Constructing Places of Resistance and Non-Participatory Identities in a Secondary School Undergoing Radical Change

Submitted by Thomas Ralph, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education, January 2016.

This thesis is available for library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has been previously submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other university.

Signature:............................................................................
Abstract

This thesis is an ethnography that took place in an ‘underperforming’ school in the South of England. The school is located on a deprived estate, taking its pupils from an area in the bottom quintile with regard to deprivation indicators, and regularly features at the bottom of local league tables. Recently converted to academy status, the school was in the process of being rebuilt. The school in question is seen as abject by the broader community and features a large number of disruptive and disaffected students.

The overarching research questions that this study focuses on are: What kind of person do resistant pupils want to be recognised as and what kind of place do they want school to be? Within this, the thesis examines how students develop an identity of non-participation as well as how they act in order to make their voice heard and affect the nature of the place they are in.

In order to investigate these questions the paper draws on the work of Foucault (1979, 1982, 2003) who suggested that in order to understand how power relations work it is necessary to investigate resistance rather than trying to understand power from the perspective of its own rationality. This approach is useful since students in school do not resist specific institutions or groups, but specific instances of power personified by those that they come into immediate contact with on a day to day basis. It also mobilises concepts of space and place developed by Doreen Massey (2005) and Tim Ingold (2008) whereby space is a product of interrelations permanently under construction as opposed to simply a surface and place becomes a product of these intersections within the wider power geometry of space. This is particularly relevant to the context of
a failing school, seen as abject by the surrounding community and struggling to maintain any improvement. The concept of voice as defined by Nick Couldry (2010) and the students’ belief that they lack control over their lives in school is also key in terms of understanding the motivations for their resistance.

The thesis argues that the fact that the school is gradually being demolished and rebuilt is seen as a threat as well as an opportunity by the participants. Since the school was intimately bound up with their identity, the changes made were an assault on their identity. However, the cracks opened up by the construction work offered them opportunities to carve out places for themselves. The participants suggest that the lip service paid to student voice by the school is a key issue in causing students’ resistant behaviour. The students in the study find that their agency is denied by the school and this, coupled with their desire to be seen as adults with legitimate opinions about their schooling, results in their resistant behaviour.
2.3 Foucault and Resistance ................................................................. 36
  2.3.1 Power ......................................................................................... 37
  2.3.2 The Development of Resistance in Foucault’s Thought .......... 38
  2.3.3 Foucault and Agency ................................................................. 43

2.4 Resistance and Place ..................................................................... 46

2.5 Voice ............................................................................................. 48
  2.5.1 Narrative .................................................................................. 49
  2.5.2 Recognition .............................................................................. 50
  2.5.3 Voice as a Process .................................................................... 54

2.6 Conclusion - The Involvement of a Culture of Resistance in the
Creation of Place .................................................................................. 55

3 Methodology and Methods ............................................................... 57

3.1 Methodology ................................................................................ 57
  3.1.1 Methodological Perspective ..................................................... 57
  3.1.2 Ethnography ............................................................................ 61
  3.1.3 Reflexivity ................................................................................ 64
  3.1.4 The Researcher as Research Instrument .................................. 71

3.2 The Site, the Sample and the Role of the Researcher ..................... 75
  3.2.1 The Research Site ..................................................................... 75
  3.2.2 Entry, Access and the Role of the Researcher ......................... 76
  3.2.3 Sampling .................................................................................... 79

3.3 Methods ........................................................................................ 84
3.3.1 Ethnographic Methods ................................................................. 84
3.3.2 Observation ............................................................................ 85
3.3.3 Interviews ............................................................................. 88
3.3.4 Interviews on Foot ................................................................. 93
3.3.5 Visual Methods and Photography .......................................... 94
3.3.6 The Use of Multiple Methods .................................................. 99

3.4 Analysis ....................................................................................... 100

3.5 Ethics ......................................................................................... 106

3.6 Methodological Limitations to the Research ............................. 110

4 Constructing Places of Resistance .............................................. 112

4.1 Issues of Space and Place in the Empirical Literature ............. 112
  4.1.1 School Buildings ................................................................. 112
  4.1.2 Negotiation of the Meaning and Use of Space .................... 115
  4.1.3 Movement Around School ................................................. 122
  4.1.4 Surveillance, Space and Identity ......................................... 126

4.2 The Participants’ Construction of School as a Place ............... 129
  4.2.1 Physical Environment .......................................................... 129
  4.2.2 Skips for Refuge and Refuse ............................................... 138
  4.2.3 Student Friendly Places: The Drama Studio and the Library 142
  4.2.4 Environmental Change as a Conduit for Resistance .......... 150
  4.2.5 Ghettoisation and the Defence of Identities ....................... 165
  4.2.6 Movement Within School .................................................... 168
6 A Compartmentalised Experience of School ................................. 308

6.1 Vocational Education, Imagined Futures and Cruel Optimism ...... 308

6.1.1 The Paradox of Vocational Education Provision ....................... 309
6.1.2 Imagined Futures .................................................................... 313
6.1.3 Cruel Optimism .................................................................... 319

6.2 The Links Between Schoolwork and Student Futures ................. 320

6.2.1 The Nature of Schoolwork and its Relationship to Identity and
Resistance ......................................................................................... 321
  6.2.1.1 The Nature of Schoolwork in Year 10 .................................. 321
  6.2.1.2 The Changes to the Curriculum in Year 11 ....................... 344
6.2.2 The Dilemma Posed by Qualifications ..................................... 351
6.2.3 The Contrast Between an Anticipated Future and the Enforced Neoteny
  of School ......................................................................................... 360

6.3 Conclusion - The Dislike of School as Distinct in Time ............... 367

7 Conclusion ...................................................................................... 369

7.1 A Culture of Resistance ............................................................... 369

7.2 Constructing Places of Resistance .............................................. 374

7.2.1 Strategic and Tactical Resistance ............................................ 374
7.2.2 The ‘Rubbishing’ of Space ...................................................... 376
7.2.3 Desire for Movement Through Space ...................................... 378

7.3 Relationships ............................................................................... 382
7.3.1 Recognition as Central to Fruitful Relationships and the Effect of Differing Agendas ................................................................. 382
7.3.2 The Façade of Formal Voice Processes ........................................... 385
7.3.3 Historic Reasons for School Aversion ............................................. 388

7.4 Young People as Learners and Pupils in School Its Link with Their Future ............................................................................ 389
7.4.1 The Nature of Schoolwork ............................................................ 389
7.4.2 The Pragmatism of Gaining Qualifications ...................................... 391
7.4.3 Imagined Futures ......................................................................... 392

7.5 Conclusion - Resistance is Not Futile .............................................. 393

7.6 Where Next? .................................................................................. 397

Appendix 1 – Certificate of Ethical Approval ....................................... 403
Appendix 2 – Details of the Data Collection .......................................... 406
References ......................................................................................... 409
Acknowledgements ............................................................................ 446
List of Photographs

1 The School's a Bin ................................................... ............................................................... 130
2 Unplastered Bricks ................................................... ............................................................... 132
3 Irrelevant Display Boards ................................................... ........................................................... 134
4 They Ain't Finished the Fuckin' School ................................................... ................................................... 135
5 Skips for Refuge ................................................... ............................................................... 140
6 The Drama Studio ................................................... ............................................................... 143
7 Additional Struts Reveal Bad Planning ................................................... ................................................... 149
8 The Staff Room ................................................... ............................................................... 152
9 The New Library ................................................... ............................................................... 154
10 Demolishing the Old School Building ................................................... ................................................... 160
11 The Entrance to the Vocational Area ................................................... ................................................... 166
12 Jenna in the Vocational Area ................................................... ................................................... 167
13 Staff in the Corridor ................................................... ................................................... ................................................... 171
14 Inside the Temporary Corridor ................................................... ................................................... 173
15 Scars in the Corridor ................................................... ................................................... ................................................... 175
16 Sofas in the Vocational Area ................................................... ................................................... 178
17 The Withdrawal Centre ................................................... ................................................... ................................................... 183
18 The Playground for Football ................................................... ................................................... 186
19 The Playground for Basketball I ................................................... ................................................... 191
20 The Playground for Basketball II ................................................... ................................................... 192
21 An Area for Smoking ................................................... ................................................... ................................................... 193
22 The Path Down to the Wood ................................................... ................................................... 195
23 Jenna Smoking ................................................... ................................................... ................................................... 200
24 Jenna and Martin Smoking ................................................... ................................................... ................................................... 201
List of Diagrams

Figure 1 - The Movement of Participants Between Groups.......................... 83
1 Introduction

This thesis focuses on disaffected students in an ‘underperforming’ school in the South of England. It considers what kind of person they want to be recognised as and what kind of place they want school to be. The thesis also questions how an identity of non-participation is developed and how students behave in order for their voice to be heard. The context that the research took place in offered an exciting opportunity to investigate these issues since it was undergoing extreme change, both physically and organisationally, as it converted to academy status. This introductory chapter sets the scene for the rest of the thesis by describing the origins of the research questions and giving a full description of the context that the research took place in. This is followed by the specific research questions addressed and a brief description of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 An Autobiography of the Question

Until 2009, I worked at a comprehensive school situated in a particularly deprived estate. In terms of General Certificate of Education (GCSE) results, the school underachieved badly, even taking into account the low baseline scores of its intake, with value added scores regularly in the bottom decile nationally. Despite all the efforts of the teachers and senior management, there was little improvement in the attainment of the children. Whilst working in this school I undertook a piece of research for my dissertation as part of an M.Ed. which focused on the impact of the external culture that the children were a part of on their relationship with schooling (Ralph, 2008). I considered how the broader culture of the community affected the ethos of the whole school and
how this combined with the difficulties with engagement that already exist amongst working class communities. This study led me to believe that there is a lot that can be learned about the mechanics of engagement and disaffection at school in relation to the external culture that children are a part of. It also appeared to me that many children were not being served effectively by the education system and were being provided with something that was not meaningful or relevant to them. The liberal political approach favoured by successive governments has emphasised equality of access to education without considering the relevance of its content to differing groups.

Much of my thinking at the time was dominated by the structural effects of class and its impact on students’ engagement with and performance in school. Despite class being described by Ulrich Beck (Beck & Willms, 2004) as a ‘zombie’ category reflecting 19th century experience, it persists as a structuring force in British society (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992). In fact, the inequalities of social stratification not only persist, but are increasing and this has a huge influence on the educational outcomes of a large proportion of the population (Reay, 2006). As Beverley Skeggs states: “To think that class does not matter is only a prerogative of those unaffected by the deprivations and exclusions it produces. Making class invisible represents a historical stage in which the identity of the middle classes is assured.” (Skeggs, 1997:7). Initially, I intended to pursue my PhD by working through this perspective and completed my initial research proposal on this basis (Ralph, 2010). There is, of course, a great deal of work that has been completed from this standpoint over many years and after many meetings with my supervisors at the start of the PhD process I was left with many questions over the precise meaning of class in 21st century Britain.
As Thompson (1978) suggests, classes arise because people with specific relations identify interests antagonistic to their own and come to struggle against them. Can this understanding of class and its relation to the means of production lead to children even meaningfully being described as members of a class in that sense? Subsequently, I came to the conclusion that there clearly were structural effects at play and there was a significant bulk of research evidence to support this, but perhaps I could take a different approach in order to offer something new.

During my preliminary reading phase I came across Pink’s (2009) ‘Doing Sensory Ethnography’, which had a significant impact on my subsequent approach. I had sketched out my research questions and had committed to the idea of carrying out an ethnography but was finding it difficult to move away from the structural ideas that I had been attached to. The theoretical understanding of place and place-making that she describes led me to conceptualise resistance to school in a new way and think more clearly about the way in which students experience school. Much research takes capitalism for granted (Ross, 1996). However, people experience deprivation and subjugation within tangible situations and it is this experience, not abstract and remote processes, that forms specific grievances hostile to specific targets (Piven & Cloward, 1979). Capitalism and class structure are not directly experienced and it was this that a focus on place enabled me to overcome; avoiding a reductionist leap from an economic situation to an assumed class situation (Scott, 1985); particularly when the participants in my research were children and therefore at a remove from the mechanics of class creation.
Much social theory has prioritised time and history over space and geography despite human beings creating their own geography alongside their history (Harvey, 1989). In other words, spatial configurations are equally as important as the temporal to social life (Giddens, 1984). Paul Farmer suggests that without an analysis that is both historically deep and geographically broad we may only see the residue of meaning; “the puddles, perhaps, but not the rainstorms and certainly not the gathering thunderclouds” (Farmer, 2004:309). Both aspects are essential to a thorough understanding of the ethnographically visible; only looking to the past misses the living webs of power in which people are enmeshed. I decided that the work that I was going to carry out, whilst not denying the structural aspects of the students’ existences that had formed over time, would instead focus upon the day to day realities of their spatial being and consider exactly what kind of place the participants wanted school to be.

The Good Childhood Enquiry, led by the economist Richard Layard (Layard & Dunn, 2009), contains a discussion around the problems caused by an education system absorbed more with governmental targets and marketization than educational practices. Searching for an underlying cause explaining both income inequality and poor outcomes for children they identify a moral foundation for these issues, citing an inadequate degree of respect between people. Specifically, Layard & Dunn suggest that in a large number of schools the ethos is one of struggle between teachers and pupils; stating that “discipline can only be based on a deeply ingrained pattern of mutual respect, shown by teacher to teacher, by teachers to pupils, by pupils to teachers, and by pupil to pupil.” (Layard & Dunn, 2009:157). This relates to a context specific instance of what Nick Couldry (2010) calls a crisis of voice. Based on this, I also wanted to
develop research questions that focused on pupil voice, how they made their voices heard and what kind of person they wanted to be recognised as.

The students that I was interested in working with were certainly marginalised and the margins, while a position of exclusion, are also a position of power and critique (Shields, 1991). Working in these margins enables the exposition of the relativity of the entrenched universal values at the centre and the characteristics deemed anomalous and excluded. If I was going to move away from structural understandings of the participants’ situation then I also needed to develop an understanding of power that reflected their agency and ability to exert influence over their own lives. In order to achieve this, much of the theoretical framework of the thesis rests on the work of Foucault and his diffuse conceptualisation of power.

1.2 The Context of the Research

The research took place in a comprehensive school in the South of England which was persistently at the bottom of local school league tables due to its students’ performance in their GCSE examinations. It is situated in a particularly deprived estate, taking a large part of its intake from an area in the bottom quintile of UK deprivation indicators. This estate forms a small enclave in what is overall an area of average wealth. It is known locally as a failing school and struggles to fill its quota of school places because the majority of parents endeavour to send their children elsewhere. The school has historically underachieved even taking into consideration the baseline results of its intake with value added scores, during the period when they were calculated by the government, regularly in the bottom decile nationally.
At the time of the study the school had recently become an academy. The academies programme was a key part of the New Labour Government’s education policy during the first decade of the 21st century (Long, 2015). Developing from the previous Conservative Government’s City Technology Colleges, which were the first state schools to be freed from local authority control, the first academies opened in 2002 and could be set up anywhere rather than just in urban areas. These academies were subject to a funding agreement between the academy and the Secretary of State and were aimed at improving standards in secondary schools in disadvantaged areas. Initially, academies were required to have a sponsor which could be a philanthropist, business, charity, educational foundation, faith group or university; however, this requirement was removed in 2007. Becoming an academy allowed a school to become free to set its own curriculum and set its own term times. Subsequently, the Coalition Government that came to power in 2010 began a huge expansion of the academies programme. The school in question began the process to convert into an academy in 2009 and subsequently converted in September 2010.

Once the school had converted to academy status it began to undergo some radical changes, both to its environment and the structuring of the curriculum that it offered. After operating as an academy for two years, parts of the school were demolished and a new school building was constructed. Whilst this was occurring, the staff and students remained on site occupying some of the remaining buildings. There were a small number of temporary classrooms used whilst the building work took place and a walkway connecting two areas of the school created through the erection of temporary wooden walls. This process
took a year and began whilst I was carrying out the fieldwork for the present study.

Taking advantage of the new freedoms on offer to academy schools, during the first year of academy status the school totally reshaped the manner in which students were educated. Classes were taught in ability sets but were not segregated according to age at all. Pupils of all ages were grouped together for many of their lessons. Additionally, a small group of particularly disaffected and disruptive Key Stage 3 students were often educated off site by a land based learning group, remaining in school for their core subjects of English, maths and science. As the academy progressed into its second year, the land based students were moved back in to school, followed a totally distinct curriculum from the mainstream and were taught in a totally discrete area of the school. Despite this, they did share the same timing of the school day including break and lunch. This became known as the vocational group and the remaining majority of the school population were known as the mainstream. The mainstream group followed a largely conventional curriculum and were moved back into groups based on age as well as ability. From the start of the third year of the academy the school was split into three sub schools. Sub school A, which consisted of the vocational group and was expanded to include more students from the mainstream; sub school B, which featured a fairly mainstream curriculum but with a reduced number of option subjects in comparison with a more standard situation and sub school C, considered to be an academic stream who had the usual number of option subjects. Also introduced during this year was the Alpha stream. This was for students who only studied English
and maths. They were taught these subjects separately from the rest of the school population and were allowed home when they were not in these lessons.

Given the extreme nature of the changes that occurred in the school, it offered an ideal context to investigate how students worked in order to create the kind of place that they wanted school to be and also the extent to which their voice was listened to and how they ameliorated the situation if they felt they were not being listened to.

1.3 Research Questions

The overarching question that this thesis focuses on is:

- How does a culture of resistance manifest in a school experiencing a period of extended change?

Within this, I specifically address these sub questions:

- What kind of “place” do the participants want school to be?
  - How do the imposed changes to their environment affect the participants?
  - How do the participants occupy space in order to create the kind of place that they want school to be?
- How do the participants’ relationships with adults affect their engagement with school?
  - What effect do student-teacher relationships have on pupil engagement?
  - What impact do parental attitudes have on student attitudes?
  - How do students make their voice heard?
- What “kind of person” do the resistant pupils want to be recognised as and become?
  - How do they develop an identity of non-participation?
  - Is there a lack of connection with their future or are they practising an expected future?
1.4 The Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is unconventionally structured. In order to avoid simply reproducing previous accounts, creating a tracing rather than a mapping in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1988) terminology, much of the reading of relevant empirical research was carried out after the data analysis so there is not an orthodox literature review section. Instead, the next section summarises the theoretical framework that the research is built upon, followed by an exposition of the methodology and methods that the research followed. After this there are three findings chapters which all begin with a review of the relevant literature which was completed after the data was broken down and reordered in order to synthesize the outcomes of the research. Finally there is a conclusion which theorises the findings in order to make the discoveries from the particular relatable to a more general situation and suggests further lines of enquiry.
2 Theoretical Framework

The term resistance may be used to refer to a range of actions and behaviours across all strata of human social life (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). Resistance is not a characteristic of an individual or a state of being, rather it is a feature of active behaviour whether that is verbal, physical or intellectual. Neither does resistance need to consist of grand gestures; for example, the anthropologist James Scott emphasised what he referred to as ‘everyday resistance’, where:

“Most forms of this struggle stop well short of collective outright defiance. Here I have in mind the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on”

(Scott, 1985:xvi)

This chapter starts with a brief overview of previous means by which resistance in schools has been investigated and conceptualised. Although I have theorised my work somewhat differently, I intend to come back to these theories in the conclusion. As stated in the introduction, I have intentionally not made class the focus of this investigation. However, it is clear from previous research that there are structural issues at play in situations such as the one under examination here. After this, in order to address the research questions detailed in the previous chapter, I lay out a theoretical framework defining what is meant by place, resistance and voice; the key concepts raised by these questions.

2.1 Theories of Reproduction and Resistance

2.1.1 Theories of Reproduction

The manner in which the behaviour of children in schools has been researched and understood has changed over time and has been analysed through many
different lenses and I will give a brief overview of these here. Building on Louis Althusser’s structuralist theory (1971), Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis developed a social reproductive understanding of education. From this angle, schools operate to reproduce social relations in favour of the dominant group or class in society and act to legitimise the dominant ideology of these groups (Sultana, 1989). Perhaps the most well-known aspect of their work is their correspondence principle through which schools mirror the social relations and hierarchy that are found in the workplace. This hidden curriculum, rather than the cognitive effects of education, is the real reason that employers value school. The implication of this is a rejection of the liberal assumption that schools offer value free and objective knowledge and instruction (Russell, 2011) and attempts to reveal the means by which schools reproduce and existing relations of capitalist production (Giroux, 2001).

These reproductive theories have been used to study pupil resistance since they shed light on the structural aspects of educational institutions in wider society (Russell, 2011). However, these views relegate human agency to passive socialization and give undue weight to domination, additionally emphasising social reproduction at the expense of cultural reproduction. The means by which power and domination operate are never given sufficient attention and the notion that domination is never total is not considered (Giroux, 2001). Dominant ideologies and processes are facilitated and not simply reproduced by schools. One of the central problems in any theory of social reproduction is the existence of patterns of opposition which suggest that the determinate effect of education cannot be assured.
Building on the theory of social reproduction, Pierre Bourdieu was concerned with the tendency in Marxist thought to privilege substances and groups at the expense of relationships (Bourdieu, 1985). He also intended a break with the tendency to reduce multidimensional social relations to the relations of economic production. In his approach, the social relations between classes would go beyond a dichotomous antagonistic struggle and blur into a layered and stratifying discourse (Lin, 2001). Whilst criticising the Marxist emphasis on mercantile exchange, Bourdieu (1986) created an economic metaphor to describe the functioning of the social world, recognising capital in all its forms. He described 3 primary forms of capital: economic, cultural and social.

For Bourdieu, cultural reproduction rests on the premise that the ideology of a class divided society is mediated and reproduced through symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1990b). Dominant groups in society protect their interests by presenting them as a natural aspect of the social order. Prioritising cultural reproduction rather than social reproduction avoids problems associated with the explicit functionalism present in accounts of education such as that by Parsons (1964) with school serving to prepare students for preordained roles in society. This approach also avoids the implicit functionalism in Althusser (1971) and his description of education as the dominant ideological state apparatus in a mature capitalist society. Bourdieu unequivocally refutes the idea that the school system is an apparatus, rather it is a field in which agents and institutions constantly struggle (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). It is also possible to avoid a conservative understanding that social reproduction is an inevitable outcome of processes which preserve the status quo (Demaine, 2003).

However, culture for Bourdieu means bourgeois culture; implying that the
dominated have no culture of their own – culture becomes a means of transmitting their ‘objective’ chances in life. (Giroux, 2001). Cultural production and reproduction through resistance or accommodation is not recognised by Bourdieu and his work and whilst a useful step forward from structural functionalist thinking this still results in an account of domination that is cyclical and indissoluble, making it impossible to account for social actors as agents of change (Giroux, 2001).

2.1.2 Theories of Resistance

In the late 1970s, reproductive theories began to be contested by theories of resistance principally in reaction to their pessimism and the implication that education could make no difference to the oppressive class relations of capitalism (McFadden, 1995). Starting from the reproduction of class inequalities through education, resistance theory endeavours to clarify the subtleties of accommodation and resistance in oppositional youth culture (Giroux, 2001). Certain pupils in school employ “working-class cultural weaponry” (Davies, 1994:333) in dynamic accounts of opposition, agency and class struggle. Claims are made that, by contesting the meaning of school, children are taking part in a struggle against middle class domination and that these struggles are part of a wider working class struggle.

In ‘Learning to Labour’, Paul Willis (1977) moved forward from the explicitly deterministic discourse of reproductive theories and tried to encapsulate the tension between structure and agency (Russell, 2011). He suggested that the formal qualifications offered by education offer no benefit to these students either in the long or short term. Learning does not just require time and effort,
but a sacrifice of independence and instant gratification. The pursuit of instant gratification becomes a lifestyle and can offer exactly the same thing in ten years as it does now. This is an opportunity costed assessment of the rewards of conforming to middle class behaviours. Not only were ‘the lads’ rejecting the academic work available in school, but they were preparing themselves for a future as manual labourers.

Paul Willis (1981) recognised that a distinction should be made between cultural production, cultural reproduction and social reproduction; identifying a relationship feeding upwards from cultural production, through cultural reproduction leading to social reproduction. The directed nature of this relationship is important to understand because social reproduction is a subset of cultural production and only explains the features of relationships between groups rather than any internal facts about them. Cultural production pertains to the lived practices and productions in a historical context on the often contradictory grounds of what is inherited and imposed on a group in a creative and active manner; experienced as new by each generational group and person. Cultural reproduction is the way in which, through ideological, cultural and historical processes, specific essential features appear to be continuous, reproducing previous forms which are subjectively inhabited to create attitudes and inform decision making. Examples include racism, sexism, private property and forms of authority. Cultural production in school is a key means of understanding some of the ways in which social reproduction is ultimately achieved.
Willis (1983) recognises that within any structural location there are degrees of agency, stating that social agents have a collective ability to “think like theorists, but to act like activists” (Willis, 1983:114). However, the association between class and resistance may have been overplayed by writers such as Apple (1982), Giroux (2001) and Willis (1977) with evidence suggesting that the relationship between resistance to school and student background being weaker than resistance theorists generally recognise (Davies, 1994). Other factors frequently come into play, for instance being placed in a non-academic stream regardless of background. Walker (1986) suggests that Willis romanticises resistance and culture and ultimately has the same problems that all Marxists have had in explaining the causal relations between the material and the ideological.

Whilst these theories of production and reproduction remain of importance due to their focus on structural motivations for resistance, I intend to focus on the minutiae of the day to day experience of the participants in the study. For this reason, the next section theorises exactly how the places in which people act are constituted before I move on to conceptualise what a more microscopic understanding of resistance might mean.

2.2 Issues of Space and Place

In order to consider how places come into being, I shall first summarise how it is that people occupy and interact with the physical location around them. This is useful for the work carried out here since I was looking at changes to the material environment around the students and how they interacted with that environment. First I shall describe what it means to be emplaced, moving on to
how individuals engage with their environment through their senses. After this I shall look at how place making occurs, building on the nature of human interaction with their environment.

2.2.1 From Embodiment to Emplacement

Much early social theorizing relied on a Cartesian distinction between the mind and the body; physical experience undergoing objectification by a rational mind (Csordas, 1994). This tendency to separate the mind and body and reify the mental over the physical has obscured the fact that the body is clearly the site of processes of knowing (Sandelowski, 2002). As Csordas (1990) suggests, on the level of perception it is illegitimate to distinguish between the mind and the body and if we understand the body for what it is in experiential terms, a subject rather than an object, the mind and body distinction moves into uncertain territory. More recently, understanding of the body has moved from being an objectified aspect of identity and entity to be controlled to being an integral part of an entire body subject (Shilling, 2012). Whilst it is valuable for medicine and biological science to conceptualise the body as an object, for the social sciences to do so would have the effect of making the body a “precultural substrate” incapable of cultural participation (Csordas, 1994). The sociologist Dorothy Smith recognises that all individuals are based in their bodies, situating consciousness in a unique setting that no-one shares. As a result of this subjects are always embodied and located in situations of activity (Smith, 2002). Building upon this, the importance of location is introduced by Howes (2005) who, whilst appreciating the importance of the unity of mind and body implicit in the idea of embodiment, feels that the sensuous interrelationship of body, mind
and environment takes this a stage further. He refers to this as emplacement. Emplacement accounts for the relationship between minds, bodies and the material sensorality of the environment and forms the basis of the next two sections which broadly follow arguments laid out by Pink (2009, 2012).

2.2.2 Multisensorality

Having established that humans are emplaced in their environment, I shall now look at how these emplaced bodies interact with and take in their surroundings, focusing on their sensory engagement with these surroundings. Perception is the ability to acquire information, beliefs and knowledge about the world via the senses (Bayne, Cleeremans & Wilken, 2009). Merleau-Ponty (2012) argued that all perception is relative, a perceived “something” is always seen within some other thing; sensation cannot be defined as pure impression. Indeed, if pure sensation were achievable it would amount to no feeling whatsoever, simply being an experience of homogeneity. He goes on to suggest that sensation is produced by the qualities of objects but when we wish to perform an analysis of perception these qualities are conveyed into our consciousness and we build perception out of the perceived. We are caught up in the world and are incapable of detaching ourselves and as a result all sensation is coated with prior knowledge. Merleau-Ponty conceived of the body as a form of consciousness, seeing it as a synergistic whole rather than a collection of adjacent organs.

Pink (2009) cites many researchers that have taken these ideas and developed work that suggests that the senses combine to form an inseparable whole and this anthropological work is backed up by recent developments in neurobiology.
Objects and events in our surrounding environment stimulate our nervous systems through more than one sense and “the experiential unity of consciousness implicates that the convergence or binding of cross-modal sensory signals occurs prior to conscious perception” (Bayne, Cleeremans & Wilken, 2009:211). Phenomenological experience is not formed through separate streams of sensory data but by a coherent amalgamated whole comprised of sight, sound, smell, touch and taste; “what we perceive or where we perceive it to be located in space is a product of inputs from different sensory modalities that combine, substitute or integrate” (Newell & Shams, 2007:1415). Based on these findings, synaesthesia comes to be seen as an augmentation of processes that already occur rather than an anomaly (Bayne, Cleeremans & Wilken, 2009). In the past it was thought that perception was a passive process, inputs from the sensory organs being passed directly to the cognitive areas of the brain. However, more recently it has been accepted that previously stored knowledge and assumptions actively influence even the most basic perceptions (Gregory, 2004). Sensory inputs are “further modulated by learning and by more cognitive or top-down effects including previous knowledge, attention, and the task at hand” (Newell & Shams, 2007:1415).

It is important that we recognise that our interconnected senses are not overshadowed by any one modality and that in different settings meanings may be construed through different modalities (Pink, 2009). Simultaneously, sensory experience is tangled in cultural understandings as well as fundamental in the on-going formation of these categories. This suggests that experience and knowledge are intimately bound with the physical environment and this is as true for schools as it is for any other location. Pedagogic practice and student
engagement are at least in part dictated by the nature of the place in which they occur (Prosser, 2007). As I argue in the next section, the behaviour of the inhabitants of those places is intimately bound with the nature of the place itself.

2.2.3 From Space to Place

Recently, there have been calls for research in education to pay specific attention to issues of space and place (Gulson & Symes, 2007). For some time, anthropologists have not considered their work to be focused on isolated cultural groups located within clearly defined territorial boundaries (Pink, 2009) which raises the problem of defining what we mean by place if it is not an area that can be clearly delineated. This section goes on to demonstrate that the place that is a school cannot be defined simply by its environmental boundaries.

In order to define place and its relationship to space and time, I shall draw on the work of the philosopher Edward Casey, the geographer Doreen Massey and the anthropologist Tim Ingold. Casey (1996) argues that the view of space as neutral, to which placial modifiers are later added, is a fallacy and one which has taken precedence during a period between ancient and postmodern thought. He recites arguments by phenomenologists such as Husserl and Merleau-Ponty to reclaim the pre-eminence of place over space and time. From this perspective, perception is primary and therefore offers more than simply a stream of information about surrounding phenomena and gives more “than a conviction that we are merely in the presence of these surfaces” (Casey, 1996: 17). Human subjects are to be found in a seething place-world, rather than surrounded by sensory information suspended in disinterested space. Places cannot be known without being present in the place itself and this knowledge is
not a consequence of perception, but is a part of perception itself. Perception at its most basic level is synaesthetic, relating to entire bodies sensing as they move through places. Casey contends that perceiving synaesthetically is to be “actively passive”, absorbing the surrounding environment whilst constituting the world at the same time. Consequently, this is to be constituted by cultural and social structures that are embedded at the most fundamental plane of perception. Anthropological sensing and movement are never precultural or presocial and prioritising perception is to prioritise the experience of the lived body. None of this is to suggest that people are subjugated by the place that they inhabit; we have control over their influence on us. One is never devoid of perception, never only in a place but always of a place. So I draw from this that the inhabitants of a school do not simply attend the place, but are integral to its on-going construction as a place, giving substance to the question of exactly how young people can occupy space in order to create the place that is school.

Whilst for Casey space and time arise from the embodied experience of place, Doreen Massey (2005) recognises that this prioritisation of the local places a limit on the extent to which power relations beyond a specific locale can affect things ‘in’ that place. Massey (2005) contends that by envisioning space as an inert slice through time or as a closed system strips it of its true meaning and allows us to overlook its importance. She rethinks space through a spatialised subjectivity, recognising it as the sum of heterogeneous interrelations which are always in the process of construction. From this perspective time and space are inseparable and space is a source of exhilaration as much as time in its passing is. This conceptualisation of space as open, multiple, relational and unfinished allows for the possibility of politics and political action. Space becomes a
product of social relations and the act of travelling about it implies a contribution to its ongoing fabrication.

“If space is ... a simultaneity of stories-so-far, then places are collections of those stories, articulations of the wider power geometries of space. Their character will be a product of these intersections within that wider setting, and what is made of them.”

(Massey, 2005: 130)

Massey sees both place and space as arising from active material practice. When one arrives in a place one becomes enmeshed into the plexus of stories from which that place is made. Place is defined by these intersections within the wider setting and as much a part of this are the connections and relationships that are not established and the exclusions that occur, all contributing to the specificity of place. Movement is always temporal as well as spatial and the moment a place is left that place moves on, its character altered. Massey rejects the idea of place as having a predetermined identity but emphasises its ‘thrown togetherness’, seeing it as a constant negotiation between the human and non-human. Through Massey’s understanding of the distinction between space and place, the interaction between the local practices that occur in a school and the wider discourses that that school and its occupants are subject to can be understood. Students, teachers and the rest of a school’s population enter the school, bringing with them their histories and relationships creating a specific place within the broader national political context of the education system and its demands on those individuals.

Whilst Casey and Massey both recognise place as a form of event it is important not to over emphasise the similarity of their positions (Pink, 2012). Casey sees place as having a gathering power which both contains and
excludes both the animate and inanimate. This is a power which enables people to repeatedly return to the same place. In contrast, Massey highlights the ‘thrown togetherness’ of place and sees it as an incomplete instant held within wider geometries of power. Casey usefully implicates embodied perception and experience in the establishment of place but neglects the wider structures of power; Massey opens place up to dynamic space but lacks emphasis on the specifics of local human activity (Pink, 2009 & 2012).

Pink (2009, 2012) reconciles this difference using the work of the anthropologist Tim Ingold (2008). Ingold recognises that “we are in place … because we exist as embodied beings” (2008: 1808). However, to be embodied is not to be confined within boundaries but rather involves extending along the numerous paths of the body’s entanglement in a textured world. Ingold prioritises movement over place, claiming that people live along paths and that places are created out of movement along them. Without the motion of people and other entities there could be no sense of place. Ingold (2008) still sees places as events, contending that they do not exist but, rather, they occur; “they are topics rather than objects” (Ingold, 2008: 1808). Places arise out of the meshwork of paths in which subjects are entangled. We are perpetually emplaced because we are perpetually in motion. Whilst Casey’s concept of gathering might be seen to give places an undeserved power of agency, Massey’s ‘thrown togetherness’ suggests either randomness or the presence of exterior (spatial) forces in the construction of place (Pink, 2008). By invoking the idea that places occur along the nexuses of pathways that people travel along, they are neither entirely internal nor entirely external but both in varying degrees.
Casey cautions against replacing the fallacy by which space comes to be seen as a perfected, abstract plane with place nothing but decoration and projection. A danger exists that place becomes a new blank slate on which to inscribe anything of importance in human experience; “Spatiocentrism and temporocentrism would then give way to an equally spurious topocentrism” (Casey, 1996:46). Place is never a neutral medium in which culture grows and develops, but is infused with culturally constituted institutions and practices which saturate the bodies of sensing subjects. Using Ingold’s work to mediate between that of Casey and Massey gives us a useful way of looking at the concepts of place and space. Casey’s ideas regarding the embodied experience of place and the primacy of perception are useful to researchers in trying to understand the sensory engagement of groups with the world around them; as well as their own involvement in the production of place (Pink, 2008). The notion of entanglement that Ingold provides may appear to negate the importance of a distinction between space and place. However, Massey’s ideas regarding space accentuate the importance of understanding the specificity of place in the context of wider space. Proximate place is always situated and entangled with the global (Pink, 2008). By linking these approaches to space and place it can be understood that the place that is a school arises through the journey of its population in and through material space. This collection of their stories collected within the wider power geometries of space forms a local politics arising from a more extensive context. This enables us to examine the means by which young people act in order to establish school as the kind of place they want it to be whilst understanding the impact of the environmental changes occurring during the rebuilding work on them.
2.2.4 Place and Practice

Ingold’s (2008) conception of place as a meshwork guards against a view of practice as merely doing, in the same way that place cannot be seen as congruent with physical locality (Pink, 2012). If we stop thinking of practices as things we do in and to places and begin to understand them as an integral part of place making, we can begin to see how identity and practice are amalgamated into the processes by which places come to be and become known as particular types of place. Gupta and Ferguson (1997a) emphasise the importance of the social and political processes of place making, seeing them as taking place through embodied practices which mould identities rather than through the abstract realm of ideas. They stress that this perspective avoids seeing the local as the source of originality and authenticity and the global as new, external and inauthentic. A break with the supposed isomorphism of space, place and culture enables us to reconsider “who has the power to make places out of spaces”? (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997b:40) and it is this question that I will address in the next section by examining Foucault’s ideas regarding power and resistance.

2.3 Foucault and Resistance

“Marxists always refer to the class struggle, but pay little attention to the struggle, they focus mainly on defining class, its boundaries and membership but never concretely on the nature of the struggle.”

(Foucault, 1988: 123)

The quote above illustrates much of the reasoning behind the motivation to avoid a focus on class and structural issues and the decision to take a more localised approach. Foucault’s approach to understanding power and resistance
avoids teleological notions and focuses on the mechanics of these power relations. In this section I will first consider what is meant by power and then move on to examine the development of Foucault’s thought regarding resistance.

2.3.1 Power

For many writers, the concept of war has been used to describe something far more wide ranging than simply battles between nation states (Goodman, 2010). Becoming an ontological condition, it represents the low-impact conflict that permeates the most routine features of everyday existence. In their Treatise on Nomadology, Deleuze and Guattari (1988) suggest that war is an undercurrent running parallel with the social, military outbreaks being only a specific division of the phenomenon and the form which the war machine takes as it is appropriated by the state. Deleuze had introduced the term ‘war machine’ into his work in 1973 in order to solve the political problem of groups formed in opposition to state power modelling themselves on parties and states (Deleuze, 2004; Sibertin-Blanc, 2010). In other words, a means of not reproducing the power structures they wish to replace. The war machine is a transhistorical occurrence which realises itself in a range of social and technical environments without always taking war as its object, nor the submission or destruction of an enemy (Sibertin-Blanc, 2010). This makes it clear that power is always operating in every human environment. Whilst the use of force is an extreme outburst of this power, it is always operating explicitly or implicitly through human relations.
In a similar vein, Foucault (2003) inverts a proposition by military theorist Claus von Clausewitz (1992) by stating that politics is a continuation of war by other means. For Foucault, power is coterminous with the social and where Deleuze and Guattari posit the formation of war machines Foucault identifies resistance. This resistance cannot predate the power which it opposes (Foucault, 1988). As a result of this dispersed interplay between resistance and power, Foucault seldom analyses the apparatus of state power directly, rather he examines it symptomatically through its peripheral bodies, such as hospitals, prisons and schools (Giddens, 1984). Clearly then, Foucault’s conception of power is relevant to the situation I am considering here and the next section traces the path of Foucault’s thinking on resistance as it moves from a very structured and prescribed definition to something more fluid.

2.3.2 The Development of Resistance in Foucault’s Thought

Picket (1996) identifies three distinct phases in Foucault’s thinking on resistance. In the 1960s beginning with the publication of ‘Madness and Civilization’ (Foucault, 2001) he introduced the idea of resistance into his work but it is not clear at this point exactly what this resistance is against. He identifies rules, limits and norms that have been placed on individuals by history and which come to be seen as natural. These serve to marginalise some and strengthen the identity of those who restrain them. It is always possible to destabilise these limits through transgression and contestation. However, it is the case that new ones will always emerge to replace them. During this early ‘archaeological’ period, Foucault treats discourses as structured systems that regulate what can be said and done (Caldwell, 2007; Foucault, 2002). These
discourses exist independently of subjects and contexts, defining legitimate perspectives for agents and prescribing boundaries that delineate their choices (Foucault, 1980).

Foucault moved away from using the terms ‘contestation’ and ‘transgression’ in the early seventies and began to explicitly use the terms ‘struggle’ and ‘resistance’ and it is at this point that power begins to emerge as a crucial element in his thinking. Basing some of his thinking on Nietzsche, Foucault began to see that all assessments of human nature are dependent upon history and social practice and any specific idea of what human nature is fabricated, restricting potential and ostracising anyone who is not included within this ideal of human nature (Picket, 1996). Schools, alongside prisons and asylums (or, more generally, psychiatry), are key for Foucault here because they are crucial institutions in the dissemination of conservative philosophies veiled as knowledge. Again, it is evident that this notion of resistance is relevant to the research questions being investigated here. It can also be seen that, at this point, there are close links between this and the conceptions of resistance that were discussed in the opening section of this chapter.

“As soon as there is a power relation, there is a possibility of resistance. We can never be ensnared by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy”

Foucault (1988:123)

Building on the concepts that he developed in this second phase, the third phase of Foucault’s thinking on resistance began with the publication of ‘Discipline and Punish’ in 1975 (Foucault, 1979) and it is here that power becomes a central feature of his thought. Foucault criticises previous attempts
to understand power by calling into question their economism (Foucault, 2003). The liberal interpretation of power conceives of it as a right that one possess in the same way that one possess any other commodity. Power can be held or transferred and there is an obvious analogy between power and wealth. Opposing this would be a Marxist understanding of power as an economic functionality; i.e. the role of power is to perpetuate relations of production and acts to reproduce class domination. Foucault raises two key questions pertaining to this. Is power always subservient to the economy? Can power be modelled on commodity? He suggests that power is not something that can be given or exchanged, rather that it is something that exists only through action. Also, that power is not simply the propagation of economic associations but is predominantly a relationship of force.

Foucault (2003) goes on to say that, whilst the object of political power is to inaugurate peace in society, it does not do so with the intention of removing inequalities, but rather it enshrines a relationship of force through institutions such as schools, economic inequalities and even language. Modern power is not restricted to any specific place and works to augment the productive force of its subjects, concurrently diminishing the political capacity of those who seek change (Picket, 1996). Where it is at its most robust, power works positively; creating the impulse to behave in a particular manner. As a result, effective resistance must be concerned with this dynamic operation of power rather than its negative practices. Here, the significant break between Foucault’s thinking about power and resistance and other conceptualisations of resistance mentioned in the opening section of this chapter is clear. Foucault sees power operating diffusely across all members of society, working in a positive, rather
than negative, manner. Rather than subjugating individuals in order that they behave and think in a given way, individuals possess power and use it productively. This means that any individual maintains a degree of responsibility for their position in the world, rather than simply being constrained by structures beyond their control. As this project pays attention to the intricacies of day to day resistance by students in school, a conceptualisation of resistance as a productive form of power is beneficial.

Foucault (1982) suggests that in order to understand exactly how power relations operate, it is necessary to investigate resistance instead of attempting to analyse power from the perspective of its own internal rationality, stating that this approach is more empirical and involves greater links between theory and practice. To describe resistance as an anti-authority struggle is insufficient and Foucault identifies the key characteristics of this opposition. People do not identify overarching enemies, but rather their immediate enemy; that which is closest to them and can exercise power over them. This means that the object of struggle is not to attack a specific institution or group, but rather specific instance and form of power. This places individuals into categories and imposes identity on them which they and others must recognise. This power makes individuals subjects both in the sense of being subject to someone else and through being bound to their identity. This is a vital aspect of what makes Foucault so relevant to this study. The young people in school do not identify all-embracing enemies. They are not members of a class in this sense. They will identify teachers and wider school authorities as their opponents, the people and institutions that are directly exercising power over them. Their resistive acts
demonstrate their own power and serve as critical aspects of their identity formation.

Whereas a violent relationship acts upon the body, a power relationship acts indirectly upon the actions of a person. The opposite of violence is passivity and should violence encounter resistance it must act to curtail it. In contrast, power relations require two components which recognise one another as capable of action and this reveals the possibility of numerous outcomes and creative activity. Power relations can include both consent and violence as mechanisms or as results but these do not comprise the fundamental nature of power.

Foucault introduces the concept of an agonism, a neologism based on the Greek for combat, to describe the heart of the power relationship. The reciprocal incitation and struggle which represents the “recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom” (Foucault, 1982: 790). Resistance is never exterior to power and the existence of power relationships is contingent on an array of points of resistance everywhere in the power network (Foucault, 1998). Resistance is the antimatter of power and freedom is not a state of being characterised by an absence of repression but rather a type of activity within a nexus of opposing forces (Thiele, 1990). There is no “locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary” (Foucault, 1998:96). Each case is unique and may take many forms. There may be the occasional mass radical occurrence, but more often than not resistance is itinerant, effecting breaks and regroupings in society. The resistance under examination here is not a quest for a revolution, and takes its own unique form in everyday negotiations of power. How young people go about creating school
as the kind of place they want it to be is a resistive negotiation with power as they move along the paths that form that place.

Alongside this increasingly diffuse conception of power in his later ‘genealogical’ work, Foucault moves away from the idea of autonomous, regulating discourses and begins to see discourse as “not […] as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 2002:54). Although the world retains its physicality and objects exist independently of discourse, we cannot refer objects to sensory experience, facts or causes that exist beyond discourse (Caldwell, 2007). Relating this back to our understanding of place as elaborated in section 2.2, movement through and action in a spatial context can be understood as discourse “delimited precisely by the strategic intentions of the actor, by the responses of the individuals to whom the action is addressed or who become embroiled in it, and by the shared immediacy of the spatiotemporal context of the various individuals concerned.” (Moore, 1996: 89). This helps us to understand the means by which place is created through the interactions and power relations within it.

2.3.3 Foucault and Agency

“And when the prisoners began to speak, they possessed an individual theory of prisons, the penal system, and justice. It is this form of discourse which ultimately matters, a discourse against power, the counter-discourse of prisoners and those we call delinquents – and not a theory about delinquency.”

(Foucault & Deleuze, 1980:209)

Butin (2001) recognises that, in much research in schools, students are not given a voice of their own. They are subject to discipline, controlled and created
with school being the bellicose agent. This is the result of this undue focus on a small section of Foucault’s writing. Even where there exist extremely asymmetric power relations Foucault perceives individuals as capable of action. Resistance takes many forms; running away, remaining stationary, saying no or remaining silent. Even the acceptance of an obligation to act in a particular manner is an act within a power relation (Butin, 2001).

Foucault frequently comes under criticism for a perceived negation of agency (Butin, 2001). For example, Giddens claims the disciplining of the body by discourses of power becomes so pervasive in Foucault’s work that agency becomes indiscernible and that “Foucault’s bodies do not have faces” (Giddens, 1984:157). The “face work” that Giddens refers to requires strategies that must be developed through agency in situ. Schrag (1999) proposes that Foucault’s current popularity is simply down to the fact that the neo-marxist perspectives of the earlier means of understanding resistance that were discussed previously do not resonate in a post-socialist world and that, by employing Foucault, academics are resigning themselves to a structural status quo without appearing to; a criticism that this study could easily be open to. However, Butin (2001) recognises that much of this criticism rests on an overemphasis of the place of ‘Discipline and Punish’ (Foucault, 1979) in the canon of Foucault’s work. Foucault did not elaborate on much of what he meant by resistance in this particular book and without agents capable of action his broader understanding of power relations would disintegrate:

“[P]ower relations are thus mobile, reversible, and unstable. It should also be noted that power relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free. If one of them were completely at the others disposal and became his thing, an object on which he could wreak
boundless and limitless violence, there wouldn’t be any relations of power”

(Foucault, 2000:292).

The effect of Foucault’s work on agency is not to render it impossible but rather to decentre it. This decentred agency can be understood as comprising four key components: discourse, power/knowledge, embodiment and self-reflexivity. This reconceptualization of agency, rather than being some post-modern death of agency, is its partial reinvention (Caldwell, 2007). Giddens (1984) and Caldwell (2007) suggest that at the heart of Foucault’s agency is an aesthetic desire to act otherwise with no moral or political imperative to make a difference. Additionally, others suggest that with no external imperative to act, Foucault cannot explain why resistance is superior to submission (Fraser, 1981). This misses the point that Foucault cannot stipulate the precise reasons for struggle due to his refusal to engage with totalizing discourses (Picket, 1996). A daily ethical and political choice needs to be made as to what is the most significant threat to the self and resistance starts from this. Although Foucault links resistance to a Nietzschean ideal of aesthetic self-creation through this practical engagement (Foucault, 1982; Picket, 1996), there is no justification to say that an individual cannot act to make a difference or that an individual cannot have a reason to do so within Foucault’s thought. His focus is on the local nature of struggle and he declines to judge from an external viewpoint (Butin, 2001). These issues are relevant to this specific study because they relate strongly to issues of behaviour in school. Are resistant pupils thoughtlessly transgressing boundaries, or is there something more substantial behind their behaviour? This question relates powerfully to the notion of what kind of person the young people want to be and how their behaviour illustrates this.
In terms of the difference between space and place as defined earlier, Foucault’s focus is on localised places rather than the structural issues that are determined in space. In the next section I shall look at a specific link between resistance and the creation of place.

2.4 Resistance and Place

Much writing on resistance draws on the work of Michel De Certeau and his description of strategies and tactics in ‘The Practice of Everyday Life’ (De Certeau, 1984). He describes a strategy as occurring when a subject with power becomes isolated from an environment, assuming a space that can be demarcated and which serves as the basis for the generation of relations with those distinct from itself. He claims that this is the basis on which politics, economics and scientific rationality have been composed. Tactics are defined in opposition to this as a calculus that cannot count on such a delineated space and therefore on no boundary that distinguishes the ‘other’. De Certeau postulates that tactics belong to these ‘others’ and that the circumscription of space is a triumph of space over time. Tactics are contingent on time and as such must always be on the lookout for opportunities that must be taken on the hoof. Whatever is obtained through tactical breaks cannot be kept. Strategies are actions which create systems and totalizing discourses through the establishment of a place and require the hope that the instituting of a place erodes the effect of time.

Here, strategy is static, pertaining to structure, whereas tactics are the practice of the everyday which engages with that structure. The implication of this being that power exists as a monolith on the one hand and on the other exist the
tactics of the weak. This represents a colossal overestimation of the unity of the powerful and the coherence through which order is produced (Massey, 2005) unintentionally diminishing the capacity of the weak and concealing their complicity in power. Power relations conceptualised as a simple dichotomy between power and resistance is something that I have bypassed through the work of Foucault. De Certeau endeavours to escape structuralism through the introduction of resistance but by doing so leaves its structures intact and defined as spatial. His metaphorical story of descending from the World Trade Centre illustrates his bipolar understanding of power despite his mistaken critique (similar to those mentioned earlier) of Foucault as a proponent of absolute power (Morris, 1992).

A particular dichotomy that De Certeau reinstates that is particularly problematic in this context is that between time and space. Bergson says that:

“We extend to the series of memories, in time, that obligation of containing and being contained which applies only to the collection of bodies instantaneously perceived in space. The fundamental illusion consists in transferring to duration itself, in its continuous flow, the form of the instantaneous sections we make in it.”

(Bergson, 1911:193)

As discussed previously, these instantaneous sections are interpenetrated by time rendering them inseparable. The rendering of power and resistance as a binary split between space and time has as its inevitable corollary a lack of ability to examine the relationship between them (Sharp, Routledge, Philo & Paddison, 2000). Similarly, the spatialisation and marginalisation of resistance removes any implication or responsibility for power, ultimately presupposing a politics from a geography (Massey, 2005).
Through the way in which I have conceptualised power and resistance, it is inconceivable that we accept that young people in school can be absolved from responsibility for the manner in which power operates. There is clearly going to be an inequitable spread of power between the members of staff in a school and the students within it. But the extent to which this inequality exists and how it varies from location to location within school is something that is relevant to the research questions here. Are the pupils in school simply transgressing boundaries opportunistically in time as De Certeau would suggest? Or is there a spatial component to their behaviour as Massey would contend? It can be clearly seen that, in the sense that I have defined and discussed place beforehand, resistance is key in the creation of place.

2.5 Voice

Another key element of the research questions is the notion of voice. How do the participants make their voice heard and what kind of person do they want to become? This section will expand on exactly what is meant by voice in this context, breaking it down into its constituent parts so that what is taking place in schools can be understood and analysed. The writer Nick Couldry identifies the importance of voice for human beings in giving an account of themselves and the place which they inhabit. Defining voice as something that functions simultaneously within and beyond politics, voice as a value has four levels. Firstly, there is the primary process of voice and the capacity to provide a narrative of one’s life and its circumstances. The second order of value pertaining to voice is possessing a voice that matters. Beyond these are the connection of voice to other normative frameworks and those practices that
impede voice, determining some voices as viable and others as not (Couldry, 2010). The next two sections will go into a little more depth in defining voice as a value.

2.5.1 Narrative

For an individual to tell stories about their life is not simply a practical or symbolic action; it is an inherent aspect of the political process (Plummer, 1995). As discussed earlier, power is not monolithic, something that people either possess or do not. It is better conceived as a current which configurations the extent to which people experience control over their lives. It runs through lives, places, and networks of social activity and “the power to tell a story, or indeed to not tell a story, under the conditions of one’s own choosing, is part of the political process” (Plummer, 1995:26). It is important to recognise that there is no assumption that the purpose in narrating lives is to achieve a simplified unity of self. Paul Ricoeur (2005) identifies that, in contrast with literary narrative, narrative identity is fragile and unresolved. Narrative identity can never be comprehended in its totality owing to its intersubjective entanglement with that of others. The process of fictionalised biographical identity enables a sense of permanence of self, with a significant difference between those whose biographical phraseology is given to them and those who produced them (Ricoeur, 1992). Adriana Cavarero resolves this issue by suggesting that a sense of self does not spring from narratives but unity exists only in the desire to narrate. Even a “biography of discontinuous and fragmentary characters (even in the most radical ‘post-modern’ sense) still ends up unable to flee from the unity, which, listening to the tale with the ear of its desire, is conferred upon
it by the narratable self” (Cavarero, 2000:42). From this, voice can be appreciated as the “process of giving an account of oneself” (Couldry, 2010:3), whereas voice as a value is an appreciation of the importance of opportunities for voice as a process.

From this it can be ascertained that young people in school will have the same desire to narrate their lives and establish their own biography of themselves. This is a vital activity for them in order to establish a sense of permanent self. This understanding of voice demonstrates something more fundamental than a need for political, democratic representation, but more that children are able to articulate exactly who they think they are, the kind of person that they want to be. Having established this, the next section goes on to look at how that person can be recognised.

2.5.2 Recognition

The word ‘recognition’ in German is indicative of conferring a positive sense of self-worth, whereas in English or French it can also mean to identify without the positive connotation. It is in the German sense of the word that Axel Honneth (2012a, 2007) uses recognition as he attempts to reconfigure critical theory by using norms and references from routine experience in specific historical epochs (Couldry, 2010). He begins by suggesting that our intersubjective nature enables us to perform moral harm on one another through our words and actions. Building on this foundation, any understanding of justice should include opportunities for mutual recognition, as well as the distribution of material wealth. Honneth identifies three distinct levels of recognition. Initially, a fundamental care for individuals for their own sake. Following this, a reverence
for an individual as a responsible moral agent and finally an acknowledgment that a person’s abilities are of value to a community. Recognition is the driving force behind the formation of any group because we depend on the encouragement and affirmation that arises from social recognition, unable to uphold self-respect or self-esteem without the shared values or supportive experience of the group (Honneth, 2012b).

As Honneth (2007) acknowledges, recognition cannot be dissociated from institutional and social practice, it cannot be reduced to a matter of mutual affirmation. Nancy Fraser (2005) understands that recognition is bound with the distribution of material resources and political representation and the three cannot be treated completely independently of one another. She tries to move from the identity model of recognition to a model based on status. The identity model is based on the Hegelian belief that identity is constructed dialogically through mutual recognition and that one becomes a subject through acts of recognising and being recognised (Fraser, 2000). To be deprived of recognition is to suffer a misrepresentation of an individual’s relation to themselves and an injury of their identity. Supporters of this position map this onto the cultural and political spheres and insinuate that to be misrecognised is to belong to a group devalued by dominant culture. This elevates the importance of group identities and, by ignoring redistribution, treats misrecognition as an independent cultural harm. By moving to a status model of recognition it is not the group identity but rather the status of individual group members that obliges recognition (Fraser, 2000). Misrecognition then becomes not a distortion of group identity but rather social subordination through prevention from participating in social life as a peer. A claim for recognition is an attempt to be instituted as an equal in social
life, interrelating with others as peers. This is what links recognition to our broader understanding of voice in this context and links quite clearly to Honneth’s third level of recognition (Couldry, 2010).

The later work of John Dewey (1927) advocates that a state is formed and reformed by an experimental process and, since the conditions of that process are perpetually changing, the experiment must always be refined. Honneth (2007) builds on this, stating that “the democratic public sphere constitutes the medium through which society attempts to process and solve its problems” (Honneth, 2007: 234). This leads to an understanding of democracy as first and foremost a social and not simply political ideal; something that cannot be reduced to representative processes but the result of the experience that all participants in a society could achieve through cooperatively relating to one another.

Addressing criticism that his conception of recognition could be seen to be reproductive of social relations, Honneth (2012a) distinguishes between ‘ideological’ recognition and true recognition. Ideological recognition exercises means of “ritual affirmation” (Honneth, 2012a:77) to generate a self-image that corresponds to social expectation, reproducing the existing relations of domination as opposed to affirming another individual or group. In Foucauldian terminology the power employed by ideological recognition would be productive rather than repressive, recognition becoming ideological once individuals adapt their beliefs and practice to environments which do not materially provide for them. Having said this, Foucault’s understanding of power as diffuse and omnipresent presents a substantial challenge to Honneth’s view of ideology as
a diagnostic category (Olsen, 2008). One means of addressing this issue is through the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001) and the bridging of the work of Foucault and Gramsci. Hegemony is generally understood to be the nexus of ideas and practices that predominate in a given socio-political context, taken to be common sense even by those whose interests they do not serve. By aligning the concept of hegemony with Foucault’s diffuse, kinetic, view of discourse it cannot be seen as ideological duping but is rather an essential discursive condition of the socio-political (Youdell, 2011). Mouffe states that without hegemony of any kind, there would be no meaning or order.

“There are hegemonic practices because this radical unfixity makes it impossible to consider the political struggle as a game in which the identity of the opposing forces is constituted from the start”

(Laclau & Mouffe, 2014:154)

Power constitutes the social world, but there are forms of order that are more democratic than others (Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006). Linking this understanding of hegemony and power back to recognition and ideological recognition shows that ideological recognition, like hegemony, is unavoidable. Society will always impose norms on people, the question is to what extent it does this.

School is, of course, a fundamental way in which society imposes its norms upon people, as recognised by Foucault. But the source of this imposition is not a monolithic, top down, form of power, but a dynamic, momentarily negotiated power in which the resistance of the pupils is integral. This view of recognition as a key element of voice is fundamental to the relationships between pupils and teachers in school. As a result, this theorisation of voice as a value is useful in helping to answer the research questions here, since they in part focus on
how students make their voice heard and their relationships with adults. Now I have examined voice as a value, I will now go on to look at how this feeds in to voice as a process by which someone can be heard.

2.5.3 Voice as a Process

I have expounded the most relevant aspects of Couldry’s understanding of voice and I will now briefly outline the remaining details of voice as a process. Voice is socially grounded, requiring practical resources such as language and the symbolic status required to be recognised by others as having voice. Voice is inconceivable other than as an open-ended exchange of narratives with others. It is also a form of reflexive agency, linked to our broader actions in the world. This is not naïve agency, but rather agency involved with reflection and exchange of narrative between both others and our own preceding and current selves. Voice articulates the world from a distinct emplaced position. A recognition of voice must understand that voices are inherently different and requires that not only is what is being said important, but also who is saying it (Cavarero, 2005). It also requires an appreciation that there is diversity within any one voice, as well as exterior differences between voices and moral injuries can occur across more than one dimension; for example, by failing to credit that a child’s experience in the family home is relevant to their journey through school. Voice requires a material form, it cannot occur without the support of others. If there is an unequal distribution of narrative resources then the material used by some to construct their account of themselves is not their own. This constitutes a denial of their voice. When collective voice, or institutional decision making do not credit individual experiences, for example, when
establishments fail to acknowledge the voice of groups or when a society is organised on the premise that a superior rationality has ultimate validity, voice is undermined. Voice can also be undermined through simply not valuing voice or by obstructing alternate narratives. This may not take the form of an outright denial, but may work to weaken material voice at specific levels (Couldry, 2010).

It is transparent from this theorisation of the process of voice that school authorities may inhibit the voice of their students by not giving it material form. If the young people in school are not provided with adequate resources to make themselves heard can they make themselves heard anyway? And how do they go about achieving this?

2.6 Conclusion - The Involvement of a Culture of Resistance in the Creation of Place

“Culture is your local consensus reality; your clothing and cuisine, the music you listen to, the books you read, the films you see; your values, ideas, beliefs and prejudices.”

(Hughes, 2010: 6)

The constantly shifting nature of local consensus reality is clearly closely related to the concept of place as outlined above. The paths that people weave through material space, the ideas and relationships that they bring with them all feed into this as a sense of place is created. Through this understanding of place as momentary, linked to the identity of its inhabitants and their practice and not simply consistent with physical locality enables us to consider the question of how pupils in school might act to create the kind of place that they want to inhabit. The nature of power is diffuse and a focus on place requires us to
examine the local nature of struggle and its impact on sense of place within the wider spatial geometries of power. Foucault’s dispersed understanding of power also helps us to understand the nature of relationships that school pupils have with the various adults who are responsible for them and how these relationships affect their engagement with school. The desire to narrate ones’ own life and the desire for recognition cannot be dissociated from institutional and social practices that are implicated in the ongoing production of place and these not only inform relationships but also what kind of person the resistant pupils wish to be seen as. The theoretical framework described here will enable us to consider how a culture of resistance affects the processes through which the place of school is constituted and how power is distributed across the population of school, as well as how the status of individuals within the school contributes to their attitudes and behaviour.
3 Methodology and Methods

“You can’t use a bulldozer,
To study orchids”
(The Magnetic Fields, 1999)

This thesis describes an ethnography carried out in a school using data collected from observations, interviews and photographs taken by the participants. In this methodology and methods chapter, I will first outline the methodological perspective and why I came to take this approach. I also examine the research site, the sample and the role of the researcher. After this I go into detail in order to explain and justify the use of the specific methods used during the fieldwork before describing how the data were analysed and the ethical concerns relating to the work. Finally I summarise the limitations inherent in the approach and how the findings can be used.

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Methodological Perspective

Research in education takes many forms and there is a wealth of approaches through which it can be executed. Nevertheless, there are certain characteristics which it should always display (Bassey, 1992). The paths it follows should never be arbitrary or random; it should always be systematic, proceeding with the guidance of a theoretical perspective. It should also subject any perceptions, interpretations, explanations and conclusions to critical, logical and ethical questioning. Any individual instance of research requires the creation of its own methodology, requiring its own justification. The general consensus is that the important challenge for researchers is to associate the
most appropriate methodology to their empirical questions rather than to advocate a universal methodological approach (Patton, 1999).

Having come into the world of educational research from a background as a maths teacher with a degree in maths I was quite comfortable with a scientific approach to research. However, the world that positivist science attends to is not the world that people experience on a day to day basis. It is an abstraction which deals with nomothetic regularities, distinct from the messy nature of the everyday (Davis & Hersh, 1988). Husserl (1970) claims that Galileo instigated this mathematisation of the world, believing that the only real qualities that an object possesses are those that can be measured and quantified. For Galileo, geometry was already far removed from its original basis in the sensible world and had become an idealised technology for creating a methodology of measurements. Wherever such a methodology is implemented, we can overcome the relativity of subjective interpretations of the world and achieve non relative truths; although this comes at the cost of constantly increasing approximation on the return from the abstract world to the world of the everyday. Adopting a positivist or post-positivist paradigm is to reduce the world to an abstraction in order to generate laws which to a greater or lesser extent can describe the world and make predictions. Whilst completing my M.Ed. I had become involved in carrying out interpretive design methodologies, but my approach still had much associated with positivism, such as avoiding bias and triangulating data, in order to address a fundamental social reality. As I read around the subject of my research and gained a better understanding of the writers summarised in chapter 2 I realised that this was still an inappropriate
approach and I had a lot of work to do in order to develop a suitable methodology.

My research questions clearly focus on how individual students interact with and create the cultures and places that they are a part of and how this interaction affects their relationship with adults, their education and school in general. Geertz (1993) believes that the concept of culture is in essence semiotic; forming webs of meaning and significance; webs which people have themselves have spun. The study of these webs cannot form the basis of a nomothetic science, but should rather be an interpretive search for meaning. Whilst there is a clear distinction between physics and the physical world, the analysis of culture permeates the very focus of its study. Bearing this in mind, an interpretive approach is particularly appropriate since it places an emphasis on individuals and their subjective experience of the world around them (May, 2002). By taking an idiographic approach, I can build a picture of the individuals involved and come to grasp their understanding of the world around them. Whilst the scientific method has obviously had a profound impact on the way that we live our lives today, to adopt this approach to addressing my research questions would be analogous to using a bulldozer to study orchids.

The fact that scientific norms disregard peoples’ values and expect marginalised groups to be objectified forms the basis of the feminist critique of positivism (Collins, 2000). Building on the approach taken in order to make women’s experiences the starting point for research, many researchers adopt a standpoint epistemology whereby they draw upon their own marginalised group and experiences (Denzin, 1997). This is closely linked with identity politics.
which sees the organization and normalization of identities emerging from fixed
categorical and hierarchical positions (Popoviciu, Haywood & Mac an Ghaill,
2006). This has been a successful approach in terms of highlighting social
structures that underlie the propagation of social inequality and making visible
the perspectives of marginalised groups. In addition to this it has been
associated with the surrendering of academic control over research which may
be implicated in the reproduction of existing power relations. These
methodologies are evidently related to some of the earlier work on resistance
summarised in section 2.1. However, these approaches maintain a focus on
structure rather than the minutiae of the everyday. The approach developed
here surrenders a degree of academic control in order to study power relations
from the perspective of resistance rather than through the internal logic of
power as Foucault (1982) suggests.

More recently there has been the rise of postmodernist and poststructuralist
perspectives which contest this position (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Scheurich,
1997). These frameworks imply a more fluid and disjointed notion of identity
than identity politics sanctions and require an examination of identity based on
the unstable dynamics of subjectivities. It is inaccurate to perceive identity as
identification with an essential nature, but rather as an assortment of subject
positions (Popoviciu et al., 2006). From this standpoint, knowledge is always
incomplete, located and formed through discursive practice (Weedon, 1997).
Further to this, an individual will be situated within many discourses, often
identifying a number of disparate and fluctuating subjectivities. The role of the
poststructuralist researcher is to uncover the narratives that reveal how these
subjectivities are situated and identified (Popoviciu et al., 2006). These
approaches are clearly linked to the theoretical style developed in the previous chapter. A localised study of culture and identity demands such an approach in order to avoid imposing the kind of totalising discourses that Foucault wants to avoid (Picket, 1996). This project focuses on the mechanics of how resistance occurs in a specific locale, rather than global, structural reasons for its occurrence. Similarly, a study of place, in the sense that was defined in section 2.2, also requires such an approach, since the identity of its inhabitants is fluid as they travel along the paths through space that constitute place.

3.1.2 Ethnography

Western anthropology is predicated on the concept of cultures (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997a) and the term ‘Ethnography’ originated in the 19th century as a descriptive account of a community. Whilst it has become a widely used term, it has a convoluted history and therefore has no standard, precise, meaning (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) and Pink (2009) proposes that ethnography is better defined by examining what ethnographers do rather than through more doctrinaire means.

Originally ethnography was concerned with the description and interpretation of exotic cultures. Anthropologists would travel around the world to become accepted members of cultural groups; studying them for extended periods of time in their own environment (Clifford, 1997). Believing that distinct societies are composed of differing cultures was at first a retreat from an understanding of the world determined by biological features such as race. As cultures came to be comprehended as systems of meaning the world became a collection of contiguous cultures, self-contained and impermeable. This stance is
unsustainable today and the best ethnography does not direct attention to a
circumscribed and coherent culture. Later, sociologists at Chicago University
extended the ethnographic approach in order to study communities in urban
societies and it is now extensively practised in social research. Although there
are many schools of ethnography, most would argue that they are concerned
with the description and interpretation of the values, beliefs, behaviours and
language of culture-sharing groups (Atkinson, Delamont & Housley, 2007). The
type of ‘culture’ ethnography focuses on today tends to be made as opposed to
uncovered (Fabian, 1990). This opposition to a spatially contained view of
culture requires weight to be given to the processes of place making and ties in
with the definition of place that was given earlier. An ethnographic approach is
clearly appropriate in order to tackle the research questions given in chapter 1,
using the theoretical framework developed in chapter 2, since ethnographic
work is focused upon the idiographic, local concerns of a community.

In this research there was a focus on place and how the young people taking
part in the research went about constructing the place that they experienced at
school. Considering the understanding of humans as emplaced within their
environment, elaborated in section 2.2.1, and the multisensory manner in which
people engage with this environment, as described in section 2.2.2, it was
important that this was borne in mind when carrying out the fieldwork. If
ethnographic research is to consider the senses effectively, then methods will
be required that address the profound types of knowledge that are implicated
above (Bendix, 2000). Although there are approaches that prioritise specific
methods over others, for example, traditional ethnography emphasises
observation and some ethnographies concentrate on visual methods, an
approach that tries to capture emplaced experience in its entirety should not favour any one type of data or method (Pink, 2009). One significant advantage of using multiple methods is as Bloch says:

“…One must not confuse what people say with what they know. Different types of knowledge are organised in different ways, each with its own specific relation to language and action. Normally, the most profound type of knowledge is not spoken of at all.”

(Bloch, 1998:46)

This does not mean that multiple methods are used in order to triangulate to find an underlying truth to a situation. In reality, the data will converge, be inconsistent or will be contradictory (Mathison, 1998). Inconsistent or contradictory data does not mean that no meaning can be extrapolated but may well provide a multifaceted experience of social phenomena.

Amanda Coffey asserts that research is “necessarily an embodied activity” (Coffey, 1999:59) and therefore relies on an analysis of the body and how it is negotiated in everyday life. The sensory embodied practices that people engage in and the identities they construct around these are the focus of the ethnographer with a concern for the senses and one of the fundamental concerns of the ethnographer is to come to know in ways that others do. Therefore a key question here is how is it possible to inhabit and engage with place and ways of perceiving that are akin to those experienced by research participants. Etienne Wenger’s (1998) concept of communities of practice as a theory of learning can assist this. He sees participation as key to the development of knowledge; meaning is negotiated, not independently of the world but neither is it imposed upon us. This negotiation involves participation, as an essential aspect of our social life, and reification, which creates points of
focus around which negotiation is organised. This duality is fundamental to our human experience of meaning. Community forms a source of coherence and involves mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a shared way of doing things. We form communities of practice, not because we lack individualism or freedom but because identification is the core of our social identities. This is essentially an experiential understanding of knowing and as such it helps us to understand that not all knowledge is transmitted through words alone; social, material and sensory practice are all involved (Pink, 2009). Thus the methods used in a study of this sort should attend to the questions of how the sensory knowing of others may be appropriated by the researcher and how it may be extricated from these processes into the form of academic knowledge. This relationship with the researcher transforms the participant from an object of external examination into an accomplice in the reflexive, inter-subjective, creation of interpretations. Again, this corresponds well with the understanding of place established in chapter 2. If a researcher is present in a place then they will inevitably influence the momentary creation of that place and will therefore influence what occurs in that place. In order to understand the impact of this I will consider what is meant by adopting a reflexive approach in the following section.

3.1.3 Reflexivity

Reflexivity can be defined as the ability of any organism capable of signification to make itself its own object by referring to itself (Myerhoff & Ruby, 1992) and it is the process by which a researcher may reflect upon their position and
influence in the undertaking of a piece of research (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

In research undertaken from a positivist or post-positivist perspective a researcher often aspires to achieve objectivity and will present their findings as objective truths, claiming validity and generalisability through means such as triangulation and avoiding bias (Crotty, 1998; Wellington, 2002). There are also approaches to interpretive research that, whilst recognising that unmitigated objectivity is neither achievable nor desirable, still pursue these aims through a form of researcher reflexivity. For example, Ahern (1999) discusses avoidance of bias through reflexive bracketing; claiming that reflexivity is a matter of researchers being aware of their personal viewpoint and putting it aside. Padgett (1998) identifies several strategies to minimise bias inherent in the use of the researcher as an instrument and Robson (2002) lists a number of ways in which qualitative research can improve its claims to validity and imitate a ‘scientific’ approach.

Rather than adopt this halfway house position, many researchers working in the interpretive paradigm recognise the futility of attempting to remain isolated through methodological guarantees. Subjectivity will inevitably encroach regardless of the researcher’s best intentions (Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody, 2002). Rather than seeing this as bias, which has pejorative overtones of intentionality, it has been suggested that we should see this as simply an aspect of qualitative methodologies in the social sciences. With the rise of the crisis of representation and legitimation in social research in the mid-80s associated with the emergence of postmodernism and poststructuralism both the use of
terms described in the previous paragraph and the notion that researchers can precisely portray lived experience have been exposed as problematic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a). In the light of these challenges a movement toward reflexive practice is a means of legitimisation.

By taking on a reflexive approach, one recognises the fundamental importance of the subjectivity of the researcher in fabricating and representing ethnographic knowledge (Pink, 2001). The idea that a reflexive approach should produce an approximation of objective data as discussed earlier is superficial; it extends beyond bias or how the reality of a social situation is deformed by the presence of a researcher. A reflexive ethnography is a process of generating and expressing knowledge about societies, cultures and individuals that evolves from the ethnographer’s own experiences. Rather than being a ‘truthful’ description of reality, it is an account of the ethnographer’s experience of reality; faithful to the circumstances and intersubjectivities through which it was produced (Pink, 2001). Ethnography is fiction, not in the sense of falsehood or opposition to the truth, but in the sense of an economy of truth. It is inherently partial both in research and its representation (Clifford, 1986). Pink (2009) suggests the use of the term ‘ethnographic places’ to describe what arises through from the interaction between readers and ethnographic reports. These are not the places that ethnographers and participants engage with during fieldwork but are instead formed by the ethnographer “intentionally pulling together theory, experiential knowing, discourses and more” (Pink, 2009:42).

Importantly, regardless of the medium, the nature of an ethnographic place cannot be understood without the participation of the reader or audience. A reflexive methodology allows researchers to work with people whose lives are
substantially different to their own and become a part of their everyday world through the research process (Pink, 2012). This can be done by remaining aware of the sensory, emplaced experiences via which the researcher generates an understanding of the everyday lives of others.

Reflexive social research practice supposedly aims to redress the normalisation of particular privileged speaking positions both in relation to the knower and the known but is often far from the critical practice it is understood to be (Adkins, 2002). May (2000) argues for the division of reflexivity into two separate types: endogenous reflexivity and referential reflexivity. Endogenous reflexivity is an individual's understanding of the knowledge that comes to be within their social and cultural groups, informing their practice within those localities. Referential reflexivity, on the other hand, is the manner in which knowledge enables an individual to recognise the circumstances through which these practices are facilitated and constricted. This is the difference between reflexivity within actions and reflexivity upon actions. Endogenous reflexivity is brought about through a person experiencing their identity interacting with other people; referential reflexivity comes later, as a result of altering social landscapes or episodes of exclusion and refusal.

Identifying the ways in which understanding arises is an endogenous issue relative to explanations of the conditions that actions occur in, which is referential. These concerns relate to the capacity of a person to scrutinise their own actions, how that person is positioned by others and consequently how they position themselves. May contrasts belonging, a method to perceive “how the social world is both subjectively and inter-subjectively experienced” (May,
May (2000) believes that endogenous reflexivity within the social science community is unconsidered as a part of the practices of social science. The consequence of which is that social science becomes self-serving at this level. Researchers forget how they are positioned themselves and as such become implicated in the positioning and fixing of their participants. The starting point of the social sciences should be an understanding of endogenous reflexivity, as a result of which positioning and belonging should be considered together. The result of failing to do this is that identity of research participants can only be understood in terms of positioning and therefore become objectified, their subjectivity denied.

Skeggs (2002) identifies the dangers of using reflexivity in the research process to tell one’s own story as opposed to that of the research participants. Telling the stories of the powerless becomes the route by which the researcher becomes known; participants becoming objectified and used as extensions of the researcher’s self. The researcher’s tendency to attribute reflexivity to themselves and not to their participants is one of many ways in which the authority of the researcher’s voice is guaranteed. Adkins (2002) criticises the ways in which textual techniques are used by some researchers in order to splinter the singular voice that appears in research write ups in the name of the reflexive project. In fact this is another way of reiterating the researcher’s authority over the researched, demonstrating how well they grasp their powerful position by playing with it. It is often stated that the freeing of agency from structure promotes the reflexive self to the status of the ideal characteristic of late modernity (Lash, 1994). Adkins (2000) contends that the fact that, by its
own recognition, this standpoint requires that traditional relations are not undone by reflexivity implies that the mobile self is a vehicle for positioning and privileging and acts as a distraction to this.

One of the key differences between those with a greater degree of power (i.e. researchers) and those with less (i.e. participants) is the ability to create a narrative biography on their own terms (Ricoeur, 1992). The autobiographical self plays a key constitutive part in the production of subjectivity (Radstone, 2000) and by limiting what can be told by research participants through a reflexivity that exists only to authorise the researcher’s self the researcher is contributing to the positioning and fixing of those participants. It is important to avoid accounts of identity replacing questioning of the positions that participants occupy and the cultural assets to which they have access (Skeggs, 2002). Skeggs calls for a return to the use of “reflexivity as practice and process as a matter of resources and positioning; not a property of the self” (Skeggs, 2002:369) rather than as a rhetorical means to authorise the researcher’s power. This requires an examination of the researcher’s “location, positioning and cultural resources, but not of the [researcher’s] self” (Skeggs, 2002:357).

What this means in terms of the research described in this thesis is that the methods used to collect the data were designed in order to maximise the capacity of the participants to tell their own story rather than mine. In order to achieve this, participants were given the opportunity to discuss their own interpretations of events and images they captured. This will be discussed further in the methods section below. It is inevitable that the presence of a researcher will affect what occurs in a place. But it is also inevitable that that impact will alter over time. On initial entry to a research site, the researcher will
be seen as alien to that place but as time passes that researcher will become more familiar to the participants. This is a matter of the endogenous reflexivity that May (2000) describes. It is important for researchers not to allow themselves to appear as an authority figure to the participants so as not to unduly influence and position them, compelling them to tell the stories of the researcher rather than their own.

The research encounter is a place event in itself and as such the researcher is intimately involved in its creation (Pink, 2009, 2012). The sense we make of the expressions of the participants is an expression of our own consciousness as well as that of the participants (Cohen & Rapport, 1995). Walkerdine et al. (2002) maintain that as researchers we are rightly anxious about our position of authority in the research process, but we should still be confident that it is a worthwhile activity despite its contradictions. Moving away from agreed versions of events toward recognition that accounts will be fractured and partial does not necessarily need textual trickery or the exposition of the researcher's self. There is no single group of people that has a monopolistic grip on knowledge which is why it is important to create texts and experiences that enable people from one group to vicariously cross the threshold into the experiential world of other groups (Denzin, 1997). As members from different groups come together in the production of research they enter into a shared arena of experience; if this fails to come about then specious interpretations will be produced. As Skeggs (2002) states, rather than asking ‘can research participants speak?’ we need to ask ‘can we hear?’
Ethnographers are drenched not simply in discourse and words but in sensations, imaginations and emotions (Geurts, 2002) and a researcher with a consideration for the senses requires a reflexivity vis-à-vis their own sensory experience and how these might enable them to understand the experience of others. Sensory encounters are as intersubjective as they are personal (Desjarlais, 2003) and the intersubjectivity that exists between researcher and participant is a function of both the researcher’s sensory subjectivities and the local perspectives and subjectivities of the participants.

Having established the methodological position taken in this research, the next section reflexively considers the effect of my own biography on the work.

3.1.4 The Researcher as Research Instrument

As discussed in the previous section, a reflexive ethnography is an account of the ethnographer’s experience of reality (Pink, 2001). Because the approach adopted here recognises the superficiality of attempting to produce unbiased, objective, data, no attempt has been made to carry out any form of “reflexive bracketing” (Ahern, 1999). As a result it is important for there to be a reflexive discussion pertaining to the specific researcher’s biographical details here. This is not, however, used as an opportunity to assure the authority of my voice as the researcher (Skeggs, 2002); nor will I be using this in order to objectify the participants or to overlook their own reflexivity, which is something that is considered later in the thesis. These reflections are offered here in an attempt to understand the positioning of the researcher as the research instrument and how this might have impacted on the findings of the research. Also, understanding this positioning is useful for the reader of the research as they
construct ethnographic places through their interaction with the report (Pink, 2009).

My perception and experience of ‘myself’ is as a white, ostensibly middle class, man. Raised by two university educated parents, I studied mathematics at university before going on to complete a PGCE and work as a mathematics teacher. Throughout the majority of my teaching career, I committed to working in schools serving areas of low socio-economic status. It would be easy to see this commitment as the patronising act of a member of the middle class; as an attempt to ‘save’ those less fortunate than myself. However, I believe that the relative success I had in this field is in part due to my conscious effort not to occupy that condescending position and the fact that I felt it important to make this effort was in significant part due to my family background.

My grandparents and their siblings were born into conventional working class families in Kent in the early part of the twentieth century, with the men ultimately working in the local trades such as dock work, brick making and milk delivery and the women tending to find employment as shop assistants and in secretarial work but often maintaining traditional divisions of labour as housewives. My parents, both born in the immediate post war period, benefitted from the socialist education policies of the time, enabling them to attend grammar school having passed the 11-plus and then attend university at no cost to their families; something that would have been impossible before then. Not all of my parents’ siblings went to grammar school or university and neither have many of my cousins.
My parents moved from Kent to Poole in Dorset when I was very young and as a teenager I attended the local comprehensive school. I was always frustrated by intolerance of peoples’ differences on the part of those from a fairly privileged background like my own. In particular the lack of understanding that peoples’ ways of being are influenced by the economic situation that they find themselves in through chance. This located me in an interesting position since I am one step removed from the awkward position of feeling as if I had betrayed a heritage with alternative values to my own. That was a dilemma that was confronted by my parents. However, I remain close enough to comprehend the issues experienced by those less privileged than myself. As a teacher, this empathy made me acutely aware of the institutional tendency to focus exclusively on results and frequently positioning children as failures.

As Amanda Coffey (1999) recognises, it is quite possible to over-identify with participants during field work. A relevant case in point would be ‘Learning to Labour’ (Willis, 1977) in which it has been argued that Paul Willis develops an ‘over-rapport’ with his participants. The result of this is an uncritical celebration of the participants with the researcher acting as their spokesperson and unwilling to distance himself from their accounts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Additionally, Poggenpoel & Myburgh (2003) suggest that there needs to be sufficient distance between the researcher and their research so that they recognise the difference between their own experience and that of their participants. My own background means that I both have an understanding of the value and benefits of an education system systematically designed for people such as myself, but also a large degree of empathy with those who are excluded by it. This particular aspect of my biography enabled me to be able to
engage with the participants in the current study effectively, readily developing a rapport with them, whilst simultaneously maintaining sufficient distance so that I remained critical of the situation. This has clear links to the endogenous and relational reflexivity described by May (2000). I was keenly aware of my positioning in relation to the participants and as a result was able to ensure that I was not fixing them in position and telling my own story rather than theirs as Skeggs (2002) cautions against.

Relations in the field are not simply rational and purposive and the quality of social relationships formed during fieldwork must be considered in a reflexive and self-conscious manner (Coffey, 1999). Both insider and outsider status requires critical reflection (Ganga & Scott, 2006). Whilst being an insider is broadly beneficial to the research process, it can also emphasise the diversity in proximity. In the particular research described here I was clearly not an insider since I was not a child living in the conditions that the participants were. However, due to my family background and my ability to form empathetic relationships with disadvantaged students developed whilst a teacher, it was relatively straightforward for me to gain a degree of trust from the participants and become an adopted insider (Ganga & Scott, 2006). Once this trust has been acquired and the status of adopted insider granted a researcher is still required to continually negotiate an insider/outsider dynamic and this is where the tension between endogenous and referential reflexivity is key. My awareness of my own values combined with my awareness of the values held historically by my family enabled me to manage this tension and effectively form appropriate relationships with the participants.
Sharing these autobiographical details should enable the readers of this research to interrogate my own location, positioning and cultural resources and bear this in mind as they interpret the findings and conclusions of this study for themselves. In this section I have also emphasised the understanding of reflexivity as practice and process that has been adopted within this research (Skeggs, 2002) and the impact that my own biography had on this. I shall refer back to this once I have elaborated on the research site in the next section.

3.2 The Site, the Sample and the Role of the Researcher

3.2.1 The Research Site

The site that research takes place in is not only the source of knowledge; it forms an integral part of that knowledge (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). In order to address my overarching research question I identified a comprehensive school which was known locally as a school with significant behavioural problems; consistently at the bottom of local school league tables due to its students’ performance in their GCSE examinations. The school was described in detail in chapter 1 and the nature of the school is an interesting context in which to consider the research questions in the light of the theoretical framework in part because of its location in what Massey refers to as the “wider power geometries of space” (Massey, 2005:130) and therefore how this affects the place-making activity that occurs there. The school is subject to power relations that extend beyond its borders and one manifestation of this is that it is considered to be abject by the larger community.

The research questions focus on resistance and this school is evidently the site of a great deal of resistance from students towards their teachers and their
education in general. This also makes it an interesting choice in order to examine student voice processes because there is a disconnect between what the students come in to school to achieve and what the school intends. For this same reason it is also an interesting place to consider how the participants want to recognised. The fact that the school was in the process of being rebuilt opened up the opportunity to look at the effects of the physical environment on place and what occurred once significant changes were made to the built environment. It also raised issues around voice and whether the students had any influence over the nature of this change.

3.2.2 Entry, Access and the Role of the Researcher

Having identified this school as an ideal site for my research, I contacted the headteacher who agreed to meet with me. After an initial meeting, where I explained the nature of the research and what I was interested in achieving she agreed that she was happy for me to carry out the work in the school. After this meeting, I rarely spoke to her and she allowed me a free hand to come and go as I needed to. I was assigned a member of the support staff who was to negotiate entry arrangements with me, provide me with student timetables and arrange any interviews I wanted to carry out.

A rigorous site selection and sampling procedure involves carefully selecting cases that are congruous with a study’s purposes. This often involves a two stage process where initial fieldwork is done on a possible case in order to assess its suitability before committing to more thorough and prolonged fieldwork (Patton, 1999). Once the school was identified, admission granted and arrangements for entry made, I carried out an initial exploratory stage of pilot
fieldwork during which I refined my research questions and began to identify potential participants. At the very beginning of this exploratory stage, I was introduced to the staff during a morning briefing and I made it clear that although I would be entering their lessons and observing the behaviour of the participants in the study I was not observing them and would not be providing any feedback to the school on specific teachers.

These formal arrangements with the school were relatively straightforward to negotiate and the school leadership team were extremely accommodating. However, Stephen Ball (1993) contrasts entry with access to participants and successfully engaging with potential research participants was a far more significant hurdle to overcome. Permission from school authorities to be present in school does not necessarily grant access and cooperation from pupils at the school and it was important to ensure that I was distinct from teaching staff (Russell, 2011). This links back to the comments in section 3.1.4 about becoming an adopted insider. Once my research questions were decided upon after the initial fieldwork stage a key decision to be made was whose ‘side’ I was on and appeared to be on (Mac an Ghaill, 1991). I decided that the focus of the Ethnography was on the children in school and so I would be adopting their perspective. Since this was the case, it was important not to be associated with the role of being a teacher. In order that I did not become tainted by association with the staff I made the conscious decision not to dress in the way a member of staff would. The expectation that I needed to dress reasonably smartly was made clear to me and so I wore jeans and a shirt with no tie. I also made sure that the pupils rarely saw me conversing with teachers other than when asking for permission to enter rooms. I spent lunch times and break times sitting with
pupils. I presented myself to the participants in the study as a researcher who was interested in what school was like to them and they were responsive to this and enthused by the opportunity to work with me, keen to take the opportunity to be listened to.

In order for on-going access to be granted by the participants it was important not to take it for granted once an initial rapport had been established. Their consent needed to be informally renegotiated throughout the project as a part of our developing relationship (Miller & Bell, 2002). This links back to the idea of endogenous reflexivity mentioned previously and the importance of not appearing to be an authority figure who enforced the telling of specific stories. This became easier over time as the participants developed a degree of trust in me, realising that I was not a member of the teaching staff and that I would not relay the things they told me or did in front of me to their teachers. The elements of my biography described in section 3.1.4 also made this task easier as I found it straight forward to develop a rapport with the participants. However, the fact that I was dressed reasonably smartly helped me maintain sufficient distance and not to develop the over-rapport previously discussed. Alongside this, as time went on and I became more confident that I had data that I could use, I began to take more risks. This was particularly useful towards the end when, knowing that I had enough data to produce a thesis, I began to stay with the children whilst they were smoking during their break times. Had I been caught doing this by a member of staff I am confident I would have been asked to leave and discontinue my work there. If this had happened it would not have been a disaster at that point, but being able to do this added a huge amount to what I was able to observe and discuss with the participants.
Sara Delamont (2004) describes “proper ethnography” as synonymous with participant observation and fieldwork. The ethnographer spends time living with the participants in the study, watching them and interpreting what they see. This is very much the classic style of ethnography derived from social anthropology (Pink, 2009) and is not always feasible; e.g. it is not possible for a researcher to go and live for an extended period of time with school children. However, understanding culture as a local consensus reality that comes into being in a specific place as in this study renders this less problematic since the culture that is of interest in school is specific to that place in space and the time in which the participants occupy that school.

3.2.3 Sampling

As elaborated earlier, place-making is intricately bound with time as well as its location in space and consequently the time that the ethnography takes place in is as much part of the knowledge as the site. I decided to focus on students that were in Key Stage 4 since working with students who are at this point in their education will obviously help in the consideration of the focus of the research questions on the relationship between students’ time in formal education and their futures. Based on this, when I carried out the initial exploratory fieldwork, the students that were ultimately included in the study were in Year 9 and the bulk of the fieldwork took place from when they were half way through Year 10 until they were half way through Year 11.

According to Savin-Baden and Major (2013), most researchers working qualitatively will use purposeful sampling. This is in contrast to probabilistic sampling and comprises the inclusion of information-rich individuals to study in
depth and detail. This emphasises a focus on understanding and illustrating important instances rather than attempting to generalise (Patton, 1999) and requires a researcher to look for the groups and individuals where the processes under investigation are likely to occur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b). Fetterman recommends taking the “big-net approach” (Fetterman, 2010:35) prior to refining their focus and deciding on the sample they will work with. By mingling with everyone at first the ethnographer uses their judgement to identify members of the cultural unit that will best help them to answer their research questions.

Despite the fact that anyone may become an informant in an ethnographic study, not all people will act as good informants (Spradley, 1979). Key informants are particularly significant individuals to a researcher’s understanding of the culture of which they are a part (Gilchrist & Williams, 1992); providing an information rich link to the research topic. Key informants will also provide access to other individuals based on sponsorship due to their links within the community being researched. Therefore, once a group of key informants have been identified snowball sampling maybe utilised whereby the initial small group of participants go on to identify friends who will be of value to the research project (May, 2001).

During my initial visit to the research site the students were in Year 9 and I began with the big-net approach and observed a wide variety of students across the year group. On the basis of my observations during this period, I identified a group of 7 students who would form the key informant core of my sample. I looked for students who were particularly difficult to engage and I ensured that I
did not just work with those who were markedly vocal in their lessons because I wanted to make sure that those who were more subtly disengaged would be included. I ensured that I did not jump straight in with intrusive questioning of these participants, but gradually started to sit with them once I decided that they would be useful key informants. By adopting this approach, I fairly quickly developed a rapport with these students, ensuring that they would be prepared to engage with the project and freely give their thoughts and opinions.

On my return, the children had moved into Year 10 and had been split into the vocational group and the mainstream group, with 3 key informants placed in the vocational group and 4 in the mainstream group. I applied the snowball sampling strategy from here to generate a sample of 20, 8 in the vocational group and 12 in the mainstream group. The mainstream group was significantly larger than the vocational one and my sample does not accurately represent the split between the two. The sample was composed in this manner because there was more evident resistance to the school coming from the vocational group. As the school moved towards the new groupings (outlined section 1.3) once the students were in Year 11, the vocational students were all placed in sub school A along with 2 from the mainstream group (This included 4 of the original key informants); 6 of the mainstream students went into sub school B (including 2 of the key informants) and 4 went into sub school C (including 1 of the key informants). See Figure 1 below for a pictorial representation of this movement of the participants.

This sampling method was not representative of the school as a whole. However, this does not pose a significant problem to the research findings.
because I was not trying to represent the school as a whole, I was attempting to identify the mechanics of resistant behaviour. May (2001) recognises that a potential problem with snowball sampling is that you may miss voices that are not part of a given network. I avoided this pitfall to some extent because I used key informants to generate several subgroups of participants. These groups became split over different streams within the school which also helps to counter this criticism of my research. This should also address the risk that these methods of sampling give access to a closed network of friends, resembling what Ray Pahl (1995) calls saloon bar sociology. There were undoubtedly still gaps in the school population that were not covered by the research but it was not a case study of a specific school, rather an ethnography of resistant pupils within a school.
Figure 1 - The Movement of Participants Between Groups
3.3 Methods

3.3.1 Ethnographic Methods

O’Reilly considers ethnography to be a family of methods that rest upon a minimal definition of inductive and evolving research that involves “direct and sustained contact with human agents, within the context of their daily lives” (O’Reilly, 2012:2), watching, listening and asking questions followed by the production of a “richly written account that respects the irreducibility of human experience, that acknowledges the role of theory as well as the researcher’s own role” (O’Reilly, 2012:2). Pink (2011) proposes that when choosing methods that attend to the senses one may well use methods that could be used in any other ethnography, but they will be thought of in slightly different ways. In classic ethnographic studies data collection tends to revolve around unstructured observations and interviews, with the possibility of reviewing some written materials or other artefacts (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Sarah Delamont (2004) certainly prioritises observations and interviews whilst Atkinson, Delamont and Housley (2007) go as far as to say that the visual is the most important means of understanding.

The research questions addressed by the current research are focused on the creation of place and, as a result of the multisensory manner in which place is experienced and engaged with, described in section 2.2.2, demand methods that neither prioritise the visual nor are reducible to it (Pink, 2009). Whilst more traditional approaches to participant observation and interviewing attend to cultural and social systems, values, organisation and more, they can be restricted by their lack of responsiveness to experiential facets of ethnography.
In order to address these issues a variety of methods were chosen in order to collect data and maximise the engagement of these methods with the creation of place. Observations, interviews and walks with the participants were carried out alongside the participants being given the opportunity to create photographic representations of their school. In the following few sections I shall describe in more detail each one of these methods.

3.3.2 Observation

There are many inherent tensions present in ethnographic observation (O’Reilly, 2009). Both participating in and concurrently observing a group is difficult to achieve in practice and many discussions relating to approaches to fieldwork often begin with Gold’s (1958) spectrum ranging from complete participant through to complete observer. However, all ethnographic observation must involve a degree of participation, since a researcher’s presence in the room will inevitably have an effect on what takes place (O’Reilly, 2009). Participant observation is an emplaced activity and as such should be a reflexive practice, comprising of taking part in activities alongside others. It is important to participate in order that other people become familiar with your being there and act naturally in your presence (O’Reilly, 2012). This familiarity is important in order for behaviour to be as close to natural, unobserved, behaviour as possible. Additionally, as Grasseni (2004) states, as a researcher participates in a practice, over time their sense will become attuned to the senses of those that they are researching and gain a flexible resonance with them. This method was chosen because the creation of place was central to both the research questions and the theoretical approach used in
this project. It was of central importance to observe the resistant behaviour that was such a significant part in the creation of school as a place. It was also important for me as a researcher to have a feel for the way in which the participants experienced their surroundings and their relationships with the adults who were responsible for them. Whilst I was engaged in these observations I took field notes. These were written in a notebook rather than typed on a laptop. This was principally because it was less intrusive, but also because it meant that I could move more quickly as the participants moved and also was more accessible should I need to write anything down outside, between lessons or at break times.

Observation is not restricted to looking, but rather should incorporate all the senses (Sandelowski, 2002). Human experience is messy not simply because it is equivocal but also because it is visceral; knowledge being created through bodies as well as minds (O’Reilly, 2012). Often, instances of sensory learning are unplanned and serendipitous and an understanding of other people’s memories and meanings are achieved via a researcher’s own emplaced experience (Pink, 2009). Pink (2009) describes the ethnographer as a ‘sensory apprentice’, learning about the culture we are interested in through engaging with its activities and environments. Learning, not just how things are seen by the group in question, but how their emplaced knowing is created through all the senses. This requires a reflexive self-consciousness pertaining to the apprenticeship, connecting sensory experience and the value-laden discourses to which this is subject. This emplaced and active participation accommodates elements of classic ethnography whilst granting that our own emplaced experience allows us to better understand those of others.
The degree to which one can participate and the level of immersion in the culture of the group that is being observed is as much a practical consideration as a part of the ideology of the research design (O’Reilly, 2009). Of course, I am not a pupil in school and so this limits the degree to which I can be considered a true participant in the practices of the students in school. However, my observations never took the form of me standing at the back of a classroom making notes as if I were observing the delivery of a lesson by a teacher. I always sat with the pupils and engaged with the work that they were doing. Any other approach would have made it impossible for me to experience the room, the work and the behaviour of other students from the perspective of the participants. This enabled me to appear to be ‘one of them’ to an extent and also, in relation to the earlier discussion, helped me to appear to be ‘on their side’.

Whilst I discussed their work with them and occasionally helped them with it if they were interested I made sure I did not do this in a manner that made me appear to be a pseudo teaching assistant. I did not encourage them to get on with the work if they were not engaging with the lesson, just joined in with any conversations about the work that they were having anyway. They were often interested to see what I had written about them in my field notes and would sometimes correct things that I had written down. It would be a valid question to ask to what extent my presence influenced their behaviour. On one occasion, a teacher suggested to me, in front of the pupils, that they were acting up because I was there and that this might affect the validity of my work. In response, a student who was not one of my participants said (to me, not in front of the teacher) that this was not the case and that he was embarrassed that he
could not control them. This is clearly one of the major difficulties of this method. To what extent does the presence of an observer affect the observed? It is possible that what this particular teacher said was true to an extent and that the behaviour in some contexts was aggravated by my presence. Having said this, it is unlikely that my presence caused specific instances of resistant behaviour. There were also many lessons where the same students were more cooperative with the same teacher so I do not believe that it was a matter of acting up simply because I was there.

3.3.3 Interviews

An interview is a conversation between two or more people whereby the interviewer asks questions and the interviewee(s) respond (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). In a research context, this should take the form of a natural conversation, encouraging participants to share their own perspectives and experience. A research interview may be structured, semi-structured or completely unstructured depending on the extent to which the researcher has a predetermined script and the level of formality required. In order to address the research questions here, I used semi-structured interviews throughout the course of the year in school carrying out fieldwork. The timings of these are detailed in appendix 2. These were always performed with groups of participants, varying the members of the groups on each occasion. Alongside these more formal interview situations, more informal spontaneous discussions were carried out between lessons and at break times. Each interview was arranged to take place during lesson times and the member of staff assigned to
me would email teachers to check that it was acceptable to remove the participants from their lessons.

The concept of the interview suggests that an interviewee can be probed and subjective properties of experience can be exposed through the interchange (Atkinson, 1997). However, the relationship between emplaced experience and a narrated life history is complex. Whilst we may interview participants in order to give expression to their personal experience there is a danger that we go beyond analytic methodology and naively celebrate the individual subject. Interviewing practice can, by constructing the interviewee as a rational modernist subject, invite people to occupy certain subject positions which in turn normalise and regulate (Alldred & Gilles, 2012). The semi-structured nature of the formal interviews in this project meant that I asked fairly few questions and these were generally prompts for the interviewees to talk about their experiences. This was a conscious decision in order to prevent positions being forced on to the participants by prompting them to discuss what I wanted to discuss. Once each prompting question had been asked, the interviews followed an almost totally conversational style. The belief that the qualitative interview discloses authentic experience is as inaccurate as the realist assumption that interview responses catalogue a definitive exterior reality (Sandelowski, 2002). Participants use interviews to strategically justify themselves and their actions. Interviews are emplaced encounters that do not mirror experience, but rather make and remake it. What this meant was that the interview data could be used alongside data from observations to question the motivations and justifications participants gave for their actions.
An interview within the context of an ethnography is not merely a matter of a researcher asking questions and recording the responses of another (Pink, 2009). An ethnographer establishes an on-going relationship with their participants allowing an exchange of views and an ability to explore purposefully the meanings that are placed on events and objects (Sherman-Heyl, 2001). Comprehension is enabled when speakers enter a dialogic relationship with one another, enacting cultural values and bringing social structure to life (Denzin, 1997). The benefit of having less structure to interviews in a research design is, due to their open ended nature, participants have the ability to contest the preconceptions of the researcher and emphasise the standpoint of the interviewee (May, 2001). Qualitative depth is provided by enabling interviewees to talk around themes using their own frames of reference, drawing on concepts and meanings with which they are conversant.

Both O'Reilly (2012) and Atkinson & Coffey (2003) agree that ethnographic interviewing and observation should not be seen as totally distinct and in opposition to one another. Atkinson & Coffey assert that “actions […] are understandable because they can be talked about. Equally, accounts – including those derived from interviewing – are actions” (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003:110). Indeed, Latham (2003) recommends seeing the interview as a type of performance. In this way we can avoid the issues of searching for depth in the sense of a cohesive truth and look for detail in the sense of a more complete and disparate understanding of the interviewee. Implicit in the suggestion that interviews are performative is the idea that they are not simply about talk and from here we can identify that interviews are not just embodied
and performed but are a fully emplaced activity that dovetails the performative and sensing body with its surrounding environment (Pink, 2009).

The choice to interview in groups rather than individuals offered a number of benefits. As participants are able to talk to one another in a group interview they can give different results to an individual interview. This is not to say that one is ‘true’ and one is ‘false’, they simply offer differing perspectives on the same issues (May, 2001). The group interview can offer insight into social relations in general and the processes of social dynamics in general. Whilst not wholly naturalistic, they are a closer approximation of organic interaction than individual interviews (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). They can also moderate the authority of the researcher themselves (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013), permitting participants to take control of the place where interview occurs.

It is fitting to use the notion of place-making to understand the interview process (Pink, 2009). Interviewee and interviewer act together to create a shared place and as such the interview becomes an opportunity to understand other emplacement through shared and reflexive investigation. Building on these ideas, I carried out several interviews during my fieldwork always ensuring that we occupied a different space enabling me to share the participants’ emplaced experience in differing environments. Group interviews were chosen over individual interviews for the reasons laid out above and also because the opportunity for discussions with individuals was available as I moved around school during observations. This enabled contrasts to be drawn between individual and group conversations. The locations that were chosen for the interviews varied between classrooms, meeting rooms, the canteen and the
library. There were some occasions where I dictated where the interview was going to take place and others where I allowed the participants to choose where they felt most comfortable. This was important in the interests of obtaining data from a variety of places within the overall place that was the school.

Whilst notes were taken during the more impromptu interviews, the more formal interviews that took place were recorded on a digital voice recorder. I checked with the participants that this was acceptable to them and none of them refused once it was established that no one else was going to listen to the recordings. These recordings were moved from the voice recorder immediately after the interviews and kept securely on a password protected computer. I chose to transcribe the interviews myself, since this process would enable me to better come to an understanding of the emplaced experience of the interviewees. Talk in the real world is visual, theatrical and tactical. Transcription loses these elements, subjugating the spoken word to written grammar (Barthes, 2010). Transcription is also neither passive nor neutral, it always requires compromise and we should always be reflexive about how this practice conspires with the elevated status of the modern subject (Alldred & Giles, 2012). In the first instance the transcriptions were carried out quickly, with the minimum use of punctuation and grammar in order to preserve the immediacy of the spoken work. This was in the interest of the endogenous reflexivity mentioned in section 3.1.3 and to diminish written grammar impinging on the performative nature of the interview. Once the analysis was complete, in order to make the data more meaningful to the readers of the research, punctuation was inserted, a form or referential reflexivity.
3.3.4 Interviews on Foot

I have discussed the overlap between observations and interviews and the ways in which it is important to consider the location of discussion in terms of the construction of the emplaced interview. Building on this, as well as static interviews, I carried out some of my interviews on foot as we circled the school. This meant that participants could take me to specific places that we were discussing and I could examine how they interacted with different places. Also, it offered the opportunity to observe exactly how the participants moved around the school. Of course, the manner in which the participants moved around the school when they were with me during lesson time was in contrast with how they moved around the school between lessons and during break times. I was able to take note of this movement outside of lessons during field observations.

In order to record the interviews that took place on foot I carried a digital voice recorder in my shirt pocket. These were then transcribed in the same way as the more static interviews.

Life, rather than being an interior property of the animate, is a web in which organisms are entwined (Ingold, 2008). Walking is a condition whereby one engages with the environment allowing an understanding of place through the creation of routes (Lee & Ingold, 2006). In the process of walking the movement of the entire body is significant rather than an act of vision and through our feet being in contact with the ground we are unremittingly in touch with our surroundings (Ingold, 2004). The networks of significance that humans are entangled in are stridden on the ground as people move about (Lee & Ingold, 2006) and a consideration of walking is a key means by which
phenomenologically informed fieldwork may be distinguished from more traditional means of ethnographic design. Walking is an intensely social activity. Through rhythm and movement, walking does not solely express thoughts and feelings it is a means of thinking and feeling (Ingold & Vergunst, 2008). By means of perambulation cultural forms are repeatedly created; the body is foundational both to culture and to emplaced experience. There exists an analogy between narrative text and walking (Ingold & Vergunst, 2008) through which the following of footsteps is akin to reading, enabling one to share the experience of somebody who has gone before. The use of this method formed a useful contrast with the more conventional interviews as it gave a unique insight into how the participants occupied space as a part of the formation of school as a place. Having expanded on my use of observations and interviews in the research, I shall now go on to address the manner in which photography was incorporated into the project.

3.3.5 Visual Methods and Photography

“There are moments when the social world seems more evident in an object or a gesture than in the whole concatenation of our beliefs and institutions”

(MacDougall, 2005: 94)

Participants in this project were provided with cameras and asked to take photographs of areas of the school and activities that represented what their day to day life was like in school. They were encouraged to photograph things that they both liked and disliked about their experience but were given little guidance beyond this in order not to be too leading. After this they were left with a digital compact for a day and I collected them back at home time. The participants were provided with the cameras for a day at a time in order to make
sure that they had the opportunity to picture all aspects of their experience in school. They were not given the cameras to take home because I did not want any pictures from outside the school to be taken since the focus of the research was on what occurred within the boundaries of the school. All participants were given the opportunity to have access to a camera in pairs or threes and they were told that we would be looking at the photographs in groups and that if it was acceptable to them I would look at their photographs with other groups. Once this had taken place, photograph elicitation interviews were carried out. I selected some specific photographs that I thought were particularly interesting to discuss with each of the groups in these interviews in order to start the conversation. I chose these because they were either relevant to subjects that had arisen during interviews or observations previously or because I did not know why the subject of the photograph was important to them. Once the conversation was started we took the opportunity to examine and speak about any photographs that they particularly wanted to highlight as well. Each group that I interviewed was given the opportunity to look at photographs taken by all the participants in order to interpret other participants’ emplaced experience as recommended by Pink (2009). This was vital to the research because it gave an insight into the differing means by which different participants contributed to the creation of place and also demonstrated how some participants were actively avoiding other participants and the spaces that they chose to occupy.

The opportunity to take photographs was also provided during the walking interview. This was particularly useful since the school was being rebuilt at this stage they could chose to photograph the areas we visited and these photographs could be used alongside the recording of the discussion relating to
specific areas of the school. Again this relates back to the creation of place and how movement around the school was key in this.

MacDougall (2005) interprets school by means of a social aesthetic. By this he means a sensory, aesthetic space as opposed to a system of signs and meanings encoded in school life. This social aesthetic can only be considered indirectly through incidents and material objects through which it is engaged. In order to describe the phenomenological reality of the social world we are required to engage in a language congruent with the aesthetic space itself. Visual methods, such as photography, that can access this aesthetic space are clearly a valuable tool in a research project that focuses on emplaced experience in the way in which I have defined it. In particular, the photography enabled the participants to highlight the changes that were impacting on their school experience and also brought to light behaviours that were taking place when I was absent and whether these replicated behaviour when I was present or not.

It is important not to overstate the degree to which visual methods enable a researcher to access participants’ authentic voice. The use of visual media enables participants to present their experiences, but they do so through conventions and forms of communication that have been learned in much the same way that they have learned to write (Buckingham and de Block, 2008). Luttrell (2010) suggests that a researcher should be transparent and reflective about their analysis, considering the wider social forces that have contributed to the creation of images as a part of a research project. These methods, when used alongside other qualitative methods, introduce a wealth of evidence but
may splinter the narratives available as the evidence provided through different methods comes into conflict (Prosser & Loxley, 2007). This is not something to be avoided, in fact it is precisely what we are asking of the different methods since we are disinterested in triangulating to find commonalities but rather we are looking at the idiosyncrasies of a particular situation. Images and words contextualise each other, representing different elements of what is being researched rather than forming a complete record of it (Pink, 2001).

Despite the parallels that exist between seeing and image-making they are not the same thing. Images are a representation, reducing the irreducible by removing the uncontrolled and uncontrollable (MacDougall, 2005). The framing that takes place through image making is as much about something as the image itself, simultaneously amplifying and reducing. The process of leaving things out of an image, either reveals what the person creating the image does not see, or discloses what they feel is unimportant to create an effect. If photographs are produced in collaboration between an ethnographer and participants then they are comprised of a combination of their intentions (Pink, 2001). It is impossible to record an authentic visual record of a process or an occurrence and images should be studied reflexively bearing in mind how they were produced and the subjectivities and purposes of those involved in their production. Photographs are not a transparent representation of reality, but depictions that maybe interpreted in differing ways (Harper, 1998). When discussing what should be photographed, there is a danger that the researcher could be too leading. Participants should be encouraged to photograph things that they like, dislike, are particularly meaningful or even things that are bland, boring and meaningless (Warren, 2008). Because the participants were only
asked to photograph anything that they liked or disliked about school when they were left with the cameras, the impact of my intentions on the creation of the images was minimal. My impact on the images they photographed during the walking interview was more significant because I was present and, although I did not prompt them to take photographs of specific places, the intent behind taking them was a co-creation of both parties present.

The resultant images from photographic methods may be used in two fashions; either in a supporting manner in order to provide evidence for research questions, in which case they are subordinated to the researcher’s interpretation, or supplementing the researcher’s interpretation whereby they are used to act as a visual complement to the researcher’s interpretation (Rose, 2007). A photograph elicitation interview is an interview process that requires participants to be provided with a camera and given guidance as to what kind of photographs to take. These photographs are then discussed in detail with the participants, enabling them to reflect on aspects of their experience that they might not normally consider. This facilitates a degree of detail about how participants see their world that would not normally be available (Rose, 2007). Pink (2001) specifies a difference between what is visible and what is visualised. The use of photographs conjures up memories and recreates experience in interviews. This is useful in countering the transience of aesthetic and sensory experience. In a photograph elicitation interview the researcher and the participant may discuss differing understandings of an image, appreciating that meanings that that image might have are constructed by both the creator of the image and its viewer (Harper, 1998). It can also be useful to share with participants’ photographs taken by other people during photograph
elicitation interviews (Pink, 2009). This enables them to interpret and categorise other people’s emplaced experience as well as involving them in their own memory work. The use of photographs as prompts for conversation during interviews forms a catalyst for a form of analysis carried out by the participants themselves (Young & Barrett, 2001).

3.3.6 The Use of Multiple Methods

These methods complement one another and are able to draw together the various strands of the participants’ emplaced experience; a suitably reflexive approach that allows immersion in the participants’ subjective experiential world. These methods were chosen to gain the best access possible to the mechanisms through which the sense of the place that is school was created, accessing the multisensory engagement with that place. They also allow the participants voice, to explain why they behaved in certain ways, as well as enabling a description of that behaviour. The starting point of this group of methods is that of endogenous reflexivity, whereby belonging, an understanding of the means by which the world is subjectively and intersubjectively experienced, and positioning, the location of a subject from a relational viewpoint, are grasped concurrently. This should avoid the objectification of the participants by only considering their positioning and generating the self-serving social science that May (2000) describes. Key to this research was the notion of place and how it was created, how relationships are formed between the participants and their teachers and the development of identities. The methods outlined here gave a substantial insight into these issues.
3.4 Analysis

As Clifford Geertz (1993) says, the physical world is clearly not the same as physics but, just as with the study of culture, analysis infiltrates the substance of its object. There is a danger of isolating cultural analysis from its object by treating it as though that object is a system that can easily be schematised. We can gain empirical access to this symbolic system through the inspection of events, not by arranging abstract entities into unified models. There is little that discredits cultural analysis more than perfect descriptions of tidy arrangements that defy belief. Any social research that attempts to portray the truths of social life in an unproblematic and atheoretical fashion assumes a separation between theory and data that cannot be maintained (May, 2001). Disclosing this relationship requires a reflexive practice in the analysis of ethnographic data that acknowledges its implications for knowing the social world.

Ethnography should have a respect for the empirical world, following an open rather than predetermined course (Woods, 1996). The analysis carried out during an ethnography is inductive rather than deductive and the initial work of this analysis is untidy and chaotic until themes begin to emerge. This respect for the empirical world means that as few assumptions as possible should be made in advance and because of this ethnography becomes an act of faith which requires a robust initial commitment. Deleuze & Guattari (1988) believe that researchers should aim to create maps of reality rather than tracings of prior research. What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented towards an experimentation in contact with the real; a performance rather than a competence (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988). A tracing is facsimile
created according the heritable characteristics of a priori structure and
dedication to the further discovery and illustration of that structure (Kamberelis
& Dimitriadis, 2013). Once a researcher has produced their map which presents
an organisation of reality, rather than reproducing a previous description or
theorisation of it, they may then overlay previous tracings to interrogate their
gaps and fractures.

Having said this, an ethnographic description is never a pure representation of
the world, and all ethnographic findings rest on theoretical assumptions
(Hammersley, 1992). As a result, any ethnographic description is only as good
as the theory upon which it is based. Existing literature has the benefit of an
ideological hegemony (Becker, 2007), its authors possessing the advantage of
not having to explain why their thinking may differ from their readers. Bearing
this in mind, it is important to use the literature rather than allowing the literature
to define findings. In order to base my approach on these ideas, I did relatively
little reading of related empirical research work until I had analysed my data,
only wishing to make links after I had begun to map the landscape so that I did
not simply regurgitate previous ideas. Similarly, aside from aspects relating to
the methodology, much of the theoretical framework was developed after
beginning to analyse the data. The influence of previous writing is unavoidable
to some extent due to the fact that a researcher will always have read previous
work but I have attempted to mitigate this by adopting this strategy.

Ethnographic analysis often takes the form of a thematic analysis (Savin-Baden
& Major, 2013) which fundamentally takes the form of “recovering the theme or
themes that are embodied and dramatised in the evolving meanings and
imagery of the work” (van Manen, 1990:78). Order and inference are not discovered in the social world, they are created through conventions of speaking, reading and writing (Atkinson, 1990). Ethnographic writing depicts the world as patterned through its own ordering. Where the narratives offered by participants maintain internal coherence, it is the relations between these narratives that offer a coherent wider structure. A principle means by which the process of identifying these relations that offer wider structure begins is through the use of coding, assigning descriptive labels to fragments of the data (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The coding of data is a combination of data reduction and data complication, both breaking data down into manageable units and subsequently expanding it with levels of interpretation imposed by regrouping these units of data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The danger that can arise from coding and categorizing interviews and field notes is that the data can become fragmented (Atkinson, 1992). Whilst this is to some degree inevitable, I made the effort to keep some narrative sections together in order to preserve the coherence of the whole piece.

Strauss (1987) identifies a difference between codes derived from the literature and codes that arise in-vivo. The systematic use of in-vivo codes provides a ‘bottom up’ approach to the coding. As suggested previously, in order to avoid creating a tracing of work previously carried out, I focused on in-vivo codes grouping elements of data based on their contents rather than because they contrived to fit a predetermined scheme. In order to achieve this, it is important for an ethnographic researcher to immerse themselves in their data prior to carrying out any analysis of it in order to gain a feel for its content and meaning.
Transcribing the interviews myself enabled me to live with the data, and relive its collection, prior to any coding of it.

Saldaña (2012) describes a two cycle process to coding, taking ownership of the data through the first cycle, before further refining codes in a second stage, classifying and synthesizing them. He also particularly recommends in-vivo coding during the first coding cycle whilst working with participants in school due to its focus on their understanding of the world around them and the fact that this is likely to be quite different from adult researchers working with them. I carried out the coding using NVivo which enabled me to quickly assign codes to sections of the transcribed text and also link the relevant photographs to text from the photograph elicitation interviews. Once the first cycle of coding was completed a process of merging conceptually similar codes and removing marginal codes was carried out (Saldaña, 2012). Following this a second cycle consisting of focused coding was completed whereby the coded data was grouped based on thematic and conceptual similarity. Once this second cycle was completed the data began to be grouped into thematically coherent groups which ultimately formed each separate findings chapter.

It is important to identify the level at which themes are categorised; whether they are semantic and explicit or latent and interpretive (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There should be a progression from organising to interpretation whereby there is an attempt to theorise the emerging patterns and their wider significance. A thematic analysis should inspect the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualizations that shape the semantic content of the data. Of course, it is vital that the theoretical position underpinning the analysis is made clear. This
type of analysis can be linked to forms of discourse analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in a European, Foucauldian sense rather than an Anglo-American, linguistic sense (MacLure, 2003). In this case, structures and meanings are theorised as the foundation of what is actually articulated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is useful in the context of the present study since it in part examines the effect of Foucault’s Discourses (with a capital D as opposed to linguistic discourses (Gee, 1999)).

The task of ethnographic analysis is to ascertain what the observed feats of expression comprise and to divulge their significance by connecting them to larger ideas about the world and its residents. This is a literary challenge as much as an analytic challenge, requiring the creation of a written account that communicates the ethnographer’s interpretation of other people’s understandings (Basso, 1996). Strauss (1987) recommends making links with literature at different levels of generality at distinct times. Whilst the boundaries between these levels will blur within any specific project, an analyst should focus on a certain level at any one time. Once the initial two cycles of data coding were complete, links began to be made with other relevant empirical studies. This allowed a further layer of analysis to be carried out, finding similarities and contrasts with what other researchers had found in similar areas and enabling the data to be further pulled apart. Once this layer of analysis was completed, the focus moved from the particular to the general and broader links were made with wider theoretical work.

The purpose of ethnographic analysis involving visual material is not to translate the visual into verbal or written knowledge, but rather to explore the relationship
between them. Images and words contextualise each other, representing differing strands of the research (Pink, 2001). Analysis should therefore not necessarily focus on the content of photographs, but on the meanings that participants give to those images. Since, in this particular project, analysis of the photographs that the participants took was carried out themselves in the photograph elicitation interviews (Young & Barrett, 2001) the photographs are presented in order to supplement my own interpretations of the interview data rather than being analysed by me in their own right (Rose, 2007).

There is no neutral text and research writings are as much products of convention and contrivance as any cultural product (Atkinson, 1990). Texts should be produced that enable members from one group to vicariously experience the world of another group, entering a common, shared experience. It is not possible for any piece of writing to achieve everything; there is no perfect ethnography (Denzin, 1997). It is important not to valorise the subjectivity of the powerless in order to tell their story (Goodson, 1995). Simply recording the stories of the researched is a deeply conservative move as it purely reiterates the constrained means of narrating that the participants have. There should be a narrative of actions contextualised with theory whilst attempting not to incline too far away from the participants; an attempt to document and understand whilst not romanticising participants (Coffey & Delamont, 2000). Much behaviour, including speech, is automatic and unreflective (Scott, 1985); relying on thoughts that are rarely brought to the level of consciousness. Interpretation of this behaviour must be more than just a repetition of the common sense knowledge of participants. These interpretations must be judged by the benchmarks of their consistency with
other known social facts. This may be complicated by the fact that participants may provide contradictory accounts of themselves and their behaviour. A knowledge of factors that are beyond a participant’s awareness may add to the analysis but not be substituted for that participant’s own understandings.

When Geertz (1993) asks ‘what does the Ethnographer do?’ he suggests that they simply write; guessing at meanings and drawing conclusions from those better guesses rather than attempting to accurately map the landscape of meaning. He specifies that ethnographic description is interpretive of discourse and attempts to rescue discourse from its fragile circumstances, preserving it in a readable state. The approach taken here has been to emphasise and bring to light an understanding of the experience of the participants. However, this experience has been related to findings from other contexts and linked to theory in order to render this transparent to a wider audience and draw meaningful conclusions. This avoids simply rendering the stories of the participants, fixing them in position whilst still providing an accurate mapping of their situation.

3.5 Ethics

Robson (2002) discriminates between ethics and morals by suggesting that ethics are concerned with the principles that underlie what one ought to do and morals are laws which dictate whether a given act concurs with conventional ideas of right and wrong. Ethical concerns are intrinsic to any research plan and form a more convoluted path than the adoption of a simplistic moral code. In every instance a researcher must reflect on the ethical values which form the basis of their research and how those values permeate their work (Malone, 2003).
First and foremost, the major ethical issue was that the participants should be protected from harm and this can mean several things. Primarily, the participants should not be identifiable from the research report. Bell (2005) describes a difference between anonymity and confidentiality. In an anonymous situation a participant in research is unknown even to the researcher, whereas confidentiality guarantees that anyone reading the research report cannot identify those participants. It is a necessary part of the research design that I know the identity of those that are taking part. This confidentiality is so that anything that they may have said cannot be used against them, either by the school or by any other agencies. Quite apart from this, if they could be identified from the project then it could deter future potential research participants from engaging with researchers. All participants were promised that they would remain unidentifiable and that no one other that myself would know that it was them who said certain things. It was made clear to them that they would be quoted but without their identity being known. It was also made clear to the headteacher of the school in question that the school would remain unidentifiable from the research for similar reasons. It is necessary to give a comprehensive description of the school taking part in the study as this is a key aspect of communicating with users of the research. However, the school itself must remain unknown to the readers. This is not as straightforward as it sounds, since giving too much information about the location of school may make it easy to determine its identity. This is particularly the case in the days of league tables and the internet. As much information about the context of the research has been given in order to provide as complete a picture a possible about the nature of the school without it being identified from the report.
In order to maintain the confidentiality of the school and participants any photographs reproduced in the report that could enable their identification have been blurred. Additionally, all school, county and borough names and logos have been redacted from the photographs. This should enable readers of the report to gain enough detail from the pictures to interpret the findings whilst not causing an ethical problem. Additionally, all the participants have been given pseudonyms in the written report.

Another potential cause of harm would be a belief that, simply by participating in the research, the material position of the participants would be improved. Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton (2001) believe that a researcher has an obligation to empower the participants that are involved in research. Whilst this may be the case, a rhetoric of empowerment may become counterproductive since, through participation in the study, students may develop the view that changing their situation is not possible. This would also affect the willingness of the community involved to play a part in future research. It is important that I avoid justifying this work by using a potentially empty rhetoric that may be counterproductive. Having said this, it is important to keep participants informed as to what will happen to the research findings so that they can judge how it will be used (Malone, 2003; Silverman, 2005). The participants were aware that taking part in the research was unlikely to make a significant difference to their situation but they were happy to do so in order that someone was prepared to listen to their voice.

Perhaps the most significant ethical concern was the fact that by taking the side of the participants as discussed in section 3.2.2 I was condoning their
behaviour. I observed much behaviour that many people would feel was unacceptable and certainly the school would not have wanted that behaviour validated by the presence of an adult. This is a particularly relevant concern to the story about smoking told in section 3.2.2. The ethical concerns of research should not revolve around the creation of a set of inviolate rules, but rather focus on idiosyncratic contexts and the consequences of acts within them. To fail to take account of the context of a piece of research would be to restrict creativity and prevent the reporting of marginalised voices (May, 2001). Whilst it is true that the participants may have felt that the presence of an adult meant that their actions were condoned, it is likely that these actions would have happened in any case. I had made it clear to them that I was not a member of school staff and so the institution of school was not contaminated by my presence whilst these acts took place. Bearing this in mind, I do not believe that this constitutes unethical behaviour. It is necessary to repeatedly consider the complex issues pertaining to the representation of individual voices and the ethical concerns over consent to participate and the activities of the gatekeeper who may see potential participants as vulnerable (Miller & Bell, 2002). If the school felt that the participants were vulnerable and my presence was affecting their behaviour, they would have asked me to leave and cease my research, effectively silencing the voices of the participants. Young people participating in research projects are in the process of becoming responsible and competent decision makers in projects that have bearing on their lives (Prout, 2003) and as such should be trusted to engage with researchers.

This project conformed to the ethical guidelines set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011), with the qualifications set out
above. No one was coerced into taking part in this research and everyone was made aware of their right to withdraw at any stage. This is a particularly important consideration when working with vulnerable groups such as children who are used to being given instructions by adults. Each participant signed a consent form demonstrating they understood what they were agreeing to take part in and the University Ethics Committee agreed to the research being carried out (see Appendix).

3.6 Methodological Limitations to the Research

Having outlined the methodological approach adopted and the specific methods that were used in the research above, I will clarify the limitations of the findings based on the methodology. The approach adopted unambiguously focuses on a local, very specific instance of children in school. This idiographic approach denies us the opportunity to make far reaching statements from the data. Bassey (2001) states that the best that can be hoped for from this type of approach is a ‘fuzzy generalisation’ in order to inform decision making rather than unambiguous predictions. Any generalisations made are legitimate if they are treated as moderate generalisations within a pluralistic approach to research (May, 2002). The study of a singularity suggests possibilities for action (Bassey, 1992) and must be used alongside studies of other singularities to provide more concrete possibilities.

The approach implemented here was to tell stories entirely from the school pupil’s perspective, not to give a full ethnographic description of the school including the views of the school staff and an analysis of school documentation. This clearly gives a very one sided view of school processes. This was entirely
intentional and inherent in the research design. This was for two principle reasons. Firstly, as described in section 2.3.2, Foucault states that to understand how power operates we must investigate resistance. The alternative is simply to reinscribe the rationality of those who hold the lion’s share of power. To understand how power works in school we must take the students’ perspective. As Shields (1991) says, the margins are a position of exclusion but they can also be a position of power and critique, exposing the relativity of established universal values. Secondly, in order to counter Butin’s (2001) critique of much educational research, I have focused on giving students their own voice; allowing them to speak rather than forcing them to become subjects of the research. The reflexive, intersubjective creation of interpretations should have avoided limiting participants to telling the stories that I wanted them too, restricting the power I had over what was told. The account of the research is inevitably my interpretation and theorisation of the data but the methods summarised here should have allowed participants a significant amount of control over what was communicated.

So, like all research, there are significant limitations to what it can tell us. As described in section 3.1.3, any ethnography is a partial description of reality. This thesis gives a student’s eye view of processes of power in a singular school in an extremely specific context. This opens cracks that enable us to see things that may not otherwise be visible but it does not mean that the findings will be entirely relevant in all situations. Ultimately, the conclusions reached by any piece of research are incomplete and provisional, requiring others to reconstruct and evaluate them in the light of their original context (Peshkin, 2000).
4 Constructing Places of Resistance

This chapter focuses on the first of the research questions and relates to issues of space and place. It shows the manner in which identity formation is influenced by the environment in which school students find themselves in and the effect of imposed changes upon this environment. It also considers issues of power in terms of the reappropriation of space and the creation of student friendly places. It begins with a brief synopsis of relevant empirical literature and then moves on to elucidate the findings pertaining to this area.

4.1 Issues of Space and Place in the Empirical Literature

4.1.1 School Buildings

There has been an inclination to understand school buildings as neutral, a container for practice rather than a constituent part of socio-spatial relations. The material environment of schooling has not been routinely problematised despite this being well established practice in areas outside of education (O'Donaghue, 2006). I contend here that school architecture cannot simply be seen as a vessel within which education takes place. The most up to date psychological models of learning recognise that the physical learning environment must be taken into account when considering cognitive load (Choi, Merriënboer & Paas, 2014) and schools that are well maintained are likely to exhibit higher academic performance (Uptis, 2004). School design and construction itself forms a category of discourse that materially establishes a system of values (Benito, 2003). Pedagogical practice is, in part, defined by the spaces that enable them to occur; both guiding and constraining them. This ties in to the understanding of place in part arising from the embodied experience of
space as defined in section 2.2. Educational space itself composes a tacit form of teaching, emphasising specific cadences of movement in time. This visible but obscure aspect of the curriculum is a significant force that provides form to the everyday activities taking place in school. In turn, facilitating the creation of a specific and unique visual culture contributing to the manner in which individuals occupy and move through those spaces (Prosser, 2007). The material space of a school, being more than just a context, silently contributes to the production of subjectivities and identities (O’Donaghue, 2006).

Uptis (2004) suggests that for approaching two centuries schools in the west have been built according to the factory model of education, whereby homogenous groups of pupils are moved between confined spaces, filled with knowledge and then tested. Uptis (2004) builds on this by suggesting that this model implicitly favours transmission models of learning and core subjects such as mathematics and languages over the arts. This embedded constraint on the experienced curriculum means that, despite a wish to teach in differing ways, teachers cannot provide lessons that take a different format. Although the technology has changed from fixed desks and slates, through pens, pencils and on to the internet, certain substantial structures remain the same such as the classroom, textbooks and the board (McGregor, 2004). Teachers and students mutually constitute the place that is their school through their emplaced experience of materiality of the educational environment; mirroring not just the tangible construction on their environment but also the stable continuation of particular power relations. School populations are emplaced, rather than suspended in space and time, and therefore draw on discourses from further afield which are implicated in defining the kind of place that a specific school is.
Traditionally, children have been portrayed as incompetent and incapable of decision making relating to the social world that surrounds them (Prout, 2003). However, in recent studies that involved school children in the design process they came to have a deeper understanding of their own needs as members of a school community and were found have a nuanced understanding what could be expected from the process (Newman & Thomas, 2008). In addition to this school children involved in school design demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of budgetary restrictions and are aware that not everything that they desire is possible. On the other hand, there are concerns that pupil participation in this process can unfairly raise expectation and this concern is borne out by findings showing that the ideal of pupil participation is often shut down in practice by exigencies at a local level (Woodcock, Horton, den Besten, Kraft, Newman, Adey, & Kinross, 2009).

In a review of the literature concerning the impact of school environments (Higgins, Hall, Wall, Woolner & McCaughey, 2005), the Design Council found strong and consistent evidence that basic physical conditions such as temperature and noise had an impact on learning. However, once these have reached certain minimum standards, the evidence as to their effect is less clear. Woolner, Hall, Higgins, McCAughey & Wall (2007) found that improvements are generally less related to any specific change than to the manner in which that change is managed, there being a significant link between effective engagement with both staff and students and the success or otherwise of environmental change impacting on behaviour, well-being or attainment. It is this ownership of change, rather than change imposed by decree, that possesses motivational potential, in part due to differing understandings
between experts and the untrained pertaining to the architecture of schools. Further to this, ownership of change is dependent on renewal, requiring new cohorts to be engaged in the process of transformation in order to continue capitalizing on this motivation (Woolner et al., 2007).

4.1.2 Negotiation of the Meaning and Use of Space

Having considered the impact of the physical environment of school I shall now discuss how that physical space is negotiated and used. Whereas in many buildings the entrance is a place of welcome, in school the entrance represents the boundary separating the inside and outside world. The closing doors and fencing off signifying that the students leave the outside behind and must come inside (O'Donaghue, 2006). Once inside, the users of school space attribute multiple meanings to school and these affect how spaces are claimed. Although this space is often considered via the purposes of those who have a tactical and political advantage, the students who inhabit a school do not necessarily endorse the form that a school environment is presented to them in and can and do resist prescribed representations (Schmidt, 2013). As far back as primary school, children will find means by which to evade the limits imposed on their use of space and interaction, modifying and subverting the classroom space to their own interests (Catling, 2005) and through conspicuous occupation of territory children can make their presence felt and publicly assert their collective identity (Hall, Coffey & Williamson, 1999). However, identical spaces are frequently understood and experienced differently by distinct students. The interpretation of space being mediated by students' self-concept
and identity; the formation of identity as related to the school environment being multifaceted (O’Donaghue, 2006).

An example of students claiming space is through the creation of student friendly spaces. Schmidt (2013) found that students drew a distinction between spaces that were friendly and those that were unfriendly and this distinction formed the basis for their spatial claims. The key to the level of friendliness was the level of adult authority present, both inside and outside of classrooms. Students would assess individual teacher’s strategies in order to establish the friendliness of specific classrooms. Failures of regulation by adult authorities enabled student activity, conversely where there was a substantial adult presence students would use their collective knowledge to circumvent it.

Spaces outside the classroom are where children take the opportunity to learn about themselves and others. These spaces are not simply for performance and display, but they also embody specific values, beliefs and traditions which affect the possibilities of behaviour (O’Donaghue, 2007). Corridors serve as a means to funnel students from one classroom to another, the structural design of schools affecting the length and shape of their hallways. This also provides students with spaces for social interaction and, as a result, the formation of their identities (O’Donaghue, 2006). The formation of contested spatial meanings and the division of school by varying degrees of the ability to claim space demonstrates an emergent range of student abilities for identifying themselves as civic actors in public spaces (Schmidt, 2013). This identity encompasses an understanding of self as a subject and a grasp of the means by which to implement this subjectivity across a diverse and often excluding terrain. Tupper,
Carson, Johnson & Mangat (2008) agree, identifying that the physical structure of school buildings has a function in how students enact these civic identities. They found that corridors and common areas became the spaces where students negotiated their nascent identities and their civic affiliations. Although corridors in schools designed according to the factory model were indistinguishable channels between classrooms, nonetheless they became a key site where students engaged in their social relationships.

Specific areas in Tupper et al.’s (2008) study became associated with particular groups (ethnic groups in this case). Alongside the corridors, larger open spaces were also important in the establishment of identities since they enabled public expression of group membership. It was easier for the students in this study to convey the group identity of others whereas within their own group they could only recognise the likenesses and dissimilarities that their friendships were based on. The public spaces allowed individuals to experiment with different identifications and affiliations within the safety of their own clique and also enabled them to develop strategies balancing the tension between autonomy and control, friendliness and unfriendliness, discussed earlier.

Allen (2013) found that particular places in school are key in terms of the formation of identities, specifically the playground which provides a greater degree of freedom to perform their subjectivities. In her study, the spatial and temporal characteristics of talk during breaks, lacking the academically structured activities which managed their bodily expression, was much freer. The field had a significant allure since it was difficult to regulate as it involved a long walk to cross it. The open air space meant that the students felt freer and
any crack down by teachers was dealt with by students breaking up into groups. These spaces were overtly malleable in terms of the schools regulatory practice enabling the students to fashion their meaning and use as they desired. This clearly links back to Schmidt’s (2013) findings around the friendliness of spaces as determined by students and their use of collective knowledge to evade adult authority.

As well as creating particular places where they like to be, students can disidentify with the totality of school as a place. The young women in Morris-Roberts’ (2010) study strove to be seen as individuals and a part of this required a group to distance themselves from. By drawing on these distinctions they were able to emphasise their insider status at the same time as accentuating the differences within their own group. Morris-Roberts draws on the work of Muggleton (2002) and his idea of ‘distinctive individuality’. This enables people to highlight individuality from a collective reference point and, by self-exclusion from a bigger category, accentuate their insider status whilst still allowing within group variation. She also builds on Skeggs’ (1997) idea of disidentification, the intentional stating that you are not part of a group, to develop a spatial disidentification. The young women in her study disidentified with school as a place where they might want to be, marginalising themselves from school girl culture. This disidentification was carried out through different contexts within school and to varying extents. This links back to the findings by Tupper et al. (2008) and Schmidt (2013), levels of autonomy and control leading to varying degrees of performed identification or disidentification with school. However, disidentification was constantly under the surface and exclusion can operate in diverse ways. There can be physical isolation from resources, but
there can also be a sense that certain benefits do not belong to certain individuals. The narrative of social exclusion often presupposes that all power sits apart from the excluded. The students in Schmidt’s (2013) study were not passive in their exclusion from school and what it had to offer. They employed tactics that allowed them to move through school with a minimum of interaction with adults. This could mean either conforming in order to avoid the over involvement of adults, or by misbehaving so that they would be removed from a teacher’s classroom. Disidentifcation taking the form of either an overt resistance to school or a tactical compliance to smooth movement through the school day.

Another fundamental approach by students in the creation of school place is the reappropriation of space for their own ends. Avoidance is a tactic that is seldom mentioned in the literature which generally understands exclusion as a spatially productive strategy rather than a negotiated occurrence. In Schmidt’s (2013) research the students realised the areas where they lacked authority (classrooms conceived of as learning spaces, admin offices and specific hallways) and where they were able to assert themselves (larger areas where adult attention was more diffuse). Students who did not feel comfortable in larger areas acted to reclaim classrooms and other learning spaces outside of timetabled lessons so that they could negotiate a spatial identity that was in harmony with their needs. Soja (2010) suggests that spatial reappropriation is fundamental to rupturing discourses that restrain access to space and authority. These moments of spatial reappropriation were meaningful instances of dissent that destabilised the dominant sense of place. Spaces created for explicit purposes amass extra, unintended, functions once they are occupied and
experienced. Students appropriate spaces for their own recreation that were designed for something else (O’Donaghue, 2007). However, implicit in the provision of areas for certain activities is the understanding that children should do specific things.

The reappropriation of space by students cannot simply been seen as a student body working in concert against more powerful figures. As stated before, the same space may be experienced in different ways by different students. Certain groups of students may act to exclude other groups of students from given areas. Bullying behaviour by students is a highly spatialised tactic, associating specific spaces with the power dynamic and instilling fear beyond the immediate encounter (Andrews & Chen, 2006). Throughout every encounter there exists a covert power dynamic through which an individual or group can influence the thoughts and behaviours of others.

In a study focusing on students in an alternative education programme, Narin & Higgins (2011) identify that the students have an increased sense of control over their environment when removed from mainstream education. These students benefit from a spatial strategy for ‘at risk’ students with fewer and different rules. In terms of the previous studies discussed they perceive their location as student friendly and as a result feel that they have more control over their environment. To an extent they felt less need to reappropriate the space that they were in because it was already made more student friendly, with an increased sense of control for the students and less overt control over them. In spite of this, the students in this particular study also highlighted the importance of smoking in identity formation, contrasting this behaviour with the normative
messages about smoking. Bell and Valentine (1995) adapt Judith Butler’s (2011:109) notion of the subversive bodily act in order to consider subversive spatial acts, acts which rupture a previously seamless space. Whilst these writers are considering acts which disrupt the normative heterosexualising power of place, the term still retains meaning in this context as students resist the normative use of school space. Smoking, in defiance of messages clearly stating the negative health impacts of the practice, is a clear form of resistance to school power structures and the way that space in schools is ‘supposed’ to be used. The pupils in Narin & Higgins (2011) study remain aware that they are separate from the majority of pupils and this continues to produce a sense of alienation. These students still disidentify with school as a place, despite having been reengaged with a form of education through spatial strategies, and as a result still feel the need to reappropriate the space around them.

As well as the spatial strategies described above, defensive spatial strategies informed by Massey’s (2005) wider power geometries of space are often adopted by young people in disadvantaged areas. A school’s ability to improve its academic performance is influenced more by the position it occupies in the local hierarchy of schools than by deprivation in the area it serves (Woods & Levačić, 2002). The nature and comparative performance of a school and the external perception of it serve to exaggerate one another with the labelling of school affecting their learning experiences. Sustainable educational change is consistently destabilised by social and political geographies that group people by status and enmesh them in power relationships (Hargreaves, 2002). Faced with uncertainty and popular and political disdain for schools and teachers, the belief persists among parents that private, individual, choices benefit their
children. This leads to a sense of nostalgia which impacts on the teaching practices which take place in school.

Diane Reay (2007) distinguishes between the experiences of middle class children and working class children and investigated the spatial strategies that the two groups operated. Prior to attending secondary school, middle class children in her investigation split schools into good and bad schools. This division was used to articulate anxiety and fear of places populated by others. In contrast to this, working class children tended to implicate themselves. This betrayed an understanding that where they lived and the schools they attended were not good enough. Once the transition to secondary school was complete, they carried out a convoluted psychic and spatial recoding so that they could maintain a feeling that both their school and they were good enough. The working class children in the study were in two minds when it came their school, tactically attempting to rehabilitate an area seen as abject, but also cognisant of the stigma attached; endeavouring to amplify positive characteristics whilst neglecting stigmatised aspects. In doing this the stigmatised children were challenging spatial representations of their school in order to open the dominant social imagery to new ideas. These spatial strategies link back again to student friendly and unfriendly places. Students’ cooperation can be both a strategy of avoidance building on disidentification with school as a place and an attempt to defensively rehabilitate school’s inherent contribution to their sense of identity.

4.1.3 Movement Around School

Claims to space and disidentification are not simply static strategies, movement around school is key to understanding the behaviour of students. Lahelma
(2010) found that, comparing schools in Helsinki and London, school children are happier when their daily space-time paths are less rigid. Hall, Coffey & Williamson (1999) state that pupils’ increasingly independent identity is intimately linked to space and place and that, whilst the need for room in the sense of a room of one’s own is important, the room to move is more so. This discloses a need not just for privacy but also for movement and association in the sense of a place to go. A free space which is neither essential nor enforced, such as school, but chosen of their own will. Whilst the participants in the research described in this thesis are compelled to be at school the distinction still exists between spaces where they are expected to be at given times and times where there is less coercion to be in a given space. The need to gather in order to take part in peer group dramas was important for the children in Hall et al’s (1999) study but there was also a desire to be where things were likely to happen. They did not cite a lack of anywhere else to be as a justification for their choice of location.

In considering why movement itself is therapeutic, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (2010) identifies five direct reasons as to why this is the case. Movement precedes everything, even language, and is therefore the preeminent sign of life; providing an experiential feeling of aliveness. Not only this but it also validates and expresses a sense of agency and capability. It foregrounds the connection between affective and tactile/kinaesthetic bodies, meaning that we move naturally in a way that is at one with our emotions. By bringing our attention to kinesthesia we can experience head on the difficulties and limitations of applying language to our experience. Finally, by developing an awareness of our kinaesthetic experience we bring attention to the kinetic
nature through which our sense making is defined. This fits closely with the theoretical approach laid out in chapter 2. Place is partially created through an embodied and multisensory interaction with space. That movement should be such a fundamental aspect of this engagement comes as no surprise.

Movement around school is not simply a matter of emplaced engagement with the environment. Gordon, Holland & Lahelma (2000) liken everyday life in school to a dance with both formal and improvised steps. The formal aspects of education are the formal steps and in the fissures between these exist the informal school, represented by the informal steps of the dance. These fissures provide possibilities and alternate practices for both students and school staff. Power relations are played out through the formal and informal aspects of the dance; with powerful emotions found in the informal school. Students’ sense of place is moulded principally in the informal school as their informal movements extend over the official steps of the dance but strengthen the further they are from officially sanctioned areas.

As teachers organise the steps of the formal dance, these authors suggest that pupils respond through processes of accommodation, conformity, negation, challenge and resistance. Through these spatial practices students are inscribed into particular subject positions and are implicated in this positioning through their locating of themselves. Research has shown that students are not passive in their exclusion, but have a degree of agency through which they are implicated in their marginalisation. Through their desire for movement as a therapeutic end in itself, they resist the sense of place imposed upon their school by both teachers and the nature of the building itself. Through their
movement in school they impart new meaning to specific sites and engage in a behaviour that is not seen as worthwhile in and of itself. Something that is seen as so lacking in value that the design of school buildings themselves work to restrict.

A degree of movement is obviously necessary as pupils navigate their way around school, but this desire for movement can be seen as leading to too much of it. A report by Gordon (1996) identifies the resistance implicit in moving around ‘too much’ and without any obvious aim, part of the teachers’ role being to assess the degree and purpose of movement and to curb any deemed unnecessary. In the hubbub outside of lessons, boys tended to move more than girls, occupying more space as they did so. As a result, a more active use of space by boys was assumed and teachers were more inclined to close down the movements of girls because they were more unexpected. Students were steered into certain time-space paths which became routinised through their continual reiteration. More generally she found that students did not have their own space in school and as a result began to treat particular spaces as their own and became protective of these areas.

Schmidt (2013) found that, in social spaces, students rarely challenged spatial boundaries conferred upon them, preferring to challenge social hierarchies and confront other students. They mobilised a thorough understanding of socio-spatial dynamics when making decisions over how and where to place themselves. Kenway and Youdell (2011) concur, writing in some detail about an instance of teachers chasing a student and drawing of Deleuze and Guattari’s (1998) notion of affectivities. They explain that the boy running from teachers
does not cross the school boundary, despite the ease with which he could, because he wants to remain recognisable as a student. Crossing the line would impact on his identity in a manner in which he pre-discursively does not wish to happen. Despite a desire to resist, students still wish to retain their identities as students of their school. Even if it does not precisely correspond to how they would like it to be, it is still a fundamental aspect of their identity.

4.1.4 Surveillance, Space and Identity

Clearly students’ negotiation of the meaning and use of space around them is important in terms of identity formation and the means by which they enact their subjectivities and as a result their behaviour around school. Yet there is one aspect of the use of space around educational establishments that skews the balance of power further away from them. In recent years crime and safety has received particular prominence in public debate (Hope, 2009). Within UK schools CCTV devices have become a part of the material culture of schools and illustrate the underlying values in disciplinary procedures. Whilst much of the momentum for the installation of these devices derived from the murder of Phillip Lawrence outside the school at which he was headteacher and the Dunblane primary school massacre (Hope, 2009), gradually the focus has moved from protecting children from threatening outsiders towards the social control of the children within school.

The use of CCTV in this disciplinary fashion characterises a move away from social integration towards system integration whereby disorder is believed to be prosaic and inevitable (Hope, 2009). Instead of educating children to be law abiding citizens this represents a move towards control of deviant spaces, the
need for reform being minimised if deviant behaviour is relocated to marginal spaces. These marginal spaces created by the monopolisation of space are an expression of power, relegating those with disproportionately less power to undesirable environments (Sibley, 1995). This parallels moves generally in society where, in the past, pathological offenders were identified as requiring analysis and intervention with the rational offender being considered a fringe category. More recently there has been a transfer of interest to the routine, opportunist, offending and in turn to the potential of policing populations in order to reduce transgression (Garland, 2001). These are important points, but the argument should not be overemphasised since a key aspect of schooling is to implement social integration.

This movement of values signifies that the priority must be the control of deviancy. The fear of being watched, despite the uncertainty as to whether you actually are being, leads to the policing of one’s own behaviour. For self-surveillance to take place, an individual must have a good comprehension of the rules. This grasp of the rules enables panoptic supervision, whereby individuals are constantly observed, to function on a cultural as well as a physical plane. The uncertainty over whether an individual is being watched dealt with by their monitoring of themselves. Where there exist alternative or marginal social values and cultural norms are contested, regulation by means of self-surveillance collapses. Some students intentionally participate in certain behaviours despite expecting punishments as part of the process of identity formation (Hope, 2007).
CCTV has a significant bearing on the formation of identity. Bauman (2000) builds on some of Foucault’s thinking, stating that power is dispersed and plastic not simply restricted to an ethos of discipline. In Foucauldian terms, visibility is related to power the implication being that those who can see are more powerful than those who are seen (Koskela, 2004). The first lesson that is learnt by school children is that one’s body is continually monitored, schools are role expectations made concrete (Margolis & Fram, 2007) with form embodying the politics and culture of a given culture just as, if not more so than, content (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001).

The empirical work building on this theoretical underpinning proposes that school staff generally believe that pupils remained relatively unaware of the CCTV technology that surrounded them (Hope, 2009). Pupils in another study on CCTV in school stated that they needed a degree of privacy around school, at least in part because of their need to express emotions that they did not necessarily wish to be publicly exposed (Taylor, 2010). They were also frustrated by their lack of power to object to its use. This again relates to the ideas of student friendly and unfriendly spaces examined earlier. The presence of CCTV is fundamental to the construction of identity in school spaces but also provides students with another spatial strategy to assess the degree of power they may or may not have in a given situation. It also gives them another avenue for resistance, either by avoiding areas with CCTV coverage or by deliberately misbehaving with in their view despite the possibility of repercussions.
4.2 The Participants’ Construction of School as a Place

The remainder of this chapter goes on to build on the review of previous research above and describes the data collected in school with reference back to prior findings.

4.2.1 Physical Environment

Repeatedly, throughout the time I spent in school, the participants were extremely critical of the physical environment that they were made to spend their time in. A key comparison that the students used to describe their surroundings was that of a bin. This metaphor was often used to illustrate their feelings about the fabric of the building. The Year 10 mainstream group took several photographs of a specific bin and this became a focus of part of one of the interviews. Below is one of the photographs and a part of one of these discussions. The bench cannot clearly be seen here, but as the students note, there was not a seat to the bench.
1 The School's a Bin

Simon: That’s what reminds us of the school.

Me: The bin?

Richard: Shit.

Me: So the bin. Tell me about the bin...

Simon: It’s dirty.

Richard: That’s like the school though.

Simon: School’s a bin.

Me: Why is that?

Simon: Coz it is... look at it... it’s just terrible.
Richard: There’s bricks falling down by the benches. Part of the bench has fell off.

Simon: That bench there, there IS no bottom bit.

Mark: It’s just concrete.

Simon: It’s just 2 concrete supports.

It was evident from conversations like these that the rooms in the older part of the building that was going to be demolished in order to make way for the new building were particularly reviled. This was both due to the material building and to the teachers’ use of it. Visible, unplastered, bricks on the inside signalled to the students that very little effort and money had gone into the rooms (something that students commented on and pictured, see the image below). Participants stated that the rooms with plaster on the walls as opposed to bare brickwork felt cleaner. They felt that many of the rooms in the older part of the building let in very little light and were drab, although this was contrasted with the rooms that did allow in plenty of light but had no blinds which also caused problems from the point of view that it was hard for them to look at the board or watch videos. Some of the smaller IT rooms were also singled out due to the fact that they were far too hot to work in.
2 Unplastered Bricks

It can be seen here that the physical space that they are occupying forming a visible but hidden aspect of the lived curriculum (as described in section 4.1.1) experienced by the students. The decaying and unloved building that they were in for several hours of the day contributed to the visual culture of the students and was interpreted by them to show that their school was literally rubbish. The making sense of this facilitated metaphors which enabled them to describe their lives in these terms. In their understanding there was little to value about school and they could not see how it was possible to see themselves in a positive light or value themselves. The meeting of minimum environmental standards is key in enabling schools to be effective and it can be seen from this evidence that the participants believed that these were not being met. With reference to these
physical classroom spaces, classroom places were being constructed through their talk, and in turn their identities as ‘worthless’ students were also being constructed. Their attitudes and behaviours could not be easily separated out from the spaces which they inhabited.

The feelings of the participants extended beyond the physical building to the way staff made use of the space and displays that they developed there. The display boards were often cited as aggravating the poor quality of the physical building. They had been on the walls for years in the view of the participants with no effort made to change them or to make the rooms look interesting. Although this was clearly an exaggeration, this builds on the previous point that the participants interpreted everything as being in a state of decay. Whilst the display boards within classrooms were criticised their poor quality, those in the corridors were clearly well maintained and changed often. In spite of this, they were still the focus of criticism due to their perceived irrelevance. They tended to consist of aspirational messages, presumably intended to motivate students around the school. The example below centres on the 2012 Olympics that were taking place during the summer that the fieldwork was carried out. These boards were considered “stupid” and “pointless” by the students.
3 Irrelevant Display Boards

Even in newer parts of the school there were aspects of the physical environment that the students believed demonstrated that they were not cared for. An example of this was the prominence that was given in one of the photographic exercises and the subsequent interview to broken fixtures and fittings around the school. Pictures like the one below raised questions for the participants such as: “Why isn’t everything in the correct place?” Despite knowing that this did not pose a significant risk of danger (see the exchange below) students were still upset by the lack of care and attention given over to their setting.
4 They Ain't Finished the Fuckin' School

Me: You're obviously quite annoyed about that.

Charlie: Yeah! I was! Health and safety I'm thinking!!

Brandon: Charlie, that isn't electrical.

Martin: It's coz they ain't finished the fuckin' school.

The issues that students had with their surrounding environment revolved around two main factors. Firstly they believed that many of the rooms, particularly the older areas of the school were not conducive to their ability to work due to the environmental conditions mentioned earlier. This underscores the idea that they want to come to school to learn but that there are obstacles to this that are not within their control. Alongside this, there is a definite conviction
that the physical environment that they are surrounded by demonstrates that they are not cared for by the institution of school. They are expected to present themselves in a certain way through the expectation that they wear the school uniform and also in the way that they are expected to make the effort to present their work in particular ways. However, the school only strives to look good externally, to create a positive impression for outsiders, whilst making very little attempt to help them with their education or simply to provide them with a comfortable space in which to be. The look of the school made a significant contribution to the visual culture of the students in the school, generating a belief that there is some sort of educational ‘masquerade’ taking place, a façade underneath which they do not really matter.

These attitudes towards the physical environment were complicated by the changes that were taking place to the building as the participants moved into Year 11 and there was a noticeable adjustment in their behaviour, particularly regarding the students in sub school A. This change in behaviour was more perceptible amongst those who had formerly been in the vocational group, but it was still present in those who had moved across from the mainstream. To some extent, all pupils across the years were engaged in damaging school property and the substance of the school building, but this behaviour was particularly prevalent amongst Year 11 pupils. A lot of this behaviour centred on drawing on the desks or scratching desks with compasses and scalpels, particularly in the more practical subjects where they had more access to the type of tool that could be used for this. This behaviour was almost constantly happening in the practical sessions with the former vocational students. Some examples from my field notes are:
Brandon comes over and starts screwing a screw into the ghetto blasters plastic grill that protects the speakers. It won’t go in, so he uses an electric screwdriver instead. This still doesn’t go in, but gouges out lines that run across the speaker grill.

Later – he drills holes into the teacher’s desk. Brandon – “You always know when I’ve been somewhere coz I’ve drilled holes. Or stuck a compass in”. He takes a compass and walks around room throwing it into surfaces.

This could be seen as a type of subversive spatial act (Bell & Valentine, 1995). O’Donaghue (2007) claims that the hard architecture of the school resists human inscription, aside from the aerosol can, but the furniture of the school can be used to mark physical space as well. These acts of vandalism might be considered to disrupt the conventional uses of the space and are a form of resistance to school power structures. Another instance from my field notes centres on an incident that occurred as we were moving between lessons:

I arrive as the English lesson ends. It’s a particularly disordered end and kids drift out. I walk along corridor with Charlie and Martin. As we are walking along, Martin swings his foot at a water fountain on the wall. Although he barely connects with it, it comes off the wall. It’s hilarious! Charlie and I step back laughing. Martin and Charlie go to see Ern in order apologise and I go with them. Martin tells Ern that he was “mucking about and it happened by accident”. Ern sends Martin to site team, Charlie and me go on to Maths…
It’s interesting that, having been a teacher in a similar school, I spent so much time expecting pupils there to take care of the environment; understanding that there were money issues that meant that the poor quality of the building could not be addressed. However, having spent time with the pupils I can see why some of them might disregard this, that their view of the fabric of school is so poor that they might as well have their impact in order to make the space theirs in some way. This is an aspect of the reappropriation of space, instances of dissent through subversive spatial acts that destabilise the dominant sense of place.

4.2.2 Skips for Refuge and Refuse

Another commonly mentioned item was the skip which was placed in the playground, unlike the bin the skip was not pictured in relation to their concerns about being ‘rubbish’. In Year 10, a large number of the participants I worked with cited a skip placed in one of the playgrounds as a key space that they used in order to avoid lessons. This was photographed by a number of the students whilst they were independently photographing the school. The green container behind it held PE equipment and this was an area that was frequently used for smoking. The rubbish that the skip contained was mainly discarded pieces of furniture and the students explained that they spent their time in there smashing things like light bulbs and bottles despite also stating that it was a good place to ‘skive’ ‘as long as you were quiet’. They were unconcerned at having a skip in their playground, claiming that they did not care as long as it provided them with a place to hide which provides an interesting contrast with the previous
comments about bins. The skip provided a useful function for them and so it was not used metaphorically in the same way as the bins.

In discussing the image below I was repeatedly told that it was someone else’s idea to get into the skip, not Ella’s. This activity, smashing objects, could be linked to the damage of school property as a process of marking out territory through subversive spatial acts. The fact that they each thought that the skip was their unique place to go to avoid lessons showed that they felt that their way of engaging with the environment was unique. Additionally, the fact that they were unconcerned with having a skip stuck in their playground is linked to the idea that the fabric of the school is so poor that there is little point in being concerned by it, and there is no point in making an effort to maintain it as suggested in the previous section. In fact, the opposite is the case and the students feel that they may as well make their mark on the school.
Me: have you climbed inside?

Simon: Deena was in there...

Mark: I was in there on the same day as Deena and we.... for about an hour we sat in there and we got all like the test tubes and smashed them.

Simon: Why?

Mark: Coz it was in the skip and we was bored!

Simon: What was in there?
Mark: Peter got this fat light bulb as well and threw it and you could hear it sort of like steaming...

Simon: Was there cardboard in there? And you sat on that?

Mark: Cardboard, tables, chairs.

Me: Why did you get in the skip?

Mark: Bored.

Simon: It's a good pace to skive really.

Me: Was it a break or lunch? Or during lessons?

Mark: During lesson.

Simon: It's a good place to skive though really innit.

Mark: As long as you don't make noise. If you try and move everything goes!

Me: As long as nobody chucks some more rubbish in!

Mark: That's what we... coz we was sat like just here in front of it and we was hoping no one else would chuck more rubbish in.

Me: So you smashed some stuff up?

Mark: Coz we're ‘ard? (Sarcastically) I dunno...

Me: Do you think they should have that skip there? Does it annoy you?

Simon: Not really.

Mark: If I can get in it and not get caught I'm fine! There'll be no more hiding from me next year.
The skip was emblematic to them of their skipping of lessons which is why so many of them had highlighted it when taking photographs. But, also, it shows how a sense of place was key in differentiating themselves from other groups in school. When individuals occupied that place, they believed that it was their unique idea to do so. When it was exposed that other people did the same thing, there was a sense of disbelief that this could be the case. Alongside this, as in the quote above, since it represented their truanting it was often discussed how much less of this they intended to do in Year 11. This was largely mentioned by those in the mainstream groups recognising that as they moved into their final year, they would need to knuckle down and get some work done.

The fact that a skip came to be seen as a student friendly place clearly links back to the students’ perception of themselves as discussed in the previous section. The absence of adult authority was key, but it also links back to the perception of school as rubbish and as a result, since their attendance at school is a key aspect of their personality, they must be too. Behaviour such as smashing the contents of the skip might be seen as a subversive spatial strategy elsewhere but it is the occupation of this specific space was significant for this group in this instance, providing them with a space to call their own.

4.2.3 Student Friendly Places: The Drama Studio and the Library

One specific place that the students who were in the mainstream group in Year 10 referred to as a place that they enjoyed being in during our conversations and travels around the school was the Drama Studio. This group continued to identify with this place as they moved into Year 11 and were broken up into the different sub schools. The students occupied the vocational spaces did not
Identify specific rooms as places they liked to inhabit beyond the area that they were based.

6 The Drama Studio

The room was left open at break and lunch times and it was seen as a place where teachers would not go. Students could be free from interference and left to their own devices. The room was large, with a high ceiling, as you would expect in a space dedicated to performing arts. There were large black curtains covering the windows which meant that the room was very gloomy. This served 2 purposes; firstly the students, particularly the female students, saw it as an alternative to the playground. It was a very different place to be to the classrooms but did not have the risks associated with standing by the football
being played. However, because there was no reason for teachers to pass through the room they had the same kind of control over the space at that particular time.

Me: What about the drama studio? Do you ever go there?
Deena: Yeah, we're always in there. I like it in there.
Me: Yeah, why's that?
Elizabeth: It's dark and dingy though.
Deena: It's like, more space and you don’t really get teachers in there all the time.
James: More places to hide in, like little cupboards!
Deena: So they leave you to do your own thing basically....
Me: During lessons?
Deena: Not during lessons, but it's just better in there. I like it.
Me: Just coz it’s more open?
Deena: mmm, yeah.

Another significant reason why the students liked that particular space was that there were several nooks and crannies in which they could hide. They would do this during lesson time whilst skipping their lessons and they saw this as a means of getting one up on their teachers. For example, a story that I was told by the students whilst they were in Year 10 is as follows:

Simon: Aaahhh... Remember when you lot hid in the little room?!
Mark: We're in that every day for this week. For just assemblies.
Simon: Mark, do you know the little room bit? At the back?

Mark: Up the stairs we got...

Simon: Yeah, like him and some others went up there and underneath, there’s like a big thing underneath.

Mark: It goes into a big tunnel into a big thing and you can just sit in there making noise, and teachers come in and they can’t see you. All you see is their feet and it’s funny.

Simon: Mr [xxx] spotted you straight away when you went in there.

Mark: Yeah.

Richard: Yeah, coz when...

Simon: Mr […] could see like, one of their shoes or something and Ben was hiding behind the curtain...

Mark: It was me, him and James...me, […] and James and Mr [xxx] came in and crouched down and saw […] erm…. James’ foot moving like that. He touched it and yanked it!

[Laughter....]

So the room was important, both as alternative space to the playground at break and lunch, but also because it was difficult for the teachers to police it due to its design and function. This is another example of the students using disruptive spatial strategies to take control of a space and have some ownership over it. The other area that this group of students named as a place they liked to inhabit as they moved into Year 11 was the new library. Many of
the students testified that the reason that they enjoyed going there was the
erelative comfort and warmth that it offered.

Me: Is this a good place to come then?

Esther: Yeah, I love it up here.

Simon: It’s well comfy and warm.

Jenni: It’s quiet and warm.

Whilst this was undoubtedly the case, there appeared to be more to this than
just the ‘cosiness’ that they reported it offered. I spent time with several of them
during English lessons and it was clear that, whilst they did enjoy the different
environment, in the sense of being able to sit on sofas etc., they also enjoyed
the space because it meant that they were able to hide from the teachers by
moving around the bookshelves. This was not a straightforward activity because
the teachers were obviously aware that it could happen and so students
alternated their roles as students that were hiding and students that were half
working and half being amused at the students hiding. Again, this is an example
of the students working together, albeit in an unplanned and implicit fashion, to
gain control of the nature of the place that they found themselves in. This is an
example of the students reappropriating the space that they inhabit to meet their
own ends. The participants can be seen reclaiming learning spaces here and
there are clear parallels with Schmidt’s (2013) research. This behaviour
shattered the discourses that restrained their authority over places, creating
student friendly places where they felt at home.

Once the participants were in Year 11 and they spent less of their time in the
playground due to the building work, the library became a place where many of
them went during lunch times. Again, this was in part due to the comparative comfort that the room offered, but at lunch time the room was policed by teaching assistants and admin staff who were seen as easy targets by the students. In order to be allowed to be in the library at lunch time the students were supposed to be quietly reading. Repeatedly, whilst I was in there at lunch time, students were either picking up books or magazines at random as a justification for being there or a minority would make no effort to pretend to be there to read at all.

It’s calm, but kids are sneaking around and clouting others round the head!

There’s lots of laughter. They should be reading a book to be allowed here but, although many of them are holding books, very few actually reading them. It’s obvious that they’re not.

The above extract from my field notes demonstrates that they were not doing anything particularly outrageous, just trying to get away with being there and finding the reaction of the teaching assistants funny. I did see some jumping on the bean bags, but not much, which is in contrast with the perception of some of the students. For example:

Jenni: Yeah, and they tell us to get out and we were just sit on the sofa and we’re chucking pillows everywhere... and like start jumping on these and they're going mad aren't they!! "Get out!!"

I did not see anyone throwing anything, but I did regularly see the teaching assistants shouting at pupils, much to their amusement. The stressed reactions
of the teaching assistants gave them the feeling of being in control of the situation and the sense that the adults in the room could not do anything about their behaviour. They totally dominated the space without ever doing anything that warranted the presence of senior staff to deal with the behaviour. This reveals quite a nuanced understanding of exactly what they could get away with without causing themselves significant trouble from the authorities in the school. It also reveals the importance of humour as part of their spatial strategies, identifying areas where humour could be used in order to reappropriate space.

During an interview, several of the participants in the study identified the new library (which was open by this time and properly equipped) as being their favourite part of the school specifically because it did not appear as chaotic as everywhere else:

   Elizabeth: It's actually a part of the school where it doesn't look like a building site.

   Mark: Yeah... all the classrooms all look tatty.

Here they were re-appropriating the library space in the absence of many tidy and clean areas for them to go. They were allowed to go into the library during their breaks in order to read but this was not their intention. They would cover up by pretending to read and never causing enough trouble to warrant the senior staff to be summoned. This behaviour was in contrast to their behaviour in Year 10 where they would occupy the skip, regardless of the fact that it was full of discarded furniture. They had an opportunity to inhabit a space which they felt was comfortable and so had moved on.
Having said this, some participants were still perturbed by the fact that additional struts had been used in the building because, since it had been turned into an open plan design, it was found not to be structurally strong enough (see the picture below). This was more evidence to them that there had been a failure to plan effectively for the development work across the site.

7 Additional Struts Reveal Bad Planning

Interestingly, the members of sub school A who were previously in the vocational group never went to the new library despite suggesting that they liked the comfortable environment. I asked whether they ever did and this is an exemplar response:

Me: Do you go over to the library?
Charlie: No.

Me: Why not if you like it?

Charlie: Coz you've got to be quiet. It's a library.

They were clearly unaware of the type of behaviour that was enacted by some students in there. Quite possibly, the only occasion on which they had been into the new library was when I met with them in there to interview them.

4.2.4 Environmental Change as a Conduit for Resistance

One significant factor affecting the young people’s interaction with school as a place was the sense of environmental change that was taking place. The school in question converted to academy status as the students in the current study moved from Year 8 into Year 9 and work on rebuilding the school began when they were in Year 11. During the time that they were in Years 9 and 10 there were some elements of change to the built environment but these were minimal and largely related to the structural reorganisation of the school. Some of the minor changes that occurred early on were raised in our discussions prior to the rebuild commencing but much of the focus here was on the anticipated changes that were going to be made as a result of the building work.

The sense of perpetual change fed into the students’ disidentification with school as a place that they might wish to be (Morris-Roberts, 2010; Skeggs, 1997). The quote below highlights a contradiction between perceiving the school as theirs and forming a key part of their identity but disidentifying with the process of constant change that was undermining them as the inhabitants of that place.
Me: Do you think what the school is trying to do is good?

All: No!

Martin: They're trying to change us. That's what they're trying to do.

Brandon: Yeah, they are aren't they.

Martin: By changing the school.

Me: They're trying to change you by changing the school?

Charlie: Yeah, like I was saying, change the name as many times as you want. Change the uniform as many times as you want. But you can’t change the people in and around here.

[...]

Brandon: They shouldn’t be able to change us. They can’t change us.

Charlie: We’re invincible.

This view of themselves as being beyond change and invincible could be considered an example of a defensive spatial strategy as described by Reay (2007). In order to conceive of themselves as good enough they carry out a reinterpretation of the meanings imposed on the place they find themselves in. The school and its inhabitants may be rubbish but they cannot be changed.

There was a general feeling expressed that space was used largely for the benefit of teachers’ needs rather than those of pupils.
8 The Staff Room

Me: So why did you take a picture of the staff room?

Charlie: To show how big of a space they need for their staff room...

Brandon: Yeah, you see all our classrooms. That used to be a classroom but that’s...

Charlie: No, that used to be two classrooms didn’t it?

Brandon: No. It used to be one.

[?]: No, it used to be Mr [xxx]’s room.

All: Oh yeah.
Charlie: And now they’ve just turned it into one big staffroom when they could use it for ... to keep more kids in it or something. Coz apparently were getting more kids and they don’t need that.... (Scarcastically)

This view of their teachers’ need for space being prioritised over their own became part of their disidentification with school. They saw the provision of excess space for teachers as being part of the educational façade that was being prioritised over their needs. There was much frustration expressed over the slow pace of development of the new learning resource centre. This was a newer part of the old building that wasn’t going to be demolished but had been refurbished. The work on the actual fabric of the building had been completed and we were actually conducting some of our interviews in there but the furniture had not arrived and most of the resources and books were scattered all over the floor whilst they were being sorted out. Many of the students took photographs of this part of the building so it was clearly important to them and we discussed it during the photograph elicitation interviews.
Charlie: That's the library which is coming soon. Which... we’re meant to be in it now...

Me: You are in it now!! (The interview was being conducted in the library before it was fully opened to the students.)

Charlie: Yeah, but...

Me: You want to be able to use it now....

Charlie: Yeah.

Me: Why do you think they’re not letting you use it now?

Brandon: Coz it’s probably…
Jenna: Coz you need book shelves... and books!

Brandon: All they’ve done is throw a load of books in here without doing anything....

This exemplifies a feeling that there was a lack of care with respect to things that were explicitly for the pupils of the school, expanding on the attitude that they had towards the staff room. There was a general feeling that the money being spent on developing the school was restricting their access to other things. One specific example of this was the fact that they were no longer going to be able to do work experience. This was something that almost all the students stated that they were looking forward to and its absence was explicitly blamed on the expense of alterations to the fabric of the school. One student even went as far as to suggest that the teachers were lying about changes in funding for work experience:

Jenna: Every other school got to do it. And I asked one of the... the one with grey hair who’s got a bob... Why aren’t we doing work experience? And she said to me because the government int funding it no more and it’s the same with all the other schools when all the other schools are doing work experience.

Me: And how do you know that they’re all doing it?

[All explain at once about their mates...]

Jenna: So she’s basically bullshitting....

This lack of care pertaining to features of the school that the participants felt were important, and the sense that funds were being diverted away from
elements of their education towards the rebuild meant that they were losing the things that they valued about their schooling as part of their defensive spatial strategies, limiting their ability to rehabilitate school as a place and by extension themselves.

Some of the students expressed their doubts over the value of rebuilding the school believing that it was not being done for their benefit, or even in order to gain greater control over student behaviour, but purely in order to improve the reputation of the school. The reputation of the school was seen by all the students as something that was unsalvageable and that a new school building would be as ineffective in addressing this as previous name changes had been.

Brandon: They don’t need to knock down the old school.

Me: You don’t think so?

Brandon: No, coz it’s just a building, it’s just coz they want a new reputation, they ain’t gonna get it.

Here the combination of space and social relations can be seen. Related to this was a belief that the benefits from the new building were superficial and simply an attempt to look better, rather than addressing any educational issues. This was often tied to a belief that the head teacher was more interested in the reputation of the school, and by extension her own reputation, than acting in a positive manner to support the students.

Jenni: Coz she [the headteacher] wants to make it look better, that’s what I mean. She’s just trying to make everything look flash.

She don’t care.
Having come from an area long seen as abject and being aware of the link between the view of the area and that of the school, they doubt that there is anything that can be done about it. Rebuilding the school was ultimately considered as superficial as changing the name. This was spatially strategic manoeuvring by the school in order to improve its standing within the community. The perception of the students was that funds were being rerouted away from their educational provision and this meant that some of the things that they valued about the school were being taken away from them; closing down the opportunities that they had to rehabilitate their identities and that of the school. This lead to the more reductive strategy in forming the belief that they were beyond change and that that was the position they would adopt and defend.

Another major concern across both groups of students was that the building work was going to have a significant impact on their studies. This highlighted the importance that the students placed on their education and their concern over the qualifications that they were going to leave with. In Year 10 they were fully aware that the next year was their final year and they felt they were going to suffer because of the building work. The concerns that were expressed largely revolved around the noise that the construction work would generate and the incursion into the available space. The opinion on this expressed across both groups of students in Year 10 was that the work had not been thought through or planned properly. They felt that the local standing of the school overall was being given precedence over them as individuals and that the potential effect on their studies was not being taken account of. The
following two quotes highlight this (‘She’ refers to the headteacher in both cases):

Deena: She don’t care. She hasn’t thought through that... we’ve got..... Year 11s and other students as well yeah. She don’t think that it’s going to fuck our learning... shit ... it’s going to mess our learning up innit really if you think about it coz change is disturbs everything.

James: If there’s machinery going on around yer, yer can’t concentrate.

Jenni: Oh, I tell you something else, you know how we do performing arts yeah, they’re because they’re doing a new school building, they’re moving us into the phoenix studio, but we do three separate things, we do dance, music and drama. So how ever are we meant to do all that in one room? It’s just stupid, she hasn’t planned anything out, she’s just disturbing our learning even more. By making a new building int she...

Elizabeth: And we’re in Year 11...

Jenni: Exactly! It’s our last year and we need to, like, let everything settle down, not more changes. She should be doing it in the summer holidays and stuff. Where like.... or get another like portable building where we can do it outside, not giving us other rooms where there are going to be loads of loud noise and stuff.
Even before the event, there was an awareness shown here of the fact that minimal environmental standards were necessary for schools to function successfully. There was also a sense of lack of ownership - that change which was being dictated from above. On top of concerns about distraction, many students indicated that they did not feel safe in that environment, even though it was recognised by most that they must be safe otherwise the work would not be being done.

Brandon: They shouldn't do it when we're in school. See how close away they are from our English class? The other day they were knocking literally about this close away from our room and they were knocking it down.

James: They must know what they're doing or they wouldn't be doing it...

Despite their dislike of the effect of the building work, many of the students were interested in the work that was taking place around the school. Whilst walking around the school with some of the students, for example, James was excited by the machine that was grinding bits of the demolished building down to rubble. Deena also spent a lot of time stood watching the building work, interested in what was going on. All the students I was with on this occasion were talking about the dust being generated and how it was being kept from blowing around. Many photographs were taken during these walks by the students of the machines involved in the process (see example below). Interestingly there was significantly less interest in the work being done on the playgrounds, the focus was entirely on the demolition of the old building and the
construction of the new one. Their playgrounds had largely been taken away from them and so their focus remained on the building since they had become accustomed to having minimal outdoor space.

10 Demolishing the Old School Building

In some of the newer buildings that weren’t being demolished, work had already been carried out with a view to convert them into open plan learning spaces instead of discrete classrooms. This was representative of the design of the new parts of the campus that were being built at this time. The students in sub school B were based in these areas for their core subject lessons. I spent a lot of time sitting with these students in their lessons in these spaces and they frequently expressed their frustration with the nature of the rooms. They were
large rooms that had been recently decorated, but rather than being laid out in any kind of innovative manner it was as if someone had only removed the walls between traditional classrooms. There were usually three classes in each, each with their own interactive whiteboard and the three different lessons were being taught in a largely traditional way.

My field notes are full of references to being unable to hear the teacher, both in terms of comments from students and my own inability to hear. This was due to a number of reasons. Either the other teachers were speaking at the same time and all their voices mingled together, or the other classes were working and were, perfectly legitimately, discussing what they were doing. Sometimes a class would get up and move around, or leave to work elsewhere and this created noise which also masked the class teacher. In addition to the actual noise being generated the large character of the rooms meant that the noise echoed around and became amplified which meant it was hard to hear or to concentrate. Quite apart from the level of noise, there was a constant stream of teachers and teaching assistants moving through the room which only added to the disturbances in the rooms. Again, there were issues here with the meeting of the minimum standards which the children were well aware of and, as shown by the earlier discussion, frustrated by.

This was in contrast to the students in sub school C who were housed for all their lessons in another area of the school which was more traditionally laid out where they received fairly traditional lessons. Students in sub school A received their core subjects in conventional classrooms in classes composed of students who were formerly in the Year 10 vocational group as well as those who had
moved from the mainstream group. Whilst the students who had been in mainstream who were now in sub school A had their option subjects the former vocational students continued with the kind of practical work they had completed during Year 10. So the nature of the building which was being constructed was far more apparent to the students in sub school B and it was far from popular. The overwhelming feeling from the pupils in sub school B was that they would prefer to be taught in conventional classrooms; as evidenced in the following quote:

James: So in lessons you have noise from one room to the other, and you’re all mixed in and the teachers are “Be quiet while they’re trying to explain that, be quiet while she’s doing that”. You’re restricted to what you say and it don’t work, you’ve got all the echoing. It’s pretty much, you’ve got a class here and a class there and we’re all trying to learn. They should put a wall along there and a wall along there and a door for each room.

The different environments offered to the different students exemplifies the use of space as a visible but obscure part of the curriculum. Sub school C received a more traditional education and as a result were placed in a more traditional school setting. The settings that sub schools A and B were placed in were a less traditional school environment and this was clear to them and frustrated them because they did not understand the reasons for the change. This slightly contradicts the findings by Higgins et al. (2005) that the nature of change in school environments is less important than the involvement of students in the design of that change. The justification for these changes were not made clear
to the students and so they did not understand why they had happened. The findings of Higgins et al. (2005) might suggest that had they been involved with the process of designing the new school then it is possible that they would have understood why certain changes had occurred and as a consequence perhaps been less resistant to the idea.

Participants often reiterated what had been said prior to the commencement of the building work about the changes to the fabric of the school being inconsequential. There was widespread belief that the new school would look good and would be of better quality, even though this contradicted the experience of the students in sub school B of open plan learning environments. Nonetheless the universal feeling was that nothing about the new build would change the inherent nature of the school.

    Deena: Yeah, it’s not the building. Once the building is done it’s gonna look smarter an’ that, but it’s gonna be the same like how it is now inside.

    James: It’s about the kids inside, not the look of it.

Finally, there was recognition that the changes to the built environment being put into place would be good for the year groups that were to follow them in the school, but the way in which things had been managed meant that there was nothing but a negative impact on them.

    Leah: My mum reckons she wanted me to come to [another school]. She wishes she got me in there now. She’s always on about how this school is really shit. And that they’ve messed us around since Year 8. Everything’s always changing. Now
the school’s getting knocked down and we’ve got like... it’ll be all good for the year below us...

It is clear from much of this that the students were very much engaged with their education in the sense that they valued the idea of learning in general and the potential benefits that it held. However, the fact was that the nature of the school was tied up with their identity and the changes that were being carried out to their environment hurt as it impacted on their ways of occupying the space and moving around it.

Their perception was that school is for the students, belongs to them and is integral to their identity. The participants fixated on two reasons for these changes, one being the image of the school to outsiders and one being the ability of teachers to police them. The benefits of an improved image are disregarded as unimportant to their education and it is aggravating to the students that these are being prioritised over aspects of change that could be beneficial to their education. There was also a pervasive belief that their teachers’ needs were also being prioritised over their own.

Not only this, but the new building and the refurbished areas were considered to have been designed in order to enable more effective policing of their behaviour. Again, the teachers were seen as being more interested in this than their actual education. To make matters worse, the pupils felt that there was no negotiation over these changes that would impact on the development of the participants’ identity. This all fed into the conviction that the new building was for the benefit of others, either the teachers or for the students that were in lower
years and this meant that they were effectively second class citizens. This in turn acted as a justification for their resistant behaviour.

The changes being enacted on the fabric of the school could not be stopped by the students even though they were resistant to the notion of them happening at all and as a result the changes taking place became a conduit for resistance. This conduit allowed the students to move their attention away from their education and onto the building work. Enabling such behaviour in lessons as complaining that the building work was unsafe, being more interested in the construction work than the lesson itself and more general complaints about the second class nature of their school citizenship. This fits with the covert nature of much of their resistance rather than the overt and explicit transgression of rules producing not simply resistive acts, but a more general resistive mentality and a collective frustration at what was occurring around them and their lack of control over events. Their rationalisation for this being the erosion of the minimum environmental standards that they felt they had a right to expect.

4.2.5 Ghettoisation and the Defence of Identities

The previous sections showed how issues of space and place impacted on the participants' relationship with school as an institution, this section looks at the interaction between groups in school. The mainstream students othered those in the vocational group by perceiving the areas that they occupied as abject, voicing opinions and acting in a manner that ghettoised the area where the vocational students were based. This was very much a one way process, particularly since as the participants moved into Year 11 the formerly vocational students moved across the boundaries into other part of the school.
The mainstream students were vociferous in their dislike of the area allocated to the vocational group pictured below and keen to share their disgust. When the two pictures below were shared with them in a photograph elicitation interview they emphasised how they would never go to that area because it was not for people like them, as if the space was infected by what happened there and the people that occupied it.

11 The Entrance to the Vocational Area
12 Jenna in the Vocational Area

Me: Do you ever get to go to these places?

Deena: No, that’s land based...vocational....errrr look at that girl...dick.... I hate that girl...

Whilst the above quotation may be brief it is representative of many of the students’ feelings about the area. The spatial isolation of the vocational students meant that it became much easier for the remainder of the school
community to see them as different and beneath them. The nature of their curriculum and their location working in concert, enabling them to be seen as ‘other’ in the same way that the broader school population was seen by the outside world.

Here place is forming an integral part of students’ identities and participants not just dis-identifying with school as a place, but with specific spaces within school that are occupied by different groups. This othering of spaces occupied by another group emphasises the insider status within their own group. This is a spatialised strategy, othering not just people but the places associated with those people. To some extent this could be seen as a replication of their own experience of being othered as a result of attending a school that is seen as abject within its own locality; creating a divided place within the school boundaries.

4.2.6 Movement Within School

“If you wanna walk around school, it's just a you thing, you just walk around, you've got a dead end and you come back, you've got another dead end and you come back.”

Jenna

This quotation from Jenna highlights the therapeutic elements of movement, something also mentioned in Sheets-Johnstone (2010) research. Movement around school was a means of experiencing the environment and the connection between emplaced bodies and emotion as Sheet-Johnstone (2010) describes.

Across both years and all the different groups of students in the study, the corridors were seen as a place of relative freedom and where a degree of
control over their engagement with the environment could be exerted. The time spent in corridors could be broken down into two types of occasion; Movement between lessons and illicit movement during lesson times.

The time spent in the corridors between lessons was an example of children taking control of time and exhibiting some of the covert resistance that was discussed earlier. The rhythm of their movement during these times was in stark contrast to that shown when it was break or lunch time. During those times their movements in the corridor were more purposeful and directed towards getting somewhere. Whilst moving from one location to another between lessons their actions were directed towards occupying the space as if it were theirs alone; they dragged their feet, took clearly inefficient routes and stopped to talk to friends who may or may not have been in lessons with them. In part this was to delay getting to lessons, but additionally it was because it was valuable time in which they were free. Even when there were teachers in the corridor with them there was little difference; an occasional ‘hurry up and get to lessons’ but this was never followed up with any further action. It was as though there was an unspoken agreement that this was time for them. The teachers were aware that the delay that was being caused by this behaviour was not worth challenging because it would only stir up further problems that would delay things further and the students clearly felt a sense of satisfaction with the power that they had over this situation. The crowded nature of the corridors during transition periods made it easier for them to get away with this behaviour as well as the fact that all students, not just those in the study or other particularly disruptive children, were involved in it.
Although the corridors principally worked as a way of funnelling between lessons, in part establishing the nature of the education on offer to the participants, they were also where relationships were established both between pupils and between pupils and staff. This led to a very different relationship between students and teachers in these areas. Many of the conversations between them were more relaxed and teachers were much more inclined to treat students, if not as equals, as people who were of interest in themselves and this resulted in generally more humorous interactions between staff and pupils, as can be seen in the picture below. This was discernibly the site where the meaningful relationships between adults and children could be conducted, away from the core task of school that caused so much frustration for the pupils and both parties could be treated as individuals rather than people acting out a role.
Many participants across all groups involved in the study specified that they would leave classrooms in order to move around the corridors rather than get involved in any poor behaviour. This implies that the participants were excluding themselves from lessons and taking control of their engagement with their environment. A key factor in their construction of the place that they were a part of.

Leah: I don’t really misbehave. The worst thing I do is talk when other people are talking. I don’t actually misbehave. If I get that annoyed in school then I just walk out so I don’t cause any trouble anyway.
As Jenna highlighted in the quotation used to opening this chapter, it is the movement around the school that students found comforting since it was an assertion of their independence – the aimlessness of the motion being a significant contrast to the continual pressure to achieve in lessons.

Jenna: They're small... It’s nice to walk around when everyone’s in lessons. Coz they’re so peaceful

Charlie: Yeah, coz that’s where we walk out of lessons.

Me: It’s peaceful? Do you get away with walking out of class and in the corridors?

Jenna: Most of the time, yeah.

There were, however, specific places that the students returned to whilst on their travels. For example, whilst the school was being rebuilt, there was an area that had formerly been an outside space between 2 of the school buildings that had been enclosed by temporary wooden walls and ceiling. Several of the participants took me to this place in order to show where they would go when out of lessons. There were no windows and this provisional corridor was lit by strip lights (during a power cut that took place whilst I was there, the corridor was closed off and the students had to move between the areas by going outside). As it was the only internal connection between two substantial parts of the school, there was a lot of traffic along it even during lessons time which meant that the students were less likely to be identified as being out of lesson (as you can see in the image below taken by Jenna)
14 Inside the Temporary Corridor

This excerpt from my field notes also demonstrates that students came to this place particularly frequently, citing that it was unusually warm in addition to the reasons discussed previously. However, it also shows that it is the motion around the school that helps ensure that they are not challenged by teachers for being out of lesson.

The girls sit on the wooden bits on top of old flower beds inside corridor created from external wall during rebuild...

Simon: Jenni and that sit there...

Jenni: That’s where my friends hangout...

Me: Ok, why do you pick here.
Jenni: It’s warm...

Simon: If we sit here we get told to move...

Mark: Yeah, we sometimes sit here...

The building work being carried out around the school was functioning to open cracks in the formal choreography of school, enabling opportunities for the students to further re-appropriate space. But the building work also provided threats to the students as well as opportunities. It was not just the mess of the construction that caused an issue for the participants but the fact that the familiar ground of the old school was being eroded and routes around the school that they used to take were disrupted. Corridors that used to extend for some distance had had breeze block walls erected part way down them in order to cut off the construction work that was taking place beyond them. These formed a very visible reminder that their familiar environment was being taken away from them, like a scar across a familiar location disrupting the routinised space-time paths (Gordon, 1996) around the school. One student specifically took me to this site whilst on the walking interview in order to capture the image of it.
15 Scars in the Corridor

Movement around the school was something that was therapeutic in itself and where this movement was restricted the participants felt claustrophobic and this appeared to lead to frustrations and resistance. The public spaces of the corridors were areas where the participants could feel free to enact their civic affiliations and form relationships. As the rebuild of the school began to occur, familiar paths through time and space became disrupted and this was an attack on their identities, tied up as they were with the form of the building. However, this also opened up opportunities to occupy space in new and different ways.
“This school’s like Alcatraz.”

Brandon

Having looked at the importance of movement through school, this section examines the effects of having that movement restricted. The vocational group in Year 10 were taught in one single wing of the school. The practical areas such as motor mechanics and workshop were downstairs and the kitchen was upstairs. There were a couple of other standard classrooms on both floors. This part of the school was formerly the design and technology department. These were relatively new classrooms which were light and airy and quite modern in contrast to much of the school. Connected to the rest of the school by corridor, but set aside from the majority of it, the rooms at the back on both floors had double doors that opened out near the gate that led to the woods down to the common.

This seclusion meant that the students felt more relaxed in their environment, as the quote below indicates. Isolation combined with this more peaceful atmosphere certainly worked towards creating the sense of safety that these particularly vulnerable students felt in their group.

Me: So do you move around the school very much or are you quite confined into vocational?

Ella: We are quite confined in vocational now.

Me: And how’s that compared to last year?

Chloe: Because we’re in lessons. (The vocational group spent Year 9 on a land based education course.)
Ella: It's more chilled out.

Elizabeth: It's like, hardly anyone's in there.

But despite the sense of safety generated by the segregation of the group, they despised their lack of freedom to move around the school. The opportunity to have a few minutes between lessons where they were free to talk to their friends and move was missing and this was considered a huge problem.

However, it was not just the movement between lessons that was identified as an issue but the fact that many of them spent their break and lunch time in that area as the two quotes below exemplify. Although the students specified here that they did not like being trapped in the area in which they were taught during break and lunch, not once did I see any indication that they were being forced to stay there. That they stayed there appeared solely down to their own volition, it was not requested by teachers either formally or informally.

Charlie: S'like... Coz we're in land based are..... all...we can't.... we don't move around the school like everybody else. We just have to go from one classroom to another and it takes us about ... a minute. Well, if you... but when you was in mainstream... you had a bit of a chance to stretch your legs.... see your mates when you’re walking round..... and everything....but now it's just a load of... bollocks... I don’t like it.
Ella: There's no like...I dunno... break times and lunch times. They're so shit. You're just sat on a fuckin table or sat on the floor and just....

Elizabeth: There's nothing to do...

Much of their time at break was spent relaxing on the sofas that they had in this area - listening to music and talking. Although they resented the fact that they were so constrained in their movement they did value the environment that they had - specifically the provision of the sofas.
Me: You've taken a picture of this, so this is important to you ... why?

Charlie: The sofas, they're comfortable...

Me: Do you like the fact that you've got sofas?

Charlie and Martin are worrying about the pond...

Me: Ok, so you've got the sofas, do you think that having sofas in the room helps you concentrate? Helps you work harder?

Martin: No. it just helps us relax.

Me: So you feel more relaxed.

Martin: If we're allowed to do work on it... like have a table next to it, then I reckon we'd be able to do more work.

Charlie: I'd do more work if I was sat on the sofa!

Martin: Sitting on those chairs hurts your ass.

Me: What the plastic ones?

Brandon: Yeah, we've got one upstairs an' we get told to sit on it and the back of it's snapped off. So when you lean back you kind of fall off the chair. Like, it's still on there but it's hanging on there. When you lean on it you fall off.

Me: So what does that make you think about the school then?

Brandon: Fucking shit.

Once the participants moved into Year 11 after the summer, there were further restrictions placed on some groups whilst, to a small degree, some of the restrictions on the former vocational group were lifted. Sub school B were
largely taught within the section of the building that contained the new library. This part of the building had been refurbished prior to the students moving into Year 11 and now consisted of entirely open plan learning spaces where 2 or 3 classes would be taught at any one time. The students of sub school B were in this building for all their core lessons and tutor time, only moving out for their option subjects and PE. This restriction on their movement was again identified as a significant problem for the students. For much of their school day, the only movement around the school they were involved in was to move up and down stairs in this one, relatively small, area of the school. These excerpts from my field notes illustrate this point well:

Elizabeth – Its shit. We’re always in the same room, no change of scenery except break and that’s always the same thing.

Deena – It’s distracting.

Elizabeth – Whatever you’re doing you can hear the other class. You don’t get to move around.

For everything other than Engineering and Mechanics, Adam is in this building.

“Shit being in this building all the time. Before you got to move around the building, but now they have to take you outside for fresh air. When you first come into these rooms they smell of cat poo.”

The students repeatedly reported that it was boring and tedious to be kept in the same location all the time. This relates to Hall et al.’s study (1999) where it was
argued that, as young people mature and become increasingly independent, they require both a room of their own and also room to move. The young people here were provided with a room of their own but had their freedom to move curtailed. As highlighted by Sheets-Johnstone (2010), movement might be considered to be therapeutic in and of itself - validating agency and capability. The restriction placed on the movement of the participants was frustrating not because the absence of movement frustrated some ulterior purpose but because it was desirable in its own right.

The members of sub school C were less a part of the study at this point, but they were also located in a very specific part of the school and for the most part were taught in this area. It was a part of the old school building that had not been refurbished and so were they taught in fairly traditional classrooms. Although it was to a lesser extent, they still made assertions that restrictions on their movement were unpleasant.

4.2.8 ‘Imprisonment’ in the Withdrawal Centre

Whilst there were frustrations for the participants in their movement on a day to day basis in school, serious infringements of the school rules were met with internal exclusion in the Withdrawal Centre. This meant that they were separated from the rest of the students and were required to sit in cubicles around the walls of the room. The room was a former music rehearsal room which had been adapted by placing a formica worksurface around two of the walls of the room and partitioning off small areas for students to work in. There was a teacher or member of support staff on duty at all times and this member of staff had access to a walkie talkie in case they needed to contact the senior
leadership team. Whilst in the compass centre standard work was provided for them, but this was unrelated to their timetable and solely focused on the core subjects, English and Maths.

The rules of the Withdrawal Centre, Maths and English prompts and various motivational posters were pinned to the walls of the booths. The booths existed to prevent students from communicating with one another. There were no windows, just a single door in and out and a desk with a computer and telephone for the teacher to sit at. When isolated in the Compass Centre, break and lunch time were at different times to the rest of the school and the only other place the students were allowed to go was the canteen. This was all standard practice and very little different to what you would find in many mainstream schools.
Brandon: It has them all the way round the walls, so you’re not allowed to talk to people or anything and you’re caged in. The only place you’re allowed to go is the canteen.

What was of particular interest was the response that the students gave to being placed in there. They identified that the work provided was tedious and impersonal and they made little effort to attempt it with no obvious sanction as a result but they did not seem particularly bothered by this. They did not even particularly complain about being separated from their friends. The single grievance that they persistently made about being isolated in there was the
restriction on their movements and the fact that they were constrained in a small space.

Brandon: I don’t think they should be able to put people in there.

Me: Why not?

Brandon: Coz you feel... it’s tiny...it’s a little room.

Martin: Some people get ... erm... suffocated. Coz there ain’t no windows... The doors always shut as well. So you’re suffocated.

[Agreement...]

Brandon: You’re not even allowed to go outside…

As shown earlier in this section, movement around the school was such a key part of students’ engagement with their environment and their construction of the place that they are a part of that restricting their ability to move and confining them to such a small room was seen as a step too far. Nothing else was highlighted as unreasonable, neither the unsuitable work nor the separation from their friends. They accepted that a punishment was a necessary outcome of their behaviour occasionally but this curbing of their motion around the school was perceived as unnecessarily severe.

4.2.9 Young People’s Claims to the Playground

As the rebuilding of the school progressed there was some reported change in the behaviour at break and lunch times. However, consistently, as discussed earlier, the rhythm of the participants’ movements during break and lunch times was conspicuously different to those during transition time. Rather than
attempting to manifest some control over space and time through inefficient movement around the building, the students were purposeful in their transit to different locations. In Year 10, many of the boys were desperate to get to the areas where they could play football, others were in search of somewhere they could smoke uninterrupted by teachers and some were just interested in heading to the canteen. In my field notes I regularly identified that the students moved more quickly when released from lessons to breaks and engaged in less conversation until they arrived where they were heading. The destination was assumed knowledge, there was no need to discuss where they were heading. There was one central playground where the participants in the year group I was working with tended to congregate on or near which is pictured below. This was clearly an important space for the participants.
18 The Playground for Football

Me: Tell me about that one...

James: It's where like at break time we play football...the playground.

The funnest part of school....

Me: Yeah? Why’s that?

[Laughter at later photograph, I tell them we'll come back to it...]

Deena: Well, there’s the canteen...that’s where the boys play football...

that’s the Withdrawal Centre, isolation....

James: On your right, that’s where everyone goes for a joint...

Me: Where?
James: That’s where everyone goes for a fag, round that corner....

Deena: Yeah, we'll show you in a minute... but that's where all the boys play football basically...

Me: Ok, and you like that playing football?

James: Yeah...

Me: How does it compare with the rest of the day? When you're out playing football...

James: It's just a rest from the lessons... You have two hours, then play a bit of football then go back to your lessons...

Me: What do you think about break then? Coz, James and the boys seem to really like it...

Deena: well, I dunno what Jenni does, but sometimes we just try and like go for fags.... Get away from teachers to go for a fag....

The playing of football was important to many of the boys because it was something they enjoyed for its own sake; but it also performed another function which benefitted all the students. The boys playing football occupied the vast majority of the playground with other students pushed out to the periphery. The frantic games of football being played caused adult staff members to think twice about crossing the playground or to walk out of doors, realise what was happening and go back inside. This behaviour was clearly visible to the students who were not playing the game and obviously fed in to their sense of control over the area. I spent some time with groups of students here (not playing football) and they clearly felt empowered by this situation, openly
mocking the members of staff and their awkward or restricted movement through the space. Not only did they feel able to laugh at the members of staff present, but on several occasions I stood talking to students outside the windows of the management suite and they would be confidently hurling fairly personal abuse directed at the head teacher. I can’t say whether she, or any other members of staff, were aware of it but the fact that they were doing it showed how much freedom they felt they had in that particular space at that time and their getting away with it bolstered this confidence.

The playground had lots of routes away from it where participants could go in order to smoke and I deal with smoking separately later on. As discussed previously, students were very critical of specific parts of the fabric of the school environment, but consistently came back to these areas.

Me: Why do you chose to hang out there then? (By the bin and broken bench)

Simon: Coz that’s our area....

Richard: There’s nowhere else to hang out.

Mark: There was...

Simon: And that’s just where we always, that’s just where we go... The football is there so...

Me: Why is it your area?

Simon: It’s just somewhere we just always go...

They kept returning to this area because it was perceived by them as being their area. This was substantially due to the relative power that they felt they
had over the place, in part due to the football taking place in the area. This particular form of resistance was certainly overt, although did not involve transgression of formal school rules. It was also certainly a collective act but it would have to be viewed as unintentional, a spontaneous result of the boys football games. Rather than an attack on a specific person, it was a means by which teaching staff were excluded from a certain place, giving the children freedom from the intrusion into their existence, if only briefly.

As the students moved into Year 11 and the rebuilding of the school progressed, the outside space available to them became ever more restricted. The playground where they had once had so much control over the space was now a fenced off building site with just a small section acting as a thoroughfare between the main school building and the area where sub school b were housed. The main outdoor space that they occupied during break and lunch times was the other playground which was a basketball court. This prevented the boys from playing football because there were students, mainly from the younger years, playing basketball. The boys that had formerly played football regularly became bored regularly saying that there was nothing to do now that they could not play football anymore. They were unwilling to challenge the basketball players for the space or to offer to share. They were dispersed now at break times, simply wandering the corridors without the sense of purpose that they had once had.

Me: You don’t play basketball do you?

Adam: Not a lot.
Me: You play football? Simon was saying people haven’t been bringing in the balls recently.

Adam: Yeah....

Me: Who comes out here? I know you two do but you don’t really play football... Does that cause a problem?

Mark: Everyone keeps walking across...you...

Richard: All the basketball people come here and play on the hoops but they’re no problem whatsoever...

James: I usually walk around, lunchtime I usually go down there to the toilet if I need toilet ‘n then I just.... go to the basketball court outside.

Me: What’s special about the basketball court? Why do you like it?

James: I just hang out in the canteen a bit now and just stand by the radiator coz its warm. On days like this when it’s raining outside I don’t really want to go outside and get wet.

Me: Very sensible!

James: So I just eat my dinner in the canteen and that’s about it. Same at break. And when I need the toilet I come out the canteen and go to the toilet. And get ready for my next lesson.

They took many photographs of the playground whilst we were circulating the school, the outside space was still a very important part of their school to them.
However, they had lost the area that they had a significant influence over. It is possible that the students in lower years still exercised the same kind of influence over areas of the school, but the students I was working with had become very much a spent force and were atomised; spending their time moving around the school at break and lunch in a similar manner to their movements between lessons. Occupying spaces where they found them and exerting a degree of control over these areas, but on nothing like the scale that they had done in Year 10.

19 The Playground for Basketball I
20 The Playground for Basketball II
21 An Area for Smoking

The students in sub school A, who were formerly in the vocational stream, were less likely to find a space and lodge themselves there. They tended to continue moving around the school, trying to avoid teachers and have a cigarette. At break and lunch they were inclined to follow a specific route that lead them to locations where they thought they could get away with smoking.

4.2.10 The Relationship Between Smoking and Place

Smoking was an important part of the daily lives of many of the participants, although this manifested in slightly different ways for different groups of students. At the start of Year 10, the vocational group were given frequent '10
minute breaks’ where they were allowed to go off the school ground and the teachers would turn a blind eye to the fact that they were going for a cigarette. There was a gate just by the area of the school that they were based in that lead down to a wood where they would often go to collect wood in order to build things and carry out other activities. There was also a path that led down to the common from here as well. This appeared to be a reward in order to encourage the expected behaviour from some of the most difficult to manage children in the school. The students valued this for a number of reasons. In their minds they were set apart from the rest of the school by being allowed to smoke, even if it was not a formal arrangement. When I was with them out in the woods, they clearly enjoyed the temporary escape from the classroom environment and the freedom of movement that they had. They occasionally stretched their ten minutes out a little, but rarely. For the vast majority of the time they returned to their classroom on schedule. Although it was never explicitly stated, it also seemed to act as a counter to the fact that they were so restricted in their movements around school, and allowed them some freedom that they were not otherwise afforded. It also had the effect of breaking down the barriers between school and the outside world, because the place that they experienced was both on the school grounds and in the outside world in a space that they enjoyed being in.

However, around the May half term in Year 10, they were suddenly no longer allowed to go for the ten minute breaks anymore. Ern, the senior teacher responsible for the vocational group withdrew the privilege, giving them 3 weeks to stop smoking before that freedom was curtailed. This was a matter of significant annoyance for the students and it was only because it came at the
end of the academic year, in the run up to the summer holiday that it did not cause substantial disruption. The participants told me that there was no reason given for the change, it just happened.

22 The Path Down to the Wood

Me: Where's that?

Charlie: It’s where we used to go for our 10 minute break.

Me: Oh, right.
Brandon: It’s where we used to go for 10 minute break then Ern just cut it out. Within 3 weeks.

Me: He must have done that quite recently though because you were going for 10 minute breaks since I’ve been here.

Brandon: Yeah.

Me: Since half term?

Martin: Basically when we’ve gone down to play manhunt or something.... or if we go down to do work.

Brandon: Not manhunt. They won’t let us.

Martin: Ok, when we go down to do work, they um... Mike said go off for ten minutes and then we'll go back up to the classroom. That'll be ten mins. He's basically saying you can have one.

Brandon: But Ern used to come down there, watch us go for a fag coz we used to go down the thing and he used to walk up and down looking at us. He used to be like has everyone had a nice walk around and that. An’ then all of a sudden he said you’ve got three weeks to give up smoking. An’ he just stopped ‘em.

Charlie: But now he’s realised that were getting more and more into smoking outside now. When we leave the classroom.

Brandon: Our behaviour was really good when we used to go for them.

Charlie: Mmm... and they used to have no problems.
Martin: And they all walk off now...

From the perspective of those students in the mainstream group, this behaviour acted as a further signifier of difference between them and the vocational group. They saw this flexibility as unfair, but also indicative of the fact that the vocational students were beneath them. The ten minute breaks were seen as congruent with being allowed to do what they want but a pragmatic approach meant that, although they wanted that freedom to smoke almost at will, they were willing to accept this restriction.

Me: When I spoke to the guys in the vocational. They’re always based in the same place.

Colin: They get to do what they want. They have fag breaks.

[General agreement…]

James: They smoke, go down the beach and play footie....

Mark: They do loads.

Richard: Even if it was once every couple of weeks or something it would be ok.

Adam: They have about 6 fag breaks again.

James: They don’t do it once a week, they do it all the time.

Simon: Mental.

This recalls findings by Narin & Higgins (2011) that smoking is a form of resistance to power structures and the manner in which space in school is supposed to be used and the fact that ‘at risk’ students can benefit from a spatial strategy involving fewer and different rules. The vocational students in
this study did feel that they had more control over their environment due to the fact that they were given the freedom to smoke in certain place and this was keenly felt when it was removed.

Whilst much of their break and lunchtimes were spent based in their allotted area, the vocational group did spend some time out smoking. Whilst they were doing this, they were much more open about it than other participants in the study. I rarely saw members of the mainstream group smoking, although the smell made it clear that some of them did. Some mainstream students made half-hearted attempts to deny to me that they smoked, such as in the exchange below:

Me: Do any of you smoke?

Adam: No.

All: No.

Me: So you don’t go down the places...

Mark: Errrr.... Me and Adam do smoke.

Me: It’s alright, I’m not going to tell anyone...

Adam: I don’t smoke in school.

Mark: I do.

Adam: he does.

As they became more engaged in the project they became a little more open but they still never actually smoked in front of me or allowed photographs to be taken of themselves doing so. The vocational group definitely made something
of a performance of photographing themselves smoking when they were photographing areas of the school as can be seen in the photographs below. There was some disagreement as to whether it was easy not to get caught when smoking in such an exposed place, but they just tried to get away with it when they could.

Me: So that’s where you hang out and have a fag at break yeah?

Martin: No, that’s one of the places.

Me: Yeah, no, I know. I haven’t put them all in. Is it easy not to get caught there?

Martin: Yeah.

Brandon: No, we just do it when we can.

Jenna: We just felt like smoking on a bench.
23 Jenna Smoking
Another example of the difference in how explicit their smoking was, was regarding smoking on the roof. Although they occasionally denied it, the vocational group sporadically ventured out on to the roof to smoke. This was always referred to by them in the past tense, as though they used to do it but did not any more. There was a room with a window that provided relatively easy access to an area of the roof which was often unused, allowing them ample opportunity to get out. They specifically went to photograph this room so it was clearly of some importance to them, possibly because it provided a representative story about their defiance of school rules.
25 The Route to the Roof I
Brandon: I know where that is. That’s Mr [xxx]’s room.

Jenna: Oh yeah. We used to go in there and climb out the window and have a fag on the roof.

When I raised this with the mainstream students, they used the photograph to identify areas that they did use to smoke, but several of them denied that they had ever smoked on the roof.

Me: have you ever been in this room?

Jenni: Mr [xxx]’s room....
Deena: Yeah, I used to do project in there... That’s where we go for a fag, behind that wall... don’t really tell anyone...

Me: Do you ever go on the roof to have a fag?

Deena: Nah...

Although they were more overt with their smoking, the vocational student still did not want to get caught. As a result, both they and the non-vocational students would move through circuits of the school in order to find a location that was safe to smoke in. They would follow a specific route each time they went, checking out the sites where they thought that they would be safe.

Charlie: This is what we normally do... walk...

[Boys running around...]

Martin: We walk round here

Me: Do you have a specific route?

Charlie: Yeah. Checking all the places we think we can get away with smoking...

Martin: We're not allowed in this area.

Me: Why:

Martin: Coz of smoking. This is my favourite place...

Me: You go up there?

[Running around...]

Me: You actually go up on the roof?

Boys: Yeah!
Me: Why do you go up there? To smoke?

Charlie: Yeah.

Me: Is it just coz the teachers can’t see you?

Jenna: They can...

Charlie: But they don’t normally.

Me: They don’t normally think to look up there.

Brandon: We’re doing free running!

Me: Do you ever spend much time in the playground?

Charlie: No.

Me: Is it just that you’re looking for those secretive places?

Charlie: We ‘ave fags there, there, there...
Another Area for Smoking

This practice of circulating the school, moving from one site to the next was common practice amongst the smokers from all the groups in the study. They had specific place that they would always return to until they established one that was free from the teachers’ prying eyes.

The secure places that they used for smoking all had a very similar nature. They were all small alleyways between two buildings that enabled the students to keep a look out at both ends for any teachers that might be coming. The noise of the teachers walking around the school was distinct as well and this was amplified by the narrow spaces that they smoked in enabling them to react if any came by, as exemplified in this quote from my field notes below:
Break. 10.45-11.05

Ella and Elizabeth – Trying to find a place for a fag. Keys hanging down and rattling give early warning of teachers - and the women wearing high heels. Several key places where they go – circle the school. Behind containers and between buildings. Hate walking across the playground. “They always play with balls” – too dangerous.

Teachers placed in too many places they usually use. Me – “They’re too good for you! They’re everywhere!”

Elizabeth “Sometimes I just sit in front of the camera!”

Eventually find a place between 2 buildings. 1 boy joins. Take it in turns to keep watch whilst they smoke rollies.

When discussing the photograph shown below that one of the vocational students took whilst smoking they highlighted the usefulness of having smoking in an alleyway, both in terms of being able to watch out for teachers and having an exit in the opposite direction. It is clear from the photograph the kind of cramped space that the students prefer for the security that it offers.

Me: Does it feel secure in the alleyway?

All: Yeah.

Charlie: Yeah, coz we can see both ways...

Brandon: You can literally just....

Charlie: If one teacher comes down we can leg it the other way.
Another favoured place for smoking was behind the green container that housed the PE equipment which was in turn behind the blue skip that they occasionally hid in as shown in the photograph below.

Me: What's the container here?

Brandon: That's our PE container, where they keep all the PE stuff.

Jenna: And we smoke behind there.
Me: You smoke behind there as well?

Martin: And the blue ones like a rubbish bin.

29 The Container for PE Equipment

I was with two students whilst they hid behind the container during lunchtime. There was a teaching assistant on duty and they were talking with him prior to going for the cigarette, waiting for him to be distracted by something else before they went and hid behind the container. The TA knew exactly what was happening and made it clear that he did without explicitly referring to smoking. He made a show of trying to stop them, but was not really interested in doing so. Eventually he was distracted by other goings on in the playground and the boys took the opportunity to duck behind and smoke. They smoked a cigarette
between them quickly and then moved out into the playground again. The TA could easily have reported that they were smoking to a teacher who could have caught them. However, there was an unspoken acceptance that it was going to happen.

After this, they stood in the lunch queue, wandered around the school for a bit before settling on a place, between the sports hall and the main building, to have a second cigarette. We were joined by another student who was known to Martin and Charlie and who was wary of my presence at first but quickly came around to the idea of me being there. They smoked and asked me to keep a look out (as discussed in section 3.2.2). Again, they smoked the cigarette as quickly as the previous one, although this was not just for show and they were definitely inhaling. There were no staff around and so no problems caused for the students. However, it was as if the statement made by smoking the cigarette is more important than the physical reward of doing so even when there is no one to watch, evidence for themselves that they have some control over the space.

When the young people had finished smoking, they tended to leave their cigarette butts not just thrown on the floor but left so as they were as conspicuous as possible. This was in order to make it clear that someone had been smoking. The most conspicuous example of this was near the police station in the school. A hole had been bored into the mortar of the wall, presumably where there had been a pipe at some stage. This was one of the students’ regular venues for smoking and the hole was usually full of cigarette ends. Near the start of my fieldwork the vocational students tried to tell me that
police based in the school station smoked there. Other students told me this was untrue and as I gained their trust this was not a story that was repeated. It was also a popular place to smoke because, should a teacher come past, lit cigarettes could be placed in the hole and left until they had passed. Several children took photographs of this hole in the wall whilst they had cameras and it was clearly a key symbol to them of their ability to get one up on their teachers.

30 Cigarettes in a Hole

The fact that it was so obvious that children smoked in this area due to the constant presence of cigarettes in the hole begs the question why did the teachers not patrol this area more regularly and pay more attention to the fact that there may be lit cigarettes in the hole? Most of the locations used for
smoking were fairly obvious due to the butts lying around, but this area particularly so.

As identified by Narin & Higgins (2011), smoking might be considered a crucial part of identity formation in school. It is a means by which space is reappropriated by students for their own ends in opposition to existing power structures. This was more significant for the participants who began Year 10 in the vocational group in this study. In part because they had been allowed the freedom to smoke as an informal spatial strategy by their teachers. Once this freedom had been removed, it was important to them that they continued the practice and made it clear that they were doing so. Many of the other participants in the study smoked but it was less important for them. They were more reticent to reveal that they smoked initially and even after they had done so they were less overt about it.

There were also links between the motion around school in order to find a secure place to smoke and the notion of movement as therapy in itself. The ritual circulation of the school enabling the emplaced engagement with their environment. The challenge to authority structures linked to movement and engagement with the surrounding world both vital aspects of the formation of the participants’ identities. This link between spatially subversive acts and therapeutic enjoyment of the environment cemented resistance as a central part of the participants’ identity.
4.2.11 Constant Surveillance

CCTV cameras were placed in several locations around the school and this provided a particular annoyance since it limited the number of places that were available for smoking.

Deena: Cameras, they do my fucking head in...

Me: Why’s that?

Deena: Coz they just...

James: Stalking...

Deena: Can’t go for a fag... in front of the camera.

Me: That’s the main reason?

Deena: Yeah, with the cameras yeah, there’s no teachers and then can’t go for a fag, but we always find places to go for fags. We always got our spots. We’ve got three spots.

Beyond the irritation at interfering with their ability to find a place to smoke, the constant monitoring that the students felt that they were under was a source of aggravation and the CCTV cameras around the school became a particular focus of this irritation. Many pictures of the cameras were taken by the students whilst they were given cameras and these gave rise to comments such as the above and the discussion below.
31 The CCTV Camera

Adam: That’s a camera

Richard: Spying on you all the time...

Mark: PRICK!

Adam: That’s by the basketball...

Simon: I might just throw a brick at it one day...

Adam: We tried, we tried in motor mechanics. We tried throwing bricks at it. We didn’t hit it. We got near it! But we didn’t quite hit it...

Simon: Remember... when it was... I think it was one of the first times we had a big assembly at this school, [new academy name].
They were showing people smoking because, like, the cameras caught them.

Richard: Yeah, that’s right, when it just went to [new academy name].

As Hope (2007) states, panoptic surveillance operates at cultural as well as physical levels. In this instance it can be seen that differing social values between the participants and the school authorities lead to a collapse in the regulation of behaviour through self-surveillance. Occurrences of specific behaviours despite the expectation of sanctions are also apparent. In reality, the effect of these cameras on the day to day life of the students might have been fairly minimal and they were simply acting as a signifier for wider concerns around their treatment by staff at the school. As stated previously, visibility is associated with power and those that see are more powerful than those that are seen (Koskela, 2004). The participants had learnt that they were continually observed and this contributed to their identity and their behaviour. They had a fairly blatant disregard for the cameras and they did not seem to impact on their behaviour beyond selecting smoking areas that were not covered by the cameras. Key to these frustrations was the refusal to treat them like adults despite apparently paying lip service to the idea. This was related by the students to the difference between work and school, but also they compared their treatment to that of young people in other schools particularly schools catering for younger children.

Charlie: They want to treat us like adults, like young adults, but they don’t, they treat us like kids. My little cousin, who goes to [local primary], which is a younger school don’t get half the
detentions we get for the stupidest reasons. They get detentions for swearing at a teacher. Not for having no pen, no planner anything like that. What we going to do? Go to work and say sorry I forgot my pen, you can dock my wages. I’m a retard, derrrr. You’re going to have pens already at work, or you’re going to ask a mate. But the stupid thing is, why would we want to come ‘ere...

This comparison was drawn across all the groups of participants - there being a belief amongst them that they were singled out as being particularly infantilised by their particular school. This infantilisation comprised a significant aspect of the formation of their identity and their resentment over this contributed towards their attitude towards school in general. Linked to this was the impression that staff at the school continually over reacted to minor infractions. It was not so much that they minded having these pointed out to them, but that they could not be trusted to deal with the issue without being supervised or being threatened with some form of sanction.

James: I think somethings are dealt with wrongly... like you’re 2 minutes late for school, you get a 10 minute detention.

All: Yeah.

James: It can’t be helped. Why can’t they...

Simon: Like the other day, yeah, I was walking, I went to go the toilet and Mr [xxx] told me to tuck my shirt in and my bag in that hand so I was putting it in and I got to the end of the
corridor and he stopped me and was having a go at me for no reason. And I was tucking my shirt in.

This highlights a belief which was held amongst the participants that their behaviour was expected to be problematic, an informal understanding of the transition from what Hope (2009) calls social integration to system integration. This refusal to accept what they saw as unnecessarily harsh punishments for minor transgressions, or incorrectly attributed blame, inevitably led to more serious confrontations between staff and pupils. This was something I regularly saw during observations and was highlighted many times during interviews. For example:

   Elizabeth: If I’ve done nothing wrong and I’ve done nothing then I won’t do it.

   Me: Give me an example.

   Elizabeth: Say someone shouted at a teacher, a swear word or something and you get the blame and then they don’t own up to it and you’re the one who gets in trouble for it.

   Me: What about when you have done something?

   Elizabeth: If I got told off for chucking a pen I’d go off my head.

   Charlie: Yeah, I did that I nearly got put in Alpha for it.

   Elizabeth: It’s fucking pathetic.

There was a general acceptance by the participants of the need for their behaviour to be policed by the staff of the school, alongside their belief in the utility of education. However, there was a pervasive awareness that what was in
place was not ‘policing by consent’. Instead, this was an organisation that did not have the students’ best interests at heart and was concerned only with maintaining and improving its own standing in the community. This acceptance led to a degree of self-policing and it reveals that there was a shared understanding of the school rules on a cultural level but, these were not accepted uncritically in their totality.

A comparison between school and prison was frequently made throughout my time with the participants. This might not be an uncommon parallel to draw, however, it was considered to be heightened in this school because there was a persistent belief that the rebuilding of the school would only make this worse. Rather than on opportunity to provide more effective learning spaces or a more comfortable environment, the rebuild was seen as solely an exercise in increasing the grip that the school maintained over its pupils. This was a typical response regarding the open plan nature of the new building:

Charlie: When they're building the new school....yeah... it's going to be a lot more badder than this because they're knocking down the whole of it and it's basically going to be built like a prison, but they're going to make it look like a school. It'll have bars everywhere. They're going to have a gate around the school like normal and they'll also gonna have like walkways, you know like in some prisons you’ve got like a classroom underneath and you've got a classroom on top and you can look down and you can see, like in prison. They're having that in the school. So basically
they're trying to make it feel more like… tryin' to… actin' 

like it's more like a big college or school when to us lot it feels like a big ass prison.

Not only were there concerns over the nature of the design of the new building, but there was an expectation that there would be a huge increase in the number of CCTV cameras that would be present in the school. The expense of the new building was frequently cited as one of the reasons for the presence of so many cameras. As if they expected not to be trusted to play their part in maintaining their new environment. It had been disclosed to them when the school had first became an academy that it was too difficult to install many new cameras in the old building. This meant to them that when the new building was completed there would be a lot more surveillance of this kind. For example:

James: Y'know when they build this new school, there’s gonna be so many hidden cameras...you won’t know where they are...

Me: Do you know that or are you just guessing?

James: No, it’s obvious they're gonna do it coz she said ages ago they wouldn’t fit in this school, but now they're getting a new building they're going to.... So they're going to fit in with the new school aren’t they?

The increase in CCTV was not the only aspect of the changes in the building that were perceived as being concerned with monitoring. One aspect of the initial changes that they generally felt positive about was the new canteen. This was due to the fact that the space was much more open and light than the areas that they'd had access to before for eating in.
Sid: I’d say the only decent thing that they’ve done with this school is the canteen.

[General agreement]

Despite the perceived improvement in the actual built environment of the canteen, there was a pervasive impression that the change had largely been implemented to facilitate an increase in control over their behaviour. It was now more open so that they could be observed and monitored more readily.

Me: Do you think that’s why they moved the canteen?

Adam: Yeah, probably coz they’ve got more control over it.

Simon: Plus, it’s bigger.

James: And the leisure centre wanted to buy, have it back. Coz they never owned the canteen over there but they own this.

It was also next to a larger playground than previously so that they could be moved outside more quickly regardless of the weather. This was an issue since they were not allowed to eat in the corridors in order to prevent mess. The previous canteen was owned by the adjacent leisure centre and the students felt that by building a new one the school would have more control over it. Here it is again apparent that, because the students had been offered very little influence over the rebuilding process and since the environment was key in the formation of their identity that there was a sense that they were being objectified and that things were being done to them rather than for them.
4.2.12 The Physical Boundaries of Space

So far in this chapter I have discussed events that occurred within the boundaries of the material space that the school occupied. In this final section I shall examine the physical boundaries in space that the participants had to cross in order to enter school.

The nature of the school boundaries were a consistent issue for both the mainstream and vocational groups in Year 10. There was much talk from both the Year 10 vocational and mainstream groups about the strengthening of the physical boundaries of the school once the transition from the old school to the academy was complete. For example, new gates were installed and holes that had been dug under the fences in order to get down towards the common were filled in. In addition to this, access to the skate park, which was on the school grounds, was taken away.

The metaphor for school as a prison has been touched upon in the previous section on surveillance, but this comparison was particularly significant in relation to the school borders. As well as a prison, it was also likened to a catholic school and the local pupil referral unit. Not only did they state that the school felt like a prison, but it seemed even worse to them that it even looked like a prison as well. There was a perpetual sense of feeling trapped in the school by the fences that had been erected since the conversion to the academy and the cameras around the school contributed to this sense of imprisonment. An example of this would be:

Me: Ok, so... so what kind of place does it feel like? You mentioned prison before. Do you want to expand on that?
Charlie: They got gates up... like tryin’ to get out, you can't.

Martin: Feels like a lock down school.

Charlie: Mmmm, s'like…

Martin: Juvey.

Charlie: I’m surprised they ain’t even got like bloody ummm, what are they called? Towers to make sure we're stood ‘ere with a man with a gun!

Martin: Yeah, I... they got cameras.

The use of cameras was raised as problematic in part because when students were accused of crossing the limits of the school site staff repeatedly refused to check them for evidence that might support the students claim that they had not. The size of the school population was also raised as an issue because their movements across the boundaries were more easily monitored. This gave rise to a mood of claustrophobia amongst the students which was felt as unpleasant. Across both groups in Year 10 there were references to being treated like animals in the way that they were locked away. Certainly, there was a sense that they were no longer trusted with being granted the freedom to move between the school grounds and the outside world. Much of the desire for this movement related to wanting to eat away from the school grounds and many of the pupils stated that when they were trusted to leave the school at lunch time they could be trusted to return, that if they were treated like adult they would act like adults. For example:

Me: What was the benefit of not having the fences all around the school?
Jenna: You can walk out whenever you want and come back whenever you want.

[Laughter]

Elizabeth: But you always came back when you walked out.

All: Yeah

Chloe: But now you can't get back in again, can ya.

[...]

Ella: It's like at lunch time we get our lunch tickets, don't we. We get lunch tickets that we can take out of school with us and like go down to the fish and chip shop and buy, like, proper lunch, not the canteen shit. And then, like, we would come back. Because we're trusted. We feel trusted to go there and act mature about it. And then come back.

There was a belief held by the students that without these strictly enforced barriers to their movement in and out of the school grounds there would be less truancy. Or at least if people did leave to visit the shops, which was their sole stated reason for wanting to leave the school grounds, they would always return as they had done in the past. Now, the increased security around the borders meant that there was an increased desire to leave the site and a willingness to stay away once the boundaries had been transgressed. This is related to the findings by Kenway and Youdell (2011) pertaining to students’ reluctance to cross site boundaries in order to preserve an identity as a student. The students here wished to retain the student aspect of their identity. With the formerly porous boundaries of the school the students would cross over into the outside
world, blurring their identities as students and those as people outside of school crossing between the two worlds as trusted members of the school community. It would have been easy for them to drift away once they were beyond the perimeter of the school and yet they chose not to because their identity as students of that school was important. Once the boundary became more impermeable it became an affront to their identity as trusted young adults and a site of frustration for them.

Many students wanted to discuss the following picture taken by vocational students during the photography exercise. This is the gate that leads onto the path down to the common. The vocational group often used this whilst going out on their '10 minute breaks'. The mainstream group clearly felt some frustration at this additional freedom that the vocational students had both from the point of view of these cigarette breaks, but also at the fact that they were regularly allowed out of the school grounds whilst working. They identified no tangible benefits to this other than, for a couple of them, the opportunity to smoke. It was just a desire for an escape from the claustrophobia of the enclosure of the school. The vocational group did not state that is was a benefit in this sense but the relief of escape when they were on their cigarette breaks or going out to work on the common was palpable during my observations. Despite this and the suggestions made during interviews that they used these as an opportunity to go home, I never saw any of them make a break for it and actually leave and not come back and, presumably since they allowed the practice to continue, neither did their teachers.
32 The Gate to the Wood

Once the students moved into Year 11 the matter of the physical boundaries was no longer raised during interviews or highlighted by the photographs that participants took. The only occasion on which it arose was during the walking interview with sub school a students who had been in the vocational group. They took this opportunity to highlight the increased porosity of the borders caused by the building work. They were very excitable as they showed me this, making a lot of noise and running about, as evidenced in the photograph below.
In spite of this, they seemed more interested in the victory of discovering a secret exit and less interested in actually using it. The massive decrease in interest in this aspect of school life suggests, in common with findings elsewhere, that the students had gradually come to accept the nature of the place that they were in and were less interested in acting to change it and were rather just biding their time prior to leaving.

33 Discovering the Secret Exit

This might again be seen as indicative of their desire to maintain their identity as students of the school despite the relative ease of crossing the margins of the school. The cracks opened up by the building work represented an opportunity for the participants to take ownership and reappropriate the space.
The increased impermeability of the borders that had occurred prior to the majority of the building work characterised the increased grip of the teaching staff on their location in school. The construction work exposed gaps in the control over space that teachers had and as a result led to opportunities for the participants to create student friendly spaces and exert influence over their environment.

4.3 Conclusion - Creating School Place Through Resistance

This chapter has given an overview of the relevant research pertaining to the creation of place in school and went on to relate these to the findings of this ethnography. These findings suggest that, due to the poor physical environment that the participants found themselves in initially and subsequently the condition of the school during the building work, the participants began to actually identify with the condition of being rubbish. Even to the extent that they would choose to spend time in the skip. There was a general awareness that the quality of the building and the presence of the construction work was impacting on their education and this substantiated a belief that there was an educational masquerade taking place. School was not for them, rather it existed to benefit others; the teachers and other remote figures.

The physical environment in which they were emplaced formed a significant influence on their identity formation as students of the school. The changes that were being enacted upon this environment was carried out with no consultation to them and as a result they felt they were very much the object rather than the subject of these changes. These changes to the school buildings provided both a threat and an opportunity by the participants. The place where they
experienced their education was being altered by forces that they had no control over and this was understood as a threat to their identity. In response they became intransigent and saw themselves as beyond change and in some cases ‘invincible’. However, the changes that were taking place opened cracks in the discourse surrounding them and enabled them to make further claims to space and reappropriate it through their behaviour.
5 The Limitations of Democratic Student Voice Structures

Having looked at the creation of place through the participants’ behaviour in the last chapter, this chapter focuses on the relationships between the participants and adults in order to address the second research question. The chapter starts by looking at some recent research on the nature of relationships between students and teachers and the impact of parental influence before going on to consider student voice and its impact on educational outcomes before explicating the relevant findings from the study. Subsequently, these research findings are linked to the outcomes from the ethnographic data collected.

5.1 Relationships with Adults and Student Voice in the Empirical Literature

Mannion (2007) suggests that though we have asked in the past about how children are marginalised by structures and spatialities, and questioned how children subvert the limitations placed on them in order to create their own spaces, it is now more important to ask where the new spaces of engagement are - where are adult-child relations being reconfigured and does this demote a shift in power relations? It has been suggested that, in order to counter the idea of children as incompetent, they should be seen as ‘beings’ with adult style rights and responsibilities, rather than ‘becomings’, (Mannion, 2007). However, this is rather old fashioned in Mannion’s view and, as both adults and children experience less stable forms of identification, it may be better to re-evaluate both as ‘becomings’ in order to see more clearly these positions in relation to one another. He builds on Butler’s (1990) use of performativity to understand how we inhabit the categories ‘child’ and ‘adult’; understanding that identity does not generate action but is rather established via action in given places and
discourses. Similarly, Steele (2005) states that, in order to let go of the notion that children are always dependent and needy, adulthood should be seen as a continuity of change rather than the perfect endpoint of childhood.

5.1.1 Relationships with Teachers

It will be shown in this section that the quality of relationships between teachers and their pupils in school are a vital aspect of education. However, there are several systemic qualities that exert a negative influence on these. The relationships between pupils and teachers have been shown to be significant for a number of reasons. The consequences of poor relationships with teachers include anti-social behaviour, negative attitudes towards school and poor engagement and achievement (McGrath & Bergen, 2015). Academic performance will be affected by relationships with teachers from the point at which children first begin school (Birch & Ladd, 1997). Sabol & Pianta (2012) found that the quality of teacher-child relationships can be used to predict current functioning and development across academic performance, motivation and achievement. They determined that, to a large degree in early school years, positive relationships with teachers map closely with parent-child attachments. This is replicated as young people mature but diminishes in importance. Positive relationships are understood as the presence of positive affect between the teacher and student and how comfortable a student is in approaching that teacher; a general absence of conflict between the individuals; and the student perceiving that a teacher offers support to their students. This is the definition of positive student-teacher relationships that I shall use here. In a national American longitudinal study on adolescent health, teenaged students that enjoy
greater connections with teachers presented reduced degrees of emotional distress, suicidal thoughts and behaviour, violence, substance abuse and risky sexual behaviour (Resnick, Bearman, Blum, Bauman, Harris, Jones, Tabor, Beuhring, Sieving, Shew, Ireland, Bearinger & Udry, 1997). Of course, student-teacher relationships do not operate in isolation in this, or any other, context. The relationships between teachers and children that have been shown to be a central factor in the improvement of the quality of education and interactions between teachers and children are part of a multifaceted system encompassing families, peers, schools and wider communities (Sabol & Pianta, 2012).

McGrath & Bergen (2015) carried out a review of findings from international research over the last 30 years publish in English language journals. Understanding positive relationships in the same way as Sabol & Pianta (2012), they saw that, as students progress through school, positive teacher-student relationships become increasingly influential whereas the actual quality of the majority of these relationships declined. These increasingly negative relationships characterise the expectations of both parties. However, when an unusually positive relationship is formed, notwithstanding expectation, these are particularly powerful in promoting pro-social behaviour, engagement and reforming students’ beliefs about the possibilities of good relations with teachers. However, when students encounter positive relationships their behaviour, attitude and degree of engagement may improve but these do not appear to affect academic achievement.

Summarising the outcomes of many enquiries from the 1970s to the early 2000s in the UK, Rudduck & McIntyre (2007) found that a majority of pupils
wanted to believe that school is for them but commonly consider that it belongs to their teachers. Additionally, a perception of students as clients by teachers contributes to a sense of distance between teachers and pupils (Mitra, 2003). This distance borne of a sense of the dependence of young people in school in part arises from the disparity in power in a school context. Dominant groups in social situations often use their disproportional power to shame subordinate groups into silence as a means of exercising control (Jordan, 2006).

Marginalised individuals and groups in school receive regular messages that bolster their division from those that silence them. If one is to experience a complete and genuine interaction which enables development, one should not be in a subordinate position. In Mac an Ghaill’s research (1994), a perception was identified that teachers only liked the ‘snobs’ in school and that they tended to look down on other students. Children from low socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to have poor relationships with their teachers despite the fact that troubled students often desire closer bonds with their teachers (McGrath & Bergen, 2015). However, their poor behaviour commonly increases the risk of a negative relationship. In fact, close relationships between teachers and children are particularly associated with improvements in academic and socioemotional functioning in children from disadvantaged backgrounds and it is possible for these relationships to compensate for earlier adverse experiences with teachers (Sabol & Pianta, 2012).

5.1.2 Unacceptable and Impossible Learners

The previous section determined the importance of relationships between young people and their teachers. Here I shall go on to consider how teachers
might discursively position their students depending on their perception of them; potentially excluding them from the processes of education. Youdell (2006) examines exclusion in terms of exclusion from the abstract notion of schooling rather than simply from a specific school and the manner in which exclusions are instituted through the quotidian practices of education. She discusses how the learner can be constituted as desirable/undesirable or acceptable/unacceptable in the discursive realities of school. Whilst this unacceptable learner is still intelligible, there may be a further category of student; the impossible learner. The judgement as to whether a student is unacceptable or acceptable is formed on the basis of a teacher’s relationship with an individual student. Judith Butler (2004) suggest that the terms through which we are recognised are socially articulated. These terms that confer humanness on some divest others of that opportunity and recognition becomes a means by which a person is differentially produced. Youdell claims that people become who they are by being intelligible within discourses and there are advantages to being beneath intelligibility if that intelligibility is created by predominant social norms. An individual that is beyond normative discourse may prefer estrangement to developing intelligibility via norms that arrive from another source ultimately accepting their constitution as ‘other’. What this means is, for a child to become an acceptable learner to their teacher they have to be understood in a way that is mutually discursively constructed. If that child does not accept the terms under which acceptable identities may be formed there are benefits to remaining unintelligible and beyond understanding; impossible in the eyes of their teacher.
Constitution as an impossible learner can come in many forms. School discourse signifies the ideal student as inherently childish, passive and possibly feminine (Youdell, 2006). Additionally, the good student body is the subdued instrument of the rational, Cartesian, mind. One example that Youdell gives from her research that contrasts with this is that of the teenage boy occupying the position of an adult, masculine, sexually desirable man who is entitled, confident and anti-authoritarian. These bodily expressions of contempt for authority enable a technical obedience without deference or obsequiousness.

Teacher-learner subjectivities are brittle and attempts can easily be made to upset their hierarchy. By students acting out of place in discourse, the teacher’s station is at risk and they must reconstitute students in their correct position.

5.1.3 The Reengagement of Disaffected Learners

I shall now scrutinise some examples of practical attempts to reengage students who have suffered from negative relationships in school. Narin & Higgins (2011) examined an alternative education programme for excluded students which occupied a small building in a poor state of repair on an industrial area. The students in this research their new place of education as a refuge from antagonistic relationships in mainstream school. The staff in the programme were not like teachers and, we are told, became more like friends. Staff had the opportunity to establish in-depth social relationships, enabled in part by a preferential staff to student ratio. However, there were also some negative aspects to these relationships in that their new teachers were not qualified. This added to the students’ sense of alienation since they saw it as a continued separation from the kind of educational resources that their peers had access.
Similarly, Meo & Parker (2004) carried out ethnographic research in a pupil referral unit (PRU) in the West Midlands, UK in which teacher-pupil relationships were characterised by a more informal approach. They found that interrupting the cycle of exclusion necessitated a reformulation of the teacher-pupil relationship in order to include a degree of respect, solidarity and involvement which many pupils in the setting had not experienced previously. However, the research also identified that a significant obstacle to achieving these improved relationships was the rationalization of teacher time. Out of the classroom demands on teachers reduced the opportunity to develop these relationships away from the day to day teaching that went on.

There are suggestions here that these differently defined teacher-student relationships may enable children that have been previously positioned as impossible learners to engage more effectively with their day to day education. The sense of solidarity between teachers and their students going some way to address the disaffection of these students. Additionally, the fact that the students were not seen as being in a subordinate position mean that they were more able to form effective relationships. This different style of affiliation between adult and child also enables students to understand school as being for them rather than being run in the interests of their teachers. These instances also make clear the power of forming positive relationships against expectations as described by McGrath & Bergen (2015). One significant problem that remained, however, was the compounding their sense of alienation from the mainstream due to the fact that the students knew that their teachers were untrained.
5.1.4 Disaffected Students in Mainstream Education

Lumby (2012) examined a national UK data set produced by the former Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in conjunction with the (now defunct) Department for Children, Schools and Families. This consisted of 45 case studies of various state schools in the UK and focused on whether students enjoyed learning, achieved and wanted to progress. Drawing on a subset of this data, consisting of students identified by their teachers as disaffected and disengaged, Lumby found that a majority of students did not consider themselves to be incompetent but rather unable to cope with unreasonable demands made of them. Negative relationships with teachers were a key feature and many students did not believe that teachers respected, cared or even liked them. It was found that these indifferent relationships impelled either aggressive responses or psychological or physical exit. A majority also acknowledged some positive relationships and were therefore not incapable of positive relationships. Negative relationships nevertheless were found to have a disproportional effect on their learning. Lewis, Romi & Roache (2012) found that often students associate being removed from class with negative relationships with teachers rather than any specific classroom event. This reasoning varied little between those who were regularly excluded and those who were less frequently so with the majority seeing removal as related to teacher anger. Again, student relationships with teachers are intertwined with events that take place in school and that the process of education is not impersonal and depends heavily on the nature of these relationships.
Lumby (2012) also found that relationships with mentors were often contrasted with those of teachers. These relationships were often regarded as being more positive and of extreme importance to students. This relates back to the differences in relationships experienced in the studies conducted by Meo & Parker (2004) and Narin & Higgins’ (2011). Relationships that are characterised by care and valuing the individual students are crucial to educational success, particularly for those students who are experiencing disadvantage due to external factors. The young people in Lumby’s review (2012) frequently accepted that the fact that their education was a waste of time was, to an extent, their own fault. But they also indicated systemic failures of curriculum, pedagogy and relationships. By taking responsibility for their failures, at least in part, externally they managed to maintain a belief in their own competence and allow a belief that there was hope for future success. This protected their self-esteem but disenabled them to impact on a context which repeatedly failed them.

In an 8 year longitudinal study focusing on students from disadvantaged backgrounds in mainstream schools in Australia, Johnson (2008) found that teachers who took an interest, listened, treated them with respect and explained things when asked were particularly valued by students. In addition to this, simply being available had a positive impact on the sense of well-being of students and was seen as being particularly important to the pupils. The students in this study felt that when teachers listen it communicates a sense of respect and a failure to listen disrespect. These students also emphasised the importance of teachers that cover ‘the basics’. Teachers who were thought to be acting in the interests of their students were of particular importance to them.
as were simple human connections, such as sharing a joke. Students wanted teachers to be themselves and be respected as distinct humans, not just an amorphous body of students. This suggests that there are similar benefits to students in mainstream settings of the positive relationships identified elsewhere and much of this revolves around school staff listening to students and acting, or at least being seen to act, for them rather than in the interests of the teachers.

5.1.5 Parental Experience and Expectations

The previous sections have concentrated on the importance of relationships between teachers and their students but these are not the only relationships of significance to young people in schools. The experiences that parents had whilst attending school themselves influence the relationships that they subsequently have with the teachers of their own children. Families are not closed communities but sites where larger formations intersect (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler & Dowsett, 1982). However, just like schools, families are not simply subject to the whim of these outside forces and the two domains of family and school are not entirely separate. Initially the nature of relationships between teachers and pupils mirrors that of relationships between parents and the offspring (as discussed in section 5.1.2). However, the similarity between parental and teacher relationships weakens as children enter secondary school and their time is shared by many teachers (Sabol & Pianta, 2012).

In Mac an Ghaill’s (1994) research, parents were frequently cited as an influence on children’s attitude towards schooling. However, as with the work of Willis (1977) there was no systematic link between parental assessments of
schooling and their children’s beliefs. Geoff Bright describes this as acting “within a socially remembered repertoire of refusal at the very same time as they improvise afresh with newly available cultural materials” (Bright, 2011b). As a result, young people’s experience of education is located in historical geographies of affect (Bright, 2012). Similarly, Reay (2009) claimed that young people negotiate education through their own experience but also through what she calls the “sedimented” experience of their parents and grandparents. Mac an Ghaill (1994) found that parental legitimation of school authority has a complex relationship with their own experiences of school. He also demonstrated that school teachers regularly presupposed that the middle-class two parent family is a moral norm and frequently make judgements about the backgrounds of the students they teach against this standard. Teachers were more comfortable identifying with middle class lone parents, believing the less well-off children in their care to be ‘someone else’s children’ (Gleeson, 1984). Many parents whose background is not congruent with that of the majority of teachers have experienced school as alienating and intimidating (Connell et al., 1982) and left feeling injured, insulted and disempowered. This process results in identities produced through resistance to the practice of education unlike those whose families, schools and peer group are in synchronization with one another.

Castro, Expósito-Casas, López-Martín, Lizasoain, Navarro-Asencio, & Gaviria (2015) carried out a meta-analysis of the impact of parental involvement across a range of cultural contexts. Their key finding was that educational outcomes are most closely linked to parental expectations of their children and not directly to any specific educational actions that parents might become involved in. This
strengthens findings by Wilder (2014) in a synthesis of 9 further meta-analyses of the same relationship. Wilder suggests that parental expectations reflect their beliefs and attitudes towards schooling, teachers, specific subjects and education in general. Children are likely to hold similar attitudes and beliefs as their parents as a result. Although this would appear at first glance to contradict the findings of Mac an Ghaill (1994) and Willis (1977), the point is that there is no mechanistic relationship. As Bright (2011b) suggests, the attitudes and opinions of children in school are informed by their parent’s perspective, but not in isolation from their own experience.

5.1.6 Student Voice

Having discussed the relationships that students have with some of the significant adults in their lives, this section will examine student voice and suggest that formal democratic procedures within school are less important to effective voice processes than developing aspects of relationships with school staff. Educational establishments are vital in reducing vulnerability to social exclusion through the development of self-efficacy, self-worth and a sense of belonging (Razer, Friedman & Warshosky, 2013) and listening to student voices is a process through which children’s inclusion and participation can be developed in a perpetually changing world (Czerniawski & Kidd, 2011). Aston & Lambert (2010) ran several focus groups involving a range of pupils aged between 8 and 16, educational psychologists and advisory teachers in the UK. They asked how things would change if young people’s views were included in decision making and what the barriers were to this. They found that the participants believed that an authentic involvement of pupils in decision making
processes across schools would lead to a more positive school culture and improved teacher attitudes towards their pupils. A commonly held view by the children in the study was that society in general does not want young people to be heard and that their voices were only partially and occasionally heard. Although the behaviour of some young people was considered to be a barrier to this, it was thought that if children’s voices were heard and involved in setting standards then behaviour would improve as a result. Student voice in schools is usually discussed in terms of democratic structures such as student councils, but, as I shall discuss, this is a restricted view of the meaning and importance of student voice.

Pupils hold knowledge and perceptions relating to school that cannot be found elsewhere (Mitra, 2003); their understanding of their own experience cannot be inferred by speaking to adults. Without the involvement of students, specifically those that are at risk of failure or low attendance, the responsibility for failure is easily placed on their shoulders rather than interrogating school structures or ethos. By looking at high schools in the United States, Mitra (2003) found that student voice processes are particularly effective in improving learning when directly related to altering curricula and teaching methods. She initiated opportunities to allow communication between students and teachers allowing students to feedback on their classroom experience. Students also participated in teacher training activities by attending teacher training days. This was a two way process allowing teachers to understand their students more effectively and students to understand their teachers work and their attempts to reform school. It was discovered that this process provided students with a greater sense of ownership over their schooling and reengaged previously alienated
students. By recognising each other as individuals rather than stereotypes tensions between the two parties were reduced, allowing disagreement without enmity that was present previously. This also helped address the view of students as ‘clients’ of the school, enabling a view of education as shared endeavour. This relates student voice to the issues surrounding relationships between adults and children in schools which were discussed earlier. It is also clear that a shared investment in the process of education by both students and teachers offers significant benefits to both.

In a summary of 75 studies largely in the UK, Davie, Williams, Yamashita & Ko Man-Hing (2006) found that student participation activities were indirectly linked to academic achievement. Through providing feedback on teaching after observing lessons, not only can students improve teachers’ practice but they also develop a greater appreciation of learning processes leading to enhanced communication skills and proficiency as a learner. Beyond this there were also benefits to pupils taking public roles, such as school councillors, which largely related to increases in confidence. As students felt that they were being listened to and as teachers felt that students understood their role more fully, relationships between the two groups improved. One of the benefits of pupil voice processes is that they can be used to help teachers appreciate where habitual approaches to teaching are inhibiting the improvement of teaching and learning (Flutter, 2007). However, Flutter (2006) revealed that, where consultation with students is newly initiated, commenting on teaching can be uncomfortable for both students and teachers. She identifies that consulting on building and environmental issues has many benefits and is also a comfortable starting point for teachers and students to look at together. This demonstrates
that there is evidence to support the benefits of student voice for a wide variety of students in school. However, there are both specific benefits for marginalised students and specific problems them that are exacerbated by a lack of adequate voice.

The previous paragraphs show the benefits of student voice practices and that there is a wide variety of practices that come under the title of student voice. This section will go on to specifically look at student voice in relation to students in marginalised contexts. Children forming their identities in a problematic and marginalised context are characteristic of the manner in which neo-liberalism treats those it has failed (Smythe & McInerney, 2013). A system that is incapable of accommodating them cannot be held responsible and so blame is shifted onto their own shoulders. Lumby (2012) identifies a homeostatic situation where a tendency for either physical or mental exit from the processes of education and weakness in the impact of voice yields little impetus for change. Children who cannot or will not adapt to established ways of being in school are either disconnected or disempowered, not through exclusion as a rule but by marginalisation. Levels of involvement in decision making in schools have been shown to ebb as students become increasingly involved in disciplinary processes in general and specifically with disciplinary exclusion (McCluskey, 2014). This is important because the consequences of disciplinary processes are already unjustly distributed across sub-sections of the population and burden the already disadvantaged (Munn & Lloyd, 2005). The insight gained from excluded pupils is useful because they can shed light on many school practices that are taken for granted (Munn & Lloyd, 2005). Teachers act as agents of exclusion from school whether it is intentional or unintentional and
a very narrow view is taken of these pupils, as discussed in the earlier section on relationships. As Munn & Lloyd (2005) say, were more inclusive practices developed around listening to the most troubled and troublesome pupils, schools would be able to see that the majority of pupils want teachers to understand their circumstances and be seen as worthy of respect. Specifically, Munn & Lloyd (2005) identify including pupils in the development of behaviour policies, the writing of the school development plan and appointing staff.

By examining groups of children who had given up on their education and subsequently tried to re-engage through second chance programmes in Australia, Smythe & McInerney (2013) learned that many school children disengage due to the fact that they had no voice in shaping their own identities as school children. A significant number of children ultimately formed their identities in opposition to school, willing to sacrifice the deferred economic benefit that comes with educational credentials in order to create their identity in the present moment. In the flexible learning programme scrutinised by Smythe & McInerney (2013) life skills and vocational education were emphasised, allowing the participants to claim a place for themselves where their voice could be heard. The result of this was that teachers interacted with them in a more humane and helpful manner, trusting the students and allowing them a responsibility for their learning which was denied in mainstream school. So again, the link between forming alternative relationships to those regularly seen in mainstream education can be seen as being beneficial to resistant students and the manner in which this is intimately associated with students having the impression that their voices are heard.
The previous paragraphs have shown that there is a range of evidence that demonstrates that allowing children a voice is associated with improving efficacy of learning, motivation and behaviour. However, the research also shows that there are problems with voice centred, participatory, approaches. For example, the ethnographic study carried out by Leitch & Mitchell (2007) indicates that headteachers are largely unaware of the fissures between the intended ethos of student participation and the reality of student experience. In fact, the very creation of democratic structures, including school councils, disguises the lack of trust between students and staff. The current inclination towards student voice can lead to its superficial observance. With consideration of structures enabling it to be heard without any reflective and critical thought as to why it should be listened to (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006).

When restricted to consultation, in the sense of simply asking for opinions, participation does not address the multifaceted concerns of young people. Percy-Smith (2006) found when carrying out action research into children’s use of community space that the voices of young people exist within a plexus of voices and value systems. This gives rise to conflict, ultimately causing a separation between young people and adults. In order for adults and young people to interrelate and mutually participate, reflexive and reciprocal relationships need to be developed, leading to more cohesive communities. Student voice cannot be reduced to simple imposition of democratic forms with no consideration of the deeper interaction between student and teacher.

A further problem concerning student voice is that many school policies intended to promote teachers listening to pupils are framed within a school
improvement agenda. For example, case studies carried out by Byrom, Thompson & Gates (2007) observed that children were pushed to apply to and attend Oxbridge universities in order to improve the image of their school with no consideration paid to the concerns of the individual students involved. Similarly, others were excluded from this process based on their backgrounds rather than their desire to try. These are examples of institutional practices have a bearing on discrete student’s capacity to convey their own choices and student voice practices only legitimate certain voices, even when it comes to very high achieving students such as these.

Rudduck & McIntyre (2007) in their review of research on pupil voice identified that, for students, the personal and interpersonal dimensions of learning were very important but tend to be disregarded and suppressed by issues of school performance. School pupils generally aspire to a positive appreciation of learning and of themselves as learners, desiring a sense of agency over their learning and an ability to contribute to improvements in teaching and learning. Engaging with these aspects of pupil voice has a significant impact on pupil engagement with school. However, some practice pertaining to student voice demonstrates that cynical attempts to co-opt voice for school performance purposes alone perpetuates the objectification of learners who become passive passengers on their journeys through school (Czerniawski & Kidd, 2011). So the policies adopted by many schools in order to pay lip service to the notion of student voice actually result in undermining the potential positive outcomes if it were implemented effectively. What children wish for is an increased sense of agency and control over their destinies. Many schools enact policy that simply increases students’ awareness that this is not the case.
“Voice has too much about it that smacks of singularity, of presumed homogeneity, of deferential dependence on the unpredictable dispensations of those who deftly tune the acoustics of the school to the benign status quo.”

(Fielding, 2007: 306)

In the opinion of Fielding (2004), a significant degree of student voice work is predestined to meet with failure and disillusionment because its procedures simply reinforce subjugation or because it pays too little attention to the extent to which children are acclimatised to their experience. A supposition of insight in the oppressed is as mistaken as its denial by those in a position of power. Fielding (2007) also sees the danger of essentialism in the comfort of amplified talk which is entertaining but means little and changes less. There is the potential for delusion to set in with respect to the independence of student voice (Mannion, 2007). Voice processes can easily become effectively scripted by adults and it is important to hold these processes up to the light in order to identify these delusions. The participation of children is both spatially and relationally sensitive and the debates around it can ignore both a key outcome in the improvement of relations between adults and children and the key context of place.

Dimensions of power are perpetual in relationships between adults and children and these are often exacerbated in a school context. Robinson & Taylor (2012) carried out case studies of two groups of students, one in a primary and one in a secondary school, working as researchers identifying how children learnt best. The participants in this study were chosen by their teachers, exemplifying the assumed cultural norms pertaining to authority in school. The case studies identified that student voices were easily co-opted into agendas that were
dominant in each individual school and raised the question as to whether it was possible at all for staff and students to engage with one another as true partners in a mutual enterprise. Adults react to pupil voice differentially according to how it is framed (Cremin, Mason & Busher, 2011). The discursive practices that different pupils engage with determine precisely what can be said and by whom. Linked to this, Tisdall & Davis (2004) observed that the voices of children are more likely to be heard when supported by adults and consequently an altering of the relationship between children and adults is an essential prerequisite of children’s participation.

Whilst it may not be possible, or desirable, for teachers and students to exist on a truly equal level, there is evidence that there are benefits to be had on both sides for greater prominence to be given to student voice. Not simply through the creation of democratic structures that mirror liberal democratic representation, although this is important, but through the development of teacher-student relationships that give appropriate weight to student agency in order to allow students to take ownership of the direction of their education. In order to do this it is necessary to let go of the notion that students are entirely dependent on adults; understanding the adulthood as a continuity of change rather than the end result of childhood (Steele, 2005). I shall now go on to look at the findings relating to this of the present study.

5.2 The Nature of the Participants’ Relationships with Adults

5.2.1 Unconventional Relationships

One of the most useful aspects of carrying out the research in the context of the school in question was the contrast between the experiences of the vocational
and mainstream groups. This was particularly true in terms of the different
experiences of teacher-student relationships. The relationship between students
and teachers in the vocational group in Year 10 were significantly different to
those witnessed elsewhere and there were a number of reasons for this. There
was much more of a sense of being on the same level and working together to
achieve a common end that there was in a more conventional classroom. The
groups were smaller and they tended to learn by working on projects together,
rather than through traditional didactic lessons. This gave rise to an affiliation
that was based far more on mutual trust than on a power imbalance and, in
turn, this difference meant that they were not seen as ‘teachers’ in the same
way. It was common for the staff to be referred to by their first names, even
those in more senior position, and one TA was even referred to as ‘Nan’
because she was with them all the time. However, there was a distinction drawn
between those staff that had a great deal of day to day contact with them and
those that were more managerial. The managerial staff were considered as a
part of the wider school system by the vocational students and as such they
were not trusted in the same way. Much of this is evidenced in the quotation
below.

Me: So do you prefer it in vocational to mainstream?

Several: Yeah

Jenna: Yeah, because, like, when you talk to, like, the adults in there,

they're not like teachers. You can talk to them like a

person.

Me: You think they're not like teachers?
Jenna: No. They're not like teachers.

Me: Are they teachers? How do you see them?

Jenna: One of 'ems a teacher, but they're not actually all teachers.

Chloe: Tanya 'n that go to university dunt they.

Elizabeth: Yeah, Tina, Josie, Becky.

Ella: Mike's at college or university. He's at one of the two.

Chloe: Yeah, but Mike's classed as a teacher.

Ella: Yeah.

Chloe: So's Alan and Ern. Classed as...

Ella: Like a head teacher innit. Like that section.

Mike was a former site manager who had become the principal teacher for the vocational group since the conversion to academy status. The difference between Mike, who was their main point of contact at school in Year 10, and the more senior teachers is also exemplified below. The students were keen to photograph Mike when they were left with the cameras since he represented so much of what they liked about their school experience. This was emphasised whilst we discussed this picture during interviews.
Me: Ok, so that's your room downstairs. Tell me about that.

Martin: We felt like taking a picture of Mike. Coz we like Mike.

Brandon: That's Mike. [Surname].

Martin: We like Mike, that's why we took a picture. Mike’s probably the best teacher.

Me: Why’s that?

Martin: Coz ‘e don’t shout much.

Brandon: Ern and Alan are actually in your face a lot. And when you ask ‘em to move they don’t.
Charlie: Mike, if you ask him to leave you alone for a few minutes and come back he'll do it.

Me: Ok. And why do you think that is?

Brandon: Coz 'es chilled out. Not like them. Think they're all hard.

Part of the reasoning for the depth of their relationships with their teachers in the vocational stream was the belief that they acted as a line of defence for them against the wider school and its processes. Mike, for example, was seen as defending them against actions by the SLT in after school staff meetings.

Brandon: No, but we've pissed off Mike so much, he's starting to get pissy about it. So he's going to like stop it. So you think Mike doesn't do much for us, yeah, but when he's in the after school meetings, yeah, with Ern an' that, yeah, he does stick up for us a lot.

Having drawn this distinction between the more senior teachers and the staff that the vocational students had most day to day contact with, it is important to note that there was another division which the students highlighted between the senior staff working with this group of students and those in the broader school. This tranche of school staff were still seen as being ‘on their side’ to a greater extent than other ‘outsiders’. For example, considering the incident described in 4.2.1 again, when Martin kicked the water fountain off the wall, and went immediately to see Ern, the deputy head responsible for the vocational stream during the first year of fieldwork and sub school A in the second. This would seem to demonstrate something of the positive relationship that these students had with the staff that worked directly with them, these relationships meant that
they felt comfortable enough to approach them honestly with respect to their actions.

As consequence of this atypical rapport with their teachers, where there was a greater degree of trust between them, the vocational students believed that they caused much less trouble than they would in a different context. However, they were still keen to emphasise that they were prepared to be difficult for staff that they saw as being in a position of power that they did not come into day to day contact with such as the head teacher; as the next quotation seems to demonstrate.

Jenna: We're better and we don't cause the adults in there shit because you actually know they've got a personality and they treat you like an adult. They treat you like an adult.

Me: And how does that compare to kids in mainstream?

Elizabeth: Like, I dunno, if they want something, they kick off right, but with us, we can […]

Chloe: Unless we don't get what we want. With Miss Heron we kick off.

Elizabeth: We kick off, but not as bad as mainstream do. We don’t run round the school.

This is reminiscent of the findings by Narin & Higgins (2011) and Meo & Parker (2004) relating to the improvement of relationships with students placed in alternative education settings. The teachers almost becoming more like friends to the students and resetting their relationships with school staff. However, as these students moved into Year 11 and into sub school A, less time was spent
with Mike since many of their core subjects were delivered in more traditional classrooms. This was keenly felt by the vocational participants and something they reported on in interviews. Mike was identified as the individual who looked after them the most at school and when they had to spend time away from their tight knit group they were not happy about it, suggesting that part of the closeness of the relationship they had with him was down to a shared group identity.

Charlie: He’s our number one teacher. In vocational only he used to teach us for every lesson and we used to love it! And now it’s... we’ve got at most a few hours...

The different form of association between staff and pupils in the vocational group in Year 10 and sub school A in Year 11 was apparent to mainstream students as well. They often stated that they would prefer that kind of approach taken to them and they similarly did not see those staff as ‘teachers’. One possible explanation offered for this was that the staff were more relaxed and provided more choices for students. It was also thought that those members of staff were there to support as well as teach, which was in contrast to their experience with their own teachers. Again, there was a recognition that there was a separate layer of teachers containing the more senior staff that would deal with serious behaviour issues. However, it was broadly stated that they preferred the teachers in that area of the school to those anywhere else.

Deena: They’re more like lenient... not lenient...

Adam: In sub school A? They’re relaxed...

Deena: More relaxed and give you more opportunities. And choices.
Me: Are they like... like teachers? Do they behave the same?

Deena: No.

Me: What's different about them?

Deena: Obviously they behave the same but they're more I dunno how to explain it... How would you explain Becky an' that?

Leah: They're like just there for support... They're not really a teacher or anything.

Deena: Yeah, they support you, they teach you an' that but they support you.

Leah: Like Tina, Miss [xxx]...

Me: You mean they don't stand up in front of you and tell you what to do?

Deena: Not unless you get Ern or Alan.

James: Yeah, Ern is like....

Leah: Yeah, Tina and Mike don't do anything....

Deena: Ern is like a real proper teacher.

James: Yeah.

Deena: But if you get like the teachers, the other teachers are better.

James: He can be fair Ern. He is good.

Deena: Yeah, Ern is fair and that, but if you do something wrong then you are like...

James: He'll punish you...
Deena: Yeah. But I prefer the teachers in sub school A to the ones in sub school B and sub school C.

The teachers which the vocational group had in Year 10 and sub school A had in Year 11 formed relationships with their students that were more akin to those relationships the students in Lumby’s (2012) study had with their mentors. These relationships were characterised as caring, with an emphasis placed on the individual, were significant to those acutely vulnerable students that made up the original vocational group, but were also viewed as the ideal of teacher-student relations by those who experienced more conventional relationships with their teachers.

Newman (2002) found that, whilst adults tend to see momentous events in life as stressful such as the death of a significant person, young people tend to be more concerned with daily ‘hassles’. These day to day hassles are more connected to a person’s life than major life events and are more closely related to outcomes. For example, the arguments between parents associated with divorce are often seen as having a greater impact on young people than the actual death of a parent. The emphasis on the importance of the relaxed nature of the rapport in the vocational context here ties in with the notion that it is ‘hassle’ that defines stressful situations for young people. The students in vocational were particularly vulnerable young people and they valued the opportunity to avoid ‘hassle’.

Prior to the school being split into 3 sub schools when the students were in Year 11, there was a shared belief that the forthcoming changes would have a negative impact on them. In the vocational group there was little thought that
the changes would lead to any difference to their curriculum. They mainly converged on the fact that their fairly small group would be absorbed into the much bigger sub school A and that they would lose the distinctive nature of their education. The view that was consistently stated was that “It’s not going to be like normal vocational”. Specifically, they were apprehensive about the fact that they would be getting new teachers in and that would disrupt the relationships they had built up with the vocational staff and that this would subsequently lead to behavioural issues. As well as this, it was thought that the increase in the number of students would mean that they were harder to keep track of:

Charlie: You see me and Martin. They won’t be able to keep track of all of us. Because we’ll still be in the landbased area, but with 200 kids. They ain’t gonna realise if two of us go missing. Or, like, three of us coz they’ve still got 200 other kids mucking about.

The vocational group had become very comfortable in their small cluster and clearly felt that its size offered them some protection from the outside world of the school. An increase in the size of this group would mean a change in the teaching personnel and this would mean that they would lose the teachers they had developed such positive relationships with. Their expected reaction to this would be one of increased disruption and rejection of their schooling.

From the beginning of Year 11, they felt that their concerns over the changes were justified and that their comfortable and safe world had been taken away from them.

Brandon: We've been thrown back into mainstream haven’t we really.
All: Yeah.

Brandon: We've had our own little group didn't we. And then they've just quit that group, finished that group and put us back in mainstream.

As a result of this exposure they claimed that their behaviour had deteriorated and this certainly appeared to be borne out during observations. They had formed very strong bonds with a very specific and small group of teachers and they felt comfortable with this group. They knew what wound them up and what they could get away with and they enjoyed the work they were given. Breaking apart this sense of family had a huge impact on the students and their sense of identity and safety. They even made comments during interviews about the classrooms being bigger even though this was clearly not the case. The reality did not matter, it was their sense that everything had been distorted that led to these views. Where they had been reasonably engaged with the work they were doing in Year 10 they were now far more disruptive and as a result many of them were gradually being moved on to the Alpha course. They very much saw this as an intentional move by the school to get rid of them before they could disrupt the majority of students who had now joined them in their sub school.

Charlie: the thing also which gets me thinking is that all the last vocational people are now going into Alpha. Being threatened with it. They thought about putting the whole group into it once. That's what Mike told me about it. That we nearly, that the whole group nearly got put into Alpha at once. All of us.
Brandon: That's what I don't get.

Charlie: They want us in Alpha.

Brandon: Yeah. They're trying to put us in Alpha.

Me: You think they are?

Brandon: They are trying to.

Charlie: To get rid of us, coz last year the people who are in there for now got put into vocational for bad behaviour. So it means that we couldn't be in normal lessons. So now they're putting us in Alpha because we're back in mainstream because there's nowhere else for us to go. So I think oh ... they've been good for so long right, how long before he starts playing up and starts playing up and has nowhere to go except for Alpha. Get them in Alpha now and we won't have to do it in so many weeks. Or so much time longer. They want us in there now.

The vocational participants had experienced a positive change as they went into Year 10 and had formed effective working relationships with their teachers but as they went into Year 11 they were now exposed. Where they had been sheltered and allowed to form their own little community this was now open to view by the rest of the school and they felt threatened by this, as they had expected to be at the end of Year 10. Their resistance became much more overt and intentional as a result of this and they began to detach themselves from their education. As a result the majority of them were gradually moved onto the Alpha stream and ultimately spent very little time in school. This
highlights how vulnerable these students are and how important the context of their education is, they had such a negative impression of school previously and they had successfully been reengaged to an extent. The school had allowed them to become comfortable and happy in their small family group and the result of its removal was ultimately their total withdrawal from school.

This is congruent with the findings of Narin & Higgins (2011) and Meo & Parker (2004) in that a reformulation of teacher-student relationships is key to the reengagement of pupils from challenging backgrounds. Also, as McGrath & Bergen (2015) discovered, that the forming of these positive relationships in the light of prior negative experience is particularly powerful. However, the alteration of the situation that they were so comfortable with caused a significant emotional injury to these already vulnerable students. What had begun as a very successful experiment with these students resulted, through its expansion, in exacerbating the kind of outcomes that might have been expected in the first instance.

Many of the members of the staff that the students across the school particularly liked were people who originated from the same area as them and this coincided to a large extent, but not entirely, with those staff who worked with the vocational students. The headteacher joined the school as it became an academy and had moved from a school that was located in a city about an hour’s drive away. When she arrived she had brought a number of teachers with her who commuted across and this compounded the students’ view that the teachers were a different breed to them. This following quote shows the
overlap regarding this view between members of the vocational group and the mainstream group.

Charlie: They are from Southampton. Mike, lives round here coz he’s been to this school.

Elizabeth: Most of the teachers that are in sub school A, like Tina, she grew up on this estate she knows how it is, she knows how to work the children. That’s why most of them like her. They like Mike and Tina coz they grew up here so I think that’s a big thing coz when we get all the snobby ones coming from Southampton or whatever and they went to a different school and they turn round and are like ner ner ner...

Charlie: like, err at our school we didn’t behave like that...

Elizabeth: Yeah…

Charlie: Why don’t you go FUCKING BACK THERE THEN!!!

The evidence above indicates that the different nature of the relationships between the vocational group and the mainstream students had a positive effect on the engagement of the vocational students. This different relationship was also very attractive to the students outside of this group. Not only did they say they would value the lack of ‘hassle’ that the vocational students experienced, but the fact that they were from the same background as the pupils in the school was significant, meaning that they had a greater understanding of the day to day lives of the participants.
5.2.2 Trust, Teachers and the Undermining of Students

A significant problem for the children in terms of their relationship with teachers was that they saw teachers acting differently with different audiences. This was frequently mentioned by the non-vocational groups across Year 10 and 11 but was never raised as an issue by the vocational group. They had a much closer relationship with their teachers than the other group and so did not think of them in this light. The problem took two particular forms, manifesting slightly differently in the presence of other teachers and the presence of the parents of the participants. Certain teachers and support staff would act in a more familiar manner with the children until they were in the presence of a senior member of staff at which point they would suddenly turn and act as if they were at a remove from the students. I observed this behaviour happening often and it was also discussed several times during interviews, as in the example below. This indicated that mainstream students not only felt that the vocational group had more supportive relationships that they did, but that they were actively being undermined. Interestingly, the specific example that the mainstream students discuss is someone they have identified elsewhere as being in a more supportive role with the vocational students. This is indicative of the frustration that the mainstream students feel regarding their preference for the way that the vocational students were treated.

Deena: I think they're 2 faced. Tina.

James: Pineapple head.
Deena: Coz like when were in front of us lot yeah, she'll like really like real like, ahhh, how do you explain it?! It’s just like....she ain't bothered. She ain't professional or nothing.

James: What she says. She’ll say anything.

Deena: As soon as she get in front of [deputy head] or something... she acts...

James: She wants to impress....

Deena: She wants to impress ‘em all.....like last week.... she was like go and tell [deputy head] how you feel... blah blah blah... and all this yeah... well basically saying like... just like... slagging ‘em off basically... ah yes, he’s messed it up so why don’t you go tell ‘im ....blah blah blah.... But as soon as she got in front of [deputy head], she was like “listen”... blah blah blah... Trying to act like a proper professional when she is just two faced... I don’t like her... And they get involved...

Teachers were frequently referred to in the same terms as the Police. In the past, there had been a Police station on the site of the school and, despite this being closed once the school became an academy, it remained a symbol of what the students disliked about the staff at the school. The, now disused, door into the station was highlighted by several students during the photography exercise.
For example, at one stage the young people said:

Jenna: They think just because they’ve got an illuminous jacket on they can do what they want.

Brandon: One of them started swearing at me ages ago.

Martin: One of them grabbed one of the students into the office because...

Jenna: One of them grabbed someone in coz they were stood outside the door and they was... stood on the bit by the Gavvers and one of ‘em came out and said you’re not supposed to be ‘ere an’ dragged ‘em in. I can’t remember who it was.
It was clear that, in general, the students did not like having the police on site with them, but this was something which was more evident amongst the vocational group in Year 10, and a fairly small group of the mainstream students including Deena, Jenni and Mark. However, the parallels drawn between the Police and teachers were made by those outside of these groups too. Specific behaviours and objects were used to highlight this similarity.

36 The Walky Talky

Martin: That’s what they use. They use the radio. They think they're cops!

Brandon: They use walky talkies to, like, communicate through school.
Jenna: So if someone’s misbehavin’ or walking out of lessons, kicking off, they'll radio someone. And then they'll try and cut them off. Coz they're smart.

Martin: They think they’re the police.

Brandon: Smart. Yeah, you can hear one of the mikes from the top of the school at the bottom. That’s how stupid it is.

So even though a parallel was drawn between Police and teachers, teachers were seen as less competent and threatening than the police; they were treated as more of a joke and as people who could be played with. The staff at the school were often seen as laughable outside of lesson time when the students felt less under the control of their teachers. They would take this opportunity to confirm to themselves their opinion of their teachers, as in this conversation recorded in my field notes:

[Laughter at teacher picking out food...]

Me: Do you often make comments about your teachers?

Deena: Yeah. Coz it's funny. Just look at ‘em all. They're dinlos. They look like such pagans.

Me: Do you do that much to your mates?

Deena: Yeah! Not horribly.

Me: What’s the difference between you doing it to teachers and doing it to your mates?
Deena: Coz teachers are dinlos! (Dinlo means idiot. It is a word adopted from the local traveller community) They’re just peasants.

There was also an impression that teachers were covertly acting as a corporate body in opposition to them, trying to gather, or create, information to use against them. This feeling was clear during observations and is illustrated nicely by this quote centring on an email that the students claimed to have seen:

Esther: Oi, Mark, do you remember when we found that email from Mr [xxx]? it was to Miss [xxx] saying [xxx]s mum thinks I’m picking on him so please could you raise some concerns about him so we can take him down or something.

This relates to the conclusions drawn by Ruddick and McIntyre (2007) that pupils commonly believe that school is operated in the interest of their teachers. Although the sense of distance created here is not created by any sense of the students being clients of the school, with limited stake in the processes themselves, as in Mitra’s (2003) work. When this same behaviour occurred with parents the children were given the overwhelming impression that the teachers were simply saying whatever people wanted to hear in order to have an easy life. Students that were often in trouble and being shouted at were suddenly described as being intelligent and behaving well in class. The participants felt that this made them look stupid in front of their parents and as though the description that they gave their parents of school life was inaccurate. As you can see in the two quotes below:

Leah: He’s a twat to me but my mum come in the other day an’ ’e was like "Oh, yeah, Leah is really bright an’ she behaves in my
class." I was like......! He only said that in front of my mum. But when I’m there it’s like “Shut up and get out of my class”. Because I asked for help.

Jenni: Yeah, coz they make you look like the dicks. When you do that and you go home and tell your mum and then they come into school and he acts like he’s never even shouted at you before. Makes you look like a right twat. Makes you look like you’re lying when you’re not.

This suggests a total lack of trust between the students who were in mainstream groups in Year 10 and sub schools B and C in Year 11 in contrast to the more mentor like, trusting, relationship that existed in the vocational group in Year 10 and then, to a lesser extent, in sub-school A in Year 11. There is also a sense of their voice being undermined here as they feel that they are made to look like fools in front on their parents; as though their narrative of events is unreliable. This feeling that the teaching and support staff were two-faced and untrustworthy fed into their self-justification for their disruptive behaviour as evidence below. The view of teachers as hypocrites set up the students in opposition to them before any interactions took place in the classroom or elsewhere in school.

Me: When you misbehave is it wrong?

Jenni: No! It’s payback! I think it’s payback.

Mark: It’s fair enough...
Jenni: Yeah, it’s fair enough coz they shout at us all the time! So it’s payback.

Me: So you think it’s what you should be doing?

Jenni: No.... It’s obviously not right, but they’re ... like... our mums and that think teachers are something that they’re not. If they were sat in school... If we had a camera attached to us for the day and we showed it, I think they’d be so shocked. Coz when like at teacher meetings, they’re just hypocrites.

This all demonstrates that trust is central to the way in which relationships are formed between students and teachers. These participants felt that there was no mutual trust and that their teachers were actively working to undermine them, so in return they would act in opposition to them. In the vocational groups where the relationships between the students and their teachers were so much closer there was the feeling that they could trust one another and this meant that I observed less disruption in their classrooms. In addition, there was a definite feeling from the mainstream students that they were unimportant to their teachers. This was demonstrated by a repeated failure to follow up on promises that were made to the students.

Simon: The last time I had a meeting with Mr [xxx] was when he told me and Dani were top of ‘is list and he was going to take us out for intervention to do extra science. And this was... like... basically say 3 to4 weeks after we come back from Christmas and I haven’t been out with him.
Leah: Yeah, months ago, my mum came in for a meeting and they were supposed to move me to sub school A Science and they never did. So that's why I'm doing rubbish.

Simon: If you was in sub school A Science that would make my day!

Me: Have you followed that up at all?

Leah: No, well, my mum’s been in for meetings since and they haven’t said anything about it.

Similarly, mainstream students in sub school C were frustrated by the mixed messages that they received from teachers, as in this quote:

Colin: I dunno, coz sometimes I mess about and sometimes when I do well, Miss [...] says well done you’ve done really well today. One minute she says I’m going to fail when I’m messing about and then the next she says I’m gonna get... I’ve got an A in one of the tests... or B or whatever.

They realised that it was inevitable that their behaviour would not be perfect all the time, and that they would have days when their focus would not be the work, but felt that their teachers could not understand this. It seemed to them that their teachers' comments veered from one extreme to another, one day telling them that there were going to be successful and the next saying that there were going to fail. This exasperation fed into a general sense amongst the mainstream group that the voice of the teachers could not be trusted. This was in contrast with the vocational group’s experience that the teachers they had the most direct contact were on their side and trustworthy, whereas those higher in the hierarchy and in the wider school were less so. What was experienced by
those students in the vocational group and by many of the participants outside of sub school C was positioning as unacceptable or impossible learners (Youdell, 2006). They carried out their work at school but, because they were seen as a specific type of student, they were more likely to receive sanctions for their behaviour and teachers had preconceived ideas about how they would behave.

Martin: The point is, when we act up, when we're throwing pencils. We're just having a little laugh. But they don't see that. They just see us fuckin’ muckin’ about.

Charlie: But we still end up doing work.

Elizabeth: Basically, if you’ve got a bad reputation, if you’ve ever mucked around and it’s been enough for you to be put on eportal (Behavioural incident recording system) then they'll, if you’ve got a bad name whatever, then straight away, if something bad happens in school, something goes missing, anything, then they'll think it was you. Because you’ve got a bad name. They don't reckon we can change our lives around, and yeah fair enough maybe some of us cant. Maybe I won’t, maybe he will, maybe she will, but not all of us are going to be failures just because we were a dick in school. But they reckon we are and they give us the attitude like we will be.

Martin: All we want is to have a little laugh, sit with our mates. That’s what you can do at work really.
Participants frequently stated that their teachers expected them to misbehave before they had even entered the room. This expectation was at such a level that, on some occasions, teachers even asked why they were behaving so well. In addition to this reputation that the students have developed whilst at school, for some there was the added issue of a reputation earned through older siblings that attended the school. See for example this exchange:

Me: Ok. Moving on.... Do you think that you behave in the way teachers expect you to behave, now let me explain what I mean. Not in the way they want you to behave, but do you think you're behaving in the way they expect you to behave?

Charlie: Yes. I've been told that I ... say like since I turned to this school, coz my brother came here, so did his brother, and they're both little...

Martin: All my family been in this school.

Charlie: Yeah, basically they've been little fuckin shits. So when we come up here they tag us that we're going to be like them. And so we don’t get the chance to prove ‘em wrong. And when we do something, say we do like chuck a pa..., It’s only the first day of school, we chuck a paper aeroplane or something. They go psycho at us like we were one of them. And since all that they just target at us. And we've, I've tried to change but it doesn't even work. So I've just gone worse and worse and worse until I've got put into there.
Martin: My brothers [xxx] and [xxx] they... [xxx] is quite smart, [xxx]’s a
dumb shit..... See those two ain’t THAT smart but they've
got really good jobs, but my sister she ain’t got any
GCSEs, none of them has, I don’t think any of my family.
They didn’t get any GCSEs but she’s still got a job, she's
got a nice job. But she's had a baby now so she's looking
after that. And, um, I want to prove to my mum and dad
that I can achieve some more GCSEs than my brother...
coz they're just like.... If you look at them compared to me
[???] I dress smarter than them and everything ... Just
dumb shits, I wanna prove wrong that I am. My dad,
there’s a teacher, he taught all my family, my dad ’es got
a job. And he didnt get any GCSEs. So y'know, I wanna
be like 'im. Really.

What can be seen here is that the students who were initially placed in the
vocational group felt they were constructed as impossible learners by teachers
even before they had started there, as a result of their family ties. This also
implies a removal of their voice before they have even arrived, a narrative
imposed upon them that is impossible for them to shake off. The fact that
Charlie says that he did progressively badly until he got placed into the
vocational group exemplifies the importance of newly developed positive
relationships in contrast to past negative relationships. As with the findings of
McGrath & Bergen (2015), this is clearly powerful.

Amongst the young people there was also a commonly held view that the
teachers that were employed by the school prior to it becoming an academy
were good, and that those that had replaced them were not. The participants had been in the school for one year before the conversion to academy status and they were aware of some teachers who had been there for a very long time who left. They also saw the teachers that remained as being superior to those that had been brought in. There were periods in my field notes where students would reminisce over the fact that they preferred the teachers who had moved on and also this came up during interviews. There was the occasional dissenting view that the teaching had improved, but this was qualified by assertions that it was still of a poor quality. There was also often a sense of discontinuity that had occurred when many of the teachers at the school prior to its conversion to academy status had left. Teachers that had taught not only older siblings, but parents as well. This is all exemplified in the following quote:

Simon: There’s teachers that were here that were really good.

Mark: Like Mr.... Mr....

Simon: Remember Mr [xxx].

Mark: Mr [xxx].

Adam: Mr [xxx]. He was amazing...

[Something funny happens.... some talking about teachers.]

Richard: Remember Mr [xxx], I liked Mr [xxx].

James: He worked for this school for like 30 years...

Mark: He worked here when my mum was here...

James: Longest serving soldier....
Alongside this was a conviction that many of the teachers were only there for the money and not because they had any interest in the students themselves. Whilst there was some recognition that there were teachers that were motivated by a desire to help them, there was also an attitude that many were not. One signifier of this, for the students, were the teachers’ cars. Their discussion of this in interviews led to a heated debate about teacher motivation. For example, the participants claimed to be incredulous as to the number of Audis parked in the school car park, this they felt was symbolic of the divide between the relatively well paid staff at the school and their own background, experience and family material wealth. It was even suggested that it ought to be a part of the interview process to try and identify teachers who were motivated by the needs of the children rather than pecuniary interests.

Elizabeth: There’s a few of them that are useless and only care about the money. And I reckon that there should be someone that interviews them not only to get the job but to see how they care about the children and not just the money that they’ll be getting. Coz I think it helps if you can get on with a teacher. Then it’s going to help you get on with the subject they teach. Coz if you don’t like ‘em, you’re not going to wanna ask them for help. Coz you’ll feel like they’ll patronise you sort of thing. So I always think it’s better.

There was also a perception expressed that some teachers in the school believed they were something that they were not. This was one of the few times that class was mentioned by the participants. The terms higher and working class both being used in a disparaging sense, indicating something that is not
normal. This is also linked to financial status with one extreme being wealthy and the other being in debt.

James: Miss [xxx] thinks she’s higher class.

Deena: Miss [xxx] thinks she’s higher class, but not she’s not, she’s working...

James: She says she’s got three houses… Do ‘em up, sell ‘em on...

Deena: She got three houses? I bet she has! Fat bitch. She is a house with people inside her!

[Laughter...]

James: She told us in class she’s got a load of money...

Deena: Yeah, she thinks she got a load of money, but she ain’t... she’s in debt, stupid prick.

With a number of the teachers being seen as largely only in it for the money, this ties in to the idea that the school was for the teachers rather than the pupils and served to distance them from the children they were educating. Whether or not it was true, the students believed that the teachers that cared had been weeded out by the incoming academy regime. This connects with the importance of the mentor role, as opposed to the teacher role, as far as the children were concerned. The teachers that they felt cared, that had stayed and taught successive generations in the school, came to occupy the position of mentor rather than teacher in their eyes.
5.2.3 Conflict Between Students and Teachers

Often the students would deliberately goad teachers in attempt to get them upset and there were specific stories that they would tell about events that showed to them they had power over what took place in their lessons. They shared a real sense of reward if they could get a teacher to lose their self-control and show some kind of weakness. This did not happen very often, but these were valuable stories to them that they often shared with one another, such as the account given below:

Jenni: do you remember when Miss [xxx] and me had that fat argument at the end of the year when she was pregnant and she started kicking the door and calling me a bitch and that.

Elizabeth: She threw a book at [xxx] didn't she!

Mark: I made her cry.

Jenni: We just sat there and she started going off her head coz she's got hormones and that and she was like... she said to me... We were all laughing coz she was crying, well, not laughing but you know when you're holding your nose trying not to laugh? And me and [xxx] was pissing ourselves and then [xxx], she called [xxx] out and started screaming at him and [xxx] started crying then she started screaming at me calling me a bitch, crying and then she started kicking down the door and calling me a bitch and a fucking cow and kicking, punching the door everything. I just looked at her and said, “What the fuck are you doing
you weirdo?” I walked off, she was like, “No, no Jenni, please come back...” Coz she thought I was going to go tell my mum...

There was still a sense that teachers were people that pupils should be wary of; who were able to carry out sanctions as a consequence of their behaviour. The participants described reflex reactions to being caught showing that, despite all the displays of power, they were still conscious of an imbalance of power.

Jenna: That door used to be unlocked and we used to just walk in and jump out the window and have a fag. But we didn’t know... you know the upstairs hallway? Whilst we was doing it we didn’t know that the teachers were stood up there watching us whilst we were sat on the roof smoking away!! Then you’d just look over and realise!

Brandon: You go hot don’t you! And freeze!

There was a feeling that the relationship with teachers was very one sided and that, whilst teachers were free to talk to them in whatever manner they wished, they did not have the same freedom. This was evident to the students to such an extent that they believed that people outside the school would be shocked at how they were spoken to by teachers as you can see from the quote below.

Jenni: People would be shocked how teachers treat us... How they speak to us...

Me: You think they’re rude?
Jenni: Yeah, like... they can say something really rude to you, yeah, like really insulting... like, you say it back, when you comment back you get like... Coz they've got more power than you while you’re in school they like to... you can get in really trouble but they can say what they want to you. Like with Mr [xxx], he can say whatever he likes to you coz he’s friends with [headteacher] and won’t ever get told off, but we do.

The feeling amongst the students was that if they were spoken to in a fashion that they felt was appropriate and that they were being given an opportunity to give their side of things in a conversation then they were much less likely to misbehave and cause problems for the teacher.

Elizabeth: I can be reasonable to the teachers, it just depends how they talk to me.

Charlie: Mmmm... If they're just saying listen to my side and you’re not saying your side then of course you’re going to mouth off and do.... what we want.

Some teachers were clearly marked out as being weaker than others and these teachers were seen as fair game for them. They would cause disruption in the lessons of the less weak teachers but this was seen much more as making a statement whereas the weak teachers could just be played with, almost as if they were practicing for the real challenge.
Deena: Depends what teacher you got though. If you’ve got like Mr [xxx] or Mrs [xxx], everything’s like under control. But if you get Dr [xxx] or shit like that, they're just dinlos.

Similarly, their behaviour in front of TAs in the absence of classroom teachers was very different. Whilst they would rarely directly challenge them they would frequently use abusive language in front of them simply because they knew they could get away with it. A good example of this comes from my field notes:

Mark has been told not to work with [xxx]. Teacher said they’ll distract each other. Teaching Assistant asks them to keep quiet because other students working there. Mark continues talking over her and she walks away. TA asks James to email Mark his work. “No!” call each other “cunt” and “dick!” repeatedly in front of the TA. This is ignored by the TA.

As students moved from Year 10 into Year 11 there was a definite change in attitude towards this disparity in power. Whereas the vocational group maintained their defiant stance as evidenced below, there was a subtle difference between the students who were formerly in the mainstream group who had moved into sub-school A and those who had been placed in sub-school B.

Illustrating the continued defiance of the vocational group as they moved into sub-school A:

Me: What makes it funny when you wind up your teachers?

Martin: The way they react!!
Jenna: It’s the way they react! They take it so seriously! Winding them up is so easy! They always react!

Me: Ok, and what about... When isn’t it funny?

Charlie: When is it not funny when you wind up a teacher? (Said as if he doesn’t understand the question)

Martin: Never! It’s always funny!!

Jenna: Even if they’ve run out crying then it’s still funny.

Me: Ok, why do you think that’s funny?

Brandon: Coz then they have to get someone to back them up.

Jenna: Because it’s just funny!! I don’t know why...

Me: Do you think it’s to do with the feeling of power?

Jenna: Yes...

Charlie: I think if they don’t like it then we’ve shown them up. In some respects.

Brandon: They’re there, like, giving, like, mouth to you then as soon as you give it back to them they don’t like it and say "Oh, we’re going to get Ern" and you just start laughing at them. Go on then, he’s fat.

The participants quoted above genuinely could not understand the idea that winding up their teacher might not be amusing and they gave the impression that it was simply what they expected to do. In contrast with this, the group who moved from the mainstream group into sub school A exhibited a sense of
defeat. They were at school and there was nothing that could be done. There was simply a sense that it was time that needed to be sat out:

Simon: If sub school A hadn’t come in an all that then I probably would have been the same, but coz of sub school A, I wouldn’t say I’m scared of Ern, I just don’t wanna deal with him coz he’s like... He takes it too far.

Adam: He talks at you for like 3 hours...

Simon: And then if you say something back and he knows you’re right he’ll give you a longer detention or something like that. So I’ve changed a lot because I can’t be bothered to deal with that.

Richard: Just keep out his way innit. That’s the way I think about it.

Conversely, those that had been in mainstream and had gone into sub school B perceived value in having strict teachers. Rather than simply biding their time until they could leave school the strict teachers were seen as a valuable resource in order to achieve good grades and improve their future chances. This shows a link between their relationships with teachers and a pragmatic approach to the value of school, discussed in more depth in the next chapter.

Me: But would you rather have those strict teachers or ones where you play up.

Deena: Yeah. No. I dunno! But it’s like, if you have a strict teacher you get better qualifications don’t you? Better GCSEs. But if you have the shit teachers you can’t get nothing so you’ve
just gotta look at it at the end of the day; what your future’s going to be like.

They became less inclined to deliberately goad the teachers that they felt had something to offer them and this is part of the pragmatism discussed in the previous paragraph. In contrast with this, their attitude towards teachers that they perceived as being weaker and supply teachers hardened, for example:

Jenni: If you’ve got, like, a supply teacher, or like Tina or someone, you have all the power.

Mark: Yeah, all the power.

Jenni: But if you’ve got someone like Mr [xxx]...

Mark: I hate him...

Jenni: You just get kicked out straight away.

Simon: Or Mr [xxx]...

Mark: If you say one thing you get kicked out.

Jenni: I don’t know about Miss [xxx]. Miss [xxx] is in between sort of thing. She can be like sound sometimes and other times she can be like a proper bitch.

Mark: She hates me...

The students who were not in sub school A were able to alter their relationships with the majority of the teachers because rather than having been constituted as ‘impossible’ learners (Youdell, 2006) they had been seen as unacceptable learners in the past through their behaviour and their relationships with their teachers. They understood that, despite this past behaviour, they remained
intelligible by the teachers and therefore could work in order to be reconstituted as acceptable. The students in sub school A were the impossible learners. The manner of their behaviour and past relationships with teachers had led to this and, as a result, they had been sidelined away from the majority of the school population. In line with the findings of Narin & Higgins (2011) and Meo & Parker (2004), the students in sub school A had their disaffection addressed to a degree by a sense of solidarity with their teachers and a less subordinate position in the relationship. However, they also still felt the alienation and stigma of the impossible learner. They may have felt that the staff with whom they had day to day contact were working for them but the school as a whole was not felt to be on their side.

What is revealed here is that, repeating what has been found in the past, positive relationships with teachers are vital for engaging young people with their education and that this is particularly the case for disadvantaged students (Sabol & Pianta, 2012). In part, close relationships between disadvantaged students and their current teachers can compensate for their past experience. Where the nature of the relationships were changed for the vocational group in Year 10 this had a beneficial effect on the self-reported engagement with education of these children. When the vocational group was expanded to become sub school A as they went into Year 11, whilst this new found engagement did not completely break down, they were further alienated from education and this ended, through various means, in their exit from school. Whilst they could not reconstitute themselves as anything other than impossible learners, those outside of this group struggled to make themselves intelligible
and become acceptable learners with some caveats that they were unable to accept.

5.2.4 The Influence of Parents

The preceding sections have examined the impact of the relationships between the participants and their teachers. However, these are clearly not the only significant adults in the lives of the participants. I shall now go on to look at the evidence pertaining to the participant’s perceptions of the thoughts and opinions of their parents and the effect these perceptions had on their schooling. In fact, the parents of participants were rarely mentioned whilst they were in Year 10, if at all. As they moved into Year 11 they seemed to become more conscious of their impact on their attitude towards school and their education. A significant issue that was frequently discussed was the participants’ belief that their parents had an expectation of educational failure by them. This was not something that they believed was desired by their parents and it was perceived as a significant cause of concern for them. An example quote being:

Leah: Mum obviously hoped I’d do better, but coz I went really downhill in Year 10 she knew I wasn’t going to get good grades. So she was sort of expecting it anyway. Obviously she didn’t want me to but she was expecting it.

All the participants made assertions along these lines at some point during Year 11, although there were differing reasons for, and reactions to, this alleged expectation.

Many of the students stated that their parents put the blame squarely on the shoulders of the school itself. The view that was held by the participants, that
they believed their parents shared, was that the school was disorganised, chaotic and actively working against their best interests and behaviour that was perfectly reasonable was interpreted by teachers as disruptive and dealt with as such. Since I had focused the work I was carrying out exclusively on the children, I cannot say if this was an accurate representation of their parent’s views but this perception influenced the thoughts of the children. This resonates with recent claims in the Unseen Children Report by Ofsted (2013) that parents’ negative views of their own schooling education have a significant impact on the engagement of their children with school. When the parents of the participants were contacted by teachers, the participants believed that they took their side and shared their belief that the school was working against them. For example in this quote, where a student was accused of being disruptive and not working when they were, at worst, running where they should have been walking.

Deena: Well, she thinks... the school is shit...

Me: Why does she think that do you think?

Deena: Coz they chat shit. And they're not very organised and they always try and get me in trouble. Like yesterday yeah, yesterday a teacher rung my mum yeah, saying that I was running round school for 2 hours when I wasn’t. I was doing my English work in the library. And because I ran out there yeah, me and Esther run that way coz we was going to get more work, yeah. She was like chasing us coz we was messing about. She rung my mum to tell her that
id been running around the whole day. I said to my mum I hadn’t. They just cause shit. And they’re 2 faced.

This relates to the findings by Connell et al. (1982) that the prior injuries experienced by parents at the hands of schools can be witnessed feeding into the experience of their children, as the Unseen Children Report (Ofsted, 2013) also suggests. As far as the participants were concerned, their parents believed that their children must be telling them the truth in opposition to the messages from the school. Another issue for many of the parents, as far as their children could see, was the constant change that was being experienced, as discussed elsewhere. The message that the participants took from their parents was that they were being messed around and this acted to reinforce the beliefs that the children already had.

Leah: my mum reckons she wanted me to come to [xxx]. She wishes she got me in there now. She always on about how this school is really shit. And that they've messed us around since Year 8. Everything’s always changing. Now the schools getting knocked down and we’ve got like... It'll be all good for the year below us...

The participants felt that their parents thought that they should change school and this was frequently mentioned by many of the participants. This perception was held despite the fact that this did not happen for any of them and neither did it appear to happen particularly often to any of the other students in school. It was often mentioned that younger siblings were not going to be sent to the school based on the experience the families had had so far. Having said this,
many of the participants had had older siblings go through the school and yet the participants had still ended up there.

Leah: My brothers just gone into Year 8 and my mum’s already threatening to put him into [xxx]. She doesn’t like it that much and how shit I’ve done.

This demonstrates that, as far as the children were concerned, the belief of the parents was that the constant change that the children experienced was another wrong that was being done to them. All this cemented the sense that the school was having a negative impact on their education and that there was little that they could do about it. Alongside this was a view shared by the vast majority of the participants that they were ‘not academic’ and they believed that their parents also held this opinion. Of the students that were in sub school C by the time they were in Year 11, one even stated that her mother thought she should be ‘lower down’ and be in one of the more practical sub schools. This again links to the fact that there was a perception by the participants that the school was not acting in the best interests of its students and that students were not necessarily being placed in an environment that suited them.

Me: So what does your mum think of you being in sub school C?

Leah: She doesn’t think I should be in there. Not like she doesn’t... yeah, coz she thinks I would be doing better if I was lower down one. Less academic. Coz I don’t work well with stuff like that.

The importance of familial expectations is apparent here despite this being the perception of the participants rather than being directly reported by their
parents. However, in contrast with this, one student who was in sub school B claimed that his mother expected him to fail at school because he had never been academic and he recognised that he was better with his hands. However, it was a source of some pride for him that he had succeeded despite this lack of confidence from his parents.

   Me: Why did she think you were going to fail?

   Adam: I was never academic.

   [...]  

   Adam: No, it’s coz I’ve never been academic in my life. I’m just good at building stuff. With my hands. I’m not good at writing or anything like that so she didn’t think I was going to do that well. But I have.

This is linked to the non-mechanistic nature of the relationship between parental attitudes and those of their children. Whilst there is a link between the two, it is complex and continually developing. As Bright (2011b) suggests, young people improvise with the materials available to them but incorporate the sedimented experience of their parents (Reay, 2009).

Although this was a view expressed by a minority of participants, some felt the pressure of parental expectations that they were put under was too high. These students were those who were in sub school B and were focused on by the school because they should have been capable of meeting the benchmark of 5 GCSEs including Maths and English at C or above. Rather than living out an expectation of poor performance at school, these students were reacting negatively to what they perceived as unrealistic expectation by their parents.
because they could not understand what education and exams were like for these students, as evidence by the example quote below:

Jenni: They expect so much from me...

Mark: Yeah, they expect you to get everything, like Cs

Jenni: It does my head in, like my mum didn’t get like... amazing grades like she got Cs an’ that but she is expecting me to be an A* student... It does my head in, an she’s like... AHHHH!!

Mark: My dad’s got no qualifications, but yet he’s still got a good job and he’s earning but he’s got no qualifications...

Me: Do you think they’re like that coz they’re worried about you?

Jenni: No! They just expect so much of you! They don’t actually realise how hard exams are.

Mark: Back then it used to be easy!

Jenni: Exactly! Exams have got harder and harder and our exams are really hard... and they expect us to get A*s and it does my head in!

Me: How do you know they’ve got harder and harder?

Mark: Coz that’s what they’ve said. They’ve made the mark.... like to get a C they’ve made it 10 marks harder. So you have to get 10 more marks than usual.

Whilst demonstrating the lack of routine relationship between parent and child’s relationship with their schooling, it also shows the difficulties that the children experienced in moving from unacceptable to acceptable learners, with the
weight of perceived parental expectation being an obstacle rather than a benefit.

Across the board, whether living out the perceived low academic expectations of their parents or suffering the weight of what they saw as unfair demands, the participants all saw their parents gain some kind of success in their life despite not thriving at school themselves. All sources claimed that their parents failed at school and yet were earning money which appeared to be the sole benchmark by which they measured.

Mark: My dad failed and he got a decent job.

Me: Your dad failed and he got a decent job?

Mark: Yeah, he’s got no qualifications or anything like that.

Me: What does he do?

Mark: Plumber.

Even if school turned out to be a fruitless exercise, there were examples available of people who chose to return to studying when it became necessary to achieve what they wanted to achieve. This relates back to the point made in earlier sections about choice. Choosing what to study because it has value is part of what makes the studying valuable and worthwhile. Removing that choice and forcing the participants to study is a fundamental cause of their resistant behaviour and they have role models in their parents to show that this behaviour will not prevent them from being able to earn a living in the long run.

Deena: My mum was a little shit in school. And then she had to go... She failed all her GCSEs an’ that... and then she had to go
back to college and sixth form to all her A levels an’ that again. So she was behind everyone else basically coz she used to like mess about an’ that. She weren’t payin’ attention.

Me: Do you think she regrets that? Or do you think she’s not that bothered?

Deena: Dunno. She doesn’t really say nothing to me about it. She never says she regretted it or nothing... Which sounds bad yeah, but if you look at her, where she is now... She does like fitness instructing and like personal training... Not personal trainer, but she’s doing a fitness instructing course. But then she’s a legal secretary so she done well for herself at the end of it. When she could have just like... reckon she could have done better though...

Even though the participants used their parents as role models in this way, there was a general lack of detailed knowledge about many of their parents’ education or in some cases even their occupations. For example, the conversation below shows that there had never been a conversation about whether or not one participant’s parents had been to university:

James: I think my mum did better than my dad, but...

Me: She did A levels.

James: Yeah.

Me: But they didn’t go to university?
James: I’m not sure if my mum did. We’ve never spoken about that.

The following quotation also suggests that the absolute priority for a number of participants was making money:

Deena: [xxx], my step dad... I don’t know if he was good in school or not. I’ve never really spoken to him about it... but like... I don’t think he was that good in school. To be honest, I don’t really know, but they make money now, so I ain’t bothered to be honest.

Amongst many of the students there was a belief that they were re-enacting the same behaviour and an expectation that their lives would follow the same types of path. They thought their parents had misbehaved at school, had prioritised things other than learning, and still they earned enough money to get by (see the quote below). There was never any mention of the possibility of earning more than enough to get by, it just was not a feature of their discourse and so no belief that it was possible.

Deena: That’s where I get it from. My mum.

Leah: My mum was proper bad at school.

Deena: Good old [xxx]!

Leah: No, my mum was bad outside of school, not that bad inside of school. She was supposed to go to grammar, she was 1 mark off and they said she could go, but she didn’t want to go. Yeah, coz her best friend was going to [xxx]. So she
went to [xxx]. She still did well. My dad was kicked out of school and didn’t bother going back. So...

So, whether the parental expectation of the participants was seen to be that that they were not academic and therefore could not be anticipated to perform well at school or whether the participants believed that the weight of expectation was unreasonable and unattainable, the principle influence that parents exerted was as a realistic role model. They had largely been seen to be unsuccessful at school and, nonetheless, has ended up making a reasonable living. When they had found that they needed some kind of formal qualification it was possible to return to education to get it, but it was often unnecessary to provide the kind of lifestyle to which the participants aspired. It certainly could not be said that they had no aspirations at all, they were just in line with what they were familiar with.

Simon: My mum is worried about me I reckon. But it’s just my maths and I’ve told her that I’ve given up with my options, but most of the time she doesn’t listen so I’m going to have to say it again. But like, I want to do painting and decorating coz it’s a good job, or plumbing, but if they don’t offer anything like that, I’m either going to go to college or I’m just going to get a job.

This quote demonstrates that the lives of the participants’ parents represented possibility and opportunity beyond anything that was, for the most part, available as a result of school. The parents of the participants provided a realistic role model for them in contrast with many of the teachers. The exception to this came from the teachers who were perceived as originating
from the same areas as the participants themselves who, in effect, could occupy the role of mentor, as opposed to teacher, more effectively.

5.2.5 Non-Compliance as a Substitute for Voice

Having scrutinised the nature of the participants’ relationships with adults, I shall now go on to look at how this related to their sense of a lack of formal voice within school. Although, as the quotation below shows, they believed that there were things that they had control over, in general they felt that their voices were not taken seriously.

“We are in charge, they might have the name by their head, like Principal and all that shit, but we're in charge of the school. The school is mainly for running education and everything if we can’t be fucked to do our education, they’re not ... We're in charge of the school coz they're not doing their jobs properly. Of educating us. If we can’t be fucked and say nah mate, I’m not doing any work, all that shit, like we normally do... We're in charge coz we're saying no. They might say, come on, come on, come on but in the end we’re in charge of what we do.”

Charlie

In discussions participants always had very clear ideas about the direction they would like their school life to take. Particularly across three key areas, learning, the uniform and the nature of the school building. They were very vocal about their preference for practical learning, independent and personalised learning as well as the restrictions that were placed on their subject choices. As far as the uniform went they distaste for the blazers was clear and they desperately wanted a return to wearing the type of jumpers that they had worn previously. They also had many thoughts and opinions about the approach that should be taken towards the new building and its layout, some of these more realistic than others. It is important to make this point in order to be aware of the fact that the
students were not just mindlessly rebelling with no clear idea of what they would prefer. It may not have been consistently realistic or attainable but they did have a clear sense of a different direction for key aspects of their education.

Having said this, there was a pervasive sense that they had extremely little influence over the decision making processes in the school. The participants clearly gave the impression that if their thoughts were heard and responded to they would be prepared to accept a different outcome. One particularly good example of their views being ignored was with respect to the uniform. Their frustrations being clear in this exchange:

Deena: But they... it's for us yeah, but they don't take our point of view...

Esther: Like the uniforms... We all had our say in that...

Deena: ...and they don't take our opinions and stuff yeah... into consideration they just think...

Esther: No, with the uniforms we all had our say on what uniform we wanted and she said something completely different.

Jenni: Yeah, none of us even said any of this.

Esther: No, none of us said nothin’ like this.

Deena: Yeah, but the whole school chose what they wanted but I wasn't there at that time that they said it as well, now we've heard it before and [headteacher] don't change nothin’. She just thinks her own mind.

Esther: She just did this...
Jenni: Yeah, but if she... if... if... if we weren’t here then she wouldn’t have a school. So she should take up our opinions.

Deena: Yeah, coz she’s not the one that’s learning here... she’s just runnin’ it... she doesn’t have to sit in the class room 6 hours a day...

The participants’ justification for having their voice heard is also apparent here. Their perspective was that the staff and the head might be responsible for managing the school but they were the ones who it was being run for and as such they should have more of a say in its decision making processes. Not only did they feel that they were kept removed from this, but they also considered themselves locked into decisions even when they had had a say in them. For instance, this was particularly an issue for those who were in the vocational group. For example this dialogue that took place with between Jenna and myself:

Me: You don’t think you should have been in landbased?

Jenna: I wanted to at first, I’m not going to lie. But I didn’t know you wouldn’t be able to do your GCSEs and it would like fuck your education up.

Me: So did the school not tell you that?

Jenna: I don’t think I was listening.

Me: But you think it was a bad option.

Jenna: I regret it.

Me: Were you not given the chance to change? You were locked in?
Jenna: Pretty much.

Me: Were you put under any pressure to go into land based? Or was it just a completely free choice.

Jenna: It was... well... it was a free choice at first but they started putting badly behaved people in.

Me: So they put more people in after you’d chosen it?

Jenna: Yeah.

The perception of the participants was that they had initially being given the impression that their voice is being listened to whereas they soon came to realise that in reality it was not. Of course, as with many schools there was a student council in place that was called student voice. Students were elected on to this through tutor groups and there were year councils that in turn elected representatives on the school council. However, paralleling national disillusionment with the parliamentary political process, the participants could see no benefit from participating. There was a recognition that whatever the senior leadership wanted to happen would be what happened and there was little point in trying to do anything about it. The perception of student voice was that it was the school paying lip service to gathering their opinions whilst nothing would change in reality. This coincides with Fielding’s (2004) writing, suggesting that much student voice work is predestined to fail since it simply strengthens and emphasises the suppression of pupils. The following exchange highlights this well, making it clear that the students are aware that, in reality, school staff will simply get what they want.
Me: How much influence do you feel that you have over what kind of place it is?

James: Not a lot, coz the school do what they wanna do. They say they've got all this... what is it?? When they all meet up??

[General agreement, talking at once...]

Me: Student voice?

James: Yeah, student voice. ‘N’ all that. You go to tell ‘em what to do ‘n’ they don't listen.

Mark: An’ they don't even do it.

Simon: I've been put up for that, so if I get voted for I've gotta wear a red shirt! But I don’t wanna wear it.

James: They're not gonna listen. If [headteacher] don’t want something, she don't have it.

Mark: She's like, “Oo yeah, we're all listening to you, what you want, you say what you want.” And she won’t ‘ave it.

James: She'll only have what she wants.... nah it’s too much or something like that. So it’s a load of bollocks.

In fact, one participant had been a member of the student council at one point in the past, having been encouraged by the notion that he might be able to change the school. However, it quickly became clear to him, he said, that nothing was really going to happen.

Adam: Yeah, I did, but then when I actually joined nobody would actually listen to what you were saying. Coz they were like, join,
join, join you can change the school, I had a few ideas, join and then "nah, we can’t do that". So I just started going for the food.

The following quotation shows a rare instance of belief in the potential of student voice as well as the fact that the students were willing to compromise and did not just militantly want to constantly get their own way.

Simon: If I was in year 8 and I joined student voice, I'd try and get the uniform changed to jumper and polo.

Richard: Something a bit smarter.

Adam: Yeah.

Leah: Something a bit more comfy.

Simon: Something comfy and respectable.

Adam: Yeah, you can still have a tie on underneath a jumper can’t you.

So there was an understanding that things could not just be as they imagined it. However, as Robinson & Taylor (2012) describe, student voice is easily co-opted into representing dominant agendas. The recognition that nothing would be changed by taking part directly in student voice was one thing, but neither was it set up in order for non-members of the councils to be represented. So when students had a legitimate and reasonable request they generally took it to student support (the part of the school that was responsible for teaching assistants and had a lot to do with challenging students). See the following quote for an example:
Deena: Nothing... but just, right... I know this has got nothing to do with it yeah, but our phone rules, yeah? We’re not allowed our phones out yeah during lessons or nothin’, not even break or lunch time. And I said to ‘em yeah, I said why can’t we have our phones out break and lunch time when we’re not even allowed it out during lessons? I said it’s fair to have ‘em out during break and lunch...

Jenni: Yeah, that’s right you should be allowed...

Me: You actually asked someone that?

Deena: Yeah, I told student support and they said, you’ve gotta take it to student voice. I said why can’t you take it to student voice or something? And I was like you’re the ones who work here. So... I don’t work here. I just come here... It’s not my job...

However, the student voice process did not seem to consist of any requirement by its member to represent students who were not a part of it and so telling them to ‘take it to student voice’ was not very helpful. There was a prevalent idea that people who took part were not like the rest of the student community, adding to the detachment not only between them and any decision making processes but between them and anyone involved in that process.

Me: How much influence do you have over what kind of place it is?

Deena: Nothing.

Me: What about through the student voice?
Deena: I don’t speak to student voice, they’re a bunch of goons.

Jenni: Yeah, they are actually a bunch of goons.

Me: Do they get anything changed, anything done?

Deena: Some things I reckon they do change. But we never see it happen.

Jenni: What do they change?

This builds on previous work on student voice that suggests that the creation of democratic structures is not a sufficient condition for student voice to be heard. Not only does an effective student voice depend on the quality of relationships with teachers, it depends on students being provided with an understanding of the manner in which a representative democracy should work. Building on this detachment, the students came to see their behaviour in school as a route to power. Recognising that they held some power, even if the distribution of it was one sided, their misbehaviour was a means by which to exercise that power and gain control over their lives at school a sense of control that was missing through legitimate means. This took several forms. Firstly, a rejection of the education, or at least parts of the education that were on offer to them. This is effectively expressed as a refusal of a right to something that they wanted but was simply not offered in an appropriate form here:

Charlie: The law says we've got a right to an education, but it's our right to say whether we're going to do it or not. So if we're sitting down and piss arse about then it's our right to be saying we don't want to do this education.
Another reason for not complying with rules was the lack of understanding that the students’ lives were complex and involved relations beyond the realm of the school. If they needed to be in touch with other people by text or by not attending at a given point then they would prioritise that over obeying the rules laid down by the school:

Martin: Because if we have our phones out and they tell us to put them away, what if we're texting our mum or something? Or if we want to sit next to our mates and they tell us to move, what's wrong with that?

There was also the sense that their individuality was being compromised in order to create a compliant corporate body of students.

Elizabeth: Dunno... they're trying to make us all be like one school as if we're all one person when actually we're all individuals. Like they won't even want us to wear nail varnish, like even they won’t let us do anything, and it’s just so strict and the more strict and the more they speak to us like we're shit the more we're going to bend the other way and not listen to them.

This exercising of their power meant that they were gaining control over the way the school operated and allowed them, to some extent, to shape it in the way they wished it to be. Their non-compliance became a substitute for the voice within the school that they wanted to have and this could force themselves to be heard; for example the opening quotation at the start of this section. It is indicative of the fact that the school recognised that this was an issue that
participation in student voice was offered as a remedy for behaviour on occasion. The response demonstrated in this exchange was also indicative of how dismissive the participants were of the idea.

Jenni: You're going to laugh.... Apparently, I'm uncontrollable.

[Laughter]

Me: Who said that?

Jenni: All the teachers.... Tina wants to give me a home visit. She wants to take me out for a meeting for like 2 hours and they want to give me like more responsibility in the school, like...

Elizabeth: Student voice. (Laughing)

Jenni: I said that I'm NOT doing that... have a laugh...

There was also a sense that submitting to the school rules was not a good preparation for their future. In part this was a belief that by exerting their authority and standing up to their teachers it showed that they were not afraid and that they could put their opinions across, exerting their own voice. This was mentioned in several interviews. There was certainly a belief that, at work, power was more shared and so you could speak more frankly with one another. The payback they were engaged with when they were non-compliant in lessons was a reaction against the unequal share of power. For example:

Jenni: If you had that sort of situation at work, which I had the other day, you’d like you could say something coz you’re like, it’s not like someone’s above you and you’re below. You’re all at the same level unless they’re like the boss. So you can
like.... it’s different. We do payback because there’s nothing else we can do. We can’t … like the whole Miss [xxx] thing with Deena, there’s nothing we can do because Miss [xxx] a teacher and she’s a student… and like teachers are teachers they stick together, and it’s Deena’s word against Miss [xxx]. It’s different. At work it’ll be completely different.

Another perceived disconnect between their future and their lives at the time was an absence of risk. This is discussed in more detail in the next chapter. But the absence voice meant that the students could not express this desire to be exposed to risk. The participants were young adults and saw risk as a key feature of the adult world. By being treated as children, rather than young adults, they were being cosseted and protect from this. They wanted the freedom to have their voice heard and to make their own mistakes and learn from them. For example:

Deena: In college, they haven’t got like rules. As much rules as they do ‘ere. If you don’t listen in your lesson then that’s your problem. They’re not going to spoon feed you. They’re not going to tell you off or nothing. If you don’t listen, you don’t listen.

Me: Do you think school would be better if it was like that?

Deena: Yeah.

James: For the ones that wanna learn, let ‘em learn, for the ones that don’t let ‘em get on it.

305
They wanted to be able to have greater choice and if they made a choice that turned out to be a bad one they would like support to rectify it, but the learning experience behind the choice was what they felt was key.

5.3 Conclusion - Relationships and Their Importance for Student Voice

This chapter began with a summary of research focusing on young people’s relationships with the adults who are responsible for them and the importance that the voice of those young people be heard. The relationships formed between students in school and their teachers have a profound influence on the way in which those students engage with school and this was certainly reflected in the data collected in this ethnographic study. The nature of the separate vocational and mainstream groups and their subsequent conversion into the three sub schools offered a good opportunity to compare different styles of teacher-student relationship. The vocational group demonstrated the importance of positive, caring relationships and in particular the impact that these could have of the perceptions of vulnerable, disaffected young people. These relationships could easily be contrasted with the experience of those outside of the vocational group where there was a far greater degree of conflict between the teachers and their pupils.

The perception by the participants of the views of their parents affected their thoughts and opinions. These thoughts and opinions influenced the behaviour of the participants in school and in turn the relationships that they had with their teachers. The parents of the participants formed realistic role models for them and this ultimately caused conflict with the purposes of their education.
The findings here emphasise the findings by Smythe & McInerney (2013) that many young people disengage because they have little voice in shaping their own education. Munn & Lloyd (2005) say that listening to disenfranchised pupils can enable their engagement and this appears to have happened to the vocational group whilst they were in Year 10. The formal voice processes were disregarded, but the supportive relationships that they developed enabled them to be heard by their teachers.

It is clear from this that good relationships with teachers are a vital prerequisite to having voice as a student. Whilst democratic structures are important, they are not the ‘be all and end all’ of this process and there is a danger that the absence of voice at a more basic level may reinforce a lack of agency in school. Young people know they cannot have everything they want and would accept compromise were their voices heard and school staff showed a willingness to cooperate with them. However, the desire for this agency manifests itself as non-compliance and a refusal to accept things as they are. If both students and teachers are conceptualised as ‘becomings’ as recommended by Mannion (2007), understanding that children are not simply dependent and needy (Steele (2005), they can work together to enable the best possible outcomes for both groups.
6 A Compartmentalised Experience of School

This final findings chapter addresses the last research question and focuses on the nature of the work that the participants carried out in school and how this related to the rest of their lives as they saw them. In doing this I also consider the pragmatism of the participants as they come to value the qualifications that school can offer and their dislike of feeling that their childhood is being extended. It follows the same structure as the previous two chapters. There will be a summary of the relevant research findings followed by an exposition of the data from this research linked back to these prior results.

6.1 Vocational Education, Imagined Futures and Cruel Optimism

There has been a consistent conflation in the education systems of western world of the poorly defined term ‘employability’ with ‘inclusion’ and ‘social justice’ (Atkins, 2013). In the UK there have been many policy enactments promoting employability leading to a glut of employability skills agendas seemingly in contrast with rhetorical statements that children are being prepared for life in the knowledge economy (Atkins, 2013). Despite the attention paid to graduate employability, there has been little regard paid to the impact or effectiveness of curricula provided for academically low attaining children from disadvantaged backgrounds in the 14-19 age bracket. These tend to lack conceptual content and offer little other than penurious forms of employment (Simmons, 2009) as well as disregarding local jobs markets and personal identity (Atkins, 2013). Through the types of vocational course offered to certain children in the 14-19 age range, marginalised children from disadvantaged backgrounds are being acclimatised to insecure employment. The provision of
these courses is often justified by recourse to inclusion and improved access to employment and further training (Simmons, 2009; Atkins, 2013). Government policy over recent years has also attempted to encourage further study at higher education institutions. However, there is a tendency for these discourses to alienate certain groups of student and reinforce modes of behaviour that have been instilled by prior experience of learning (Crossouard & Aynsley, 2010).

6.1.1 The Paradox of Vocational Education Provision

For many people, the acquisition of a qualification is the ultimate goal of education. However, the boys in ‘Learning to Labour’ (Willis, 1977) displayed an ingrained scepticism with regard to the value of formal qualifications and the sacrifices required to get them. The ontological nature of learning does not just require a sacrifice of time but of independence and the benefits of instant gratification. Not only is instant gratification immediate but it becomes a lifestyle and is unchanging with time, offering the same thing in 10 years’ time. Becoming a conscientious student will gain qualifications of uncertain value in the short term, but may well negatively affect their abilities to attain immediate gratification at any time in the future. There is an opportunity-cost appraisal of the rewards of conformism and refusing to take part in the competition is a radical act which expresses a refusal to accept their own suppression. Since they rejected the knowledge that school had to offer, they also rejected their institutional definition. Qualifications seemed to them to be a deflection of direct activity, with the demonstration of any required ability able to be performed on the job. The ‘doing’ of an activity being easier than its account. A broader curriculum and vocational qualifications have been seen by many as a means
by which to engage the type of disadvantaged student who Willis was writing about almost 4 decades ago (Steedman & Stoney, 2004). I shall go on to examine the effect of vocational courses on the education of disadvantaged students.

Ross, Green, Brown, Pickering, Schoon & Vignoles (2011) conducted a study for the Department for Education in the UK looking at whether disengaged students who chose vocational options in Year 10 had any effect on outcomes post Year 11. Disengagement was given the following definition:

“Definitions of disengagement included in the study compromise underachievement at Key Stage 3, having poor attitudes to school, aspiring to leave education and training at the age of 16, and playing truant.”

(Ross et al., 2011: 5)

The study revealed that there was no significant difference in outcomes, in terms of either exam results or destinations, or engagement between those who took the vocational courses and those that did not. The reasons that young people offered for choosing these courses were both strategic in that they believed they were required for employment and due to their perceived enjoyment of them. This clearly raises questions as to the meaning and purpose behind these courses which I shall now go on to consider.

Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti (2005) emphasise that we must move beyond a naïve dichotomy between community and academic knowledge and it is of vital importance to connect a curriculum to the real lives of pupils. Curricula that connect to the real world experience of young people can have a substantial influence over engagement with education and its outcomes (Comber & Nixon, 2009). However, when Skattebol, Saunders, Redmond, Bedford & Cass (2012)
investigated the perceptions of young people aged between 11 and 17, they found that students from disadvantaged backgrounds generally want both intellectual challenge and a sense that their school work is connected to their lives and interests. It was clear to the participants in this study which teachers made efforts to deliver lessons that were challenging and these teachers were particularly appreciated by their students (Skattebol, Saunders, Redmond, Bedford & Cass, 2012). Smythe, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson & Wurst (2004) found that it is often the case that optional subjects, as opposed to the core subjects of English, maths and science, are often preferred by disadvantaged students as these have a tendency to connect with the reserves of knowledge that are available to them at home. For young people, maintaining a connection to their learning is intimately linked to the understanding they have of themselves, their community and their future and this connection is not evident during core subject lessons (Smythe, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson & Wurst, 2004).

Smyth, McInerney & Fish (2013) examined the destinations of pupils who were reengaged through vocational provision. They found that, although they may provide a more cordial and supportive environment, vocational education programmes can severely limit the options of students when they come to leave school. The history of many of these students with respect to education is one of conflict and there is an accompanying supposition that they are only capable of the most basic vocational work (Smyth, McInerney & Fish, 2013). Building on the work by Smythe, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson & Wurst (2004), what Smyth et al. (2013) suggest is that much of this vocational work is divorced from the actual talents of the young people engaged in it, despite their preference for
hands on activities and relative underperformance in academic subjects. This underperformance is likely to be due to many factors which ultimately disrupt the lives of these students.

In a review of cross-national research and policy documents, Raffe (2003) found that over time there has been a general move away from vocational education in upper secondary schooling, with a tendency for it to be offered by the tertiary education sector, where it is viewed as having slightly higher status. There are various types of vocational courses which are generally, perhaps unsurprisingly, more likely to lead to employment rather than further study and they are generally have more positive outcomes when the criterion used is employment rather than income or occupational level. Shavit & Müller (2001) observed that vocational courses acted both as a diversion from further education and a professional career and as a safety net; enhancing the likelihood of employment. They linked this to family background, stating that all families have identical aversions to risk. Those from a more privileged background wished to invest in academic qualifications in order to secure a job in the professions, those from less advantaged backgrounds recognised that a diversion from the professions mattered little since this was not a realistic part of their realm of possibilities. Similarly, Keep & James (2010) lay out several reasons why pupils who are likely to occupy less well remunerated positions in the labour market perceive that incentives to learn are weak in the UK. They expound a matrix of interrelated factors including weak occupational identities, limited skill requirements of many jobs and a conception of vocational education that includes no basis for future learning or job progression.
This suggests that there is evidence that vocational education courses at secondary level are appealing to students from disadvantaged backgrounds due to the nature of the work that they offer but that this appeal is only in contrast to conventional academic routes through school. They still fail to provide the kind of education and challenge that these students hunger after. Linked to this there is no perceptible improvement in engagement and, subsequently, no real improvement in employment opportunities. In reality, the effect of vocational courses at secondary level actually closes more doors than it opens. I shall go on to consider how this relates to the transition from school to work and the nature of the lives that students imagine for themselves.

6.1.2 Imagined Futures

Bottrell & Armstrong (2007) argue that transitions between education and work are highly differentiated. The gap between doing well and doing badly once school has been left behind remains rooted in privilege and disadvantage and this social positioning is very influential in terms of whether transitions between education and work or between jobs are conceived in terms of flexibility or precarity (Furlong & Kelly, 2005). In other words, people are not selecting flexible forms of employment as part of a lifestyle choice, but rather there is a situation whereby less advantaged positions in the labour market are forced into an even more precarious situation through government policy. What has happened recently as a result of structural social and economic change is that the nature of the transition from education to work has become increasingly important (Furlong & Kelly, 2005; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). Along with the fading of jobs for life, there has been a concomitant disappearance of a linear
transition from school to work (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). The literature on transitions between compulsory education and work indicates there still exists a direct association between education levels, jobs and employment (Bottrell & Armstrong, 2007). Levels of educational achievement establish positions in an occupational hierarchy. This gradient effect is greater now in determining why people from certain backgrounds acquire certain jobs than it was even in Paul Willis’ (1977) time (Bottrell & Armstrong, 2007).

Young people have internalised neoliberal conceptions of learning where by learning is primarily understood in relation to employment (Crossouard & Aynsley, 2010). This suggests that the value of education can only be interpreted in terms of the employment opportunities that it might bring. The students in Bottrell & Armstrong’s (2007) study saw through the school to work promise. Conforming in the manner of the ‘ear’oles’ (The school conformists dismissed as being overly passive by ‘the lads’) in Learning to Labour (Willis, 1977) was a possibility for action, but for many this was not a realistic possibility. Partially this was because of the perception of an inherent unfairness to school but also because of a rejection of the discourse that it was their difficulties that prevent their conforming from occurring. However, there was still a persistence of the belief that schools had the power to improve individual positioning because jobs feature strongly in their imagined futures. Lumby (2012) observed that some children kept their heads above water by believing that responsibility for their difficulties in school originated with the system itself, upholding a belief in their own capability and a belief in their future success, in order to protect their self-esteem. This contrasts with findings from Alamillo-Martinez, (2014) that non-academic students tend to believe that their
underachievement is their own fault, refusing to blame school structures and prevailing power structures. These are two different reactions to the fact that young people in school have been socialised to perceive themselves as autonomous subjects fabricating their own present and future and creating the selves they are and may develop into (Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody, 2001). Disadvantaged students either believe that their failure to achieve is a result of their own failings or they use this sense of autonomy to resist negative perceptions of themselves.

As I have shown, the period of transition from school to employment is less linear than it once was and young people still see education as powerful in terms of the type of work that they can achieve once they have left school. The next paragraphs will examine the mechanics of what is taking place during this transitional period. Zinneker (1990) identified that there has been an extension of the youth phase and that we might refer to the ages between 15 and 20 as ‘post adolescence’. The transition to paid employment during this phase has become postponed and may even be seen as a period of ‘flexible underemployment’ (Beck, 1992). Maguire, Ball & MacRae (2001) suggest that many school leavers enter a period of refusing adulthood as a part of this post adolescence, with their hopes and dreams lacking congruence with what they see as adulthood. It may be the case that what they are actually doing is reconfiguring what it means to be an adult in a period of late modernity. In another qualitative study by Maguire, Ball & MacRae (2013), the end of compulsory education represented an escape from learning. It was not that the young people in this study did not want to work, they simply desired control over
their own destiny with the idea of a job being a generalised category to be occupied rather than any specific ambition.

Possibilities at the age of 16 are constrained as much by educational pasts as by future opportunities and one way of making sense of decision making at this age is to consider the role of imagined futures (Ball, Macrae & Maguire, 1999). Ball, Macrae & Maguire identify three broad categories of imagined future from the point of leaving school. In their typology, there are those that have clear, stable and possible imagined futures; either children who intend to go on to study A Levels or those with strong vocational commitments who are already embedded in work through part time jobs or extra curricula activities. These children who have a robust concept of the vocational direction they intend to follow have the strongest link between their vocational choice, sense of self and their learner identity. The second group have a future direction but with a degree of uncertainty about it. Their family backgrounds do provide them with a clear sense of what is possible, they tend to have some academic success but learning is seen as necessary for a route into their future rather than an affirmation of their goals and intentions. The third and final classification are those for whom the future is always short term. The options for these students are dictated by their economic position and are by necessity in a position of having to wait and see.

Many studies suggest young people explore pathways from school into work because they fit with the sense of identity that an individual has or would like to have (Higgins, Vaughan, Phillips & Dalziel, 2008). These identities are particularly dynamic since these young people are at the cusp of moving from
childhood to adulthood. By examining the meaning of young people’s decisions and actions concerning their transitions from school to work, Vaughn & Roberts (2007) found that certain paths are valued for what they can do for an individual in terms of reinforcing or offering new possibilities for their sense of self as much as the specific content. They found that these meanings coalesced around two major themes, that of security and exploration. Security in the sense of committing to or attempting to escape from given pathways and exploration either in the sense of experimenting before ultimately settling on a career or because of a general unhappiness with their choices based on an inability to interpret information given to them. Those that sought security through escape particularly pursued a form of adulthood that was no longer contingent on limits to who they were or what they could be.

As school children come to make decisions about their futures, their interpretation of the risks and opportunities available to them, whilst contingent on their backgrounds, are pragmatic and tightly bound with their identities (Lawy, 2002). Students moving from their early teenage years into post-adolescence tend to have aspirations that become more focused on the reality of their daily lives rather than the realms of possibility (Lawy & Wheeler, 2013). A career is no longer structured, but rather a process, in the sense that it may take the form of several different occupations over the course of a lifetime (Wijers & Meijers, 1996). Additionally, workplaces are increasingly becoming sites of learning and knowledge needs to be conceived of in terms of what it can do and how it can help individuals be in the world. Those young people who understood their path from childhood through to adulthood as an exploration are far more in line with this understanding of career development than those who
perceived this route as a search for security (Vaughan, Roberts & Gardiner, 2006).

Working in an Australian context, Skattebol et al. (2012) found that school structures were overwhelmingly focused on the end game of moving children into the world of work or further educational opportunities. For children from underprivileged backgrounds, this is one of many challenges taking place in their lives and it is of more use to gradually approach this transition point. School completion and retention tends to be used interchangeably with school participation. Young people who leave school at the earliest opportunity tend to be marginalised as being incapable of seeing the intrinsic worth of education and characterised as lacking maturity. However, the young men in Taylor’s (2002) study, also in Australia, contest that logic, believing it was those who stayed in school unnecessarily who were immature and lacked motivation. In another study carried out by Taylor (2005), she again identified that the narratives that young people ‘spin’ for themselves is as much about what they want to do with their lives; relating to lifestyle choices and identification as much as the specific job they do. The danger of a relentless focus on career decisions is that these broader concerns are relegated to insignificance in school. The participants in Taylor’s study were not concerned with getting jobs in the knowledge economy, not due to any anti-intellectualism, but because of their broader concerns relating to their lives.

What I have argued from the literature here shows that the imagined futures that young people have for themselves is a significant influence on their identity. As Vaughn & Roberts (2007) demonstrated, this identity, informed by an
imagined future, is implicated in the value that young people place on certain pathways through the transition from education into work. As young people move through their post-adolescence these imagined future become more tightly bound with the reality of their daily lives (Lawy & Wheeler, 2013) and they tend to become more pragmatic in their decisions (Lawy, 2002).

6.1.3 Cruel Optimism

For some, this preparation for the world of work has been regarded as a form of cruel optimism. Lauren Berlant describes cruel optimism as a condition whereby something that a person desires is an obstacle to their flourishing. Optimistic relations are not inherently cruel but become cruel once the object that is attractive obstructs the aim that initially drew a person to it (Berlant, 2011). To be optimistic is not to be delusional, but rather it is a condition that makes life endurable and school is among the institutions that Oliver Bennett (2015) sees as propagating this necessary optimism. However, despite the contraction of the social-democratic promise of the post war era and the failure of neo-liberalism to provide opportunities to attain the good life, people remain attached to unattainable fantasies. This attachment to compromised conditions of possibility exemplifies the dynamic of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011).

What has been discussed here suggests that, in general, the offering of vocational courses to specific groups of students is hampering the potential of these students and their ability to achieve the imagined future that they desire. The selection of vocational courses that restrict their options in the long term due to a marginal preference for these over conventional academic routes is an example of cruel optimism. They are an attempt to blur the line between school
and the work place but, although ostensibly they are more suited to their preference for hands on work (Smyth et al., 2013), they fail to adequately challenge students in the manner that they would like to be as suggested by Skattebol et al. (2012). What many post-adolescents want is an opportunity to challenge conventional notions of adulthood, a blurring of the boundaries between education and work and a chance to realise an imagined future that is relevant to their identity and background. What many post-adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds experience is the cruel optimism that Berlant describes. They believe they are on pathways that maximise their opportunities once they leave school as Ross et al. (2011) suggest, but the evidence implies that they are actively following a course that restricts them.

I have looked at these specific areas of research because much of the data gathered revolves around students’ preference for hands on, practical learning. The vocational group were obviously provided with this type of learning and it is interesting to contrast their feelings about their education with the mainstream students who maintained a preference for this type of learning but did not receive it.

6.2 The Links Between Schoolwork and Student Futures

The nature of the work that was provided by the school for its students and the links that this had with their futures had a significant impact on the formation of the participants’ identities. The context in which the research was carried out provided a very interesting opportunity to compare the impact of differing approaches to school curricula on children. This was because the nature of the curriculum that the vocational group pursued was so different to that of the
mainstream group. This also allowed an examination of how schoolwork and its resulting qualifications impacted on the imagined futures of the participants. This section focuses on the findings relating to schoolwork, followed by those relating to qualifications, then imagined futures.

6.2.1 The Nature of Schoolwork and its Relationship to Identity and Resistance

6.2.1.1 The Nature of Schoolwork in Year 10

The contrast between the work on offer to the vocational and mainstream groups in Year 10 and their feelings towards this highlights many advantages and disadvantages to the vocational approach. The subsequent change as the year group was split into the three sub schools in Year 11 also emphasised these. In the vocational group in Year 10, students were often provided with very practical activities and were allowed a far greater degree of autonomy than students in a more conventional classroom. These often took the form of constructing objects from wood and there was a very clear sense of engagement whilst I observed the students in these sessions. There were few moments when they were ‘off task’ and they were all producing something either individually or by working together. It seemed that all of the talk in these lessons was focused on the work and there was very much a sense that they were engaged in something productive and worthwhile. These practical sessions were a significant focus of the photographs that the students produced whilst left with the cameras and the focus and atmosphere present in these lessons is exemplified in this picture.
However, in contrast to their behaviour in the lessons, their descriptions of the work after the event were fairly negative. They tended to emphasise the unrealistic nature of the work and its disconnection with what they expected to be doing when they left school, as in this discussion focusing on the photograph above:

Me: Ok, so where is it?

Martin: In construction.

Brandon: We're making the chairs. Pretty shit.

Me: You're making the chairs.
Brandon: Yeah.

Me: That’s pretty shit? Why?

Martin: It just is.

Brandon: Pure shit.

Me: It’s boring?

Martin: They don’t give you much help...

Charlie: If... you ain’t going to make a chair in real life, you ain’t going to make a chair outside of school are you?

Me: Aren’t you?

Charlie: Hmmm, today, let’s make a chair.....

They were keen to stress, however, that they felt more comfortable with the hands on work and that they enjoyed working with the machines as opposed to carrying out abstract, written, work.
38 Machine Tools

Martin: We like doing the work, using machines and that...

Me: Do you feel more comfortable...

Charlie: Prefer hands on things...

Several times, the quality of the material that they had to work with was raised and this seemed to be the overwhelming issue with the work that they were doing. Much more so than its relevance to their future. The fact that their post hoc view of the work in lessons contrasted with their behaviour in lessons seemed to be at least partially explained by their frustration with the material they had to work with. For example, much of the wood that they were given to work with was offcuts which they had to sort through to find appropriately sized
pieces and they could rarely find pieces of the same type. This wood was also often wet or rotten. It seemed clear to them that they were offered this material due to them being seen as second class by the school - not valued in the same way that more academic students were. In their view, the poor quality of the material leant the work an unrealistic air, separating it from their view of their future. They believed that once they left school, whatever work they were asked to do would not involve such poor materials.

39 Bird Boxes Made from Poor Quality Material

Brandon: It’s alright but we had to use scrap wood again...

Martin: That why it was so crap...

Charlie: It was wet...
Martin: Look at that one there, I don’t know whose that one is but they’ve got so many… different wood there it looks pretty shit.

Charlie: It’s mine.

Martin: No offence if it’s yours.

Charlie: Yeah, we had to choose from so many different pieces of wood in there, all different sizes.

Brandon: And then they’re all wet and rotten so we had to screw it all together.

Charlie: Yeah, and mine snapped.

Brandon: And when you screw it, it snaps and stuff just goes straight through it.

Martin: Coz were vocational we get treated differently. We get shit wood. We don’t do work experience, nothing.

Jenna: We’re outcasts.

The use of the word ‘outcasts’ makes clear their perspective that they were not valued in the same way as other members of the school student population.

They respect each other’s work, clearly locating the blame for the poor quality of the outcome with the school. The view that the school considered them to be second class also extended to other areas; such as the motor mechanics room. Despite evidently being very absorbed by the work that could potentially be done in this room they felt that the resources in the room were being kept for the mainstream students. There was a sense that they were not the ‘C and
above’ students that are so valuable for the schools league table position and that, as a result, the school did not consider them a priority.

40 The Car in the Motor Mechanics Room

Me: Have you done much work on that?

Martin: No.

Charlie: Not really, we've done nothing.

Brandon: Well, we were meant to change the tyres but we've not been allowed to.

Me: Why’s that?

Brandon: We haven't. Don’t know why.
Me: Ok.

Charlie: They're saving it for mainstream basically.

Me: Is that what you think?

Brandon: Yeah, coz now it's not like that anymore. It's all in parts. Like, all the wheels and brakes and that are...

Their disappointment became focused on the quality of the resources available to them and became a means by which to defend their identities. The school had given them no choice over taking the vocational route through Year 10 and the result of this was that they had come to be viewed as second class citizens of the school. As with the students in Lumby’s study (2012), they were defending themselves by locating responsibility for their difficulties externally, enabling a positive view of their own capability and the possibility of future success.

Occasionally the products of the Year 10 vocational group’s practical sessions were made with a view to selling them to staff and students of the school. When the product of the students work was sold they received some of the income generated. This was part of an attempt by the school to try and to provide a curriculum that mirrored life after school by giving a financial reward for their work. However, it was still seen by the students as artificial due to the small amount of money that students received.

Brandon: We were making big wooden reindeers to make money.

Me: So this was sold to make money?

Both: Yeah.
Me: And who got the money?

Brandon: We got...

Martin: We got hardly any of the money.

Brandon: Yeah, they’d sell every reindeer, like the big ones went for like £12.

Martin: And the medium ones go for a fiver,

Brandon: And the small ones...

Martin: And I did most of those. I did like 4 or 5 and I only got like 8 quid.

Brandon: Yeah, we only get like 50p of it so...

Martin: And we’re making benches now so we’ll probably get like 12 quid.

Brandon: No... I got 18 pound 50 for the reindeers.

Martin: The benches gotta go to the school, then it goes on something else, then it goes to us.

Brandon: Yeah.

Martin: So we get the lowest money.

While the activities were seen as contrived, the vocational students gained a lot of satisfaction from seeing their handiwork around the school. Many of the photographs they took revolved around the picnic tables that they had been involved in building. They clearly spent a lot of time there and spoke quite proudly of their involvement in building them. The fact that these picnic tables were prominently placed around the school allowed them a means by which to show themselves as worthwhile and capable. This enabled a defence of their
identities and a link between their present and their imagined future where they
would be engaged with meaningful activities that provided some monetary
reward. This blurring of the boundaries between education and work provided a
connection between the understandings they had of themselves and of their
imagined future.

41 Proud of the Picnic Tables

In contrast with this, the students in the Year 10 mainstream group felt that their
access to practical work was restricted and they were rarely given the chance to
physically engage with school work. Not just in the sense of hands on work in
the way that the vocational were provided with, but in the also in the sense of
PE and performing arts. They frequently associated their classwork with writing
which was not perceived by them as being entirely valuable. Whilst it was
recognised that not all their school work could be of a ‘practical’ nature, the
general feeling was that it was severely lacking in their curriculum. This talk
demonstrated a preference for vocational work, whilst understanding the limits
that it might place on them in their futures.

Mark: Nah, I mean yeah, like, not everything practical but, like, half and
half.

Simon: Yeah, we hardly do anything practical.

James: Most of my mates, yeah, they learn from practical. Like, if we do
a practical they take it in. But we're always writing an' that.
Like, 6 hour lessons of writing. They don't take it all in.

When the mainstream students discussed practical work, they made it clear that
what they meant by this was not necessarily that the work should represent the
real world in the way that the work carried out by the vocational group was often
predicated on creating something in order to sell. They were very clear in
contrasting theory and practice; recognising that they needed the theory but that
this theory was of little value on its own. They understood that the theoretical
work enabled further study and this kept future doors open for them. The
consistent nature of written theoretical work was branded as boring time and
time again and a key reason why they misbehaved during lessons. Many of the
photographs that were taken by this group revolved around bored students in
class staring out of windows or pulling faces at the camera.
There was also a positive feeling relating to working in the computer rooms, specifically when set a challenging question and left to find possible solutions to them. This was not a direct result of working on the computers, but rather a preference for using the internet as a tool to discover relevant information. There were many photographs taken whilst working in the computer room and looking at these prompted this type of exchange:

Deena: We had to find out a question, yeah... like, I had a question of "Could you fit London’s population into a thousand double decker buses?" But you gotta find out what the population
of London is, how many people can fit into a double
decker ‘n’ shit like that but I found that you couldn’t do it.....

[...]

Me: So, did you like that sort of lesson where you’re sort of given a
challenge more than when someone’s stood there talking
to you?

Deena: Mmmm...

43 The Computer Room

This reiterates the findings by Skattebol et al. (2005) that students enjoy an
intellectual challenge. It also clarifies that the use of the term ‘practical’ by the
students in the mainstream group did not solely refer to work that engaged them
physically but also independently engaging with questions and being given the opportunity to think for themselves.

It is worth contrasting this approach to school work with a specific Science lesson that was bought up in one on the photograph elicitation interviews.

44 James and the Science Teacher

Me: Okay, what’s going on here?

Deena: I took that!

Esther: Look at Mr [xxx]!

Deena: I took that... Jamie....that’s when we was in science making paper aeroplanes and I’ve got in a shit coz it was shit...
Me: Why?

Deena: Coz it was so boring. Making paper aeroplanes. It was so shit.

Me: Why were you making paper aeroplanes?

Deena: To find out if we could make them travel faster....

James: How you could change it so you could make it hit a target...like, would you change a wing, would you change the weight.

Deena: Yeah, and Jamie was just talking to Mr [xxx] about the variables! ‘n’ shit weren’t you Jamie.

James: Mmmm.

Science was often cited as being particularly boring, which is perhaps in contrast with what might be expected given the practical nature of the subject. In observations students were frequently disengaged with the work as in the discussion around the photograph above; often ignoring instructions from the teacher and not attempting to engage with the work at all. It appeared that this was very much to do with the lack of independence around the applied work. There was very little independent decision making and experiments were expected to be carried out according to the design of the teacher. The lack of engagement with practical work in science led many teachers to rely either on showing videos or simply carrying out the experiments themselves to illustrate the theoretical points that they were trying to make. This became a vicious circle as the students became less and less engaged with the lesson as they had less and less input into how the work was carried out. This reiterates what was seen by Smythe et al. (2004) in terms of the importance of maintaining a link between a student’s future, their understanding of themselves and their community. The
participants desired independent work that enabled them to tackle challenging problems. As recognised by Gonzales et al. (2005) curricula must be linked to the real experience of students, moving beyond an unsophisticated contrast between community and academic knowledge. As exemplified by the discussions about science lessons here, teachers did not appear to be linking these together and students reacted negatively to the spoon fed nature of the knowledge on offer.

Much of the theoretical style of work that they covered was also dismissed as irrelevant. There were many claims that this work would be of no use in their future and that, if you did need it, it ought to be covered in college rather than in school. In particular, areas of Maths such as Algebra were criticised for this, although many of the mainstream students did state that they enjoyed much of the number work that they carried out. There was a definite feeling that all subjects should be optional in order to make their education relevant to their future. Option subjects were consistently celebrated as the areas in which they were successful. In part because of the simple fact that they had elected to study them and in part because they tended to be the subjects in which had a better balance between theory and practice. Having said this, it was regularly suggested that their failure to engage with the work and succeed at school was in part their own. Although they felt that the teachers should be making the effort to provide them with activities that were stimulating and engaging, if they were not provided with these the ultimate responsibility for success remained their own. Even when the content of the lesson was acceptable to them, the very fact that they disliked school as a whole inhibited them from fully engaging with the task. The lessons which were based on activities that they considered
worthwhile were tainted by association with the place in which they were taking place.

Deena: It wasn't boring. I enjoyed it. It was alright. I was just...

Me: What were you doing?

Deena: Doing newspaper articles.

[...]

Me: Why's that?

Deena: Because I don't like the school.

Me: You don't like the school? But you didn’t mind that lesson.

Deena: Yeah, I don’t mind the lesson, I just hate the school.

In contrast with the vocational students who blamed the school for their problems (as in Lumby (2012)), these students seem to have more in common with the children in the study by Alamillo-Martinez (2014) blaming some inherent fault of their own for their underachievement. There appears to be no simple dichotomy between the two loci of blame, although the vocational students tended to be more defensive and blame systemic features and the mainstream students laid the blame internally.

The vocational group were very keen to show that they were achieving more now that they had been placed in an environment that they felt suited them. It was as if they sensed that their situation was perceived as being easy and were compelled to defend this slight. Many of the photographs that they took were of pieces of written work, as though they needed to show that their school day was
not just about building and making objects leading discussions such as the following.

45 Written Work by the Vocational Group

Me: So this is in the normal vocational room yeah?

Martin: Yeah, we was doing portfolio work...

Brandon: They try and make us do that every day.

Me: Why? Tell me about that room. Why was it important to take a picture of the work?

Martin: To see how we're doing...

Charlie: To see how much stuff is getting done
Me: Just to show that you are doing stuff?

Martin: Yeah.

Charlie: Yeah, not sitting on our ass doing shit.

Me: Do you think you do more in that room than in errr...?

Charlie: Yeah. We do more in there.

Jenna: I’ve done more in vocational than I ever have done in like Year 8 and Year 9.

Despite the enjoyment of the practical work and their need to show that they were actually engaged in written work as well, they were clear about their frustration at their seeming lack of academic progress as suggested by the following exchange.

Me: How do you think you are doing with the academic side of things?

Charlie: Shit. In one word. Shit.

Me: Do you know what your grades are?

Charlie: Don’t have a clue.

Me: How about you Martin?


Their preference was for the practical parts of their curriculum and they felt that this was more representative of their future but they still saw the importance of school in terms of academic qualifications. Because of this they felt a lack of control over their progress in school. They were aware of the importance of
qualifications and desired an intellectual challenge and in this sense at least
times have changed since the time of Learning to Labour (Willis, 1977).
Alongside this, the fact that their academic work was broken up around their
practical work meant that they could not retain their focus even though it was
clearly relevant to the practical work they were doing alongside.

Charlie: Yeah, we didn't finish it. They did this... say we did a unit, like,
‘lectrical unit. We do it for like 3 days. We leave it for about
a month. Then we'll go back to it. An’ it’s like in (???) it
took us a day to finish it off (???). If you hadn't kept us on
that we'd've done that unit totally and moved onto another.
But they don't like doin’ that, they like mixing up our units.
An’ it fucks me off. Coz 'e asks us what did we do last
time... thinking... how the fuck do I know... you, we just did
this one last week and now you're sayin' we're doin’ this
one this week. Why don't you just keep us...
The students also implied that much of their portfolio work was more or less
dictated to them by the teachers. This fed into the conflict in the participants’
minds around the pointless and irrelevant nature of the academic work that led
to qualifications and the fact that they considered those qualifications and the
work that led to them the natural purpose of schooling. There was also a side
issue that when the teachers made an error and that error was replicated
across all their work they had to then produce alternative work that was
appropriate. This, again, fed into their understanding of the pointlessness of the
activities.
Charlie: Yeah, we've done this, yeah, we did erm... we've been in land based for about, not even a year now. I got, you know, one of them big folders you can get, filled it up. They ripped it all out. Everyone had to start again, all because the teachers... apparently we got it wrong, but it was the teachers who were telling US what to do. Say like this, they went "write this and write that" ‘n’ we writ it, now it’s done. They look back over it, they say it’s all dope, basically we send it off and everything then it comes back and its wrong and we've got to do everything again. ‘n’ now we have to start from scratch again. Doing everything again.

Although this shows that they value academic work, it also demonstrates that they require it to link to their practical work if it is not to simply repeat the dichotomisation between academic and community knowledge. On top of this was the lack of care shown towards their work by teachers. Several times the vocational pupils indicated that teachers were responsible for the loss of their coursework. The representative quote from my field notes below demonstrates this inconsiderate treatment of their work combined with their understanding of the necessity of theoretical work, again feeding into their frustration at the futility of their schooling. This frustration at the lack of care shown towards the products of their effort was shown across the board, but it was far more prevalent in the vocational group.

We are in a Hair and Beauty class and Ella and Chloe are cross because their work is lost. The teacher says it’s been taken out due
to plagiarism. Their files have been rifled through and the girls are cross because their work has been messed up. They say they do the same practical work over and over and they are fed up. They say they need to do some theory in order to pass and so are refusing to do more practical work until this demand is met. The rest of the class are practicing facial treatments.

Although there was an awareness of the importance of academic work, there was also a great deal of frustration expressed over the relatively narrow nature of their curriculum. Subjects such as music and drama were not available to them as options and whilst photographing areas of the school that were important to them they highlighted abandoned musical instruments, as in the photograph below.
46 Instruments Dumped in the Cupboard

Me: I was interested that you took that one, why did you take that one?

Brandon: Coz they've just dumped all of the instruments in there.

Martin: We used to have music lessons. I wanted to do music...

Me: Yeah, you said before...

Brandon: They just cut our music lesson out.

Me: What about the mainstream kids? Do they not have music?

All: Yeah!

Brandon: That’s just coz they’ve got...

Martin: They do it Friday.
Brandon: Yeah, only some of them do it though.

The quotation above highlights that, although they appreciated the more practical nature of what they were doing, there was a clear sense that the absence of choice and diversity in their curriculum was frustrating. The school was very much dictating to them what they could and could not do in terms of their curriculum, restricting them from certain subjects that they would like to study. Having looked at the nature of the work that was on offer to the participants in Year 10, I shall now go on to discuss the data pertaining to their work in Year 11.

6.2.1.2 The Changes to the Curriculum in Year 11

As the participants moved into Year 11, the distinction between the groups became slightly more blurred as some moved from mainstream and joined the vocational group in sub school A. The students in sub school B still wanted to define themselves in opposition to those in sub school A but their preconceptions as to what went on in this sub school was challenged by the fact that some of their friends were now in it (see the quote below). The members of sub school B still wanted the more practical work that was on offer in sub school A but not the identity of a group that they saw as devoid of prospects. The quote below also illustrates that there was a distinction within sub school A between the former vocational and the former mainstream students.

Simon: We don’t just do vocational, practical...

Mark: You do. You always go down the woods...

Simon: No, WE don’t...
Esther: Sub school A don’t...

Simon: No, not us Year 11s... we went down there last week because we
done cooking and we...

Mark: You do cooking. That’s not even your option....

Simon: Yeah, that’s coz we was cooking for the whole of sub school A.

We was making cakes. Year 11 did that for sub school A.

Those that had moved from the mainstream group into sub school A felt that
they wanted to be distinguished from those that had been in vocational during
Year 10. The nature of the work that they did was a key means through which
they did this. They tried to portray themselves as still completing the same type
of academic work that they completed in Year 10 and this was, in fact, largely
the case. The overlap they had with the former vocational students was in core
subjects and in employability skills lessons. They still completed their option
subjects as before, whilst the vocational students were in their practical
sessions.

As the participants progressed through Year 11 this overlap fed into the
members of sub school B becoming more envious of what they perceived as
happening in sub school A. They believed that they would prefer the
environment, the teachers and the work that was available and that those
students in sub school A had a greater degree of control over their school lives
in there. There was still the recognition that they were working towards GCSE,
but there was suspicion that this was because GCSE results were beneficial to
the school.
Me: Are you envious of them?

James: More practical work, but that's why they're in there, coz they don't like writing stuff, but still... if had a choice I'd be in there now. Coz I wanna do that.

Deena: Yeah, that's what I would do, they don't... I would rather be in sub school A than sub school B coz they got more practical things. But they put us in sub school B because you get more GCSEs in sub school B and sub school C than you would sub school A. Coz it's all practical and BTECs and that...

Leah: I'd choose to be in sub school A.

James: I work better at practical. That's why I did res mat an all that.

This increased envy of those in sub school A bolstered their desire for more practical activities, both in the sense of hands on work and in the sense of independence referred to earlier, and their general distaste for abstract, theoretical work. Many of the members of sub school B stated a regret that they were not in sub school A, but when pressed they still recognised that they thought that their diet of work was best for their future prospects where they were, equally in terms of the qualifications on offer and in terms of protecting themselves from being branded with the identity of those who were previously in the vocational stream. The quotation below highlights their continuing frustration with the character of their work and the environment that they have to do it in but also ultimately their desire to protect their identity as people who were worth investing in.
Mark: It’s always book work, copying off the board. That’s all it is. It’s just pointless. We don’t learn nothing from just writing it down, do we.

Me: But you don’t think you’d be better off in sub school A where they’re doing more practical work?

Mark: I don’t know, that’s the thing. I don’t know... I’d end up like a dosser then. Coz they’ve got all the retards in there.

Jenni: No, I think I’m in the right school, so if I was in sub school C it would be too much for me and in sub school A, they treat you like you’re a spastic.

Me: But would you prefer it if there was more practical work? As a part of what you’re doing?

Jenni: we could only really do practical work in science... like, in English, you could probably do practical work but it would have to be out of school, going to shows and that. It’s just science that does my head in, sat there with a book and like the environment you’re in as well. When we used to be in like a science room it would be real dark and horrible, I just wouldn’t want to go in there. If I was in science up here it would be completely different I reckon. If that makes sense.

The former vocational group within sub school A continued with their practical sessions and continued to fully engage with them. They stopped complaining about them being unlike their future working environments and often stated to
me during these lessons that they were happy with the fact that they were able
to sell the results of their work to people. Just prior to the Christmas break in
Year 11 they were making Christmas trees from old palettes and reindeer from
pieces of wood salvaged from the woods between the school and the common
(similar to the activity mentioned earlier that they did in Year 10). The focus that
they had in Year 10 remained, but they refused the help of the teachers more
often, for example when trying to break the palettes up. The atmosphere was
even less like a classroom than previously and much more like a workshop, with
staff and students working towards a common goal together, as this short
extract from my field notes reveals:

The room smells of wood – caused by all the sawing and drilling.
Everyone working very hard, totally focused on what they are doing.
It’s really noisy, there’s lots of hammering as well as all the sawing
and drilling. The radio is on but it has to be really loud to be heard.
Can hear and speak if close, but not at a distance. Mike offers to
continue cutting wood for them during break but Ella is insistent that
she does it herself. There is actually some reluctance to leave the
room at break, but Mike tells them that they have to go outside for a
bit.

But despite this palpable enjoyment of these sessions and their perceived value
there was frustration that they had been allowed to study so little of the core
subjects and this would now impede their ability to find employment once they
left school. They began to believe that the purpose of school was not
necessarily solely about enjoyment. I recorded many statements to this effect
from most of the participants who began in the vocational group and this quote is representative of their feelings:

Jenna: It was bad. It was like doing my English and maths and I didn’t really enjoy it. But when I think about it now, it’s not about enjoying it, it’s like... at the end of the day I’m going to walk out of here with no GCSEs because of that.

It is clear from this that the students on the vocational pathway realised that their options were being shut down around them and that their expectations were not being raised, but rather they were being pandered to in order that they keep in line. As many of the former vocational students moved into the alpha stream they were glad for the opportunity to focus on their core subjects, feeling that they had learnt enough from the rest of their experience in school and they now needed the focus on these. They were not distracted from this by any of the other issues that they encountered through attending school every day.

Me: Ok. How are you doing at school?

Jenna: Doing better now.

Me: Now you’re in Alpha?

Jenna: Yeah.

Me: What subjects do you do?

Jenna: Work skills, maths and English.

Me: And that’s it? How often are you in school?
Jenna: Ermmm... I don’t come in Mondays and Wednesdays do a full day, Tuesday and a Thursday 2 hours and a Friday 1 hour every other week.

Across all the participants there existed a desire for the work to be creative and have space for the students to express themselves through their effort. When they discussed an antipathy for theoretical work what they meant was the constrained nature of what might be called bookwork. For example, the freedom that the question about squeezing London’s population into double decker busses is abstract and theoretical but it allowed an opportunity to think more freely and research the information that was needed to solve the problem. The fact that this was explicitly recognised as engaging and worthwhile by a student who displayed some of the most challenging behaviour in the school helps to establish that the nature of the work on offer is a cause of much student resistance. It links to their view that, when they have left school, their future will revolve around activity that requires much more independence. This is why the perception of the work that was on offer to the vocational group was so attractive to the students outside of that group. Although the actual experience of that group did not tie in with this perception. They desired greater intellectual challenge despite enjoying certain aspects of their work.

The school placed some of their most challenging students into the vocational group and provided them with work that would lessen their overtly resistant behaviour and this was to some extent successful. However, this came at a great cost to these individual students and their subsequent inability to gain meaningful qualifications. As they realised that their situation meant that they would be leaving school with nothing to show for the time they had spent there,
they became more overtly resistant and ended up being effectively removed from school altogether. Demonstrating an informal understanding of much of what is written in the literature about the value of vocational courses in the secondary sector and the manner in which they close down opportunities for students. Having looked at the impact of the nature of the school work that was on offer to the participants, I shall now go on to discuss the effect that the need for qualifications, whether perceived or actual, had on the participants.

6.2.2 The Dilemma Posed by Qualifications

As I shall reveal in this section, on one hand, qualifications were seen as largely irrelevant to the work and life of the participants once they had left school. However, qualifications were seen by them all as a gateway for continuing in to further education and training.

The children had seen plenty of older friends and relatives get work and make money without having any degree of success at school. This was particularly the case with parents, as exemplified by this quote:

Mark: My dad failed and he got a decent job.

[...]

Mark: Yeah, he’s got no qualifications or anything like that.

In contrast with this, some people were seen to have been relatively successful at school and yet did not have the kind of job or income that the participants were interested in:
Adam: Like my brother, he’s got 2 A-levels and he can’t even get a job, like pickin’ up dirt and shit. [He explains later that he means landscape gardening]

[Laughter...]

Adam: He can’t even get a job with it and he’s got 2 A-levels.

The participants felt that they had been told that gaining GCSEs was of prime importance, however exam results appeared to them to be unlikely to have any significant impact on their future success. They acknowledged that you needed to have some of the skills that were being taught to them in school for any job, but the actual end result was, in essence, valueless.

Leah: This school can’t be connected to my future if I’m going to do an apprenticeship in a hairdressers. I’m pretty sure I don’t need English and Maths for that.

Simon: You do need English and Maths. For any job.

Richard: No you don’t. You could open your own salon. I seen it on some program. Don’t have to have nothing.

Leah: Yeah, my auntie did. You don’t.

Simon: You need English skills so you can actually speak to people.

[Laughter]

Me: But you’re talking about the skills, she’s talking about the qualifications.

Adam: Yeah, you can still speak...
Leah: I’ve still learnt it, don’t need the As and Bs and Cs... And open a salon!

This exemplifies a contradiction in the thinking of the participants. On some occasions they would acknowledge the importance of qualifications and the necessity of obtaining them, even if they did not directly relate to their imagined future. On other occasions, such as above, they would dismiss them as unnecessary documentation. This relates back to the idea of cruel optimism and the belief that school tried to engender in them that if they work hard and gain the qualifications on offer at school then anything is possible. The view of the documentation as unnecessary was an example of the participants seeing through this charade and refusing to focus on things that are not relevant to them and may actually stand in the way of their thriving. Much of what they are expected to study is irrelevant to the future they imagine for themselves and actively impacts negatively on their sense of self.

There were several occasions, both during interviews and during observations, when there was disbelief that some of the work that they were doing could lead to qualifications, including GCSEs. Simon, for example, was incredulous when I was sat with him during an employability skills session that he had been told was worth “2 to 4 GCSEs”. This credentialisation of non-academic skills was often part of the reason that GCSEs were held in such contempt by the students. Mainstream students in Year 10 had been told that the vocational course was not better because they would not be getting GCSEs. This tempered their dislike of their less practical curriculum but when they discovered that non-academic work carried a significant GCSE equivalence they could not believe it. Here there is an informal realisation of what both Atkins (2013) and
Simmons (2009) found in the form of a questioning of the worth of a focus on employability and its lack of conceptual content.

Regardless of the benefit of gaining good grades or otherwise in terms of employment, there was an acceptance that, were you to continue with your education, good grades were what you needed to facilitate this. This lead to a clear split between the vocational and mainstream groups in Year 10. Overall, the vocational group felt that this meant they were being kept in school pointlessly. The doors to college or university had been shut and it was accepted that they were not going to get what could be thought of as a ‘good job’ so they might as well be allowed to leave school much earlier.

Chloe: That’s what I mean. You go to school for 10 odd years an you get some qualifications and some GCSEs out of it but yet again you still can’t get a good enough job unless you go to college or university. So it pisses me off that we have to stay in school for so long.

There was a general lack of awareness among the vocational group of what qualifications they could actually achieve and whether or not they were equivalent to GCSEs. They often referred to working towards “more qualifications” but at the same time they were conscious of not working towards GCSEs in subjects that they perceived as important like Maths, English and Science. Not only this, but there was a general rejection of the idea of paper qualifications. They would rather work their way through life and their career gaining and building on experience rather than accumulating abstract documentation. For instance:
Charlie: Back in the olden days they used to do it by ... the only way you got a job was by experience. Now it’s all qualifications and all that shit and bollocks and crap.

This links clearly to their preference for the type of work that they were doing in Year 10 and to a slightly lesser extent in Year 11. The fact that it was more like a work place involved with the creation of actual physical objects and less geared up for the achievement of what seemed like them to abstract and meaningless credentials enabled them to engage with the work far more effectively.

Similarly, in the mainstream group in Year 10, students tended to concede that you could not get a decent job without post compulsory education. However, whilst they generally felt negatively about their chances of gaining a decent job there was no resignation to the idea that they should have been allowed to leave school earlier and the work environment was referred to far more frequently in terms of competition. They often suggested that, although they were failing to achieve their potential in terms of qualifications at the moment, they understood that they wanted to go on to some form or post compulsory education and that they would need to raise their performance once they were in Year 11. This is illustrated by this quote:

Deena: It’s your future, innit. If you don’t get good grades you can’t get into college. Means you can’t get a job nowhere... and like because there’s no jobs going, you have to have better grades than everyone else so you can get the job. Otherwise then you’re fucked basically.
As the participants moved into Year 11, these attitudes became a little more nuanced. The students who had moved from the Year 10 mainstream group into sub school B and C were still focused on achieving Cs in English and Maths and some thought that they were on course to do this, however, they had abandoned all interest in their option subjects since these were a complete irrelevance to them. For instance, when discussing the grades that they were likely to get in their subjects it was clear that these grades were linked to progressing on to further education:

James: I think it’s A* to D in English Maths and Science but I’ve already got a D in my Maths so I can improve on that. I’d like to get a C not a D, but it does my course so I wouldn’t be gutted if I got a D.

Colin: I got an apprenticeship in engineering, up the industrial estate, and I do day release so I need 5 As to Cs to get into college.

The importance of grades to their progression to further education was not lost on former vocational students in sub school A once they had made the transition into Year 11 either. For example, this passage from my field notes when Charlie was threatened with being moved onto alpha because of his behaviour demonstrates his blind fury over the fact that he will no longer be able to get the grades he needs in order to get on to his agricultural course:

Charlie believes he is being threatened with alpha because of throwing pencils after Ern says he’s going to speak to his mum (his mum was going to come in and complain about lost English work, but Charlie found it. He found it in a pile of
work that he was told not to look in because it wouldn’t be there. He needed the work because he needs a D to get onto his course at [local agricultural college] next year. He had texted his mum not to come in). He goes and gets lunch and goes for a walk to “clear his head”. He has a hasty fag. Then circles the school. He’s angry. He tells everyone he’s going into alpha for throwing a pencil. He needs 2 Ds (English & Maths) for his course but he doesn’t think he’ll get them if he’s on alpha. He continues circling the school despite it starting to snow quite heavily.

In fact, once they were in Year 11, the former vocational group appreciated the fact that they were now being offered the chance to do core GCSE exams which they were not previously. They still felt that these subjects were boring and irrelevant, unlike much of their curriculum. However, it remained important for them to achieve good grades in these subjects. This repeats the scepticism shown by the lads in Learning to Labour (Willis, 1977) although this appears to now be coupled with an acceptance of their necessity as demonstrated in this quote.

Jenna: We’re in Year 11, we’ve got GCSEs coming up. It’s gonna be boring.

Charlie: Yeah, but Jenna, if we were still in vocational this year it would be a whole different story.
Jenna: If were still in vocational this year we’d walk out with fuck all qualifications. We wouldn’t have maths and we wouldn’t have English.

It was clear to the participants that if their curriculum had remained as it was in Year 10 they would not have had the opportunity to gain any grades at all. They also retrospectively saw the fact that they had been placed in landbased and then vocational as a negative thing even though they had appreciated it in the past. They saw the fact that they had not had a more traditional education as limiting.

Jenna: It fucked up my education this school did. And so everyone else is doing 5 or 6 GCSEs and I’m only doing 2. That’s not that good.

Me: You think that’s the schools fault, not your fault?

Jenna: Yeah, it’s the schools fault. Coz they put me in landbased.

Me: You don’t think you should have been in landbased?

Jenna: I wanted to at first, I’m not going to lie. But I didn’t know you wouldn’t be able to do your GCSEs and it would like fuck your education up.

Again, the vocational participants came to the same informal conclusion that their education had ultimately closed off opportunities and, although they enjoyed it initially and found it relevant, the fact that they were to leave school with limited GCSEs meant that their future options were severely constrained. In their view, a lack of qualifications from their time in school would not restrict
them from getting a job in the short term. Instead, the problem was that it might prevent them from continuing to study once they had left compulsory education.

The pressure to achieve a good set of qualifications did not solely come from the school authorities. There was also pressure from parents that members of the vocational group felt across Years 10 and 11 in order to succeed at school where previous generations had failed. A sense that the families needed to show that they were not all educational failures even though they all managed to survive without succeeding at school themselves. This gave rise to a sense of frustration amongst many of them that they were being pressurised to achieve something in order to alter a perception of their family

Charlie: They ain’t got no qualifications at all. None, zilch, maybe a few but that’s about it. But they want me to do better, so they’ve put pressure onto me, like it feels like they’ve got all their pressure when they were in school to get GCSEs, it’s all on me. Its weighing on me to change how they are... how everything looks out for our family kind of thing so its "were not all dumb fucks", kind of thing. If you get what I mean.

In this, an understanding of the importance of credentials in order to prove yourself and evidence your worth can be seen. Ultimately, all the participants understood the importance of work that got them qualifications and, ultimately, they all came to realise that they needed to connect with this process. Those who were in the mainstream grouping in Year 10, regardless of where they ended up in Year 11, were more aware of this early on. Those that were in the
vocational group were still conscious on the importance of qualifications but did not develop this pragmatism until later on, at which point they felt betrayed by the school because they had not been given suitable opportunities to access this until it was too late. They also felt let down by the narrow nature of their curriculum. As many of them moved onto the Alpha stream throughout Year 11 they were glad of the opportunity to concentrate on academic work. The fact that those students from mainstream had this pragmatic understanding earlier meant that they latched onto the nature of their classwork as a means of protecting their identity. They wanted to protect themselves from the possible suggestion that they had no future. This earlier adoption of a pragmatic attitude was what enabled themselves to see themselves as people who were going to have future success in contrast with those in vocational.

6.2.3 The Contrast Between an Anticipated Future and the Enforced Neoteny of School

The students' perceived view of their future and the relevance of school to it remained fairly constant across the two years and the different groups within them. When discussing the direction that they thought their future would take, participants consistently highlighted that, despite being told that school was largely preparation for the world of work, they did not expect their working lives to resemble school in any way.

   Deena: You know how all the teachers like, oh yeah, in school like, they try and act... make school like how it is a job.... it's not. A job ain't nothing like this.
There was a great deal of cynicism evident that teachers even genuinely believed that school was like work or that they were even trying to make it such. The students plainly felt that this line of argument was pursued simply as a means of encouraging them to fall in line. Knowing that school was unlike their projected future meant that they knew exactly how their behaviour would have to change once they were in the world of work.

Deena: Obviously... it’s weird though, coz we’re in school they always like "you can’t act like this in a job" yeah, but in our heads we’re like, we know we’re not going to obviously act like this in a job. But it’s where it’s different like you can't get fired from here...

This cynicism about the teachers’ motivation paired with the belief that the threshold of acceptable behaviour was lowered by the fact that the school was obligated to keep them on roll was an enabling factor in their resistance to school. And it was not just standards of behaviour that broke the link between their anticipated future and their current experience in school. The nature of the work on offer to the majority of students bore little resemblance in their mind to the kind of employment that they would be involved with later in life.

James: Coz a lot of people now they do practical jobs, I’m not gonna work in an office. I don’t need maths and English.

There was some faith in the vocational group in year 10 that there was a link between the style of work that they were engaged with and their future working life, however, the issues relating to control and behaviour remained consistent with everyone else’s.
Me: How does school relate to your future?

Jenna: Quite a bit.

Me: In what way?

Jenna: coz I’m in vocational I do an apprenticeship that sort of relates a lot more to what I wanna do.

This is similar to what was argued at the start of this chapter, but it was not just the world of work that school was compared unfavourably to. College was also seen as a place where students were afforded a greater degree of freedom, both in terms of the choice of learning that they could engage with and also in terms of the way they were able to conduct themselves.

Deena: in college, they haven’t got like rules. As much rules as they do here. If you don’t listen in your lesson then that’s your problem. They’re not going to spoon feed you. They’re not going to tell you off or nothing. If you don’t listen, you don’t listen.

Whilst college was seen as a potential part of their future, university was completely off the agenda. Both the financial cost of attending university and the irrelevance of the qualifications to real life meant that there was no point in even considering it as an option.

Adam: my next door neighbour, he went to college, like uni. He’s got loads of debt. He’s got 20 grand debt and he works in Burger King.

[Laughter]
Richard: Living the dream.

Adam: He did drawing and shit. So he’s got no qualifications that actually can be used in real life. They’re just bullshit qualifications that cost him 20 grand!

The issue of freedom was key to the students in illustrating the difference between their future and their current experience. They foresaw freedom expressed through their choice of job and because they had chosen that then they would be prepared to put the effort into working to become successful.

Deena: Yeah, coz you're choosing to do that job. Like, you wanted to do it so... like, if I want to do something, if I come to school the only thing I wanna do is say... is choose two... two... two subjects... like if you’re choosing to do a job you enjoy it. But we don’t enjoy coming to school so we don’t put any effort into it.

There was also the issue of freedom provided by the money. Although they understood that they would have far less free time once they were out at work than they currently did at school, their lives would be improved by the fact that they money they earned would buy them the freedom to live their own lives.

Me: What will work be like compared to school?

James: You get an income.

Deena: You get money.

Colin: Shitter.

James: You can’t just shit around.
Deena: You get paid to do it.

Colin: It’s a lot more work. I’m going to work definitely. Obviously. It’s not shitter, just more time. You get more time off of school to do stuff. You get your own money though so you get more freedom to do stuff.

In fact, the opportunity to earn money was seen as of overriding importance. School was perceived as being an obstacle to this and there was a considerable degree of frustration at being forced to stay in school.

James: In today’s society, the best thing to do is just earn. Try and get your own money as quick as you can.

One means by which they thought that school could be made more relevant to them and they way they wanted to live their lives in the future was to actually pay them to attend school, even if it was only a symbolic amount of money. However, the vocational group stated that they felt that the money they received for their work was derisory and felt artificial (see also section on work).

Richard: I think if you got something stupid, like 5 quid a week for school, I think people would be a bit more like oh yay, 5 quid.

Adam: it’s still a fiver isn’t it.

Richard: I know they can’t afford to do that.

Adam: I would still be happy that it was still a fiver.

Another aspect of their future after school that they were looking forward to was an apparent lack of hierarchy in interactions. They saw that in their part time jobs and out at interviews they were spoken to as adults and equals and this
was appealing to them. They remained very conscious of the fact that they were significantly younger than many of the people they interacted with in the workplace but this seemed to further highlight the improved manner in which they were spoken to, in stark contrast to the way in which they felt that they were treated in school.

Adam: Well, no coz like when I went to that interview people were talking to me about things like.... like we were the same, and yet I’m 15 and he’s probably like 50. So...

Richard: Yeah, coz when I first started work everyone spoke to me like I was an adult and they just seem to speak to me like... I dunno, just better than... how they do here.

Adam: it’s weird, coz they’re the same age as your dad and yet they treat you like you’re... it’s weird, I dunno...

Me: Do you have any experience of that?

Leah: Yeah, I was going to have a Saturday job at this hairdressers, she spoke to me like I was her age, rather than... a ten year old.

Adam: yeah. It’s weird isn’t it? It’s nice.

There was some trepidation expressed about the coming change and the forthcoming step into the wider world as these two quotes exemplify:

Colin: no, it’s nothing like it is it. It’s just like a protective bubble and then when you get outside...
Simon: I’m actually scared about starting life.

Richard: Oh, I can’t wait…

Simon: The first step into the big wide world… I’m scared.

Nevertheless, in general this was something that the students were keenly looking forward too. The view of school was that it provided a protective environment for the students to be in, insulating them from risk and danger. This was the main reason for school life being unlike their future. All this reveals a frustration with a setting that, in the view of the participants, infantilises those that it is supposed to be developing. The participants were often told that school was preparation for the world of work, but they did not believe that it was going to do so in any way. They believed that they were being cosseted by the school and its teachers, having opportunities for choice that they believed they would be presented with in their adult lives restricted. The resistant behaviour that the participants exhibited was in part their way of fighting against this, establishing their independence and gaining a degree of control over their lives. Neoteny, a term borrowed from developmental biology describing the retention of childish characteristics into adulthood (Charlton, 2006), is a useful word to use in this instance. There was a frequent contrast between the future that they anticipated and what they saw as the enforced neoteny of school. As the participants had moved into the beginning of their post-adolescent phase as this research project begun, they were effectively young adults rather than children and, as such, desired control over their lives to a far greater extent than they were afforded. The later years of secondary school became an extension of their childhood which was something that they wanted to leave behind. The money that they saw as being integral to adult lives was a means by which to gain
some of this control. They wanted to be spoken to as an equal by other adults and that is something that they experienced outside of school, at work or on work experience. They also wanted an exposure to risk which they felt they were being sheltered from. They were concerned about the effects of this exposure, and about the association with the school that they attended, but not afraid of it.

### 6.3 Conclusion - The Dislike of School as Distinct in Time

In the sense that Vaughn & Roberts (2007) discuss security and exploration as characterising the meanings that those in post adolescence give to their pathways, the participants focused on here were generally seeking security through escape from school. As Vaughn & Roberts identified, this meant that they were seeking a form of adulthood that no longer limited who or what they were. Whilst some of the participants could arguably be said to fall in to Ball, Macrae & Maguire’s (1999) group with a robust vocational view of their future, the majority fell into the cluster for who the future is always short term; often dictated by their economic position. As Lawy (2002) and Lawy & Wheeler (2013) found the students were pragmatic and the thoughts they had about their future were subject to their backgrounds, but their aspirations were determined by the reality of their daily lives. The pragmatism that the students displayed with respect to their education developed at differing points. For those that started off in the mainstream group, this pragmatism was acquired earlier and as a result they acquiesced in the face of what they felt they needed to do. For those in the vocational group this came later and with it a realisation that they had been let down by the school in order to contain their deviant behaviour. In
both cases the effect of cruel optimism is clear. The vocational group ended up having their chances restricted because they were provided with a specific curriculum that they initially believed would improve their chances but came to realise its limitations. The mainstream students because they sacrificed their time working towards qualifications they knew to be of limited use beyond opening doors to further education.

This chapter shows a general dislike, across all the participants in the various groups, of school as a distinct period in their lives. Compartmentalising school work into something abstract from the rest of their lives meant that it came to lack meaning and relevance. The vocational group, for who this problem was addressed to a degree, ultimately came to see their curriculum as an obstacle to their success since it failed to provide them with adequate opportunity to gain the qualifications needed to move on to further education. The compartmentalisation of school that the participants experienced was experienced as a denial of their adulthood, described here as an enforced neoteny. The pragmatic attitude eventually adopted by all the participants represented a desire to take something from school, an acceptance that qualifications were of use to evidence to the outside world what they had achieved.
7 Conclusion

7.1 A Culture of Resistance

In this concluding chapter I shall bring together findings from the previous three chapters and link them to the theoretical framework that was developed in chapter 2. After this, I draw some final conclusions and suggest further areas for research, building on what has been done here. The purpose of this thesis was to explore cultures of resistance whilst attempting to move beyond the overemphasis on class that many resistance theorists are generally guilty of (Davies, 1994). In order to avoid simply carrying out the kind of research that Deleuze & Guattari (1988) describe as tracing rather than mapping, I have deliberately avoided mention of class and not discussed the participants’ backgrounds other than where it was raised by them. Despite this, there are still echoes from the data of much of the structural, economic, factors that have been described in the past by theorists such as Bowles, Gintis, Althusser, Bourdieu and Willis and discussed in chapter 2. Although class was deliberately excluded from the theoretical underpinning of the research, class as a cultural concept is implied throughout the findings. Before moving on to draw my conclusions in detail I shall discuss the links with these structural issues and illustrate how class can still provide a significant analytic category.

Recent times have seen the demise of the grand meta-narrative of the working class and with people identifying in such a way on a mass scale but this in itself does not invalidate claims of oppression (Walkerdine, 1995). As Steven Ball (Ball, 2013) emphasises, relationships between opportunity, achievement and social class persist and continue to be reproduced by education policy (EHRC,
Family wealth is still the single most significant predictor of success in school and social class, defined in terms of socio-economic status correlates very closely with school attainment (Hatcher, 2006).

If class is considered a zombie category from the 19th century (Beck & Willms, 2004) then it is a zombie that still stalks our classrooms (Reay, 2006). The fact that class is now deemed to be irrelevant is, many suggest, testimony to the middle class success in legitimising their own normality (Skeggs, 1997). One of the most significant exclusionary processes in a school takes place through the subtle and not so subtle way that schools convey that a student’s background and culture is/is not valued, instituting distrust and detachment that militates against the accumulation of social capital (Smyth, 2004). Narratives of a deficit culture amongst the working class are ubiquitous. Discourses of social exclusion are widespread (Lawler, 2005), with social exclusion seen as a condition rather than a process carried out by a middle class political body normalising itself through positioning others (Skeggs, 2004). Narratives of decline espouse the view that once there was a respectable working class, progressive and aware of its purpose, which has disappeared; either swallowed by the expanding middle class or relegated to a workshy underclass. This new underclass is considered to lack taste, is thought politically retrogressive and is regarded as unusually materialistic and predisposed toward a consumer culture (Lawler, 2005).

Class in its original conception is what occurs when a group formed by shared history and experience express themselves in resistance to others whose interests oppose their own (Thompson, 1968). There is a strong connection
between class and culture, with cultural reproduction necessary for social reproduction (Goldthorpe, 1996) and this perhaps explains the persistent concern with class in contemporary times. It is critical to understand that the sociologist’s class is a class on paper which consists of sets of agents in similar locations and under similar conditions who, therefore, are expected to have congruent dispositions and practices (Bourdieu, 1985). By defining class through these cultural means it becomes dislocated from the economic, representation becoming the central mechanism for identification (Skeggs, 2004). However, without access to the symbolic systems of representation available to the middle class, the working class is unable to challenge its positioning and, ultimately, social classes become moral classes with those in a position to produce legitimate sets of signs, practices and bodily inscriptions able to define ethically expected action (Aguiar, 2011).

Beverley Skeggs (2011) identifies the emergence of autonomist working class values whereby, through a shared experience of positioning in a social hierarchy, groups identify which practices are just and have value. Much of this revolves around challenges to the authority of others to judge and impose moral standards. Debates around value tend to revolve around precise, quantified, abstract, economic calculations of exchange value or nebulous, moral, qualified interpretations of what is important to people (Skeggs, 2011). David Graeber (2001) suggests that the majority of understandings around value suggest a consolidation of these calculative and moral approaches to value. Skeggs (2011) recommends that if our theoretical approaches focus on a middle class understanding of self then it is impossible to imagine or recognise how value and values are produced outside these limits, relegating other forms of
personhood to the category of valueless. If we do this, how can we account for those who appear to be existing beyond the theoretical and empirical reality of exchange value, positioned as deficit and morally responsible for all their difficulties (Skeggs & Loveday, 2012). Autonomist working class values produce different relationships, desires and practices. Through living in precarious situations and inhabiting different material conditions working class people occupy time and space differently and use their resources to travel along their own vectors within this.

It is clear from this that class remains a significant analytic category. Even though, in the interests of avoiding the creation of a simple tracing rather than a mapping, class was not emphasised in the theoretical approach of this research, we can see how cultural understandings of class reverberate throughout the findings. However, by acknowledging, as Giroux (2001) observed, that domination is never total and that dominant ideologies are facilitated rather than reproduced by schools the view through a Foucauldian lens taken here reveals how this is operating in the specific instance examined. By not taking class as the starting point for this research and yet still coming to conclusions that substantiate the findings of prior research in this area it can be seen that class persists as a structuring force in society.

As Foucault (1982) suggested, we have investigated resistance from within, by making the voices of young people central to the research, rather than from the perspective of the rationality of those in power. This is a more empirical approach which links theory and practice more closely. I have explored resistance as an everyday and momentary negotiation of power, bringing into

372
view acts that may not be seen as resistant (such as the gradual acceptance of school by the mainstream pupils) in different theorisations. By avoiding an undue focus on theory generated by Foucault’s ‘Discipline and Punish’ (1979) and looking more widely at his work, I have avoided the removal of students’ voice and agency within the research that Butin (2001) observes in much school based research. Countering the view that students in school are entirely subject to the pugnacious agency of school authorities.

Foucault (1982) identified that resistance is cannot be reduced to an anti-authority struggle. Rather than locating all-encompassing adversaries, institutions or groups, people wrestle with specific instances and forms of power. If war is a perpetual ontological condition, infusing the social and characterising the low-impact friction that day to day existence consists of (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988) then politics is the continuation of this war by other means (Foucault, 2003). A great deal of what I have shown in the last three chapters corresponds with a lack of voice, value and control over the participants’ lives but it does not do the data presented here justice to suggest that the situation is a simple matter of opportunities being taken away from the participants, both materially, spatially and discursively, although there is no doubt that they were. These were not merely negative acts of resistance by the participants but a productive reappropriation of space and a selective acceptance of discourses and appropriating them for their own use. These themes will be explored in detail as I address each of the research questions in turn.
7.2 Constructing Places of Resistance

7.2.1 Strategic and Tactical Resistance

The creation of student friendly places (Narin & Higgins, 2011) is both a spatial as well as temporal expression of power. Places that have been described as becoming student friendly such as the bins, drama studio and library in sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 become so through students acting in both space and time. This reclamation of certain learning spaces for themselves splinters the discourse that places limits on who possess authority within a place. Whilst the targets for this tended to be areas with a lesser degree of adult authority either at all times, such as the bins, or at break times, such as the drama studio and library when they were staffed only by teaching assistants or admin staff, this was not always the case. Whilst this did show power over the spatial, it also demonstrates that the participants did act reactively in time more so than the school staff.

The data in section 4.2.9 also showed the importance of occupying of outside space to the participants. Earlier in the study the participants had a great deal of control over the playgrounds during break times, to the extent that teachers were unwilling to occupy the space during those times. This emphasises the fact that the participants had control over space but this was at a far greater intensity during break times than at other times. As the participants moved into Year 11, much of this outdoor space was removed as a result of the building works and they became far more atomised and less able to take control.

As discussed in chapter 2, De Certeau (1984) distinguished between strategy and tactics by suggesting that those with power behave strategically in space whereas those that do not resist tactically through time. The occurrence of the
spatially subversive acts (Bell and Valentine, 1995) described in section 4.2.1 disrupt orthodox use of space enabling its reappropriation. These would be seen as tactical acts of resistance by De Certeau contained within a strategic control of space by more powerful forces. However, this relies both on a dichotomous understanding of power which I have refuted through the work of Foucault and a separation of space and time which I have negated through the work of Massey (2005).

This emphasises that although, as I have discussed, the participants' maintained control over space, there was a degree of what De Certeau would describe as tactical behaviour. Although power as I have conceptualised it here is diffuse and spread between the students in school and their teachers there is nevertheless an imbalance and although the participants did not exclusively behave tactically in time it was a feature of their behaviour.

As further evidence that the students do not simply act tactically in time in response to events, I have shown in section 4.2.5 the participants not just disidentifying with elements of their education but also with specific spaces occupied by different groups, a replication of their own experience of being othered through attendance at a school that is marked as abject. Place forms an integral part of their identities and they act to control space, again undermining De Certeau as they act spatially rather than just reactively.

By avoiding the conceptualisation of power as monolithic, and of resistance and power as a binary split, the power that students have to construct place through their resistive and spatially subversive acts can be understood. The students acted in space and time, the proximate place that was their school being
created both through the influence of global power structures, within and beyond school, and through their spatially subversive acts. However, it is also clear from the data, as would be expected, that there is a substantial disparity between the degree of power that the participants had and that that the staff within the school possessed. Although Massey’s (2005) critique of De Certeau (1984) is largely appropriate, there is still an element of temporal, tactical, behaviour in the participants’ occupation of space. So whilst the students were not solely acting tactically through De Certeau’s practices of the everyday, there was still an element of temporal, tactical, behaviour in the participants’ occupation of space. Similarly, the behaviour of the school authorities was not static and structured, beyond time. The nature of power within the school and the manner in which the place was formed was a dynamic interplay between two bodies that possessed different magnitudes of power.

7.2.2 The ‘Rubbishing’ of Space

As I have demonstrated in section 4.2.1, the physical environment of school moulds a visible but veiled aspect of the lived curriculum experienced by the children who inhabit it. A result of interconnected sensory experience and its entanglement in cultural understanding as described in section 2.1. The experience of the school environment is implicit in the nature of the knowledge generated within it, influencing even the most basic behaviour within its confines. The students are emplaced within this environment, in the sense that their minds and bodies are entangled with the material space. Their perception of this setting as ‘rubbish’ influenced their understandings of themselves and the means by which they could narrate their lives.
The way in which students identify with school as a place that belongs to them but, amongst other things, disidentify with the rapid pace of constant change that is imposed upon them, undermining them as inhabitants of that place, is clearly highlighted by the data in section 4.2.4. The result of this is the converse of what De Certeau would expect as they come to view themselves as invincible and beyond change. A defensive and static spatial strategy in order to preserve their identity resisting change through time as they recode understandings of themselves as ‘rubbish’ into a positive view of invincibility.

Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.4 presented their view that the manoeuvring of the school authorities formed an educational façade which was prioritised over their needs, diverting finance away from their education towards superficial improvement in the image and reputation of the school. The operation of the wider power geometries of space can be seen at work here, with external influences and priorities impacting on the creation of place within the boundaries of the school. Alongside this, the erosion of basic minimum environmental standards during the building work emphasised to the participants a perceived lack of their power and engendered a collective resistive mentality leading to behaviour that demonstrated their power to themselves and to others.

The changes imposed on the environment during the rebuilding of the school described in section 4.2.4 offered both threats and opportunities to the participants. There were threats to their identities as citizens of the school and the effects of the building work furthered their view of their environment as ‘rubbish’, exaggerating their view that they were rubbished by their environment
and by the perception of them by outsiders. Section 4.2.4 shows that the principle way that they could manage this was by coming to see themselves as indomitable and beyond modification. However, the advent of the construction work offered opportunities to carve out student friendly places and an enhanced ability to reappropriate space to their own ends.

7.2.3 Desire for Movement Through Space

The necessity of room to move as well as a room of one’s own was clear from the data as shown in section 4.2.6, replicating findings from elsewhere. The restrictions placed on the movement of the pupils described in sections 4.2.7 and 4.2.8 were frustrating for the participants, not due to some ulterior motive but because it was required for its own sake. This was both an assertion of independence and provided a sense of aimlessness in contrast with the persistent pressure to achieve. Synesthetic engagement with their environment through walking allowed enabled means of thinking and feeling, creating and recreating cultural forms (Ingold & Vergunst, 2008). Whilst opportunities to do this may have been latched upon opportunistically through time, it nevertheless demonstrates a degree of exerting control over space. A sense of control through sensory engagement with their environment, re-establishing that it is their environment to themselves and others. Building on this, the confinement that was experienced through exclusion in the compass centre was understood as excessively harsh and totally unreasonable. The removal of any opportunity to engage with their wider environment in their own manner and for its own sake demonstrated that although they did possess power over space it was more
restricted than their teachers and, again, they were still required to behave tactically in time to a degree.

Smoking demonstrated a form of resistance to the manner in which space was expected to be used, becoming a critical part of identity formation within school through opposition to formal power structures as seen in section 4.2.10. The students in this study marked out their space with cigarette butts and also the act of finding a place to smoke was linked to their motion around school. These action cemented resistance as central to their identity. Once more, the creation of place through the control of areas of space in time is far from simply tactical. However, there are clear limitations to students’ ability to control space, requiring the elements of tactical behaviour that were discussed earlier.

The informal permission granted to the vocational group in Year 10 to smoke discussed in section 4.2.10 broke down barriers between the school and the outside world and increased the control that participants had over space and time. This was a spatial strategy employed by the staff to include the students in this group which was not endorsed by the wider school leadership team. This demonstrates that, as a group, the staff and students on the vocational group acted together to maintain control over the space that they occupied and, if anything, it was the staff working in this area of the school that were acting tactically in time to defend the nature of the place that they had developed for the students in their charge. The students here enjoyed the increased control that they had over space and the fact that there was a blurred boundary between school and the outside world. This signifies a broadening of the place of school, allowing the vocational group to blend their experience of the world
outside with their lives inside school. As this was taken away from them, it was a significant blow to their relationship with school, affecting their relationships with their teachers as well as with the more extensive purposes of education.

Section 4.2.6 revealed that the building work that was taking place in the school opened fissures in the formal choreography (Gordon, Holland & Lahelma, 2000) of the school. This was both in the sense of the scarring of familiar landscapes and the disruption of habitual paths through space and time as well as in the sense of the creation of fresh places for students to perform their civic affiliations, inhabiting space in new and different ways. What much of this behaviour shows is that students are not simply transgressing boundaries and rules (as Foucault proposed in his earlier works), but are engaged in the constant struggle within a dispersed web of power (an idea that he developed later in his career). They are resistant to a more powerful body, but have a degree of power themselves and they are implicated in the effects of its working. Movement around the school was crucial to the manner in which the participants occupied space, sensorially engaging with their environment and exerting influence over the nature of place. This links back to the earlier critique of De Certeau’s ideas around tactics and strategy. The students possessed a degree of power over the spatial although the emphasis of their behaviour remained in the temporal.

The participants accepted the fact that their behaviour needed to be policed. However, the manner in which they were constantly monitored, whether this was through CCTV systems or facilitated through architectural design as in the canteen, meant that there was no policing by consent. The participants
understood the school rules but this was not an uncritical acceptance. The observed reactions to this constant monitoring in section 4.2.11 indicate further that they were engaged in a resistive struggle rather than simply transgressing regulations.

Beyond movement within school, another issue discussed in section 4.2.12 was the porous boundaries that had existed prior to the conversion of the school to an academy, which allowed this blurring of the distinctive identities of the participants as students and individuals that existed outside of school. As these identities had hazy borders, it meant that school as a place also takes on indistinct boundaries. As the margins of the school became increasingly impervious after the conversion to academy status, this formed an attack on the participants’ identities as trusted adults. With the advent of the building work, the opportunities arose to uncover gaps in the border and exert influence over their environment, allowing the potential of this blurring once more.

This represented desire for school to be more related to their wider existence; it was, after all, a key aspect of their identity, with all the contradictions that that entailed. But it also epitomised a longing for trust in themselves as adults; people who could be relied upon to return to school when they left the physical site. This establishes that the participants disliked the severity of the distinction between the place of school and the physical spaces, relationships and movement that brought that place into being and the places that they experienced beyond that. Massey (2005) states that when an individual arrives in a place they become caught up in the stories from which that place is made. If place is defined by intersections with wider settings, attempts to separate a
place from those wider settings in space will be felt by the actors creating that place. There was not an expectation that school should be entirely congruent with other places that were not school, but rather that the move between the two should not be so acute.

7.3 Relationships

7.3.1 Recognition as Central to Fruitful Relationships and the Effect of Differing Agendas

Student-teacher relationships are fundamental to the manner in which students engage with school. The key to the creation of relationships that engage students is mutual recognition (As discussed in section 2.6.2) between teachers and students. This has two levels. Firstly, the teachers that students are in contact with on a day to day basis are a vital point of contact and the degree of recognition between these groups has an immediate effect on engagement. Another issue was the degree of recognition between students and the wider school community. The lack of this recognition was one of the reasons for the longer term failure of the vocational students to remain engaged with the school.

The changes that occurred in the educational setting that the vocational group was exposed to, shown in section 5.2.1, reveals that recognition is a key attribute in creating productive relationships between school staff and students. The improvements in relationships that occurred between staff and students in the Year 10 vocational group, and the way in which they tie in with findings generally that alternative education settings allow for improved relationships, suggest that there is an escalation in the recognition between students and staff.
in this context (Honneth, 2007, 2012a, 2012b). This is a two way occurrence with both parties becoming recognised as individuals with unique narratives. The anxiety at the end of Year 10 around the insertion of others into the vocational group signified a betrayal of this recognition between the students and their teachers. This meant that the outcomes that might have been expected for this group became exacerbated and in due course led to their almost total isolation from the school community.

The prior construction of the participants in the vocational group as impossible learners (Youdell, 2006) constituted a removal of their voice. The subsequent move into the vocational group described in section 5.2.1 and the development of positive relationships revolving around a new found recognition meant that they experienced less social subordination and were allowed to participate within this group as a peer. Similarly, in Year 11, sub school A had their disaffection addressed to an extent by the formation of more positive relationships and a sense of solidarity with their teachers. As seen in section 5.2.1, they were still stigmatised as impossible learners however by the bulk of the school staff, even though the staff they encountered day to day were perceived as being on their side. This is indicative of two levels of recognition within school, the mutual recognition by the staff encountered on an everyday basis and the lack of recognition from the wider school community. The members of sub school A were able to engage as peers with their immediate teaching staff, whilst being socially subordinated through being prevented from engaging in social life as a peer elsewhere.
This can be contrasted with the nature of relationships outside of the vocational group in Year 10 and sub school A in Year 11. Much of the estrangement of the participants who were not in these groups from many teachers revolved around the fact that they originated from different backgrounds and linked to this was the view that many of them were only in it for the money as elaborated in section 5.2.2. This relates to the difficulty to establish genuine recognition between groups with relatively few shared values without any mechanism to enable such recognition. The desire for recognition is the driving force behind group formation (Honneth, 2012b) and in order to maintain self-respect and self-esteem the students grouped in opposition to their teachers, forming an interesting contrast with what occurred in the vocational class. In addition to this, there was the feeling that the school operated in the interests of the teachers. This led to a total lack of trust between students and teachers in the mainstream groups. Exacerbating this was the suppression of voice in front of their parents, which resulted in them being made to look foolish. Trust is central to the means by which relationships are formed and recognition is achieved. Voice requires a material basis and cannot occur without the support of others (Couldry, 2010). The unequal distribution of narrative means led to the students in school creating narratives out of material that was not their own.

With the move from Year 10 into Year 11 there was an associated change in attitude towards the disparity in power in the school as shown in section 5.2.3. The students who had been in the vocational group up until that point maintained their defiant stance. The other students who made up sub school A decided that they needed to sit out school, taking the path of least resistance until they could leave. In contrast to these two approaches, the participants in
sub school B began to perceive value in their strict teachers, adopting a pragmatic approach. This was possible for them because they had been constructed as *unacceptable*, rather than *impossible*, learners. They were intelligible and could therefore work to become acceptable. This pragmatism was the result of the productive power of ideological recognition as described by Honneth (2012a). In other words, it was an example of the creation of an identity that tallies with social expectations. The participants in sub school B began to adopt beliefs and practices within an environment that did not necessarily materially provide for them. This constitutes a hegemonic acceptance of common sense which cannot be considered an ideological deceit due to the diffuse and productive nature of power and discourse (Youdell, 2011). The participants in this sub school were in part accountable themselves for the path that they ultimately followed, there was no monolithic power structure forcing them to accept their fate.

The contrast between these group shows that the degree of true recognition that had been achieved between the students who were in the vocational group and their teachers was localised and whilst this conferred some benefit to them, they still ultimately suffered from the power of ideological recognition in the long run. They were not capable of the pragmatic approach taken by the students in sub school B since they were not able to become anything but impossible leaners in the eyes of the authorities beyond their immediate clique.

### 7.3.2 The Façade of Formal Voice Processes

The failure of formal student voice processes acted to further disengage the participants from school, facilitating the belief that school was not run in their
interests. Effective voice depends on relationships based on mutual recognition and cannot be based on simple representation. The students in the study understood that teachers had something to offer them, but in order for this to be effective it required them to be heard on all levels. In the absence of their voices being listened to, students resist aspects of the education process in order to gain resources to enable themselves to narrate their lives and be heard.

Section 5.2.5 established that the existence of the student council in the school paid lip service to the notion of voice but, in reality, whatever the leadership of the school wished to happen, happened. This process, co-opting the opinions of the student body into the dominant agenda, ultimately emphasised the suppression of the pupils. The unequal distribution of narrative resources generated the material through which the students generate their account of themselves within school. As a result of this material not being their own, student voice was denied, obstructing alternative, student driven, narratives. The participants recognised that the staff were responsible for managing the school but also felt that they were the ones who it should be run in the interests of and therefore they should have a say in its decision making processes. The staff of the school were identified as a superior rationality that had ultimate validity (Couldry, 2010) and the school was organised on this premise, undermining the voice of the students in the school.

It is clear from the evidence that the formation of democratic structures are not a sufficient condition for the voice of students to be heard. The quality of relationships is foundational to effective voice as the change in affiliations between pupils and teachers in the vocation group in year 10 clearly shows.
Honneth (2007) identifies that democracy is a social rather than a solely political ideal, it cannot be simply reduced to a representative process. Genuine democracy is the experiences that the entirety of a given society could succeed through communally recognising one another. Recognition is the key element to the production of the good relationships that are the prerequisite of effective student voice, specifically Honneth’s (2012b) third level of recognition whereby an individual’s abilities are recognised as being of inherent worth to their community. This is key to the findings of Percy-Smith (2006) and also explains much of what can be seen in the current study.

The participants grasped that their school life cannot be just as they imagined it demonstrating an informal understanding that voice is inconceivable as anything other than an open-ended exchange of narratives with others. Although obviously not expressed in these terms, they are not naïve about their agency, but rather understand that voice is a reflexive agency involving the need to understand what others and who is saying it (Cavarero, 2005). In other words, they understand that the experience and knowledge of their teachers is important and useful to them and they wish to benefit from it. However, this knowledge and experience needs to be made relevant to them through the lens of their own knowledge and experience.

Ultimately, resistance becomes a means by which to exercise voice. This resistance forming a contestation of power, reaching beyond the reactive and private becoming political in essence (Bright, 2011b). By rejecting aspects of education that the participants felt were inappropriate for them and rejecting a compromised individuality that led to a compliant corporate student body they
demonstrate their desire to form a sense of self through narrating their own lives (Cavarero, 2000). Resistance comes about through the desire to gain the material resources required to narrate lives and to do so beyond the restrictions of the self-proclaimed superior rationality of the teachers. Beyond this, the participants desired risk, in the sense of being allowed to make their own mistakes and learn from them. This represents a desire for true recognition as individuals capable of decision-making and capable of dealing with exposure to risk.

### 7.3.3 Historic Reasons for School Aversion

A significant factor in students experiencing recognition is the understanding of their parents’ experience and how this affects their lives and choices. This does not mechanistically influence student engagement, but it is an influence which should not be dismissed. The parents in this study provided realistic role models for the participants, often more convincing than the teachers that the students had.

The historical experience of parents fed into the attitudes of children, although, as I have discussed in section 5.2.4, this was not in a mechanical, deterministic manner. The sense of constant change reinforced the negative opinions of the parents and this drove some of the participants’ views. The hegemonic effects of ideological recognition, where ritual affirmation generates self-conceptions that are congruent with social expectations are clear here. The nebulous effects of power and discourse enabling the enforcement of social expectation. This also relates to Cavarero’s (2005) understanding of the diversity within any one voice as well as exterior differences between voices. Failure to credit that a
child’s experience in his or her home is relevant to their journey through school and the fact that the school was seen by the participants as being in opposition to their parents had a large impact upon them. The parents of the participants had generally not engaged well with school and yet had gone on to achieve a degree of success in their lives (from the participants’ perspective) and the participants had an expectation that their lives would follow similar paths. They formed realistic and believable role models where the teachers of the participants did not and represented possibility and opportunity. Again, the functioning, hegemonic, effect of ideological recognition can be seen here and the historical repetition of the common sense understanding of the kind of futures they were expecting and expected to live.

7.4 Young People as Learners and Pupils in School Its Link with Their Future

7.4.1 The Nature of Schoolwork

There was both a lack of connection with the participants’ future and an element of practising for their future involved in school. The contrast between that nature of the work on offer and what they imagined they would do in the future was clear outside of the vocational group. Within the vocational group there was a greater congruence between the activities they were set and how they saw their future selves but they still felt looked down upon as second class citizens of the school. So it was not that their resistance was about the future path on offer, rather their resistant behaviour was often a means of establishing a sense of independence and, from their perspective, was a means of practicing for their imagined future.
As section 6.2.1 demonstrated, despite being engaged through a more practical approach to their education, the vocational group in Year 10 felt as though they were viewed as second class citizens, largely due to the quality of the resources that they were given to work with. Initially, they did not blame the fact that they were in a vocational stream, but simply that the broader school authorities did not allow them the same access to resources as the mainstream group. Although the nature of the vocational setting allowed greater recognition within the group, they were given no choice over their placing in this group which constitutes a denial of their voice and beyond this, the lack of resources restricted their ability to gain voice through expressing themselves as they would like through their work. Throughout Year 10 and 11, the vocational group took pride in seeing their work around the school which acted as a defence of their identity as worthwhile and capable people, blurring the boundary between their education, their understanding of themselves and their imagined future.

This is another example of productive power at work through ideological recognition. They had achieved recognition through a hegemonic view of their expected future by themselves and others.

In contrast with this, section 6.2.1 also disclosed that the mainstream groups had access to practical work restricted and this frustrated them. Not in the sense that they wanted the same kind of manual work as the vocational group, but they felt a sense of challenge was absent from the work they were provided with. They understood practical work not just reductively as physical engagement but rather as a form of independent thinking. They considered their future as being linked to this type of functioning. This represents a conflict between the students’ belief that their future was linked to independent thought
whilst the school as an institution was linked to the hegemonic influence of wider discourses around the importance of GCSEs and as a result tried to ‘teach to the test’. As engagement diminished through the lack of this practical work, less practical work was offered revealing no maintenance of any link between the students’ future and their endeavours in school. This represents a decrease in true recognition from an already weak starting point.

The vocational students tended to blame systemic features for their perceived underachievement, whereas the mainstream group tended to locate the blame for this internally. The mainstream group had a greater acceptance of ideological recognition compared with the vocational group that accepted it to a degree but, as far as they were concerned, there was less in it for them materially and so as a result there was a greater imperative to gain voice through their resistance.

7.4.2 The Pragmatism of Gaining Qualifications

The participants wanted to be offered activities in school that challenged them and were related to their imagined future. Where this was not the case, they tended to refuse to participate in the fashion in which their teachers envisaged. At varying points, and to differing degrees, a measure of pragmatism occurred within the participants, leading them to engage with aspects of their education that they felt might be useful to them, accepting the prevailing common sense that qualifications were useful to them.

Whilst section 6.2.2 demonstrated that there was an understanding of the importance of gaining qualifications, there was a general dislike of theoretical work that was disconnected from practice. There was a desire for this practical
work across all groups in the study, but the participants in sub schools B & C came to understand the importance of work that offers qualifications; another example of the pragmatic approach to school that was mentioned earlier in the section on relationships with teachers. As the vocational group moved into Year 11, they realised that their options had been closed down. As they largely moved into the Alpha stream they became glad to focus on their core subjects. This comprises a contradiction between a final acceptance of ideological recognition in the desire to gain core subject qualifications and an increase in their ability to gain voice by having their time within the restrictive environment of school reduced. The pragmatic attitude gained earlier by Sub school B came to be understood by all in time; this pragmatism again being the face of hegemonic, ideological recognition.

The contradiction inherent in understanding the need for qualifications and the necessity of obtaining them despite their not being directly related to their future and their dismissal of them as irrelevant is a manifestation of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011). The theoretical work devoid of links to practice that they wanted to reject, knowing that it was of little realistic use they pragmatically engaged with in order to gain qualifications that, in time, were unlikely to improve their material position in life.

7.4.3 Imagined Futures

Section 6.2.3 highlights the way in which school forms a protective shell around its pupils and how, in general, students resist this. They want exposure to risk and to make their own decisions. That is what they imagine their adult life will be like and their imagined futures were all about having an established
independence. In this there exists a contrast between their envisaged future and the enforced neoteny of school. The kind of person that the participants wished to be recognised as, and ultimately to become, was simply as an independent adult capable of engaging with the world and making their own decisions and taking their own risks. They desired a form of adulthood that no longer limits who or what they are in contrast with their experience of post adolescence in school. Vaughn & Roberts (2007) describe attaining security through escape from school, what the participants in this study wanted was the security of understanding themselves as adults, not children, desiring true recognition and power over their own destiny. However, they were forced to remain in stasis as children by remaining in school and this neoteny frustrated them as they looked forward their escape.

7.5 Conclusion - Resistance is Not Futile

“It’s a little childish and silly, but then, so is high school.”
(Ferris Bueller’s Day Off, 1986)

The specific context that this research was carried out in provided an opportunity to conceptualise resistance and demonstrate its operating in a new way. The fractures opened up by the radical changes that the participants were experiencing, both environmentally and through the structure of their curriculum, allowed me to investigate the way that the school as a place came into being and how dispersed power was used by the distinct bodies within the school.

The authorities in the school in question did not recognise the power that students possess, seeing their own power as monolithic in nature; the agonism (Foucault, 1982) at the heart of all power relationships going unnoticed. As a
result, they give the power of the students in school no formal expression, ultimately creating a situation that gives rise to negative acts of resistance which are perhaps ultimately not in the students’ long term interest. Gupta & Ferguson (1997b) ask, ‘who has the power to make places out of spaces?’ and it is this question that needs to be addressed by schools. As shown in chapter 2, we need to guard against seeing practice as ‘doing’ in the same way that ‘place’ is not simply physical location. Practices are an integral part of place making, not just things we do in and to places. Identity and practice are parts of an incorporated process through which places come into being. The Foucauldian lens that has been used here to focus upon the students’ lives shows the momentary and diverse nature of the negotiations that form school as a place.

It is vital that educators recognise how these power relations play out across place, both shaping one another. The material environment is of importance, as previous research has shown, but not as a simple container of relationships and practices. School authorities need to move from a perception of themselves as inhabiting Foucault’s panopticon (1979) and recognise the need for movement, trust and freedom that young people have.

The participants in the current study disliked the partitioning of their school experience from their broader lives leading to a sense of an isolated place in space/time. They would have preferred there to be a blurring of the boundaries in both space and time between school and the rest of their lives; creating a place that overlapped with the generality of their lives. This means both a porous school boundary demonstrating trust whilst allowing movement and a curriculum that overlapped with their future, not simply terminating with high
stakes assessments. This happened to an extent at first in vocational but its gradual removal emphasised the effects of its general absence to the participants in that stream. The dearth of an effective student voice meant that, amongst other things, this frustration could find no means of expression. It was this subdivision of their lives that led to the neoteny of their condition.

The relationships with teachers that the participants experienced were central to their education. The recognition that they desired through these precedes any effective student voice procedures. Although there were effective relationships (in the vocational group) these were undermined and delegitimised by the school as a whole. Relations between teachers and their students need to be rethought, moving beyond behaviour management into something more reciprocal. If the democratic public sphere is the medium through which a society manages and resolves its problems (Honneth, 2007) then children’s voices are effectively excluded from this. In which case, whose problems are being addressed? One could very easily argue that it is the teachers' problems and the issues caused for them by mandates from central government such as league tables. If democracy is a social and not simply political ideal and a broader crisis in society of democracy and voice is caused by neo-liberal conceptions of markets as prior to democratic functioning (Couldry, 2010) then the apathy and disconnection that this causes has its parallel in the apathy and disengagement caused by the purposes of education being seen as prior to the democratic functioning involving school pupils.

The informal understandings that were discussed demonstrate the participants thinking like theorists whilst acting like activists (Willis, 1983). However, at first
broader power structures do not impact on their thinking, these are filtered through their parents’ experience of life and school and they react to their immediate opponents in school. Over time the participants developed the pragmatic attitudes discussed earlier and this pragmatism was the expression of ideological recognition. As Laclau & Mouffe (2014) acknowledge, with no hegemony of any description there would be no meaning or order. It is not a case of arguing that hegemony and by extension ideological recognition are to be avoided at all costs. The question, as stated previously, is to what extent is this necessary? The participants can be seen moving from endogenous reflexivity (understanding of knowledge that comes to be in social and cultural groups) to referential reflexivity (recognizing the circumstances through which these practices are constructed). In other words, they were moving from reflexivity within to reflexivity upon actions. The pragmatism that they exhibited was a result of becoming more aware of the world that they lived in. Acceptance of an obligation to act in a particular manner is an act within a power relation (Butin, 2001) and it is the development of this pragmatism where the reproductive, structural approaches of the past become relevant.

If Foucault cannot give overarching motives for resistance because he avoids totalizing discourses (Picket, 1996), in this instance the specific localised example of the lack of voice afforded to the participants can be cited. The resistance here is largely motivated by and takes the form of a desire for voice, an aspiration to narrate lives under the conditions of their own choosing. This desire for voice symbolises a desire for true recognition as experienced to an extent by the vocational group; a group who were ultimately frustrated at its removal.
Wherever power exists, there will always be a culture of resistance. This is not a matter of those who are weaker mindlessly transgressing rules and conventions, but rather a struggle over the expression of that disseminated power. Although Foucault sees this as a Neitzschean creative aesthetic of the self, there is no reason that it should be limited to this by necessity and the potential of the less powerful could be used to make a positive difference. As Bright (2011a) claims, resisting is not a failure of aspiration but rather an aspiration for something other than the dominant model. As has been shown, politics and voice cannot be simply linked to representation and a broader understanding of these processes could lead to the more productive engagement of a student body. If the situation that students in school similar to the participants in the current study find themselves in is to be improved, it will be necessary for schools to recognise that power is diffuse and that young people in their post adolescence are emerging adults who wish to be independent, able to make decisions and be exposed to risk. The building of relationships between staff and students that allow true recognition, leading to genuine voice and a positive engagement with the degree of power that students have over the place in which they are educated are of central importance.

7.6 Where Next?

This thesis has investigated the impact of a lack of voice in a school serving a deprived estate. As has been established, there is plenty of research identifying structural reasons why a school in this position does not perform as well as a school in a leafy suburb with few, if any, signs of deprivation. There is a lot of
research, for example, invoking Bourdieu's (1990a) idea of habitus and the fact that school systems are designed to cater for the middle classes. I would like to take this research further and investigate how voice functions for the children in a school like this in order to build upon this approach. This would enable a deeper understanding of how class as an analytic category relates to the findings of this thesis. Resistance must still occur in these schools, particularly as I have conceptualised it here. Are the schools functioning in ways that ‘suit’ those that are being educated there and therefore the voice of these children is being heard? Or do they develop the pragmatic attitude that was found in the school in this study earlier?

Another interesting angle to follow would be to consider how groups of students organise themselves when they are in school. Jeffery Juris’ (2008) ethnography of anti-corporate globalisation movements considers how these networks operate without clear leadership structures and articulates how they can operate without agreed political statements. This would be an interesting way to take forward the work on the pursuit of voice within schools.

As well as new potential avenues for research, another important question to consider is how this thesis can be taken forward in terms of academic publications and its potential for impact. There are several sections from the findings that could be brought together with relevant parts of the reviewed literature to form journal articles. The initial sections of chapter four, 4.2.1 to 4.2.4, could be brought together to form an article focussing on the rubbing of the students and the environmental change that they experienced posing a threat to their identity but also being an opportunity for them to assert their
control of the formation of place. Later sections from chapter four could also be used together, such as 4.2.5 to 4.2.9 forming an article on movement and the use of space in forming identities within school and 4.2.11 to 4.2.12 on the impact of surveillance and boundaries and their impact on place formation. 4.2.10 could be used on its own as the basis of an article on smoking, place and identity. The particular originality that these articles would contribute are on the influence of environment and environmental change over identity formation and the manner in which the participants made use of their material setting to express their power within school.

I intend to bring together aspects of sections 5.2.1 to 5.2.3 in order to demonstrate the contrast between staff and student relationships in the vocational and mainstream groups. This would show the effectiveness of the alternative relationships on offer in the vocational group. I would then also bring together aspects of these chapters with the findings in section 5.2.4 to discuss parents and teachers as role models. I would then build on this with a further article looking at non-compliance as a substitute for voice using section 5.2.5. These articles would give a fresh perspective on power within a school setting and the need for school authorities to acknowledge the productive power that students possess. Rather than attempting to suppress students' voices a more constructive approach would be to attempt to allow them the opportunity to form more equitable relationships, allowing them to be heard more effectively.

Finally, chapter six is significantly shorter than the previous two chapters and could be split into two separate articles. One of these could focus on section
6.2.1 and the nature of schoolwork and its relationship with resistance and identity and another encompassing sections 6.2.2 and 6.2.3 looking at the problems caused by school being isolated from the rest of the participant’s lives. The innovation here is the understanding that the neoteny of school is caused by its partition from the rest of their lives regardless of the content of what is taught in school.

There are several opportunities for me to ensure that this work has impact. Recent government policy has devolved much decision making power to school level. Therefore, despite the likely aversion by a Conservative government to much of the findings of this research, much could be achieved by working with individual schools and multi academy trusts (MATs). In order to make this a possibility, those schools and MATs would need to be made aware of this work and this could be achieved by becoming involved in professional conferences and publishing in professional periodicals. The fact that this thesis is based on detailed ethnographic data means that it has a level of detail relating to the mechanisms of behaviour in school that other types of study do not have. This also facilitates a larger degree of engagement with the readers of the work than might otherwise be the case. The potential then exists for me to work with schools, demonstrating impact through schools rethinking policies on student voice and engagement with their student bodies. Also, the findings relating to the rebuilding of schools could be useful as school enter periods of extended change. As the wider education profession became aware of my work in this area I would be able to work with schools in order to help them enable their students to cope with the changes that are taking place.
On a wider level, some of the findings in this thesis resonate with some of the more radical suggestions for the development of curricula. For example, the idea of Self-Organised Learning Environments (SOLEs) proposed by Sugata Mitra (Dolan, Leat, Mazzoli Smith, Mitra, Todd & Wall, 2013). In a SOLE, students are empowered to take far greater control over their learning than would be the case in a traditional classroom. Pupils are set very open questions and are then free to explore these by researching in teams on the internet. This clearly has links to some of the preferences expressed by the participants in this research. The students in this research desired an education that was not distinct from the rest of their lives and the implications in terms of wider, national, policy would be the dismantling of barriers in space and time between formal education and the outside world, including employment. This would be harder to achieve directly with a Conservative government. However, by working with think tanks such as the Centre for Labour and Social Studies who have published policy papers that are sympathetic to some of the findings here it would be possible to have some impact. The fact that SOLEs are being implemented across the world and being shown to be effective demonstrate that some of the ideas in this thesis can be built upon in order to create an education system that works for people from many different backgrounds. As De Lissovoy (2010) recognises, we should see the fundamental importance of education when it comes to the larger projects of democracy and community building. In order to achieve this, it would be necessary to address the tangled web of the reality of modern adolescent existence and out of touch educational policy regimes (Smyth & Wrigley, 2013).
This thesis has made an original contribution to knowledge by investigating the resistance of a group of disaffected secondary school students in a particularly idiosyncratic situation. Through this it has shown that these students are not helplessly acting out social relations imposed by dominant groups in society nor tactically reacting in the moment to a greater power. It has also shown that their behaviour is not simply mindless transgression of imposed rules. It has clearly demonstrated that, whilst school students in disadvantaged socio-economic positions are implicated in their continued oppression, there is the potential for schools to make a greater contribution towards overcoming this. This could be achieved by acknowledging that power in school is shared between school authorities and the students attending school. By treating young people as emergent adults with responsibility for their own lives and engaging them productively with the running of schools it is likely that they would feel a greater sense of ownership over their education and connect with it more positively. The suggested next steps would take this original contribution to knowledge further and provide more insight into how this new form of engagement could be achieved.
Appendix 1 – Certificate of Ethical Approval

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER
Graduate School of Education

Certificate of ethical research approval

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor and finally by the Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/guidelines/ and view the School’s statement on the GSE student access on-line documents.

READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER (the form will expand to contain the text you enter). DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND

Your name: Thomas Ralph
Your student no: 650020634
Return address for this certificate: GSE, St Lukeo Campus
Degree/Programme of Study: PhD in Education
Project Supervisor(s): Martin Levinson & Alexandra Allan
Your email address: t.ralph@ex.ac.uk
Tel: 01392 724762

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my dissertation / thesis (delete whichever is inappropriate) 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 form.

Signed: .................................................. Date: 1/3/12

NB For Masters dissertations, which are marked blind, this first page must not be included in your work. It can be kept for your records.

Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee
updated: April 2011
Certificate of ethical research approval
DISSERTATION/THESIS

Your student no. 550029634

Title of your project: Cultures of Resistance

Brief description of your research project:
This research project aims to look at how the culture that children are a part of affects their engagement with formal education. The overarching research question is “How does a culture of resistance manifest in school?”. It will focus on children who are resistant to education and involve an ethnographic approach in order to interpret their attitudes toward and perceptions of schooling and how they act to create the kind of place they want school to be.

Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):
The participants in this research will be members of a specific year group in a secondary school as they move from year 10 to year 11, so they will be between the ages of 14 and 16.

Give details (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) regarding the ethical issues of:
a) informed consent: Where children in schools are involved this includes both headteachers and parents. Copy(ies) of your consent form(s) you will be using must accompany this document. A blank consent form can be downloaded from the GSE student access online documents.

The consent of the headteacher will first be obtained prior to entering the school. They will be made aware of the aims and objectives of the research. It is essential to obtain the informed consent of the parents of the children who will be involved in the interviews and focus groups. The school will contact these parents. The children will also be involved in giving consent. The right to withdraw will be made clear and participants will be made aware of how the research findings will be used.

b) anonymity and confidentiality

The nature of the research requires me to be aware of the identity of the participants. However, the identity of the school and all participants will be kept totally confidential in the final report.

Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis, and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:
The methods being used for data collection will be participant observations, semi-structured interviews, participant journals, some drawing activities and a photographic project. The impact of classroom observations will be minimal as far as the students are concerned. Teachers will be informed of the fact that they are not themselves being observed and their permission will be sought prior to entering any classrooms. The interviews will require that students are removed from lessons. Permission will be sought from teachers for this to happen and the timing of these will be considered so that the same subjects are not repeatedly missed. The participant journals will be carried out as a part of the children’s ordinary school work and homework so there is no additional workload or stress.

Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee
updated: April 2011
The drawing activities will take place as a part of the interviews which should not cause any additional work or stress. The photographic project is also being carried out as a part of their work in school. All interpretations will be checked back with the participants in order to ensure that they are not being misrepresented.

Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project (e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires or special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.):

During the data collection, analysis and write up all data will be stored securely. Physical material will be kept in a locked building and digital material will be kept on a password protected computer (with virus protection). Journals and photographs will be returned to the participants at the end of the project and anything else will be destroyed when it is no longer required.

Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

The fact that the school in question has recently become an academy and also its position in national league tables mean that it may be easier to identify than would otherwise be the case. In order to ensure that the school cannot be identified no mention of its location will be made beyond ‘the south of England’ and it will be described as ‘historically very low achieving’.

This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School’s Research Support Office for the Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.

N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor.

This project has been approved for the period: 1st June 2012 until: 30 Sept. 2014

By (above mentioned supervisor’s signature): .......................................................... date: 1/3/2012

N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.

GSE unique approval reference: 12/11/12 7.6

Signed: .......................................................... date: 12/21/2012

Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee

This form is available from https://education.croydon.sch.uk/students/

Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee
updated: April 2011
The ethnographic fieldwork in the school took place between February 2012 and March 2013. The frequency of the visits was approximately twice weekly. There were occasional weeks where no visits took place due to work commitments. No visits took place during September 2012 due to the start of the school year, Ofsted inspecting the school and the researcher attending an international conference.

The interviews took place on the following dates at the specified locations and in the specified groups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charlie &amp; Martin</td>
<td>Student Support Area</td>
<td>28/5/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth, Jenna, Chloe, Ella, Poppy</td>
<td>Student Support Area</td>
<td>28/5/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark, Simon, James, Richard, Adam, Colin</td>
<td>Student Support Area</td>
<td>29/5/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deena, Esther, Leah, Lily, Jenni</td>
<td>Student Support Area</td>
<td>29/5/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie, Martin &amp; Elizabeth</td>
<td>Meeting Room</td>
<td>11/2/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin, James &amp; Deena</td>
<td>Library</td>
<td>13/2/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon, Richard, Leah &amp; Adam</td>
<td>Library</td>
<td>25/2/13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The participants were given cameras and left to take photographs during their school day on the following dates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brandon &amp; Martin</td>
<td>11/7/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>11/7/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella &amp; Elizabeth</td>
<td>11/7/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deena &amp; Mark</td>
<td>18/7/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>18/7/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>18/7/12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The photo elicitation interviews took place on the following dates in the specified groups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deena, Jenni, James, Esther</td>
<td>Learning Resource Centre</td>
<td>23/7/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon, Richard, Mark, Adam</td>
<td>25/7/12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon, Charlie, Martin, Elizabeth, Jenna</td>
<td>26/7/12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James, Deena, Adam &amp; Leah</td>
<td>27/11/12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella &amp; Poppy</td>
<td>14/3/13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark, Simon, Jenni &amp; Esther</td>
<td>29/11/12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


London: Routledge.


Gupta, A. & Ferguson, J. (1997b). Beyond “culture”: Space, identity, and the politics of difference, in Gupta, A & Ferguson, J. (Eds.), *Culture, Power,


425


*The Impact of KS4 Vocational Courses on Disengaged Young People’s 
Engagement with Education 15-18.* London: Department for Education.

2(1), 67-75.


Pupils.* Oxon: Routledge.

students and teachers in ethnographic fieldwork. *Qualitative Research.* 5(2),  
181-199.

Ethnicity and Class.* Gloucestershire: E & E publishing.


Saldaña, J. (2012). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers.* London:  
SAGE.

Sandelowski, M. (2002). Reembodying qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Health 
Research.* 12(1), 104-115.


Smythe, J., McInerney, P. & Fish, T. (2013). Re-engagement to where? Low SES students in alternative-education programmes on the path to low-


Acknowledgements

There are many people who have helped me in completing this thesis, too many to name individually. However, there are a few who deserve a special mention.

Firstly, Lynn, Oscar and Barney without whose patience and moral support nothing would have got done. This thesis is as much a result of your work as mine (although the mistakes are probably my work).

Martin and Sandy, who are the most amazing supervisors you could hope to have.

Keith, for getting me started on this path in the first place.

Mum and Dad, obviously.

Auntie Joan, you were more excited about me doing this than anyone else. It’s a shame you just missed out on seeing the end result.

Laura and Edie, for the use of the spare room.

Jim, you put me in yours so I guess you ought to be in mine.