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Work in Progress?

**14-16 year old boys' experience of
vocational education.**

Submitted for Doctorate in Education

Discipline: Education

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Abstract

This research arose from my professional concern, as a teacher, in boys' underachievement in secondary schools, an issue that has occupied a central position in educational debate in recent years. My study focused on how the 14-19 curriculum changes, introduced by the last Labour Government, might have some enduring relevance to the debate on boys and achievement. The first two research questions considered perspectives on achievement and interventions aiming to benefit boys while the final question related to experiences of the 14-19 curriculum. Review of the literature led me to employ a critical theoretical framework

The methodology used was qualitative in nature in which I adopted a post-modern interpretivist perspective. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with young people and with their teachers in a number of English schools and colleges with some accompanying policy document review. Semiotic analysis was also employed to examine the use and implications of language and how this can alter perspectives of all those involved in education. Analysis of the data related to the key categories underpinning the research questions and using a methodology informed by grounded theory. Key issues arising related to the concepts of 'choice', 'practicality' and 'being treated as adults'.

In conducting the research I was most interested in finding out whether and how policy intentions can translate into practical outcomes and how the needs and voices of young people can be articulated for their benefit and for that of the wider society. My findings suggest that the issue of underachievement is systemic within the mainstream educational curriculum with a gap existing between what young people think they need and what policy makers perceive to be required. I propose that there is need for renewed

attention specific to learners aged 14-16 which will enable the development of skills and enhance life choices so that achievement is better understood, inclusive and accessible.

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Glossary

ASDAN

Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) is a British charity organisation which provides educational opportunities for young people helping learners to develop their personal and social skills through its award programmes and qualifications.

BTEC

The Business and Technology Education Council is a secondary school and F.E. college work related qualification.

C.S.E

The Certificate of Secondary Education (C.S.E.) was an academic qualification awarded between 1965 and 1987 in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Achieving C.S.E. grade 1 was equivalent to achieving an O- Level in the subject.

Eleven Plus (11+)

Created by the 1944 Butler Education Act, this was a test taken by children at age 11 to determine the most suitable secondary school linked to ability and future career needs.

F.E. College

Colleges of Further Education (F.E.), provide post-16 vocational education in England.

G.C.E.

The General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.) was introduced in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 1951. The examinations were graded into O-levels for the top 25%

academically of 16-year-olds. A-Levels were the subsequent examination for those who studied for a further two years.

G.C.S.E.

The General Certificate of Secondary Education (G.C.S.E.) is an academic qualification introduced in 1986 to replace the G.C.E. O-Level and C.S.E. qualifications.

G.N.V.Q.

General National Vocational Qualifications (G.N.V.Q.) was a certificate of vocational education awarded in the U.K between 2000- 2007.

L.E.A.

Local education authorities (L.E.A.s) was the former term used for (L.A.s) Local Authorities which are the local councils in England and Wales that are responsible for education within their jurisdiction.

NEETS

This is an acronym for young people who are not in education, employment or training.

T.V.E.I.

The Training and Vocational Education Initiative (T.V.E.I.) was a national U.K. scheme announced in 1982 and ended in 1997. It was part of an attempt to align education more closely to the needs of industry and commerce and to rectify some of the perceived knowledge, skill and attitude deficits of school leavers.

Section A Introduction

1. Chapter One Introduction

1.1 Context

This chapter sets out the context for the research study along with its aims and rationale before describing some personal influences which have contributed to my researcher positionality, meaning the way in which I am situated within the research, the choices made and the interpretation offered. The chapter then presents the research questions which underpin the study and concludes with an outline of the overall structure of the thesis.

In the early years of the twenty-first century in the UK, underachievement of boys has been central to crisis accounts about falling educational standards and failing pupils (Smith, 2010). For example, this phenomenon within English education has been linked to the findings of the Third International Maths and Science Study TIMSS (1995) and to the Programme for International Student Assessment PISA (2000 onwards). These internationally generated statistical comparisons led many nations, including the UK, to examine closely their students' achievement in the international context (Moreau, 2011). In the UK perceived national problems were seen as an educational deficit when measured against the performance of other countries. This concern, at the beginning of the millennium coincided with growing youth unemployment (Bay and Blekesaune 2002) and fears surrounding youth anti-social behaviour (Smith, 2003). Successive UK governments developed policy to address perceived underachievement in schools and colleges of further education. These reforms have led to further policy reform targeted at 14-19 year olds.

In 2004 the final report (Tomlinson, 2004) was published of a working group set up by the Labour Government with the aim of conducting wide ranging reform of the 14-19 curriculum in England and Wales. The committee was chaired by Mike Tomlinson and

his report presented a unified educational programme for all 14-19 year olds in England, in which GCSEs, A levels and vocational qualifications would become components. The resultant government response was the 2005 White Paper 14-19 Education and Skills (2005) which incorporated elements of Tomlinson's proposals. This thesis provides an appraisal of this policy and its practical application with a focus on its relationship to the issue of boys' underachievement. The research explores the experiences of some of the first young people and their teachers in England to be involved in this programme. It does this through the collection and interpretive analysis of interview data collected between December 2009 and March 2010 in a number of Midland schools and colleges.

1.2 Aims

The overall aim of the study was to explore the concept of boys' underachievement and to examine if and how 14-19 curriculum reform, with the introduction of the Diploma programme (outlined in Chapter Two), had impacted on this. This research aims to:

- Consider what is meant by the terms achievement and underachievement;
- Discover what is known about successful ways of motivating boys;
- Examine the perspectives of boys and their teachers in secondary and F.E. settings;
- Evaluate the 14-19 curriculum in practice alongside its theoretical basis;
- Attempt to define *achievement* in a new way.

These research aims will be used to formulate research questions which will be explored through the thesis with the intention of examining the wider implications of the research and its practical application to the teaching profession and educational policy makers.

1.3 Rationale

My interest in this area stemmed from my professional experience as a teacher of boys and personally, as a parent of a son. The early career as a teacher involved teaching in the late 1970s in a large secondary comprehensive school where I encountered the full range of 'lads', as vividly described by Willis (1977). At that time, the curriculum was structured in such a way that students were taught in mixed ability groups and in my subjects of History and Integrated Humanities, examined through continuous assessment between the ages of 14-18. Teachers decided on which students to enter for CSE or GCE, or if in doubt to make dual entries. Practical and vocationally oriented subjects, such as Community Studies and Rural Studies had a place in the timetable alongside academic subjects. There were still unskilled jobs available in the nearby farms, factories and pits for school leavers with low levels of qualifications. However, the experiences of boys in school did not tell the whole story of their achievements. Two brief examples are given here that illustrate common experiences of the boys that I taught.

Daz aged 16 in 1978.

Daz, was a quiet, football loving boy whose unrecognised dyslexia meant that his reading age remained at the level of a six year old despite his being sixteen. Along with other teachers, I worried for Daz's future. It was clear that he would be leaving school that summer, with only a very few low grade C.S.E. qualifications. With no family connections, there was no obvious employment route for him to follow and with his lack of qualifications, F.E.College, would provide little other than a postponement of the problem of having no skills to offer an employer. One of the local factories seemed to be the only way forward for Daz and I suggested that he could phone to ask about any vacancies in local businesses. Daz looked nonplussed, asking why would he do that? He already had a job at the local crisp factory and was going to be made a section leader in July when he left school and could finally work full-time.

Daz had got himself the job at the beginning of Year 11 and had worked weekend and holiday shifts in such a way as to impress his boss and line up his own opportunity for when he left school. Daz saw this as his own out-of -school business with no connection to what he did from 8.30 a.m.-3.30 p.m. on school days. Unfortunately, the education system provided no clear connection between learning in and outside of school.

While much has changed in education since the 1970s, young people are still facing a period of immense change at this stage of their lives as they move forward towards more vocational learning. In this thesis, I am using the Diplomas as a clear example of the state of vocational education and 14-19 learning for boys at risk of underachievement. This has enabled me to look outside of a mainstream school setting to explore policy, structures and practices of this aspect of the education system through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders - learners and practitioners, to give a clear sense of the experience of those involved in these educational innovations. Daz was able to create his own opportunity in 1978 when there were still vacancies for unskilled workers. However, there are still enterprising young people for whom school is only a partial success. The example of Wayne is given below as an illustration.

Wayne aged 16 in 2011

Wayne was a student who left school with a history of many detentions in school. As with Daz, he was due to leave with less than the now requisite 5 A* - C GCSE passes necessary for him to continue his education. Fortunately, however for Wayne, he had been able to access some of alternative post-14 opportunities including Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and Wider Key Skills which enabled him to develop his entrepreneurial skills.

Many staff can still not comprehend how Wayne managed to gain a C in Mathematics given that he never seemed to pay attention in class or even be in many lessons. However, when asked to describe a recent experience for his ASDAN portfolio, Wayne outlined the steps he had taken to buy and sell a tractor on E-bay. This was a reflection of his out of school spare-time activities and skills.

I came across many other similar examples of boys making their own way in the world separately from school. This research aims to contribute to further development of a 14-19 education sector which is responsive enough to address the needs of all students and not one that regards some as simply underachievers. My interest is in the 14-19 phase of education, having begun my career in Leicestershire which at the time was following the Leicestershire Plan. In 1957 the L.E.A. introduced a new method of secondary organisation based on the two tier system piloted by The Chief Education Officer, with the intention of removing selection in secondary education. Under this scheme the eleven plus examination was abolished and all children spent the first three years of their secondary education in a high school. At the age of fourteen, all pupils had the right to transfer to the upper school, where they continued their education, but the L.E.A. insisted that the parents of children should give an undertaking to keep their children at school until they reached the age of sixteen, with the option of remaining for a sixth form (Elliot, 1970). My experience of teaching has given me an appreciation of the particular nature and needs of the 14-19 phase of education.

In this research I have highlighted the experiences of a range of fourteen-sixteen year old students, mainly boys. Alongside this, I have spoken to a number of the adults working with them in schools and further education colleges. In carrying out this study I hope to contribute knowledge which will help to improve further the vocational education provision for this age group. The thesis looks at how theories of learning relevant to this age group of learners can be further developed to enable the curriculum to become more meaningful and responsive to all learners, including this group of male learners. While class and ethnicity are important I have focussed particularly on gender as key impacting factor affecting 14-19 year old boys. Gender is a key issue in exploring boys' underachievement at 16-19 vocational developments and is the focus of recent literature

(Bostock and Wood, 2012; Haight, 2012; Duffy and Elwood, 2013; Epstein 1998; Francis, 2006; Hodson, 2008; Isaacs, 2013; Kidd 2011; Lindsay, 2006; Moreau, 2011; Ren and Deakin Crick, 2013; Senior, 2010; Stahl, 2013; Wilkins, 2012), as well as ongoing debate in professional education practice.

During the period of the research a new Coalition Government came to power and diverted the focus away from the Diplomas towards an increase in apprenticeships and the establishment of a limited number of studio schools to provide vocational education for some 14-19 year olds. While the Diplomas were no longer being promoted due to this change in government, this research has offered a unique opportunity to explore the effectiveness of specific programmes responsive and relevant to 14-19 year olds, some of whom were identified as being at risk of underachievement in school settings. This research points out some areas for further consideration in helping young people fulfil their potential after the age of 14.

These areas include:

- building on previous successes to create more imaginative views of 14-19 educational futures;
- changing our expectations and definitions to recognise and promote a wider range of achievement;
- promoting further engagement and involvement of young people in their education leading to their empowerment.

Incorporating these issues into the debate on 14-19 boys' vocational education will contribute to young people achieving their potential.

1.4 Personal Influences

This study arose from my personal ontology which reflects my own life story located within its historical context (Goodson, 1992) and so it is useful to reflect here on how my viewpoint has been formed.

At my primary school in Glasgow in the 1950s I was taught by women in nineteenth century Belgian attire which, on reflection may have seemed unusual for that period and in that geographical area. These were the sisters of Notre Dame, a religious community of women founded in Namur in 1809 who had dedicated themselves to educating and serving others, especially poor and marginalized groups of the population. In 1895 a group of these religious sisters had come to the west coast of Scotland to set up a teacher training college for girls and had gone on to provide staff in a number of citywide schools. Their progressive educational approach was based upon the theory and practice of one of the twentieth century's leading educationalists, Dr. Maria Montessori. The use of her particular child-centred multi-sensory learning approach was now being applied to the working class boys and girls of post war Glasgow.

A review of her seminal work (Montessori, 1912) shows that the Montessori Method was directed initially at nursery and reception age children and was characterised by an emphasis on self-directed learning with the use of physical activity and specific equipment. The ideas of self-direction and personalisation I have found to be key aspects in my own approaches to learning and my subsequent professional teaching role. Montessori developed her method as part of her postgraduate research into the intellectual development of poor children in the San Lorenzo area of Rome, especially those with intellectual and developmental difficulties. She emphasised that children were beings in their own right, not merely small adults. In this she was influenced by Jean Piaget's (1928)

stages of cognitive development and she further developed the outcomes from Piaget's methods and findings. Montessori saw children as being capable of directing their own learning with adults introducing materials and then remaining a "silent presence" in the classroom. It was her belief that children learn through discovery and so didactic materials should be available and these should enable self-correction to take place without teacher intervention.

My experience of the Montessori approach to learning led to the development of my initial research questions about achievement. In particular, I aimed to explore how some of the interventions suggested by the Montessori Method might help engage disaffected boys further in their learning. For example, how do greater learner-centred approaches to learning a subject enhance the student's engagement in 14-19 learning? 14-19 curriculum changes provided the scope to further develop discussions on the development of good practice for this group, drawing on Montessori's principles that:

"The pedagogical method of *observation* has for its base the *liberty* of the child, and *liberty is activity*. Discipline must come through liberty. We call an individual disciplined when he is master of himself, and can, therefore, regulate his own conduct when it shall be necessary to follow some rule of life" (Montessori, 1912, p.86).

Through my experiences of the Montessori approach to teaching, I gained an appreciation that, experimenting and making mistakes was an important part of the learning process. As I progressed through the state education system other approaches to education directed what was learned and how it was to be taught. I have, however, retained some appreciation of the individual at the centre of learning. Montessori's education of the whole child, fundamental belief in the importance of the individualised

experience, and emphasis on kinaesthetic learning reflects Maslow's (1943) discussions of preferred learning styles. Boys' preference for practical based learning styles has also been borne out in the data collected for this study and has been reflected in my own experience of teaching, which suggests that many boys at the 14-19 age want to learn and to progress but that they want to be engaged more practically - in learning by doing. Montessori's methods have been further developed as well as criticised by some for not transferring to larger or less well-resourced settings. She did however, aim for the methods to be applied and further developed.

“This book of methods compiled by one person alone, must be followed by many others. It is my hope that, starting from *the individual study of the child* educated with our method, other educators will set forth the results of their experiments. These are the pedagogical books which await us in the future.” (Montessori, 1912, p.374).

My educational experience of the Montessori philosophy also influenced my professional teaching practice. In addition, Paulo Freire's work (1968) was a further important influence on my thinking in my work with an international volunteer and development organisation. The relevance of Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (1968) was clear, not only to projects overseas, but also to community development projects in the UK. A fundamental goal of his dialogical teaching was to create a process of learning and knowing that involved thinking about the experiences shared in the dialogue process. For example, the development of 'paired work' in UK schools was influenced in part by Freire's radical work in education. Similarly, mentors working with students in secondary schools drew on the principles of his approach. Particularly significant for this research was Freire's situating educational activity in the lived experience of learners. Freire discussed the means of enabling conscientization for illiterate South American peasants

and the importance of relevance of the teaching to the lived experiences of this group. This research explores what the principles of such an approach to teaching can offer to English underachieving urban boys at the 14-19 stage of education. My third research question, therefore explores the necessity for intrinsic relevance to be built into courses for boys needing to equip themselves for their future living and working environment.

The ideas of Montessori and Freire have both affected my role as educator and as a researcher. The contribution of other writers and teachers who have provided insight into the 14-19 curriculum and achievement of boys are reflected in the literature review in Chapter Three. Researcher positionality, the research questions and outline of the structure of the thesis are given below.

Researcher positionality

These influences, along with others have impacted on me personally, professionally and as a researcher. At the outset, I had preconceptions about boys, schools, learning and achievement, mostly based on personal experience but also influenced by professional awareness of the on-going debate about boys' underachievement. Foucault (1972) reminds us of the need to have an open mind when looking at old problems:

“There is negative work to be carried out first: we must rid ourselves of a whole mass of notions” (Foucault, 1972, p.21).

While my own biography and positionality have relevance (Sikes and Goodson, 2003), I have tried to look at the issue of boys' underachievement with fresh eyes. In so doing I have been open to different perspectives undertaking an initial literature review which in turn led on to a more focused approach as the topic area became clearer and key concepts have arisen (Rudestam and Newton, 1992).

1.5 The Thesis

The title of the thesis begins with the question “Work in Progress?” for three reasons. Firstly, many of the particular young people who have contributed to the interviews were still in the process of progressing through the education system at the time and many of those young people were still unsure about how their future working life would develop. They were however committed to continue the process of training and learning to equip themselves better for future work. Secondly, the reforms to the curriculum for 14-19 year olds were not yet complete before being over-taken by further developments and so this study reflects a sense of transience. Thirdly, the courses themselves were vocational in intent and therefore could be seen as providing a means for enabling young people to progress towards employment in the workforce at a time when economic conditions were undergoing change that would significantly affect opportunities for work. The presentation of the title as a question reflects the existence of uncertainty and trialling that accompanies the work being carried out in this phase of education. The findings of this research contribute towards showing how far these changes have impacted on boys potentially at risk of underachievement and what can be learned from their experiences.

The Research Questions

Having outlined above the aims of the research along with my rationale and personal ontology, in this section I demonstrate how these aims and the thinking have been encapsulated within the research questions. As with much of the research process these were subject to considerable reformulation based on an ongoing review of the literature and data collection. It was important, however, that the ultimate design of the research questions was consistent with the underlying aims of the research which centres on boys aged 14-16 who may be at risk of underachievement. For this reason my first question focuses on notions of achievement and particular different perspectives on boys’

underachievement while the second question centres on what might be done to further motivate boys. The final question relates specifically to vocational education and how achievement might be redefined. These three research questions guide the study and are given below along with the subsidiary questions which have helped in the process of carrying out the research.

Are boys underachieving? Perspectives on achievement.

What are the schools' views of the boys' achievement?

What are the boys' views?

What are the views of highly achieving boys and girls?

What, if any, intervention will benefit the boys?

What do we know about successful ways of increasing achievement and how can more boys benefit from that knowledge?

In what ways will the new 14-19 curriculum, with its vocational emphasis, meet the needs of students at risk of underachieving?

What specific lessons in relation to policy and practice can be learnt in order to engage boys?

How can we redefine achievement?

This thesis sheds light on these questions through a review of the literature and collection of the perspectives of learners and providers. Finally, analysis of data is presented and related to current theory, policy and practice with suggestions for further research.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

An abstract is provided at the start of the thesis along with lists of contents, figures and appendices followed by a glossary of abbreviations and terminology. The thesis is divided into five sections: introduction, literature review, methodology, findings and finally conclusions and implications. An alphabetical list of references and numbered list of appendices are included at the end of the thesis. Chapter One has provided the background to the project context and explained the personal and professional rationale and context of the work. This chapter has identified the researcher's personal and professional interest and presents an account of researcher positionality before discussing the research questions which frame the work. The following section gives an overview of the contents of the thesis and the design of the research questions.

The next four chapters provide the contextual and methodological structure of the study. Chapter Two begins with an overview of the complex policy area of this secondary phase of education in England including discussion of the concept of 'vocationalism'. The chapter offers an account of how the modern phenomenon of globalisation has an effect on the education of students aged fourteen and above. Finally an appraisal is provided of the particular policy context against which this study is set, explaining the proposed curriculum changes recommended in The Tomlinson Report (2004) before going on to describe what happened in practice. Chapter Three presents a review of practice based literature related to this research study and presents the conceptual framework which includes perspectives on achievement and underachievement, a review of literature centred on the underachievement of boys along with a consideration of some of the suggested solutions. Chapter Four outlines the researcher's understanding of theory in research before proceeding to detail the theoretical framework adopted within the thesis and providing an

explanation of the reasons why Bourdieu's theory of reproduction was seen as being most relevant. This chapter also describes how this theoretical perspective has been modified by other influences over the course of the research. Chapter Five deals with the methodology adopted within the study. The first part considers the methodological literature which has supported the study while the second presents the rationale for the research structure. The third and fourth parts of this chapter consider respectively the ethical issues involved and the insider-outsider researcher dichotomy while the fifth part of this chapter outlines pilot work carried out and lessons learnt.

The next two chapters deal with the interviews carried out for the study. Chapter Six discusses the approach to, and reflections on the analysis and interpretation of the data. It provides background information on the choice of settings and respondents before proceeding to explain the rationale for the thematic consideration of the data. The chapter identifies the themes I have chosen to focus on throughout the research: perspectives on achievement, motivation and empowerment and finally, curriculum choice and flexibility. It also considers the different ways in which the data was prepared in order to enable interpretation. Chapter Seven presents the data in relation to the identified themes, noted in the previous chapter taking student and staff respondents in turn.

Chapter Eight provides an analysis of the data presented in the previous chapter along with summarizing conclusions from the data. The final chapter, Chapter Nine, discusses my conclusions arising from my research findings with reference to the earlier literature and policy review. It offers an interpretation reflecting on the three broad conceptual themes on which I have chosen to focus during this study and includes a number of methodological reflections. It demonstrates the ways in which the research has complied with the criteria set and looks at the conclusions drawn in relation to the research

questions posed and identifies the contribution made by the research to the field. It discusses the research implications in terms of theory, policy and practice with recommendations for future possible research and concludes by looking to the future and recommending practical applications for reform to address boys' underachievement through the 14-19 curriculum.

1.8 Summary

This introductory chapter has explained my personal and professional reasons for carrying out this research and has identified the contextual position relating to the underachievement debate and also to the 14-19 curriculum developments. The chapter has presented the research questions which underpin the study and has given an overview of the structure of the thesis. The next chapter examines the context surrounding 14-19 curriculum reform.

2. Chapter Two

The vocational policy context for young people aged 14-19

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the context to the research by outlining the curriculum reforms impacting on the 14-19 curriculum and boys' underachievement. In 2004 the final report was published of a working group, chaired by Mike Tomlinson and set up by the Labour Government which marked the beginning of the formal classification of a 14-19 curriculum. The report fulfilled its brief, by presenting a unified educational programme for all 14-19 year olds in England, in which GCSEs, A levels and vocational qualifications would become components. While the report itself was destined to be controversial and not all of the proposals were enacted, it was, nevertheless, disappointing that instead of beginning the intended ten year programme of reform, the proposals that were implemented survived for less than five years. This was yet a further blockage in the development of vocational education in England and the researcher's appraisal of some of its precursors are outlined in the next section.

2.2 Early reforms and subsequent developments

Ever since the Elementary Education Act (1870), governments have sought to use education as a means of meeting the needs of employers. However, the beginning of modern UK educational policy was marked by the Education Act (1944) legislating for free education for all with the leaving age extended to age 15. Within this vision there was the beginning of a recognition of the fact that there was an underlying need to tackle the post-war economic skills' shortage with a curriculum which had both relevance and was suited to the ability of the learner. In 1951, access to grammar or secondary modern schools was determined by the outcome of the 11 plus examination. The small minority who passed and proceeded to grammar schools then had the opportunity of taking GCE O levels and finally A levels. Such a system was a suitable route for progression into university or in to higher level business and commerce positions. The system neglected to address the needs and

prospects of the majority of children, deemed failures at the age of 11 due to their not passing the 11 Plus examination. The curriculum to be followed by them in secondary modern schools was seen as second best to what was offered by grammar schools and it was not possible to transfer from secondary modern into a grammar school.

Governmental desire for education to link closely with industry carried on through the 1960s and 70s. In 1976, Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan inaugurated 'the great debate' (Callaghan, 1976) emphasising the need for a practical application of education to serve the needs of industry. In a period of rising unemployment and the apparent decline of Britain's economy, the concern was that education was failing to produce appropriately skilled and motivated young workers. Callaghan stated that there needed to be improved relations between industry and education (Callaghan, 1976). Margaret Thatcher's incoming 1979 Conservative Government developed the idea of 'vocationalism' further as a political response to the needs of the economy which fitted well with the New Right's attempt to instil a belief in entrepreneurialism and individual effort. The concept also served the purpose of reducing the role of the 'liberal' educational establishment and instead allowed business to have more influence over education/training. As part of the core curriculum all children were to have some vocationally related craft, design or technology education along with a period of work experience. There were critics of this new government intervention, some believing that it was more motivated by a means of maintaining and even extending social inequalities rather than equipping pupils for adult life (Brown, 1987). Brown concluded by saying that things could only get worse with vocationalism seen as a solution for the working class, echoing Willis's (1977) earlier claim that social engineering enabled schools to fit the working class for working class jobs (Willis, 1977).

The Technical Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) provided funding to develop innovative new models of vocational education from 1983. The initiative aimed to influence and encourage schools to adopt a more vocationally orientated curriculum through a system of financial and other incentives but most of these were stopped by the introduction of the 1988 Education Reform Act which established the new GCSE as the entitlement pathway for all school students. Butcher asserted that in spite of the fact that many schools accessed a range of vocational programmes throughout the 1990s, this was 'virtually untouched in the literature' (Butcher, 2004, p.30). He suggested that this may be because of 'continuing doubt as to whether vocational courses are proper activities for a school sixth form' (Butcher, 2004, p.30). It was noted that the success of General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) could be attributed to the fact that schools received valuable 'on roll' income for offering such courses (Butcher, 2004, p.31) which meant that additional funding would be given to schools if they had students enrolled on such courses. There was, therefore, considerable confusion and inconsistency surrounding vocational education in schools throughout this period.

An underlying premise of this thesis is that much government curriculum intervention over the past twenty-five years, some relating to the inconsistencies mentioned above, has been directly associated with the economic and societal changes associated with globalisation. Three key drivers of globalization have been identified (Lauder et al, 2006). These are:

- Development of technology and the knowledge economy;
- Dominance of the USA;
- Growth of multinational companies.

The most apparent of these is the fact that the economic prosperity of Western developed economies is seen as being dependent on the creation of highly skilled jobs while lesser skilled work can be carried out much more effectively in low wage economies. While, it has been argued that globalization is not irreversible, particularly in relation to free trade and financial markets (James, 2001) there are clear effects on young people in the UK and their educational choices and future employment prospects. It is for this reason that a study on vocationalism and young people's achievement is a highly relevant educational and political issue.

2.3 The developing curriculum for 14-19 year olds.

It has been demonstrated that successive governments in the UK have seen education's main purpose as a tool in economic competition, a factor that has been further emphasised as a result of globalisation. This creates tension with those who see education as serving wider human needs than purely satisfying the requirements of industry. Branson and Miller (1991) argue that one of the complexities in respect of pupils' post-16 choices is that individuals are affected by their social and cultural contexts. However, he explains that at the same time they are 'unique and creative individuals' (Branson and Miller, 1991, p.93) with their identity being socially and culturally located in time and space. It has also been claimed that with 16-19 year olds 'traditional notion of pedagogy is no longer entirely appropriate' (Butcher, 2004, p.40). Neither is the concept andragogy, as discussed by Knowles (1984), appropriate to the needs of 16-19 year olds, and even less those of 14-16 year olds. This stage of development is a distinctive phase in a person's life when, for example, in many societies young people go through initiation processes as rites of passage from childhood to becoming adults. Further, within education, Butcher claims that 'a bridge is needed between Years 11 and 12. A new word is needed to describe this stage

which focuses on the goal of students becoming more independent and self-directed learners (Butcher, 2004, p.41). These wider educational aims were to be included within the intended reform of the 14-19 Curriculum to be examined in the next section which looks at the Tomlinson Report and the political context of the introduction of the Diploma programme.

2.4 Labour's 14-19 Curriculum Reforms

This section concentrates on the issues surrounding, and the rationale for, the Labour Government's review of the 14-19 Curriculum. It maps the continuities and changes from the inception of Diplomas to their implementation. The section then goes on to consider the implications for 14-19 education brought about through a change in government in 2010. These governmental changes serve to illustrate the need for a more in depth theoretical understanding of education in the 14-19 phase which transcends policy changes and interests and provides a rationale for greater attention to the needs of 14-19 vocational learners.

The main focus of the curriculum reforms contained in the proposals made in the Tomlinson Report (2004) is important for this study. In looking at perspectives on boys' underachievement it was possible to make some comparison between the Tomlinson Report proposals and the perspectives of a sample of young learners and their teachers/trainers gathered from the interview data. The Tomlinson Report (2004) built on previous work in this area but a major way in which it was ground breaking was in its clear aim to create 'a unified framework for 14-19 learning' (Section 2). Its relevance for this study is its intention to meet 'the needs of different learners – entry, foundation, intermediate and

advanced programmes and Diplomas (Section 2 chapter 5), to strengthen the vocational offer (Section 3, chapter 8) and to raise participation and tackle disengagement' (Section 3, chapter 11). Addressing disengagement, strengthening the vocational offer and meeting the needs of different learners were particular strengths identified in the Diploma provision. In practice these strengths translated into provision of new opportunities for this group of learners, for example enabling school pupils to make use of college based equipment not available to them in school.

As indicated earlier, globalised economies require highly educated, flexible and mobile workforces which are commonly associated with qualifications and competitiveness. In 2002 participation in education at age 17 showed that the UK ranked 24th out of 28 OECD countries with a participation rate of 76% and of those not participating, 9% were not in employment, education or training, while a further 15% were in employment without training. Further, and of particular relevance to this study, more than 5% of young people reached the end of compulsory schooling with no qualifications with disproportionately low participation and attainment of some minority ethnic groups. (OECD 2004) Against this backdrop the Working Group into 14-19 education was established by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in February 2003 to respond to the remit contained in 14-19: Opportunity and Excellence.

The Report began by justifying the reforms, stating the need to build on strengths within the current system while addressing its weaknesses. It went on to spell out the need to expand entitlement to all. The 14-19 Education and Skills White Paper (2005) was a part of this policy development containing the Government's vision for reform across the phase with a focus on:

‘ .. high standards and much more tailored to the talents and aspirations of individual young people, with greater flexibility about what and where to study and when to take qualifications.’ (DfES 2005)

These policy change proposals were underpinned by two linked principles, firstly, that there should be a core, common format for all 14-19 learning programmes, building on the Key Stage 4 statutory National Curriculum, and secondly that there should be the inclusion of an extended project as part of core learning. Relevant work experience was also to form part of the core. Opportunities for additional specialised learning allowed for further personalisation

Components	Characteristics
Principal learning	<p>Gives the industry title of the Diploma</p> <p>Learning that is related to the sector of the economy</p> <p>Learning that is designed and endorsed by industry</p>
Core content	<p>Includes the assessment of Functional Skills in English, mathematics and ICT</p> <p>Develops a student's employability skills of teamwork and self management</p> <p>Gives the student the opportunity to produce an extended project</p> <p>Requires at least 10 days' compulsory work experience</p>
Additional and/or specialist learning	<p>Allows for the student to specialise</p> <p>Allows for the student to choose more qualifications</p> <p>Allows for flexibility and choice of learning</p>

Figure 1. Component characteristics of the Diploma (Source: QCA, 14-19 education and skills what is a Diploma?)

It was proposed that learning was linked to up to 20 ‘lines of learning’ within the

framework, each reflecting good sector vocational provision. One line was open, providing a relatively unconstrained choice of subjects and diploma components, similar to the mixed programmes of A levels or GCSEs or equivalent vocational qualifications. Students were also able to select from a wide choice of subjects and areas of learning, including traditional academic subjects and specially-designed components combining content from specialised Diploma lines which allowed students to sample relatively short vocational options. The other lines covered a wide range of employment sectors and/or academic areas of study which were not normally available to fourteen year old students. Figure 2 illustrates the proposed ‘lines of learning’ with their planned dates of introduction.

Area	First Teaching
Information Technology Society, Health and Development Engineering Creative and Media Construction & the Built	September 2008
Environmental and Land-Based Manufacturing & Product Design Hair and Beauty Studies Business, Administration and Hospitality	September 2009
Public Services Sport and Leisure Retail Travel and Tourism	September 2010
Science Languages Humanities	September 2011

Figure 2 Diploma ‘Lines’ of learning Source: (Smithers and Robinson, 2008, P.5)

The term Diploma was introduced and described as ‘a wrapper’ for a coherent suite of

learning programmes. The structural aim of the Diploma was therefore to provide the necessary link which would pull together the different elements of those programmes into a single whole linking new and existing qualifications.

Diplomas			Existing Qualifications	
Advanced	Core	Main learning	Level 3	Advanced Extension Award; GCE and VCE AS and A level; level 3 NVQ; equivalent qualifications
Intermediate	Core	Main learning	Level 2	GCSE grades at A*–C; intermediate GNVQ; level 2 NVQ; equivalent qualifications
Foundation	Core	Main learning	Level 1	GCSE grades D–G; foundation GNVQ; level 1 NVQ; equivalent qualifications
Entry	Core	Main learning	Entry	Entry level certificates and other work below level 1

Figure 3. Diploma Structure Source: (Tomlinson, 2004, P7.)

In the Tomlinson Report section entitled ‘Our vision’, the report stated that the 14-19 phase of learning is crucial for all young people and that by age 19 they should have the skills, knowledge and attributes necessary to participate fully and effectively in adult life. They should have a passion for learning and should see it as a natural, necessary and enjoyable part of adult life (Paragraph 3). To achieve this goal, 14-19 learning should be inclusive and challenging. It should cater for and excite all young people, whatever their aspirations, abilities, interests and circumstances. It should build upon learning up to 14 and provide pathways beyond 19 to further learning or employment. It should value and encourage a variety of content, styles and contexts of learning, including ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’, school-, college- and work-based. It should recognise and reward all successful learning, differentiating between individuals and celebrating outstanding achievements. (Paragraph 4).

Its three underlying principles were to:

- Raise participation and achievement – by tackling the educational causes of disengagement and underachievement and low post-16 participation.
- Get the basics right – ensuring that young people achieve specified levels in functional mathematics, literacy and communication and ICT, and are equipped with the knowledge, skills and attributes needed to succeed in adult life, further learning and employment.
- Strengthen vocational routes – the existing patchwork of vocational qualifications fails to provide coherence and progression for learners.

Its structure was such that learners of all abilities would be able to achieve and have recognition for those achievements. There would be the possibility of studying for a specialised diploma or an open diploma at various levels which were intended to offer coherent pathways in preparation for further learning. The Diploma was to be divided into two parts with the core comprising the following:

‘functional mathematics, functional literacy and communication; functional ICT; and an extended project. In addition, learners should experience a range of common knowledge, skills and attributes (CKSA) which should be integrated into all 14-19 programmes but with no requirement that they are separately taught or assessed. In addition, learners should be supported in reviewing their learning, with guidance to help them make choices about further learning and careers; all 14-19 year olds should be entitled to access wider activities such as work experience, service within the community and involvement in sports, the arts or outdoor activities. Participation and (where appropriate) achievement in these should be recorded on the diploma transcript;’ (Tomlinson, Section 3).

An intrinsic feature of the diploma was to be the extended project which was modelled on the personal project feature of the International Baccalaureate and which already formed part of some vocational qualifications such as BTECs and ASDAN awards. The extended project would ensure that all learners develop and demonstrate a range of generic skills, including research and analysis, problem solving, team-working, independent study, presentation and functional literacy and communication and critical thinking without unduly adding to the assessment burden. Perhaps most importantly, it would:

‘Encourage cross-boundary learning and ‘a personalised space within 14-19 programmes for young people to pursue areas of particular interest to them’ (Section 3).

Tomlinson accepted that change would not be immediate or straightforward, acknowledging that full implementation may take up to 10 years given the Report’s ambitious aims. He did, however, envisage quick and successful introduction of parts such as those related to assessment and to functional skills. He spoke of a need for strong coalition between all those involved in education and a change of ‘mind-set’ away from a focus on individual qualifications rather than programmes of study. A clear timescale was to be put in place with a phased introduction over the ten years with piloting, research and ongoing dialogue to be part of the process (Donovan, 2006). Unfortunately, this change of mind-set was to be the most controversial aspect of the Report. While there were concerns about aspects of the implementation of the proposals within schools there was also a good deal of enthusiasm about the opportunities the Diplomas provided (Donovan, 2005). In the Report’s second recommendation it had proposed that existing qualifications such as GCSEs, A levels, and NVQs should cease to be free-standing qualifications in their own right but should evolve to become components of the new Diplomas. This presented the

over-arching difficulty for Tony Blair's Government which was reluctant, in the run-up to an election, to antagonise the sizeable section of the middle-class electorate which wanted to retain the status quo, namely the traditional 'gold standard' of the A level. The report was, in fact, quickly dismissed by the Labour Government, which had commissioned it, for short-term political reasons (Pring et al.2009, p274). In the end major reform was not carried out as A levels and GCSEs were retained in their traditional form and much of Tomlinson's vision for a unified 14-19 education system was abandoned. Vocational Diplomas remained with a focus on:

- post 16 retention targets
- Basic skills of those entering employment after age 16
- Concern over those not in employment, education or training (NEETs).

The result, however, was a compromise with the existing GCSEs, A.S and A levels exams remaining and the academic/vocational divide continuing.

The Conservative-Liberal Coalition Government came to office in May 2010 and Professor Alison Wolf was commissioned to conduct a review of vocational education. Economic recession affected all aspects of public expenditure and against this backdrop a major conference was held in London in November 2010 and chaired by Geoff Hayward who had led the Nuffield Review of early 14-19 reforms. The aim of the conference was to examine reforms 'designed to ensure that young people are able to acquire the knowledge, skills and aptitudes that employers and the economy need to prosper in the 21st Century'. Increased participation and cross-phase cooperation were to be keynotes against a background of decreased public expenditure. No explicit mention of engagement was made in connection with those seen to be at risk, rather their cooperation was assumed. The Wolf Review of 14-19 Vocational Qualifications (Wolf, 2011) recognised some positive

elements in previous vocational provision she did not continue with Tomlinson's plans. The subsequent government response emphasised the value of apprenticeships, work-based learning and internship; strongly criticised many of the vocational/applied qualifications that schools and colleges had been using with 14-19 year olds; highlighted the value of programmes of learning for 16-19 year olds, including the continuation of English and Mathematics and called for an end to the use of equivalences between general and vocational/applied awards in performance tables at 16+ (Young, 2011). All of these measures, which were swiftly acted upon by the Department for Education, effectively reversed many of the policies of the previous government and the 14-19 phase of education was altered once again with the introduction of pilot studio schools in some colleges of F. E. for post 14 vocational learners and a renewed emphasis on apprenticeships at age 16+. Young (2011) argues that two issues stand out in considering the implications of the Coalition government's approach to the 14–19 curriculum and that one is the emphasis on knowledge that is expressed in the priority given to school subjects and the second is the specific reference to GCSEs, A levels and vocational education with no consideration of the 14–19 curriculum as a whole.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of 14-19 curriculum reforms initiated by the Labour Government in 2008 and has also presented a contextual picture of the development of vocational education prior to and following this. In providing a background to the context of Tomlinson's reforms, specifically the Diploma, this chapter gives an outline of the proposed policy reforms along with the rationale for and composition of the Diplomas. Criticisms of the complexity of the proposals and logistical difficulties highlighted in schools and colleges working in consortia have been indicated. The Labour Government's opposition to the subsuming of the A level has been

demonstrated as being a significant undermining of the overall principle underpinning the reforms. Finally, the change of government in 2010 has been shown to have brought about renewed alteration to vocational provision for learners aged 14-19 and the phasing out of Diplomas and any vestige of a unified 14-19 provision. Later data presentation and analysis will aim to build further on this preliminary appraisal of the 14-19 Curriculum Reforms by focusing on the specific experiences of some students and their teachers in order to provide more comprehensive answers to the research questions. The next chapter, the Literature Review, provides a further focus in answering these questions by considering the relevant themes emerging from the literature.

Section B Literature Review

3. Chapter Three Literature review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to review literature relevant to the main research questions which are:

1. Are boys underachieving?
2. What, if any, intervention, will benefit boys?
3. In what ways will the 14-19 curriculum meet the needs of students of all abilities?

These questions have been operationalised in such a way as to provide a conceptual framework which enables coherence between the examination of the literature, the analysis of the data and the eventual presentation of the findings. The concepts or themes have been arrived at over the course of the study and ongoing review of the literature. The concluding part of the literature review builds on this and looks at the specific case study of the 14-19 curriculum reforms outlined in Chapter Two and presents an examination of participants' views on curriculum choice and flexibility. Chapter Three examines the theoretical framework adopted for the study with a review of the methodological literature relevant to this study included in Chapter Four.

3.2 Conceptual framework

The first research question is examined by considering perspectives on achievement and underachievement in the literature, particularly in relation to boys. The literature is evaluated in terms of how far there is universal agreement on what is meant by either of the terms before going on to look at how and why underachievement has become so focal in recent discussion about education. The review then looks at the way in which the issue of achievement is seen as a gender issue while alternative discourses would suggest that underlying this are deep rooted concerns regarding social economic class divisions. This section also aims to provide a critical review of a number of key studies relating to boys and their perceived underachievement and the thinking behind some suggested solutions

The chapter then considers how far suggested interventions have increased student motivation and empowerment which sheds light on both the second and third research questions relating to the concepts of choice and curricular flexibility. Consideration of curriculum choice and flexibility helps to examine further successful ways of enabling achievement. The conceptual framework therefore being used to address the research questions in this thesis is as follows:

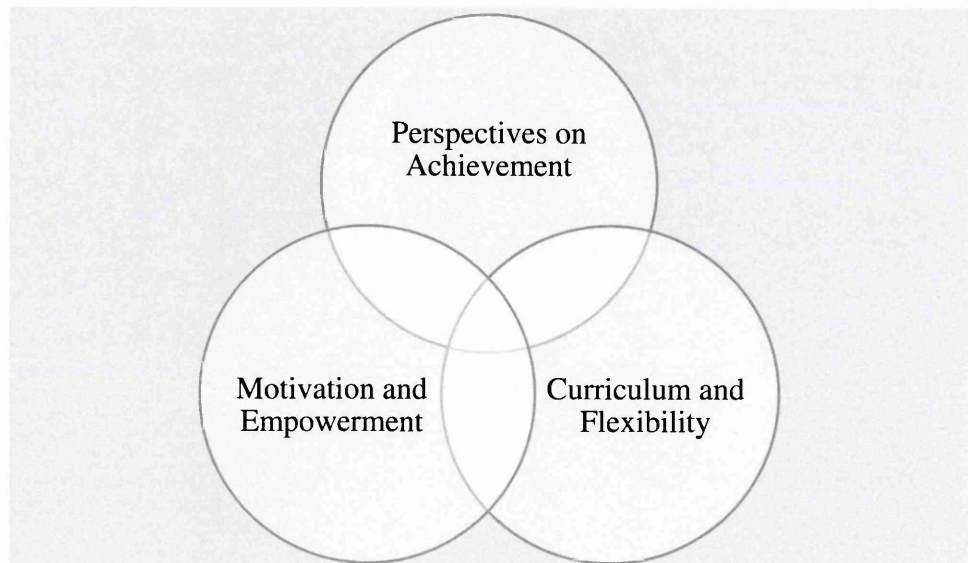


Figure 4. Conceptual framework of thesis.

3.3 Perspectives on Achievement

This section begins with a review of the discourses around the themes of achievement and underachievement. It focuses on boys' underachievement, presenting an appraisal of differing perspectives on boys' underachievement. Finally, this section presents the case for a wider definition of the problem and possible solutions.

Definitions of achievement and underachievement

The literature review looks at varying standpoints on achievement. The term is generally used as a relative rather than an absolute measure in educational contexts. Most typically it is used as a relative descriptor often combined in relation to other factors such

as gender, ethnicity and social class. (Francis & Skelton, 2005; Driessen, 2001; Epstein et al., 1998; Slavin, 1990). The term 'achievement' does not appear so often in the literature as does the term 'underachievement' which is more value laden and has more judgemental connotations. Underachievement, its causes and consequences, have been significant educational issues and at the forefront of educational debates over the last twenty years. Working definitions, however, are strongly contested. Meuret (2002) claimed that, significant public money had been spent attempting to overcome problems that may not actually exist. Even if we do accept that underachievement exists then he pointed out that there is 'no evidence that underachievers have much in common' (Meuret, 2002, p.205). Smith agreed that established definitions are crucial, maintaining that the debate has failed to answer two 'fundamental questions' about what is meant by the terms 'underachievement' and 'underachievers', arguing that these questions have to be answered before attempts can be made to solve the associated problems (Smith, 2005). She questions whether it is reasonable to use such terms in relation to an examination system which by its very nature sets out to differentiate between people. Smith argued that this gives rise to problems about educational equity and the consequences for lifelong advantage or disadvantage. As it is so difficult to agree on definitions, then it is important to ask whether some meanings have more dominance than others and, if so, why this should be?

Performativity and underachievement

In considering the notions of educational achievement and underachievement it is important to determine who is making the judgements and how these decisions might stem from vested interests, such as, post-industrialist workforce needs. As large scale manufacturing with a myriad of low skill level jobs in the UK have been replaced by

numerically fewer but jobs requiring a higher skill level and an increase in service related jobs, so the debate has widened over society's educational and training needs. Some lay blame at the incoherent provision made by successive governments for the 14-19 age group and the dilemmas which face tutors and students as attempts are made to translate rhetoric into practice (Halsall & Cockett, 1996). Much of the literature relates to post 16 learners as they were the first group to be highlighted in the debate over skill shortages. Ball (2000) provides useful analysis of this group's experiences, demonstrating how 16 year old learners had to find a way of negotiating their way through their lived experiences of social structures of 'family', 'values', 'race', 'gender' and 'class'. Ball argues similarly to Smith that experiences of individual inclusion and exclusion are imbedded in wider social, cultural and structural systems (Ball, 2000). Other forces argue against divorcing individuality from broader social structures. In discussing post -16 choice, Branson (1991) says that one of the tensions is the duality between the individual and society which he describes as 'thoroughly social and cultural but at the same time unique and creative' (Branson, 1991, p.93). This highlights the way in which identity is socially and culturally located in 'time and space' which is a key consideration in this study.

From a teacher's perspective, the term performativity and achievement is centred on whether a student does or does not gain 5 A*-C passes at GCSE as this is currently the requirement for admission on to post-16 courses and is the measure of a school's success in the league tables. In raw scores in national tests it may be possible to say that one group attained lower scores than another but it is not reasonable to conclude that the group who scored lower should have done better on that assessment and so we should not draw conclusions about why or how their gender is the cause of the difference in attainment (Meuret, 2002). Others voice similar concerns about the problems of unreliability and invalidity in categories used to describe underachievers (Gorard, 2003; Lee et al., 2003).

Most recently it has been argued that government approaches to addressing the educational achievement gap are preoccupied with standardised assessment and accountability. It has been argued that recent attempts at raising pupil standards in England through for example, the introduction of Academies has done little more than pay lip service to the persistent, underlying roots of inequality (Goodman and Burton, 2012). The national emphasis on competitive comparison in performativity is closely paralleled with international perspectives. The findings of the Third International Maths and Science Study TIMSS (1996) and the Programme for International Student Assessment PISA (2000 onwards) allowed for internationally generated statistical comparisons. These results led many nations, including the UK, to examine closely their students' achievement in the international context. Perceived national problems were seen as an educational deficit when measured against the performance of other countries.

The underachievement discourse has therefore been fuelled by national government competitiveness rather than out of concern for any particular individual or group's experience. It is this desire to compete internationally that has been driving policy debate and reform (Smith, 2005). The UK has been heavily influenced by practice in the US and so concerns about underachievement have led to a massive increase in national testing and target setting following an American model. This argument provided another perspective on the seemingly equitable legislation in the form of the 1988 Education Act which introduced the national curriculum and standard assessment task testing. It has been suggested that such systems of testing are unproven, and moreover, coupled with punitive accountability measures. In effect, such testing may serve to reinforce individual inequalities and label many otherwise good schools as failing (Linn, 2003; Smith, 2005).

In the UK, unfavourable international comparisons made by TIMSS and PISA have contributed to the assertion that the performance of certain groups of students is characterised by underachievement (DfES, 2001). In this way, public concern about national falling standards and failing students leads to concerns about the performance of particular groups. The statistical base of the comparison does not present the whole picture as it does not allow for individual variations in terms of maturing rate and individual interests and inclinations.

This section of the review has looked at the varying definitions of achievement and underachievement, examining why the debate has become so central in educational debates. The initial findings would suggest that issues of achievement and underachievement in education are highly political and multi-faceted. This review now focuses on one particular aspect - the underachievement of boys.

3.4 Differing perspectives on boys' underachievement.

There are differing perspectives on boys' underachievement. Educational debates on problems in education in the 1960s and 1970s focussed much on inequalities of social class. For example, government policy was seen to have unforeseen consequences such as the grouping of boys according to academic ability which resulted in promoting more anti-education attitudes amongst some boys (Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey 1970). It could be argued, however, that this was because of the differing social 'status' attributed to different groups and the associated learning issues, not the actual grouping itself. Further studies identified the impact of social class on boys' school achievement (Parker, 1974; Willis, 1977; Robins and Cohen, 1978).

Sociological explanations for male underachievement have focussed mainly on schools, parents and gender role socialisation. Epstein et al. (1996) produced a useful model demonstrating these dominant discourses. This model is a helpful starting point for the review as it encompasses many of the key issues to be discussed.

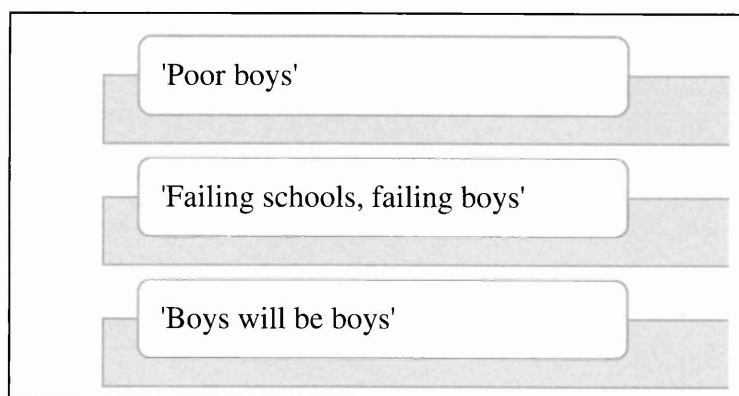


Figure 5. Epstein et al. model (1996)

The model has identified three dominant discourses as follows:

1 'Poor boys'

This first area of discourse depicts boys as 'victims'. They are generally seen as existing within one-parent (fatherless) families educated within female dominated primary schools. Moreover, the impact of the feminist movement over time enabled girls' achievement and educational success. Children may equate learning with femininity because of the predominance of female primary teachers and the significant role played by mothers in early learning. Women were seen as cause of boys' failure,

'If it is not women teachers, it is mothers; if not mothers, it is feminists; most often it is a combination (Epstein, 1996, p.6).

2 'Failing schools, failing boys'

The second narrative emerges from the school effectiveness and improvement movement. In this discourse Epstein et al explained how schools were blamed for failing

pupils because they produced leavers with low literacy and numeracy levels and therefore below average exam passes.

3 'Boys will be boys'

The final discourse presents boys in conventional, stereotypical ways and attributes these traditional characteristics to 'natural differences' as a result of biology and psychology. This has much in common with 'poor boys' discourse but Epstein points out its contradictory nature:

“.. it manages at one and the same time, to posit an unchanging and unchangeable 'boyiness' which involves aggression, fighting and delayed maturity and yet situates poor achievement at school as extrinsic to boys themselves” (Epstein et al, 1998 p.9).

Further studies (Smith, 2003; Francis, 2006) have shown aspects of this third discourse of boys' underachievement but have then gone on to demonstrate the way in which particular social conditions facilitate and establish such behaviours. Willis's study of working class boys in the 1970s gave an interesting insight into the nature of disaffection amongst boys within the context of existing economic and political downturn for the traditional British working class. He described the boys in his study as constructing their own day out of what school had to offer with truancy being part of their construction and 'the laff' being part of 'an irreverent marauding misbehaviour' (Willis, 1978, p.30). Willis also commented on the hierarchy recognised by 'the lads' which 'defined their exclusivity, and through which their own sense of superiority is enacted'. Girls and ethnic minority groups were used in this way with a 'limited approval' being accorded to West Indian boys who embodied some elements which were respected by 'the lads' (Willis, 1978, p.49). This study illustrates the power of youth and masculine culture in influencing the lived experiences and resulting educational decisions of boys in this age group.

Each of the explanations identified within Epstein's model contains elements of truth but are explained in such a way as to confirm dominant pre-conceived ideas and particular solutions. In reality this may give rise to contradiction and make it impossible for the three explanations for boys' underachievement to co-exist. For example, the solutions for boys being subjected to too much feminine influence as in 1 and the macho tendencies identified in 3 may suggest the need for 'recuperative masculinity' strategies in which boys' specific needs are subsumed under the priority given to girls and minority concerns (Lingard and Douglas, 1999, p.133). The basic premise at work here is that boys and girls are different but should be treated equally.

The case has been made by Skelton (2000) for policy, particularly at primary age, which allows education to be delivered to boys through a palatable medium such as in the case of football being used as a strategy to stimulate boys' interest within the national literacy programme 'Playing for Success'. Some criticise such schemes for drawing on conventional masculine cultures such as violent, competitive sports (Epstein 1999; Francis, 1999). A further criticism of this could be made, relating to the marginalising of girls which may result from such overt ways of trying to promote boys' interests in schools. However, there is evidence that girls benefitted from this initiative as well as boys (Sharp et al., 2010). Elwood (2012) explained the impact of particular teaching approaches that impacted differently on gender.

"Gendered learning, outside and inside school' had negative influences on boys' achievements" (Elwood, 2002, p.179).

Boys were seen to have difficulty in producing satisfactory results with coursework and 'teaching for the test' (Smith, 2010, p.44). In response to Discourses 1 and 3 it was proposed that there was a need for the re-masculinization of schools with more male teachers in primaries (Skelton, 2002). However, in response to the alleged feminization of

the curriculum, it was also argued that all students could achieve when pedagogies were designed to appeal to and engage with both boys and girls (Younger & Warrington, 2005). The phenomenon of 'laddism' of the 1990s could be seen as a possible backlash against feminism. Some feminist strategies towards the problem have been described as 'challenging macho values' and have concentrated on the development of interpersonal relationships with the emphasis on speaking and listening alongside emotional literacy (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996).

Criticisms of these studies (Wright, 1986; Mirza, 1992) have pointed out that the research was based on assumptions that failed to take the issue of race into account; that the white, euro entered nature of the curriculum alienated and disadvantaged black and Asian boys. Sewell's study (1997) of African-Caribbean boys suggested that the 'rebels' in one school celebrated what he called a 'phallogentric masculinity' (Sewell, 1997, p.148). Mac an Ghail (1994) writing about a midlands comprehensive said that he had found that macho boys responded to academic failure by celebrating the 3Fs: 'fighting, football and f-----.' They coped with multiple uncertainties by promoting a 'hyper-masculinity', the resultant confusion of which led working class boys to conclude that qualifications are a waste of time. (Mac an Ghail, 1994, p.80). These depictions suggested that Epstein's model of 'boys being boys', the phenomenon was more analogous to a form of alienation of some boys from the education system. Mac an Ghail and Sewell both conducted qualitative case studies of non-white boys and their findings demonstrated that many of these boys chose to develop an extreme outward show of masculinity in the face of academic failure within a system over which they felt that they had no control. Specifically, the impact was to affect boys' levels of educational achievement negatively and significantly.

Literature relating to boys' underachievement highlights the importance of establishing male identity in particular ethnic groups which is helpful in informing the current study. This literature relates to the continuing debate over the interaction between gender, ethnicity and social class. It has been pointed out that it is not possible to consider gender in isolation from class and ethnicity (Gilborn & Mirza in Claire, 2005). It was found that the gender gap in achievement was smaller than the inequalities of attainment associated with ethnic origin and socio-economic background. The interface between gender, race and class presents a further extension to Epstein's model by comparative analysis of boys' experiences in association with their ethnicity, class and underlying cognitive ability. The London Association of Teachers and Lecturers published a review in 2005 entitled 'Gender in educating 3-19 – A fresh approach'. This report highlighted underlying learning or literacy difficulties amongst some of the boys identified as underachieving. Daly (2005) echoed Epstein's second identified discourse (relating to failing schools) and maintained that it was 'less a boy's problem' than a manifestation of the difficulties with restricted definitions and understanding of literacy (Daly, 2005). This view implied that it was the nature of the curriculum that impacted on boys' achievement rather than the fault of the boys.

Mahoney (1998) claimed that the assumptions underpinning the concerns regarding boys' academic performance were misconceived and resulted from the growing impact of global economic competition which brought about increasing emphasis on measurable results. This perspective also reflected the emphasis on the 'Virtuous three Es of economy, efficiency and effectiveness' (Pollitt, 1993, p.59). Mahoney explained how the traditional 'masculine' manufacturing base has either become mechanised or moved overseas and so, in the UK the economic base had been replaced by a traditionally 'feminine' service sector. He suggested that this shift had led to the need for working class

boys to be educated differently. In this way boys could develop the 'soft' interpersonal skills that they needed in order to compete with working class women in the service sector or middle class men and women in managerial roles. What is required is for the debate to be re-focused on the educational prospects of working class boys in particular. In this way educational opportunity should be recognised as a key policy issue which requires investment in new types of vocational education provision.

In the 1980s concerns about gender and race were often seen as affecting women and men respectively while, by contrast, the current debate focussing on boys' underachievement implies a more complex set of ideological and political traditions. Importantly, blame for boys' relative lack of success has not always been attributed to something intrinsic to or culturally produced in boys, but, on the contrary, to the 'feminine' culture of primary schools or single mother families or the media. Any 'masculine' attribution arose only in discussions of male working class pupils. While concepts of masculinities were questioned in relation to postmodernist perceptions (Lash and Urry, 1989), it was the inner-city, disaffected, black and white males who were seen to be most affected by social structures and cultures that limit their opportunities.

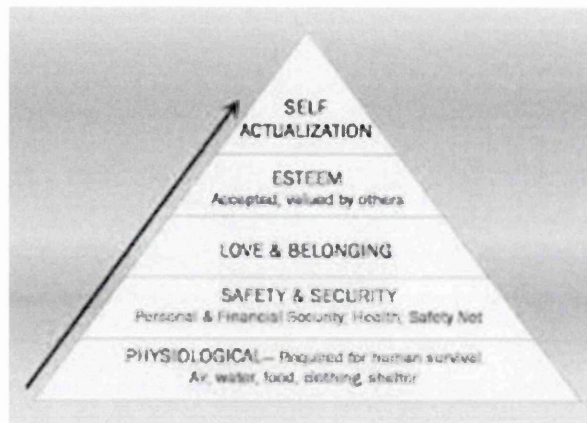
This section of the literature review has illustrated some of the strands which exist within the literature to explain the phenomenon of boys' underachievement. It has demonstrated that the recent concern has been further fuelled as a result of governmental concerns over statistically generated international competition. The chapter has also shown that research has indicated that the problem needs to be reframed as not only being a gender issue, but also one of ethnicity and most significantly a social class related issue. The next part of the review relates to the second research question - what, if any,

intervention, will benefit boys? It considers the literature on what has been discovered about strategies that support achievement.

3.5 Motivation and Empowerment

Motivation and empowerment can be seen as two ways in which the learner can be at the centre of the learning process and both can also be seen as ways to enable further learner achievement. Understanding what we mean by the first of these terms, motivation, can be problematic with it occupying a huge area of study and having many competing understandings of its nature, however, for the purpose of this study I am taking as a starting point that motivation means the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained (Schunk et al. 2008). However, it has been argued that this is not a straightforward process and that emotions have a large part to play within human motivation. Seifert (2004) describes several theories of motivation with an underlying theme of the influence of emotions in eliciting different patterns of behaviour such as pursuit of mastery, failure avoidance, learned helplessness and passive aggression. In his research implications emerged which focused upon creating classroom contexts that foster feelings of autonomy, competence and meaning. These classroom contexts could be described as the catalysts for motivation which stems from within and develops out of the learners's interests and leads towards constructive learning. Specifically, in relation to adolescent learners, motivation can be described as 'intrinsic' to the learner or 'extrinsic' (Kidd and Czerniawski, 2011). In the former case, motivation arises from the adolescent's own perceived concerns and interests whereas in the latter case, motivation derives from an external factor such as reward or punishment.

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs provides a psychological motivational theory. This theory argues that people need to have all of their needs met, in a form of hierarchy with higher needs only providing motivation after basic needs have been met. One of the ways in which learners' needs can be met is through the mediation of positive relationships between them and their teachers.



***Figure 6.** Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943)*

Hattie (2011) has suggested that student - teacher relationships have great significance in promoting student achievement, meaning that the relationship between instructor and learner is by far the most important factor in enabling learners to achieve. This would suggest that motivation to learn is closely bound to the rapport created between the teacher and learner in the process of learning.

Developing further the link between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for the learner is the notion of meta-cognition which enables learners to be aware of what they are learning and the purpose of their learning. The Assessment Reform Group (ARG, 2002) demonstrated that for learners to be able to gain a sense of their own self as learners they had to first develop this meta-cognition which acted as a key ingredient in motivating them to learn. As students develop more self-awareness then their confidence and motivation can also increase which allows them to feel that they have some control over their learning

and, by association, their lives. The ARG suggested that this growing sense of autonomy can be seen as part of an empowering process for learners.

This takes us on to a consideration of the second term, empowerment. A review of the origins and subsequent development of the term 'empowerment' was carried out (Lausch, 2011), noting the earliest reference dating from the era of the civil rights movement of the 1970s (Conyers, 1975) when it was used to describe the struggle of black Americans existing in a segregated world. Other groups quickly began to utilise the term empowerment, including social workers (O'Connell, 1978), politicians (Perlman, 1979) and health workers (Sternsrud and Sternsrud, 1982). By the 1980s, it was a common term used to identify the struggle of marginalised groups such as women (Molen, 1983), and, more recently, economically disadvantaged groups (Wallis, 2010). There is, however, some controversy over the use of the concept and there is a duality of perspectives within the literature on empowerment. The concept's meaning is viewed differently across the literature as some authors view it in the sense of a reward to be bestowed while others dispute this and claim that it is a right to be exercised and is more focused on the individual who has the freedom to achieve desired goals (Sen, 1985). In the UK, the term was included in with New Labour policies since the late 1990s. The term was used in tandem with the notion of the 'responsibility' of parents and, in effect, policy delegated previous school responsibility to parents. This approach replaces previous assumptions of individuals passively receiving services with the onus of educational responsibility put on parents, and students exercising choice.

The use of the term empowerment reflected the view that empowerment was not so much a right as an opportunity to develop the responsibilities assigned by those in power.

This approach could be seen as altruistic but also patriarchal in nature. Education has been seen as key in preparing citizens to participate in their political communities. For example 'Excellence in Schools' (DfEE 1997) had as its purpose the teaching of democracy and citizenship within schools as a solution to perceived lack of engagement amongst young people. This vision of empowered citizenship was also evident in the framework for citizenship education outlined in the Crick Report (Crick, 1998). In this way, empowerment can be seen as part of the discourse on social exclusion in which 'all marginalised groups have a motivation to develop forms of well-being and empowerment that rely on intersubjective recognition' (Fisher, 2011).

A number of writers on the issue of youth empowerment have focussed on the transition from youth to adulthood and how the young people can develop the confidence to effect change (Kohfeldt et al., 2011). For others, empowerment is closely associated with the notion of voice. Scales explains how young people can be empowered if their enthusiasms, or 'sparks', can be harnessed (Scales et al., 2011). In this American sample, 1,817 15 year olds were surveyed to find out about their aspirations. The findings supported the hypothesis that linking the young people's enthusiasm with a sense of voice and supportive opportunities and relationships enabled positive outcomes for the group. This is a particularly relevant field of research which focused on adolescents thriving as opposed to failing (Scales et al., 2011). The direct link to empowerment and the underlying premise in Scales' work relates closely to this study of boys and educational achievement.

In England the CReSt project took place between March 2009 and January 2011, funded by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency. It investigated

responses to reforms in education for 14-19 year olds, in 52 schools and colleges across England. The findings of the CReSt project highlighted learner dissatisfaction with assessment practices and the irrelevance of the curriculum to their aspirations and goals. Positive relationships with teachers, and a range of teaching methods in lessons were found to work best in motivating students, whereas poor relationships, feeling labelled, and the quality of teaching could de-motivate students. These findings were borne out across my own pilot and main research study. The CReSt study revealed interesting results in relation to motivation and engagement which suggested that students' levels of engagement were not fixed but were influenced by peer and teacher relationships. The CReSt results also concluded that despite disengagement, most students remained aspirational, recognising the value of education. However, as can be seen in the wider literature, terminology is not always commonly understood as the concept of disengagement is used in different ways within different contexts. Feelings of disempowerment were noted within the study's results and mirrored the views of others. Many of the report's recommendations stressed the need to involve young people in decisions affecting them and their education. The CReSt research did not set out to focus as this study has done on the particular experience of boys and underachievement.

Age 14 has been seen by governments as a significant time in the development of young people as long ago as 1917. The Lewis Report made it compulsory to stay on at school until 14 while early in this century in 2002 the focus has been on giving all 14 year old a realistic choice of options which has included vocational courses in conjunction with colleges of F.E., while the 2009 Nuffield Report proposed fundamental changes to education of 14-19 year olds (Bostock and Wood, 2012). Some elements of a rite of passage can be seen to exist within the education system where the 14-19 phase has been described as a period of transition- from youth to adulthood, from compulsory schooling to

employment for some and into post-compulsory education and training for others (Pring et al, 2005). The age group being studied in this research lies between these phases of childhood and adulthood. While various perspectives of pedagogy may be applicable to this age group it is important to note that, the relevance of term pedagogy has been questioned by some as inadequate to describe fully the education of adults. As a consequence, an alternative term has been applied, namely, andragogy (Knowles, 1980). To fully understand and meet the educational needs of 14-19 year olds it has been suggested that it may be necessary to draw on both traditions, in order to fully understand this phase relating to transitions.

3.6 Curriculum choice and flexibility

The previous section identified a range of different views existing within the literature around achievement and underachievement, particularly in relation to boys. This section, looks at possible ways forward, in respect of choice and flexibility within the curriculum. It has been pointed out that young people should be able to see the connection between education and their future in the world of work (Schoon & Bynner 2003). This perspective was explored through the data collected from both student and staff respondents in this study. However, there is a lack of debate from different perspectives in order to prevent what the Nuffield Review (2006) described as a situation where ‘the professional voice is only relevant when it provides a solution to a problem raised by an implementation plan that is already fixed’ (Nuffield Foundation, 2006, p.37). The effective embedding of vocational and applied learning properly embedded is a crucial element in any strategy aiming to reduce low achievement and maximise engagement. Apprehension, however, has been expressed about ongoing policy approaches which still appear to marginalise vocational and applied curricula (Cassen & Kingdon, 2007).

The issue of assessment is a key next area in which learners have been found to benefit from a more flexible approach. The Rowntree Foundation Report into low achievement (2007) expressed continuing concern about the way in which choice was exercised at 14+, particularly in relation to the target of five A*–C GCSEs and its associated league tables. The Report stated that the establishment of league tables do a disservice to potential low achievers, discouraging many schools from admitting pupils who might bring down their scores, and concentrating teaching resources on the pupils most likely to raise the schools' standing. Some of the students questioned in this study were especially critical of this particular policy and practice. A move away from the target of five A*–C GCSEs is an important measure that has been suggested will support the children most vulnerable to academic failure (Cassen & Kingdon, 2007). The move towards more "personalised learning", as proposed within Making Good Progress (DfES, 2006) entitled every learner to be monitored, encouraged and challenged to perform as well as they could. Schools, therefore, should have incentives to pursue such a goal in personalising for the individual learner and should not have other targets such as only rewarding certain types of achievement, that conflict with it. The curriculum taught and the mode of assessment, therefore, are two important aspects of inclusive practice in education. A further element discussed in the literature surrounding achievement related to the nurturing nature of the relationship between teacher and learner. Mentoring has been discussed as one means of offering support to vulnerable learners.

The notion of 'engagement mentoring' is a model tied to employment related outcomes (Colley, 2003) which has been embedded within the government's welfare to work policies and aims to alter attitude, values and behaviours. The concept of mentoring as a means of mitigating against social disadvantage and educational underachievement

has been widespread in secondary schools over the past two decades where it has been used as a way of supporting vulnerable students with target setting and counselling. (Fletcher, 2000). In 1994 the National Mentoring Network was established to promote local schemes and to develop a national infrastructure of mentoring. In 1998 the House of Commons Select Committee on Disaffected Children stated that all programmes seeking to address disaffection should include mentoring (House of Commons Education and Employment Commission 1998).

However, Colley points out the implicit problem in the practice of 'engagement mentoring' where the model used is tied to employment related outcomes (Colley, 2003). She talks of the paradox where mentoring is focused on 'hard outcomes', namely the development of employability and progression into a limited range of youth training programmes. This approach assumes a linear school to work progression pattern, while the success of mentoring is often, in fact, to be found in 'soft outcomes' with young people gaining increased confidence, better health and higher aspirations. Colley concurs with Watts (1999) who describes government policy as interpreting social exclusion as a combination of deficit and deviance in those who are socially excluded. This results in a process in which society inflicts disadvantage on vulnerable young people rather than a support mechanism for young people themselves (Watts, 1999). Colley compares this to Bourdieu's concept of field 'habitus'. More recently Barnes (2003) highlights the positive benefit of mentoring within a wider programme in combatting social disadvantage. He emphasises the need to close the opportunity gap in education alongside the need to combat the other causes of disadvantage, as evidenced by the Social Exclusion Task Force (2008) which identified the importance not only of economic status and parental

characteristics but of the community within which a young person grows up as determining their future opportunities and the life choices they make.

Barnes' experience related to an experiment carried out with the Globetown Learning Community a charity operating in partnership with an inner city school. The project, for, ten years, provided additional support through, 'It's Your Life' schemes for students identified as likely to fail to achieve their potential. The charity explored the individual and diverse needs of these children and devised responses tailored to develop in them self-efficacy and the educational and social capital necessary to build successful lives. The initiatives aimed to develop educational and social capital through quality experiences with academic and personal mentoring, social and vocational networking and family support. The approach was based on a belief that whilst poverty and social deprivation may be root causes of low achievement, young people's life chances could be changed through education. The initiative was based on the belief that solutions lie ultimately with the young people themselves taking charge of their life decisions with mentors facilitating the process. Many past participants remained connected to the community of learners developed through the project and gave up their time to act as mentors for incoming students. The experience of one of the participants, reflects the experiences of the group of pupils participating in the study. At age 15 he was considering leaving school when he got involved in the first cohort to enter Globetown's Raising Aspirations project in 2001:

"It would have been so easy to get trapped in a different way of life and if I hadn't become part of their Raising Aspirations project I think I would have ended my education then. My mum wanted me to get a job at 16 but I know if I had, I wouldn't have had the experiences and made the choices I have. It's easy to get involved with antisocial

behaviour and drugs but University kept me focused and determined to have a better life. I now have a degree in Criminology and play American Football for Great Britain.”

Younger (2009) carried out interviews with students who achieved considerable 'value-added' in their GCSE examinations therefore showing significant statistical improvement in their progress between Key Stage 2 (age 11) and Key Stage 4 (age 16). This suggested that the impact of mentoring was strongest amongst those students who came from homes where there was less expectation of them participating in further and higher education. This effect was not differentiated according to gender. Younger suggested that longer-term transformation of students' aspirations, and the challenging of gendered course and career stereotypes, would only be achieved if schools adopted a more holistic and proactive approach to careers education and to widening participation to higher education for their students. Younger believed that the absence of such proactive approaches would limit the longer-term gains initiated by successful mentoring activities (Younger, 2009).

Mentoring, therefore, can be seen as an effective means of developing young people's capacities which in turn can lead to more proactive behaviours on their part. However, even in cases where students may not be perceived to be socially disadvantaged, mentoring can play its part in developing the confident and competent learner. Although Pollard (1997) was referring specifically to primary-aged children, her assertion that the provision of support for learning of one person through the guidance of another person, who is more skilled, knowledgeable and experienced is equally true of all learners. In this she drew directly from Vygotsky's (1999) socio-cultural model in which he stressed the fundamental role of social interaction in learning and the need for there to be a

collaborative dialogue between a learner and a more knowledgeable other (MKO). Such collaboration enables the learner to have learning scaffolded with support from the MKO while the new skills are being mastered. Rogers (1983) developed elements of this further with increased emphasis on the psychological dimension of learning. He was concerned with student centred, experiential development based on ‘whole person’ learning with the teacher acting as a facilitator who would provide regular supportive feedback. Rogers’ intention was to reduce any threat to the learner’s self so that the he or she would be able to develop the skill. There are therefore different interpretations associated with the notion of mentoring but they all share the common feature of requiring skilled and experienced adults who understand what is required of them and the learner so that productive relationships can be formed and learning take place.

3.7 Student voice, reflexivity and engagement

There is a significant school of thought which is critical of the fact that governments pay insufficient attention to student voice. Despite the fact that students are often articulate about qualifications, their perspectives are rarely listened to. Isaacs (2013) argues that this is because governments shape qualifications’ policy according to pre-set beliefs and are unwilling to take note of dissonant voices (Isaacs, 2013). This reflects a similar view expressed in the Nuffield Review in relation to the curriculum.

Relevant work has been carried out in a number of studies around young people and the importance of gathering their perspectives. Wilkins (2012) looked at what could be learnt from students deemed to be achieving, most particularly in two groups of 12–13-year-old pupils. The emphasis in this study was less on actual participation but more on how these pupils managed to fulfill academic expectations alongside satisfying their need

for positive approval from their peers. He highlighted again the importance of learners feeling involved, showing that there are interconnections between neoliberalism and pedagogy and school-based orientations to learning and concluded by considering how neoliberal styles, rhetoric and cultural forms impacted on ideas of social justice and possibilities for a 'critical' or 'transformative' pedagogy that takes seriously the positive contribution of learners to education discourses and practices (Wilkins, 2012). Stahl (2013) set out to examine the social class identification of 15 white working class boys in a socially marginalized area of south London where academic performance was seen as crucial to economic and social well-being. He concluded that their engagement with education was strongly linked to their sense of participation within such a high performing school (Stahl, 2013).

Ren and Deakin Crick's (2013) study into underachievement of 14-year-old students in four English schools examined the characteristic learning profiles of underachieving and overachieving adolescents, and then used student learning profiles diagnostically to support the learning needs of a selected sample of underachievers. This was followed by an impact study of the interventions on the development of student learning power and their academic achievement. The pre-intervention quantitative findings demonstrated a significant difference between the learning dimensions of underachieving students and the rest of their cohort. Qualitative and narrative analysis provided a greater depth of perspective from the data and the sample group. Coaching conversations, as a major intervention strategy, were found to be successful in strengthening underachieving teenagers' learning power and enhancing their learning experiences rather than just raising their exam performance. The study concluded that in addressing the learning needs of underachieving adolescents, serious attention should be given to their learning

subjectivities, enabling them to relate school learning to their personal values, attitudes, aspirations and identities (Ren and Deakin Crick, 2013).

Further insight into educational disengagement was given by Duffy and Elwood (2013) who criticised government policy in England for being too narrow, focusing primarily on raising the age of educational participation, promoting vocationalism and directing resources at the population of young people not engaged in any education, employment or training (NEETs). They suggested that, in fact, ‘disengagement’ was a more fluid and dynamic concept than policy-makers recognised. Disengagement was visible within a wide range of students, even those deemed to be engaged by their presence in education and educational settings. Physical attendance did not necessarily equate with active participation in learning. They drew on students’ accounts of their educational experiences which suggested many factors at work in engagement including the context of and the pedagogical methods used within the classroom, student–teacher relationships and peer relationships (Duffy and Elwood, 2013).

The studies outlined here have enabled young people’s voices to make a contribution to the debate as this study has aimed to do. In all cases it has required a shift in power away from the educator towards the educatee who has become more engaged in the learning process. The purpose of doing this is to empower young people in relation to the decisions affecting their own lives so that they can engage more fully at all levels in the democratic process. Critiques of student voice have argued that this is far from the case and that the concept has, in fact, been created by policymakers and others involved in schools, in such a way that it can mean students having a say with no guarantee of a response, whereas in its most radical form it calls for “a cultural shift that opens up spaces

and minds not only to the sound but also to the presence and power of students” (Cook-Sather, 2006, p 363). Freire’s (1970) description of cultural synthesis is relevant in showing how dialogue between educator and educated could enrich the world view of both. Cultural synthesis does not deny the differences between two views but denies ‘the invasion of one by another’ instead affirming ‘the support each gives the other’ (Freire, 1970, p.162). Freire was referring here to a government and illiterate peasants but the underlying principle of implicit respect in such a dialogical exchange could play a part in engaging young learners who might otherwise underachieve.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has explored, a number of the frameworks and classifications that have been used in the literature to discuss the concepts of achievement and underachievement. It has noted the diversity and relativity in understanding of and application associated with both terms. It went on to consider specific literature related to boys’ underachievement. At the outset, this review has set out to examine the development of perspectives on boys’ underachievement while noting relevant historical issues, as well as, the connection between globalization and national policy development. The literature shows that, for a range of different reasons, some boys and some girls underachieve around the ages of 14-19 while some others achieve their full potential. Examples of possible solutions were examined to explore how young people might be offered an education which would enable them develop work and life skills relevant to a changing economic world. The next chapter examines the theoretical framework adopted to underpin the study and helps to shed light on the research questions.

4. Chapter Four: Theoretical Framework

4.1 Introduction

This second part of the literature review aims to provide the theoretical context in which the study is situated, by highlighting and discussing the theoretical basis relevant to boys' underachievement. The chapter clarifies the nature of the research questions underlying this research while also setting the study within the wider context of the broader body of knowledge within which discussion and explanation of the research findings take place (Burgess, et al., 2006). The research process has been an iterative one in which there have been many modifications and which have continually been built upon. This research aims to make a contribution to the debate and in so doing enhance my own practice and highlight issues for the professional practice of others.

4.2 Definitions of theory

In carrying out this research certain concepts have arisen from the literature. The research reflects the complexity and variety of young peoples' experiences of education. It has been necessary, therefore, to consider multiple possible interpretations of the problems identified. In order to provide focus and coherence it has been necessary to be selective in both the literature and methodological approach taken. As such, it has been important to begin by clarifying the key concepts being explored and to consider where key theories originated. It has been suggested that theory is an essential tool of research which stimulates the advancement of knowledge still further (Hammersley, 1995). It has also been pointed out that while theory may be the impetus for research it can be self-confirming as a theory can never be disproved but only found to be more or less useful (Silverman, 2000). Understanding theory as a tool which can be useful in helping to answer research questions provides a useful starting point. A theory can also be seen as an exploratory device which explains the key factors, and the presumed relationships between

them (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and one which can potentially explain how something works (Haralambos and Holborn, 2000). The theories I have chosen to adopt in this study help to present ideas in such a way as to create a useful tool for understanding the problem identified and to further advance knowledge in the field.

4.3 Developing a theoretical framework

The following diagram sets out the way in which the theoretical position for this research was developed.

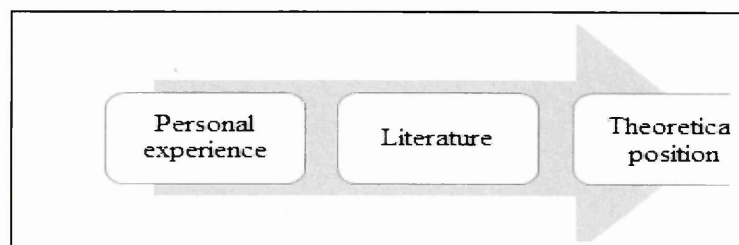


Figure 7. Theoretical Framework (i)

The personal experiences described in Chapter One have been built upon through the selection of key literature in order to derive a theoretical understanding. The initial simplistic understanding was challenged through further exposure to literature, revealing gaps in knowledge and also through ongoing professional discussions with academic staff and peers. The process of exposure to the literature and ongoing professional discussions has been cyclical in nature. The further additional process of the systematic collection and analysis of data can now also be illustrated diagrammatically as in Figure 8. (ii) below.

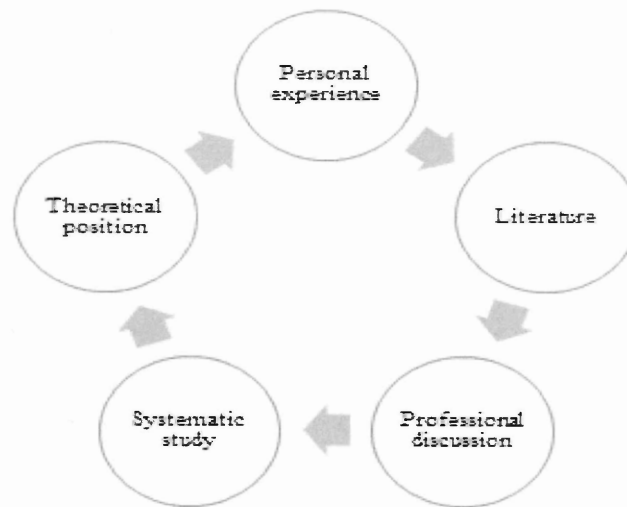


Figure 8. Theoretical Framework (ii)

In this diagram the ongoing nature of the process of establishing a theoretical framework is illustrated although the many changes of direction and sometimes inconclusive or contradictory elements, are less visible, This further illustrates Silverman's kaleidoscope metaphor in which the world under investigation changes shape as theoretical perspectives shift (Silverman, 1993).

This process has also involved creating theoretical boundaries for the study so that it maintains focus and provides a relevant theoretical basis for the analysis of its findings grounded in the relationships amongst the concepts (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The process ensured that the research was grounded in relevant previous work in the field (Maxwell, 2005). Further, the grounding of the research in relevant theoretical perspectives helped to signpost how the research could make a further contribution to the field (Anyon, 2009).

4.4 Theoretical discussion

The study has considered theories which are helpful in providing insights and an analytical framework for exploring the problem. My research questions relate to humans, their views and motivations and so I chose not to follow a positivist route which can suggest that people and their actions can be analysed as though they follow logical and predictable pathways. Instead, I have chosen to adopt a hermeneutic, interpretivist and social constructionist standpoint which gave value to the lived experiences of different people and interpretations of those experiences. There are different perspectives regarding the relationship between these varying approaches with it being argued that interpretivism and constructivism are interchangeable (Guba et al., 2011) or alternatively, that constructivism lies further along the continuum of subjectivity (Savin-Bader and Howell-Major, 2013). Further debate exists between those constructivists who follow Piaget's (1928) belief that the learner constructs knowledge and later social constructionists who believe that all knowledge is socially and culturally constructed (Kuhn, 1962) with shared knowledge being shared and negotiated with others (Berger and Luckman, 1966). However, as part of this interpretivist framework, it is necessary to consider which theoretical approaches help to shed light on the research questions posed.

Phenomenology arises from structural theories such as Functionalism and Marxism with the aim of improving social structure through the shaping of human behaviour. While Functionalism values consensus, conflict theorists also believe that there are fundamental differences of interest for some groups that cannot be resolved through consensus. In this sense, a critical theoretical model is relevant to this study. Marx maintained that the ruling class asserted a dominant ideology which promoted a false consciousness amongst the masses which in turn legitimised that ideology. Neo-Marxists further stress the part

played by ideology and hegemony in sacrificing the freedom, creativity and capabilities of the majority in the economic interests of the ruling classes (Lauder et al., 2006). The education system could therefore, be seen to be not meritocratic but rather to legitimize unequal allocation of rewards based on the social reproduction of labour. Gramsci (1971) has shown how capitalist democracies create a moral climate or hegemony, in which existing inequalities are seen to be legitimate. For example, in practice, students and teachers believe that success or failure in education is deserved and brought about by the students themselves and not by the nature of the education system. In this way, education can be seen to play a crucial role in promoting the dominant ideology. The contextual nature of education is, therefore, fundamental to this study as the key issues, achievement, underachievement, motivation and empowerment are all relative terms open to different interpretations.

There are elements of Interactionism within the study as meanings are not seen as being fixed entities but rather as having their meaning constructed according to their context. Educational policies and curricula change over time and can be seen to reflect the dominant interests in a given society at a given time. Interactionism, however, emphasizes the importance of human behaviour in shaping society and places importance on insight and understanding, interpretation and intuition. These latter concepts have relevance for this study having its focus on individuals' own perceptions of their experiences of the education system. In relation to the importance of recognising individuals' perceptions, post-modernist theory sets out to reject all encompassing theories in the belief that it is most important to highlight the differences between individuals and allow different voices to be heard. This is in keeping with Geertz's rejection of traditional ideas and instead the adoption of 'thick' descriptions emphasizing multiple perspectives (Geertz, 1973). This,

too, provides a useful way of looking at research such as this which draws on the experiences and understanding of many different people.

4.5 Human and social capital theory

Critical theory, and ‘thick’ descriptions all have a key part to play in the theoretical framework adopted for this study. This section focuses on specific theoretical frameworks, specifically conceptual bases relevant to this aspect of education being studied. The frameworks of human capital theory, social capital theory and critical social theory are considered as the theoretical focus of the research to obtain a better understanding of why boys’ underachievement has become such a concern and how the curriculum may have a role in addressing this concern. The following sections provide an overview of how these theories are relevant to this research. The section then explains how critical social theory has been used to link these different educational theories to the research questions.

It has been argued that current policy in education, training and employment is driven by the theory of human capital which judges students by their measurable performance in relation to their economic potential (Ball, 2000). The basic human capital model claims that education is of value to individuals because of its impact on knowledge and skills. Aspects of the human capital theory can be seen within the G.C.S.E. in England which purports to advance necessary knowledge and skills within learners who in turn have to be ‘sorted’ in such a way as to meet the needs of employers and avoid over supply. The theory therefore links education to economic outcomes but there is no single accepted theory linking education to social outcomes (Desjardins and Schuller, 2006). The different perspectives of the relationship between education and social outcomes have widely used the model of social capital to explain the processes and differing outcomes of learning. Building on this are ideas for the application of social capital theory. Education

is about more than purely economic outcomes and it can be argued that social outcomes are of equal importance and this is where social capital theory offers insight.

Finally, critical social theory contributes further to understanding of the problem identified as it seeks to critique domination and subordination and instead aims to promote emancipatory interests and interpretation involving social explanation. It originated in the Frankfurt School and according to one of its founders, Max Horkheimer, a critical theory is adequate only if it meets three criteria: it must be explanatory, practical, and normative, all at the same time. That is, it must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation. Its emphasis on providing a critique of social reality makes it useful to this research as it acknowledges the fact that meaning itself is seen as being unstable given the speed of transformation in social structures, giving rise to problems in representation. This 'crisis of representation' provided yet further critique of positivism. There was now acknowledgement that there was no longer a universal truth and that researchers represent lived experiences (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). As a result, the focus of research is centered on local manifestations, rather than on broad generalizations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). These developments support the theoretical basis and methodological position of this research. The following section focuses on an adaptation of Bourdieu's theory of reproduction in education which sheds further light on the research questions.

4.6 Theory of reproduction in education

Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist was strongly influenced by Marxism, a form of critical theory, arguing that the education system is biased towards the culture of the

ruling, dominant social class and therefore devalues the skills and knowledge of the working class. The terms, field, habitus and capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1971) serve to shape a theory which demonstrates the way in which education is a conservative force. Bourdieu (1984) shows how different types of capital: economic, cultural, social and symbolic all have a part to play in enabling an individual to achieve upward mobility and so argues that students from a middle and upper class background have an advantage over those from a working class background because they possess more cultural capital that can be translated into wealth and power through the education system from one generation to the next therefore ensuring the maintenance of inequality. An example of this has been described by Coleman (1988) who carried out an analysis of the effect of the lack of social capital available to high school students who drop out of school before graduation. Bourdieu's theory of reproduction in education can also be evidenced Woolf (2002) and her criticism in that too many working class students directed towards poorly structured vocational courses, without full consultation and thereby setting limits to future aspiration. Bourdieu's investigative frameworks and the concepts of habitus, field and capital seem to be highly pertinent to my study.

A useful adaptation of Bourdieu's social field model was provided by Mutch (2006) who likened it to the playing field of a sport expanding on Bourdieu's own reference to participants as 'players' in a game (Bourdieu, 1993, p.74). Mutch's development of the model was useful for my own study in the way in which she related Bourdieu's terminology to an educational curriculum, in her case in New Zealand. Where Bourdieu identified the field, the habitus and capital, Mutch redefined these as the field being the curriculum construction with its parameters of time and purpose, the habitus being the rules to be followed and capital being the way in which players gain access to and position themselves. Mutch further developed a line of tension to indicate competing

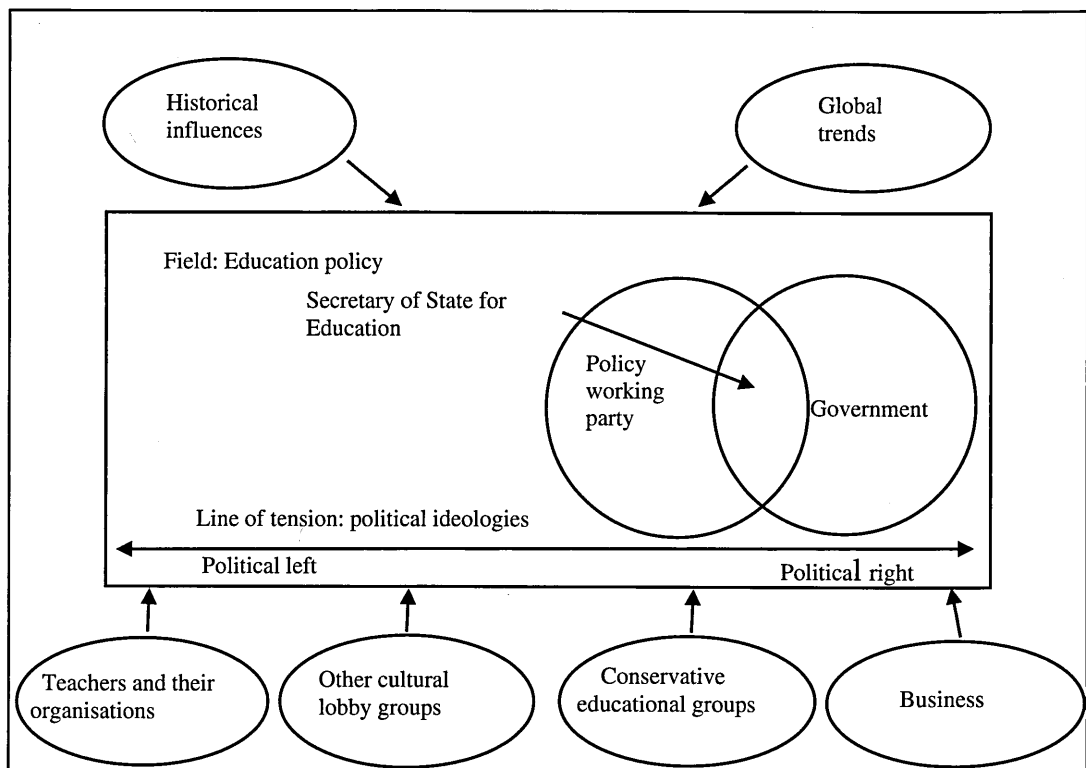


Figure 9. Mutch's diagrammatic representation

ideologies, asking the questions: which ideological positions are favoured and why; who are granted entry and why; who are excluded and why; what particular capital do members bring and how is this valued?

Diagrammatic representation of theory was intrinsic to Mutch's approach because she argued that it helps 'to identify changes in the locus of power over time' (Mutch, 2006, p. 169). Visual representation could also be used to show the relationships between the different habitus. Mutch, nevertheless pointed out that while Bourdieu's model may appear dense and complex, her diagrammatic approach may be seen as 'too reductionist' (Mutch, 2006, p. 170). With this limitation being noted, nevertheless, Mutch's adaptation of Bourdieu's model helped to shed further light on the research questions by promoting further understanding of the different elements and participants involved in curriculum reform. Mutch has helped to illustrate the way in which external factors influence the development of the curriculum as well as policy makers giving rise to resultant tensions between different ideologies.

4.8 Summarizing conclusions

This theoretical literature review explored the underpinning theories on which this research has been based. It also looked at some of the direct connections to be made between different educational theorists and this study and has shown how theory has helped in the search for answers to the research questions. The manner in which I have carried out the research has been 'language' centred and language has been used in order to construct meaning. The overall framework of the research has been shown to be interpretive rather than positivist and purports, in the first instance a constructivist paradigm (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). A constructivist paradigm, allows our experience of reality to have a multiplicity of possible constructions or interpretations which provides the study with its substantive position with its emphasis on the respondents' communicated narrative combined with the researcher's interpretation and in so doing enters a social

constructionist (Berger and Luckman, 1966) space with a relativist ontological stance and a realist epistemological position which will be explored further in Chapter Five.

Section C Methodology

5. Chapter Five Methodology

5.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the underlying principles of this research along with the range of methodologies available to the researcher in carrying out an educational study such as this one. It goes on to explain the decisions taken in the light of the literature review and the lessons learned from the pilot research over the methods used. The chapter presents the manner in which this project was carried out and demonstrates the ways in which the research took account of the ethical issues involved and sought to safeguard the interests of the participants. The chapter goes on to offer a contextual exposition of the respondents within the main study, their settings and the organisational detail of the fieldwork.

5.2 Underlying Principles

As a precursor to carrying out this research it was necessary to determine where it sits in relation to the existing body of educational research and in so doing to discover what new knowledge might be presented about the reality of the educational process experienced by boys. Elsewhere there will be some examination concerning how this process was contained and made manageable but here it is first necessary to look at the two basic underlying philosophical questions: ontology, what is the nature of existence and epistemology, what is knowledge? Both of these underpin this research in that it has sought to examine the views and behaviours of human beings who happen also to be providers of and participants in education. In doing this an attempt is made at relating the individual's personal experience to the wider social, political and economic context. It has been argued (Seale, 2004) that obtaining knowledge of social reality is the primary goal of the social scientist and although I take educational research to be one subset of the wider society, I dispute that there can be only one social reality when it in fact comprises many individual lived experiences. My ontological position in examining human beings and the development of these beings, acknowledges the importance of adopting an objective stance

in relation to the subjective nature of different beings' realities. It is necessary to be aware of the distinction between what is 'out there' and what is 'created in our own minds' (Burgess et al, 2007, p.54).

In amassing data from my observations and from the recorded views and opinions of different individuals it has been necessary to make epistemological judgements about knowledge. In fact, this reflects similar judgements made by the participants in what they have chosen to tell me. This requires us all to make assumptions about the nature of knowledge based on our own experiences and our understanding of the world. While it is reasonable to argue that there is a possible infinity of factors that played a role in the production of any given phenomenon, (Collingwood, 1940), the researcher must make a selection relevant to the purpose that the explanation is intended to serve. This takes the research into the realm of interpretation in which the researcher is aiming to give meaning to the reported views of others. These epistemological concerns with the nature of knowledge are central to the quantitative/qualitative debate and require decisions to be made about suitable methodology which allows others to put forward their own interpretation of phenomena. For the researcher this requires others to be enabled to give their interpretation of the question and for the researcher to attempt to understand this and incorporate it into the overall findings.

Kuhn (1962), characterised a paradigm as an integrated cluster of substantive concepts, variables and problems attached with corresponding methodological approaches and tools. Most researchers agree that, it is very important to begin the research process by identifying the researcher's own world view (Mertens, 1998). It is this world view which provides an internally coherent way of seeing the world which has implications for methodology and analysis because questions are differently framed within different world

views. This world view understanding of paradigm is akin to what has been referred to as a 'preferred place' in which to situate the research (Burgess et al, 2006, p. 54). In searching out my 'preferred place' I find that like many educational researchers I occupy a number of 'places' but primarily these all relate to a world view that sees education as context-related. It did not seem relevant to position myself within a positivist paradigm as I do not believe that human beings can be studied in the manner of scientific phenomena and in fact, this thesis aims to critique this manner of judging achievement in schools. Neither did the study require the accumulation nor evaluation of masses of statistical information which may have been compatible with a positivist methodology. However, given that the effect of government education policies was fundamental to the research, it did seem necessary to draw on some of the data produced around these policies. Access to numerical data kept by educational institutions was also used as a means of defining the parameters of the project.

In designing the research, therefore, I was faced with the decision of whether to use a quantitative or qualitative methodology or to use a combination of both. A reasonable starting point might have been to have drawn on Government produced data or perhaps some of the international compilations from PISA. The table below was part of a bank of statistical information produced by the Government to chart relative attainment by gender over the period immediately prior to the commencement of my research.

Percentage

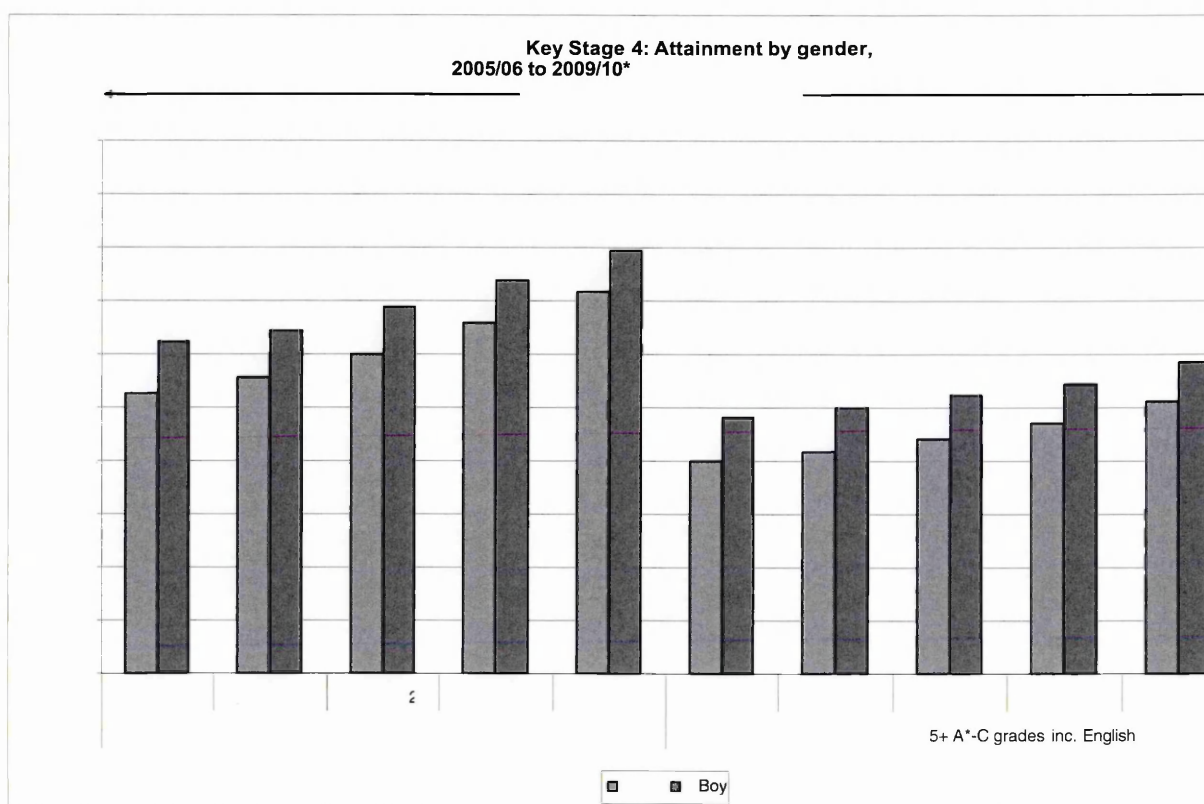


Figure 10 Attainment by gender at KS4 Source : DFE 2010)

Figure 10 shows that girls outperformed boys in all the main attainment indicators at Key Stage 4 over the years being surveyed. The gap between the proportion of girls and boys achieving 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent including English and mathematics GCSEs is 7.5 percentage points, with 58.6 per cent of girls achieving this indicator compared to 51.1 per cent of boys. This gap is relatively stable from 2008/09. However, the gap between the proportion of girls and boys achieving 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent is 7.6 percentage points, with 79.5 per cent of girls achieving this indicator compared to 71.9 per cent of boys. This gap has narrowed from 8.1 percentage points in 2008/09. This statistical data serves to answer the question of interest to the Government at the time, namely was there gender disparity in attainment of the grades A*-C including English and Maths over the period 2005 – 2010 and was the

Table 6.4 Teacher-pupil relationships

How much do you disagree or agree with each of the following statements about teachers or your school?

	agree / strongly agree	
	England	OECD
	%	%
I get along with most of my teachers.	86	85
Most of my teachers are interested in my well-being	78	66
Most of my teachers really listen to what I have to say.	69	67
If I need extra help, I will receive it from my teachers.	88	79
Most of my teachers treat me fairly.	83	79

Table 6.5 Preparation for adult life (The OECD average is not available for this question.)

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	disagree/strongly disagree
	%
School has done little to prepare me for adult life when I leave school.	79
School has been a waste of time.	95
	agree/strongly agree
School has helped give me confidence to make decisions.	83
School has taught me things which could be useful in a job.	90

Figure 11 Teacher-pupil relationships (Source DFE (2010))

disparity stable, increasing or decreasing? This quantitative data, however, does not provide sufficient information to answer the research questions specific to my research which centre on the young people themselves.

The PISA international data similarly deals with the numerical performance of different sub-groups of students in different countries but does not look at the individual experience. Even where questionnaires were used to obtain more detailed information as in Figure below, the end product is given as percentages rather than individually explained answers. In establishing my research design I was influenced by Cresswell (2009) in that I wanted to project a constructivist paradigm which would answer my research questions from the viewpoint of my respondents. These research questions were open ended and did not require a close-ended quantitative hypothesis to be proved through the collection of numerical data. If anything, the thesis arose out of my dissatisfaction with the prevailing views promoted by the international quantitative studies carried out by TIMMS and PISA into student achievement. For this reason it was more appropriate for me to develop a qualitative approach using appropriate methods in order to obtain individual responses from my student respondents and their teachers as they set out to describe and construct their own reality.

While it may not be possible to fully inhabit more than one paradigm simultaneously, I believe that it is perfectly possible to draw elements from one, in the way that I have done, in order to better understand the full richness of knowledge available within the chosen paradigm. The approach adopted therefore, has been post-positivist in nature and has essentially been a research study focused on a small number of people which has involved the collection, analysis and interpretation of mainly qualitative data.

This seemed most appropriate because of the reasons outlined above and because of work described in the literature review (Willis, 1977; Mac an Ghail, 1994) which have inspired my study.

Denzin (1970) states that multiple and independent methods should, if reaching the same conclusions, have greater reliability than a single approach to a problem. A range of qualitative methods were used in the pilot work which produced data and enabled the trialling of different approaches in order to help form judgements about their efficacy in producing the type of data required to help answer the research questions. While I accept that Denzin's claims about triangulation may well be true for other projects, particularly those with a positivist basis, I did not feel that it was appropriate for this study. From the pilot it was decided not to use questionnaires or focus groups in the final study for the reasons described later in this chapter but the decision was also made not to use combined methods because breadth was being sought and provided through the different perspectives provided by the range of people involved in the interviews.

Finally, having considered various different possible paradigms in which to set my research questions I decided that because differing world views and the use of language were fundamental to the study therefore it would be most appropriate to adopt an interpretivist paradigm. Within the literature there are advocates and critics of such an approach. Interpretivists believe that reality is not objectively determined, but is socially constructed (Husserl, 1965). It follows that a fuller understanding of participants' perspectives results from talking with people within their own social environment (Hussey, 1997). The interpretivist paradigm is not concerned with the need to replicate situations but rather with the uniqueness of a particular situation, contributing to the underlying pursuit of contextual depth (Myers, 1997). Critics of this paradigm argue that it

does not allow for generalisations because studies are unique and cannot be replicated in such a way as to apply to the whole population. A further limitation is seen to be in the subjectivity involved. Both of these criticisms present real problems for the researcher but awareness of the issues involved can help to mitigate these problems.

With this acknowledgement of there being different relevant paradigms, I reiterate that this study sits within an interpretivist space which allows for all of the research participants to make a contribution and accepts that reality is socially constructed, complex and ever changing (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). Such a conceptualization allows for a small localised study carried out at a particular moment in time to be seen as having some value in its contribution to knowledge. The next section will explain further the design frame adopted for the study.

5.3 Research design frame

A design frame can be seen as a further tool for the researcher. It has been described as:

“an action plan for getting from here to there, where ‘here’ is the initial set of questions and ‘there’ are the set of answers” (Yin, 1994, p.19).

Conforming to Yin’s definition would mean that, at the outset of study, the researcher should have a clear understanding of what has to be done and how best to achieve that aim. Instead I found myself more in sympathy with Mertens (1998) who has pointed out that the research process is rarely linear but more probably cyclical in nature with the researcher returning to earlier steps while at the same time moving ahead to later steps. Nevertheless, my starting point was my initial belief that the issue of underachievement was not as clear cut as was often assumed. In particular, it seemed that concern about boys’ underachievement needed to be unpicked in order to uncover

some of the human stories to set beside the apparent statistical evidence. As much previous work has been contributed to the literature on general issue of boys' underachievement I wanted to set my study within a more focused frame. It was for this reason that I decided to look at what might have been contributed to the debate by the new 14-19 curriculum reforms.

From this combination of interest in boys' underachievement and in curriculum reform I was able to frame my main and subsidiary research questions which were to be the driving force for the following stages of the research process. Having conducted a literature review I decided to centre my study on the collection of human stories and was led to consider different possible qualitative methods, some of which I tried out in pilot study before deciding to use the semi-structured interview as my method for data gathering. My choice of respondents were made in such a way as to help me gather information to provide answers to my research questions. The plan was to include different perspectives on achievement and 14-19 curriculum changes from students, mainly boys and their teachers. The way in which this was done is explained more fully later in this chapter. The collected data was then examined as outlined in the following chapters with the eventual aim of providing an interpretation which would be a fair reflection of the respondents' views and which would provide some answers to my research questions.

As a teacher, I inhabit the world which I am studying and so in certain respects my study might be considered to be ethnographic in nature and I might be described as a participant observer (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). However, I do not work directly with the participants and was not fully immersing myself in the world being researched and so the research is not technically an ethnographic study. It is true that such a method enables the researcher to give due weight to variation and exception in what is being

observed, however, there is an underlying expectation that these observations will take place over a period of time so as to allow the researcher to interpret the world in the same way as the people being observed do themselves (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Such a longitudinal approach was not possible in conducting this study as each set of interviews was limited by the time students and teacher/trainers were able to allocate. A further reason why an ethnographical study was not adopted was that it seemed less important to observe behaviour over time than to learn what respondents had to say about their feelings and values at this stage in their lives and education which did not require a longitudinal study.

Some modification of the research design and sampling was necessary, partly because of the logistical problems encountered in some of the settings visited but also as a result of a growing realisation that the respondents were individuals with their own perspectives and not members of a unified and set group. 'Groups' are social constructions and it may be argued that the student respondents in this study may have had no more in common than the fact that they were present on the day I visited. However, the students were not interviewed as members of a particular group but rather as similarly aged individuals who might have meaningful contributions to make towards addressing my research questions. The sample comprised boys and girls of varying academic ability in the first year of their post 14 optional study programmes. The majority were boys and two girls engaged in vocational courses, mainly the Engineering Diploma. To have excluded the girls may have resulted in the loss of interesting viewpoints concerning my first research question on boys and achievement in relation to those particular courses. The inclusion of some girls and boys on academic pathways, including some from a school where I worked, was to explore further views relating to my first research question on achievement and boys' motivations to achieve and to balance these opinions with the

policy and institutional views encountered in the literature. I was also aware that these students did not have the choice of taking vocational courses and I was interested in how their views might have a bearing on my second research question related to motivation and to my final research question regarding a new way of defining achievement.

Despite the fact that my focus was on boys at risk of underachievement the fact that I included these interviews, along with some from the school where I worked was done deliberately as my first research question required a range of student perspectives on achievement. By conducting interviews with a small number of girls on vocational and also on non-vocational courses along with the views expressed by some academically successful boys, I was able to enrich the data and gain further insight into the issues surrounding achievement and boys' underachievement.

Where they took place the small group interviewees were in fact individual interviews conducted in the same space and time setting and were conducted in this way because of the time and space limitations set by some of the educational institutions as described in the section on ethical considerations. This required some changes to the research design but not in the questioning. In relation to the student respondents, it is difficult to judge whether there was any significant loss of data because of respondents sometimes being able to hear one another's responses. This may have occurred through the copying of responses or unwillingness to voice their own views. However, when the data from these interviews is considered alongside that of individual respondents, it is apparent that briefer answers were given in the latter interviews. It may be surmised that respondents found it less familiar to be in a one-to-one situation and so were less relaxed about answering.

5.5 Reflections on pilot study

The pilot work was carried out as an initial means of exploring the issues and probable methods to be used in the main study. It provided an opportunity of trialing different qualitative approaches to see which would provide the most valid and reliable insights. In each of the pilots I had a dual insider/outsider role working or having worked as a teacher in the schools in question but not always directly with the students featured in the pilots. The pilot work highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of the possible methods which helped to form decisions in relation to the main study and also helped in the refining of the research questions which were evolving in a more coherent way. Lessons were learnt from each of the pilots. A questionnaire was used in the first pilot as a seemingly time efficient way of collecting a range of viewpoints which could be used in combination with some of the school's quantitative data concerning current and projected exam results. All but two of the questionnaires were returned in varying stages of completion which indicated that the method used in this way was flawed and would not provide sufficiently rich data. The students' low level of response may have been because of limited literacy skills which militated against detailed and insightful written responses from boys who disliked writing. Alternatively their limited response might have resulted from uncertainty surrounding the questions or process in which they might have felt some resistance to giving their views about aspects of school-life which they found difficult within a school context and to a researcher whom they perceived as a teacher.

Literacy difficulties or uncertainty surrounding the questions or process without mediation from the researcher may have contributed to the lack of detail in the questionnaire answers but it was evident that these written responses did not succeed in uncovering attitudes or views. The use of the questionnaire had provided little in the way of detailed information about the boys or their views. The main value of the questionnaire

pilot was in helping to develop a means of categorizing replies for the purpose of analysis. This practice proved useful in developing the analysis of data for the main study. The questionnaire, illustrated the need to capture a range of experiences. This could include the experience of those students who were seen as being both able and achieving in order to examine their experiences of the curriculum, examples of their achievement and what might be learned about their perceptions of achievement itself. It also highlighted the issue of non-attendance as a contributory factor in underachievement.

The more informal discussion used in the focus group and interviews enabled students to express themselves but it was clear that more information could be collected from the semi-formal interview, preferably with a tape recorder placed unobtrusively. In terms of the focus group, a combination of logistical difficulties involving questioning and recording made the data collected less comprehensive than was wanted. Issues of group dynamics and possible peer rivalry also limited the richness of response within the group. The semi-structured interviews proved to be the most useful in enabling the collection of detailed responses by means of a combination of recording and field notes. This was because such interviews enable the researcher to encourage the interviewee to expand on initial answers through the means of probing. Generalised findings could not be made from such a tiny sample but this pilot did, however, enable a trial of the questioning which was able to represent different and similar perspectives within the main research. The pilot study helped to gauge the potential richness available in such semi-structured interviews and demonstrated its suitability as the method to be used in the main study and the interviews themselves made a pertinent contribution to the main study.

The experience of the pilot led to further perusal of the literature in which there are differing views as to the nature of 'the interview'. The interview can be perceived as a

representation which gives direct access to experience (Dingwall 1997). Alternatively, it may be seen as a constructed narrative in which the researcher interprets what has been said by respondents (Silverman, 2000 and Hammersley, 2003). In the light of the literature and the pilot I was led to view my interview data as a constructed narrative arising from the interviews conducted between me, the researcher and the other research participants, the interviewees as will be explored more fully in the next section.

5.6 Methodology used in Main Study

The interview

As indicated above the semi-structured interview was to be adopted in the main study because this seemed to be the method most suited to research with a range of young people and their teachers/trainers. This decision was reached as a result of the literature review and reflection on the pilot work carried out previously. It has been identified (Gorden, 1998) that interviewing skills are not simple motor skills but rather that they involve a high-order combination of observation, empathic sensitivity, and intellectual judgment. In semi-structured interviews not all of the questions are formulated in advance but additional secondary questioning can be incorporated in order to enable the interviewee to communicate their views.

On the one hand the semi-structured interview allows for a specific function to be constructed rather than being merely 'an everyday conversation' (Dyer, 1995, p.56) while on the other, it permits the probing and informality necessary to uncover underlying ideas and feelings. In this way I believed that, at least in part, the interviewer and interviewees were able to co-construct the interview, in that both were able to attach their own understanding to questions (Walford, 2001, p.90). By allowing for some openness around the questioning I felt that it would be possible to achieve what has been described as 'an

inter view' with an exchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest which enables participants to discuss their interpretations of their experiences (Kvale, 1996, p.347). This seemed to be the most accurate description of the type of interview conducted for this research in which subsidiary questions arose out of the concerns of the respondents themselves which were enabled through probes used as tools to draw out the participants to reflect on experiences and the implications in their own lives (Rudestam and Newton, 2007). I also found probes to be useful in the main study in encouraging young people who were unaccustomed at talking in detail about themselves. Judicious additional prompts and clarifications allowed the student respondents to expand more fully on initial responses. Probes were also used with the adults but these were required less often due to their increased confidence and experience.

The semi-structured interview allowed for the flexibility to vary the additional probes required for different settings and different interviewees while retaining a common core which applied to all. This style of interview was also most appropriate when interviewing adult trainers and organizers as again it allowed them to expand on the areas of the interview which most engaged them through the use of probes. Probes are used by interviewers to generate further explanation from research participants through follow-up questions and may sometimes include the registering of nonverbal pauses or gestures. Effective probing in interviewing relies on the interviewer's ability to actively listen to what interviewees have said and judge if further information is necessary in order to make full sense of what has been said or allow the interviewee to give voice to his or her concerns. The probes used to expand on the questions were similar to *Uh-huh* and *Tell-me-more* probes (Russell Bernard and Ryan, 2010, p.32). These seemed like a natural extension to the informal style of the interviews. Examples of probes used are provided in

Appendices 4 and 5. The interview questions used with staff and students are illustrated and discussed more fully in the next chapter.

The interview data were recorded by way of a combination of audio tapes and hand written in situ field notes. The field notes helped me to conjure the atmosphere of the interview room and seating arrangements. Notes were also useful to capture expressions and aspects of body language that would not be picked up by audio-recording. The audio taped interviews were then transcribed verbatim within a few days of the actual interviews having taken place. The next stage of the process was the ordering of the data which required attention to be paid to the terms to be used. (Russell Bernard and Ryan, 2010). The most appropriate terminology was then evaluated with the following terms being considered: 'categories' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967); 'labels' (Dey, 1993, p.96); 'concepts' (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p.61). In this way, it could be considered that the data analysis was informed by the principles of 'grounded theory' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The probable reason for their appeal is that they equate closely to everyday parlance.

In managing the data it was essential to order and reduce the material in such a way that it retained the essence of what was being said in such a way as to highlight what seemed to be the most significant elements. Use of computer packages such as NVIVO and NUDIST was considered for use in the analysis of the data. However, because it seemed that these might be more suited to predominantly quantitative studies or qualitative studies mirroring them because of the quantity of data involved, it was decided not to use them. In the case of this study the numbers of interviews involved were relatively few and the collected data was not so great as to be unmanageable. For this study the identified concepts were then placed on grid sheets with questions on one side and the key concepts taken from answers recorded on the other. The purpose of doing this was to enable the

researcher to capture evidence related to categories. Where other interesting views were expressed these were also recorded on the grid sheets with a view to creating possible new categories as the research continued and certainly helped with the semiotic stage of analysis. In most cases the answers given by student respondents were relatively short and so it was possible to write student comments with a series of and dashes – where there was some hesitation or obvious pondering being done. Where this happened it may have been because of ambiguity in the question or possible sensitivity in the subject matter. It may have been because of boredom or genuine difficulty in phrasing a response. Help was given by way of reassuring body language on the part of the interviewer who also rephrased questions and used probes with subsidiary questions to help scaffold answers. (Examples are given in Appendices 4 and 5).

Completing tables of the interviews done with adults was more reliant on the field notes because in all cases there was more sense of passion coming over in their answers which were fuller and contained additional content. Interview field notes were able to convey more about the interviewee's manner of answering and general demeanour. However, this serves to illustrate the point made earlier that while such decisions and judgements help in the construction of an interpretation they also involve 'inevitable acts of selection' (Powney and Watts, 1987). In creating the categories additional field notes were used sometimes with quoted parts put into inverted commas. This helped to reflect the feeling generated within the interview at the time it was taking place as the immediacy does not always come through in the transcribed audio-taped version of the event. However, there is a fine balance to reach here and one must be mindful of Gillham's entreaty to keep as close as possible to what the interviewee *actually said* by editing rather than translating into one's own words (Gillham, 2005, p. 127).

The next section of this methodological review relates to data presentation and representation. Figure 12 illustrates the main themes arising from the research questions (highlighted in bold) and how these appeared in the interview questions. Secondary questions relating to views on achievement occurred across a number of questions within the matrix. A summary of the interviews is presented here along with an indication of the terms used by the respondents. The matrix identifies the main questions being posed in the interviews and relates these to the underlying research questions for the study. The second use of the matrix is that the final column lists the key concepts within the questions serving as a check with the themes identified from the literature and also with those drawn out from the analysis of the data.

Research Question	Student Question	Staff question	Concepts to be explored
Are boys underachieving? Perspectives on achievement.	Why are you studying for this diploma? Whose decision was it? How did you feel about studying for the diploma?	What criteria were used in order to decide which students would study for the Diploma? Whose decision was it?	Power and decision making
What is the school's view of the boys' achievement?	What do you think people mean by the word "achievement" in school? Teachers/Parents/Other students/Yourself	What is your school's view of underachievement amongst the boys?	Definitions of "achievement"
What are the boys' views?	As above	How do you feel boys view achievement?	Definitions of "achievement"
What are the views of highly achieving boys and girls?	As above	How do you feel able boys view achievement? How do you feel girls view achievement?	Definitions of "achievement" Gender
What, if any, intervention will benefit the boys?	Is there anything else that could have been done in this course to have made it better?	Why has your school decided to be amongst the first to introduce the 14-19 curriculum?	Curriculum breadth and flexibility

What do we know about successful ways of increasing achievement and how can more boys benefit from that knowledge?	As above	In what ways has your school attempted to address boys' underachievement?	Curriculum breadth and flexibility
In what ways will the new 14-19 curriculum meet the needs of students at risk of underachieving?	How does this Diploma course compare to other subjects/lesson you have had?	In what ways do you think that the new curriculum will meet the needs of students at risk of underachieving?	Motivation
What specific lessons in relation to policy and practice can be learnt in order to engage boys?	Now, after studying for a year, which parts of the Diploma course have you enjoyed most? Which parts of the Diploma course have you not enjoyed?	What was done in planning the new curriculum in order to maximise engagement amongst boys?	Curriculum breadth and flexibility
How can we redefine achievement?	How will you know if you have done well in this Diploma course? How do you feel about your achievement in doing this Diploma course?	How will the Diploma participants be assessed?	Motivation Accreditation Vocationalism
As above	Is there anything you are proud of achieving which is not part of your ordinary school courses?	Is any accreditation given for extra-curricular activities?	Motivation Accreditation Vocationalism

Figure 12. Matrix to show connection between research questions, interview questions and concepts to be explored.

This chapter discusses how data was analysed for students' responses and staff responses respectively. It explains how key ideas were drawn from the verbal responses and then categorised for each group. From this process, the main themes arising from the data were identified and further analysis carried out.

5.6 Ethical considerations

A major concern for the researcher pertains to the ethics surrounding the research. In planning the research I consulted the Research and Ethics at the Open University website and referred to the Human Research Ethics Committee documentation in order to determine the ethical position of interviewing young people in schools. It was advised that no ethical approval was required if the research was ‘deemed to be ‘no risk’” (extract from HREC Constitution). Having viewed the Project Registration and Risk Checklist I decided that the nature of my research and the age of the participants was such that there was no risk. Nevertheless, I needed to obtain permission from the head teachers entrusted with the safeguarding of the students involved. As I was a practicing teacher I already had clearance from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) to work with young people in schools and in each of the establishments in which I worked I had verbal permission to conduct the interviews from the head teacher or his/her representative who were acting in loco parentis, as in each case, given the age of the students involved, the head teachers chose not to have me contact parents. Finally, permission was asked of the individual members of staff and students themselves prior to interview.

The ethics of educational research consist in more than satisfying the legal requirements. Even when permission is given, it might be asked, what moral right does the researcher have to obtain information about the boys’ lives? They may have felt satisfied with the status quo regarding their lives inside and outside of school. They had not sought to divulge about their lives and so the researcher must deal respectfully with any disclosures. However, given the nature of the research and the age of the boys under review there was the possibility that some information could not be kept confidential because it might relate to criminal activity and/or issues of child protection. If this were to

have happened my position as a responsible adult would have had to take precedence over the boy's right to confidentiality.

Within the methodology it was my aim to conduct the study in a professional manner. The intention was to carry out interviews in a quiet classroom with the door open and other members of staff and students in adjoining classrooms in order to provide maximum privacy for the interviewee while still complying with the child protection and health and safety policies. This would have been my preferred environment from a researcher's point of view, however for the interviewees, this may not have been ideal as they may have felt inhibited by people walking past or coming in. In fact, although there were no intrusions, in practice, not all interviews enjoyed such a quiet, undisturbed space which reflects the reality of busy schools. Nevertheless, as the researcher, it was important for me to be mindful that the interviewees might have felt less relaxed than they might have otherwise felt if the interview room had been in a totally private space. Some changes, however, were required to the research design as a result of logistical issues within the schools and colleges in which space is often at a premium.

The interview situation gave rise to further ethical considerations. The requirement by institutions that interviews be carried out with least disruption to working classes. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) describe this as part of negotiating with the gatekeepers of the institution to be researched. In practice it meant that time and space were at a premium for the interviews and so interviewees were not all afforded privacy in relation to answering questions as I was often obliged to conduct interviews with students in a space where other students were present, at the back of classrooms or in workshops against the whirr of machinery. The consequence of this was that individual interviews were

sometimes conducted in the same space and consecutively with one or two spirited interjections from one student to another. In a few cases this resulted in a quasi-pair interview. This was not ideal, but as a guest in the various educational establishments, it was necessary for me to be pragmatic and manage the situation as well as I could within the limited time and space I had available. Although this required some changes to the research design it did not alter the main questioning but rather helped in suggesting the most useful probes. In relation to the student respondents, it is difficult to judge whether there was any significant loss of data because of respondents sometimes being able to hear one another's responses. This may have occurred through the copying of responses or unwillingness to voice their own views. However, the respondents were assured that I would not be leaving straight away if anyone wanted to speak privately at the end. When the data from these interviews is considered alongside that of individual respondents, it is apparent that briefer answers were given in the latter interviews and so it may be surmised that respondents found it less familiar to be in a one-to-one situation and were less relaxed about answering when they were when in proximity to their peers.

An additional ethical concern was the power relation between the interviewer and respondent. As the adult interviewer I was able to decide any compromise or limitations I was prepared to accept in conducting the interviews, for example, in relation to rooming. The respondents, on the other hand, being students in their place of education were under the double direction of their teachers and me the authorised interviewer. As a result the respondents had fewer rights in respect of participation in the interviews or in establishing the parameters in which they took place. This power imbalance was taken into account by my asking their permission to carry out the interviews and to do so in close proximity with their peers. Although, permission was sought in this way from the boys before the interviews but it must be recognised that this was not an ideal situation as the power

balance between them and me, the interviewer authorised by their place of learning was such that they may not have felt able to object. I also sought to address the power imbalance in my analysis of the data by giving voice to the participants' own language, in particular through semiotic analysis.

These limitations may have suggested that a series of focus groups might have been more suitable, however, I had previously decided against conducting focus groups because I wanted to retain initial consistency in the questioning process, with the possibility for some personalisation in the use of probes. My question schedule, therefore, was devised with this in mind. A focus group with one adult may have replicated the conventional classroom situation, perhaps not the happiest setting for some of the respondents, and may have been less helpful in obtaining a range of different perspectives. Interviewing in the way that I did was a pragmatic response to the institution's conditions in allowing the interviews to take place which still allowed me to gather individualised data to address my research questions. Despite these ethical concerns the decisions taken by me as interviewer, were taken using my professional judgement because I considered that the questions being asked were not dissimilar to problems that would be discussed in tutor group sessions or in CPHSE lessons. Before conducting the interviews I had asked the schools for consent and then had also checked with students prior to the interviews to be sure that they were happy to participate. Their affirmative responses were taken as informed consent because of the willing participation that followed. I was also satisfied in the knowledge that I could change direction with the order or nature of the questions if a student seemed to be uncomfortable in answering or informed me that they were as was made clear to them at the start of the interview. A further way in which I showed awareness of the potential power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee was in the way in which I analysed the data by giving voice to the participants' own language, in particular, through semiotic analysis. .

A final ethical issue concerned the audio-recording of the interviews. Permission to do this was obtained from staff and students to allow for possible later transcription and to help with the better management of the interviews. Interviewees were reassured that replies would only be shared with necessary Open University staff in the first instance where their anonymity would be preserved. However, it is possible to envisage situations where it could be argued that such consent given by young people might not be fully informed. To enable respondents to withdraw consent later, I made clear to all concerned how I could be contacted if anyone wanted to speak to me about the interviews at a later stage. In order to protect anonymity within my data presentation I used fictionalized names for respondents and generalized descriptions of locations so that neither those involved in the interviews nor other people would be able to identify any of the participants in the research. In presenting and categorizing the data I ensured that I fragmented what was said in such a way that statements could not be traced back to any one individual. I took these steps because I was aware of the importance of treating all of my respondents with respect but I was particularly cognizant of my responsibility to the young people involved so that the research would in no way damage or compromise them.

5.7 Researcher insider/outsider dichotomy

Conducting research in educational establishments created some advantages and posed some challenges for the research. As a teacher, I benefitted in carrying out research within schools as I was readily given access to students and staff. I was used to school settings and was able to develop a good working rapport with my respondents. By explaining to the young people that I was also a student trying to learn from them, I was privileged in being able to win their trust and cooperation. However, my conflicting roles as researcher and or teacher had to be separated and explored prior to the interview stage. This was easier in schools other than my own but even there I was able to talk to students

for whom I had no direct teaching responsibility. Although, I accept that no position can guarantee nor prevent the presentation of valid knowledge (Hammersley, 1992) my intention was to represent a fair account of what I believed the respondents wanted to communicate and, in no way was intended to be exploitative. One issue to be overcome was that the interviewees may have resented someone prying into their business but their willingness to be involved would seem to run contrary to this. In order to involve the interviewees more fully in the project, elements of emancipatory research were used in explaining to them the purpose of the research and suggesting ways in which their experiences might be helpful to students coming after them. It was pointed out that the interview process might also be of help to them in assisting them to think through their own choices or by helping them to explore the ways in which they might gain credit for their other achievements. The wider implications of the research were also explained as their reported experience may be of help to other researchers wanting to understand more fully what was happening in the lives of young people in the early part of the 21st century.

Developing on from this reason for the study, a further issue to be taken into account was that the analysis of the data may have revealed new issues for exploration and, in this way, showed that the researcher's reality and that of the interviewees were dissimilar. As the researcher, I must however, declare the possibility of personal bias and safeguard against its colouring the interpretation of the results and consequently possibly compromising the findings of the study. As a means of safeguarding against this more than one student's perspective is being considered within this research and each of these perspectives is also viewed alongside those of teachers and trainers. As the research comprised analysis of government policy and wider relevant literature these also provided a further contextual perspective. In addition a reflective manner of working was adopted which assisted in critical self-scrutiny. These were all means used to mitigate possible

researcher bias but on a more positive note it is worth pointing out that in seeking to understand and interpret, the researcher has a significant role to play as s/he becomes the main 'research instrument' in gaining multiple perspectives (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

5.8 Summary

I have drawn from the methodological literature to provide an explanation of the decisions I have taken in constructing the study. I have outlined the choices made and have explained the rationale for using these methodological approaches. Importantly, relevant ethical issues and the manner of addressing these is outlined. The account also summarises the pilot work carried out and how this affected the methods employed in the main study.

Much was learned from the pilot work in relation to suitable qualitative methods. The choice of using semi-structured interviews proved well suited to the task of collecting perspectives for the main study and I also came to understand better the mechanics of conducting interviews as staff in educational institutions had a great influence in setting the conditions and parameters of the interviews. It was necessary to adapt my methods to what was available to me, such as in the case of respondent grouping, interview location and means of recording responses. This chapter presents an overview of the way in which analysis of the data was carried out, demonstrating the rationale for the decisions made which were influenced by the research questions. The intention to link to a particular theoretical perspective was decided at the beginning of the research process (Finch and Mason, 1990) and arose from the initial literature review. Primarily, this theoretical perspective could best be described as an ethnographic constructivist, interpretivist and heuristic perspective. The next chapter describes the methods employed in the data collection.

6. Chapter Six

Methods

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents information on the respondents and their settings, reflecting on the practicalities and logistics of the various interviews but in such a way as to protect respondents' anonymity. Interviews were carried out with twelve staff and twenty-four 14 year old students in a number of Midlands' schools and colleges. Most of the students participating in the research were already involved in the first presentation of the Diploma programme or were engaged in alternative learning programmes such as Wider Key Skills and ASDAN Cope Award in settings where Diplomas were not yet fully in place. Exceptions to this were three students who were seen to be able and high- achieving by their teachers and were following G.C.S.E. courses. They were included in the sample to provide the perspective of such students to the study. Figures 11 and 12 are tabular representations of student and staff involved in the interview process.

6.2 Presentation of respondents and data

Figures 13 and 14 detail the student and staff respondents interviewed as part of this study. My research questions focused on boys of school age 14-16 who were to be the initial students involved in the Diploma Programme and so this age group was the target choice for my respondents. It was clear that there were also concerns being expressed by some teachers and so it seemed desirable to have their perspectives play a part in the research.

Location	Interviewee	Course	Role	Gender
1	Rob	Diploma L1 Engineering	Borderline student	M
	Michael	Diploma L1 Engineering	Borderline student	M
	Johnny	Diploma L1 Engineering	Borderline student	M
	BDW	Diploma L1 Engineering	Borderline student	M
	DC	Diploma L1 Engineering	Borderline student	M
2	Tom	Diploma L1 Engineering	Borderline student	M
	Lisa	Diploma L1 Engineering	Borderline student	F
	Hassan	Diploma L1 Engineering	Borderline student	M
	Mohammed	Diploma L1 Engineering	Borderline student	M
3	Lisa	GCSE	Achieving student	F
	Molly	GCSE	Achieving student	F
	Jay	GCSE	Achieving student	M
	Nick	ASDAN	Achieving student	M
	Dan	ASDAN	Borderline student	M
	Titch	Young Apprentice	Borderline student	M
	John	Young Apprentice	Borderline student	M
5	Jamie	Diploma L1 Engineering	Borderline student	M
	Gary	Diploma L1 Engineering	Borderline student	M
	Will	Diploma L1 Engineering	Borderline student	M
	Rick	Diploma L1 Engineering	Borderline student	M
6	Yan	Diploma L1 Engineering	Borderline student	M
	Gordon	Diploma L1 Engineering	Borderline student	M
7	Grant	Diploma L1 Engineering	Borderline student	M
	Paul	Diploma L1 Engineering	Borderline student	M

Figure 13. Students interviewed

Location	Interviewee	Course	Role	Gender
1	Abdul	Engineering Diploma	Teacher	Male
2	Sanjay	Engineering Diploma	Teacher	Male
3	Kate	ASDANCOPE	HLTA	Female
	Nick	Wider Key Skills	Private Trainer	Male
4	Ian	Construction	College Lecturer	Male
	Terry	Engineering Diploma	14-19 Consultant	Male
	David	14-19 curriculum/Diploma	14-19 County Manager/Lecturer	Male
5	Mike	Engineering Diploma	Teacher	Male
6	Paul	Engineering Diploma	Teacher	Male
7	Mary	Engineering Diploma	College Lecturer	Female
	Dennis	Engineering Diploma	College Lecturer	Male
	Jim	Engineering Diploma	College Lecturer	Male

Figure 14. Staff interviewed

The fact that the Diplomas were being introduced in a phased manner contributed to the process of decision making. Locating a suitable cohort was problematical due to the fact that the Government had invited local authorities to bid for admission within the 2008/09 Pilot Programme and there were only a very few authorities taking part at this stage. Schools and colleges were required to group themselves into consortia within an area in order to deliver the Diploma Programme to 14-16 year olds. The intention in doing this was to enable different consortia to build up differing expertise with the schools enabling students to continue with their core studies of English, Mathematics and Science alongside the theoretical element of their principal learning in their school setting while the colleges would provide access to enhanced subject specific provision. This structure enabled the student to be placed in the centre, accessing part of the learning through school, part through college and work experience through local employers.

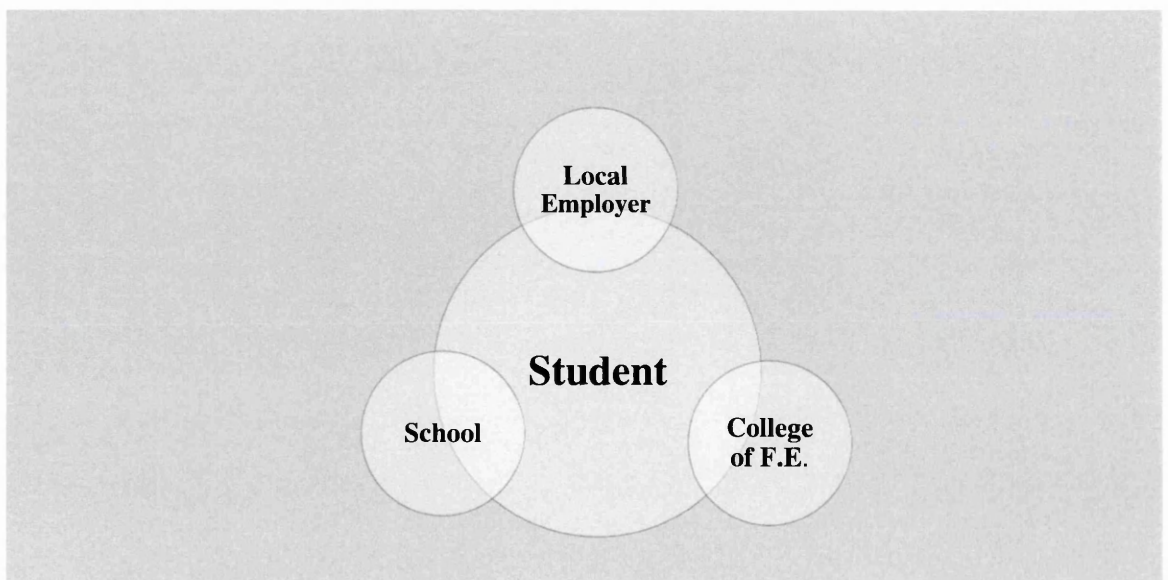


Figure 15. Structure of Diploma consortia

Only a limited number of schools were actively involved in the first phase and the successful bids in my vicinity were mainly linked to Level 2 in ICT and Business and so

were not quite hitting my target group of potential underachievers. Two neighbouring areas, however, were also successful and began a limited number of Level 1 courses in Engineering during the Year 2008/09 and so I approached institutions in each of the counties who were offering these subject streams which I thought would appeal to the boys I felt might be at risk of underachievement. In talking to some of the staff involved there was a willingness to allow me to visit and carry out interviews and so these institutions became my focus for the study. In addition I felt that my questions for students and staff could be asked of those involved in other courses intended to widen participation and raise achievement. This enabled me to interview other students and gave me a further opportunity to talk to staff who were looking for an alternative curriculum but did not yet have access to the Diploma Programme. To help answer my research questions fully I also spoke to male and female students whose teachers described them as potential high achievers so that I could canvas some of their views on achievement and so widen the range of perspectives canvassed. It is possible that some of these students might also be underachieving, depending on the criteria being used.

There follows an overview of the locations and respondents featured in the study. The interviews took place between December 2009 and March 2011 in a variety of Midland settings which included secondary schools and colleges of further education. Some were already offering Diplomas at Levels 1 and 2 while some were planning to do so in the future. These latter institutions were currently offering non- GCSE courses such as ASDAN awards or Wider Key Skills. As a means of preserving the anonymity of those involved, code names have been given where necessary to the schools and colleges with educational establishments referred to as Location 1, 2, 3 etc. The following section provides more specific background to the interviews.

I contacted the Assistant Principal at Location 1, a mainstream secondary school, early in the autumn term and was scheduled to interview her, the lead teacher and eight students in the last week of term. Three of the boys were away from school but the other five and the lead teacher were all very positive about giving up their time to answer my questions. The Assistant Principal was not free in the end to be interviewed but I was able to interview the lead teacher at the end of the session. The procedure for obtaining the necessary consents was outlined earlier in this chapter. The interviews were conducted in an area adjacent to the workshop in which the boys were having their last Diploma lesson of the term. Later, I learnt that their exam was scheduled for 15th January and so I was even more grateful that they and their teacher were willing to give up the time. The room itself was not very private as a few people required to have access while we were meeting. The students, however did not let themselves become distracted and all gave their good natured cooperation. I had planned to interview them in pairs but the staff preferred that I met them in two groups of three with a follow up interview with the Lead Teacher. These changes did not surprise me given the time constraints the class and teacher were under. The boys themselves seemed amenable to what was arranged and certainly no-one refused to take part. I began by introducing myself as a local teacher who, like them, was still studying and thanked them for taking time to help me by talking about their learning on the new course they were studying. The old audio- tape recorder proved to be a good ice-breaker as they were convinced I had brought it from a museum. I explained that I was not a very quick writer and so this would help me listen back to what they had said. I assured them that no-one else would listen to the tape and that their contributions would not link to them if they would like to decide on fictional names. They said it did not matter but in the interests of preserving their anonymity I have given them fictional names so that they could not be identified within the final thesis.

My initial contact at Location 2, another secondary school, was the Deputy Principal who was very friendly and prepared to help. As with Location 1, the reality was beset with delays, due to weather, staff interviews and the students sitting their exam. The interviews took place on a Wednesday afternoon after the teacher was meeting with the students to debrief them on the exam which they had taken the previous week. This time there were twelve students willing to be interviewed, including the one girl studying for the Diploma in Engineering. There was insufficient time to talk to all twelve and so I interviewed the first four who were able to take part including the girl. On this occasion, I was able to conduct interviews in a corner area of the large open-plan classroom adjacent to where the rest of the class were meeting with their teacher. I asked their permission to tape the interviews, pointing out that I was not a quick enough writer to be able to record all of what they had to say as they were speaking. As before, I explained that I was conducting the research as part of my own training as a teacher and that it was my hope that my work might be of benefit to students such as themselves in the future. I assured them that their responses would not be linked to them personally and asked them if they would like to make up names.

In the case of Location 3, another secondary school, interviews were carried out over a longer period as this was the school in which I wanted to gauge the attitudes of staff and students who were not yet able to access the Diploma programme. Interviews with staff delivering alternative programmes, an independent trainer and a higher level teaching assistant (HLTA), were each carried out in a quiet office on a one to one basis. Two students on these courses were also interviewed as were three others, two girls and one boy described as being high achieving. As before, the purpose of the research was explained and their permission was sought for the audio-taping of the sessions.

The interviews with the 14-19 Consultant and the Adviser were carried out at Location 4, a College of Further Education. These interviews were not conducted in the same way as others because the respondents were unable to devote more time to meeting with me. In neither case was the interview recorded because of limited time available and the informal nature of the meetings in the college café. However, in each case the contribution made was a valuable further layer to the richness of varying perspectives being collected through the interviews. Two students at Location 4 were interviewed in a pairs as this seemed to suit the teacher and learners because it meant that they would miss less of their lesson time. These interviews were carried out in a corner of the large workshop and because of the noise level, a tape-recorder was not used.

The interviews in Locations 5, 6 and 7 were conducted on the same day with a programme set up for me to carry out the interviews in the different venues. There was a strong sense of cooperation between these institutions which gave me an appreciation of how well a consortium could work. At Location 5, a secondary school, I interviewed and taped one teacher in a science laboratory before speaking to two students in a classroom. I then spoke to a further trainer and two students at Location 6, also a secondary school. In each case I was able to interview in quiet offices where I followed the procedure outlined previously with regard to audio-taping. The day ended at Location 7, a College of Further Education, where three members of staff contributed to the interviews in the form of a group interview which took place in the workshop office and was audio-taped as were the interviews with students.

Teachers/trainers were interviewed in the various settings previously described. They were all involved in working with young people, primarily boys aged between 14-16 years. Some were directly involved in the delivery of the Diploma programme while others

were engaged in other vocational/alternative programmes in establishments where the Diploma was not yet fully operational. All saw themselves as promoting boys' achievement. Staff respondents spoke openly and informally, particularly the three members who were based in a workshop apart from the main school. They spoke in an unguarded manner, perhaps perceiving me as a teaching colleague. However, some of their comments were critical of senior school staff such as myself and so the interviews left me with the overall impression that their comments were a true reflection of their views. Sample transcriptions of interviews appear in Appendices 6 and 7.

6.3 Data Analysis

While it has been argued that there is no consensus about the meaning of the term 'analysis' (Atkinson and Coffey, 1996), there are common factors in many researchers' understanding of the word. For example, having a plan and being methodical are common components to the process of analysing qualitative data which involves searching for themes and patterns (Huberman and Miles, 1994). Being open to scrutiny is also a feature of analysis being systematic, factual and justifiable (Wolcott, 2009). In this way, others are able to make judgements as to the reliability of the study. This has involved detailed and systematic splitting of the data into separate concepts to connect these into thematic groups of relevance in answering the research questions.

Constructivist theory suggests that there is no reality independent of our construction of it and so it follows that our knowledge of transactions with the social world are shaped by our own ideas and analytic procedures. Analysis is not a discussion of something that is already and passively there but is a constructive or creative process (Leavis, 1943). The danger of bias is a real one. In carrying out this research, I have become my own main research instrument being the instigator, planner, executioner and

eventually, analyst and evaluator (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). As a corollary to this, the relationship between the researcher and the researched might be questioned. I have designed and carried out the research from which I am translating social experiences and constructing a narrative. However, to mitigate possible bias, the study was carried out in such a way that the qualitative materials was collected in an ethical manner which has similarly been subjected to multi-faceted dissection so as to produce ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973).

Having demonstrated some understanding of the initial responsibilities relating to data analysis, attention will now be turned to its practical execution. In order to make the data collected in this project usable, various stages have had to be traversed. The initial research questions have been mapped on to the questions used in order to collect the data and indicated the themes as previously depicted in Figure 13.

6.4 Coding and thematic grouping of data

The method employed for the analysis of the qualitative data began with coding and then retrieval in such a way that the recontextualised data could be meaningfully displayed (Atkinson and Coffey, 1996). The first level of analysis involved grouping of words and expressions into generic terms. Coding in this way enabled the simplification and reduction of the data. There is a danger of decontextualizing data into overly simplistic codes. As Marton (1986) stated every quotation has two contexts – the one from which it was taken and the ‘pool of meaning’ to which it belongs. This notion is developed further in the discussion of semiotic analysis. Figure 15 and 16 present an overview of the key concepts which emerged from the student and staff data respectively.

free	not just sitting in classroom	enjoyed taster	practical	enjoy engineering
proud	choice	creative	goal	hands on
no breaks	fun	help get job	learn new things	progress
set own goals	facilities at College	more privileges	too much theory	lots to remember
open pathways	teamwork			

Figure 16. Table of key concepts from student data

want to make things	mini - objectives	humour	structured	practical
disengaged	problem solving	working with others	new development	take part
don't know what to do	taster	motivation	proud	not long enough
steep learning curve	independent learning	confidence	vocational	proud
Link to industry	enjoy	different cultures	potential	support
Students chose	5 GCSEs	more of the same	early stages	suited to a technical college
control	Diplomas fit spiky profile	treat like adults	role models	mentoring
gender specific	real life learning	teacher language	"boys will not put up with it"	boys critical of school

Figure 17. Table of concepts arising from staff data

Category	Instance	Totals
Achievement	11111 11	7
Control	1111	4
Treat like adults	1111 1111	9
Practical	1111 1111 11	12
Choice	1111 1	6
Gender	11	2
Real life	1111 1	6
Motivation	1111	5
Enjoyment	1111 111	8
Teaching & learning	1111 11	7
Accreditation/testing	1111	5

Figure 18. Frequency table of key themes arising from student interviews

The second stage of data analysis involved a quantification of the frequency of use of key terms within each of the data sets relating to students and staff respectively (Figures 16 and 17). This quantification was then followed by further scrutiny, to produce a thematic interpretation, after which, the data was reviewed again in its totality drawing out patterns across the data as a whole.

Category	Instance	Totals
Achievement	Kate x3 Nick x1 Paul x1	5
Control in schools	David x 1 Sanjay x 1 Terry x 1 Brian x 1	4
Treat like adults	Brian x 1 David x 1 Nick x 1	3
Practical	Kate x1 Sanjay x2	3
Passion	Terry x 1 David x1	2
Gender	Terry x1 Kate x 1 David x1	3
Real life	Sanjay x2 David x1	3
Motivation	Sanjay x1 Kate x1 Brian x1	3
Criticism by boys	Kate x1 David x2	3
Teaching & learning	Sanjay x2 Terry x 6 Brian x1 Nick x2 Paul x2	13
Accreditation/testing	Kate x1 Nick x 1 Sanjay 1	3

Figure 19. Frequency table of key themes arising from staff interviews

Having completed the initial organisation of the data, the next task involved developing thematic categories. The broad thematic categories developed were:

Achievement – differing perspectives (gender, ability);

Motivation and empowerment (treat like adults/real world);

And Curriculum choice and flexibility (skills, vocational, accreditation).

These three thematic areas form the basis of the Findings chapters.

6.5 Interpreting the data

Interpretation of the data involved exploring ways of understanding it, including noting anomalies in the data that did not fit the overall schema. The purpose of this was to make connections and enable subsequent theorizing on these anomalies. This process was influenced by the grounded theory approach in which axial coding enables the full examination of ‘phenomena’ arising from the data.

Representing the data through narrative analysis helped to complement and counteract the ‘culture of fragmentation’ which can occur when analysis relies only on coding and categorizing (Atkinson, 1992). In constructing an interpretation I considered different voices and experiences as well as context and how that might affect meaning. In this way, the analysis can be seen as a representation or reconstruction of social phenomena (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p.108). The conduct of and reflection on the literature review is also part of the ongoing process of reflection and interpretation. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Just as themes may be detected within the coding of the data, so too connections may be found to exist between texts. Intertextuality – the relationship that exists between textswith continuities perceptible over time (Boon, 1983). Within the literature review, these connections were apparent in the recurrence of themes relating to

boys' underachievement over a number of years and also in respect to the enduring debate surrounding vocational education.

The data was examined within its own particular context but also in relation to the wider data collection. Interpretation, is personal and possibly contentious especially, where multiple, interpretations reflect the complexity of real life (Foster, 1969). As one of its main intentions was to examine different perspectives, this has led to consideration of alternative interpretations of the data. In looking at Tomlinson's proposals and the Government's change of direction in relation to them, the research has provided a critique which forms part of the analysis. 'Research is a political act involving power, resources, policy and ethics' (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p172). This is true, even in relatively small and in-depth studies such as this one.

6.6 Semiotic analysis

The literary base of this research has involved developing awareness of the language used within the existing body of literature and this was also an important part of understanding the data collected where meaning has been constructed through an interpretation of the language used by the respondents. This approach has been provided through exploration of the themes using semiotic analysis of the language used by respondents. This semiotic analysis approach has helped in the exploration of the themes and is a useful means to help highlight meaning contained within the narrative of the data (Denzin, 1987; Feldman, 1994). I considered how respondents' choice of language helped to provide a further layer to the ideas they were trying to convey. Meaning was most apparent in respondents' use of metaphor where 'understanding and experiencing one kind of thing is described in terms of another' (Lackoff and Johnston, 1980 p.5).

“Interview data was seen as situational accounts provided by social actors. These social actors recall events and describe experiences in such a way as to legitimise or justify actions or behaviours and in turn, produce plausible and coherent constructions of the social world” (Lyman and Scott 1970, p.112; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p.100).

Particularly in the case of young people, the use of comparative metaphoric imagery can enable them to communicate more easily the ideas they want to express and can provide the researcher with some useful insights into the young person’s world-view.

‘Metaphorical imagery can provide a useful way of thinking about and interpreting textual data.... accomplished through comparison or analogy... (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p.85).

In analysing respondents’ discourse I was aware of the cultural significance and possible shared values implicit within the words used. Noting the occurrence of particular words was the first step in this analysis with contextual appraisal being the second (Tesch, 1990). Domain analysis outlined by Spradley (1979) shows how a consideration of the language and imagery employed by respondents can help to produce a richer interpretation of it. In subjecting the data to this type of ‘back to front, inside-out’ examination, I was able to get a sense of the feelings and meanings that lay behind the language and metaphors used. Figure 18 shows some of the language used by staff and student respondents grouped in a thematic manner.

There was a strong sense of physicality in the use of language by staff respondents with one talking about the value of having ‘a hands-on approach.’ Expressions derived from other occupations were sometimes used. For example one trainer utilised a military expression, ‘three strikes and you’re out,’ to explain the assessment procedures. Another

staff respondent said that it was all about ‘catapulting kids further.’ For me, this was a very striking image to use in a school workshop in a midland school setting. It suggests that this teacher wanted more for his students than he felt they might otherwise experience. His use of language indicated that he was cognizant of the part he played in enabling this to happen. Another respondent spoke about ‘planting the seeds’, using a horticultural metaphor to validate his role in relation to his students. These figures of speech are not exceptional and do figure in everyday usage, however, it may be significant that the use of

Staff			
Ownership	Physical	Emotional	Energy
we've re-written the rule book	hands-on approach.	have passion	So much energy to learn
we've planted those seeds	three strikes and you're out.	dare take the risk	have a go
	'spiky profile' of the learners	keep the vision	can do it attitude
schools want to control	catapulting kids further	different cultures	
Students			
It captures you	under a higher authority	have a laugh	
hands on	practical	hate you	
team building	mess about	pressured	
boys need to be kicked into it	pushed		
get kicked off			
girls are right on it			

Figure 20 Semiotic analysis of data

such language made reference to the previous work experience and world views held by some of the staff respondents.

Students used less metaphorical language than did their teachers although some did use physical figurative language to express their meaning. As with staff respondents, 'hands-on' was a favoured description by students of Diploma learning activities. Metaphorical language was less used by the students, possibly because they had not acquired so many work-related references or perhaps because they were less in the habit of talking at length about what they were doing. An exception to this was the use of the word 'kicking' which appeared three times in the data. On one occasion a female student commented on the fact that boys, unlike girls, do not participate freely in learning activities but have to be 'kicked into it.' In another instance, two male students explained how they no longer indulged in immature behaviour because it would result in their being 'kicked off' the course. These phrases are in common parlance but are nevertheless forceful expressions of viewpoint, in each case having a negative connotation.

It was clear that some staff respondents felt a degree of ownership in what they were doing as evidenced by views expressed such as 'we've re-written the rule book', suggesting pride in challenging and improving on what had gone before. This contrasted with the view of one of the students who believed that school staff were 'under a higher authority' and so constrained in what they could do. Yet another student used the metaphorical phrase 'it captures you' to explain how he felt that the teaching related to the Diploma was motivational. The staff respondents generally spoke in a respectful, almost affectionate, manner about their students, even when talking about them being 'rogues' or 'so and soes.' Expressions used included 'they have so much energy to learn;' they want to 'have a go' and learners have a 'can do it attitude.' Once again, it is worth noting the

physical nature of the descriptions, but it is also apparent that these respondents were very positively disposed towards the learners. The term 'underachiever' was never used except when prompted by me in the course of the interviews.

The final set of notable expressions used by staff respondents had emotional undertones and may almost be read as denoting a sense of embattlement on the part of the staff. Firstly, there was an acknowledgement by one college lecturer of there being 'different cultures' in schools and colleges. One teacher spoke about having 'passion' for the task of teaching Level 1 and Level 2 students before later talking of 'daring to take the risk' when discussing how the course could be improved. Another staff respondent talked of the importance of 'keeping the vision' which again suggested that there was some threat to what he is trying to do. In examining these small snippets of language I think it is significant to note that both staff and students favoured language that denoted physical action, sometimes associated with other occupational lexicons. A sense of camaraderie is conveyed by both with references to behaviour that will allow people to participate or alternatively be excluded from the learning group. Some staff use language almost to denote a sense of mission in the face of adversity. From this semiotic analysis I believe it is possible to construct some understanding of the world views being expressed by respondents.

6.7 Analysing and theorizing

Coding, thematic and semiotic analysis allowed viewing of the data from multiple angles, the next stage of perspectives. The next stage of analysis was to construct a theoretical interpretation. This interpretation has been influenced by particular bodies of literature especially critical theory along with identification of patterns in the data through grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Developing theory in this way allows

identification of patterns or association (Gubrium, 1988), dealing with causal relationships (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and/or to generalization (Goffman, 1961). These processes have allowed for an explanatory and interpretive account of the achievement of boys at the 14-19 stage of vocational education. Denzin (1987) suggests that the point of research is to produce detailed narratives of personal experiences – interpretation is the key aim rather than generalisation. This is in line with Gubrium (1988) and Denzin (1987) as the data is rooted in the everyday experiences of the respondents at a specific point in time. The final stage of analysis requires being aware of limitations; typically sample size and possible idiosyncrasies of the results (Pole and Lampard, 2002).

In evaluating the findings I determined their significance by judging the extent to which they might be representative of the views of other teachers and students in similar settings. The presentation and reflection on the methods allows the research to be open to scrutiny thus enhancing the reliability of the research. Finally I judge whether the interview questions were valid. In noting the key themes in Figure 15 above. I did not keep strictly to question wording as the adult respondents tended to develop their responses further and often beyond the limitations of the initial question. A wider perspective was possible as some of the selected adults were not only involved in the actual teaching but importantly were also engaged with policy and management of the courses. As a result, a number of additional categories were identified beyond those arising at the pilot stage. The range of responses arising illustrated how qualitative methods allow exploration of individual perspectives that are subjectively experienced by respondents. The study of different interactions necessitated gathering of individual responses and judgements. To strengthen validity, comparison was made between sets of respondents' answers in order to

pick out similarities and also inconsistent findings. Comparing this set of findings with those of other previous research also formed an important part of the research.

6.8 Summary

This chapter has presented how the data was collected using interviews conducted with students and staff. This has been done in relation to the main research questions examined within the study. Key terms arising from these two sets of data are highlighted.

This initial coding, identification of themes and semiotic analysis has provided the basis of the data presentation and its thematic analysis. The Findings chapters examine each of the main themes identified through this data analysis, namely:

Achievement – differing perspectives;

Motivation and empowerment

Curriculum provision, choice and flexibility.

This chapter provided transparency in how I have collected my data by outlining the processes clearly. In reaching conclusions I have endeavoured to avoid researcher bias by presenting the words of others transparently. The research outcomes are my interpretation and the decisions made, while collecting and analysing the data forms part of the process of modifying and shaping the findings that are grounded in data. The interpretation presented here, however, aims to allow others to question these decisions, explanations and evaluations. The next section presents a further narrative of the interviews, with an interpretation of the findings.

SECTION D - FINDINGS

Chapter 7 Data Presentation

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the collected data within the themes selected for the study: perspectives on achievement; motivation and empowerment and finally, curriculum provision choice and flexibility. It begins by presenting the respondents' differing views and ideas relating to achievement. A number of the questions posed to both staff and students were related to this concept and some specifically to the question of boys' underachievement. The chapter then presents data relating to the concepts of motivation and empowerment. Previous literature has highlighted that the recurrent theme of engagement of the learner is fundamental to successful outcomes as is a sense of ownership in which the learner feels intrinsic involvement in the choice and process of learning. Finally it turns attention to the theme of curriculum provision, choice and flexibility because from my initial study of the data I was able to see that respondents felt that this issue was important to them. The initial questions in this section to both students and staff were related to the curriculum and specifically the Diploma. Curriculum choice and flexibility also featured in questions on students' plans for the future.

Interview questions, examples of probes and sample interview transcript can be found in Appendices. The chapter deals with student and staff respondents in turn within each of the three thematic sections.

7.2. Achievement – differing perspectives

i) Student respondents

Students were asked a number of questions relating to achievement, their own views and their beliefs about other people's perspectives. Unsurprisingly, they had more to say about their own ideas than about the explanations they attributed to others.

Students' reflections on their own views

The most commonly expressed feelings about achievement were categorised as self-fulfilment, being proud and making others proud and obtaining recognition through accredited qualifications. Michael began by saying that achievement was about, "getting to where you want to be." He then added that it was to do with pride. BDW said similarly that it "makes me proud of me". He thought it was important to have a target for himself and "really go for it." Others similarly emphasised intrinsic personal achievement as with Johnny who explained, "They're your goals... the ones you have set out." Yan agreed with this view, saying that it was about "getting where you want to be." Grant continued the theme by saying that it was about "achievement in yourself." Tom understood achievement to be about producing work to a high standard and being "pleased with the work". Satisfaction with self was a strong factor for many of the respondents. Stephen equated achievement with: "earning what you want and doing it for yourself." While Titch said that achievement was to "gain something by yourself".

Such expressions of self-autonomy were pleasing to hear and denoted more of a sense of ownership than was expressed by others such as Dylan, one of the students following an alternative programme to the Diploma who said that he didn't know what other students thought but he felt that achievement "was like winning something." He thought it would be a good thing but did not feel that it was something to be earned. This was an interesting response as it suggested that Dylan did not feel that success was automatic nor directly linked to his input but rather, a welcome, although uncontrollable, outcome. BDW added to his earlier response by making the observation that for him, achievement on the Diploma course was about "making me feel free." When probed further, it became clear that this too was a manifestation of self-fulfilment but in this case, arising from a feeling of failure in the past. DC also talked about "having a goal to

achieve” while Dan said it was about what “you achieve at the end.” Rob agreed with this summative understanding, “It’s things you manage to complete at the end.”

Others of the respondents took a more formative view, believing that the process counted in the achievement. “Achievement is what progress you have made,” said Nick.

As the interviewer, I gained the impression that some had internalised their teachers’ views. When asked about underachievement Gary was quick to respond. “Oh that means not reaching your goal” and went on to add that it was something to be avoided because “it does you no good in the future.” Paul said that he thought achievement was about:

‘Getting better – knowing much more –keep improving.’

Rob was even more explicit in suggesting the extent to which his teacher’s influence coloured his view of achievement by stating that it meant:

‘Being able to get to goals your teacher has put for you at the end.’

Some defined achievement in terms of pleasing others, parents or teachers. Again, given the age of the student respondents it was not surprising that many responses involved pleasing others. While students may have exercised some control over their involvement in the course, they were still of an age where they were obliged to be at school and were not autonomous of families. Nevertheless, the respondents, on the whole, were accepting of what was available to them, in contrast to the attitudes of boys discussed in previous literature (Willis, 1977; Mac an Ghail, 1994). A few of the students interviewed saw achievement as a stepping stone. Rob said that achievement was needed for a career path while Titch felt that he would have achieved if he got a diploma at the end of year “for the practical stuff I have learned.”

Chris crystallised this thinking, summing it up as:

“Achievement ...putting in 100% effort... getting certificated qualification.”

His was a functionalist viewpoint, indicating that he was focused on the end product rather than the process and so Chris's response illustrated the way in which some students understand the purpose of education to be limited to what is required to achieve accreditation. Such views mirrored the Government's expectations of the 14-19 curriculum which linked closely to employers' needs and expectations. Nick's response emphasised this as he saw achievement as being conferred externally by an employer who would judge that you could, for example, do bricklaying. Once again, Nick's part in the process was limited to his ability to satisfy the employer.

There were only three girls interviewed for this research but their views are interesting and add another perspective to the study. One of the girls, Lisa, said that achievement to her was:

“Getting qualifications... being pleased with work...able to produce work to a high standard.”

Another of the girls interviewed was Molly, an able student who made some insightful comments. She felt that achievement meant something different depending on different types of learners:

“Higher ability become more competitive while lower ability are more proud of themselves because they have tried their best. More intelligent boys are driven to achieve due to pressure from teachers and possibly parents. Less intelligent are pushed more but they don't see it as failure if they don't achieve.”

It was interesting to note the way in which Molly felt that boys were “pushed” and “pressured” to achieve. For herself, she felt that the onus was on her:

“Achievement means doing the best you can....getting resultsgetting somewhere while you are doing it.”

Reflections on parents' views

As has been stated, the respondents had less to say about other people's views of achievement. Many mentioned the notion of pride: "parents are proud of you;" "parents are proud and support you;" parents are "proud of their children-of what they were able to do." Two of the boys were more specific in saying that parents were proud of their children for "achieving grades." Lisa took it further still by saying that parents wanted their children to achieve because "parents think you will earn money if you do well." Paul was in agreement with this, he explained that parents understood achievement to mean that "it will help you to earn money."

Mohamed started by grouping teachers and parents together:

"Teachers and parents think you have to achieve."

When probed to explain further what he saw to be the difference between parents and teachers, he then went on to mark a distinction by saying that:

"It's more important for parents – they want you to do well in the future."

His answer was interesting because it suggested that he understood that his parents were taking a longer term view of his future rather than one that was linked solely to the immediate course result and follow-on courses. Pride was the over-riding emotion attributed to parents but it was clearly a two way process: student respondents stated that parents would be proud but their responses also demonstrated that they actively sought to make their parents proud. Jamie thought that parents and teachers had the same understanding in relation to reaching or failing to reach goals but felt that parents would be more concerned about lack of achievement. His view may have been uttered flippantly but he stated that you needed to achieve good grades to please parents:

'Yeah else... they hate you.'

Gary agreed that it mattered to parents, saying that it was "about As, Bs, Cs..." and that parents worried about whether "their kid's going to get a good grade, at the end of the

day.” However, he thought that parents were more “easy going” about results than teachers.

Reflections on teachers’ views

Molly felt that boys needed teachers to push them to achieve, but that this varied according to the ability of the student. There appeared to be some contradiction in what she was saying here about the external forces to succeed being put on different types of students. She explained:

“Teachers have been moulded by higher authorities about getting people to levels. Teachers work with the mass- improving grades rather than with individuals.”

Molly felt that this was wrong as she took the view that individuals had different aspirations which they should be helped to achieve. Jay, an able student at the same school as Molly had a similarly critical view of teacher motivation in connection with student achievement:

“At school it is just about percentages and target grades and coursework deadlines. Teachers think about statistics and data - so many pupils above a C. Teachers don’t push when you get an A to help you get an A*. I had to convince my teacher that I could move work from A to A*. She was worried about deadlines. I had to work to get a higher level and also had to challenge the teacher’s perception. It is driven by data. It’s not individual enough. Teachers can give extra support. A push to help can make the difference.”

Both Molly and Jay had awareness of the pressures on teachers to strive for achievement on the part of their pupils, however, their experience suggested to them that individuals could be lost in the process if their needs did not dovetail with the broader expectation of them to work towards 5 A*-C passes including English and Maths. Jay, however, did not lay all the blame on teachers as he felt that lack of motivation was a factor for groups of boys in school. This will be considered more fully in Chapter Eight.

Will took up a similar theme to Molly and Jay saying that for teachers achievement was all “Fischer targets, grades and number of merits.” Rick shared this view, saying that teachers want you to get the “target grades you need to achieve.” On the matter of achievement only Dave conceded that teachers will think you achieve “if you try your best to achieve grades, aims and objectives.” While Lisa took a different view, saying that teachers think that underachievement means “not doing well enough.” Being a teacher myself, I recognised what these students were saying and could hear my colleagues emphasising the importance of obtaining a C grade as I myself have done. This is the rhetoric of government policy on achievement and it is thought-provoking to hear it being critiqued by the students themselves.

Reflections on other students’ views

Respondents were also asked how they felt other students viewed achievement. Value judgements were made which often blurred the distinction between motivation at the start of the process and achievement in the course of or at the completion of study. Several stressed what they perceived to be the distinguishing factor and for many this linked to ability and willingness to conform and make an effort. “High achievers get more competition” said Grant. “Clever boys are more competitive” thought Paul, while Tom declared that achievement was of no interest because:

“Some boys don’t want to try. They are more interested in other stuff.”

This comment was not surprising because again, it is important to remember that the boys being questioned were mainly fourteen years of age and their own appreciation of their lives is far more complex than only being school centred. Jamie thought that there was no difference between boys and girls in terms of achievement and Gary expanded on this idea:

“I’d say it depends what kind of personality you are... if you’re a person that aims high, but will most likely get put down then achievement is really important to them, then there are the kind of people who aren’t really that bothered with school.”

This is indicative of his belief that achievement is closely tied in with a person’s inbuilt nature and so not dependent on course content or delivery. Gordon felt that:

“Other students think it is too hard and some don’t want to do it because their friends aren’t here.”

It was clear that he was speaking specifically about the way in which the Diploma courses required students to travel and mix with others. Paul looked at this positively by saying that some people liked it and made an effort because “it was all about teamwork.” This was the only response that recognised achievement in terms of working together and was insightful given that a major drive of the Diplomas and vocational learning about people developing the skills of working together.

ii) Staff Respondents

Teachers and trainers were also asked specific questions relating to achievement and underachievement and, as with the student respondents, staff were asked for the school’s viewpoint, their own and also for other perspectives. The first theme to be highlighted by staff related to student behaviour and indicated that some of the staff respondents felt that poor behaviour led to underachievement. Paul, a college tutor said that “Students coming through last year were not suitable.” He went on to add that they did not have the maturity necessary “for the learning involved.” Brian believed that all the boys who had started the Diploma with him were of similar ability but it “took time to get them in line.” By this he meant that staff had to work with students to help them conform to the requirements of college study. He went on to add that by the second term he could begin to see the

difference. "One was very disengaged...he has been excluded." In another case, Brian stated that "he had never seen a bigger improvement." The others, he thought, would see it through. "In terms of achievement, if they are enjoying/progressing then they enjoy it more." Brian thought that this combination was what was required for them to achieve:

"The lads need to feel that they are making meaningful progress while enjoying themselves at the same time."

Interestingly, Brian thought that he, himself, had felt quite disengaged at school and so looking back he could see that he had underachieved but at the time "he wasn't bothered." He felt that this gave him further insight into how the boys felt.

Nick was a teacher at one of the schools where students were having tasters but did not have full access to the Diplomas yet. He began by saying that students didn't think about the dichotomy between achievement and underachievement:

'They don't see themselves as underachievers because they don't see the point of some things.'

As a result, he believed that they failed to engage and so didn't care about the outcome. This reflected the view of many of the student respondents who believed that they achieved goals which they had set for themselves and therefore goals which had some meaning for them. Kate and Brian echoed this sentiment. 'They didn't get their choice, so they weren't going to do well' Kate thought. Brian said that the problem was that the boys last year 'didn't know what they wanted to do'. He believed that they would benefit from having 'a back- up plan' which would need to be built into Year 9 option planning. He thought that lack of motivation was why they had not achieved well.

Some college staff felt that an argument could be made for the fact that underachievement of learners was the responsibility of their secondary educational institution. Terry developed this theme saying that the manner in which schools did or did

not put learners forward for the Diploma was linked to the eventual outcome of the student's success or failure. He claimed that the head teachers were 'keen to keep control in their schools.' This control related directly to the perceptions of difference between academic and vocational qualifications whereby the introduction of Diplomas was viewed with suspicion and not seen as being appropriate to most learners. Terry went on to say that he felt strongly that the structure of the Diploma was ideally suited to the 'spiky profile' of the learners and for that reason they could achieve well. His reference to the 'spiky profile' was a reference to the way in which statistical representation of a student's exam results could show a widely fluctuating graph line depending on the individual's strengths and weaknesses. He had much to say about other courses with which he had been involved and was critical of some Diploma courses such as the hospitality diploma which he felt 'didn't offer enough sufficiently different.' Terry was certain that the Engineering Diploma offered a positive way forward:

'I have passion for it....we have been failing students for years.'

He thought that there was 'no excuse' for students not achieving because, he argued, there is so much data available to mitigate against it. He suggested that by using the data correctly it was possible to achieve: 'right student on the right course.' In this way students could achieve their goals. Sanjay agreed with this view as he believed that although the Diploma was in its early stages it was important that with a new development 'kids were not getting more of the same at college.' He felt that curriculum content and delivery methods was integral to student achievement. In terms of underachievement, Jim and Denis were in agreement that they had seen positive changes in some of the students but it was not always a matter of ability. Jim said that there were two or three who were:

'Academically streets ahead of the rest of the group but because of that they're quite lazy because they know they can do it'.

Dennis added that:

‘You get the pleasant surprises, the ones that look as though they’re little so and soes and they turn out alright.’

Two students, in particular stood out:

‘They came in as rogues but they’ve suddenly realized they can actually do the work... they can achieve and as a pair they’ve turned into quite nice young men now.’

It was heartening to note that their motivation had spread to the functional skills ‘the area which could have really seriously stopped them’. Despite this, tutors did mention that difficulty with functional skills could still be challenging for students even if they were achieving in other subject areas.

Student respondents had less to say about other people’s views on the achievement/underachievement debate than they had about their own viewpoint and this was even more marked in the case of their teachers who had little to offer in relation to girls’ perspectives, for example. This was possibly because of the fact that so few girls had chosen to take courses in construction or engineering. Mike noted that in the five years he had been delivering engineering courses ‘there had only been five or six girls enrolled which constitutes 4-5%.’ David had a view on this pointing out that, ‘This area of education is very gender specific.’ In his college, for example, they were initially recruiting 50-50 boys and girls but then there was a huge drop off of girls. He said that this was hardly surprising given the gender representation of the staff delivering the course. He suggested that the girls fall off was ‘due to their experience on induction day.’ David felt that there was still ‘an old fashioned mentality... sexist attitudes continue.’ Lecturers call the girls ‘young ladies’ and this, he felt, served to make girls feel uncomfortable and not fully included or less valued as learners. The study did not reveal a great deal in relation to staff views on girls’ attitudes towards achievement and underachievement. This area would, however, be an interesting topic for further research related to the Diploma.

7.3 Motivation and Empowerment

i) Student Respondents

In the responses to questions around the notions of motivation and empowerment there was some overlap with the students' responses relating to achievement as many thought that their motivation was to achieve in terms of the course. Jamie was uncertain about why he wanted to do the course:

'I don't know really, just about being motivated and find out about cars and stuff...you don't learn if you aren't motivated.'

For some respondents, as with achievement, motivation was linked to self-fulfilment but this was also seen as being a matter of choice. Mohamed thought this, saying that, 'I enjoyed it because I chose to do it.' Jay, however, felt that motivation depended somewhat on ability and the choices people made:

'At higher end of school – boys are motivated to work... to push yourself further. Middle and lower are not motivated to achieve. Boys don't all care. Some doss about and are not motivated. Boys are involved with outside school sports...they can get into trouble.'

Jay believed that these were conscious decisions that boys made.

A number of the students felt that not everyone would be motivated to do the Diploma course Gordon said 'friends weren't interested. I think they were scared of the amount of work.' Hassan took a similar view saying that some people might be 'afraid of failing'. He believed that they thought it was risky to take the Diploma because it was a double option.' This meant that the Diploma was timetabled as though it were two separate subjects and the significance of this, he felt, would be that the risk of failure

would be doubled if there were problems with the courses. He, himself, dismissed these fears by saying that those students were just ‘looking at the negative side.’

However, there was some criticism made of students perceived to be less motivated. Michael said that ‘at school people mess around...are immature.’ Others agreed that they had been involved in ‘messing about’ in the past. They saw this as childish behaviour which they no longer chose to be engaged in. Will said that people:

‘Can’t afford to mess about at college..they get kicked off.’

He saw this as the ultimate deterrent which acted as a strong motivating factor and the major difference with school where exclusion was rare.

The content of the course was a powerful influence for several of the boys. “I enjoy engineering – building stuff,” said Johnny. That was why he had signed up for the course. BDW knew what appealed to him and so actively sought out relevant training “I enjoy engineering and I went on a taster”. Actual studying on the course continued to motivate him because he says: “Now I think it is very interesting –always learning something new.”

John was similarly subject oriented “I was interested in how things work.... being an engineer.” Rob echoed this sentiment saying that “I like to know how things work and make things – vehicles –computers.” This was a dominant theme in that the respondents wanted to learn but their focus of interest was in the mechanics and not on the theory. This linked course content to delivery, with the teacher’s role being crucial. Most of the respondents felt that their motivation to take and then succeed on the course arose from the enthusiasm of their teachers. This was particularly expressed by some of the students from Location 5. Rick gave credit to his teachers for helping him to sign for the course. “Teachers are motivating” he said. Will from the same school was in agreement, “Guidance was good.” Both students felt that this combination of advice and encouragement helped to motivate them to enrol and then to focus on doing well. Yan

from another institution continued in a similar vein, saying that he was ‘inspired’ by his teacher, ‘I’ve learned things I was never taught before.’

Will developed the theme of motivation further by saying that it was predominantly the learning that was motivating as he liked ‘being taught something you want to learn’.

He said that was why he liked being on the Diploma because ‘it’s practical – it sticks with you.’ DC believes that he is ‘very creative’ and so he was attracted to studying for the diploma rather than more traditional subjects. John went back to an earlier expressed liking for the practical aspect of learning, saying that he ‘enjoys engines...it’s hands-on’.

Improving employment prospects was most important for some of the respondents who were results-focused, being motivated by the qualification or the hope of employment. Rick said, ‘I just want to get a good grade. That’s what I’m doing it for.’ Johnny’s motivation was similarly work-related as he wanted to ‘work towards a job.’ While Paul’s impetus was comparable, ‘I want to get a job in the future,’ he said. Michael said that ‘the practical bit’ motivated him but he added that he thought that the course would open doors – advance him – trying to get a job’. BDW from the same school believed that the diploma would ‘open pathways....with work done differently.’ When asked to explain further he said that because this was a new course and a new qualification, he thought employers would be very interested and so this was his motivation in wanting to study it. Lisa was very clear about her motivation in doing the Diploma. She said that what mattered was:

“Being able to be good at skills so you can go to university.”

This was the first reference directly made to higher education although in many answers their desire to do well in the future was implicit. Many felt that their motivation to succeed came from the family. Yan believed that “Family can provide motivation” while Titch thought that he had been influenced by family members:

“Dad influenced me. He owns his own business ...paint and body. My Grandad used to help on Jaguar ... help out, you know.”

Rob was quite direct when asked if there had been any influence from home, saying that “Yeah, my Mum decided”... When probed further he conceded that it was his choice too to study for the Diploma but initially it had been his mother who encouraged him to sign up for it..

A few student respondents expressed mixed motives in relation to their learning as they were unclear about his/her motivation to follow the course. Some were happy to cite different reasons such as Tom who felt that he had combined reasons for doing the course saying that:

‘It’s fun, exciting and interesting to learn new things and to achieve ‘unique new qualifications’.

Others were still undecided and had not made final decisions because they were still at a relatively early stage of their studies. This was particularly true of the students in schools where the Diplomas were not yet being offered and so access was through the local college. The few students questioned felt that they were not able to decide yet and so had no over-riding motivation. When asked about her motivation to study, Sarah said:

‘Boys are more competitive – girls more internal. At this age you keep changing what you want to do. I wanted to be a psychologist or a teacher now I want to be a singer or dancer. Don’t really know, it keeps changing.’

Jay felt similarly confused thinking that his motivation had changed:

‘I was told that my options would be linked to a jobs. I wanted a career in business. Now I don’t want that and wish that I had chosen subjects I enjoyed.’

When he was asked how the school might have helped him better, he replied that students like him just needed advice but not to be pushed. In listening to some of these responses from students it is very important to remember that these are not full-time

college students but fourteen year olds who are at a stage of their lives when it is unsurprising that they should feel uncertain about their choices for the future. A number of respondents were in agreement that they were motivated by being given responsibility and treated as adults. Gordon supported this view:

‘This is a lot more relaxed but you get treated like an adult but without the responsibility of an adult.’

Sarah saw gender playing a part in people’s behavior and so consequently on how much responsibility was given. She felt that boys lacked self-motivation. She said that:

‘Boys needed to be kicked into it but girls are straight on it – seem more adult.’

Johnny also felt that he was motivated because of being treated as an adult and most specifically because he was given a NUS card which would allow him reduced price access to places he wanted to go.

i) Staff Respondents

Role models and mentoring

It was clear from the interviews with staff that many highlighted the importance of relationships in motivating the learners. Jim made the point that in one case having a positive role model in his father who was in the motor trade had been an important factor in ensuring that a particular boy continued with the course. Dennis agreed that this family influence was a help but he felt that staff role models and attitudes also played a part. He stated:

“In the early days it was un-cool to be seen to be smart but we’ve re-written the rule book a little bit now.”

When probed, he expanded further:

“Well we don’t ever think of ourselves as school teachers... we’re the foremen and this is the workshop, they’ve come to work with us for a day and we can interact with them in a completely different way”.

Denis agreed that they were all on first name terms with Jim adding that the trainer’s word still has to be law but it could be a much more relaxed and adult atmosphere. Ian developed this point further saying that the structure of the course changed the way in which he actually taught to the benefit of the learners. He described a big improvement in one student:

“The way I taught was different. I showed him more and treated him more like an adult.”

The converse was also true. Terry believed that boys could be completely demotivated by the language teachers used. He felt that there was no place for ‘the old teacher knows best stuff’ because, he said “boys will not put up with it.” Jim went on to say that some people are just ready for work:

“Some of these lads need to be out of school now and they need to be these adult, mature.”

This was Jim’s own experience as he had gone to work at 16 and so he felt able to relate that to the boys, whom, he believed, really just wanted to go out and earn some money. However, he did not believe that this was a justification for lowering standards:

“We can see that they want to earn and we’ve got that sympathy there. I know everyone should have the opportunity but let’s get real, somebody’s still got to make things, somebody’s still got to fix the roads.”

Staff obviously wanted to do the best for their students but I wanted to know whether they felt that they had time to take on a specific mentoring role. Jim replied:

“Well, we tend to do it as part of the normal working day, particularly when they’re in the workshop. And they’re pretty good, they do open up with us, possibly more than they would with someone they see as being a school teacher.”

Mary emphasized strongly the role played by staff. She said:

“That’s why it works so well. The absolute thing with both groups; you’ve got to have the right staff.”

Dennis also emphasised the importance of building relationships in order to motivate saying that, “boys open up with the right staff” before he went on to provide an example which arose from there being so many questions about mopeds and moped law. Dennis explained that this was because “they’re all desperate to get one.” He went on to explain how they had to do a lesson relating to mopeds and relevant legislation, adding that as it had been forty years since he had taken a motorbike test he had no idea of what was involved. Dennis, therefore put to the students:

“Let’s get on the internet lads and we can do it, we can agree. Okay we’ll cancel today’s lesson, this is what we’re going to do but actually this is gonna be more use to you.”

There was a shared belief amongst college trainers that being flexible was the key to engaging and motivating the learners. This contrasted to the manner of working in schools which, for this age group, was less exploratory and more didactic in approach.

The Wider Key Skills trainer said that he was disengaged himself at school but got involved through the Prince’s Trust. He maintained that:

“It’s important, how you approach them and guide them through. In a couple of days you can change attitudes – treat them like adults - support them – encourage their potential.”

Ian concurred but added that motivation comes from a worthwhile end goal:

“Boys were motivated because they all felt they would come out with good qualification. They wanted to get on bricklaying course and felt they didn’t have good enough grades but they are more motivated when they could see an end product.”

He went on to add that their confidence grew as a result of being given the chance and they were “proud of what they did.”

7.4 Curriculum provision, choice and flexibility

i) Student respondents

When asked why he wanted to study this course Jamie said that he just wanted to be a mechanic while Gary stated that he wanted to increase his employability. He said that he had chosen this particular course because ‘it’s what I’ve always wanted to do, taking things apart’. He agreed, however, that he also liked to put things back together again. Jamie also enjoyed the course because, as he put it:

‘Yeah it’s more fun than school, you get to take apart cars and stuff like that.’

The themes of enjoying practical learning and being treated like an adult were recurring refrains within the interviews. Both Gary and Jamie agreed that the Engineering Diploma was more interesting than other courses they had studied in school because as Gary said:

‘It is more involving because you get to take apart cars. You get to see it and then do it for yourself instead of just sitting in the classroom and learning about it and then... just to forget it.’

Jamie agreed, saying that he too preferred practical work and then added that he learned best when:

“They just show you on the computer and you see what you’re going to be doing and then you learn about that, you write some notes down about it and then you come down here and you try to fix that part or take it off a car.”

Gary agreed that demonstrations helped but added:

“It helps if your tutor uses a bit of humour, to keep you interested. Erm... mainly like friendly banter kind of thing... that’s probably it.”

Both Jamie and Gary felt this was not the case in school. Gary said ‘It’s different in school, it’s very different.’ When asked to explain further he said that because in school:

“If you have a laugh they just don’t take it, but if you have a laugh with the college teachers they’re okay as long as you get on with it.”

Jamie summed it up by saying:

“At school you get treated like a kid, here you get treated like an adult. The tutors here don’t mind if you say the odd swear word or anything like that but in school you’ll get detentions... and a few times you get expelled.”

College teachers were helping the boys to cultivate the inter-personal requirements of belonging to an adult community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Students were able to identify the different requirements of school and college but they still had some difficulty in navigating between the two. This notion of existing within different educational worlds also featured in the staff interviews. Jamie registered his approval of being in college by saying that it was better than school because:

“You’ve got all the tools you need. If it ain’t there then you don’t need it.”

He also felt that staff attitudes were important saying that the teacher praised students saying that you’ve “done it right.” He felt confident that it would lead to a job:

“Cos then you get more of a chance if they know you’ve been to college instead of just jumping straight into it.”

Both Gary and Jamie said that they would definitely think about doing another course at college after they left school which denotes a positive outcome for a policy with this intention at its heart. When asked if they had done anything outside of school that they were proud of and saw as being an achievement, Jamie said that he had helped his uncle build a kit-car while Gary's response was that he managed to dismantle a motorbike and then put it back together again afterwards. They both felt that their learning in college had helped them to achieve even when they were working on projects such as these, extra-curricular to their course work.

The student respondents enjoyed the flexibility within the college teaching and curriculum, with Michael stating: "it's more free and not just sitting in a classroom." Dan felt it would 'help with everyday life skills.' BDW enjoyed the course because it was 'practical' while DC approved because it was 'more varied and active'. Rob cited the freedom of choice in college:

"More freedom in what you do. You get to choose a project... how the suspension works in racing car."

He was pleased at having longer to spend on a project so that he could make a good job of what he was doing. These comments were indicative of the seriousness with which most students took their learning. There were, however, exceptions. Dan was less enthusiastic about being in college, saying:

"I thought it would be good. Now I think it's OK but sometimes it drags – we're getting prepared- not doing much practical."

When probed further he went on to explain that the teacher had decided to concentrate on theory during the first term in preparation for the exam in January. Johnny was similarly disappointed having 'expected more practical.' Mohamed said that:

"At the start it was very boring ...all theory. So dull – five people dropped out."

It would appear that to engage such learners, the theory cannot be divorced from the practical component of the course. It was also worth noting that these negative comments were made of the school based component where it would seem that the teachers had had less experience of teaching vocational learning courses before. As with the students, staff confidence was more apparent where teachers felt that they were able to demonstrate their own proficiency and had previous positive experience.

Hassan said that he thought that what was good about the practical work was that it was “taught with more importance because it’s vocational.” This was the antithesis of the view held in schools where vocational learning is often seen as the poor relation to academic learning. John stated that with being treated more as an adult gave rise to some anxieties:

“It’s more hands on with the equipment. More free but still tricky, you know, being independent. Sometimes you might not really know what to do and so it would be up to you to ask teacher for a demonstration.”

Such ownership of the learning experience was also highlighted by Lisa, one of the girls interviewed, who said:

‘Demonstrations are good...showing, copying and practising.’

She thought this process was different to school but conceded that this type of learning also had its challenges.

“Inspection sheets are hard. It needs to be perfect work. I enjoyed doing cutting metal, drilling turning and fitting but it was hard.”

Many of the students interviewed felt that the teaching and learning for the Diploma course was a more rewarding experience than their earlier school experience had been.

Dan and Chris considered why they had not achieved more success in their earlier schooling. Dan commented:

“The college work suited me because I thought it was my way of learning. I felt it worked and I know a lot more.”

Chris agreed that he enjoyed the work because it was more ‘hands on and not all from a book.’ He went on to give some insight into why he had got into trouble and had not done better when he was younger:

‘I used to dread going into History and Geography. Sitting there, bored, listening to not very important things. Achieving is better here for the simple fact that it is more fun. It captures you and makes you want to keep going.’

A small number of articulate, achieving students in school settings, following academic pathways were most critical of the guidance they received and also of the way in which they saw staff to be overly concerned with achieving targets at the expense of the individual learner’s specific needs. Jay was of the view that:

Teachers have been moulded by a higher authority about getting people to levels.’ Molly thought that:

‘Teachers work with the mass - improving grades rather than with individuals.’

The few expressions of such views from mainstream school students serve as an interesting point of comparison with the views expressed by learners following college based Diploma courses who felt that their teachers dealt with them as individuals. Reasons for these different experiences may relate to the diverse training routes followed by staff in schools and in colleges with the former being staffed by graduate and professionally trained teachers while colleges have a mix of similar staff alongside industrially experienced instructors. There are different pressures on the two phases which may translate into their resulting attitudes and the ways in which they work. School staff and their schools were judged on their ability to maximise the numbers of students achieving minimum of C passes at GCSE while colleges of further education are funded according to numbers enrolled and retained on courses.

Finally, Titch stated that what he really liked about the Diploma course was that you got to talk about what you were doing with the teacher and with the people you were working with. He concluded: “Business places look for this... it’s communication.”

ii) Staff respondents

Staff respondents were particularly interested in talking about teaching and learning approaches along with curriculum content specific issues. As has been previously noted, some staff respondents spoke critically about student selection for the Diplomas. One example of this was when Jim was asked to describe the criteria he used in selecting for the Diploma. He responded by saying that there were two sets of criteria operating over the previous two years. “In the first year it was anybody with a pulse,” he wryly suggested before going on to elaborate by adding that the students were selected by the individual schools on “the basis of who’s the biggest pain in the neck” and who will they want to get rid of” and “as a bonus they might even get some grade D in GCSEs.” Jim corroborated the view of other respondents, saying that:

“The senior members of all the schools, this one included, didn’t seem to have a clue what it (the Diploma) was about, they didn’t do their homework.”

He did not blame the students for the difficulties they might have. Rather, he felt that teachers in school were responsible for not being more aware of the requirements of the course. He said that this wasn’t fair because it meant that many of the students could not progress into the second year because:

“The kids aren’t capable of matching the specifications and they can’t work to the criteria that’s needed for passing.”

Jim felt that he came under a lot of pressure from school head teachers to justify why he felt one student would be suitable over another.

“That’s where the horse-trading comes in...well you can take so and so and drop so and so....”

He was pleased that lessons had been learnt so that with the second cohort, the behavioral difficulties were largely removed (two of the first group had been permanently excluded) and the groups were now smaller. However, it has to be acknowledged that the Diploma structure was such that schools had to make decisions about learners’ suitability for a learning programme which was largely outside of the school’s area of expertise.

Jim believed the curriculum he was offering was appropriate but felt dissatisfied with the attitude of school staff and those of some students. He did not feel that there was any accountability on the part of the programme developers or regional managers of the Diploma to ensure that all stakeholders fully understood and were working together on its implementation. Another tutor, Mary explained that her concern was not with the students but with the method of teaching. Her worry was that some of the teachers did not have an appreciation of the applied nature of the subject. She said that she considered the difficulty to be that:

“Engineering is one of the Diplomas which is done most but you actually do question how they’re doing it because there has been a lot of BTEC engineering, vocational GCSE engineering and I think the concern is that they might be teaching in the same way as they were teaching it before and then when someone comes out with an Engineering Diploma, they haven’t had that industry background.”

Terry, a tutor from another college shared this concern, saying that he felt school staff were very unsure about what was meant by applied learning. He summed it up by saying:

“What is a brick? Academic learning will consider definitions and descriptions while vocational learning will concentrate on how do you build a brick wall? Only applied learning encourages students to stand back and think about the problem and how they are going to solve it.”

These comments throw into relief the fact that some of the school based part of the Diploma were taught by schoolteachers who had limited or no industrial experience themselves. It is also indicative of the highly specialized awareness required of the parameters of applied learning. Nick emphasised the importance of work experience within the Diploma pointing out that “Some kids don’t learn in the classroom.” He spoke of the success many had enjoyed on work experience and emphasised that what they needed to succeed was further work based learning. Jim took the view that it may be some time before the students fully understood the purpose of what they were learning. His colleague Denis suggested that “the kids weren’t necessarily smarter this year.” He felt, however, that they were more open to learning, going on to explain:

“It’s not an academic course but they’ve got the ability to absorb the information, the guys like to learn, hands on really...”

He went on to say that when his students first came in (they were the school-link students) there were still those who weren’t going to achieve academically and needed to be moved out of the school. It was not automatic, he said, that these would go on to achieve well in vocational learning. Out of a group of ten to twelve, he would generally expect there to be around three or four who would progress on to the next level of vocational learning. He suggested:

“There will always be those students who do the course simply because it sounds like a good idea... or they think they might drive the car.”

He conceded however that “you can still turn some of those round.”

Some of the staff interviewed, believed that the logistics of the Diploma were difficult for staff to manage and therefore detrimental to students. Sanjay cited the time and issues related to students having to travel between sites. A further respondent, felt that the structure of the Diploma was helpful to boys who might otherwise not achieve well. He said that being part of a consortium made it a “joint effort.” “We are working together with a clear plan and about how we deliver.” He felt that there were many interesting ideas and projects around and “it was all about catapulting kids further.”

Apart from the benefits attached to vocational and applied learning in the process of learning, respondents also considered the longer term implications for learners, employers and the economy. Some staff were particularly concerned that, although University Common Application Service (UCAS.) tariff points were agreed for the Advanced Diplomas, many universities did not accept the qualification for entry to further study. This exclusion went against the initial spirit of the Diploma. With the new Coalition Government coming to office, Denis felt that there was less likelihood of there being continued promotion of the Diploma. This tutor feared that there were ‘no long term guarantees.’ Jim, another tutor, agreed with this view, pointing out that the incoming Secretary of State for Education had already dismantled the system of consortia. Mary, another tutor also said that she felt that it would be a great shame if the Diploma in Engineering did not develop:

“An employer knows what he wants. This area has a lot of small engineering companies and some big ones and it is an aging workforce with average age of 55. Without applied learning like the Diploma being offered it is difficult to see where the necessary skills will come from.”

Jim was afraid that there was a real danger that altering too much with the Diploma at this stage, such as ending the consortia, would result in the “Roots being cut off before it

sprouted.” Dennis thought that undoing what had been accomplished would be “depressing” and he talked of teachers writing their own version in order to “keep the vision.”

8. Chapter Eight

Data Analysis and Discussion

8.1 Introduction

The issue of boys' underachievement was identified as an area of concern within the literature where it was seen as an area of educational and social as well as political concern. The year the research began, 2008 also marked the beginning of the implementation of the Labour Government's flagship 14-19 curriculum reform programme with the introduction of the first Diplomas. This government led initiative was a national response to the perceived economic needs of the country in the 21st Century. It was devised as a means of promoting a policy to encourage more students to stay in education and to develop the skills identified by employers in particular industries. The premises of human capital theory reflect this approach to educational policy and practice in which the human labour input adds to the intrinsic value of employment. At a local level, consortia of schools and colleges had been trying to implement programmes to address the needs of the stakeholders in their area such as Leisure and Tourism, I.T, Hairdressing and engineering which was the focus of this research.

This chapter considers the data collected from student and staff respondents engaged in the Diploma programmes and other alternative provision. It is presented as a three part review divided into the three broad areas on which I have chosen to focus during the course of this study:

- Perspectives on achievement and underachievement
- Student motivation and empowerment
- Curriculum provision, choice and flexibility

An analysis of each set of data is presented alongside some interpretation and discussion of the data findings within the context of the existing literature. In so doing, the contribution to knowledge in this field made by the thesis, is demonstrated.

This chapter also answers explicitly the research questions posed at the beginning of the study. It contains methodological reflections and points out possible areas for further research and identifies possible new developments that have come about as a result of the interviews carried out for this study. As a whole, the chapter aims to illustrate the dynamic and evolving nature of the area under consideration at a time when pilot presentations of the Diplomas were still commonplace and when many schools were introducing other types of courses in order to provide pathways relevant and responsive to 14-19 year old students.

8.2 Analysis and discussion of data on perspectives on achievement and underachievement

i) Student respondents

The student respondents had wide ranging perspectives of the term achievement. Many saw it as the fulfilment of personally set goals but there was also a strong sense of the importance of pleasing others, especially parents and teachers. Some mentioned the acquisition of a qualification being significant but interestingly, the process of learning and working together with others was seen as an important aspect of achievement. In terms of boys' underachievement, some of the boys recognised themselves, as previously coming within this category while others identified the underachievement of peers. Although a lack of maturity was frequently given as the reason for underachievement, there were also criticisms of uninspiring curricula and teaching methods combined with teachers' over concern with performance data. It was apparent that the students interviewed had individual perspectives according to their life experiences. This self-orientation of the individual also made the respondents more forthcoming in talking about themselves rather than about other people's views. There was, nevertheless, a frequency in respondents' positive associations with the concept of 'achievement', perceiving it to be a good thing

which conferred self-fulfilment, recognition and approval on the part of others. Overall, the notion of self-setting and achieving goals was dominant in responses which indicates a strong sense of these young people feeling that they had the ability to affect their levels of achievement. Proving themselves, whether because of previous failure, or alternatively, out of a growing sense of self, was important to respondents. Achievement of qualifications was also cited but less forcefully which may reflect the fact that students were currently at the outset of their studies.

ii) Staff respondents

In terms of achievement, most staff respondents felt that there was a correlation between achievement and behaviour, although there was an appreciation that poor behaviour could be modified by positive staff-student relationships and methods of course delivery. Blame for underachievement was not always focused on the student but criticism was levelled by some college staff at colleagues in schools who did not understand what was required on Diploma courses. There was an additional sense from college staff that they had a greater empathy with the students than school staff did because the college staff they could relate to their own similar learning experiences to those of their students.

The focus of the study was not to compare boys' and girls' experience as so few girls were involved in the Engineering Diploma. Nevertheless, some of the comments made about staff attitudes re-affirmed the crucial part played by staff in fostering students' belief in their ability to achieve, whether they were students who had not experienced success in the past or else were students who wanted to challenge gender stereotypes in learning. Staff shared the view that underachievement often arose from poor behaviour but respondents acknowledged that this was not the fault of the students but often due to incorrect selection by schools where it was believed that vocational learning was a suitable route for the less able or poorly behaved students. There was a palpable feeling of

disapproval for the injustice of this belief among some of the staff respondents who held the contrary view that applied and vocational learning were intellectually and physically demanding and ideally suited to the needs of students.

Discussion

While the literature review began with some controversy over definitions (Epstein, 1998; Slavin, 1990; Driessen, 2001; Meuret, 2002; Gorard, 2003; Francis & Skelton, 2005; Smith, 2005), the student respondents were quite clear that to them achievement was about achieving goals that had been set by most often themselves, but sometimes by parents or teachers. The debate in the literature, was at a macro level, linked closely to international statistical data comparisons of adolescent performance (TIMSS, 1995; PiSA, 2000 onwards) while the students themselves were more focused at a micro level, on what it meant for them as individuals and for their families. Their most commonly expressed feelings about achievement fell into the categories of self-fulfilment and self-autonomy but there was also a strong impetus towards pleasing other people especially parents and teachers. The acquisition of a qualification was seen as being important but more students valued the process of learning and working with others as being the main achievement. Much government policy has stressed the need for students to achieve benchmark levels of qualifications and in the case of vocational courses this has frequently been linked to the needs of employers rather than the personal development of learners. Tomlinson's initial vision for the Diploma programme was different in this respect in that it sought to combine vocational learning with more personalised learning in the form of the extended project.

Underachievement was seen as blameworthy in the literature on the part of the boys who failed to meet the required C pass at GCSE (Epstein et al., 1998) and the student respondents similarly apportioned blame, to their peers and sometimes to themselves in the

past, although, they were more inclined to see this as a stage of immaturity which would pass and through which they could be helpfully guided. The students, however, were less sympathetically disposed to those teachers who focused on achievement over and above the needs of the individual student, a view also expressed by Branson (1991). Many of the staff respondents shared a similar view, recognising that some underachievement was due to immaturity but also often as a result of unsuitable curriculum and externally imposed expectations of staff and students. In the literature, this view was shared by some who believed that the incoherent provision for the 14-19 age group created dilemmas for tutors and students (Halsall and Cockett, 1996).

The literature examined the relationship between underachievement and social class (Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970; Parker, 1974; Willis, 1977; Robins and Cohen, 1978) ethnicity (Wright, 1986; Mirza, 1992; Mac an Ghail, 1994; Sewell, 1997) and gender (Epstein et al., 1998) the last of which illustrated how the focus for boys' underachievement has been variously focused on schools, parents and gender role socialisation. Sharp et al. (2010) suggested, however, that it need not be seen as a gender issue in that good pedagogy met the needs of both boys and girls although staff respondents felt that this was not always the case in further education settings. Both male and female student respondents expressed the view that course choice was an individual preference for which there should be equal entitlement. They did not feel that these choices were limited by virtue of class, ethnicity or gender. Such beliefs were challenged within the literature where it was argued that ideas of inclusion and exclusion are imbedded in the system, (Ball, 2000; Smith, 2005; Goodman and Burton, 2012). Bourdieu's theory of habitus helped to provide a theoretical model for understanding the

competing world views at play within the debate and has implications for policy makers but also for all who actively engage in the democratic process.

8.3 Analysis of data on motivation and empowerment

i) Student respondents

Student respondents generally felt happy talking about motivation, seeing clear links to the previous theme of achievement. There was the belief that different people were differently motivated and that girls and more able boys more readily saw the point of what they were studying and from this came the motivation to succeed. Empowerment was interpreted through the notion of being treated as an adult which respondents felt equated with being empowered to move on from childish pursuits and behaviour.

ii) Staff respondents

The staff respondents mainly felt that positive relationships between staff and student was the key to successful motivation of the student. Examples were given of where staff were able to build on their own experiences of learning as well as of teaching. The data also indicated the significance of clarity in goals and skill development in the growth of confidence amongst learners who could then see themselves as becoming capable and proficient adults and being empowered in the process.

This chapter of thematic analysis has examined the part played by motivation and empowerment in enabling boys to achieve. There was some overlap between what the young people said about their motivation and their will to achieve. However, the strong sense of transition with young people seeing themselves passing from a state of immaturity or childhood, to the beginning of maturity and adulthood. They generally welcomed this and were grateful for the help given by staff to help them navigate this transition. Many

saw this as a motivating force which in turn helped to empower them and enabled them to take on the necessary responsibility required for vocational learning and progression. However, while enhanced future employment prospects were seen as a motivator by some, this was still seen as being a future rather than a present concern. This may be seen as a further indicator of the transitory nature of the 14-19 stage of education which passes from childhood to adulthood.

Some staff regarded choice to be the main factor in determining motivation, or its absence. In some cases, student respondents were critical of the choices made by their peers whether this involved being disruptive in lessons or else being unwilling to try something new as with the Diplomas. It was apparent that judgements were being made at somewhat face value and factors such as ability and gender were seen as being immutable and directly related to levels of motivation. Students generally lacked the experience to be able to empathise fully with others whose views they did not share. Many considered that their decision to embark on the Diploma course marked them out from many of their peers who had lacked this motivation. While some of these respondents may have been seen as possibly underachieving, they themselves felt themselves to be sufficiently empowered to undertake a course of study which was recognised as being challenging. Their motivation might be seen to arise from this sense of challenge or else from a desire to be different and stand out from the crowd. Similarly, the views expressed by some of the staff respondents stressed that there were huge challenges within the Diploma, especially at Level 2.

Students were variously motivated by course content, teaching and learning styles and by the staff teaching the courses. They cited relationships with family members as being important sources of influence. However, many stressed that the relationships with staff were of crucial importance in helping to motivate them. For many of the young

people interviewed, it was clear that they frequently saw their teachers as role models who inspired and empowered them. This is a tribute to the staff who recognised this as an important aspect of their role. Staff respondents demonstrated considerable respect for the young people with whom they were working, sometimes expressing the view that they had a better understanding of these learners than anyone else because they themselves had overcome educational challenges in their own lives. Some college staff were critical of the way in which learners were provided with guidance over course choices while at school. For example, they criticised the fact that school staff generally believed that vocational subjects were inferior to academic and this was reflected in how students were directed. There was a risk, therefore, that students may not have the full range of opportunities made available to them.

Discussion

While the variations noted above serve to demonstrate contrasting views between the literature and this study's respondents, there were some profound areas of agreement. Respondents shared a belief that learning was closely associated with motivation and that this was most inspired by positive relationships between staff and students and a meaningful curriculum which combine to develop confidence and a sense of empowerment. In the literature, motivation was seen as goal-directed activity which is instigated and sustained (Schunk et al. 2008) in line with learners having their needs being met (Maslow, 1943; Seifert, 2004; Kidd and Czerniawski, 2011). The importance of the relationship between teacher and learner in the process of learning was seen as being crucial (Scales et al., 2011) with the positive benefit of mentoring highlighted (Watts, 1999; Barnes, 2003, Younger, 2009). One of the staff respondents spoke of how staff became like father figures which mirrored the view of one of the students who spoke positively of teachers who helped students to learn by flexible means providing role models. Different interpretations of mentoring appeared within the literature, whether

involving the development of skills by way of Vygotsky's (1999) socio-cultural dialogue or growth of the 'whole person' (Rogers, 1983) but skilled and experienced adults were fundamental to the development of productive learning relationships.

Finally, there was shared importance given within the literature (Wilkins, 2012; Isaacs, 2013, Duffy and Elwood, 2013) and collected data to the role of student voice. A recurring refrain from the student respondents was the desire to be treated as adults which would require their views to be heard. Ren and Deakin Crick (2013) spoke of coaching conversations placing the emphasis on student engagement and the importance of students' contribution being central.

8.4 Analysis and discussion of data on curriculum provision, choice and flexibility

i) Student respondents

Many of the students interviewed expressed a clear desire for a practical based curriculum which enabled them to be engaged in the process of production rather than having to be the recipients of didactic teaching which did not appear to be relevant to their needs. They spoke positively of teachers who helped them to learn by flexible means and by way of developing role model relationships. The camaraderie associated with college based learning appealed to them more than the traditional teaching methods utilised in formal school settings.

ii) Staff respondents

The majority of the staff questioned had positive views on what the Diploma had to offer learners and, more importantly, what they as teachers, could contribute to the students. College based staff in particular felt that it was an essential component in engineering education in the country. There were, however, some concerns aired about the

logistics of schools and colleges working together in geographically based consortia. College staff had concerns about school staff's insufficient grounding in the applied learning being offered in colleges. This, they felt, led to unrealistic views of the suitability of the Diplomas for all learners. Staff also voiced their unease about the future sustainability of the Diploma given Government changes and therefore for the opportunities for prospective upcoming cohorts of students.

This section of the data analysis has focused on the area of curriculum choice and flexibility. It has looked at these issues in relation to the Diploma and has identified themes arising for student and staff respondents respectively. Students were overwhelmingly in favour of the practical nature of the course and the nature of the work involved which reflected their area of interest. Several highlighted enjoying the fact that there was flexibility in what they did rather than the rigidity that they had experienced in school. Along with this, some student respondents commented positively on the manner in which they learned, with peers and by following teacher demonstrations. Concentration on theoretical learning was seen as a challenge when it took priority over practical work. Relationships with teachers were cited as being an important component to learning and allowed for a climate of flexibility in learning to be established.

Flexibility was seen as being one of the advantages in the structuring of the Diploma. This could allow students to learn and develop at their own pace and so retain their motivation. Staff respondents believed that ongoing small successes were important in motivating learners along with eventual improved employment prospects providing some sense of empowerment. Once again there were some similar views expressed by respondents with overall positive responses relating to the empowering and motivating elements of the courses which built confidence as well as competence in the learners. The

following section reviews the final theme being examined through the data: curriculum choice and flexibility.

Staff felt very positive about what they felt they offered as a suitable curriculum for these students but they felt at times thwarted by school staff who they felt were not sufficiently aware of the requirements of applied learning of the Diplomas or even, in sympathy with such learning. There was also criticism of Government policy makers not showing sufficient commitment to the ongoing needs of learners especially with the Government's lack of recognition or support for the positive vocational developments for this age range, offered through the Diplomas.

Discussion

There was therefore, agreed importance shown in the literature and collected data in respect of the importance of relationships in enabling student achievement. Similarly, there was evidence that a meaningful curriculum was vital to engage learners. Young people should be able to see the connection between education and their future in the world of work (Schoon, 2003) with vocational and applied learning properly embedded in any strategy aiming to reduce low achievement and maximise engagement (Cassen & Kingdon, 2007). Lumby and Foskett suggested that students of this age increasingly want to 'control their lives, to receive respect from other adults, to make choices according to their own preferences and not necessarily to be confined by school parameters' (Lumby and Foskett 2005:06). Some staff respondents felt very positive that they could offer as a suitable curriculum but expressed the view that there were training issues for school staff and that further commitment was required on the part of policy makers in meeting the ongoing needs of learners. Many of the students interviewed expressed a strong desire for a practical based curriculum which enabled them to be engaged in the process of production rather than having to be the recipients of didactic teaching which did not appear to be relevant to their needs. Data from both students and staff reaffirmed Freire's

(1968) belief in the transformative nature of education at this transitional stage in the lives of young people. The first chapter of Tomlinson's was called 'Our vision' and in it he outlines the 14-19 phase of learning should be acknowledged as crucial for all young people who by age 19 should have a passion for learning which enables them to acquire the skills, knowledge and attributes necessary to participate fully and effectively in adult life. To achieve this goal, Tomlinson emphasised that 14-19 learning should be inclusive and challenging and should cater for and excite all young people, whatever their aspirations, abilities, interests and circumstances.

While the tripartite thematic examination applied throughout this thesis has had relevance here, it is most interesting to note that in considering the dominant themes to emerge from a comparative analysis of the literature and the data, a new emphasis has emerged. While many views have been aired on achievement and underachievement, there have also been disagreements and a lack of consensus. Moving forward, there has been more of a shared appreciation of what is required to help all young people achieve their potential. There has been a clear message from both literature and data that young people must be motivated to learn and achieve and that this motivation is fuelled by positive relationships with inspiring teachers on courses of study which have a strong element of practical and applied learning and a progressive structure which leads to transparent and worthwhile outcomes. All of this is required within a framework which involves young people in the decision making on important issues which will affect their lives and the wider society within which they are taking their place as adults.

8.5 Methodological reflections

This section evaluates some of the methodological issues arising from the study. Firstly it reflects on the use of qualitative semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. Choosing to collect data by way of qualitative interviews allowed me to collect specific data which captured the viewpoints of my respondents who were particularly well placed to have views and experiences related to this area of research. In the study the adoption of a qualitative approach proved to be most appropriate as it allowed me to deviate from my set questions when necessary and examine a range of views which arose through further probes. It also enabled me to analyse a number of categories in depth, identifying relationships and patterns within the data and cross-referencing between student and staff respondents. The use of a semi-structured interview also facilitated a good rapport with respondents. During the interviews respondents employed language that was more representative of their feelings than would have been the case if the research method had fixed questionnaires. This added unique richness to the data collected, particularly where students may have otherwise lacked confidence or were unfamiliar with being asked to input their views on the nature of the education they received.

There were some challenges involved in the process of actual data collection which had to be managed during the research project. The first of these was that it was difficult to find a sufficient number of available educational settings, in which to carry out the interviews, partly as so few institutions had embarked on the initial pilot stage of Diploma delivery. Furthermore, of those institutions that had done so, many had opted for courses that appealed largely to girls rather than to boys. A second methodological issue was that the interviews were carried out at a relatively early stage of the Diplomas and stage of study for the learners involved. Rich data, however, has been collected at the key point in

time when respondents were undertaking this important stage of study of 14-19 education provision. As the Diploma courses ceased, this was a unique opportunity to capture an innovative approach to vocational education that has produced some fruitful and interesting data for future 14-19 provision, especially addressing issues of boys' underachievement at this age and stage of their education.

An important consideration in my use of methodology was my decision to treat my interview data as a constructed narrative through semiotic analysis. In so doing, I recognised my role as an active participant in the construction of knowledge (Scott, 1999). This involved me in acknowledging my own subjectivity during the process of collecting and analysing the data where my own professional and personal views may tend towards views with which I was most familiar and empathetic towards. This can be challenging for any qualitative researcher and so I have actively guarded against bias in my data collection and analysis by presenting respondents views transparently, using their own language to tell their story.

Section E Conclusions and Implications

Chapter 9

9.1 Review of thesis

My thesis began by drawing on my own personal ontology partly derived from Montessori's (1912) belief that the learner is central to the process of learning and that learning itself is derived from lived experience which can provide the catalyst to motivate the learner. Freire (1970) provided a further theoretical perspective in which dialogical learning helped the curriculum develop alongside positive relationships between teacher and learner. This study has specifically examined the concept of boys' underachievement in relation to 14-19 curriculum reforms in England at the beginning of the 21st Century and has had the following aims:

- To consider some perspectives on what is meant by the terms achievement and underachievement in relation to boys aged 14-16 in England;
- To discover what is known about successful ways of motivating boys;
- To examine the perspectives of boys and their teachers in a number of settings;
- To evaluate the 14-19 curriculum in practice alongside its theoretical and intentional basis;
- To attempt to define *achievement* in a new way.

These aims were drawn from the research questions on which the study was based and which were formulated from an ongoing review of the literature and subsequent data collection.

My research questions were as follows:

Are boys underachieving? Perspectives on achievement.

What, if any, intervention will benefit the boys?

In what ways will the new 14-19 curriculum, with its vocational emphasis, meet the needs of students at risk of underachieving?

This final chapter reflects on what has been discovered in relation to these questions from a review of the literature and collection of the perspectives of interviewed learners and

teachers. It demonstrates what has been learnt and the contribution this study makes to research in this field of vocational education. It continues with a discussion of implications for current theory, policy and practice and concludes with suggestions for future research. I have tried to conduct the research with attention to ethical considerations and, as a practicing teacher in the field, have been particularly aware of my responsibility to the respondents. The research did not set out to be provide a study with generalizable results but rather it sought to capture the views and experiences of a sample of learners and teachers at a particular 'moment in time'. This moment was unique in that it captured the trialling of a new and controversial education policy as it was emerging. Wider political and economic factors, specifically the change of government, in addition to economic recession, impacted on the policy although aspects of it provide valuable lessons for future vocational educational developments for this age group.

9.2 Conclusions in relation to the research questions

In exploring the Research Questions and issues of: Are boys underachieving? perspectives on achievement and how might 14-19 Reforms impact on this, this research has advanced knowledge by presenting the perspectives of the young people and their teachers who were in the unique position of having experienced the Diplomas at first hand. These perspectives have served to give voice to some of the young people, mainly boys and those who were thought to be at risk of underachieving in terms of the government defined measure of 5A*- C G.C.S.E. passes (including English and Maths). The research has therefore, offered a critique of aspects of recent and current policy and practice related to educational; provision for 14-19 year olds.

This research is original in that it has brought new evidence to bear on an unresolved and still contentious issue as seen within the literature. I have provided a new

interpretation using a focussed study of a particular innovative approach to vocational education of 14-19 year olds. This research has sought to re-position the emphasis within the debate on boys' underachievement away from the boys deemed to be underachieving and instead place responsibility with policy makers. The study illustrates the scope for further work in developing relevant curricula which are fit for purpose for this group. This research points the way towards further flexibility within this phase of education with potential for students themselves being far more involved in developing policy and practice.

I have set out to link the data findings to the literature in order to shed light on the research questions. This research has advanced knowledge by focusing attention on the Diploma programme and those involved in its provision. It has also offered a critique of aspects of current policy and practice which impact on the lives of students and teachers. The findings provide a contribution to the understanding of many aspects of the theory and practice of 14-19 vocational education. In particular, the research has used critical theory and the theories of human and social capital to challenge the view that underachievement is the fault of individual students rather than the education system being a relative feature of the modern post-industrial, globalised world. The research has also questioned the dominant theories relating to boys' underachievement and has repositioned the debate towards one, not only of gender but also of class inequality.

Are boys underachieving? Perspectives on achievement.

The findings of my thesis show that the problem of underachievement is far more systemic than specifically an issue affecting boys. The term, by definition, is inherent in any normative national system – as is overachievement because of the 'normal' bell curve and its local and national and year-on-year variations, however, the underachievement

discourse has been set against national government competitiveness which has fuelled the debate rather than concern for any particular individual or group's experience. As was noted in the review of the literature, it is this desire to compete internationally that has been driving policy for debate and reform (Smith, 2005). While high levels of low skill employment existed in the UK in the past, the underlying demise of the manufacturing base of the country has demonstrated an inadequacy of the education system to meet the new labour needs. Poor overall economic planning has resulted in a lack of suitable employment for the low skilled young worker but has also resulted in a lack of jobs for the more highly skilled with over-qualified young people in routine jobs. This problem, however, was made explicit as long ago as 1976 when Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan inaugurated 'the great debate' emphasising the need for a practical application of education to serve the needs of industry. In a period of rising unemployment and the apparent decline of Britain's economy the concern then was that education was failing to produce appropriately skilled and motivated young workers with Callaghan addressing students at Ruskin College in Oxford, stating that 'there is the need to improve relations between industry and education.' (Callaghan, 1976). Now, almost forty years later, this research has demonstrated that there is still a need for further ongoing attention to be paid to vocational education in the UK. In 1976, it was considered most important that education should serve the needs of industry, currently there is additionally, an expectation that education should produce equality of opportunity. This research, therefore, drawing on various perspectives from the literature and collected data, has illustrated how the issue might be restated to show further awareness not only of gender, but also of the significance of ethnicity and importantly, social class. In doing this the study has helped to reposition the argument away from one in which boys are blamed for their perceived underachievement towards a wider view that focuses on educational entitlement within a human rights context in which education can enable all learners to fulfil their potential.

What, if any, intervention will benefit the boys?

If, therefore, the right to education is seen to be a part of an individual's human rights then fundamental to this is the enablement of achievement in learning and personal fulfilment. This however gives rise to the paradox surrounding choice. It has been argued that much of the literature traces longstanding patterns of inequality within this 14-19 phase of education which have been influenced by class, ethnicity and gender and yet much of the policy involved is driven by assumptions of free choice and individual responsibility (Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996). My research has demonstrated that boys aged 14-16 have acquired distinct preferences in what they want to learn and the manner in which they want to study. The findings, however, also indicate a desire for guidance and an opportunity to try new experiences and be credited for their learning. Recognition and respect for learning are important in enabling boys to participate successfully. It has been shown that within school based pre-vocational courses considerable emphasis is given to the forms of assessment used with these being a means of motivating pupils while at the same time providing a broad profile of attributes and abilities (Ball, 2006). This formal recognition gives the same status to achievements outside of the academic domain which involve students more in determining their own routes of learning.

A further point arising from the data was that all the respondents involved in this research believed in the positive value of the Diplomas. While, some of the students would have preferred not to begin their studies with theory and some of the staff were irritated by the logistical problems they had to face, no-one expressed unhappiness at being involved in the Diploma programmes or in other alternative vocational courses. Such positivity further enhanced motivation. Staff and students were most positive about the

benefits of practical learning, with students particularly favouring being taught by way of demonstration, using “hands on” methods of teaching and learning. Many of the staff respondents felt that they provided positive role models for students and believed that good relationships were crucial in facilitating learning for this group of students. Students agreed with this, and by comparison, were less positive about the role played by staff in schools where there was a feeling of less positive or supportive learning relationships. Students and staff expressed strong support for opportunities for students to be treated, and to act as adults, with college staff being more aware of the benefits this provided for learning. Moreover, school based staff voiced concern that the different cultures of school and college could lead to confusion where students were less able to cope with the more limited freedoms offered in school. It is also possible that other students might be challenged by the increased autonomy of a college setting and so it is important that attention is paid to transitioning between settings. The attempted merging of these different cultures was a key feature and was one of the most interesting features of the Diploma programme. The findings of this research indicates that further training for staff in secondary schools would be beneficial to enable them to develop additional skills relevant to vocational and applied learning. It has also shown the need for further support with transition at KS4 as is expected between KS 2 and 3.

The research gives insight into successful interventions in which boys were motivated to participate and had their learning recognised through meaningful assessment. The human dimension of learning was also seen to be highly significant with both learners and teachers talking of learning together, most particularly within the college context where teachers demonstrated and learners acquired the skills under guidance. Having “hands on” practical experience was crucial for learners alongside the opportunity to develop as adults within a nurturing environment that enabled the practicing of

interpersonal workplace skills alongside technical job-related expertise. Incorporating the students' lived experience in this way reflects part of Freire's approach and gives meaning to the students' learning within the real context of their lives.

In what ways will the new 14-19 curriculum, with its vocational emphasis, meet the needs of students at risk of underachieving?

This research has highlighted some gaps in the current provision of vocational education in England. Local employers want context-specific and locally relevant training while national and international employers want broad based and flexible competence skills. Students want skills and employment routes while government wants educational policy to create national wealth and international standing. In looking at the literature on boys' underachievement it can be seen that many in the wider society wants the solution to problems of marginalisation and social disadvantage. It can be argued that this is because the resulting civil unrest which is bad for the economy although recent studies suggest in fact that greater equality is better, in economic terms, for everyone and the growing rich/poor gap is creating economic problems (Picketty, 2014). While education, and specifically, vocational education may not be able to solve all of these wide ranging and differing concerns and purposes, this research case study has shown that some aspects of the 14-19 Diplomas were able to meet the needs of students at risk of underachieving and provide them with skills and vocational pathways

The Level 1 Diploma offered a real alternative to GCSEs which was not purely vocational but provided personal and practical skills with Level 2 continuing on this route but also allowing for GCSEs to be combined with more practical skill based learning. The key was to be a in a personalised approach to learning which would engage all by motivating and catering for different learning styles and abilities. The Diploma

programme built on some of the previous successes of vocational learning but also aimed to create more imaginative views of 14-19 learning which enabled a change in our expectations and definitions to recognise and promote a wider range of achievement. By promoting further engagement and involvement of young people in their education, lessons were learnt about empowerment of this age group of learners. Incorporating these positive features of the Diploma programme into the continuing debate on 14-19 education will contribute to young people achieving their potential.

Government policies changed during the period covered by this research with Labour's commissioned Tomlinson's Report of 2004 giving way to the Conservative Liberal Democrat Coalition Government's presentation of the Wolf Report in 2011 which set about dismantling the Diplomas. The relevance of the data being analysed in my research is insightful as it illustrates the positive approaches possible for 14-19 vocational learning for boys at risk of underachieving, particularly within the 14-16 age range. Lessons from the experiences of the Diploma programme offer ways forward for addressing underachievement for this group as well as potential application to other groups. For example, differences may be explored between respondents of different gender, ethnicity and social class. It is important not to lose sight of the positive elements of the policy as there can be a danger in contemporary problems in education arising from contradictions between present and past policies as in the case of the Education Reform Act (1988) which was almost a negation of what had gone before with significant continuities being lost, especially in relation to vocational education. This thesis has shown how Prime Minister Tony Blair's reluctance to antagonise potential voters before the General Election caused him to reverse crucial parts of Tomlinson's plan. Most notably, by retaining the A level as a stand-alone qualification, Blair's action resulted in the continued academic-vocational split with Diplomas being seen as purely vocational

qualifications. This partial destruction of the coherence and spirit of Tomlinson's proposals was completed with the coming to power of the Coalition Government which phased out the Diploma programme altogether.

The findings of this thesis emphasise the importance of acknowledging and building on the very successful aspects of the Diploma programme. Tomlinson's ambitious vision helped to redress the marginalisation of many learners, most especially those boys who favour practical over academic learning. The Diploma programme enabled them to achieve and this thesis has given a voice to some of them. The 14-16 age group is an underrepresented one in the literature but in terms of a human lifespan this age is very significant and can determine an individual's future pathway. This study presents a snapshot in time, but one which serves to highlight an alternative educational vision which was prematurely terminated as a result of the prevailing political will. While Tomlinson's recommendations pass into English educational history, it is the fundamental premise of this thesis that many of the principles on which his report was founded should re-emerge in future policy affecting this age group.

9.3 Implications: general points

In the previous section I have presented my conclusions arising from carrying out this research. Here I discuss possible implications although I acknowledge that alternative interpretations are possible and these may offer other interesting options. The over-riding implication of this research, in my view, is that all those involved in education must recognise the particular nature, concerns, needs and learning requirements of learners aged 14-16. This will require rethinking previous assumptions especially now that there is the expectation that all students will remain in education or training until they are 19 years of age. Policy makers and practitioners have a duty to ensure that, instead of stigmatising

young people at the beginning of their adult lives, we facilitate their becoming the best that they can be with the confidence and skills required for the future. The changing policy context over the duration of this project gives rise to many areas for further ongoing research. A new approach to the formulation of theory, policy and practice in relation to this age group is advocated as a result of this research.

9.4 Implications for Theory

Butcher (2004) has claimed that a new word is needed to describe this stage which focuses on the goal of students becoming more independent and self-directed learners. It is my view that a new word may indeed be needed, but this is only part of what is required, as further interdisciplinary attention is required to focus on the particular needs of the 14-19 year old. While it may be true that all learners respond to good teaching, I believe that my data indicates that the 14-16 age group in particular, needs to see the purpose of learning and responds more positively to certain approaches. Further pedagogic research is required, in my view, to do justice to the particular requirements of this age group. It might also embrace the study of the particular intellectual and socio-economic concerns leading to enhanced awareness of successful teaching and learning strategies and the theories underpinning these.

The data from this study supports the view that further research should put young people at the centre of educational policy and practice developments in such a way that they are fully empowered to have an active voice and involvement in decision-making affecting their lives.

9.5 Implications for policy

The literature review and the data both indicate the need for policy makers to take note of the views of students and teachers as well as those of employers. Ranson (1994) argues that the management and policy of education since the Second World War preserve inequalities and serve the vested interests of those already in power. Problems arising from the restructuring of work, environmental erosion and the fragmentation of society “ raise questions about what it is to be human, what is the nature of community; what kind of polity do we need to secure the future well-being of all?” (Ranson, 1994, p.99). My findings concur with this view and demonstrate how active involvement of students and teachers should be fundamental to the underpinnings of a worthwhile vocational education system.

Learner participation must play a part in policy development as it is imperative that policy enables the full engagement of all learners. In this way educational opportunity should be recognised as a key policy issue which requires investment in new types of vocational education provision and becomes a human rights issue which necessitates public expenditure. The resultant empowerment will help to engage the more disaffected learners where there can be a marked imbalance of power between providers and recipients of education. It is crucial that staff also feel that their knowledge and expertise is used to help frame policy so that their direct experience can help to formulate workable solutions. In addition, it is important that policy makers show cognizance of the differences which currently exist between school and college settings and allow realistic time frames to initiate cross-phase parity of provision and experience.

Hodkinson et al (1996) expand further by stating that vocational education policy makers need to be focused on a fuller agenda which addresses:

- the wider needs of society in a social democracy;
- Global issues of interdependence;
- Deep rooted inequalities in society based on class, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation;
- Mass (youth) unemployment;
- Conflicts between individuals, groups and institutions;
- The accelerating rate of social change.

It is clear that we are living in a world in which all of the concerns impact on our immediate lives and will do so for the foreseeable future. While, from a neoliberal standpoint, economic prosperity and participation may be seen to be fundamental to well-being, my own ontological perspective requires me to challenge an education system which seeks to put global economic standing above all other concerns. My research questions did not require an examination of all of these areas but instead called for a more inclusive understanding of what is meant by achievement in the 21st century and one which will enable the meeting of some of the challenges highlighted by Hodkinson et al (1996). By collecting data from young people themselves my study sought to emphasise the significance of the individual's development within the process of education and training rather than focusing only on the importance attached to their potential contribution to society (Coffield 1999).

By focusing on individuals' experiences of education I have given voice to those young people who, through my collected data, are able to provide a critique of how 14-19 educational policy impacts upon them within both school and FE settings.

9.7 Implications for practice and further research

This research could be developed further in a number of ways. I made choices in line with my research questions but was aware of many other interesting lines of enquiry associated with my study. In the course of searching the literature it soon became apparent to me that every component had its opposite and many other facets in between. For example, I set out to study boys, but a comparative approach, looking in detail at the experience of girls could add a further dimension to the study. Similarly, as boys do not arrive fully formed at age 14 further updated research could be carried out to examine the experience of younger boys now, in the second decade of the 21st Century. Issues of class and ethnicity also presented themselves as having specific literatures which could be explored more fully by other researchers. Historical and global perspectives played a small part in my study but I believe that further examination of these could prove fruitful and provide further knowledge of this area of education within a wider context.

I did not set out to look at Diplomas in themselves while other researchers might choose to do so and perhaps consider the range of Diploma subjects offered and the views of employers. Nor was my study focused on boys' underachievement at GCSE which would have entailed looking at different subjects and quantitative data related to performance, both areas which have been extensively researched. Instead, my research was unique in that I wanted to focus on a certain group of boys who were not fulfilling their potential as they were not able to access an appropriate curriculum. In this thesis I explored their lived experiences of 14-19 educational provision and have provided an original study in relation to boys and achievement with vocational education at the centre.

I plan to extend this work personally in the future by contributing to curriculum development within my own and neighbouring settings, drawing on the findings of my

research. By providing input to staff development I will help staff to become more aware of ways in which they might be able to alter their teaching styles in order to help learners access the learning. I also intend to develop closer professional links with the local FE colleges so that I can improve on the current transition practices at KS4. This will involve me in further research, reviewing the literature and formulating realistic research questions before deciding on appropriate methodology to help answer these further research questions.

I hope that my current research may also provide a stepping stone for others interested in either of these areas namely, boys' underachievement or vocational education. Other researchers could develop my work in other ways. It would be possible to view data arising from school settings in comparison to that gathered within colleges. This qualitative study reflected on the experiences of respondents by focussing on this relatively small group of respondents. Additional perspectives may be discovered through further research, building on the views of further individuals, highlighting significant issues and exploring a range of different views from different groups depending on the nature of the research questions being posed. On the other hand, a quantitative approach could be used to gather data from a wider number of respondents and settings, possibly at different times, in order to produce a longitudinal appraisal.

A number of recommendations for further research have been noted above. However, it is most important that educational practice builds on what has gone before and this is most apposite in the case of education catering for the 14-19 age group where there has been so much experimentation and where high quality research should aim to inform high quality practice. This study has been small in nature and so it would still be appropriate for further research to develop a longitudinal perspective examining a

consortium which was involved in delivering the Diploma at Level 1, 2 and 3. Research could look into other subject areas than engineering. However, as such courses have ceased to exist, the collection of data may be problematic and rely on respondents reflecting retrospectively. Nevertheless, such a study would have a significant part to play in the further evaluation of the 14-19 Curriculum in relation to students with interests other than engineering (the focus of my research) who were not achieving by other educational routes. At the point of delivery teachers have been tailoring what is on offer to the specific needs of their own students. Further longitudinal research could be carried out with these students again at the end of their courses. This could help to obtain important data relating to the Extended Project element of the course which was to be offered at Level Three of the Diploma. Such research could also provide rich evidence from students who are more experienced after studying the Diplomas for more than two years.

A further and pertinent source for interesting investigation might be an examination of the Coalition Government's policy in relation to the establishment of studio schools aimed at providing students with a more vocationally based education. It would be useful to examine whether these opportunities have been successful, particularly for the boys, deemed to be underachieving, who have attended them. Such research might also encompass the renewed appearance of apprenticeships, with attention being paid to the definition of the term, what they encompass and what they offer students in practice. A final area for further research, again having a longitudinal element, would centre on the practice of education, looking at the longer term benefits of the methods employed in teaching and learning in different settings with learners aged 14-19. This would be a particularly fruitful extension of the current research and one which I hope to pursue. This research has provided data to suggest that some young people have definite preferences in

what and how they wish to learn. Data has also been presented which outlines what staff respondents professionally believe to be necessary in the education and training of this age group. The collection of further data from other student and staff respondents could provide a rich bank of information on which to base future policy and practice.

9.8 Summary and final reflection

This thesis has focussed on young people on the threshold of adulthood at a time when society has a responsibility for providing them with educational and training opportunities which will enable them all to achieve and make a success of their individual pathways, achieving what sports men and women have come to define as their 'personal best.' The research has examined the application of an educational policy that was in place for a very short time. However, a main aim of the study was to look at the experiences of boys who were considered to be at risk of underachievement and this research has concluded that the issue is more multi-faceted and requires ongoing attention from curriculum policy developers so that all young people can be enabled to fulfil their potential.

I have outlined above some of the ways in which I plan to further my own research in the future and now wish to conclude by reflecting on how the current research has enabled me to develop many of the skills needed by the professional researcher. It has encouraged me to take time to think, to study and to theorise on issues involved in my day-to-day work in schools. The ongoing process of reviewing the literature has enabled me to discover further information in my field and in other related areas of educational interest. The collection, transcribing and coding of the data have enhanced my analytical skills while writing the thesis has refined my ability to communicate new knowledge to others. The

process of becoming a researcher has taught me about myself, both as an individual and as teacher, and it has reminded me of the challenges inherent in learning, for me, as for my students. I trust that my resultant deeper understanding of the needs of these young people within a 21st Century context will lead to increased effectiveness in my roles as teacher, school leader and educational researcher.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Sample of letter sent to schools/colleges

23 February 2009

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a teacher working locally and am in the process of completing my Doctorate in Education with the Open University. I have been looking at gender in relation to achievement within schools. I am now proposing to research the early stages of the implementation of the 14-19 Diplomas. As I know that your school is involved with this programme I am contacting you to ask if I might meet with you and some of your students.

My intention would be to conduct some informal interviews and possibly distribute some questionnaires. If you are able to assist me with this request then I will be delighted to give you further information.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

Rosemary Gilchrist

Appendix 2: Interview Questions: Student

Numbered main questions with supplementary additions.

1. Why are you studying this Diploma?

Whose decision was it?

How did you feel about studying for the Diploma?

Before

Now

2. What do you think people mean by the word “achievement” in school?

Teachers

Parents

Other students

Yourself

3. How does this Diploma course compare to other subjects/lesson you have had?

Is there anything else that could have been done in this course to make it better?

Now, after studying for a year, which parts of the Diploma course have you enjoyed most?

Which parts of the Diploma course have you not enjoyed?

4. How will you know if you have done well in this Diploma course?

How do you feel about your achievement in doing this Diploma course?

5. How do you think this course will help you in the future?

6. Is there anything you are proud of achieving which is not part of your ordinary school courses?

7. Are there any other questions you feel that I should be asking?

Appendix 3: Interview Questions: Staff

1. What criteria were used in order to decide which students would study for the Diploma?

Whose decision was it?

2. What is your school's view of underachievement amongst the boys?

How do you feel boys view achievement?

In what ways do you feel able boys view achievement differently?

How do you feel girls view achievement?

3. Why has your school decided to introduce the 14-19 curriculum straight away?
4. In what ways has your school attempted to address boys' underachievement?
5. In what ways (if at all) do you think that the new curriculum will meet the needs of students at risk of underachieving?

What was done in planning the new curriculum in order to maximize engagement amongst boys?

6. How will the Diploma participants be assessed?

Is any accreditation given for extra-curricular activities?

7. What criteria were used in order to decide which students would study for the Diploma?

Whose decision was it?

8. What is your school's view of underachievement amongst the boys?

How do you feel boys view achievement?

In what ways do you feel able boys view achievement differently?

How do you feel girls view achievement?

9. Why has your school decided to introduce the 14-19 curriculum straight away?

10. In what ways has your school attempted to address boys' underachievement?

Appendix 4: Sample Probes used with Students

Example of probes, indicated in bold, which were used to help students to explain more fully what they understood to be teachers' and parents' views on achievement.

- 35 **INT:** What do you think people mean when they talk about underachievement?
- 36 **S2:** Oh that means not reaching your goal.
- 37 **INT:** **Hmmm, simple as that?**
- 38 **S2:** Something to be avoided.
- 39 **INT:** **Right why is it to be avoided?**
- 40 **S2:** Because it does you no good, in the future.
- 43 **INT:** Do you think there's any difference in what they mean when they use them?
- 44 **S1:** Yeah... yeah.
- 45 **INT:** **What?**
- 46 **S1:** Well, underachievement isn't reaching your goal and achievement means you have reached your goal.
- 47 **INT:** **Yeah so it's a difference there, what about if teachers use those terms, what are they talking about?**
- 48 **S1:** Erm... that you haven't done well enough for underachievement and for achievement that you've made it.
- 49 **INT:** **And how are they measuring it,**
- 50 **S2:** A's, B's, C's...
- 51 **INT:** **Right, so it's qualifications and grades. What about parents, what are they thinking about?**
- 52 **S2:** Wondering if their kid's going to get a good grade, at the end of the day.
- 53 **S1:** Yeah else... they hate you.

Appendix 5: Sample Probes used with Staff

Example of probes, indicated in bold, which were used to expand on how they perceived the students enrolling on the Diploma.

- 25 **T1:** Again we've got two that we've identified this year but last year were challenging somewhat and they were definitely going the wrong way, but they've both turned round.
- 26 **INT:** **Can you tell me a little bit about those ones?**
- 27 **T1:** By now they would have been in trouble. I'm thinking of James and Bill, they've gone through the...
- 28 **T2:** They came in as rogues but they've suddenly realized they can actually do the work ..they've turned into quite nice young men now.
- 29 **INT:** **And they're developing the skills that are going to actually enable them to progress?**
- 30 **T2:** And also the functional skills which is very important, the area which could have really seriously stopped them so there is great promise for those two.

In both cases supportive body language and facial gestures were also used along with encouraging phrases such as : "Ums" , " I see" and "Go on."

Appendix 6: Sample Student Transcript

The interview involved the interviewer and two young apprentice students. The interviewer is denoted INT and the young apprentice students as S1 and S2 respectively.

Transcription

- 01 INT: Okay right so first of all I'll ask you S1, why are you studying this?
- 02 S1: Erm... motor vehicles.
- 03 INT: Why?
- 04 S1: Cos erm... just want to be a mechanic.
- 05 INT: Hmm... And whose idea was it, whose decision?
- 06 S1: Oh it's mine just to... see what it was like.
- 07 INT: And what about when you were at school, did your teachers or your parents try to influence you to do this?
- 08 S1: No I just chose it myself.
- 09 INT: Okay, right and what about you S2?
- 10 S2: I just chose to come here.
- 11 INT: Right you chose to come here, you chose to come to college?
- 12 S2: Yeah to like increase my employability.
- 13 INT: And why this particular course?
- 14 S2: Because it's what I've always wanted to, taking things apart.

- 15 INT: And how are you at putting them together again?
- 16 S2: I'm all right.
- 17 INT: And how do you feel about studying?
- 18 S2: Erm... well, I'll have to wait a bit.
- 19 INT: Okay and what's the difference between this and school?
- 20 S2: This is a lot more relaxed but you get treated like an adult but without the responsibility of an adult.
- 21 INT: Treated like an adult and that's important?
- What do you think S1?
- 22 S1: Erm... yeah it's more fun than school, you get to take apart cars and stuff like that.
- 23 INT: Hmm... it sounds as if taking cars apart seems to be a big motivation. Why's that?
- 24 S1: Yeah
- 25 INT: What do you understand S1, by the word 'achievement', what's that to do with?
- 26 S1: Erm... don't know really, just about being motivated and find out about cars and stuff...
- 27 INT: Hmm... and what do you think S2, in terms of achievement, what's that got to do with...
- 28 S2: Erm... I think reaching a goal that you've set yourself.

- 29 INT: Okay and is it one you've set yourself, it's not one that somebody else sets?
- 30 S2: One I've set myself.
- 31 INT: Does that make a difference? And how were things at school, did you manage to achieve what you were setting yourself to do there?
- 32 S2: Yeah. Most of the time.
- 33 INT: How about you?
- 34 S1: Yeah most of the time as well.
- 35 INT: What do you think people mean when they talk about underachievement?
- 36 S2: Oh that means not reaching your goal.
- 37 INT: Hmmm, simple as that?
- 38 S2: Something to be avoided.
- 39 INT: Right why is it to be avoided?
- 40 S2: Because it does you no good, in the future.
- 41 INT: Okay, right do you think teachers and pupils all mean the same thing... and parents when they use those terms achievement and underachievement?
- 42 S1: Erm... sort of.

- 43 INT: Do you think there's any difference in what they mean when they use them?
- 44 S1: Yeah... yeah.
- 45 INT: What?
- 46 S1: Well, underachievement isn't reaching your goal and achievement means you have reached your goal.
- 47 INT: Yeah so it's a difference there, what about teachers... if Teachers use those terms, what are they talking about?
- 48 S1: Erm... that you haven't done well enough for underachievement and for achievement that you've made...
- 49 INT: And how are they measuring it, what are they particularly looking at?
- 50 S2: A's, B's, C's...
- 51 INT: Right so it's qualifications and grades. What about parents, what are they thinking about?
- 52 S2: Wondering if their kid's going to get a good grade, at the end of the day.
- 53 S1: Yeah else... they hate you.
- 54 INT: Hmmm, so parents and teachers are the same then, what they're looking at?
- 55 S2: Parents are easier going to it.
- 56 INT: And what about in terms of the students, is there a difference between what boys and girls think about achievement do you

- think?
- 57 S1: No not really.
- 58 INT: Hmm... what do you think?
- 59 S2: I'd say it depends what kind of personality you are... if you're a person that aims high, but will most likely get put down then achievement is really important to them, then there are the kind of people who aren't really that bothered with school.
- 60 INT: Right so that's their personality and it's not really to do with gender, boy or girl... you think. Okay... how would you say that this course that you're following here compares to the courses you've done?
- 61 S2: I'd say this is more interesting.
- 62 INT: More interesting, why?
- 63 S2: More involving because you get to take apart cars. You get to see it and then do it for yourself instead of just sitting in the classroom and learning about it and then... just to forget it.
- 64 S1: I prefer practical.
- 65 INT: You prefer practical as well S1... So how are you helped to learn.
S1?
- 66 S1: Erm.. they just show you on the computer and see what you're going to be doing and then you learn about that, you write some notes down about it and then you come down here and you try to fix that part or take it off a car or...
- 67 INT: Right so on the computer it's like a demonstration

- 68 S1: Yeah
- 69 INT: And then you go on and do it yourself. Is that what you feel as well?
- 70 S2: Yeah... yeah and it helps if your tutor uses a bit of humour, t to keep you interested.
- 71 INT: Oh right... right, any examples that you can think of that the tutor's done that's been funny?
- 72 S2: Erm... mainly like friendly banter kind of thing... that's probably it.
- 73 INT: And is that different in school or would you say it's the same?
- 74 S2: Different in school, very different.
- 75 INT: Right okay, very different you say. Why?
- 76 S1: Because if you have a laugh they just don't take it, but if you have a laugh with the college teachers they're okay as long as you get on with it.
- 77 INT: Hmm... as long as you get the work done. What do think the difference is in school?
- 78 S2: Erm... at school you get treated like a kid, here you get treated like an adult.
- 79 INT: Right okay but you're the same people... you know Monday and Tuesday you're in school and in here on Wednesday and you're the same people so what makes the difference?
- 80 S2: The tutors here don't mind if you say the odd swear word or

- anything like that but in school you'll get detentions... and a few times you get expelled.
- 81 INT: Hmm... schools are very different settings aren't they. Is there anything you think could be done to make this better, this course?
- 82 S1: Erm... no not really, you've got all the tools you need, if it ain't there then you don't need it.
- 83 INT: Okay what about you, S2?
- 84 S2: No everything's good.
- 85 INT: Right another satisfied customer. Which bit do you enjoy the most?
- 86 S2: Probably the practical
- 87 INT: Any particular bit of the practical?
- 88 S1: Working on the cars
- 89 INT: I can see this is beginning to end isn't it. How do you know if you... Oh yeah how will you know if you've done okay?
- 90 S1: Erm... the teacher will praise you and say that you've done it right.
- 91 INT: Okay and what about... do you get reports or...
- 92 S1: Yeah you get like... after every term you get a report to see how you're doing.
- 93 INT: Okay so you get reports. And how do you think S2 this is going to help you in the future, this particular course?
- 94 S2: Erm... might get a job in Kwick-fit.

- 95 INT: Right okay so it could lead directly to a job, and what do you think S1?
- 96 S1: Yeah leading directly to a job... cos then you get more of a chance if they know you've been to college instead of just jumping straight into it.
- 97 INT: Would you be thinking of both coming back to college after you leave school?
- 98 S1: Erm... yeah
- 99 S2: Definitely
- 100 INT: Definitely. Can I ask you S1, is there anything you've achieved outside of school that you've been proud of?
- 101 S1: Erm... yeah I've helped my uncle build a kit-car.
- 102 INT: Right so you've actually done that already?
- 103 S1: Yeah
- 104 INT: And what stage is that at now?
- 105 S1: Oh it's finished.
- 106 INT: Right and have you worked it... have you been on it?
- 107 S1: Yeah, yeah been running it.
- 108 INT: Smashing, very good. How about you S2?
- 109 S2: Well if I come in here... I have to know how something

works, like just want to know how it works, how this happens.

110 INT: So have you done anything yourself that you've achieved?

111 S2: Yeah I took a part out of a motorbike before.

112 INT: Right and did it go back together again afterwards?

113 S2: Yeah, yeah took a while though.

114 INT: So you re-assembled it... good, good. Okay well those are my questions, thank you very much for your time... thanks.

END OF INTERVIEW

Appendix 7: Sample Staff Transcript

The second interview involved the interviewer and an apprentice trainer/co-coordinator. The interviewer is denoted INT and the apprentice coordinator as AC respectively.

Transcription

- 01 **INT:** So how long has this scheme been operating?
- 02 **AC:** We've been operating for the last four years.
- 03 **INT:** And who's overseeing it, is it central government or is it a college initiative?
- 04 **AC:** It's a college initiative and we run it through our schools office.
- 05 **INT:** And has central government had any hand in it?
- 06 **AC:** It's ran through SEMTA... the erm SEMTA
- 07 **INT:** SEMTA is that S.E.M...
- 08 **AC:** S.E.M.T.A
- 09 **INT:** And I'll be able to find a website to explain what they're all about?
- 10 **AC:** Yes you will, yes.
- 11 **INT:** Right so what criteria do you use when you decide what students are going to actually come onto the scheme?
- 12 **AC:** Well what we've done in the past is our schools-office have put people forward through a selection process but then what we do is give them some diagnostic key skills test and we also give them a practical assessment of their abilities. But the scheme should be targeted... Can I explain how it came into being in the first place?
- 13 **INT:** Yes please do... yeah
- 14 **AC:** What we were finding and what the government was finding in engineering was that we were not getting a very high caliber

- of learner applying for apprenticeships. Now I'll just give you a brief history of our engineering's involvement. All the mass-production, low skill jobs now have gone to India and China and we can't compete because their rates are so much cheaper. Engineering apprenticeships by the way its evolved has got much
- 15 **AC:** more technical and much higher-end engineering for like the aerospace industry and that type of environment. We were looking for higher achievers actually, so the government put this young apprentice scheme in place and gave higher achievers the chance to see what's out there in industry and it also allowed industry to look at a higher caliber of apprentice than they'd normally get. The idea was that originally they spent fifty days over two years in the company, they had to give up their school holidays to come in and spend the time in the company. But they've reduced that now to forty days because we're in a recession. It's a very difficult thing to get companies to commit to because if you've got a young person in what is potentially a dangerous environment, you've got to make sure that the right level of support is in place, that the companies been vetted, that the people are CRB checked etc. It's worked very well, this year already six year-11's have been offered apprenticeships.
- 16 **INT:** That's excellent isn't it...?
- 17 **AC:** Yeah so it's working really well and a lot of companies have actually said that it would be a preferable recruitment way to go.
- 18 **INT:** Okay so going back to then... do the schools put forward their names or...
- 19 **AC:** You would have to liaise with our schools office for how they're selected. They're from local schools... but me having links with industry through the normal apprenticeships that I run, I'm able to get them placements within... what we try and do is get them quite a diverse range of companies to work in so that they can see what's actually out there. Obviously some of the bigger companies will be prepared to sponsor them through to higher education and possibly university which...
- 20 **INT:** So from the companies' point of view, they're looking at a longer term commitment, they're not just looking for a year or two?

- 21 **AC:** No not at all, no I wouldn't put them into a place that they were just looking... they are looking for people that could end up as potential project engineers, cab designers, that sort of area.
- 22 **INT:** So like you say that's a high level of skill that they would have to have to begin with, so you would presumably be looking to see students that were already good at maths and science.
- 23 **AC:** Yes, within engineering the one thing that is a requirement is a good knowledge of maths because a lot of the machines now used are TNT type software so for instance if you needed to plot points to generate a profile, you would need a basic knowledge of TRIG for example so the main criteria would be maths and then secondary IT skills.
- 24 **INT:** Do you still find that schools will direct students who haven't got these skills towards it because they think it's practical?
- 25 **AC:** They will try, but can I just explain what they're actually doing in our workshop. What they're actually doing is an NVQ level 2 but it is actually a special NVQ, it's called PEO which stands for Performing Engineering Operations and its designed to be delivered in a sheltered environment. It was originally put into the framework because smaller companies didn't have the time and resources to teach people...
When I started in engineering for example, everybody had their own training school and they were just sent to Tech to do the academic side of things. Obviously things have moved on from there now so that's why... at level two if a sixteen-year-old came and started on an apprenticeship with a college like this years' are doing they would start on doing PEO level 2 at 16. So if we've got 14-year-olds doing this, it's quite a high-end NVQ they've got to do for their age... so if they aren't necessarily switched-on high achievers, we've had one or two that have fallen off because the schools have tried to push them our way and they've not been up to the required standard, you've got to be quite good to be able to achieve this level 2 NVQ.
- 26 **INT:** Have there been cases where students have had the ability and have been disengaged to begin with but have become more engaged because of their involvement?
- 27 **AC:** Yes there have been some that are marginal and moving on because they're actually... I mean at the end of the day it is a hands on practical NVQ but because of the way it's evolved, you have to do three skill

specific units, we used to do milling, turning, bench fitting and assembly and now its milling, turning and CAD so you know... CAD does take some getting round, you've got to have reasonable skills to get through CAD. So that's where we're at with that.

- 28 **INT:** Do the students have any choice with what they're doing or is it all curriculum?
- 29 **AC:** No it's all curriculum, I mean what happens is they're reviewed throughout the apprenticeship. I do reviews with them, I could give you an example of that and show you how that works if you like... would that be useful?
- 30 **INT:** Maybe yes in relation to the individuals because that's going to be quite good is to actually see the case study of an individual.
- 31 **AC:** Yeah well I could do that, do you want me to get a file and we'll have a look through it?
- 32 **AC:** I touch on equal opportunities with them. What I do is I pick a specific theme for every time we do a review and make sure they understand what theme we're talking about so that covers equal opportunities. As you can see the company has an input, course tutor Chris who you'll be meeting does as well, the lad writes a brief comment on how they feel they're getting on at the work placement and how they're getting on at college and I put an overview on the bottom of it so throughout it, its continually monitored how they're getting on.
- 33 **INT:** Right okay, that's really good and he seems to be progressing well.
- 34 **AC:** Well like I said you can read... and go down and talk to him.
- 35 **INT:** I can see him... that'll be nice. Do you have any girls doing this?
- 36 **AC:** No not this year, we have done on previous years yeah.
- 37 **INT:** And how does that work, would you have one or two or...?
- 38 **AC:** Well we've only had one in each group... but this group we've not got... you know. The last girl that we had did very well,

- she achieved both the NVQ and the forty days work placement. If they do that, I think the young apprentice certificate's worth something like four high-grade GCSEs to them as well so there's an incentive there for them to get that as well. Plus the fact that if they were to go on an apprenticeship afterwards, they're already a year ahead of a school leaver because they've got an NVQ level 2 PEO and they've also got forty days work experience in industry under their belt.
- 39 **INT:** And they're a bit more savvy, also got some contacts so all together it's very, very good but I'm just wondering at 14 how a young person would know enough to actually make the choice.
- 40 **AC:** Well, the way it works with the placements... is all I can say because that's really what I deal with... I mean it's only an introduction into engineering, they don't have to go down that pathway afterwards but what we try and do is mix and match the companies so... how diverse is it. I'll give you an example, some of my young people are sent to D P in N. which is basically helping run a fully automated maintenance system dealing with cheese and dairy products. On the other side of things, I've had four apprentices out working on the V.at B., so that's how diverse the range of companies could be.
- 41 **INT:** Yeah good, well that does give people a lot of scope.
- 42 **AC:** So somebody could like dealing with aircraft and become an aircraft fitter or somebody could like working in the food industry and getting an introduction into it that way so it's quite diverse, it's not just engineering as we see it. I try to contact companies that have got any aspect of engineering running within it. I produce a leaflet as well
- 43 **INT:** Oh that's interesting.
- 44 **AC:** And these are actually companies that have put a comment down and anybody at anytime can contact them and they'll willingly talk about it.
- 45 **INT:** That's very good... lovely, do you have any of these spare?
- 46 **AC:** You can have that spare one

- 47 **INT:** Could I have that one? That's lovely then thank you it gives me... something else to go on. Okay so let me just see if there's anything... right well I'll ask the boys themselves about these issues. How do see things developing now with all the changes that this new coalition's bringing in?
- 48 **AC:** Well I don't know because SEMTA have not given us the next cohort so I'm not sure what's running after this... I mean you're talking to the year 10s and I've got another year 11 group as well. But the next one on we're not sure about yet... we run it in partnership with Warwickshire College, them being the lead college as regards tendering for the young apprenticeships.
- 49 **INT:** And who's actually paying for it, is it the college or is it schools?
- 50 **AC:** I don't know anything about the finance side of it, sorry I can't help you with that at all. I'm more to do with the contact within industry and obviously I'm sometimes in the workshop and I could tell you where they are with regards to completing these PEO units that they've got to do. So as far as financing is concerned, I couldn't pretend to know anything about the finance side of things.
- 51 **INT:** Right well thank you very much indeed for your time... that's been excellent.

END OF INTERVIEW

Appendix 8: Notes taken from interview with student at Location 1.

Subsidiary questions indicated with s.

	Student Question	Responses
1	Why are you studying for this diploma?	I enjoy engineering – building stuff
1s1	Whose decision was it?	My own. I thought I might do PE instead. Teacher and parents talked to me.
1s2	How do you feel about studying for the Diploma?	Expected more practical.
2	What do you understand by underachievement?	Your goals you have set out.
2s1	What do you think people mean by the word “achievement” in school? Other students	Achievement is what progress you have made.
2s2	What do your teachers mean?	Good grades
2s3	What do your parents mean?	Going for goals that are set out.
2s4	What do the cleverest boys think?	
2s5	What do girls think?	You need to work hard
3	How does this Diploma course compare to other subjects/lesson you have had?	Longer -3 hours
3s1	How are you helped to learn?	
3s2	Is there anything else that could have been done in this course to make it better?	
3s3	Which parts of the Diploma course curriculum have you enjoyed most?	College - practical
3s4	Which parts have you not enjoyed?	Split across them all
4	How will you know if you have done well in this Diploma course?	Good grade 20%
4s1	How do you feel about your achievement in doing this diploma course?	Learned a lot more I feel I've done more.
5	How do you think the course will help you in the future?	I want to be an engineer GCSE is harder
6	Is there anything you are proud of achieving which is not part of your ordinary school courses?	Explorer Scout - how to survive
7	Are there any other questions you feel I should be asking?	

Appendix 9: Notes taken from interview with teacher at Location 1.

Subsidiary questions indicated with s.

	Staff question	Responses
1	What criteria were used in order to decide which students would study for the Diploma?	Not involved myself. Line lead has since left. Levels taken into account Level 1 NC 5 or above Eng/Maths Level 2 –L4 Eng /Maths - but kept those who personally wanted to do it
1s1	Whose decision was it?	Students chose as part of options. If didn't attend interview then they couldn't. Needed to do 5 GCSEs as well if Dip. Doesn't work out. Functional skills within Dip..and GCSEs
2	What is your school's view of underachievement amongst boys?	Explicit - groups identified WBM
2s1	What is your school's //parents' view of underachievement amongst your boys?	
2s2	How do you feel boys view achievement?	Used to have underachieving boys going to APEX or Room 30 –college course/BTEC G or above wanted for all students
2s3	How do you define achievement?	
2s4	How do you feel girls view achievement?	
2s5	In what ways do you feel able boys view achievement differently?	Early stages – new development - kids getting more of same at college
3	Why has your school decided to introduce the 14-19 curriculum straight away?	Felt most suited as it is a technical college. Need to get more involved with industry. Engineer working in Wales on water pipeline Water Filtration Project – Enterprise -drinking straw for 3 rd world country – self-sufficiency - small filtration system. This is a steep learning curve for the students. It's independent learning. Not the way it used to be. Unit 8 is more academic. Can deliver it and students can resit
4	In what ways has your school attempted to address boys' underachievement?	Level 1 – gaining confidence Difficult to gauge with level 2 Never felt achieving that much Now doing elec. Drawing to necessary standard.
5	In what ways do you think that the new curriculum will meet the needs of students at risk of underachieving?	
5s1	What was done in planning the new curriculum in order to maximize engagement amongst boys?	Tues lunch club Imagineering sci/math. Boys and girls Try to hook them in. Food given. Op. to build something from kits.
	How does the new curriculum maximise engagement amongst boys?	
6	How will the Diploma participants be assessed?	Most internally assessed. Unit 8 exam stands alone project – there are choices but students have difficulty in coming up with something suitable.
6s1	Is any accreditation given for extra-curricular subjects?	We are taking part in competition Shell Eco-Marathon. They have to build a full size car with efficiency built –in. It's a national racing car company. Have to design and build a car. Will make joint artefact with report of their contribution. Need to convert drawing to a finished part. There will be quality control and inspection
S		We are part of a consortium. It's a joint effort. We're working together with a clear plan and about how we deliver. CLC is around the corner and some parts of Dip. Can be delivered there. Applied / made bid STEMLAB - ideas for projects – construction kit Catapulting kids further