accessing learning in the classroom. There was a clear move in some cases from discussing themselves to 'others' perhaps suggesting the boys were uncomfortable identifying themselves in this way. What was most apparent from this research was the highly complex lives that the boys were leading within the classroom setting and the differing emphasis placed on each factor at different points, indicating the shifting nature of identity within the social context.

Reflecting on my own practice

As a practitioner myself, this research has framed the way I think about my own experience, particularly in working alongside students in the classroom with literacy difficulties. This research has challenged my ten years of classroom experience and given me a far greater understanding of the experiences of boys with literacy difficulties, in all of its individual complexity. The challenges and school-wide policies aimed at closing the attainment gap need to be looked at using a far wider lens to enable a deeper understanding of the experiences of boys in each classroom and each contextual setting. Without a more empathetic understanding it appears unlikely that all students' progress can be improved. It has also revealed my own assumptions such as the belief that if I could just get my classroom practice 'right' then I would be able to close the attainment gap between boys and girls. This research has challenged that view by showing that each individuals' experience is so different, even when they appear to have the

same profile, as in this study, and are experiencing the same lessons. Each students' views of that lesson, in that context, with that teacher are based on vastly different experiences of the same event and it is this multiplicity and complexity that has really challenged the assumptions I make about my own practice.

As a research student, completing a piece of original research myself has influenced the way I now think about research. It has shown me that the experience of individuals within the classroom is vital to being able to meet individuals' needs. Gathering these views needs to be conducted in a way that gives voice and agency to those somewhat marginalised students who may have had negative interactions with school. The mechanism by which this view is sought is vital to ensuring an authentic account is gathered and as a result methods which identify the students as different in some way may not be the best approach as this potentially impacts on peer relationships which are considered vital by students for their sense of self-worth and belonging. Furthermore, an even greater understanding of research and the process of conducting research will enable me to have a more critical eye on evidence informed practice and be better able to use a range of methodologies to test effectiveness within my own context.

Limitations

Reflecting on a completed study always raises questions about how else things might have been done. Knowing what I know now, things I might do differently if I were to undertake such a study again would be the way in which I used photographs as an elicitation technique. Whilst some boys participated in the

photographs and it was a useful tool to remind the boys of their literacy experiences of the previous few days, in most cases the photographs had not been taken or the students couldn't remember why they had taken the picture, despite the instructional prompts. This surprised me a little as the majority of the literature suggested that photo-elicitation was an effective technique to engage participants who were marginalised or whose voices were heard infrequently. On reflection and throughout the interviews it became apparent that they boys' did not consider their literacy difficulty very important to them when engaging in the interviews, their complex relationships with other contextual aspects of school such as peer acceptance suggest they were perhaps working hard to cover up key differences between them and their peers. If this were the case then using digital cameras in lessons when none of their peers are permitted to would identify them as different and draw attention to this fact therefore limiting their confidence to take pictures.

In some ways I think the participatory nature of taking photographs did give the boys some confidence in participation in the study. Whilst I had intended for them all to take photographs as prompts, their choice to take the photographs or not, enabled them to recognise that they did have a role in the collection of data and the discussion that followed which could therefore have acted positively to give marginalised views a voice in this context. This is more challenging to ascribe causal effect to and therefore overall, using photo elicitation was a research tool that had a more minor impact than I had anticipated.

The study was conducted over a 9 month period of one academic year and therefore in a relatively short space of time in terms of the two data collection point. There was not as much change in views as I had expected between the two data collection points and therefore conclusions around the changing nature

of views were very limited. It was however, interesting to note that there was little change in the students' views but their responses were a little different when discussing curriculum areas of value as a result of having chosen their GCSE option. It was also interesting to see from a data perspective that in all but one participants case the number of behaviour logs they received had slowed significantly between the two data collection points. Future research could look at replicating this study but offering a comparative study to the same times in year 10 for example, to gain a better understanding of how views changed over time.

In spite of these limitations I would argue that a key strength of the approach I have taken is the case study analysis. This has enabled a very careful and detailed look at the experiences of individuals thus making the data from a small sample more useful in order to gain a thorough understanding of individuals' experiences. Setting the research within my own school has enabled a greater understanding of the context which may be affecting the boys' actions whilst recognising that this influence is continually fluid. Being immersed in the community has enabled a wider understanding of factors which may be influencing decisions. Whilst this could be seen to be a negative, the methodology has given me the opportunity to question my own assumptions about students within my setting and I refer to this throughout the project where my assumptions have been significantly challenged.

Recommendations

I anticipate that these findings will be useful to shift the discourse of school conversations from broad sweeping attempts to 'fix' the problem of boys' underachievement to those which consider the identities of the individuals' in all

their complexity. Schools need to consider the mechanisms that they are using, in their individual contexts, to better understand how they are contributing to the construction and destruction of accepted social norms and hegemonic masculinity, whilst recognising that this socio-cultural aspect will only part way explain or contribute to our understanding of individuals' experiences of school and literacy difficulty.

Further recommendations that might be made in light of these findings include shifting the culture of a school through carefully considered use of language which would help to understand a greater number of individual perspectives from within the school. This could work to enable fewer students to feel marginalised by their literacy difficulty thus possibly breaking the cycle of poor behaviour.

Whilst a great deal of research around poor behaviour focuses on meeting the needs of individuals one of the key recommendations from this study is that a greater understanding of the needs is required before appropriate support can be put into place. This includes the need for assessment to consider literacy development alongside other areas of need, including SEMH and vocabulary development. Greater consideration of the impact of intervention to the sense of identity and belonging of a student is crucial to the potential effectiveness of such intervention.

Further to this, from a classroom teacher perspective, this research may go some way to developing understanding of the use, and misuse of labels within SEN and the potential impact of them upon the students they teach. The individual experiences are so varied between the participants in this study that it is vital for teachers to remember the differences within their classrooms and the experiences of the students before them that have resulted in their presentation in that particular moment.

These recommendations suggest a challenge to accepted view in significant numbers of our secondary institutions. Without honest and considered reflection of the impact that our 'systems' are having on the identity creation of young people progress will continue to be limited in the area of boys' underachievement as it is currently understood.

Further Research

This research has identified several future possibilities for research. First, there is the potential for longitudinal studies of the way that performance of masculinities develops over the course of a boy's school career. This study could incorporate close observation of the shifts in this as linked to school reputation and perceived popularity, proximity to public examinations and shifting social loyalties.

Furthermore, comparative case studies of school belonging could go some way to exploring the experiences of those who do not feel as though they belong as part of the school community. How can the experiences of boys both 'inside' and 'outside' of the school community be given a voice? There are opportunities here to shift teacher perceptions of boys' experiences within their classrooms therefore giving greater opportunities for boys to feel part of a community which is perhaps, not so indicative of hegemonic gender performances.

Thirdly, further research could consider the experiences of boys with literacy difficulties in schools which, by the standards of national data, appear to perform better. Those schools with significantly positive Progress 8 measures based in a non-selective, mainstream setting would be a useful comparison to be able to explore the experiences of boys with literacy difficulties within a 'high-achieving' institution in comparison to my own setting where the national data is lower.

Contribution to Knowledge

My contribution to knowledge in this field is building on previous research about construction and fluidity of gender with a particular focus on the experiences of boys with literacy difficulties. In previous studies singular aspects of their experience have been considered by way of labels, behaviour and literacy itself but other studies have not considered the multiplicity of these themes impacting boys' experiences of their literacy difficulties. What this study showed was that the way boys experience literacy in year 9 in this context was through several different lenses. Despite the boys having a similar profile at the beginning of the study their experiences and the influence on those experiences was highly individual. It is this wider perspective of more of the facets affecting boys experiences and engagement which could go some way to adapting classroom practice to take into account individuals experiences further. This is a challenging and uncomfortable aspect of this research. Identifying that significant numbers of our school communities feel marginalised by the methods that are designed to identify them and support them is a challenging notion. This research is calling for wholesale change in the culture of educational establishments in order to generate more flexible environments that take into account the needs of all individuals. The choice of language in our institutions, the curriculum, the relationships and the labels all need reviewing in light of the findings here.

A further contribution to knowledge is the awareness that some boys had of the performative aspect of their actions. James was able to clearly articulate that what he did in the classroom to get into trouble was a performance of 'clown' in order to be accepted by peers and reach the sought after prize of being popular. He demonstrated how his desire for popularity came above his emotional connection

to school, teachers and the curriculum. His awareness of the performance suggesting that he was acting in a hegemonic masculine way showed more self-awareness than previous studies in this field. This has a great impact on my own personal practice in regards to how relationships are being built within my own classroom and institutional space. The acknowledgement of performance gives a classroom practitioner the opportunity to reflect on their own impact within this space and go some way to challenge this performance and create an alternative narrative within the teaching space.

Thirdly, the impact of labelling has been seen to be less clear-cut that the current literature suggests in terms of the polarised debate around labelling or not labelling students' difficulties. The complex negotiations of identity and context play an important role in the acceptance or not of a label and this needs to be considered from the individuals' perspective. It does not appear to be the case that the label itself is good or bad but in how the context accepts that label. This also presents an opportunity for future research. This has an opportunity for significant impact on current practice in the identification of need and access to resources which needs to rely less of labels and more on the voice of the student whilst recognising their own understanding and voice as a part of that process. The shift needed in SEN identification and resourcing would result in very significant changes to the current model.

Overall, this study aimed to explore the experiences of boys' with literacy difficulties and what has been shown throughout is the highly complex worlds in which these boys move and experience. The way that the boys participate in social hierarchies and how they position themselves within and outside of the school setting is constantly shifting and changing. Further understanding of these

experiences is crucial to continuing to improve a system which does not currently

allow for such individual experiences.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Participant Consent Form

<u>Boys' Experiences of Literacy in a Mainstream Secondary School</u>

Details of Project
This project is aiming to understand literacy from Year 9 boys' perspectives. It will use photographs and interviews to understand the opinions of the boys about literacy. Boys will be given a digital camera for 5 days and they are to take photographs of any time they engage in reading or writing over the course of 5 days. They will then select images to discuss in an interview which will be recorded by voice recorder for the purposes of data analysis. The project aims to answer key research questions:
1. What are boys' experiences of literacy?
2. How do boys perceive literacy at home and at school?
3. What aspects of literacy do they finder easier/harder?

The use of photographs and interviews together is with the aim of giving young people a voice about their own literacy.

Contact Details
For further information about the research /interview data, please contact:

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00 44 (0) *1392 661000*
ssa209@exeter.ac.uk

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:
Dr Susan Jones, Susan.M.Jones@exeter.ac.uk

Confidentiality
Interview tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). However, if you request it, you will be supplied with a copy of your interview transcript so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below so that I am able to contact you at a later date). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Data Protection Notice
Data Protection Notice - The information you provide will be used for research purposes and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form therefore ensuring neither participants or their families can be identified.
Data will be stored on encrypted systems held by the researcher and backed up by the University of Exeter secure networks. Interview recordings will be held on file for a maximum of 5 years. Printed photographs will be destroyed once the write-up of the project is complete.

Transcripts of the interviews which will be anonymised will be held indefinitely and may be used for other research projects.

This project is funded by the researcher (Mrs Battershall) and therefore has no commercial motive behind the project, however the school has a high interest in the research outcomes as boys' experiences and achievements are a particular focus of the leadership team. Therefore, the results may be used to adjust the practice in the school. The results of this project will be used to present the research and hopefully, allow the researcher to be awarded a Professional Doctorate in Education. The results will be published as part of the thesis and may also be used in conference presentations and further research papers which may be published.

Anonymity

Interview data will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of your name, but it may be identified that research took place at Teign School although this will not be named in the research project.

Consent

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.
I understand that:

- I do not have to participate in this research project; I can withdraw from this project at any point until the data is being written up;
- I can refuse to have any information published about me that I am not comfortable with;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of research projects, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- all information I give will be kept confidential;
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity and ensure that I am not identified in the project.
- I have informed my parents/carers that I am participating in this project.

………………………………………….. ……………………………………………….
(Signature of participant) (Date)

……………………………………………… ……………………………………………….……
(Printed name of participant) (Email address of participant if they
have requested to view a copy of the
interview transcript.)

…………………………………………. ……………………………………………….
(Signature of researcher) (Printed name of researcher)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).
Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

Appendix 2: Parental Consent Form

Boys' Experiences of Literacy in a Mainstream Secondary School

Details of Project
This project is aiming to understand literacy from Year 9 boys' perspectives. It will use photographs and interviews to understand the opinions of the boys about literacy. Boys will be given a digital camera for 5 days and they are to take photographs of any time they engage in reading or writing over the course of 5 days. They will then select images to discuss in an interview which will be recorded by voice recorder for the purposes of data analysis. The project aims to answer key research questions:
4. What are boys' experiences of literacy?
5. How do boys perceive literacy at home and at school?
6. What aspects of literacy do they finder easier/harder?

The aim of using both verbal and image methods is to ensure that participants have a voice in their own experiences of literacy.

Contact Details
For further information about the research /interview data, please contact:

Mrs Samantha Battershall
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00 44 (0) *1392 661000*
ssa209@exeter.ac.uk

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:
Dr Susan Jones, Susan.M.Jones@exeter.ac.uk

Consent
I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.
I understand that:
- My son does not have to participate in this project and that he has the right withdraw at any point up to write up of the final thesis;
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about my son;
- any information which my son gives will be used only for the purposes of research projects, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- all information my son gives will be treated as confidential;
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my son's anonymity and ensure he is not identifiable in the write up of this project or other papers.

Please keep this form for your information and only return if you wish to OPT OUT your son from participating in this research project.

............................……………..   ……………..…….....…………………………..
(Signature of parent / guardian)   (Date)

………………….……………………..   ……………………………………………….…….
(Printed name of parent / guardian)   (Printed name of participant)

………………………………………….……   …………………………….……………….
(Printed name of researcher)   (Signature of researcher)

Data Protection Notice

Data Protection Notice - The information you provide will be used for research purposes and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form. Data will be stored on encrypted systems held by the researcher and backed up by the University of Exeter secure networks. Interview recordings will be held on file for a maximum of 5 years. Transcripts of the interviews which will be anonymised will be held indefinitely and may be used for other research projects.

This project is self-funded and therefore has no commercial motive behind the project, however the school has a high interest in the research outcomes as boys' experiences and achievements are a particular focus of the leadership team. The results of this project will be used to present the research and hopefully, allow the researcher to be awarded a Professional Doctorate in Education. The results will be published as part of the qualifying thesis and may also be used in conference presentations and further research papers which may be published.

Appendix 3: Ethics Certificate

(Please note: the different name of Abbott on my certificate relates to prior to me changing to my married name of Battershall)

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St Luke's Campus
Heavitree Road
Exeter UK EX1 2LU

http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of Project: Boys' experiences of Literacy in a mainstream Secondary School

Researcher(s) name: Samantha Abbott

Supervisor(s):   Susan Jones
                              Vivienne Baumfield

This project has been approved for the period

    From: 10/02/2017
    To: 22/07/2018

Ethics Committee approval reference:

    D/16/17/28

Signature: Date: 10/02/2017
(Dr Philip Durrant, Graduate School of Education Ethics Officer)

Appendix 4: Ethics Application Form

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

When completing this form please remember that the purpose of the document is to clearly explain the ethical considerations of the research being undertaken. As a generic form it has been constructed to cover a wide-range of different projects so some sections may not seem relevant to you. Please include the information which addresses any ethical considerations for your particular project which will be needed by the SSIS Ethics Committee to approve your proposal.

Guidance on all aspects of the SSIS Ethics application process can be found on the SSIS intranet:
Staff:
https://intranet.exeter.ac.uk/socialsciences/staff/research/researchenvironmentandpolicies/ethics/
Students:http://intranet.exeter.ac.uk/socialsciences/student/postgraduateresearch/ethicsapprovalforyourresearch/

All staff and students within SSIS should use this form to apply for ethical approval and then send it to one of the following email addresses:

ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk   This email should be used by staff and students in Egenis, the Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies, Law, Politics, the Strategy & Security Institute, and Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology.

ssis-gseethics@exeter.ac.uk   This email should be used by staff and students in the Graduate School of Education.

Applicant details	
Name	**Samantha Abbott**
Department	**Graduate School of Education**
UoE email address	**ssa209@exeter.ac.uk**

Duration for which permission is required
You should request approval for the entire period of your research activity. The start date should be at least one month from the date that you submit this form. Students should use the anticipated date of completion of their course as the end date of their work. Please note that retrospective ethical approval will never be given.

Start date: 1st February 2017	End date: 22nd July 2018	Date submitted:17/01/2017

Students only
All students must discuss their research intentions with their supervisor/tutor prior to submitting an application for ethical approval. The discussion may be face to face or via email.
Prior to submitting your application in its final form to the SSIS Ethics Committee it should be approved by your first and second supervisor / dissertation supervisor/tutor. You should submit evidence of their approval with your application, e.g. a copy of their email approval.

Student number	550022602

Programme of study	**Doctor of Education (EdD) casework** If you selected 'other' from the list above please name your programme here
Name of Supervisor(s)/tutors or Dissertation Tutor	**Dr Susan Jones** **Professor Vivienne Baumfield**
Have you attended any ethics training that is available to students?	Yes, I have taken part in ethics training at the University of Exeter For example,: i) the Research Integrity Ethics and Governance workshop: http://as.exeter.ac.uk/rdp/postgraduateresearchers_ii) Ethics training received on Masters courses If yes, please specify and give the date of the training: **Research Ethics Workshop led by Phil Durrant** 25/10/2016

Certification for all submissions

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given in this application and that I undertake in my research to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research. I confirm that if my research should change radically I will complete a further ethics proposal form.

Samantha Abbott

Double click this box to confirm certification ☒

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

TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT

Boys' experiences of Literacy in a mainstream Secondary School

ETHICAL REVIEW BY AN EXTERNAL COMMITTEE

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

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

MENTAL CAPACITY ACT 2005

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

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

SYNOPSIS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Maximum of 750 words.

Throughout the years there has been considerable emphasis on the inequity of boys' achievements in comparison to girls in secondary schools in the UK. Statements in the media over the last twenty years, such as "Is school biased against boys?" "Boys are being failed by our schools (Clark 2006)" and

"GCSE day sees record results… but boys fall further behind as gender gap hits record level (Reporter 2011)"suggests to the world that there is a significant problem in boys' achievement, particularly at GCSE although it can also be seen in standardized tests in Key Stage 2. As a result of this, significant research has been conducted in order to address the 'gap' and solve the 'problem' that the statistics identify. Alongside the general boy: girl problem there is an additional issue with male students who have an identified literacy difficulty. Students in this category, (previously School Action Plus under the SEN Code of Practice, 2010 but now SEN Support under the SEND Code of Practice, 2014), also make far less progress than the equivalent of the rest of the male school population. Nationally this gap is 16% and in my own setting this gap was 30% (Raise Online Data, December 2014) for the English GCSE exams sat in the summer exam series 2014. Whilst the most media attention is given to the boy vs. girl overall GCSE statistic there is clearly a significant issue between boys with literacy difficulties and the rest of the male school population. This presents research challenges in that it intersects between researchers exploring literacy difficulties, those considering boys' underachievement, those with a focus on masculinities and policy research on improving boys' outcomes.

A complex facet of this project is the nature of literacy itself and its relationship with power. Hannon (1995) argues that literacy spreads from the most powerful in society to the least and that literacy becomes essential for political freedom and access to political ideas. He goes on to state that "school literacy may differ from other forms of literacy in the home, community and workplace that deserve to be taken seriously." He suggests a shift in teaching literacy and higher value placed on other forms of literacy as being essential to the future of literacy education. He argues that without a shift we may well be causing some young people to disengage from school and making some parents feel as though their version of literacy has less value than that literacy taught in schools. The call for adjustments to the nature of 'school' literacy is also emphasised by Hall (2004) who argues that in order to support children to develop skills which allow them to access the world in a more meaningful manner then children must be taught to evaluate the textual world they live in rather than just past tests. She goes on to argue that this criticality is essential in supporting children to become inspired by education. Jewitt (2008) argues that the nature of communication is changing and that as a result school literacy with its focus on the "industrial-print nexus" is no longer as relevant to the modern world as it once was. She argues for a re-think of school literacy to adapt a more multi-modal approach in order to allow young people to succeed in accessing the demands of the contemporary communicational landscape. This was seen in O'Byne and Murrell's (2014) study which found that allowing American High School students freedom in a blogging exercise saw them use a multimodal format almost automatically. As a result they conclude that "blogging practices identified in this study supported the position that students operated within plural forms of literacy and used media-rich tools not only to construct meaning, but also to communicate and to participate." Whilst this suggests that using a multi-modal approach may solve the engagement in literacy issue in many comprehensive schools in the UK the researchers did find that engagement from students was still an issue. Therefore, whilst multi-modal approaches may hold potentially more relevance to young people's lives there is still an issue of students engaging in practices that teachers are asking students to engage in and this may affect the nature of this project.

Combined with the issues of the nature of literacy and achievement gaps between groups of male students there is also the added complexity of the perceived 'Year 9 Phenomenon.' Many secondary school teachers in the UK have a perception of year 9 being the most challenging year to engage in the curriculum. The common feeling that hormones and options have an impact on engaging the year 9 student. As such the Australian government directed the Department for Education in Victoria to engage in research to understand year 9 and present strategies that teachers are able to use in order to accelerate progress. The research found that there is a considerable lack of motivation in year 9. They attribute this to "the learning activities at school [being] less likely to arouse curiosity and engage" (Cole, Mahar et al. 2006) in comparison to students in the younger years. They suggest that directive tasks to engage and encourage students to become lifelong learners may well be the best way of challenging the lack of motivation to engage.

This project seeks to intersect these three key areas and try to understand boys' perspectives in managing literacy difficulties in a secondary curriculum. The key questions include how do boys perceive literacy at home and at school? What literacy tasks do they find more or less accessible? How do they cope with the literacy demands placed upon them? What are their experiences of literacy? By exploring their own experiences using a photographic approach this project aims to give a voice to those students in secondary schools who are often not heard as they are unable to

communicate as effectively in a traditional written method and may be those who are opting out or disengaging from education.

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

My research will all take place within my own Secondary School work setting. There is no international element to my research for this project.

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

RESEARCH METHODS

Design

The basis of this project is on visual methodology and interviews. The reason for using visual methods, in this case photographs, is due to the nature of the participants who are not as able to use written methods as effectively as others due to the nature of their needs. I am also aiming to use a participatory methodology which gives the boys some role in the 2nd and 3rd phase of the procedure. They will be set the same task each time however, having completed the first phase and the interview their perception of what ideas they would like to communicate may change.

The use of photographs is considered an opportunity to take a snapshot of the literacy moment at that one particular instance. The social constructivist idea of literacy and learning means that the photograph gives a visual representation of that moment. The follow up interviews allow for further exploration of that exact moment as well as being able to explore why that particular photograph was taken at that particular moment. This gives many opportunities and perspectives to explore that participants' view and experience of literacy at that moment. This empowers the participant with a voice at every moment of the data collection and means that issues of disengagement will hopefully be overcome. For these reasons a participatory, visual methodology is being used.

Procedure

This research will be completed over several phases. There will be an initial pilot project to check the methodology and data analysis procedures before the main phase will begin. The main phase will run over 3 data collection sections.

In all 4 data collection points selected students will be given digital cameras in order to take photographs of reading and writing at home and at school for a week. The cameras contain memory cards to collect the data. They will be given clear instructions that the photographs taken can be any form of reading or writing, whether it's actual written form, text, online communications, etc. Instructions will be written but also given verbally as the nature of students involved in this project may mean they find it difficult to follow written instructions. The verbal instructions will be used to ensure students recognise the potential and opportunities for taking photographs. Students will be told that they are not permitted to take photographs of other people, just of the activity they are involved in. At the end of the week of photograph taking students will be given the opportunity to select 12-14 photographs that 'sum up' their week of reading or writing. Participants will engage in the selection by accessing the memory cards on a computer. They will select photographs to print from those they have taken. Very partially structured interviews will then take place on a 1:1 basis to discuss the experiences of literacy over the course of the week. For the year 9 students this will be repeated twice in this academic year. The aim will be for ideas to develop over time and hopefully, with practice, students will be able to engage in a different way with the photographs and the literacy experiences happening around them.

Sampling

For the pilot project 2 year 8 boys will be selected. These will be identified as students who have a literacy difficulty.

For the main project 5 year 9 boys will be selected. Again, these boys will be representative of those who have literacy difficulties and who are also at risk or beginning to disengage from the curriculum. The reason why these selections are being made is that the project aims to understand what the perception of these boys is of literacy within the schooling environment. Everybody will be invited to participate in the project and will have the right to withdraw. I have a further 3 students who are potential year 9 candidates should they withdraw throughout the course of the research project. The selection of the boys has been done by me. As Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) of the school in which the research is due to take place I have access to the SEND details and data and behaviour log data. I will select boys who have an identified literacy difficulty and are identified as requiring SEN Support on the SEND system. They will also be boys who have at least 10 behaviour logs for being off task or not completing work. The reason for this sampling method is that these boys are identified by staff in the school as being most likely to disengage at GCSE level and thus underachieve and fit the view of the national statistics that boys with identified literacy difficulties consistently perform below their male and female peers.

Analysis

The analysis of the data will take place after the pilot project to check the process and methodology however this data will not be used as part of the research project findings. The main data collection from the year 9 students will be analysed after each data collection point. The process will be through using the photographs selected by the students and the transcribing of the interviews. Code will then be generated from the interview data and theories will be drawn from this. This will be based on a Grounded Theory (Glasser and Straus) notion where I have no hypothesis that I am aiming to test. I am interested in their perceptions and experiences of literacy and therefore I do not wish to restrict the project by identifying one particular hypothesis that I am aiming to prove.

Expected Project Outcomes

The main project outcome will be the EdD thesis itself which will then be available in the Exeter University library of completed thesis. I would, in the future, aim to present the findings of the data at conferences and be able to use the data on further research projects. The participants involved in the project would not be identifiable although the school may well be through my association with it. The name of the school will not be published in the thesis.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants will include two year 8 (age 12/13) boys to participate in the pilot project and four year 9 (age 13/14) boys to participate in the main research project. The participants will be required to work independently to collect the photographs and then with support to select the 12-14 photographs to represent their week. It is important to note that the support offered will only be technical in getting the photographs from the camera to a printable format. This support will be offered by the researcher thereby ensuring minimal input in terms of the selection. Participants may be reminded at this point that they cannot feature people in the photographs selected. No support/advice will be given to support the actual choices and selection in order to minimise the researchers' role in the selection process. 1:1 interviews will be conducted with the interviews being recorded. The 1:1 elements will be conducted within the safeguarding parameters of the school setting. Students will be made aware of mechanisms to report concerns about the project in the same manner they report issues at school currently. Students will be reminded of this prior to the beginning of the interview element of data collection.

Participants are being selected as a result of their having literacy difficulties. This means there may be challenges with the participants accessing the written instructions. In order to overcome this the instructions will be given verbally as well as in written format. The pilot project will test and ensure that the instructions are fully accessible. The students are vulnerable in that they are aware of their own learning needs and thus the project does not seek to exacerbate or draw attention to these in any way. There is no intention to damage participants' self-esteem although this is a potential risk. This is explored more thoroughly in the assessment of possible harm.

Students will not be offered financial rewards in order to participate in this research project. Students will be offered 20 school epraise (house) points which contributes to prizes at the end of the school year.

THE VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

All participants will be recruited from their respective year groups within the secondary school setting. Potential participants will be given the consent form and information form to give them the opportunity to make an informed choice. Potential participants will be identified as having literacy difficulties of the mild/moderate state. Participants will be asked to provide written consent, parents will be informed of the research and be given the opportunity to opt out on behalf of their child.

Participants will be informed that all data will remain confidential and anonymous in the written project. It will also inform students of the purpose of the project and their role within in. The consent form will be discussed with the participants as their literacy difficulties may make it more difficult for them to understand the concept of the project. The wording of the consent form will be discussed with the year 8 pilot project participants as part of the analysis to ensure that it is accessible. Parents will be contacted via written means and parents will be given the opportunity to 'opt-out' their child at any point in the project. Where parents also have literacy difficulties the researcher will call home directly to discuss and ensure the adult understood the potential implications of the project. In most cases the school are aware of parental literacy difficulties as these are held on file to ensure parents do not miss out on vital information.

Participants are all aware of their literacy difficulties however, there is a risk that their self-esteem may be damaged by being selected for participation in a research project specifically because they have additional needs. This will be addressed carefully in the recruitment process and during discussions with potential participants. The purpose of the project is to give students a voice about how they perceive literacy and their experiences of literacy within school and at home. As a result, they become active participants within the research rather than having the research done to them in order to 'fix it.' Therefore the literacy issue will not be addressed with the student as a problem to be fixed but as a unique opportunity to learn about the school experience from a different perspective. Students should therefore not feel put down by their experiences as part of this project. At all stages students will be reminded that they have the choice to withdraw from the project at any stage therefore if they are feeling uncomfortable at any point then they can opt out of the project.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Students need special arrangements with regards to being able to access the instructions and consent forms to participate in the project. Instructions will be given verbally as well as in written format to ensure that they understand the task but more importantly understand their rights as a participant in the project.

THE INFORMED NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

All participants will be informed of the nature of the project through an information sheet which participants can keep and will also be discussed throughout the project. This will also be sent home to ensure parents are aware of the nature of the project. Through this, participants will be advised that they may withdraw from the project at any point, and parents/carers will be given the chance to opt out their child at any point, until the point of submission of the project. Participants will be reminded of this at each data collection point verbally as the data collection points are fairly well spread out and participants may forget that they have the option to do this.
An information sheet for this project is attached to this application form as well as consent forms.

ASSESSMENT OF POSSIBLE HARM

The research project is limited in the harm it may cause participants. The research is taking place within the school environment that the participants are very familiar with. They are also very familiar with me and therefore that should not present any potential risk to the participants.

Students are being asked to take photographs within their home environments and this may present some risk in terms of potential safeguarding issues that may come to light. If this happens then the school safeguarding policy will be used to report concerns and follow up using the Multi Agency Safeguarding hub. This should ensure participants, their families and the researcher are protected from possible harm.

As the participants are students with literacy difficulties there is a risk that participants' self-esteem may be damaged as a result of highlighting their participation as a result of their literacy difficulty. I am anticipating that the nature of the project to build confidence as the aim is to explore their understandings of literacy rather than to emphasise their literacy difficulties. During the project students' literacy difficulties will not be addressed directly but used as a lens to view experiences of literacy. This aims to limit the possibility of psychological damage as a result of the research project. If however, there is a feeling from the participant, their parents/carers, or staff at the school that the young person's self-esteem has been damaged/is at risk then trained mentors and counsellors are on hand in order to support the young person. These actions aim to minimise the risk of possible harm to the young person.

There is minimal risk to myself as researcher. Whilst the interviews will be conducted on a 1:1 basis they will be conducted within the environment of the school and the safeguarding measures in place. They will be recorded and then transcribed for the benefit of data analysis. The young people know who I am and have been selected to minimise risk to both researcher and participant. The head teacher at the school will be fully aware of when interviews are taking place and the students involved to ensure the well-being of staff and students.

DATA PROTECTION AND STORAGE

Participants confidentiality will be maintained at all times throughout the research process. Participants identities will only be known by the researcher and the head teacher (for safeguarding purposes) and this information will be stored separately to the data collected. The institution in which the research takes place may be identifiable as a result of my own work within the setting however, the participants will remain anonymous within this process.

The security of the data will be guaranteed through storage on the researchers encrypted hard drive. The encryption will hold the raw data, consent forms, photographs selected and voice recordings which may allow identities to be found. The transcripts of interviews will be stored encrypted and backed up on the university U-drive with password security. The encrypted data will be stored for a maximum of 5 years and then destroyed. The transcript data will not contain personal details and will only contain generic descriptors for each participant. Photographs that students have selected and printed to use as stimulus material will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researchers home until the data collection is completed. At this point that hard copies will be destroyed. This data will be stored indefinitely and may be used for other research purposes. It will be made clear on the consent forms that transcript data will be kept and may be used at a later date to inform other research projects but all details will be anonymous.

There is a data protection notice on the consent form and this is also placed on the information form to ensure participants and their families are aware of data protection and storage throughout the process.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

This project is self-funded and has no commercial motive behind it however, the school has a high interest in the research outcomes as boys' achievement is a particular focus of the leadership team. The results of the project will be used to present the research and hopefully, to allow the researcher to be awarded a Professional Doctorate in Education. The results will be published as part of the qualifying thesis and may also be used in conference presentations and further research papers which may be published.

> The information above regarding the declaration of interests will be present on the information form.

USER ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK

> Participants will have the opportunity to engage in the project by selecting the material they present for analysis. Transcripts of the 1:1 interviews will be taken and used in data analysis. Participants will be given the findings of the project through a summary findings sheet which will be made available at the end of the project and participants are welcome to read the completed thesis.

INFORMATION SHEET

> Information is contained within the consent form. Copies will be given to participants to ensure they have a record of their rights and information.
>
> Instruction sheets will be given to the participants separately with the details of how the research will be conducted in more detail. This will include detailed instructions and time frames for each section of the data collection methods. These instructions will also be discussed verbally with the participant to ensure they fully understand the instructions.

CONSENT FORM
Form for participants is included below. Parental opt out form is attached separately.

> See separate attached form with adjustments made.

SUBMISSION PROCEDURE

Staff and students should follow the procedure below.

Post Graduate Taught Students (Graduate School of Education): Please submit your completed application to your first supervisor. Please see the submission flowchart for further information on the process.

All other students should discuss their application with their supervisor(s) / dissertation tutor / tutor and gain their approval prior to submission. Students should submit evidence of approval with their application, e.g. a copy of the supervisors email approval.

All staff should submit their application to the appropriate email address below.

This application form and examples of your consent form, information sheet and translations of any documents which are not written in English should be submitted by email to the SSIS Ethics Secretary via one of the following email addresses:

ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk   This email should be used by staff and students in Egenis, the Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies, Law, Politics, the Strategy & Security Institute, and Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology.

ssis-gseethics@exeter.ac.uk   This email should be used by staff and students in the Graduate School of Education.

Please note that applicants will be required to submit a new application if ethics approval has not been granted within 1 year of first submission.

Instructions for Participants

You will receive a digital camera for 5 complete days which include Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday. I will collect the digital cameras on Tuesday morning from you.
Once the photographs have been taken you will be able to select from the ones you have taken. When we meet to talk about the photographs we will talk about the ideas below so try to take photographs which you think fit the categories. You can take photos that are more random if you think they are interesting and you would like to talk about them.

Rules
1. Do not take photographs of people – even if they ask you to!
2. Try not to delete photographs
3. Remember – literacy is any form of reading/writing at home and at school
4. Don't worry if you can't find anything for one or two of the categories but do try to fill them as best you can

Categories
1. Something you found hard to read
2. Something you found hard to write
3. Something you found easy to read
4. Something you found easy to write
5. Something you read at home regularly
6. Your favourite type/example of reading or writing
7. An example of your favourite reading or writing in school
8. Something unexpected
9. An important part of literacy
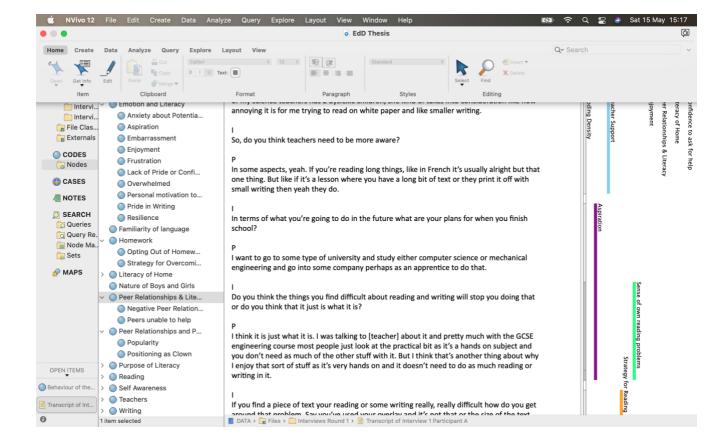10. An exciting literacy event

Appendix 6: Interview Schedule

<u>Interview Schedule for interviews</u>

1. Unstructured interview – conversations regarding each photograph taken by considering what they indicate to individuals. Address each category in turn and consider the role of teachers, difficulties and things that make it easier.
2. Discuss literacy difficulties and what makes it easier for the student to understand what the classwork entails.
   a. Based on this do they consider that literacy difficulties is more of a boys' issue, a girls' issue or equally both?
   b. Explore their perception of this – consider the subjects in which boys have a perceived difficulty with literacy more so than other subjects.
3. Does them being a boy make it harder, easier or about the same for them to learn in comparison to girls?

These are very loose themes and often direction to be taken from the discussion taking place within the interview.

Appendix 7: Coded Transcript Example

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