

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S POLITICAL COMPETENCE IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL:  
A QUEST

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## **The Development of Children's Political Competence in a Primary School: a Quest.**

### **Abstract**

This research explores how children recount and account for their developing political competence at primary school. To access participants' experience and perceptions of political participation and agency and the structures and practices within which they operate, I designed a post-structurally informed ethnographic study for a large junior school in the South West of England. The result was a range of qualitative and participative data gathering methods which emphasised the importance and value of children's voices and testimony: interviews, observations, diaries, analytical discussions and ethnographic field notes. The resulting data comprise a collection of participant accounts and interpretations of living and learning in school. In contrast to my research approach, my findings identify a construction of the child as deficient, incompetent and untrustworthy, destabilising children's emergent confidence as political beings and severely limiting the effectiveness of educational initiatives to engage them in active political participation. As a result, forms of political participation and self-expression are muted: children are encouraged to develop a conservative, self-preserving form of agency hidden from view and often characterised by self-doubt and self-suppression, counter to curricular expectations of political participation in school and community life. However, using Foucauldian theoretical tools, I argue that some children's responses to the pressure of the school's normalising structures and practices creatively build an effective, but subaltern, political competence, allowing children to exercise agency in strategic conformity and resistance. Being unrecognised, though, outside the surveillance of the curriculum and its enforcers, this learning is not readily available for teachers and the school to engage with and nurture. This presents both a missed opportunity for primary education and a threat to the stability and sustainability of children's credible political agency. Empowering children requires seeing them as politically capable and competent, rather than lesser adults, deficient and lacking in citizenship competence.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **The Development of Children's Political Competence in a Primary School: a Quest.**

#### **Introduction**

Defined as a quest, this study should be understood as both my research endeavour as well as children's incursions into the sometimes inhospitable territory of political participation, action and agency at a primary school. For about a year, I shared in the adventures of a group of children aged eight to eleven as our quests overlapped: the children's negotiations with school norms and expectations, and my pursuit of greater knowledge and understanding of those experiences and the children's developing political competence. This chapter introduces the research context and imperative of the thesis, its resulting aims, objectives and central questions. I set out my quest: to explore and theorise primary school children's participative experiences and political learning as they recount and account for them and the consequent implications for developing sustainable political competence and confidence. The chapter charts the origin of that research in previous post-graduate study and my observations and concerns as a practitioner. I then highlight the core argument within the thesis: the political learning which children experience in the primary school researched is not one promoted or recognised by the curriculum and this challenges the stability, efficacy and credibility of children's resulting political competence. I explain the origin of the adventure-quest metaphor, its relevance to the findings and the argument being made as well as how it is then developed. The chapter concludes with the structure of the resulting thesis and the function of each chapter in the pursuit and documenting of my quest.

#### **1.1 The Imperative for Action**

A child voicing his or her opinions and questions is a desirable function of democracy and an educational, legal and moral entitlement (DfES, 2004; Ofsted, 2005; UN, 1989). As a societal good, empowering children enhances the legitimacy of democratic institutions and practices and it defines a specific educational outcome: a citizenry enabled by political and social learning and experience. The promotion of a more active youth citizenry can be contextualised within western liberal democratic States experiencing changing forms and levels of interest in politics (van Deth, 1990) and citizenship participation (Ormell, 2006; Ross, 2008) as well as increasing anti-social behaviour (see Bee and Pachi, 2014; Goldson, 2001; Robb, 2014; Woodhead, 1997). Within the UK National Curriculum the understandings of citizenship,



children's rights and responsibilities have been the focus of continuous debate amongst practitioners and policy-makers, who have constructed citizenship education as uncontested, unproblematic and a general good (Holden and Clough, 1998; Leighton, 2004). Both my professional practice within the classroom and previous postgraduate research suggest that it is more complex than this. If a societal aim is to maximise political participation and responsibility as described in the new *National Curriculum* (DfE, 2013), we need to address what education for political competence is and could be.

Successive UK government education departments have set out initiatives clearly locating responsibility for political socialisation within schools through citizenship curricula and aspects of the key skills agenda (DfES and QCA 1999; DfE, 2013). At the same time, teachers' own professional autonomy has been delegitimised through the concentration of decision-making for education within central government, described as the product of a discourse of performativity (see: Ball, 2003; Busher and Cremin, 2012; Jeffrey and Troman, 2012c; Perryman, 2012), discussed in Chapter 2. This has created tension and conflict in the delivery of meaningful participatory experiences for children (Robinson and Taylor, 2007). If education for political competence is perceived as another element of school and teacher performance management, the health and authenticity of democratic practice and associated political participation can be threatened. Indeed, some have gone as far as to call it another potential mechanism for control (Hughes, 2007).

My research is an ethnographic study, described in Chapter 4, of current concerns about children's active citizenship expressed within policies of both the Council of Europe (Directorate of Education and Languages, 2010) and the UK government (DfES and QCA 1998; DfES and QCA, 1999; DfE, 2013), and in particular their focus on participation in decision-making, taking action and understandings of individual rights or entitlements that are contextualised within the local, national and European arenas. This is most clearly illustrated in the *Crick Report* (DfES and QCA, 1998) and *The Children Act* (2004). The Council of Europe's adoption of the *Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education* (2010) and Article 11 of the *Lisbon Treaty* (2007) establishes the basis for active citizenship and participation at a European level (Bee and Guerrina, 2014). A central feature of all these imperatives is, arguably, the development of policy and theory around 'student voice' as discussed by Ruddock and Fielding (2006) and 'children's voices' in the *Cambridge Review* (Alexander, 2010).

That is not to suggest an absence of similar education prior to this, but that an innovative education agenda emerged at this time, articulating a new standard. The evaluation of its success in the UK has been varied (Alexander, 2010), and the most recent form of compulsory education has been laid on top of the *National Curriculum* with little reference to the overall experience a pupil undergoes as a member of the school's community or stakeholder in his/her own learning (Alexander, 2010; Holden and Clough, 1998). With the introduction of the *National Curriculum* in 1988, including its citizenship component, and the statutory requirement for citizenship education following the election of the Labour Government in 1997, this area of teaching and learning acquired greater political and social importance (Osler and Starkey, 2006).

The need to consider primary education in this context stems from this being the children's first exposure to a public arena requiring their independent participation, schools being political institutions in their own right. Connolly, Smith and Kelly (2002) suggest that although children's political development begins at home, the most formative years are those spent in 'elementary education' when the child forms relationships with members of a community outside the family. Active political participation in their own learning enhances the way and how well children learn (Holden and Clough 1998), even cited as *prerequisites* for learning in the *Cambridge Primary Review* (Alexander, 2010). By extension, participation in a school's institutional structures and practices will be an important part in the development of their political competence as suggested by McCluskey's (2014) study on school discipline. My quest is important in developing an understanding of what meaningful and relevant learning for children as political beings is, and how effectively schools are currently nurturing this. This study moves beyond the quantifiable outcomes of formal education, and into the structures and practices of primary school communities and children's experiences which influence, and are influenced by, their understandings of political participation and entitlement (Wenger, 2000).

## **1.2 The Quest: Setting the Challenge and Defining the Study**

The particular imperative for this research was realised following the findings of a small-scale practitioner study of pupil participation in decision-making within a primary classroom. The study was carried out in 2005 as part of a Master's degree. The research raised a number of new questions, left me questioning my own political and professional identity, authority and sense of legitimacy in the classroom and, consequently, what I was offering the children. This

was reflected in the then growing discourse on the deprofessionalisation of teachers (see Ball, 2003; Busher and Cremin, 2012; Jeffrey, 2014; Perryman, 2012; Priestly, Robinson and Biesta, 2012; Smyth and Shacklock, 2004; and Woods and Jeffrey, 2004). Disappointed to learn how little sense of legitimate agency and curriculum ownership children felt and in order to improve what is offered to them at this critical stage, I initiated this quest. The foreshadowed problems I sought to understand were: the apparent political reserve and passivity of primary school children coupled with conflicting notions of childhood and expectations of children as citizens (Bosse Chitty, 2012). Whilst in the midst of data analysis and following a presentation at the *Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe* Student Conference, my central research question became: *How do children understand their participation and agency within the institution and cultures of the primary school and how does this impact upon the development of political competence?* The published paper from the conference can be found in *Appendix 7*. The changes to the central research question responded to early data analysis and reflected more pertinent concerns of my participants and the research site. This process is described and critically evaluated in Chapter 4.

The consequent research objectives became to:

1. identify examples and perceptions of children acting as political agents in school;
2. explore and describe the structures and practices governing political behaviours of children;
3. create an opportunity to rethink power relations and the nature and meaning of political participation and agency in school;
4. derive theory explaining the structures, practices and participant agency and competence in school.

The research questions guiding my literature reviews, fieldwork and analysis were as follows:

1. How do children understand their rights and responsibilities as members of the school community?
2. How do children understand the structures and practices for participation in schools?
3. How do children understand their political agency within school structures and practices?

4. What do children understand as legitimate participation in school life?
5. What is the experience of exercising rights and responsibilities in school?
6. What is the experience of agency and being an actor in the school community?
7. How does the school promote children's political participation and agency?
8. What political learning is happening? How does it happen? What is learnt?
9. How is childhood and are children constructed by different agents? Why?
10. (How) Is the above transferable to society and civic life and responsibility?

What I hoped for, and still hope for, from the research has its origins in my concept of the child and my beliefs and values about the relationship of children to and within society. I regard children as legitimate political agents with a similar capacity for political competence to that of adults. Differences in effective political agency are explained by the level of individuals' experience and knowledge. I feel that 'trying to trust children' as credible political actors in school environments sometimes hostile to this endeavour has been a personal quest of mine for several years: my story. I evaluate my value position and its impact on the research in Chapter 7.

I embarked on my ethnographic research as a quest in pursuit of making a distinct contribution to knowledge and understanding of children's experiences of political participation and agency in primary school: the impact this has on the development of their political competence and confidence as social actors in their own right now and of the future. To fulfil this quest I engaged in an in-depth, exploratory ethnography in a large primary school in the South West of England. A full description of the school can be found in Chapter 5. My methodological intent was to create a vehicle for exploring how children recount and account for political participation and learning at school, and the implications this has for developing sustainable political competence and confidence. My work follows recent educational ethnographies exploring the experience of children in the classroom and school today and the impact of performative practices on the quality of that experience (see Busher and Cremin 2012; Jeffrey, 2014; Jeffrey and Troman, 2012c; Perryman, 2012).

When investigating the 'political', I am referring to a specific dimension of what is 'social'. I am focusing on the particular area of social competence associated with becoming a recognised

political actor through ‘the demands made by a democratic society on its citizens’ (ten Dam and Volman, 2007, p.285). Whilst I would classify the political learning I refer to as an important element of citizenship competence, I have elected not to use the terms *citizen* and *citizenship* in the first instance to clarify the aspects of social competence and participation I am investigating. Pérez Expósito (2014) warns of against the over-assumptive use of such terms which mask the absence of authentic participation in education; I argue this often applies to practitioner use of citizenship ideas and can result in the tokenistic implementation of curricula (Leitch and Mitchell, 2007). The use of the term *political* is aimed at rendering the familiar strange for myself, my research participants and other audiences. For a large part of my journey, I am uncoupling political competence from citizenship to act as an ‘interruption’ to current education discourses (Vaughan, 2004). Within my discussion I use a Foucauldian interpretation of the term discourse which is defined in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.1.

Citizenship was not a compulsory element of the Key Stage Two curriculum at the time of the research (DfES, 1999; DfE, 2013), although it was timetabled as part of the weekly *Personal, Social, Health and Moral Education* half-hour lesson in the research school. However, the importance of the incidental and often unintended political learning, which happens from being in school interacting with others, featured heavily in my data. Legally, children cannot be citizens: this status is not acquired until the age of eighteen (Lister, 2008). However, children can be and are political. The choice of the term ‘political’ is more inclusive of the wider experiences of children in school and society (Pérez Expósito, 2014). My interpretation of *citizenship* is also that it is broader than what is *political*, incorporating what might also be termed *economic* and *philosophical*. However, decisions around the allocation of resources and the translation of philosophy into policy are inherently political and Political (of the State); what I present should not be interpreted as distinct from citizenship. What I am discussing is integral to much citizenship research and educational practice, but I want to approach political competence from a different angle and maintain that slightly different perspective in problematizing the current situation in schools (Vaughan, 2004).

The use of the term *competence* facilitates the analysis and discussion of a cumulative capacity which is dynamic not static. ‘The notion of competence ... is not about learning isolated knowledge, skills and attitudes, but about integrating these with a view to performing ... social tasks,’ (ten Dam and Volman, 2007, p.281). There is more to competence than the identifiable curriculum units – knowledge, skills and attributes (DfES, 1999; DfE, 2013) – which can be used

to characterise it: competence also describes the capacity of an individual to *integrate and apply* the relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes (ten Dam and Volman, 2007). This positioning represents my focus away from the curriculum and more on children's learning from the school's political environment and culture. The specific characteristics of political competence are discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1.

### **1.3 How the Story Begins: Initiating the Quest and Entering the Field**

In order to accomplish my quest, I designed an ethnographic study for a large junior school in the South West of England. The study gathered data over the course of one academic year and involved 130 participants, including 109 children and 21 adults. To get adults and children thinking and talking about children's participation and agency in school, they were invited to participate in one or more of the following: a focus group interview, collecting data on one school day, and an individual review interview. These methods are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4. The research design included particular consideration of ethics of this study which were paramount due to the young age of the majority of the participants and their relationship to me as a researcher *and* teacher in the school.

Understanding the dynamics of power relations in society and a primary school as a competition between voices vying for power (Vaughan, 2004) and the children's experience as an apprenticeship into the languages, practices and politics of representation can be used to illuminate the impact of being at school. Whitehead and McNiff (2004) argue that researchers' desire to transform and improve education is inevitable, but Hammersley (2006) cautions of the danger of centralising these political commitments. If research aims to emancipate a perceived marginalised group, they are already positioned as disenfranchised in a defined political arena and it is assumed some form of emancipatory intervention is required to redress this imbalance. Within my own research, therefore, I did *not* seek to challenge perceptions of a socially and politically marginalised primary school child, described by Prout and James (1997), and their possible disenfranchisement through schooling, but to investigate their experiences.

The analysis and presentation of my data are informed by post-structural understandings of the construction of reality, and I have used the conceptual tools of Michel Foucault to illuminate my findings and conclusions. Within *Discipline and Punish* (1995), the description of a system seeking to neutralise anti-social instincts and eliminate dissent and difference is very powerful within the current educational policy context. My aim is to problematise constructions of the

child at primary school, challenging the impact they have upon the development of his or her political competence and confidence as a legitimate social agent. The study is defined by its historical and geographical specificity, giving it depth and richness, but limiting potential generalisability and transferability (Wolcott, 2005). I acknowledge that I have chosen but one of a number of possible research foci and ways of interpreting my findings. The development of children's *political prowess* at this primary school represents what is of the most immediate interest and importance to the children from my reading of their accounts. The use of the term *prowess* is featured and defined in Chapter 6.

In looking for effective terms and ideas to communicate my interpretation of the children's accounts, I began to think of their narratives as journeying through the experiences we discussed during the fieldwork year. To many children, it was an adventure. Additionally, I noticed the frequency of my own references to journeys and journeying and began to think of my research as a specific type of journey: a quest. Roulston, Preissle and Freeman (2013) identify this autobiographical element as of great significance to novice researchers. The idea of travelling also appealed from the time taken in getting somewhere to the change of scenery and self at the end of the journey, the internal growth and learning from new experiences. Additionally, the notion of a quest's journey highlights the tension between the static and dynamic, the familiar and strange – an attribute of Foucauldian theorising (Hoskins, 1990) – and can be seen both in the children's commentaries and my own struggles and reflections on being both a practitioner and a researcher in the school. The metaphor originates in my understanding of the world and the value I place on meeting people from and experiencing other cultures and crystallised whilst travelling in Northern Germany in 2013. The new perspectives a journey allows the traveller to access have motivated me to both travel further afield, study different languages and cultures, and aspects of more familiar ones in greater depth. I have chosen to present the data and findings in Chapters 5 and 6 as a *Choose Your Own Adventure* to reflect these journeys and experiences. These gaming books were a popular narrative genre in the 1980s (Anon, 2013), and their structure and suitability to this thesis are discussed in Chapter 4.

Through the thesis, I explain and expand upon how the findings of this study make a distinct contribution to the debate on the development of children's political participation and agency at primary school. I explore how dealing with conflict and risk in their interaction with others at school challenges children to both strategically conform and resist in the pursuit of their own

self-determination, that is: seeking the fulfilment of ‘the fundamental need for competence, autonomy and relatedness’ (Wang and Holcombe, 2010, p.635). The experience of the children in the research school identifies the wider issues of trust and control, conflict and resistance, and participation and agency which challenge children’s political learning. If issues of confidence, legitimacy and recognition are fundamental to a sustainable identity of political competence (ten Dam and Volman, 2007), this research questions the suitability of this environment for the recognition and promotion of a young ‘political activist’ (Ross, 2008).

#### **1.4 The Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis is broadly structured as the log of my quest. The introduction has set out that quest, charted its origins and explored the research imperative and resulting design. This chapter has also given an overview of the research approach and key questions. Chapter 2, the substantive literature review, locates the quest in its historical and social context: the research and professional setting in which the adventure is realised. It defines the quest in substantive terms, identifying the gap in knowledge and understanding to be filled as how children recount and account for political participation and learning at school. Chapter 3 sets out the theoretical framework through which I have created, interpreted and presented my research, serving as a guide to the execution and interpretation of the quest. The methodological discussion of Chapter 4 narrates and evaluates the journey travelled in the fulfilment of the quest. Responding to the substantive and theoretical aims, it establishes the means of achieving the research aims and objectives through a participatory approach. Further, in discussing the nature of the quest as a search for understanding, I present my justification for the validity of the accounts which collectively constitute the body of evidence underpinning the main argument of the thesis.

Chapter 5, the first of two chapters presenting and analysing my data and findings, describes and interprets the environment in which the daily adventures of the children I engaged in the pursuit of my quest should be understood. Chapters 5 and 6 are structured as the *Choose Your Own Adventure* narrative, with the reader cast as the main protagonist, and are narrated as a personal adventure. Chapter 5 sets the scene, locating and critically evaluating the historical, geographical and social context of the research school as a site for the development of political competence. Chapter 6, through the narration of a fictitious day, presents examples of how children respond to their encounters with adults as agents who police the expectation of



conformity within the institution. It seeks to recognise the alternative agency and developing autonomy of children in the school as a new, but unrecognised, form of political prowess.

The development of this political prowess is mapped through the discussion in Chapter 7 which draws together the findings from both Chapters 5 and 6. It presents the resolution to and evaluation of the quest as a critical discussion of the different possible story endings to the children's adventures. Conclusions are tentatively indicated throughout the discussion of the narrative to aid its flow, and then definitively drawn in Chapters 7 and 8. Chapter 7 illustrates the original contribution to knowledge I claim to make and, in an epilogue, evaluates my part in the creation of the children's narratives and influence over the research process and product. The final chapter concludes my quest, evaluates its accomplishment and highlights the most significant findings and conclusions supporting the thesis' main argument. In addition, in marking the end of one adventure, it suggests new quests and opportunities to further the learning from this research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review: A Politically Competent Child?**

#### **Introduction**

Through reviewing the substantive literature on how the child is positioned in society, understandings of children's social competence, and the role of school in developing that competence, this chapter discusses the context for the main argument of the thesis, locating its research themes. The chapter establishes the substantive purpose of the quest, highlighting the gap in knowledge and understanding to be filled: how children recount and account for political participation and learning at primary school, and the implications this has for developing sustainable political competence and confidence as social actors. The relevance of primary education is brought to the fore; however, this chapter both defines and limits the scope of my enquiry. Due to the constraints of the thesis length, I have not included several other issues, such as the importance of other experiences, spaces, times and people as influencers constituting political identity.

This chapter is organised into three sections. The first section considers what current understandings of 'childhood' and 'being a child' are, how they are defined and what research suggests children's experiences of them are. The second section looks more specifically at constructions of children's political competence. It tackles the question of whether a child should be considered a social agent in his or her own right or as an agent-in-waiting, undergoing the process of becoming a legitimate political actor (James, 2009). Finally, Section 3 deals with how effective the primary school is as a site for the development of young social actors, both in terms of the explicit curriculum and children's experience of being part of a primary school as a politicised community. While this literature review deals with the substantive aims and issues associated with my research, it should be read alongside the following chapter, which considers sociological and philosophical literature, and describes my ontological and epistemological positioning and the conceptual framework within which I have conducted and evaluated my research.

## 2.1 Children and Childhoods

This first section considers different constructions of childhood in the UK, how these constructions are understood as a precursor to adulthood, and the importance of the boundary and relationship between the two life phases. This discussion specifically highlights the resultant issues of trust and control in relation to adults. The difficulty with how we seek to recognise and position children in society is that they all too often do not fit into their given mould. Their accepted place in society is defined for them by adults, not by them (Lam, 2012), so their experience is more likely to be outside or contradictory to expectations, marginalised by lack of recognition as social actors (Lansdown, 2001) and an independent structural part of society. Likening children to weeds, objects named as undesirable in certain locations, James, Jenks and Prout (1998, p.37) write: 'children occupy designated spaces, that is they are placed, in nurseries or schools, or they are conspicuous by their inappropriate or precocious invasion of adult territory: the parental bedroom, Daddy's chair, the public house, or even crossing a busy road. Childhood, we might venture, is that status of personhood which is by definition often in the wrong place.'

James and Prout (1997b, p.230) identify two main temporal themes in the study of childhood. The first is an examination of the time period of childhood, the 'social construction of the ageing process' of young humans as set alongside other periods, e.g. infancy and adolescence. The second is a consideration of how the time spent in childhood is used to order and control children's everyday experiences. They argue that, 'concepts of childhood and of children must take account therefore of the temporal and cultural specificity of ideas and social constructions,' (James and Prout, 1997b, p.232). We cannot meaningfully articulate what childhood is without describing the context in which we are using and applying the concept. On a macro level and in this study this means the primary school experience of children in England, the United Kingdom and perhaps 'rich countries,' as detailed by UNICEF (2007). On a micro level, this is the particular school in which my ethnographic data were collected. Through this chapter and the next, I will argue that any given understanding of childhood is a socially constructed product of an adult-defined world and that it has altered over time and continues to evolve (Adams, 2014; Stables, 2008). Further, the life phase would be better pluralised as *childhoods* (Woodhead, 1997) to reflect its different meanings to, and the experiences of, different groups and individuals.

### 2.1.1 Children's Needs and Constructions of Childhood

Until recently, in the UK definitions of childhood were dominated by views of children as with needs that require protection, characterised by dependency upon adults (Alexander, 2010; Lowe, 2012; Woodhead, 1997). This presents a confusing dualism for children who can be both stifled by protection and chastised for behaviour which is defined as uncharacteristic of their designated age or social stage and therefore deviant at the same time. 'Children's psychological 'needs' are at the heart of contemporary public concern, part of the everyday vocabulary of countless numbers of social welfare workers and teachers, policy-makers and parents. Conceptualising childhood in terms of 'needs' reflects the distinctive status accorded to young humanity in twentieth century western societies,' (Woodhead, 1997 p.63). It is my belief that this portrayal of children does not allow for the recognition of independent political competence; indeed, it excludes it. A child in need of adult mediation to participate and have his/her political agency recognised will, by definition, not be independent or autonomous. From his extensive national and international policy analysis, Woodhead (1997) challenges the ubiquity of the expression 'needs', presenting those children's needs as fact and the product of empirical study and analysis, when almost every one is the product of social construction. Lowe (2012) argues *Every Child Matters* is a clear illustration of these formulations.

Further, Woodhead (1997) argues that framing professional or policy-judgements as needs-based also has the effect of distancing authors from their assumptive narratives, with their authority appearing to issue from children themselves. Moreover, the universalising effect of treating childhood and children's needs as a single entity or experience (James and Prout, 1997a), serves to lessen recognition of their many differing needs and responses to any given situation, documented in the *Cambridge Review* (Alexander, 2010), marginalising the plurality of childhood experiences and 'pathways to maturity' (Woodhead, 1997, p.76). However, as Lansdown (2001) points out, over the last generation we have seen an increasing number of reports which challenge the 'complacency' of public services and primary carers in exercising their duty of care for children. Lansdown (2001) refers to both specific high-profile cases of neglect, abuse and the general lack of children's independent right and access to redress for transgressions against them. Despite public acknowledgement of these needs, society appears ill-equipped to protect children. Watkinson (2012) further argues that in seeking to protect adults from accountability as 'criminals', States

*deny* children human rights by legalising behaviour, such as smacking, which would be unlawful if perpetrated upon adults.

Loreman (2009) poses the question of how far constructions of children are simply a reflection of the society in which they live, suggesting the public condemnation of undesirable actions and behaviours is a response to society's own failings rather than just the young element. The 'adult view that childhood in England is in crisis' (Alexander, 2010, p.63) facilitates further the distancing of responsibility for challenging the status quo. This has been termed variously: the erosion of childhood, the conflation of adulthood and childhood or, more dramatically, the demonization of childhood (Prout, 2005). Goldson (2001, p.38) argues, 'the moribund state of childhood [could be] said to represent a wider immorality and irresponsibility steeped in permissiveness and rooted in the 1960s ... the clamour for rights without associated responsibilities, anomie and the emergence and consolidation of an amoral and utterly dysfunctional 'underclass'.' The correlating idea of childhood disappearing is countered by some authors who point out that children remain subject to adult-centred authority relations (Goldson, 2001; Hendrick, 1997; Lowe, 2012). 'The power and control of adults over children [can be] described ... as 'age-patriarchy' which refers to an imbalance of power, control, and resources manifesting themselves through adult control – expressed as a demand for obedience – over children's space, bodies and time,' (Hendrick, 1997, p.59). Further, Goldson (2001, p.39) argues that in condemning children, they become the primary subjects of a corrective 'adult-state gaze,' where individual children and specifically defined childhoods are created as 'evils' in society. Public outrage coupled with a 'political anxiety' are at such a level that the perception is someone needs to take action (Goldson, 2001, p.34).

Goldson (2001, p.36) argues that the two factors which must be present to facilitate the alienation of children in such a way are: both 'concern and anxiety' allied with 'hostility and contempt'. Children must be seen as responsible for their own actions in such a way that adults have no concern about judging them: they can be blamed for the ills of society as fully-fledged, adult-like members without fear of recriminations from those who might otherwise be held accountable for or seek to protect them. Children, however, are not afforded the same legal protection and rights of advocacy as their older counterparts. Loreman (2009) and Watkinson (2012) consider the physical punishment legally administered upon children and ask what message that sends about their social status within society and with respect to adults. Loreman (2009) cites the prevalence

of corporal punishment as a prime example and points out that it is still legal in most States throughout the world.

The discourse of children's needs legitimises the enduring subordination of children. Prout and James (1997) and Alexander (2010) assert that children cannot be seen outside their dependent relationship with adults, but argue that children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right nonetheless. However, Prout and James (1997) suggest that work which has claimed to be representative of children's worlds exclusively has remained on the margins of recognition within social science, and contend childhood should be treated as similar categories to women and the aged. Hendrick (1997, p.59) echoes this by arguing that children have been positioned in a similar way to, 'the ideal 'bourgeois' wife and mother in her historical role as 'the angel in the home': pampered and loved, an essential ornament serving as testimony to domestic bliss, but subservient to male power.' By characterising children as a minority group, Prout and James (2015) suggest social scientists could begin to identify and examine the limiting practices which construct and contain children and link enquiry to the political agenda including the study of children's rights, and, I would argue, the development of their political identity and competence.

### **2.1.2 Children in Society**

James and Prout (1997b) demonstrate how public policy has defined young people by reference to their age and created deviance in so doing, highlighting 'the uncertain position of teenagers in western, industrialised societies, neither children nor adults, with a multiplicity of different cut off points in different social contexts,' (James and Prout, 1997b, p.236). They point to the apparent anomaly of the teenage mother who is billed as a 'social problem' solely for actions deemed outside her designated age category, disregarding other experiences. Childhood becomes defined by the relative and somewhat arbitrary propriety of behaviour in relation to a particular notion of adulthood. Prout's (2005) evaluation of 'materials and practices' which constitute various forms of childhood and adulthood summarises that

these processes cannot be understood through a conceptual apparatus that constantly strains towards dualistic oppositions. This is not to argue that there are no disjunctures, distinctions or even dichotomies among the phenomena. ...The point is that such differences themselves are a product of heterogeneous processes. (Prout, 2005, p.82)

Cullingford (1992) highlights the absurdity of the notion that an individual ceases to be a child on their eighteenth birthday and immediately acquires the competence necessary to function

effectively as a politically and socially aware being. This competence develops over time and, given meaningful opportunities for development, could be present and accessible in children at a much earlier age (Goswami and Bryant, 2010; Lister, 2008). This is not to suggest, following Cullingford's (1991) and Lockyear's (2008) reasoning, that children should be afforded sole or full responsibility for political decision-making in their lives, but that their participation is desirable and advantageous.

Loreman (2009, p.54) suggests that the idea of children as 'innocent, intellectually unaware and pure' persists due to children's responses to new situations which tend to stimulate what appear to be naïve, self-evident questions. However, the root of this is likely to be from inexperience rather than a lesser intelligence or capacity (Bryant and Goswami, 2010; Lister, 2008; Loreman, 2009) which would be the judgement placed on an adult in such a situation; 'many adults continue to perceive children as being essentially rudimentary, black and white thinkers, and neglect to see the legitimate, serious intellectual work children do,' (Loreman, 2009 p.54). That work is in learning to learn, allowing them to amass the vast amount of knowledge and understanding which they do in the earliest years of their life, for example, learning to speak one or more languages by the age of 6, counting and calculating as well as developing physical, musical and artistic expression (Loreman, 2009).

Historically, the legitimacy of children's independent voices in society has not been recognised (Alexander, 2010; Fahmy, 2005; Rudduck and Fielding, 2006). Children's voices are not perceived as equal to those of adults whose value frameworks continue to deny children that form of participation (Komulainen, 2007). Cullingford (1992, p.vii) has gone as far as to suggest that children are sometimes considered 'fundamentally different beings': as irrational, not honest and unreliable, as unthinking and opinion-less. As such, children's voices have been considered non-political and their testimony has been challenged and marginalised. More recent research (Robinson and Taylor, 2007; and Noyes, 2005) has indicated that not only do children have the capacity to develop analytical and critical discourse, but that, given the opportunity, they also engage readily and honestly in the process unconfined by the social constructs of adult discourses. Rudduck and Fielding (2006, p.225) highlight an 'ideology of immaturity' which has governed the approach towards child participation in political processes and resulted in the disenfranchisement of this section of society.

The danger in focusing on age as the single most important determiner of a life stage, and equating a certain level of maturity or social competence with that, is that it does not allow for physical, cognitive and cultural differences among children (James and Prout, 1997b) or, indeed, wider societal change, all of which have been shown to impact significantly on a child's experience and life expectations (Goldson, 2001). Prout (2005, p.70) summarises: 'the tendency for contemporary social life to be marked by dissolving boundaries and heightened ambiguity is a general one and, partly in response to it, new frameworks for understanding the world after modernity are being brought into existence.' In response to change and diversity in the understandings of different children and childhoods, the *Cambridge Review* points to a 'widening educational gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children' (Alexander, 2010, p.59) which the authors claim could explain the divergent views and experiences of childhood in England today. The report identifies, 'a 'prosperous majority' of children who benefit as never before from factors such as family income, parents' educational background, their neighbourhood and their access to popular schools. Growing up alongside them is a large minority of children experiencing a potentially self-reinforcing cycle of economic and educational disadvantage,' (Alexander, 2010, p.59). Educational experiences have become increasingly diverse in recent decades, yet the expectation of schooling is that it increasingly provides a uniform outcome for all pupils (DfES and QCA, 1999; DfE, 2013).

### **2.1.3 School and the Construction of Childhood**

Hendrick (1997) identifies school as having a pivotal role in the creation, and I would add reinforcement, of a particular kind of childhood. He argues that by way of its legal authority, the introduction of mass schooling was able to impose a vision of childhood upon all children as 'pupils', willing or otherwise (Hendrik, 1997). Societal views and expectations of children's social and political behaviour and their resulting capacity to learn both through formal education and extra-curricular experiences are informed by understandings of the child in school and being schooled (ten Dam and Volman, 2007). Hendrick (1997) argues that these views and expectations, stemming from ideas of what is natural and unnatural, can be seen as a battle between care and protection, correction and reform. The *Cambridge Review* (Alexander, 2010) identified a number of different understandings of childhood and consequent purposes of primary education. The critical differences were in *who* should take responsibility for decision-making affecting the lives of children, representing one of two extremes; it was either the sole responsibility of the capable



adult *or* the entitlement of children to express their views and opinions and be involved in decision-making (Alexander, 2010). The singular notions of the 'pupil' or 'school child' both limit children's ability to self-determine and adults' ability to facilitate the development of their political competence from the apparently coherent and subordinate view of childhood it constructs.

Education's requirement for daily attendance and the physical presence of school buildings serve as a forceful reminder of who and what children are. Hendrik (2015, p.39 – emphasis in original) notes that, 'the classroom and the ideological apparatus of education were crucial because they demanded – indeed, could not do without – a truly *national* childhood, one that ignored (at least theoretically) rural/urban divisions, as well as those of social class.' Children as emergent political beings needed to be able to bear citizen duties, defend the realm, apply themselves in terms of their own labour and uphold a high level of thought and conduct which demanded a subject conformity,' (Hendrik, 2015, p.43). This view was reflected in the many submissions to the *Cambridge Review* which concluded: childhood remains 'a time of dependency and incompetence' (Alexander, 2010 p.63) during which children should be protected from the great and many risks of our society, as discussed in section 2.1.1. Consequently, a child cannot be both dependent and exhibit the independence for political thought and action (Lam, 2012). This is somewhat inconsistent considering society allows for varying levels of capacity and ability in adults, ensuring that they have equal opportunities of access and outcomes in social and political life. The result is that children lack equal input into knowledge construction whilst their voice remains muted or absent in social debate (Alexander, 2010; Lowe, 2012).

Hendrick (1997) attributes a great deal of agency to the school itself in defining the emergent citizen, but I would challenge this today as schools are almost always acting on the imperative of centralised education policy and decentralised governance (Jeffrey and Troman, 2012a), see the discussion on policy directions in section 2.3.1. Schools have little choice in their pedagogical interpretations of the high standards curriculum, and this is rigorously policed by OfSTED, ensuring conformity (Perryman, 2012). The *Cambridge Review* reminds us, there is more to childhood than going to school, but, 'there is not as much as there used to be and what remains is often cribbed and confined by adults,' (Alexander, 2010, p.63). Fler and Quinones (2009) conversely argue that children's access to new technologies increasingly frees them from direct adult intervention, allowing the creation of their own discourses around virtual worlds about which their parents know nothing (Carrington, 2008). This challenges the innocence of the traditional views of

childhood, increases the sense of children's agency and loosens the notion of adult-dependency. Despite an apparent increasing capacity to be actors within their different communities, James, Jenks and Prout (1998) question how far children are able to have constitutive roles in their own culture. The significance of schooling in shaping our views of children and childhood appears to be growing; the effect this has is to perpetuate notions of children's needs and diminished competence necessitating dependence on adults (Lam, 2012).

Alexander (2010, p.53) summarises that 'children today cannot win.' They are represented as both the purest and the most corrupt elements of society at the same time: the fragile and unpolluted innocent as well as the delinquents who are out-of-control and beyond the reach of adult reason (Goldson, 2001). Additionally, 'they find themselves bemoaned as an obese, screen-obsessed generation of couch-potatoes, leading pampered and over-indulged home lives; yet they are also represented as the over-worked and over-stressed victims of a hardened, selfish society where they can no longer be sure of proper physical or emotional nourishment,' (Alexander, 2010 p.53). As a background to the development of political competence, this 'incompleteness' (Walkerdine, 2003) contextualises the ambiguous and potentially damaging relationships children have with the adults, structures and practices which govern their legitimate participation in school.

## **2.2 Understanding Children's Abilities and Competence**

This section looks more specifically at understandings of how children are or can be politically competent and the nature of that competence. It tackles the question of whether a child should be considered a political actor in his/her own right or as an agent-in-waiting, undergoing the process of becoming a legitimate political actor or agent. It is useful at this point to make the distinction between actor and agent. James (2009) argues, for some time children have been considered social actors engaged in the construction of their own lives and immediate environment, but concurs with Mayall's (2002) claim that a greater leap is to credit children with agency. The critical difference is that a child agent can be active in the co-construction of the lives of others and wider society: they can affect change within it. James (2009) argues that viewing children in this way has prompted a reconceptualisation of what childhood is and how children are perceived as members of society. The following section investigates children's political competence as a function of their possible agency, participation in and impact on society.

### 2.2.1 Political Competence

Meadows (2010) and ten Dam and Volman (2007) assert that competence should be understood as context specific: the particular effectiveness of an individual within a system or institution and its given structures and practices. The political competence I consider must be understood as specific to the primary school as a political institution and children's effectiveness within that. ten Dam and Volman (2007, p.281) suggest 'the notion of competence is generally used to refer to the totality of knowledge, skills and attitudes that enables a person to perform tasks and solve problems within a specific social context,' and 'integrating' this knowledge, these skills and attitudes to be able to perform given tasks. Of the school, Meadows (2010, p.256) writes that the setting is known to be 'a major factor in children's cognitive development, and is also an arena for playing a range of social roles.' However, schools' aspirations for political participation and children's experiences of it are not always aligned (Leitch and Mitchell, 2007). The stability of a child's notions of his or her own competence will be threatened by the resulting inconsistencies and that will impact upon his or her ability to act effectively and with confidence.

In characterising social competence, ten Dam and Volman (2007, p.283) describe three principal characteristics: the age or specific phase of development of a child; the interaction between an individual and others; and the ability of children to deal with the social demands made of them. The definition I choose for *political competence* is that it is an aspect of social competence which deals with children's engagement with others in a public realm and is focused on the management of differing individual needs, desires and conflict. Adapting Noyes (2005) summary of the competences available to children, I have organised the political dimensions of social competence as follows: understanding and developing social relationships; understanding and accommodating societal norms and practices; understanding and developing critical approaches. I am also including a fourth area of competence which can be seen as the culmination of all the above, that of 'political activism', embodying active political participation and agency (Ross, 2008).

Children's relationships with adults represent an important vehicle for developing and rehearsing political competences, none of which are beyond the reach of children at primary school (Noyes, 2005). Indeed, at the time of fieldwork, there was increasing pressure through policy initiatives such as School Self-evaluation (Ofsted, 2005) and *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2004) to see these meaningfully promoted in schools. Although this describes desirable educational practice, it is still not formulated or understood as an educational entitlement; this is discussed further in Section 3.

This discussion refers to the policy context at the time of the research, this situation has been superseded by more recent governmental policies, and this is briefly discussed in Chapter 8.

#### *2.2.1.1 Understanding and Developing Social Relationships*

Discussing research on the child as a social person and the development of self-concept in childhood, Meadows (2010, p.72) argues that in 'middle childhood' (primary age), children show 'increasing inter-co-ordination, and more appreciation of the views of others, but still tend to be one-dimensional and not hierarchical.' This may reflect the centrality of fairness to children's perceptions of appropriate behaviour of both their peers and adults (Butler, Robinson and Scanlan, 2005), elevating notions of right and wrong behaviour and the security of predictability this represents. It is during this time of middle childhood in which social comparisons become more significant to children, but, argues Meadows (2010), their differing responses to these comparisons cannot be explained by age and should be seen as the development of an individual's identity and political disposition. At this stage, children are capable of drawing their own conclusions and making judgements based on their own experiences (Moinian, 2006a), but do not necessarily apply the expected adult reasoning and societal norms and arrive at different understandings and decisions (Lister, 2008).

Butler, Robinson and Scanlan's (2005) study of *Children and Decision-making* found that within the family, children understood the authority of their parents as deriving from their greater competence and life experience rather than as a function of their parental status. Additionally, the study found that, 'children incline very strongly to the practice of participatory decision making predicated on their sense of fairness,' (Butler, Robinson and Scanlan, 2005, p.71). These children appreciated that not all outcomes would be equal, though, and held more firmly to notions of fairness in treatment and process. This suggests a predisposition for compromise and collaboration and an opportunity for primary teaching. McCluskey *et al.*'s (2013) findings in Scottish primary schools echo this, suggesting that the sense of personal and group responsibility was better developed in schools where children had opportunities to participate in the political life of the school, but this was by no means a common experience. One problem Ross (2008, p.69) identifies is that educational practice can tend to make an assumption of 'the naturalness of competition' at the expense of collaboration, making school a less than ideal place to develop cooperative practices.

### 2.2.1.2 Understanding and Accommodating Societal Norms and Practices

Lockyear (2008) describes the process of assimilating societal norms as becoming 'politically literate' which includes developing a knowledge of political ideas, adopting an approach which values rational argument and persuasiveness, as well as engaging in political activity. However, Lockyear denies the possibility and desirability of political equality between children and adults. Political literacy and legitimacy can only be acquired through practice, an apprenticeship into institutions, such as schools, which facilitate 'the exercise of participatory rights' and practise 'community rationality' (Lockyear, 2008, p.29). The difficulty with this approach is knowing when child participation should gain the same recognition as adult participation, as Stables (2008) points out: childhood is not preparation for life itself, childhood is living. Lister (2008) identifies a theme common to much citizenship literature that children are not yet recognised for the responsibilities that they *are* capable of assuming and exercising. Moreover, it is a child's assumed lack of competence, even irrationality (Cullingford, 1992), which allegedly justifies their continuing political marginalisation (Lam, 2012).

Contrastingly, the *Children and Decision-Making* study mentioned earlier, found that children had a relatively sophisticated notion of justice as fairness which distinguished between being treated fairly and treated identically, understanding the need for such differences depending on the context, (Butler, Robinson and Scanlan, 2005). This is supported by McCluskey *et al.*'s (2013) findings in Scottish primary schools where the significance of fairness was repeatedly stressed. Butler, Robinson and Scanlan (2005) go on to argue that children should be recognised as having a 'legitimate moral claim' to fairness and equitable treatment in the process of decision-making, especially in formal contexts where child participation is sought. However, society's emphasis on children's responsibilities to others over their right or entitlement to participation, reflected in their ability to articulate responsibility over rights (Lister, 2008), does not accommodate this. Regardless of the quality of children's understanding of societal norms and practices, they are not permitted to participate.

### 2.2.1.3 Understanding and Developing Critical Approaches

In examining different dimensions of social competence, ten Dam and Volman (2007) highlight the distinction often made between interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of competence and suggest that the intrapersonal suffers with school focus often being on the interpersonal. This

reflects the lack of attention paid to developing critical approaches and thinking in school for political participation in society (ten Dam and Volman, 2004). I contend that this is a potentially damaging omission; 'critical thinking protects us from sloppy and conformist thinking and insulates us against empty dogmatism and rhetoric. Critical thinking is ... closely tied to the development of autonomy, or the ability to decide for ourselves what we believe according to our own deliberations and not on the basis of what others claim,' (Wilson Mulnix, 2012, p.473). It is this fundamental link between critical thinking and autonomy or self-determination, which provides perhaps the greatest threat to its development in schools from the challenge it represents to the given order (John, 2003).

ten Dam and Volman (2007) argue social competence in schools is interpreted as developing the ability to conform to institutional norms. Encouraging, let alone teaching critical thinking challenges the authority of those norms and teachers' ability to deliver curriculum goals. As a result, teaching and learning tend to focus on the knowledge aspects of political competence (Perryman, 2012). This focus is to the neglect of the cognitive ability required to effectively apply that competence; 'there is a difference between having information at our disposal on the one hand, and knowing what to do with that information in order to reach reasoned and justified conclusions on the other. The former is domain knowledge, the latter is critical thinking,' (Wilson Mulnix, 2012, p.470). It is from being able to identify and make judgements about the logic or meaningfulness of others' assumptions and arguments that the possibility of cognitive conflict and reasoned resistance is created. However, this is counter-productive to a system seeking to maintain the status quo to reinforce its own position (Ross, 2008). Problematically, suppressing the development of critical thinking through the demands of a performative culture, only fosters nondemocratic participative practices which need un-learning in later education (Noyes, 2005).

Whilst Wilson Mulnix's (2012) discussion on teaching critical thinking relates to her experience in tertiary education, she explains how with any competence, cognitive or other, some individuals will be more proficient than others and quicker to develop the necessary habits of mind. Stein and Albro's (2001) work on very young children's cognitive capacity to understand social conflict and reproduce argument supports the application of such reasoning and thinking to children. Of course the younger person's effective competence will be dampened by the relative lack of experience and opportunities to practise critical thinking, but this does not mean that the capacity to develop it is absent (Noyes, 2005). In their research for the *Cambridge Review*, Goswami and

Bryant (2010) report on recent developments in the way the neurological processes of children's learning are understood. Current thinking is that those processes are essentially the same in children and adults – we think and learn physiologically in the same way – and the greater sophistication of adult thinking comes with experience, not neurophysiological development.

#### *2.2.1.4 Understanding and Developing 'Political Activism' (Ross, 2008)*

Pole, Pilcher and Williams' (2005) suggest that we recognise youth 'is prone to flux, negotiation and structural constraints' which reflects a more 'realistic' picture of the lived experiences of young people. Smith, Lister and Middleton (2005, p.175) conclude their discussion on young people as active citizens with: 'established approaches to 'active citizenship' underestimate the full diversity and fluidity of social participation in lived practice. As a result, the full extent of young people's social participation is being obscured and underexposed.' The approach Smith, Lister and Middleton (2005) recommend adopting is one that works on the basis of recognising what young people do rather than what they do not do. An alternative view of developing political competence that Ross (2008) introduces is that of the *political activist* motivated by particular social issues, the *Cambridge Review* found good examples of this in climate change and safeguarding the environment (Alexander, 2010). Ross (2008, p.69) explains that this 'active citizenship requires the ability to engage in action for social change, the establishment of active solidarity, and the extension of rights: of necessity, it is engaging in debate, discussion and controversy, and using skills of engaging with and arguing with alternative viewpoints.'

Children in the *Children and Decision-Making* study (Butler, Robinson and Scanlan, 2005) saw themselves as in the process of developing competent decision-making skills, and as increasingly able to do so within the family. However, few actually claimed to be autonomous decision-makers, and how far this competence is transferable to other situations is not fully discussed. I argue that children are competent in many ways and areas, but that this does not always translate into effective participation and agency. This is due to the lack of recognition of children's legitimate participation (Smith, Lister and Middleton, 2005) which undermines self-confidence. As ten Dam and Volman (2007, p.287) suggest,

A certain level of self-confidence and a positive self-image are essential to be able to behave in a socially competent way. ... Someone's self-image can be understood as a value orientation. It concerns ideas, convictions and values regarding 'yourself'.

Problematically, children are perhaps most effective outside the established channels for their participation (Carrington, 2008), allowing such forms of political activism to be marginalised as deviance or insubordination. One difficulty Thomas, Whybrow and Scharber (2012) highlight is that underlying educational discourse is an instrumental view of participation in which it is valued for its utility to other ends. Children's political participation is not an independent educational goal. Ross (2008) suggests that this can be explained by politicians and public servants seeking to 'buttress' the structures and practices which gave them power and maintain their authority. The good political actor accepts the value and validity of the status quo, acting only in support of maintaining current structures and participating through pre-existing channels (ten Dam and Volman, 2007).

### **2.2.2 Effective Agency and Participation**

There are two dimensions to understanding children's agency. First, how far individuals are capable of effecting social and political change and, second, how far they are empowered to do so (Prout, 2005): to participate in society. John (2003, p.209) contends that the issue of participation is fundamental in 'acknowledging children as powerful agents in their own lives and citizens in their community.' However, the acceptance of the welfare or needs model of childhood has promoted the societal view that children are not capable of making meaningful contributions to their own well-being (Lansdown, 2001; Woodhead, 1997). Child action is perceived to be in need of adult mediation and even manipulation to make it acceptable to dominant discourses.

Children's testimonies in the *Cambridge Review*, though, authoritatively assert their belief that they are effective change agents and have an impact through their participation (Alexander, 2010). However, the force of this claim becomes problematic if a child's perception of active agency has been curtailed by prior adult intervention and definition. Moinian (2006a) explores notions of children's effective agency in her work in schools and argues that although children are able to accurately identify and suggest solutions to problems which affect them, they face a barrier to actualising participation from feeling they lack legitimacy in doing so. This was echoed in Pole, Pilcher and Williams' (2005) research and one conclusion of the *Cambridge Review* which identified 'a lack of engagement brought about by a feeling of disempowerment,' (Alexander, 2010, p.71).

Lansdown (2001) develops this further by arguing that mistakes have been made by omitting children from decision-making processes which directly affect their futures, although he does not



give examples of where this has been the case. Lansdown (2001, p.93) asserts that 'far from being 'in-waiting' until they acquire adult competencies, children can, when empowered to do so, act as a source of expertise, skills and information for adults and contribute towards meeting their own needs.' Notably, it is still implicit within Lansdown's phrasing that children's actions are in service of adult decision-making, as a resource rather than a recognised contributor. Thomas (2007) argues that the success and quality of children's participation depends on the aims present in involving young people in political processes and the value commitments behind those aims. One challenge with current interpretations of children's political participation is that invariably 'participation is a means to an end,' (Thomas, Whybrow and Scharber, 2012, p. 806), operating without recognising the exercise of power. 'Individuals are socialised into social and political democratic processes through participation,' (Thomas, Whybrow and Scharber, 2012, p.802), serving an educational purpose. Alexander (2010) explicitly identifies the responsibility for developing agency as being with education, but this is problematic when schools are not traditionally organised to include children's participation (Ruddock and Fielding, 2006). Additionally, Fleming (2013) reports that children in her study were quick to recognise tokenistic participation, challenging the value of such practices. This also highlights divergences in understandings of the concept of participation, and its function within society for its members (Fleming, 2013).

Lister (2008) argues that whilst the basic legal requirements of citizenship cannot be discarded in order to accommodate children's particular needs, they could be 'reshaped' to allow for recognition of what they can contribute to their different communities and participate politically if not formally acknowledged as citizens. This also recognises that children can behave in a more citizen-like way than some of their adult counterparts. As Lister (2008, p.18) points out, 'some children are deploying their agency as citizens without first enjoying the rights of citizenship.' In response to the above, I question whether the idea of 'being' or 'becoming' (James, 2009) has to be mutually exclusive. All social actors have differing and fluctuating levels of capacity, competence and experience regardless of their age (Pole, Pilcher and Williams, 2005): we are masters of some skills and apprentices to others. There is an element of participation which both necessitates and generates autonomous agency as self-determination or self-actualisation. The challenge for children is achieving this in a time and society which does not consistently recognise or respect their autonomy or independence (Lam, 2012). Authors of the *Cambridge Review* warn, however, of the limits to the conclusions which can be drawn in this area due to the absence of

child contributions to research and the lack of meaningful knowledge this represents (Alexander, 2010).

### **2.2.3 Children as Independent Social Actors: Rights-holders and Citizens**

Children's age and maturity have traditionally been considered barriers to their political involvement in society. Being young and biologically immature was equated with intellectual and cognitive incompetence up until the mid-twentieth century (Hendrick, 1997), and it must be acknowledged that this still informs much adult thinking and decision-making (Alexander, 2010). Despite legal and educational imperatives acknowledging children's meaningful participation in the UK (discussed in the next section), resistance to recognising children as legitimate rights-holders, as formulated by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN, 1989) (*UNCRC*), has come from two key sources. It is a perceived threat to order and stability (John, 2003); and it frees children from parental control, breaking the long-established 'ownership' of children by their parents (Lansdown, 2001).

Acknowledging that children are rights-holders and not merely the recipients of adult protection adds a new dimension to child-adult relations. Lansdown (2001, p.93) argues that whilst it is still premised on children as having needs, it acknowledges a 'right to have those needs met.' Hendrick (1997) cites the Year of the Child in 1979 as representing the birth of a new children's rights movement which focused on listening to children's grievances and campaigning on their behalf rather than the more traditional 'passive and often regressive protection of children' (Hendrick, 1997, p.57). However, the subsequent *Children Act* of 1989, he claims has done little to further enhance children's rights and despite the great expectations for it, a view supported also by Butcher and Andrews' (2009) assessment of the *Children Act* (2004). Defining children as dependent has been safe and enduring. Woodhead (1997) asserts that the challenge is now to reinterpret childhood within a rights rather than needs framework to meaningfully empower children. He argues, 'children's rights breaks through the paternalist, protectionist constructions that emphasise children as powerless dependents, separated-off from adult society and effectively excluded from participation in shaping their own destiny,' (Woodhead, 1997, p.80).

Although Article 12 of the *UNCRC* (1989) gives children the right to be heard and have their views taken seriously 'in accordance with their age and maturity,' how that is integrated into policy and law can be problematic (Osler, 2010). Children's 'best interests' are still determined for them by

the adults around them, albeit guided by policy documents and good intentions. Woodhead (1997, p.80) argues that challenging the orthodoxy of protectionism has resulted in a 'tension between protection and participation rights.' At times when their rights explicitly conflict with adults' rights, children may not be heard or their voices are marginalised (Watkinson, 2012). Lansdown (2001) cites the example of the Labour government's (1997-2001) reluctance to even consult the adult public on ending all physical punishment of children for fear of transgressing the rights of parents to decide the rules in their own homes. Lister (2008, p.13) concludes, 'children are not respected and therefore do not enjoy genuine equality of status as citizens in the here and now.'

The *Cambridge Review* identifies an increase in the attention that is now paid to the political, legal and moral status of children and the role adults should play in recognising this (Alexander, 2010), but suggests no expectation of further development. The *UNCRC* has not been incorporated into English law and there are not yet the same rigorous guidelines governing children's participation in schools or society which Ofsted can easily measure and report back on. Recent policy-making has created *Every Child Matters*, the *Children's Plan*, and Children's Commissioners, but Piper (2008) argues the result of subsequent decisions in education law cases have narrowed the public interpretation of children's rights and participation. The danger in allowing understandings to emerge from a *post hoc* rationalisation of policy aims (Alexander, 2010), rather than continued active decision-making is that the legal and political structures and practices become uncritical self-fulfilling prophecies, constructing meaning to sustain themselves.

### **2.3 The Role of Primary Schools in Developing Children's Participation and Agency**

Viewing children as social and political agents in their own right reflects the balance of responsibility for safe-guarding their rights shifting from the private to the public realm (Reay, 1998). It is the expectation of government, through policy for the protection and development of children from birth (Butcher and Andrews, 2009), that childcare settings and schools now provide that socialising function which was once the prerogative of home and the church. School is increasingly expected to be a model for society and teach what appropriate behaviour is. However, the resulting divisions have never been easily recognised or uncontroversial, making them difficult to navigate for parents, children and schools. Reporting in the *Cambridge Review*, Alexander (2010, p.65) identifies the inherent conflict in this situation: 'every society has to determine the respective responsibilities of the state and of parents for the care and education of children, but the English response has been distinctive. ... In other European countries, such as

France and Finland, there are clear divisions of responsibility, with parents doing the caring and socialising, and schools doing the schooling.’ Within this context, Section 3 examines how far the primary school is an effective place for the development of active social and political competence. This discussion encompasses both national and international law and policy, an analysis of the curriculum, school management and effectiveness as well as current research into children’s experiences of political action and agency at school. As suggested earlier, I limit my discussion of the educational policy context to that which is historically relevant to this study, subsequent changes are highlighted in Chapter 8.

### **2.3.1 Policy Directions**

The imperative for a child’s participation in their own schooling comes from several different public sources. The *UNCRC* (UN, 1989) states that all children should be given the opportunity to express their opinions and be heard on matters which affect them. *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2004) sought to ensure that children share in the leadership of their own learning and take responsibility for that role. The degree to which that has happened and challenges to it will be discussed later. Further, the Ofsted School Self-Evaluation process requires evidence that children’s opinions and ideas are sought and responded to as one criterion for a ‘satisfactory school’ (Ofsted, 2005). This framework of standards appears very supportive of the promotion of a participatory environment. However, each document has a different purpose and serves to perform a different function for the issuing authority: the United Nations is setting the standard for recognition of the rights of the child globally; the Government is seeking to measure and demonstrate improved performance with the ultimate aim of re-election to power; the Office of Standards in Education needs both to justify and legitimise its regulatory work to stakeholders in government, schools and society at large. What appeared supportive in theory, has proved confusing and undermining in practice. The *Cambridge Review* goes as far as to question the sincerity of such UK policy (Alexander, 2010).

Moreover, Butcher and Andrews (2009) claim that the *Children Act* (2004) has legitimised unprecedented government intervention into the lives of all children and a redefinition of childhood. The Act has extended the arm of the state to the care of all children from birth, not just those at risk, and not just children’s education. This type of intervention has been named ‘Educare’, and is defined in the *Children’s Plan* as: ‘integrated education and childcare,’ (DCSF, 2007). Integrating childcare into the creation of the Early Years Foundation Stage removes the

distinction between the two, presenting new conflicts. Reay (1998) identifies a 'reconstructing' of roles and responsibilities shared between home and the primary school, changing the public-private balance by shifting aspects of school practice into the home and increasing the degree of parental incursion into the school. Reay (1998) gives examples of the increase in homework activities and the collection of supermarket vouchers for school equipment as well as the introduction of parental choice as 'consumers' of education into education policy discourse. Additionally, these present further examples of where children's participation is completely bypassed. Responsibility for care, development and schooling is always assumed to be outside the child. Children's subsequent feelings of lack of empowerment described in the *Cambridge Review* (Alexander, 2010) should not, therefore, be surprising.

When reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2008, the four UK Commissioners for Children suggested that although the convention had been ratified many years ago and in spite of some good practice. Progress in achieving children's participative rights was limited and included a resistance to seeking the views of younger children (UK Children's Commissioners, 2008). The *Cambridge Review* also claims that for many years, children's independent input into their learning and work done at home has been undervalued by adults (Alexander, 2010). James and Prout (1997a) see a devaluing of the present for children and childhoods reflected in the relationship between schooling and a capitalist imperative: education is important as it relates to the economic futures and outcomes of individual workers and the collective workforce (Kjørholt, 2013). This is supported by children's own testimony to the *Cambridge Review* as they frequently cite the purpose of education and schooling being the way to get a good job (Alexander, 2010). Cullingford (1991) aptly describes such education and schooling as 'industrial'. If it is not the desired aim of any of the aforementioned authorities, the authenticity of children's participation in their own learning must be questioned.

Goldson (2001) concludes that, despite many policy initiatives, children remain the subjects of 'repressive' governance. Further, Lansdown (2001) argues, the prescription of attainment targets and measurable outcomes for existing policy at ever-earlier ages challenges the *UNCRC* provision for children's right to self-expression and play. On these readings, current policy is not designed or interpreted to facilitate the protection of children's rights or promote their right to meaningful participation in society. It seeks to create 'useful adult citizens' who see no need for dissent and thereby assure the elimination of anti-social behaviour and instincts (Busher and Cremin, 2012,

p.2). This imperative is one which Michel Foucault (1995) described in *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison* and is discussed as a context for understanding educational policy and practice in more detail in Chapter 3. For genuine democratic participation to develop and root itself within an organisation, individual schools would have to make it an explicit aim and seek to radically redefine their culture (Noyes, 2005).

### **2.3.2 School Management and Effectiveness: Cultures of Performativity**

Effective school management can be understood as raising standards, measured largely by test results within a culture of performativity, towards the achievement of a highly skilled workforce able to compete in the global knowledge economy (Jeffrey and Troman, 2012a). 'Performativity is a principle of governance which establishes strictly functional relations between an institution and its inside and outside environments,' (Jeffrey and Troman, 2012b). Understanding the discourse of performativity and its impact on children, schools and their staff is vital to being able to evaluate their capacity to prepare children for political participation in society. This performative focus accommodates the entitlement to an education of equal opportunity and has the potential to promote the high aspirations detailed in the *UNCRC* (1989), but that is where the enforcement of children's rights appears to end. There is no *right* to a student council in schools; children are excluded from the governing body; there is no *right* to be consulted on teaching methods or curriculum, school policies or proposed national legislation (Lansdown, 2001). The result is that education is something that adults continue to do to and for children who are positioned as its passive consumers (Woodhead, 1997). Using the example of the *Every Child Matters Outcomes* (DCSF, 2008), Butcher and Andrews (2009, p.46) go as far as to describe these national indicators as an 'illustration of the adult-focused agenda pressing down on children and their childhoods.'

By elevating academic attainment to the position of the most important function and outcome of primary education, Butcher and Andrews (2009, p.36) argue it 'likens childhood to a linear production model rather than a complex subtle and varied process.' To promote the development of healthy and effective political competence, the complexity of children's social and political identities needs to be recognised as it is with adults. This requires a shift in view from seeing children as *becoming* politically conversant to *being* politically conversant in school life (Lockyear, 2008) and therefore acknowledged contributors and participants. Expanding on how difficult political competence can be to develop within the hierarchical, undemocratic practices of state schools, Rudduck and Fielding (2006, p.225) describe the need for a 'rupturing of traditional power

relations.' If staff do not live and work by democratic principles and practices, these cannot be easily extended to children. This view is also supported by the research of Robinson and Taylor (2007) in which teachers have described little motivation to elevate the expression of the child's voice when their own is not heard. In an age of 'de-professionalisation' of teachers (Noyes, 2005), where society at large and governing elites do not value their professional or political participation, teachers may struggle to empower children when they themselves feel powerless. Moreover, the existing culture of performativity effectively delegitimises child and teacher critical engagement with an institution's structure and practices (Perryman, 2012).

The absence of children's explicit political participation in schools can be understood as the apparent lack of need for it: the current philosophy of attainment over entitlement requires little or no political participation from children (Busher and Cremin, 2012). If children are not asked to voice their ideas and opinions, the imperative to develop the skills, understanding and attributes that would allow them to do it effectively is lessened. What schools *are* required to do effectively is improve results (Troman, Jeffrey and Raggl, 2007). The resulting rigid curricula, from the inception of the *National Curriculum* in 1988 and through the development of subsequent formulaic pedagogies such as the *Numeracy Strategies* and *Literacy Strategies*, have produced a mechanisation of children's learning experiences. James, Jenks and Prout (1998, p.45) explain that 'the placing of children in classrooms to enable the general communication of one teacher to reach all is a move towards the development of an educational machine, further facilitated by the technologies of the blackboard, whiteboard, overhead projector, [and] VDU.' It ensures that what happens in each classroom space and during each timetabled session is as similar as it can be: a 'disciplined system of control' (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998, p.45), discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

The last two decades have seen a resurgence in calls for greater creativity and flexibility in the curriculum, and this has gradually moved into educational policy and discourse (Troman, Jeffrey and Raggl, 2007). However, the legacy of the imposition of the earlier curricula documents and enduring pedagogic strategies is that schools and teachers expect to follow protocol, fearing the wrath of Ofsted and the condemnation of peers and superiors for non-conformity: the effect of enforcement 'through a punitive school inspection regime' (Busher and Cremin, 2012, p.1). The culture of performativity has successfully seen off difference in the classroom: learning and teaching are prescribed and dissent is made undesirable.

The performative structures and practices which demand the subordination of non-essential learning, such as political competence, also *require* evidence of children's participation in their own learning as described in the previous section. The result, argue Komulainen (2007) and Robinson and Taylor (2007), is the growth of a consultation culture which, while increasing access for many groups, has been criticised for misrepresentation and seeking to control that participation. The agenda for consultation exercises is invariably not set by those who are consulted, and as such can be seen as a mechanism for affording legitimacy to the given programme of change and maintaining the status quo. Rudduck and Fielding (2006) draw a distinction between 'having a voice' and 'finding a voice'. Agency in the former is very much with those who control and manage education policy and its implementation. Contrastingly, agency in *finding a voice* is focused on empowering the ground-level participant and does not fit within the current, established channels of communication and consultation. An ensuing danger from consulting children on particular, single issues is that it cannot, by definition, support a culture of participation that has longevity: this is 'participation by invitation' (Fleming, 2013), and not habitual. Additionally, Osler (2010) argues that by focusing on children's voice alone is not empowering children, but expediently effecting political change.

### **2.3.3 Curriculum**

Understanding the curricula expectations of schools, teachers and pupils is important in being able to critically evaluate whether meaningful participation is possible within the given framework. Governmental rhetoric has centred on developing responsible citizenship (Alexander, 2010; Lister, 2008), but how far the curriculum and its implementation support this is questionable. In a section on 'The Schooled Child', James, Jenks and Prout (1998) describe how childhood is spatially and temporally controlled through a child's experience of the curriculum in school as passage to adulthood. Formalised curricula represent conclusions to deliberate decision-making processes which are based on particular beliefs about childhood, its development and relationship to adulthood (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). Creating curricula, 'involves selections, choices, rules and conventions, all of which relate to questions of power, issues of personal identity and philosophies of human nature and potential, and all of which are specifically focused on the child,' (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998, pp.41-2). I would argue this not only applies to how a child should behave, but also what he or she becomes as an adult member of society. James, Jenks and Prout (1998, p.42) conclude, 'the knowledge that comprises the school curriculum instances



humankind's selection from and control of its world; its replication and repetition, ... the control of others through the constitution of the child's body and consciousness into the form of an educational identity.'

Analysing the curriculum can be interpreted as an analysis of the mechanisms of control of the educational space of childhood. Loreman (2009, p.66) argues that the 'prescriptive, superficial, subject-based curriculum has been adopted, in part, because those who make curriculum decisions do not trust children or teachers to adequately negotiate and co-construct knowledge which will produce learning in areas which they believe will be of importance now, or, more importantly to them, in the future.' Jeffrey and Troman (2012b) and Allen (2013) further argue that it is the economic outcomes of the state and incumbent government which define the curricula to be taught and associated pedagogical strategies. This recognised intent is supported by many submissions to the *Cambridge Review* which defined getting 'work' or 'a good job' as a primary aim of schooling (Alexander, 2010). Furthermore, the current focus on skills acquisition fashions education as an assembly-line process for the production of 'the citizen', 'the worker' or 'the life-long learner', depending on the focus of the particular initiative (Alexander, 2010). However, there is little or no acknowledgement that the citizen, worker and life-long learner will actually be one and the same individual taking many different forms (Stables, 2008).

Whilst the first of the 'main purposes' of the *National Curriculum* (at the time of the study) declared the establishment of an educational entitlement to 'self-fulfilment as active and responsible citizens' (DfES, 1999), the other purposes of the curriculum did not refer to this aspect of learning again. In other parts of the document, the aims of the curriculum described responsible, caring citizens who tolerate difference and diversity and who develop as independent 'consumers' in society (DfES, 1999). This rhetoric appears to seek compliance with current societal and educational norms. ten Dam and Volman (2007, p.285) identify school as a place which, although it requires the development of 'social competence' to navigate its inherent challenges, 'has not been assigned a specific task in stimulating this competence.' For example, there is no reference to critically challenging authority where that may be perceived as abusing human rights, let alone seeking redress through taking political action: Lansdown's (2001) interpretation of the *UNCRC* as embodying a right to protection *from* the State is conspicuous by its absence. The *Cambridge Review* (Alexander, 2010) paints a picture of the primary curriculum as a victim of muddled discourse, pointing to the inconsistent and politically expedient use of the value-

dependent terms: curriculum, subject, timetable, knowledge, discipline and skill. Multiple source documents which use these terms without adequate definition or with no reference to educational aims or philosophy render the discourse incoherent (Alexander, 2010).

The *Cambridge Review* (Alexander, 2010, p.240) suggests the debate on curriculum content is obscured by a current 'standards, not curriculum' dualism. The *Cambridge Review's* analysis highlights the heavy emphasis on literacy and numeracy through timetable expectations, centralised funding, availability of training and development as well as the measurement and league-tabling of children's test performances (Alexander, 2010). 'The rest' is not seen to be valued, which is problematic for the development of meaningful political competence. For democratic intent to be realised, pedagogical and individual school practices must support authentic active political participation (Noyes, 2005; Pike, 2007). Problematically, the ubiquity of self-regulating learning initiatives within the curriculum and current pedagogical strategies such as *Assessment for Learning* (William and Black, 1998), *Personal, Social, Health and Moral Education (PSHME)* and *Citizenship* seriously undermine any stated intent to promote children's autonomy in political activity (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009; Hope, 2010). While all the above have value in their own right to the social and educational development of children, they become exclusionary orthodoxies of self-regulation and social control when they define a single, appropriate action or response for children. If a school's ethos serves only to perpetuate this through its own particular hidden curriculum (Pike, 2007), there is very little room for the development of children's political competence and self-determination.

Being responsive to children, Loreman (2009) argues, is critical to developing a relevant and meaningful curriculum and learning experiences for children. This is based on greater respect for children's capabilities and abilities and working from what they can do (Lister, 2008), rather than an alienated, prescriptive document. The *Cambridge Review* authors document increased respect for children as agents in their own right, as valued individuals and as citizens – a belief supported by the idea that education should be about empowerment among many respondents (Alexander, 2010). Problematically in the UK, being responsive to government policy and initiatives is what is required of schools by the regulating bodies (local authorities and Ofsted) in a performance which is monitored and measured by them (Perryman, 2012). The locus of power and authority lies outside the school, far from the children themselves. The national curriculum for England will not meet the desired standard for participation until it requires it and, as the Children's

Commissioners reported in 2008, until it is enshrined in law (Alexander, 2010). I argue that the current organisation of schooling reflects a utilitarian aim of governance of the child as a social and economic investment, and is not, therefore, designed to facilitate the development of active political competence as a core curriculum aim. Consequently, this competence is marginalised and the children's formal experience in school appears tokenistic (Leitch and Mitchell, 2007).

#### **2.3.4 Being Political at School: Gaining Democratic Experience**

This section shifts the focus of discussion away from structured political education to more flexible political learning. Developing active political competence in school requires a commitment to children's habitual participation as an apprenticeship to meaningful political agency, valuing the contribution they make. As Rudduck and Fielding (2006) point out, this is not to imply that only at the end of the apprenticeship can children participate legitimately, but that it is through authentic social and political practice without predetermined outcomes that the direct expression of children's voices is achieved. This follows the theoretical propositions made by Paulo Freire (1996) in his descriptions of emancipatory education: an education that is both the product of, and at the same time produces, a democratic citizenry. Alexander (2010, p.69) points out that for many children school is their most valuable political resource and community, 'it fosters good personal relations among children who may come from different backgrounds but share a locality, and to some extent, between children and adults.' The quality of the participative experience at school, therefore, is of fundamental importance in the effective development of children's social and political competence. However, the gap between the potential and the actual seems problematically wide (Leitch and Mitchell, 2007). Understanding children's experiences of being at school is crucial to making an assessment of how effective a time and place it is for developing their political competence.

Through education, what children learn is influenced by the curriculum and pedagogical practices, but their experience of living and learning within the school institution and community also plays an important role (Pike, 2007), and this does not always coincide with curricular or policy intentions. Research from the *Cambridge Review* (Alexander, 2010, p.68) found significant barriers to children's participation in their communities rooted in 'adult-child power relations and institutional practices,' despite the policy emphasis on children's inclusion. The divergence of educational goals and children's experience can cause conflict and present new challenges for children in negotiating the environment and relationships with adults therein (Wang and

Holcombe, 2010). From their research and experience, Ruddock and Fielding (2006) describe schools generally as culturally unsupportive of democratic practice: they are hierarchical, uncritical, lacking in equal regard for all members of the community which renders participative experiences non-authentic. The societal and bureaucratic lack of trust in and respect for teachers and teaching in schools has permeated the institutions themselves, where the micro-management of individual organisations mirrors the 'accountability' and 'performativity' driven national discourse (see Busher and Cremin, 2012; Robinson and Taylor, 2007; Noyes, 2005; Ball, 2003).

There is an apparent lack of imperative or incentive for children, or indeed teachers, to learn to trust their own judgement and develop political autonomy (Busher and Cremin, 2012). This is not encouraged and certainly not overtly taught; perhaps it represents too explicit a form of political resistance and therefore stands against institutional political integrity (Ross, 2008). Quite the opposite is cultivated in schools: learning to doubt and question the self. The controlling mechanisms of examination and monitoring dominate in seeking to produce uniform and compliant pupils (ten Dam and Volman, 2007), highlighting the absence of critical practices within teaching and learning. Further, children's experience of venturing away from or outside the norm is one of educational correction, designed to mould them into the institutionalised ideal learner (Bradbury, 2013) and results in children's lack of regard for their own legitimate agency (ten Dam and Volman, 2007). However, as reported by the *Cambridge Review*, 'children's impressive confidence where they had learned about practical strategies for responding to environmental challenges demonstrates the positive part that schools can play in replacing passive anxieties with a hopeful sense of their capacity to act,' (Alexander, 2010, p.61). The difficulty Ross (2008) sees is that this is not always integrated into pedagogical practice, but is ad hoc and dependent on teachers' interests, and, I would add, willingness to act in an often unsupportive environment.

While there are many mechanisms in place to ensure that teachers' are held accountable for their performance as it relates to the academic attainment of their pupils (Noyes 2005), there are no such measures to develop a child's responsibility through accountability. With the current emphasis on personalised learning and self-evaluation, this is perhaps a temporary omission. However, what it leaves is an inequality of scrutiny and, despite public policy acknowledging the role the individual learner plays in their own attainment (DfES, 2004), a complete absence of structured and expected learner responsibility for their own learning. This leaves a situation which

holds very low expectations for children's meaningful rights and participation generally when no concurrent responsibility is afforded them.

#### **2.4 Conclusions for the Literature Review: Defining my Quest**

My review of the literature has argued that school structures and practices are neither designed nor enacted with the aim of facilitating political competence. Ross (2008) questions how valuable the notion of 'education for democracy' is if it seeks merely to maintain or improve levels of voting in elections: what a political agent needs to know and be able to process is significantly limited by this view. Current incarnations of 'democratic education' or 'education for democratic citizenship' in the UK have suffered dilution and dislocation within the culture of performativity and the need to secure quantitative measurable accountability (Noyes, 2005; Kakos, 2012). The imperative to show that education for citizenship *is taking place* in as many schools as possible has detracted from ensuring these initiatives result in valuable and relevant learning (Perryman, 2012). Schools are not directed specifically to develop political competence, but to provide evidence that children have been made aware of it and to indicate where this has happened.

The discourse of school effectiveness within a culture of performativity positions children as perpetually deficient. The child is constructed as an incompetent or under-competent adult in a state of 'becoming' (James, 2009) and not recognised as legitimate political agent in his or her own right (Lam, 2012). However, it is my contention that children should be considered as social agents. Whatever their relationship to or with adults and adulthood, children are beings in their own right and make distinct contributions (Stables, 2008). To attempt to understand children's actions merely as reflections of adult concerns is to ignore the decision-making and considered intent behind their actions (Butler, Robinson and Scanlan, 2005). This is not an argument equating children with adults, but one suggesting they are also individual members of society and not to be approached with a 'shortfall' or deficit model (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998).

My argument is that positioning children as political agents is fundamental to delivering a meaningful learning experience which promotes active political competence for children's effective participation in society. As has been discussed, there is a lot which renders children's experiences of childhood confusing and conflicting. The inconsistent treatment of children, sometimes as individuals with rights and responsibilities, as adults in the making or lacking legitimacy before various authorities, leaves them in something of a social, political and legal no-

man's land. When the laws and norms of society appear inconsistently conceived and administered (Piper, 2008), expecting children to know how to approach different situations is problematic. This becomes further challenged by their time and experience within school: a place which is designated both as a public space where they are to express themselves and participate as responsible individuals, as well as the institution charged with teaching them a prescribed citizenship competence. Perhaps schools are being asked to do too much with the resources they have available: submissions to the *Cambridge Review* pointed to the dangers of asking schools to be responsible for remedying society's ills (Alexander, 2010). The debate so far would suggest that if primary schools are to effectively fulfil the role of developing political competence, education and opportunity need to be approached differently. The debate around the effectiveness of primary schools in promoting social and political competence for adulthood or citizenship gets to the root of my inquiry: how do children's accounts of school challenge or reaffirm the exercise and development of political competence and agency?

Alexander (2010) articulates the difficulty that little research and policy work takes into account the testimony of children, and therefore direct experience of childhood. Often we do not know what children's experience of school or childhood is. James and Prout (1997b, p.233) argue 'they are not present in their own right, reflecting the practice and ideology of lived experience if not the rhetoric of contemporary western constructions of children as being marginal to the social order.' The *Cambridge Review* noted only two exceptions to this trend, the Review itself being one of them and the *2007 Good Childhood Enquiry*, being the other (Alexander, 2010). James and Prout (1997a) suggest that this absence from research data means that children's present lived experiences do not inform current theoretical constructions of childhood which refer to either understandings from the past or a view of what children's futures should be. The present, they argue, is lost.

In terms of this discussion, my research seeks to generate child accounts of how they understand their own capacities and competence as political beings in school. I want to explore the degree to which a school can foster the development of political competence, what form this takes, and what the impact of children's experience of school has upon their sense of political agency efficacy, and motivation to participate. As Lansdown (2001, p.95) argues, 'listening to children and taking them seriously is important because children have a body of experience and views that are relevant to the development of public policy, improving the quality of decision-making and

rendering it more accountable.' My quest is to make a distinctive contribution to the debate on the development children's political participation, agency and competence in primary school. From this review, the particular literatures I take further on my journey and into my data analysis are those of participation, (represented by Alexander, (2010); Hope (2009) and (2010); James and Prout, (1997a); Lister (2008); Moinian (2006a); ten Dam and Volman (2004) and (2007) and Woodhead (1997)) and performativity in primary schools (represented by Busher and Cremin, 2012); Jeffrey and Troman (2012a); Lam (2012); Perryman (2012)) The next chapter discusses the nature of that quest from my ontological and epistemological positioning. Acting as a guide to the investigation of the above, my theoretical framework aims to provide an account of the political structures and practices which generate and normalise the beliefs and behaviour around children's political participation and agency in my research setting.

## Chapter 3

### Theoretical Framework : Constructing the Quest

#### Introduction

Chapter 2 identified the need to explore how children recount and account for political participation and agency at primary school, and the implications this has for developing sustainable political competence and confidence. The purpose of this chapter is to set out the theoretical framework through which I have created, interpreted and presented my quest. This framework and the associated concepts act as a guide to the investigation of the substantive topic. I first set out my philosophical positioning as a teacher-researcher and the values upon which I have defined, executed and evaluated my quest. Deleuze (1995) describes Foucault's contribution to philosophical debates as both exciting and controversial, and this chapter identifies and explains how Foucault's work and concepts have shaped both the progression and refinement of my exploration of the data and my findings. My aim is to define a *post-structurally informed* research position. Through identifying key Foucauldian concepts which will be used as analytical tools, the thesis's main argument is given theoretical depth and instruments through which to interpret and navigate its findings. I explore my first encounters with the thinking of Michel Foucault through analysing his ideas about what can be known about children and childhood, the effects schooling on the development of a political beings as well as notions of participation and agency. This chapter is limited by its size and scope considering only a few of his most salient works, selected for their relevance to this research. This inevitably confines the discussion to those areas and neglects ideas and understandings that may be present in other texts and exchanges.

#### 3.1 Background to My Theoretical Framework

I am a white, middle-class, professional woman who has benefited from a long and somewhat indulgent education. I believe in *education for education's sake*, and am disappointed to have met so few teaching peers who share this value. Indeed, education discourses of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in the UK have left me frustrated with the politically expedient myopia of education policy which I see as not seeking to maximise the potential of children's futures – for example see Ball, 2003; Jeffrey and Troman, 2012a; Perryman, 2012; Priestly, Robinson and Biesta, 2012 for their discussion of standards, best practice and Inclusion. I believe this comprises children's moral and legal right to a full education and turns



childhood into a functional phase of the national pursuit of economic growth through the creation of a measurably productive labour force (Allen, 2013; Jeffrey and Troman, 2012c). The educational experience to which all children should be entitled is reserved for the educationally privileged, such as me, or the well-off.

A colleague once asked me if I came from a family of “strong moral positions,” and I acknowledged that I have been driven in my careers by the pursuit of equality for subordinated or marginalised individuals, and children in particular. My family has long been politically active and concerned to elevate the interests of the disenfranchised. A close ancestor of mine was an active, public campaigner for mass suffrage and the Trade Union movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and he has always been a very significant figure to me. Following a childhood engaged with local politics and election campaigning during the establishment of the *Social Democratic Party* in the 1980s, I have been a student of government and politics for most of my life. My interest and belief in the value of children’s political participation and legitimacy as political actors is deep-rooted and personal.

Aligned with Stables’ (2008) core argument, I see children’s political participation as valuable and their capacity to make meaningful contributions as genuine and credible. Primary school is an important public site for the independent exercise and development of political competence with adults and peers (Alexander, 2010; ten Dam and Volman, 2007). I believe that it is the responsibility of adults, or individuals with greater knowledge and experience, to facilitate and foster this by facilitating children’s development of that competence. However, my experience in primary schools over the last ten years has led me to doubt both the effectiveness and the will of the adult community to engage in this important task. Additionally, my early practitioner research, mentioned in Chapter 1, left me doubting the credibility and legitimacy of my own contributions within the school. Priestley, Robinson and Biesta (2012, p.87) point to contradictions between performative discourses which define a teacher as a ‘curriculum deliverer and producer of statistics,’ and an empowered professional discourse which constructs the teacher as ‘a curriculum developer, a responsible professional and an agent of change.’ It was in response to these imperatives and my resulting internal conflict that I initiated this quest.

### 3.1.1 My Ontological and Epistemological Positioning

Following Vaughan (2004), I will argue through the remainder of this chapter that the social world should be understood as constructed by and through different and competing social discourses. Ball (1994) has described the development of discourse theory, a feature of post-structural philosophy, as a response to the inadequacy of more traditional and partial representations of 'truth' and 'knowledge'. I understand the context and execution of my research as a process of becoming conversant in my own personal, historical, political and locational micro-discourses as well as those macro-discourses, for example the distinctiveness of the phase of childhood and performativity, which have achieved some degree of independence and stability within society (Pring, 2004). Moving closer to children's and adults' perceptions and experiences of and in school is about becoming explicitly conversant in the discourses and practices which construct what is real for those individuals.

The pursuit of knowledge locates significant power with the researcher over what is represented or *re-presented* as knowable, as well as what is 'worth knowing' (Wellington, 2000). As Hughes (2002, p.82) argues 'the organisation and labelling of knowledge fields are political acts that are in consequence highly contestable.' The actions of the researcher will deconstruct and reconstruct understandings of reality for not only him or herself, but participants also (Ball, 1994), the ethical challenges this presents are considered in Chapter 4. Research can be seen not merely as a process to generate a description of the social world, but an intervention into that world, changing it and rendering its product both problematic and subjective (Hammersley, 1995). However, as Ball (1994) argues, when contextualised within post-structural analysis, knowledge is *defined* as subjective, recognising the human agency in the political choices that surround research practice. Interpretative research identifies the researcher in any given enquiry as a recognised actor (Wellington, 2000).

The agency of the reader in interpreting the account must also be acknowledged and the role they play in constructing and deconstructing meaning. The challenge for and of the researcher, as Vaughan (2004, p.396) puts it, is not to claim to accurately represent the truth of a situation, but to openly create a 'regulating fiction' which itself produces textual identities and 'regimes of truth' relocating the site of struggles in the discourses of education and away from individual players.' I embrace this understanding of what the function and product of my research could be. My argument is that I can provide a value-relevant representation (Hammersley, 2006) of

the experience of child participants in the school through a post-structurally informed ethnographic study.

In making this declaration, I also acknowledge its many limitations and contestability: Hodgson and Standish (2009) provide an enlightening and challenging critique of the use of post-structural theory in education research. The knowledge created will be a direct result of my value-commitments in deciding to pursue this quest as well as my agency in the data-gathering, analysis and theorising. Mine is but one view of many. The nature of the knowledge which will be generated in my study is, therefore, a representation of the personal and individual perceptions of the participants involved in my research, including myself. Making explicit and justifying the ontological and epistemological commitments behind research decisions is part of the process of validating the knowledge produced (Walford, 2009), see Chapter 4.

The assumption behind the construction of this enquiry is that participant verbal testimony and participant observations are valid data and can be meaningfully analysed and interpreted (Forsey, 2010). I am also assuming that some form of representation or reconstruction of experience and perception through language can form the basis of credible knowledge (Wolcott, 1990). This is far from being an uncontested assumption, and has practical and ethical implications for the methodology and methods of data collection, also discussed in Chapter 4. My data analysis and representations have sought to transform the content from opinion, both mine and my participants', to 'justified belief': that is contextualised knowledge which is of recognisable, transferable value to others (Hammersley, 1995). As Pring (2004) argues, for research to be valid it must also be evidence-based; notions of validity are discussed further and problematised in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3.

In choosing the term post-structurally informed to describe my approach, I acknowledge the 'historical specificity of discourse', that 'reality is discursive', and that 'the subject is produced through a web of power relations/discursive practices,' (Vaughan, 2004, p.392). Additionally, in seeking to disturb and make strange the apparent obvious legitimacy of a discourse's propositions, I share the intent of much post-structural research (see Downing, 2008; Hoskins, 1990; Marshall, 1996; Vaughan, 2004). However, as Willis and Trondman (2000, p.7 – emphasis in original) argue, 'theory must be *useful* theory in relation to ethnographic evidence and the 'scientific energy' derived from the effective formulation of problems, rather than the theory itself.' The result is a choice of methodology and methods which could be seen as in tension with post-structuralist thought and is critically evaluated in the next chapter.

### 3.1.2 Meeting Michel Foucault

Michel Foucault's work in the latter part of the twentieth century has influenced many diverse academic disciplines (Ball, 1990). The project of transcribing and translating and reinterpreting his lectures at the Collège de France has continued into the twentieth first century (Paras, 2006). In post-Second-World-War France, 'Foucault was intellectually weaned on [existentialist] debates and divisions...and the work he would go on to develop bears the traces of their influence,' (Downing, 2008, p.3). Elected to the chair in the history of philosophy in 1970 at the Collège de France, he named his position *Professor of the History of Systems of Thought* and captured the essence of his intellectual project at the turn of that decade, bringing to light 'the hidden order behind knowledge that gave rise to meaning without the intervention of a subject' (Paras, 2006, p.4).

Downing (2008) warns readers of Foucault not jump to associate him too quickly with other post-structural thinkers and writers of his time: he sought to distance himself from the work of Lacan, Derrida and Freud, questioning their epistemologies and methodologies. Foucault's particular approach, Marshall (1996) argues, serves to 'defamiliarise' the reader with what is known, and challenge perceptions of rationality and the exercise of power. In creating a portrait of Foucault as a philosopher, Deleuze (1995, p.106) comments, 'historical formations interest him ... because they mark where we came from, what circumscribes us, what we're in the process of breaking out of to discover new relations in which to find expression.' This presents some challenges in locating his theses, but this feature is an important part of his writings' enduring relevance as well as serving to highlight the historically constructed organisation of academic disciplines against which he mounts one of his challenges. 'Refusing to accept entirely any given or established position is very much a characteristic of Foucauldian rhetoric,' (Downing, 2008, p.3). Michel Foucault treads an alternative path among academic and social discourses challenging readers to think and think again about what is familiar and assumed.

Marshall (1996) argues, however, that understanding Foucault's work in relation to education is problematic because he does not address the subject directly. The school appears as a 'disciplinary block' in *Discipline and Punish* and other contemporary texts, but a history of the school is never the focus of discussion (Marshall, 1990). However, Hoskins (1990, p.39) labels him a 'crypto-educationalist' from the centrality of the examination in much of his most influential writing. In a number of interviews Foucault's views are more explicitly expressed,

but 'his critique of education and schooling must be constructed, in the main, from what is implicit,' (Marshall, 1996, p.6). Schools serve to exemplify and explain the process of development and exercise of modern power in the service of governance (Marshall, 1990). I would argue this is also true of his views on 'the child' and 'childhood' and this is discussed later in the chapter. The lack of explicit study, it can be argued, focuses the reader on the key concepts and ideas such as 'mastery of the self', 'correction', the construction of what is 'normal' and 'abnormal' (Foucault, 2003) which gives the work greater transferability.

Marshall (1996), though, in concluding his critique of personal autonomy in education using Foucauldian works, problematises their use to practitioners: Foucault offers no 'way out' from the disciplinary educational discourses he identifies. Instead, Foucault provides: 'a devastating critique of the subtle and complex power relations that pervade educational institutions, which shape our identity, and which make us governable by masking the reality that our identities are being constituted,' (Marshall, 1996, p.216). However, Butin (2006, p.372) argues that 'Foucault's demand that we attend to the formation of and experimentation with new modes of experience might serve educational scholars and practitioners well,' suggesting new lines of enquiry for educational researchers in contemporary schools. As Ball (1990, p.7) writes, Foucault's work can be used to 'unmask the politics that underlie some of the apparent neutrality of educational reform' and, I would add, current formulations of pedagogical 'best practice' within the culture of performativity, see Chapter 2. Jeffrey and Troman (2012b) argue that the manifest, current importance of performativity, established through wide-ranging education research, supports an enduring Foucauldian conceptualisation of power and responses to it.

What Foucault could offer teachers is twofold, Marshall (1996, p.164) suggests: firstly, he 'provides opportunities to escape the grasp of categories, objectifications and treatments which affect the teacher/student relationship,' and this, secondly, should facilitate the possibility of 'redefining' the self within the educational space and its relationships. I would dispute, however, that this is as much the case for teachers and teaching in the early twenty-first century as it was in the mid-1990s. The all-pervasive structures and practices of performativity considerably dampen teacher agency and effectiveness in stepping outside prescriptive relationships (Busher and Cremin, 2012), limiting the opportunities to reimagine the self within education discourse.

Although, Foucault's work was conceived of and written more than a generation ago and during a time from the late fifties to the early eighties when educational academic and policy debates were quite different in substance, his influence in terms of his philosophical and methodological approach is enduring (Ball, 2013; Downing, 2008; Peters and Besley, 2007; Schrag, 1999). The description of a system seeking to neutralise anti-social instincts and eliminate dissent and difference in the creation of a good citizen (Foucault, 1995) is very powerful within the current English education policy context, and as discussed in the literature review. Additionally, it could be argued that the current societal and media infatuation with the cultural divisions and insecurities of an 'age of terror' give Foucault's work a very poignant and present relevance (Downing, 2008). The ever-further encroachment of mechanisms for surveillance and enforcement measures, from supermarket loyalty cards and public denunciations of your neighbours on daytime television to airport whole-body scanners and waging war in foreign States, goes largely unchallenged (Hope, 2007). The imperative of a Foucauldian approach remains. The careful selection and application of his works and concepts, as tools for interpretation and analysis of education research, can give clarity and transferability to the accounts of lived experience of primary school children today.

The texts I have referenced were selected for their implicit and explicit consideration of the child or pupil or an educational context. The descriptions of key concepts, such as discipline, deviance, punishment, agency, resistance, and knowledge of the self, in *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (Foucault, 1995) and *The Will to Knowledge. The History of Sexuality: 1* (Foucault, 1998) most clearly articulated the ideas I was trying to represent. Further, reading the texts suggested alternative ways of understanding my conceptual struggles (Ball, 2013) and those of my participants. Additionally, *Discipline and Punish* and *The Will to Knowledge* are cited by several authors as being of particular pertinence to education (see Ball, 1990; Downing, 2008; Hoskins, 1990; Marshall 1990), and these have been supplemented with and supported by: *Abnormal. Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975* (Foucault, 2003), *Michel Foucault. Power. Essential works of Foucault 1954-1984 volume 3* (Foucault, 2002a), and *The Archaeology or Knowledge* (Foucault, 2002b). I also engaged with the work of Bourdieu and Friere during the early stages of my analysis, but it was Foucault's characterisation of the disciplinary society and his focus away from the marginalised individual and on to the structures and practices which constitute that marginalisation which guided my selection of his works.

While discussion within other texts, particularly *Society Must Be Defended* (Foucault, 2004), would offer much to this analysis, their substance is more peripheral to my core pursuit of understanding the development of children's political competence in a primary school. In selecting the specific terms and definitions I describe below as tools in my interpretation and analysis, I am forfeiting much additional discussion. I acknowledge that these terms and my choices are not unproblematic or uncontested and a different interpretation could result in a different thesis. For example using Foucault's (2003) implicit equating of 'imbecile' with constructions of the child, as highlighted in *Abnormal*, would have led to further theorising on the alienation of the deviant child and the associated impact of inclusive policies and practices in education. However, this is subject matter for another discussion.

### **3.2 The Construction of Children as Members of Society**

In this section I argue that to understand the experience of children at school, we need to understand how they are constructed as members of society. Foucault's concepts of discourse, power-knowledge and subjectivity present valuable tools in theorising their position and positioning: how they are constructed and constituted as individuals and part of school structures and practices. The focus of this section is on Michel Foucault's (1998) *Will to Knowledge. The History of Sexuality.1*. The question guiding this review is: how are children constructed as social actors and a structural part of society? – the outcomes of which support the analytical discussion of the research school and children's experiences in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

#### **3.2.1 Construction of Reality and the Individual**

Theories which use a concept of *discourse* allow us to see the world as constructed through human interaction. It frees interpretations of *the way the world is* from notions of alien, unchangeable forces and objects which define and control us. The definition I am choosing to work with is: discourses are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 2002b, p.54); a 'discourse finds a way of limiting its domain, of defining what it is talking about, of giving it the status of an object – and therefore of making it manifest, nameable, and describable,' (Foucault, 2002b, p.46). Representations of ourselves to others as adults, say, educated and southerners, for example, are also a product of these discourses, constructed by them in the same way that any knowledge or understanding of the world is. These representations are, therefore, inextricable from their discourses. Discourses form our

reality, or realities, and allow us to function and operate with some meaning within our social world. As Poster writes,

Discourse for [Foucault] is not some idealist representation of ideas; it is, in materialist fashion, part of the power structure of society. Power relations must be understood in the structuralist manner as decentered, as a multiplicity of local situations. Discourses are important because they reveal the play of power in a given situation. (Poster, 1984, p.130)

The presence of multiple understandings of the world defines the conditions for conflict and competition. 'We must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies,' (Foucault, 1998, p.100). Weedon (1987, p.35) describes the resulting 'discursive field' as consisting of 'competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organising social institutions and processes.' The idea of a discursive field is particularly efficacious in the context of my research due to the polemical nature of the relationships within and between education policy and practice (Ball and Olmedo, 2013). Mutually excluding discourses can be seen to be operating within the same area between different groups of practitioners, policy-makers and researchers as exemplified by Kakos (2012) in the implementation of citizenship education.

Ball (1994) highlights the power that is afforded the individual, located within a given discourse, to include and exclude what constitutes that discourse, whether he or she be aware of it or not. Discourses, therefore, are not only about the process and product of knowledge creation, but also the people who enable it. Foucault (1995, p.27) states that 'power and knowledge directly imply one another.' He expands, 'there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations,' (Foucault, 1995, p.27). As Mauthner and Hey (1999, p.71) write, 'power and knowledge are embedded in discourse through the production of subjects and objects.' Foucault (1981, p.93) writes 'power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.' Importantly, the Foucauldian idea of power is not obviously or necessarily hierarchical or linear, but unpredictable and a function of position within an institution (Foucault, 1998). Moreover, it only exists where it is required to govern. The apparently relatively stable mechanisms of government dissolve in the face of resistance: 'antagonisms, confrontation or struggle' (Marshall, 1989, p.104). Power should be



understood as manifested in the everyday interactions of individuals at a micro-level, not as the exercise of sovereign or State power from an alienated height (Marshall, 1989).

Foucault draws out the concept of power-knowledge as comprising the 'processes and struggles that traverse' the activity of an individual and which constitute him or her as a subject (Foucault, 1995, p.28), and it is these relations of power which should be the object of study in understanding the exercise of power and knowledge (Downing, 2008). As Marshall (1989, p.99 – emphasis in original) summarises, 'power/knowledge turns us into *governable* individuals who will lead useful, practical and docile lives tied to our real selves by knowledge of ourselves.' This knowledge is developed through practices designed to promote social control in institutions such as prisons, hospitals and schools, giving authority to those practices and resultant knowledge (Marshall, 1989). However, Paras (2006) questions the continued use of the power-knowledge concept alleging that Foucault moved on from it. The important change is a move towards 'governmentality of truth' (Paras, 2006), relocating the discussion of power and knowledge around the individual within relations of power. In 2006, Paras was citing previously unpublished work by Foucault, some of which had yet to be translated into English. As his texts become more widely published, the academic perception of Foucault's work may alter.

From the material Paras (2006) translates and cites, Foucault does not appear to openly acknowledge this dissociation from 'power-knowledge', but describes the transition as moving on to new ideas that fit his latter projects better. It is noticeable that key terms from earlier works are absent from later publications and their meaning or value within the new analyses is not made clear. I am dealing with ideas and subject matter which are more closely related to Foucault's (1995) historical investigations within *Discipline and Punish*, where the idea of power-knowledge and its associated concepts are relevant. I can justify its use almost forty years after original publication by means of similarities between his descriptions of disciplinary practices and institutions and my own observations of my research school as well as prior teaching experience and post-graduate research. Using a reformulated idea of power and knowledge and their relationship would produce new and valuable analyses, but that is not part of this enquiry.

Foucault is criticised for his apparent neglect of the subject in his earlier work: the subject only has meaning as a tool in a specific discourse which is deployed in the exercising of societal power relations (Paras, 2006; Poster, 1984). Poster (1984, p.112) asserts that Patricia O'Brien's

work in *The Promise of Punishment* (1982) in identifying active resistance within the culture of prison inmates is a 'valuable corrective' to Foucault's work: that is correcting his omission of the response of prisoners to the structures and practices of prisons and imprisonment. Poster (1984) contends 'the question of the status of the subject in Foucault's discourse and more generally a theory of resistance remains open.' However, if it was never Foucault's original intent to consider the experience of individual inmates, but focus on the structures and practices which constitute their identities, it is not an omission. Foucault's ideas of resistance are discussed in section 3.2.4. Deleuze (1995, pp.113-4) responds, 'it's idiotic to say Foucault discovers or reintroduces a hidden subject after having rejected it. There's no subject, but a production of subjectivity: subjectivity has to be produced, when its time arrives, precisely because there is no subject.' As Foucault (1998, p.85) himself writes: 'confronted by a power that is law, the subject who is constituted as subject – who is "subjected" – is he who obeys.' Deleuze (1995) further argues that the process of subjectification at which Foucault arrives in his later texts is a development from the theories of knowledge and power with which he began, not a revision of them.

From the above discussion of the selected Foucauldian ideas, my analysis uses expressions of discourse, discursive fields, power-knowledge and the constitution of individuals through processes of subjectification. These act as defining concepts in the pursuit of my substantive aim: to investigate the political experiences and perceptions of children in primary schools. It is in the light of this understanding of the construction of reality that my research account should be understood. Children's political competence and strength, or confidence, are presented as a function of access to knowledge and power relations within a school's structures and practices for children's political self-expression or self-determination. From my findings that children demonstrate awareness of these structures and practices which both govern and suppress their developing competence, my focus is on children's participation and agency and the extent to which they can choose to accept or deny the legitimacy of such power relations.

### **3.2.2 The Construction of Children and Childhoods**

As with schools and schooling, noted by Marshall (1990), notions of 'the child' and 'childhood' serve to exemplify and explain Foucault's ideas on power, knowledge, the relation between the two, our understanding of the subject and the processes of subjectification. Children and childhoods are never the focus of particular analysis. An example of this would be Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France between 1974 and 1975 entitled *Abnormal* (Foucault, 2003),

where he discusses the psychiatrisation of child-like, 'infantile' behaviour as an exercise of power in the discourse of correcting the abnormal in society. The child is not the object of analysis, but the construction of what it is to be a child and to reside in childhood, i.e. the state of an undeveloped 'mastery of the self' (Foucault, 2003, p.300), can be derived from the exemplification of the creation of the abnormal. 'Childhood as a historical stage of development and a general form of behaviour becomes the principal instrument of psychiatrisation,' (Foucault, 2003, p.304).

This psychiatrisation of childhood represents a 'discipline of scientific protection of society' (Foucault, 2003, p.316): children are constructed as sources of insecurity. 'The child's "vice" was not so much an enemy as a support; it may have been designated as the evil to be eliminated, but the extraordinary effort that went into the task that was bound to fail leads one to suspect that what was demanded of it was to persevere, to proliferate to the limits of the visible and invisible, rather than to disappear for good,' (Foucault, 1998, p.42). A discourse of security perpetuates the insecurities upon which it is premised. For enforcers to claim they are making something safe, the danger must be clearly articulated, re-articulated and reinforced as insecure, or the need for security systems and measures ceases to exist.

Discussing the insecurities in the representations of childhood, Goldson (2001, p.41) observes that more recent 'constructions of innocence and vulnerability necessitating protection contrast sharply with conceptualisations of a threatening and dangerous childhood demanding correction.' James and Prout (1997a) also highlight the conflict between what had been previously perceived ideals of childhood and children and contemporaneous social, political and economic realities, giving rise to conflict in policy and research spheres. These distinctions help to articulate the apparent dislocation between the competing constructions of the child at school, specifically the contradiction of being both with and without legitimate agency at the same time. In more recent work, Prout (2005) highlights the appeal of social constructionism as a post-structural account challenging modernist dualisms. However, he applies a caution to the privileging of discourse with social constructionism. Furthermore, 'some versions are distinctly idealist about childhood while others are simply silent or vague about the material components of social life. At best there is an equivocal and uneasy evasiveness about materiality, whether this is thought of as nature, bodies, technologies, artefacts or architectures,' (Prout, 2005, p.63). Society's dualisms and tensions are manifested in the construction of children and

childhoods, just as those individuals and their experiences constitute the societal insecurities they represent.

Foucault (1995, p.218) describes 'the formation of the disciplinary society' as being linked to historical and material changes: an increasing population in the eighteenth century with increasing movement in need of 'fixing' in a given position to be able to exert control over; the expansion of the 'apparatus of production' (armies, schools, prisons, factories, hospitals), increasing costs and presenting new challenges for efficiency and output (Foucault, 1995, p.218). The following describes the subjectification of the dangerous child. Both the adult view of the way a child is and what they need to become dominates their relationship with children by making it one of correction:

Educators and doctors combatted children's onanism like an epidemic that needed to be eradicated. ... Throughout this whole secular campaign that mobilised the adult world around the sex of children...devices of surveillance were installed; traps were laid for compelling admissions; inexhaustible and corrective discourses were imposed; parents and teachers were alerted, and left with the suspicion that all children were guilty, and with the fear of being themselves at fault if their suspicions were not sufficiently strong; they were kept in readiness in the face of this recurrent danger; their conduct was prescribed and their pedagogy recodified. (Foucault, 1998, p.42)

Foucault uses the history of sexuality as exemplification of the disciplinary society, but Deleuze (2006) identifies the disciplinary nature of modern societies as a key formulation and contribution of *Discipline and Punish* also. The creation of the disciplinary society comes with the generalisation of disciplinary forces in the establishment of panoptic surveillance which makes all prior organisations and expressions of power cohesive. Moreover, 'discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise,' (Foucault, 1995, p.170).

Marshall (1996) suggests that the adoption of 'discipline' as a conceptual tool is important in Foucault's 'rendering the familiar strange ... [and] ... relentless pursuit of understanding the strangeness that he discovered,' (Hoskin, 1990, p.29). Discipline is employed to reveal dimensions of power and knowledge which would otherwise remain hidden. Marshall (1996, p.121 – emphasis in original) argues 'the kind of knowledge then with which Foucault is concerned is not then *particular* knowledge of the form, "Children with learning difficulties can be identified in the first year of schooling", but rather with the regimes of discourse/practice

(power/knowledge) which permit such statements to emerge and be legitimated as knowledge.'

In employing theory of the construction of children and childhoods, I am specifically utilising Foucault's expression of the function of childhood in the creation and operation of a disciplinary society and the consequent need to correct and discipline the child as a source of instability to that society. This defines those within childhood as undesirable to society and not recognised as legitimate social actors. Children are created as powerless subjects, dependent on the structures and practices of discipline for their necessary reform.

Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns into an 'aptitude', a 'capacity', which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. (Foucault, 1995, p.138)

In this context of the subjectification of children through disciplinary practices at school, Marshall proposes:

The question we should ask is whether the [educational] environment in some way *structures* and *constructs*, or *constitutes* "the developing child"; that perhaps the developing child is presupposed in the construction of the very environments in which the developing child is supposed to "emerge". In which case "emergence" seems to be guaranteed. (Marshall, 1996, p.87 – emphasis in original)

The positioning of the child as 'developing' becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy and we see all children as in need of development: the 'socially developing child is seen as an outcome of socialisation processes rather than an actor in society' (James and Prout, 1997a, p.xiii). Marshall further argues,

Certain acts or behaviour which people *do* have become "pathologised", so that these acts become part of the real nature of people. If we take the ways in which children think about such things as space, time and physical objects – the Piagetian stages – this behaviour is taken as evidence for certain cognitive structures. What was an act or behaviour becomes internalised as something about the real nature of human beings. (Marshall, 1996, p.102)

Marshall (1996) contends that the pathologising of behaviour is very prevalent in education, examples he uses are in ascribing differing abilities to children: 'the developing child; the deprived child; the slow learning child; the gifted child; the hyperactive child; the child at risk,' (Marshall, 1996, p.103). In classifying and labelling children as such we construct those identities and identifications. Constructing children as incomplete and incompetent political

actors, constitutes their assumed powerlessness. The resulting political learning or training these beings require in the maintenance of a manageable, disciplined society is the focus of the next section.

### **3.2.3 The Purpose and Effect of Schooling**

In considering the school as a setting for the development of political competence, I discuss aspects of the institutional structures and practices which impact upon how children are prepared for political participation and agency. 'Discipline', Part Three of Foucault's (1995) *Discipline and Punish* is the text most often associated with and cited in relation to education. However, it is Part Four 'Prison' which goes into more detail of how regimes of training establish the situation which allows for the apparent consensual self-surveillance of individuals: the normalisation and acceptance of institutional structures and practices. This section discusses the concepts and ideas from *Discipline and Punish* which are of greatest importance to my study: docile bodies and the action of disciplinary forces; hierarchical observation and surveillance; normalising judgement; the examination; and self-surveillance. I also refer to *Abnormal* (2003) in describing the corrective impulse of the education system.

Foucault (1995) argues that through systematic temporal and spatial control and the creation of regimes of training, obedience and efficiency can be instilled within a population (soldiers, school pupils, citizens). He tracks the changes in cultural belief from the historical selection of the most appropriate individuals for a function, for example the strongest, fittest soldiers, to the current idea that through rigorous training any individual can fulfil a given function: 'the soldier has become something that can be made' (Foucault, 1995, p.135). The population is malleable and docile and training produces 'good behaviour'. Foucault (1995, p.136) writes, 'a body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved.' The notion that a 'level four pupil' can be the universal outcome of primary schooling in the current English education context demonstrates the enduring relevance of this theory. The standardisation of attainment has been a cornerstone of the policy approach of successive British governments (Busher and Cremin, 2012), and has resulted in the proliferation of measures to ensure quantifiable outcomes (Jeffrey and Tromam, 2012a) which have now achieved a structured independence within curriculum design.

The exertion of disciplinary forces on the docile body within the school, army or hospital allows for the control of the individual to ensure the most efficient means of achieving an institution's

ends. 'Discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space' (Foucault, 1995, p.141); the 'techniques' for spatial organisation and control embodied in Foucault's (1995, pp.141-149) 'Art of distributions' can be summarised as follows:

- 1) *Enclosure and confinement* – 'the protected space of disciplinary monotony' (Foucault, 1995, p.141).
- 2) *Partitioning* – particular division of individuals reinforcing the enclosure and confinement of a population, controlling their movement and associations.
- 3) *Functional sites* – unclaimed architectural spaces within institutions which acquire a utilitarian function gradually as suits the needs of the discipline.
- 4) *Rank* – arrangement of individuals into an educational order: classes, groupings, hierarchies of subjects within a system after a form of examination.

Foucault's (1995, pp.149-155) temporal control, described in 'The control of activity', comprises five principle elements, summarised as follows:

- 1) *Time-table* ensures the maximisation of useful time.
- 2) *Temporal elaboration of the act* – 'it assures the elaboration of the act itself; it controls its development and its stages from the inside,' (Foucault, 1995, p.151-2): marching in time, movement and chanting (prayer), fire drills. 'Time penetrates the body with all the meticulous controls of power,' (Foucault, 1995, p.152).
- 3) *The correlation of the body and the gesture* is to ensure the most efficient execution of the act: for example, good handwriting in total temporal posture-action control.
- 4) *The body-object articulation* – the explicit instruction of the use, action and co-ordination of body and object related to the execution of an act: for example a soldier's gun, a pupil's pen.
- 5) *Exhaustive use* aims to reduce as far as possible the loss of time to inefficiency and inactivity.

Foucault (1995) explains that disciplinary power's success is due to the simplicity of its instruments: hierarchical observation, normalising judgement and the examination. Foucault

(1995, p.175) describes this power as 'modest' and 'suspicious' exercised through 'humble modalities' and 'minor procedures' rather than the open and overt grand gestures of 'sovereignty or the great apparatuses of the state,' (Foucault, 1995, p.170).

Disciplinary power...is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. ...Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection. (Foucault, 1995, p.187)

Foucault (1995) details how the desire for hierarchical observation as the means of coercion of the subject informs architectural design. Buildings are no longer only built with the idea of being seen from outside and seeing out, but also 'to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control – to render visible those who are inside it,' (Foucault, 1995, p.172). Mechanisms and systems of 'observation, recording and training' (Foucault, 1995, p.173) were established to control and regulate individuals within an institution and have endured as key disciplinary concepts in current educational discourse and practice (Hope, 2013).

Foucault (1995) argues that surveillance in primary education became an integral part of the teaching relationship following changes to the structure of schooling in the seventeenth century which made a supervisory regime necessary. Over the ensuing decades and century, 'a relation of surveillance, defined and regulated, is inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching, not as an additional or adjacent part, but as a mechanism that is inherent to it and which increases its efficiency,' (Foucault, 1995, p.176). This is efficiency in the creation of governable individuals available to be dominated (Rose, 1999). Schools play a fundamental role in society as disciplinary institutions which normalise or correct the individual. The features of this 'normalising judgement' can be characterised by the following:

- Penal mechanisms that establish the authority of the minutiae of the working day;
- 'Non-observance', 'non-conformity' is punishable;
- Punishments are corrective, reducing the distance from the norm;
- Gratification and punishment, establish the discipline of training and correction and are used to make a measured summary of an individual's behavioural performance, introducing a conformity that must be attained;



- Ranking pupils: reward or punishment through the attainment or loss of a ranking or place within the hierarchical system.

(Abridged from Foucault, 1995, pp.178-181)

Foucault (1995, p.183 – emphasis in original) summarises the above functions of disciplinary power as ‘the perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes*.’ This is an almost covert punishing that never reaches its conclusion because it has no obvious, clearly definable crime. It is the correction before the error and the eternal correction of eternal error. This ensures that what happens in each classroom space and during each timetabled session is as similar as it can be. James, Jenks and Prout (1998, p.45) describe this as a ‘disciplined system of control.’ Here, ‘children can be placed in rows, classes can be broken down into tables or groups and specialised into activities; individuals can be put in the ‘reading corner’, required to stand by teacher’s table or in front of the class. Everyone can be evacuated, that is, sent out to exercise in the playground,’ (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998, p.45). Foucault (1995, p.184) continues, ‘the Normal is established as a principle of coercion in teaching with the introduction of a standardized education and the establishment of the *écoles normales* (teachers’ training colleges).’ From the prescriptive pedagogies to Ofsted’s surveillance and monitoring, described in Chapter 2, this standardisation is perpetuated in the performative policies and lived experience of children and teachers today (Perryman, 2012). For Foucault, the examination is a key mechanism for the control and domination of the subjected individual as an effect of disciplinary power, combining hierarchical observation and normalising judgement (Hoskins, 1990): ‘it establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them,’ (Foucault, 1995, p.184).

Foucault (1995) describes the examination as a ritualised performance which makes visible the subjection and objectification of those caught in its gaze. This ‘ceremony’ is reified as the determiner of truth and a worthy ‘political investment’ (Foucault, 1995, p.185). He declares, ‘we are entering the age of the infinite examination and of compulsory objectification,’ (Foucault, 1995, p.189). Additionally, he argues the amassing of written documentation around the examination, designed to ‘capture and fix’ the individual, mark a first stage in the ‘formalization’ of the individual within power relations, (Foucault, 1995, p.190). The associated ‘technologies of power are the public league tables, targets and inspection reports that regulate practice,’ (Jeffrey and Troman, 2012b, p.ii) in the operationalisation of performativity.

The individual remains traceable within the system, but it strips them of meaning or value beyond the unit of information they represent. Foucault (1995) argues that the examination gives a sense of permanence to the description of the individual and their differences from others, defining the numerical value of that unit.

From Bentham's Panopticon, a design for a 'reformatory' prison which enabled a guard to observe his prisoners at any time without their being aware of it (Ryan, 1987), Foucault (1995) develops his interpretation of panopticism. Applied in response to the plague, Foucault (1995, p.198) argues 'the penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life' became the model for the operation of disciplinary power from the nineteenth century for prisons, schools and hospitals. He draws a line from the treatment of lepers and the response to the plague to the twentieth century:

The constant division between the normal and the abnormal, to which every individual is subjected, brings us back to our own time...the existence of a whole set of techniques and institutions for measuring, supervising and correcting the abnormal brings into play the disciplinary mechanisms to which the fear of the plague gave rise. (Foucault, 1995, p.199)

The institutionalisation of these structures and practices physically and culturally is what allows the individuals to self-correct and become the bearers of power in this situation (Foucault, 2003). Power is at once 'visible and unverifiable' (Foucault, 1995, p.201): evidence of potential observation is always in sight. The individual will never know if he or she is actually being watched, but must always assume he or she could be at any given moment. Another product of this system is the depersonalisation of power: it could be anybody or nobody who is observing the population. 'The more numerous those anonymous and temporary observers are, the greater the risk for the inmate of being surprised and the greater his anxious awareness of being observed,' (Foucault, 1995, p.202). The mechanisms of power are elevated. In this way, the culture can become one of self-regulation: the inmate behaves as if he or she is observed at all times, regardless of whether or not he or she is: 'he becomes the principle of his own subjection,' (Foucault, 1995, p.203).

From the discussion above, I am specifically taking Foucault's description of the action of disciplinary forces on docile bodies to define my notion of the *idealised learner*. The idealised learner is what I have chosen to term the restrictive definition of a good pupil or good learner, one who is constituted through the disciplinary practices experienced by children at school. I have adapted this from Bradbury's (2013, p.1) examination of how the 'ideal learner' is

constructed in the reception year of primary schools, 'closing down other possibilities for successful subjectivities in school.' The distinction I want to make by using the adjective 'idealised' rather than 'ideal' is that it was not widely recognised by pupils and staff in my study as being realistically attainable: it represents the ideal norm *towards* which all children are moulded and corrected. In this context, I also use Foucault's expression of 'normalising judgement' to describe my notion of the *normalisation of conformity* at the research school. This is allied with the articulation of a *will to conform* through the coercion of hierarchical observation, examination and the development of self-surveillance as well as their associated corrective and punitive practices. The will to conformity is a feature of the discussion in Chapter 7.

### **3.2.4 Individual Agency and Resistance**

In this final section, I consider the ideas of agency and resistance as a response to the disciplinary environment described above. Whilst the primary text used in this discussion is again *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1995), this is where I also depart somewhat from Foucault's earlier work. Concepts such as *resistance* and *agency* appear in discussions on the effects and manifestations of power without being his exclusive focus (Poster, 1984). For example, of revolt – an extreme form of agency and resistance – Foucault (2002a, p.449) writes: 'the impulse by which a single individual, a group, a minority, or an entire people says "I will no longer obey," and throws the risk of their life in the face of an authority they consider unjust seems to me something irreducible,' and 'against power one must always set inviolable laws and unrestricted rights,' (Foucault 2002a, p.453). Foucault has been criticised for not dealing explicitly with these concepts, some calling it an omission (Downing, 2008; Marshall, 1996). However, much of this Paras (2006) argues enters Foucault's later work. I will argue that to understand what is legitimate political participation and agency for children in a primary school, we need to consider the effect of structures and practices which constitute them as incompetent and marginalised. This subsection considers the effects of Foucault's power-knowledge and disciplinary practices on individuals, the limitations these structures and practices impose, and how individuals may respond in terms of their agency, resistance and freedom to develop political competence and self-determination.

Marshall (1996) characterises the nature of power in Foucault's earlier writing as 'repressive' and 'hostile', dominating groups and individuals. Repression 'is a continuation of a perpetual relation of forceful domination, not by manifold forms, but exercised within society at a

capillary level and by each and every member of that society,' (Marshall, 1996, p.92). However, writing in 1977, Foucault clearly distances himself from these ideas:

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him [through examination] belong to this production. (Foucault, 1995, p.194)

Furthermore, there can be no meaningful exercise of power without resistance or the need for the exertion of that power would not be there. Foucault (1995) describes the body's natural resistance to disciplining as fighting domination in the inevitable rejection of the training to make it docile, efficient and receptive to conditioning into the desired occupation. 'The body, required to be docile in its minutest operations, opposes and shows the conditions of functioning proper to an organism. Disciplinary power has as its correlative an individuality that is not only analytical and 'cellular', but also natural and organic,' (Foucault, 1995, p.156). Despite the exercising of disciplinary control in school to define, promote and reward the idealised learner, the assertion of individuality in resisting is identified as a natural response. Indeed, Hope (2013, p.39) argues that Foucault's surveyed subjects were 'conscious of their own self-determination.' I contend that fundamental to the presence and possibility of self-determination and resistance is critical thinking or awareness. 'Critical thinking is an attempt to understand what it is for a belief to be rationally justified. As such, critical thinking techniques evaluate some beliefs in the light of others,' (Wilson Mulnix, 2012, p.471). This can be seen as the analysis of competing discourses, the emergent sense of reasoning or reason-based thinking which allows room for challenge, disagreement and ultimately resistance as a cognitive response.

For Foucault, argues Marshall (1996, p.92), 'the self is constituted in two ways: first by what can be called technologies of domination and, second, by what can be called technologies of the self.' Technologies of domination operate to control and limit human conduct in creating docile and efficient individuals, as described in the production of the *idealised learner*. Technologies of the self, however, permit a certain level of autonomy and agency in the reconstruction of ways of being in seeking a more fulfilling life. However, 'these technologies are not just associated with constituting the self but, also, with *governmentality*,' (Marshall, 1996, p.111 – emphasis in original). That is shaping the conduct of individuals such that they

can be governed: the creation of the incompetent child. The tension in the exercise of power between an individual's freedom and their governance is clear (Ball, 2013).

However, as Paras suggests,

The notion of government was valuable for the simple reason that it would reinsert the free individual back into the historical analysis of thought. "Government" was not necessarily anonymous and third-person: unlike "power" and "knowledge", the word "government" pointed toward an activity that could be exercised by an individual upon himself. (Paras, 2006, p.114 – emphasis in original)

Paras (2006) identifies a degree of individual agency and argues that the shift in Foucault's conception of power is most clearly seen in his 1979 lecture course *The Birth of Biopolitics*. He contends that, 'rather than tightening the reins of social control, Foucault described a kind of slackening: a power that functioned with precision inasmuch as it let natural processes pursue their course, inasmuch as it let individuals follow their inclinations,' (Paras, 2006, p.103). This conceptualisation allows for some autonomy and self-determination. Foucault's idea of governmentality embodied a '*laissez-faire* state' rather than the notion of a 'top-down intervention' (Paras, 2006, p.103 – emphasis in original), quite different from his position in earlier works, notably *Discipline and Punish*. Paras (2006, p.121) observes that this heralded the acknowledged entrance to Foucault's work of 'interpretation, agency, and subjectivity,' but that did not necessarily extend to the independent subject as well, and certainly not as traditionally understood. From within his later lectures, Paras (2006) marks the transition from the 'now worn and hackneyed theme of power-knowledge' to the 'government-truth dyad' (Foucault, *Du gouvernement des vivants* lecture of January 9, 1980, translated and quoted by Paras, 2006, p.113). However, this represents a logical development as Foucault described it, and not the about turn of which some critics accused him (Deleuze, 1995; Downing, 2008).

In examining interviews and exchanges that Foucault had during his visit to Stanford University in the United States during 1979, Paras (2006, p.110) identifies Foucault making the claim that 'self-assertive subjectivity was characteristic of modern society,' acknowledging that the issue of 'subjectivity' was of importance to him then. In concluding his chapter entitled 'Deep Subjects', Paras (2006, p.123) contrasts the construction of subjectivity in *Discipline and Punish* where, 'no individual received the choice of whether or not to undergo discipline; and only through discipline did one become an individual,' with the subject of 1980 who, 'had the ability to pursue (or not pursue) techniques that would transform its subjectival modality – but which would not, one way or the other, disrupt its status as an independent locus of experience,'

(Paras, 2006, p.123). Deleuze (1995), discussing the changes to the focus of Foucault's writing from knowledge to power to subjectification, suggests that this is a 'third dimension' to his work; 'he's talking about inventing ways of existing, through optional rules, that can both resist power and elude knowledge, even if knowledge tries to penetrate them and power to appropriate them,' (Deleuze, 1995, p.92). The disciplinary society persists but the individual's response to it is foregrounded in discussion and articulated with greater clarity.

For my use of Foucault's concepts, the above is an important argument for how agency and resistance can emerge as a response to dominating disciplinary structures and practices. This interpretation of Foucault's position challenges the paradox Marshall (1996) identifies of the pursuit of personal autonomy within an education system that seeks to guide, govern and ultimately restrict children's self-determination. This expresses well the tensions I see in my data and hear in the participants' personal accounts. It demonstrates the challenges to the incompetent child and idealised learner of developing meaningful and sustainable political competence through technologies of domination. At the same time it highlights opportunities for agency and resistance within the same disciplinary framework through technologies of the self. Critical to the analysis of my data is assessing the degree to which children can be considered autonomous beings within education and schools and with access to the reconstruction of different ways of being (Marshall, 1996).

### **3.3 Conclusion**

People are drawn to work with Foucault for a reason (Deleuze, 2006): the excitement his theories offer to reinterpretations of the world. I was easily distracted by Foucault's sojourns into familiar and at the same time new territory. However, his apparently unstructured approaches designed to undermine the more familiar practices of writing history are what some criticise as lack of coherence or clarity: 'the syncopated, uneven character of his books rubs unpleasantly against the sensibilities of those expecting a text that resolves all the main questions,' (Poster, 1984, p.147). Yet, Foucault's work was never supposed to fit into a known space (Downing, 2008): it is the challenge to what has already been defined and assumed which is critical. Additionally, in pointing to an uneven and uncomfortable alternative to popular but arbitrary histories, the way his work has been interpreted fits the purpose of his projects. Poster (1984, p.151) acknowledges Foucault's 'refusal to systematize his position', but interprets this as his 'theoretical timidity' rather than an active stance. Foucault's interpretative challenge is often part of his attraction (Deleuze, 1995; Ball, 2013).

While I acknowledge the time lapse and changes to society since Foucault created the theoretical concepts I use in my analysis, I have argued that there is still much of relevance to the primary school. I can identify with Foucault's earlier focus away from marginalised individuals and groups and onto the dominant disciplinary frameworks which define and name the subject, those subjectified (Downing, 2008). The privileged, and apparently powerful, become the object of study as do the relations of power as the mechanisms which produce knowledge. This chapter has constructed a framework and identified key theoretical concepts as tools with which to interpret the political participation and agency of children at the research school.

Additionally, 'undermining the tyranny of common sense' (Downing, 2008, p.19) as a Foucauldian aim also describes my own sense of purpose in conducting an ethnographic study: re-examining what is taken for granted within the institution, challenging the comfort of familiarity (Vaughan, 2004) and seeking to 'demystify the workings of systematisation' (Downing, 2008, p.5). These are aims which James and Prout (1997a) have argued make ethnographic research highly suited to the exploration of constructions of childhood today. However, there is tension inherent in applying post-structural thinking to standard notions of ethnography: it is not a comfortable fit (Vaughan, 2004; Power, 2011), and this is discussed in the following chapter, Section 4.2.2. Furthermore, making sense of research which is designed to be problematizing rather than problem-solving or emancipatory (Vaughan, 2004), presents difficulties in putting the research at the disposal of the researched, and not making them solely the 'other' in the research process (Hammersley, 1995). These tensions are reflected in my description of my research as *post-structurally informed*. Chapter 4 now takes on these challenges as it attempts to resolve the methodological issues presented by my research proposition: providing an account of the political structures and practices which generate and normalise the beliefs and behaviour around children's participation and agency in a primary school.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Methodology and Methods: Fulfilling the Quest**

#### **Introduction**

The discussion in Chapter 4 deals with the journey travelled in pursuing my quest. This has been defined in Chapters 2 and 3 as: providing an account of the political structures and practices which generate and normalise the beliefs and behaviours around children's participation and agency through exploring how children recount and account for political participation and learning at school. This chapter is, therefore, partly narrative and partly evaluative of my research work, aiming to illuminate the process of inquiry (Cohen *et al.*, 2005) and 'demonstrate the adequacy of its empirical and theoretical claims' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.206). The chapter identifies the means of accomplishing the quest and the data collection instruments utilised for exploring new and known places and cultures, and for surviving in unfamiliar and sometimes inhospitable territory. The aim is to demonstrate how the road travelled sought to fulfil my quest and also changed my perception of its course and destination as a result of the encounters and experiences along the way: the milestones met and challenges faced.

The fulfilment of the quest is explained and justified by presenting the derivation of the research design, which is guided by the conclusions of my substantive and theoretical deliberations. The resulting research objectives and key questions are presented and discussed alongside the selection of an ethnographic approach as most suited to this research. In discussing the nature of the quest as a research endeavour, I present my justification for the validity of the accounts which collectively constitute the body of evidence underpinning the main argument of this thesis. The methodological literature review includes particular discussions on the ethical challenges faced during this journey and my relationship with the research participants, primarily children, and as an insider to the organisation. I return to these issues and dilemmas throughout the thesis as the quest unfolds. The chapter concludes with my mapping the course of my data analysis and the resultant mechanisms and metaphors for presenting the findings.



#### 4.1 Imperative for the Quest: Deriving a Research Design

Exploring a primary school as a site for the development of children's political competence extends my previous undergraduate and post-graduate studies as a student of politics and an education professional. This research draws on and combines theory and practice from both disciplines, the particular imperative for which is outlined in Chapter 1, Section 1.1.

Investigating how teachers' self-perception might impact on children's self-perception and help or hinder the development of authentic participative practices was my initial pursuit. I had anticipated exploring the loci of power within a school's socio-political environment and culture, and examining ideas of control, emancipation and *conscientization* (Freire, 1996) being at the heart of my study. My focus was on the structures and practices constructing children's and teachers' agency and participation within primary schools as politicised learning institutions (Pike, 2007). Specifically, I was seeking to document and better understand 'lived social relations, in part at least, from the point of view of how they embody, mediate and enact the operations and results of unequal power,' (Willis and Trondman, 2000, p.10).

However, as the research progressed, what I had initially thought would have been of core relevance to the enquiry became more contextual and I was able to articulate what I believed were more widely and socially relevant questions such as: *How do children understand their role and agency within the school community?* and *What or who legitimises action in the view of participant teachers and children?* This shift towards questioning how effectively primary schooling could contribute to the development of political competence, through both the curriculum and cultural practices within the school, was prompted by the responses of child participants in the initial focus group interviews, discussed in more detail in Section 5. An important attribute of the researcher must be suspending the fixing of research questions and being able to respond to the research situation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1990). Taking direction from the research field and its agents affords the work greater credibility and relevance within both the context of the site selected and wider professional and academic communities (see Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Pole and Morrison, 2003; Walford, 2008b; Wolcott, 2005).

The research objectives became:

1. Identify perceptions and examples of children acting as political agents in the primary school
2. Explore and provide a description of the structures governing political behaviours of children
3. Provide an opportunity to rethink power relations, the nature and meaning of participation in school
4. Derive theory explaining the structures, practices, participant participation and agency

The resulting key questions can be found on page 4 of the introduction and the final version of the research design can be found in *Appendix 1*.

As a potential threat to the development of sustainable political competence in children, my concern was to identify any 'relations of structure that privilege a particular social order by helping promote its favoured forms of behaviour and belief as natural,' (Beach, 2008, p.173). The changing focus and nature of the research objectives, whilst anticipated and welcome in terms of the greater relevance they render to the study (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2007), also presented challenges and missed opportunities. I had presented all participants with a certain idea of my pursuit and line of questioning, albeit caveated with the exploratory nature of the research, and as this changed I had to refine, re-establish and re-justify my quest for some participants. Further, by the time significant changes had happened, my initial presentations to participants and focus groups had ended and I had lost the opportunity to discuss the reformulations and get participant feedback. This analysis was then confined to individual interviews which were informative and illuminating, but did not have the advantage of collective 'critical inquiry' and deliberation (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005, p.887).

## **4.2 Developing my Methodological Approach**

### **4.2.1 Methodological Approach: Ethnographic, Post-structurally Informed**

Responding to the substantive aims of the quest, accessing, understanding and explaining participants' perceptions of their participation and agency, and the structures and practices within which they operate, required a qualitative research approach (see Cohen *et al.*, 2005;

Delamont, Coffey and Atkinson, 2000; Hammersley, 2007; Lincoln and Denzin, 2005). As Pole and Morrison (2003) illustrate, this facilitated the provision of meaningful data and findings for the construction of contextualised explanations at a specific location of: the relationships between research participants; the relationships between the cultural and institutional structures and those participants; and how the perceived situation affected their sense of agency and autonomy. I approached the quest as ethnography where 'a unique sense of embodied existence and consciousness [is] captured.' (Willis and Trondman, 2000, p.6). There are also dimensions of practitioner research which lend clarity to the discussion of the methodology following from my being a teacher in the research school. However, in not seeking to make an intervention or evaluate education practice, I was not undertaking action or evaluative research (see Cohen *et al.*, 2005; Cousin, 2005). An ethnographic approach allows greater depth and more meaningful descriptions and understandings of the situation where other methodologies do not value or interrogate participant lived experience to the same degree (Walford, 2008b).

An ethnographic study typically concentrates on a discrete location and the analysis focuses on the complexities of this place and its associated events and participant experiences (Walford, 2001). In this way, it shares a similar definition to case study research: 'case study research aims to explore and depict a setting with a view to advancing understanding,' (Cousin, 2005 p.421). Cousin (2005, p.424) writes that case study research represents a 'broad church', applying a range of methods and that many examples are ethnographic, coming from cultural anthropology. Challenging the association, however, Thomas (2013, p.590) argues that the operationalisation of case study in education research 'may lack coherence and direction.' My understanding of Flyvbjerg's (2006) discussion on common 'misunderstandings of case-study research' is that while ethnography could be considered an example of case-study research, not all case studies would be ethnographic or use qualitative methods. With this distinction in mind, I chose the ethnographic description of my work as more informative and reflective of my quest.

#### **4.2.2 On Ethnography**

There has never been an unambiguous definition of ethnography (Walford, 2009), however, my approach was to use 'methods involving direct and sustained social contact with agents, ... richly writing up the encounter, respecting, recording, representing at least partly *in its own*

*terms*, the irreducibility of human experience ... [embodying] the disciplined and deliberate witness-cum-recording of human events,' (Willis and Trondman, 2000, p.5 – emphasis in original). Ethnographic research aims to provide a description and explanation of cultural knowledge of a group contributing to our collective understanding of human society (Hammersley, 1992).

As a naturalistic form of enquiry, ethnography views humans as agents and human behaviour as socially constructed and, therefore, only fully understood by those agents of construction and reproduction: there can be no universalisation of behaviour explained by cause-effect theories (Trifonas, 2009). Knowledge of my participants' political agency and competence and the methods for constructing that knowledge cannot be value-free (Greenbank, 2003). Brannick and Coghlan (2007) also detail how researchers employing hermeneutic approaches are encouraged to avoid premature conceptualisation or theorising in the field, and to instead allow relevant ideas and themes to emerge from the data and the processes of gathering and analysing it. The resultant lack of generalizability, however, does not render the data or findings less valuable (Pole and Morrison, 2003). In focusing on the 'study of cultural formation and maintenance' (Walford, 2008b), ethnographic research aims to investigate what there is in a particular field to be described, it does not assume that prior conceptions will be relevant to the research field. The credibility of data gathered must therefore be a function of the integrity of the research methodology: how well it responds to the initial research proposition and the relevance of that proposition to the research field (Walford, 2008b). Indeed, Hammersley (2006) argues that a systematic and reflexive methodology can result in the derivation of theory. 'Ethnography and theory should be conjoined to produce a concrete sense of the social as *internally* sprung and dialectically produced,' (Willis and Trondman, 2000, p.6 – emphasis in original). Theory is seen as a way of ordering data and making it meaningful rather than something to be tested, proved or disproved (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007).

Wolcott (2005) highlights the eternal presence of unresolved methodological issues in all qualitative research, arguing that it is too much for any researcher to hope to resolve these enduring tensions, he or she must articulate their own position and be judged accordingly. Ethnography is a methodology with known traditions (Forsey, 2008; Vaughan, 2004). One of which is that valid data are from participant observation in the form of field notes first and foremost (Delamont, 2008b). Other methods of data-gathering, specifically interviewing, do not

provide the same, detached observational records and cannot form the basis of a traditional ethnography. Forsey (2008) argues this is an oversight when we live in an 'interview society' where 'participant listening' provides as meaningful data as observation. Talk is evidence of thought, feeling, learning, understanding and cognition (Forsey, 2010). Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), Pole and Morrison (2003) and Walford (2008b) all suggest that a mixed methods approach now characterises ethnographic work and the particular value of this is the verification of interpretations through multiple data sources, giving the product greater 'validity' (Walford, 2008b). It is this mixed methods approach that I have adopted and describe as ethnographic, although I would describe this as lending greater *credibility* and *transferability* to the work, discussed in Section 4.2.3.

'Recently, anthropologists and sociologists have expressed concern that the worlds they study might be depicted more compellingly, accurately, and profoundly by novelists or filmmakers than by social scientists,' (Fassin, 2014, p.40). Interpreting an ethnography as providing 'reliable and hence persuasive accounts of social reality' (Pole and Morrison, 2003, p.138) or the creation of a work of fiction, is a question of how to view authorship and authority of the researcher. Presented as a dichotomy, the researcher is either a channel through which the lived experience of a distinct group is communicated, or the sole architect of the narrative sharing none of the authorship with those of the group (Pole and Morrison, 2003). Seen as on a continuum, each ethnography will be the result of a researcher's different relationship to the researched and be representative of their worlds in different ways (Lewis and Russell, 2011), demanding different forms and levels of creativity and fiction in the retelling of stories. Willis and Trondman (2000, p.6) acknowledge that 'ethnographic accounts can indeed assume an active centred agency in charge of its own history making and also assume, sometimes, that the whole meaning of a phenomenon is written on its surface.' However, they also suggest that a 'theoretically informed' humanistic ethnography can overcome some of these issues and still give some kind of voice to those whose lived experience is under analysis (Willis and Trondman, 2000). I see my narrative as creative fiction in the *Choose Your Own Adventure* scenario, but inspired by and in response to my child participants' accounts. I have written it in such a way that those participants would recognise themselves in the narrative.

Different interpretations as to what could constitute ethnography challenged my initial methodological position. In Chapter 3 I defined my approach as post-structurally informed.

Vaughan (2004, p.392) contends that 'questions about meaning lend themselves to a post-structural ethnography,' the assumptions behind which are detailed in 3.1.1. The result is that a multiplicity of voices can be heard, sometimes conflicting and far from conclusive, rather than the single narrative of the traditional ethnography aiming 'to restrict multiple meanings as far as possible,' (Walford, 2009, p.279). Acknowledging this unhappy fit of post-structuralism and ethnography, Vaughan (2004, p.393) describes the approach as being 'inherently in tension.' She suggests that a humanist perspective is tied to traditional ethnography and that the way to release the methodology from its tether is to 'avoid telling a victory narrative' where the ethnographer is both a 'truth-seeker' and 'truth-teller' (Vaughan, 2004). Engaged in the pursuit of translating data into 'a text of social science *argument*' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.193 – emphasis in original), the ethnographer must acknowledge that there are many ways of writing about the social phenomena observed. 'Each way of constructing 'the ethnography' will bring out different emphases. ... The world does not arrange itself into chapters and subheadings for our convenience,' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.191). The product and process of post-structural ethnography is itself a regulating fiction between competing narratives producing its own regimes of truth and textual identities (Britzman, 1995). This process of making the familiar strange in the creation of transferable cultural knowledge and encouraging the 'astonishment that strangeness gives rise to,' (Marques da Silva, 2004, p.568), is also fundamental in Foucault's approach (Hoskins, 1990) as discussed in Chapter 3.

Further, understanding the subject as a 'by-product of discursive formation' (Vaughan, 2004 p.400) rather than being its origins, using Foucault's work enables the setting aside of historical assumptions and limitations and moving beyond them. Vaughan (2004, p.401) suggests the value of post-structural ethnographic work is in helping 'us re-conceive ourselves in terms of post-structural accounts of the practices that invent schools, students and teachers.' The difficulty in making this research transferable is that it seeks to problematise a situation rather than solve problems or create emancipatory opportunities (Vaughan, 2004), and this does not fit well with current policy discourses on performance and the measurement of it (Jeffrey and Troman, 2012a) as described in Chapter 2.

#### **4.2.3 Validity and Reliability or Transferability and Credibility**

We are located within a pre-interpreted world for which the situated human must be the primary instrument of interpretation in ethnographic research (Walford, 2008b). However,

humans as instruments of interpretation are inherently flawed. The very social and cultural saturation within the field which allows researchers to interpret its structure and agency will produce multiple and potentially conflicting interpretations and accounts of that situation. Indeed, as Hammersley (1995) argues the researcher's values will direct both the process and product of the research. However, the contestable role of the researcher as the tool of interpretation does not render the research account worthless. 'Methodologies which support knowledge production from an insider perspective ... are of great value in developing more nuanced and complex understandings of educational experiences, identities, processes, practices and relationships,' (Burke and Kirton, 2006. p.2).

Acknowledging the researcher's openness to constructive or competing subjectivities and discourses through a reflexive methodology, explaining the systematisation of data-handling, can serve to create cultural knowledge which can be transferable. Brown and England (2005) describe this as the 'fore-grounding' of subjective discourses in analysis and representations of research to maintain the legitimacy of the authorial narrative. This will communicate to audiences what is rooted in that specific environment and what learning may be taken to be of value elsewhere (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). As a result, the aim and experience of reflexivity will be different from one research approach to another, as will the understandings of reliability and validity (Cohen *et al.*, 2005).

Willis and Trondman's (2000, p.12) conclusion expresses my intent well: 'We are interested in producing 'Ah ha' effects where evocative data hit the experience, body and emotions of the reader. ... 'Ah ha' effects fuse old experiences with new ones, thus opening up readers' minds towards new horizons.' I understand this as creating a metaphor which relates to reader experiences outside the research field, rendering the account comprehensible to others: transferable. Willis and Trondman (2000, p.12) explain the technique as bringing 'registered experience' into a productive but unfussy relation to 'theory', so maximising the illumination of wider change.'

Pole and Morrison (2003) and Walford (2008b) argue that the theoretical validity of ethnographic research lies in the natural setting being the source of the data, giving context-boundedness and offering 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973). The data are socially and culturally situated and saturated with the researcher being part of the research world. An ethnographer's immersion in the field, resulting from extended time there, allows for the repetition of events

and verification of observations, increasing the reliability of subsequent research accounts and claims. It will also allow for a deeper analysis of those events and observations and consideration of the differences between various responses, for example to routine or spontaneous events (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). This level of exposure also facilitates the development of more complex and meaningful relationships to and within the field. Coghlan (2003) argues that this lends an interpretative clarity to the analysis as it is undertaken as one of the community, and this was my intent in seeking to teach in the research school also. However, researching in your own back yard also brings new methodological and ethical challenges (Zulfikar, 2014). This depth of involvement runs the risk of losing important research distance as the strange becomes more familiar. Barley and Bath (2014) warn of the dangers of *over-familiarisation* with the field: going native. This is particularly relevant in cases such as mine where the researcher is also an existing member of the community, discussed in Section 4.4.1.

My understanding of validity for this study is rooted in the suitability of the methods and methodology used and the rigour applied in the documenting of the ethnographic research processes. This, I argue, creates a meaningful, value-relevant account (Hammersley, 2006). As Wolcott (2005, p.155) states, 'qualitative approaches represent a different way to achieve a different kind of understanding, one that appeals to those who find satisfaction in the discovery of what is going on without the hope of achieving the authority of cause-and-effect studies. Every way of knowing has its place.' When dealing with only one case or instance within the research field, differences are as meaningful as similarities which are not evidence of replications of the same thing: they cannot be if all instances, contributions and contributors are distinct (Wolcott, 2005). With this in mind, the idea of scientific reliability as the ability to accurately produce and reproduce results is also poorly matched to my work. Brannick and Coghlan (2007) suggest that better concepts may be credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability and that these are achieved through the processes of epistemic and methodological reflexivity. Epistemic reflexivity analyses and challenges a researcher's metatheoretical assumptions, their beliefs and values, while the methodological reflexivity applies a similar analysis and critique to the impact of the research on its participants and the field of study. As a consequence, applying the concept of 'transferability' (Guba, 1981) to 'address issues of external validity and generalisation' (Wolcott, 2005 p.161) is a more useful and value-relevant practice. As Wolcott (2005, p.164) reassuringly says of his work, 'in each of



[my] studies I make a few generalizations, implicate a few more, and leave readers the challenge of making further ones depending on their own concerns and prior experiences.'

I argue that the credibility of my work stems from the systematic nature and rigour of my research approach as described in the following sections. I contend this constitutes a systematic and reflexive methodology which can result in the derivation of theory (Hammersley, 2006). Walford (2009, p.279) writes, 'reports of ethnographic research (and, indeed, all research) are surely fundamentally attempts to construct a readerly text,' the credibility of which is established through methodological and cognitive rigour (Walford, 2009). I argue the result of my research approach and presentation of the data as a critically evaluated *Choose Your Own Adventure* narrative is both credible as representative of the children's accounts and transferable in its accessibility to my audiences. In this way, I apply the concept of validity to my work.

#### **4.3 Selection of the Site and Participants**

##### **4.3.1 Selection of Site**

Walford (2001) warns of the dangers of not actively selecting a site, but settling for the one which is easiest to access. So, finding what I believed to be a suitable site on my first attempt did concern me, but I chose to accept this as good fortune and initiated my fieldwork.

Retrospectively, this was problematic. Due to finding a potential site so quickly, I began to build relationships in the field before officially beginning to gather data and did not make extensive or detailed enough field notes on my arrival. Becoming an insider and not rigorously documenting that process needs to be 'fore-grounded' in my analysis of the data (Brown and England, 2005).

The selected site for this exploration was the largest junior age school in its local authority, with entry from age eight and approximately 180 children in each year group; a fuller description of the site can be found in Chapter 5. This provided an opportunity to gather data from a number of teachers and children in very similar positions lending greater methodological credibility from the intra-field comparisons it offered (Silverman, 2001). Further, it was a school which encouraged staff to pursue research interests and offered me non-executive membership of the Senior Leadership Team and Governing Body and to be present at subject or team leadership meetings with the consent of other members of the groups. Having worked as a

teacher at the school on a temporary basis, I was made a permanent, part-time employee in September 2007. My belief was that being 'embedded' would lend further credibility to the study in allowing me to more easily take on the role of ethnographer (Lewis and Russell, 2011). However, this presents additional ethical challenges which are discussed in Section 4.4.

#### **4.3.2 Selection of Participants and Their Participation**

The selection of participants proved problematic: the first respondents to the initial invitation to participate in my research project were self-selecting, indeed, a number of them had already said they would be involved before I had completed my research design let alone officially begun the data-gathering process. Whilst having many willing volunteers was encouraging, creating a more balanced sample of the school community was important to ensure the data were more representative of the whole and to be able 'to engage in the strategic search for data that is essential to a reflexive approach,' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.104). Additionally, the unexpected popularity of participation generated far more data than I had anticipated, making the selection of accounts an intricate process as is discussed in Section 6.

Initially, I had only envisaged working with Years 5 and 6, the last two years of primary education, where children were closer to statutory citizenship education and the implicit recognition of the potential for political competence. However, following initial observations and accounts from staff, the distinction between Year 4 and Year 5 appeared increasingly arbitrary and Year 4 children were also included. Additionally, in that Year 4 children were presenting themselves as equally engaged with the research ideas, to exclude them had the potential to threaten an ethical approach of equal opportunity. The resulting research cohort is formed primarily of children (109 participants) with adult testimonies (21 participants) used to contextualise the children's accounts. There was some attrition of participants after the first phase of the research as well as some later recruitment. Details of my research participant group and their participation can be found in *Appendix 2*.

Walford (2009) stresses the need for researcher-selection of informants to maintain rigour in research practice. Despite individual invitations, I had limited success recruiting certain groups of participants, for example, so-called 'disruptive boys'. I was unable to obtain specific reasons as to why such children were unwilling to participate and judged it unethical to push for responses. Many were clearly uncomfortable with the request, presenting as embarrassed or

uncertain of the commitment. Bourke and Loveridge (2014, p.154 – emphasis in original) argue that ‘informed dissent’ should be as prominent within research as informed consent, ‘partly because children are more likely to express *dissent* through non-verbal body language which may be less easily ‘heard’.’ Unfortunately, this means those accounts are missing from my findings and conclusions.

To go beyond the participants’ individualised views and to be able to describe and explain the context of their behaviours, I designed a participatory research programme to specifically engage with children’s often hard-to-reach views (discussed in Section 4.4.2). This was supported by the recording of observational and analytical field notes. For details of how the data were to be gathered see the table on page 87; and for a description of the resulting data gathered see *Appendix 2*. Participation for both adults and children was designed to progress through three phases following initial engagement:



- Phase One: contribute to reviewing and refining of research foci through group discussions and interviews
- Phase Two: provide accounts of personal understandings, perceptions and experiences in school
- Phase Three: verify and authenticate data through discussion, and contribute to initial analysis

This participation was direct, solicited and sequential. As a result, a large part of the data comprises participant accounts: direct and solicited by the researcher at interview or in conversation; direct and unsolicited – volunteered by the participant in conversation; indirect and unsolicited – inferred from participant observation. By *direct* I mean the intentional recounting of events, whereas *indirect* describes interactions in which participants are actively trying to make sense of events and ideas through negotiation, speculation and hypothesis and

from which understandings about belief, values, social order and 'discursive practices' can be inferred (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.99). Child informants featured far less in these data than adults for two reasons: first, the opportunities during my research days were limited due the children's structured timetable and their understandable preference for play at playtimes; and second, the limited access I had to children when teaching myself. This is borne out in my data by the majority of unsolicited accounts being from children in my own class or student council members (I facilitated the running of the student council at the time of my fieldwork), and is an example of the inherent bias of participant observation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

#### **4.4 Ethical Aspects of Researching with My Participants**

##### **4.4.1 Relationship with the Researched as an Insider to the School**

One area of the execution of my research design that proved difficult to anticipate was the changes to my relationships with the researched, as a researcher and a teacher, challenging what I understood as my different identities as an 'insider' within the school and presenting unexpected ethical dilemmas – some of which are briefly discussed later. Brannick and Coghlan (2007, p.60) explain how, due to insiders having a 'personal stake and substantive emotional investment in the setting,' insider research is often seen as problematic and of dubious validity: the immersion of a researcher in the field does not allow them the distance perceived necessary to effectively investigate and describe a group. However, this very familiarity could also prove advantageous in the depth of understanding offered to the researcher. 'The insider is someone whose biography ... gives her a lived familiarity with the group being researched while the outsider is a researcher who does not have any intimate knowledge of the group being researched, prior to entry to the group,' (Mercer, 2007, p.3). Notably, it is implicit in this definition that any researcher will become involved with the research group through the process of research, even if being outside at the outset. Outsider positioning is temporary and provisional in most qualitative research settings, shifting as the relationships in the field develop (Chavez, 2008).

Sara Delamont's (2008a) paper on her research into a Capoeira group demonstrates the above well. As an ethnographer, she was always only ever an observer, however, she reached a point where she could no longer define herself as a complete outsider, coming to understand the

nuanced workings of the dance and combat without ever having engaged in it herself. Mercer (2007) argues that there is no straightforward location of an individual as inside or outside a research group. There are many different communities existing within any given field of research and boundaries are not fixed or impermeable: a better description of the insider-outsider identity is on a continuum and not as a dichotomy. Brannick and Coghlan (2007) also describe group membership at different levels: peripheral, active and complete. This reflects well my own experience and the different associations I had with the institution and its members: although I was an active member of the teaching staff at my school, there are certain communities to which I did not and will probably never belong: senior leadership, student body, office administration.

Many of the difficulties that face an insider researcher stem from prior relationships and the perceived closeness to or distance from participants (Chanvez, 2008), requiring careful, ethical deliberation. This specifically relates to how far participant expectations of a researcher's actions, behaviour and role coincide with the researcher's own. Sara Delamont (2002) challenges researchers to question how the perception of the researcher impacts upon the data given and gathered: to locate the alienated view of the self as an actor in the research (Coffey, 1999). As a researcher, I had viewed myself as somewhat detached and standing-by. However, participant views were inevitably of my other, more familiar roles – teacher, colleague, friend – and it was to these known identities that comments were directed. Accounts could be interpreted as gossip, confessions or defence testimony, for example, and I evaluate this in Chapter 7. The challenge to the researcher's identity stems from the internal conflict from being at one and the same time inside and outside the research field (Zulfikar, 2014).

Analysing the closeness to and distance from participants introduces the role and notional innocence of the bystander researcher. Barbara Dennis (2009) discusses her very deliberate choice to act as a whistle-blower in the organisation in which she was researching. The intervention was justified on the basis of racial discrimination against a pupil by a member of staff, the moral/ethical imperative outweighing the confidentiality agreements of the research. Robert Barry, a psychophysicologist, equally sees no such dilemma in the intervention of so-called bystander researchers,

... this separation of the content of our science from the consequences of its application is ethically indefensible. We cannot continue to pretend to be innocent bystanders. Because of our expertise, we cannot claim innocence; in the absence of innocence, we cannot remain mere bystanders. (Barry, 1996, p.1)

Following this line of argument, doing research and gaining knowledge transforms the outsider, the bystander researcher, to an insider with responsibilities. Zyglidopoulos and Flemming's (2008) analysis of organisational action describes a 'continuum of destructiveness' along which innocent bystanders can ultimately become the guilty perpetrators of unethical action. The analysis describes how a temporal and structural 'ethical distance' can aid a transition to innocent participation in and rationalisation of unethical acts: the feeling of detachment removing a sense of personal responsibility.

I interpret this as the alienation of personal responsibility to the institution and/or process of research and an argument for the impossibility of remaining a bystander when conducting social research, whether a recognised institutional member or not. The knowledge of a situation automatically makes the researcher a participant (Barry, 1996), so choosing *not* to act could be interpreted as action in its own right. Anticipating such dilemmas in my association with both adult and child participants during fieldwork prompted me to begin a new set of fieldnotes: a commentary on the participants' observations on the research and its impact in school. Additionally, this realisation further challenged the idea of being engaged in a peripheral activity as a researcher in the school (Chavez, 2008), perhaps a naïve belief at the outset. I am not convinced that a researcher with sensitive knowledge and understanding can ever be an *innocent* bystander: the legal duty of care must always come first.

#### **4.4.2 Researching with Children**

The case for involving children as informants and participants in research to elevate and better understand their experiences and perspectives as experts on their position in society is strong (Lowe, 2012; Tangen, 2008). Alexander (2010) and Lister *et al.* (2003) identify an absence of children's views in educational and sociological research to the extent that in some areas, we just do not know what children think. Lloyd-Smith and Tarr (2000) argue that this is a result of prevailing cultural and historical models of childhood, reluctant to afford children a voice. Their rationale for including children's contributions with policy-making and research is that, 'the

reality experienced by children and young people in educational settings cannot be fully comprehended by inference and assumption,' (Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 2000, p.61).

Children should, therefore, be encouraged to raise their voice. Additionally, as Graham and Fitzgerald (2011, p.450) argue, this can promote 'children's social and emotional well-being' in the recognition it affords them as legitimate social agents and the opportunity to 'discover and negotiate the essence of who they are and their place in the world' (Graham and Fitzgerald, 2011, p.450). Moreover, Christensen and James (2008) suggest that through being involved in research, children can also develop their own critical reflexive thinking both on the substantive subject matter and the research process itself. This offers another source of data to the researcher and additional educational experiences to the children concerned through 'joint meaning-making: ... [a] subtle, evolutionary process of negotiation and renegotiation of meaning,' (Westcott and Littleton, 2005, p.148).

Woodhead and Faulkner (2008, p.34) identify studies which 'demonstrate that significant knowledge gains result when children's active participation in the research process is deliberately solicited and when their perspectives, views and opinions are accepted as genuine, valid evidence.' It is these principles which have guided my research, however, I am also mindful of Connolly's (1997) assertion that researchers cannot claim to represent the authenticity of children's voices any more than they can of any other social agent, much is lost and gained with interpretation. Westcott and Littleton (2005) also highlight the dangers of generalising children's experiences in the application of research findings, citing the example of the apparent impressionable nature of pre-schoolers in interview situations being unthinkingly applied to older children in attempts to devalue their courtroom contributions. This lack of regard for children's testimony is present in research on children and childhoods also. One difficulty Connolly (1997) describes in his work is having to justify taking children's comments at face value stemming from the assumption that there is always an ulterior motive to what they say: children will lie to please an adult, gain attention through being naughty, or simply test what kind of reaction they might receive. The accusation of the researcher was that he was either 'putting words into the children's mouths' or had 'subconsciously encouraged them to talk or behave in a certain way' (Connolly, 1997, p.162). However, this charge stems from a belief that children are not capable of meaningful social participation, illustrative of traditional

developmental constructions of childhood (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998), the arguments against which are made in Chapter 2.

What Connolly (1997, p.163) consequently seeks to demonstrate is that, 'regardless of the methods used, it is the researcher's own value base and assumptions about children and childhood that remain the most important factor in shaping the way that data on young children are collected, analysed and written up.' Judging the value of children's contributions to any given study is a function of how the researcher positions the children as subjects, objects or participants in the research, and also in society (Punch, 2002; Woodhead and Faulkner, 2008). My assumption is that children are capable of meaningful self-expression and therefore can make relevant and analysable contributions to research data. Once this is acknowledged, though, the product of a piece of research with children can be evaluated alongside others as one representing a multiplicity of children's voices (Hendrik, 2015). The ethnographer's critically reflexive approach, discussed earlier, is what makes this possible. The key to accessing children's contributions is in the selection of appropriate research methods (Connolly, 1997) for both participants and the research context (Punch, 2002), as presented in Section 4.5. The assumption here, however, is that it is possible to access children's thoughts and opinions, and not remain an 'outsider' their 'cultures of communication' (Haudrup Christensen, 2004, p.169). However, that is problematic from the other assumptions about children, their voices and experiences of childhood, researchers bring to the field (Leeson, 2014).

The selection of methods must address other challenges also. One of the greatest difficulties in researching with children stems from the inherent power imbalance and insecurity in adult-child relations (see Haudrup Christensen, 2004; Punch, 2002), further complicated in my research situation by the teacher-pupil dimension. The necessity and challenge of confidence and trust building (Westcott and Littleton, 2005), in creating an environment conducive to equal participation of child participants, comes to the fore. In a situation where I was already known to the community as a teacher, building trust was also about building children's confidence in my intent to treat them with respect as equal participants in my research as well as maintain my duty of care to them (Punch, 2002). The centrality of trust and negotiating differing perceptions of relationships within the field between students and teachers is also discussed by Russell (2005). From the critical evaluation of her first ethnography, she concludes that the quality and content of her data was a direct function of the quality of her relationship



building (Russell, 2005). Leeson (2014) comments of her research: 'what the children wanted was a relationship with an adult responsible for their care and wellbeing who cared sufficiently about them to create the right environment for them to tell their stories and their deeper emotions and thoughts.' My experience also endorses this conclusion.

Connolly (1997) argues that children's behaviour in research can be seen as a reflection of how they come to view the adults with whom they are working. In an educational setting, children are used to particular discursive patterns associated with the asking and answering of questions. Westcott and Littleton (2005) highlight the 'initiation- response – feedback' model within many classrooms: that is the teacher initiating a question, the child providing a response and the teacher issuing feedback to that response. David, Edwards and Alldred (2001) apply this caution to the obtaining of informed consent in school settings, warning that it could result in a form of 'educated consent' where a child is schooled into apparently consensual participation; obtaining consent is discussed in the following section. The resultant interpretations of the power and position of the researcher and child participant in such a research context may originate in very different places. Learning a new form of interaction with adults is then also an important part of research participation (Graham and Fitzgerald, 2011). This was perhaps particularly challenging for some children in my study due to it involving un-learning previously well-established teacher-pupil relations with me.

As James, Jenks and Prout (1998) observe, ethical issues are always close to the surface when working with children, and I had first to gain the consent of their parents and carers. However, in positioning children as participants, I was keen to get *their* individual informed consent to the research process and not just their gate-keepers'. Trusting me in my role as a researcher, seeking a less hierarchical and more equal relationship (Haudrup Christensen, 2004), was important in gaining the children's voluntary consent to participation in the research. However, the institutional view of children was not supportive of this, and I had to actively assert their right to confidentiality within my research data on a number of occasions. Haudrup Christensen (2004) and Leeson (2014) both discuss the difficulties of treating children as equals in research about them from their institutional positioning. The most obvious example of this in my fieldwork was the continued interruptions during research interviews. I was also asked for copies of my data as evidence children's wrong-doings, despite having clearly stated in my ethics protocol that would not be possible.

#### 4.4.3 Navigating and Negotiating an Ethical Approach

The reliability of voluntary informed consent is a hotly contested issue in the literature on ethical education research. Heath *et al.* (2007) explore this through an examination of the experiences of a number of researchers working with children and young people in institutional settings. While none of the researchers doubted the desirability of acquiring informed consent, achieving it in practice was highly problematic. Although I sought what I described as sufficiently informed consent to defined participation in my research quest – my ethics protocol can be found in *Appendix 3* – how far any participant can meaningfully give *informed* consent to a process and knowledge product which will be subject to continuous change is questionable (Barley and Bath, 2014). The ‘essence of ethnography’ is hermeneutic, exploratory (Hammersley, 2006, p.11): the outcome is unknown. I could only discuss the anticipated, generalised experience of the research with participants, not what would eventually happen.

Further, due to differing individual interpretations of the nature of any given project, as well as the notion of informed consent itself, a participant’s experience of being informed and giving consent can vary from project to project and even within a project (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The acquisition of meaningful informed consent becomes even more challenging with students and young children (Barley and Bath, 2014). There is an inbuilt institutional and cognitive power imbalance which leaves young people vulnerable. How far children have the cognitive capacity to understand the concepts behind informed consent and an entitlement or right to make their own decisions is a matter of tension and challenge for many ‘well-seasoned’ researchers (Heath *et al.*, 2007).

One example of the particular ethical challenges I faced came with a late participant. A child in my class asked to be part of the research project, recording a video diary in school. The primary ethical concern was that she was a child ‘at risk’ (a child protection term); however, she had never made a disclosure. My immediate concern was: what if she uses a research interview to disclose? Would she be able to distinguish between my teaching and researching activities: the familiar and the strange? Moinian’s (2006a) findings in her research with primary school children support the idea that whilst children have a clear view of events around them in school, they do not necessarily know the appropriate vehicle for communication. Research participation presented an opportunity to talk to a captive audience, and a guaranteed hot-line

to her class teacher. Haudrup Christensen (2004) problematizes the adult assumption of retaining control in adult-child relationships from the beliefs each hold of the others' relative power and authority. Establishing a common understanding of the relationship is fraught with difficulty (see Bourke and Loveridge, 2013 and David, Edwards and Alldred, 2001), if indeed possible, further challenging the idea that children are fully able to give their informed consent to participation.

In the case of my pupil, the settlement we (adults) negotiated at the time was that the research participation should be treated as any other interview in school. We would have had to act upon any revelation: the duty of care overriding all other considerations. However, the deliberations around the child's participation threatened my intention to treat participants equally. The BERA (2004) ethical guidelines highlight *both* the researcher's duty of care to ensure no harm comes to participants as a result of the research *and* the individual child's right to choose his or her involvement. In this particular case these appeared to conflict with each other. Heath *et al.* (2007) question how reliable the principle of voluntary informed consent is when the experiences of the participants are so different.

Another aspect of my research which needed particularly sensitive negotiation and navigation was the exploration of individuals' understandings of the political and social environment (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). I was explicitly engaging with potential sources of institutional and cultural stress and anxiety related to participants' personal, political and, in the case of adult participants, professional identity. This could have had a destabilising effect for both children and adults and potentially cause disillusionment with their current situations (Leeson, 2014), or generate the false belief that I would be able to initiate immediate change as a teacher or researcher (Vaughan, 2004).

Compounding these challenges was also the presence of unwitting research informants: individuals who were not research participants, but whose contributions appeared in the data due to their close association with participants. These children and adults had not given their prior consent to the use of their testimony or presence in the data. Whilst every effort was made to minimise the capture of others' data, there were unavoidable and unexpected instances where conversations were recorded and photographs taken including non-participants (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). All members of the school community were informed of my research project and the methods of data-gathering. Additionally, all

participants were instructed to gain the consent of by-standers to be included in their independent data-gathering, my research methods are discussed in Section 4.5. A number of adults and children later explained how they had avoided participants at strategic times as a result. However, this was not always possible, for example for learning support assistants working with individual children. Where non-participant data have inadvertently been recorded, they have been excluded from the data set and analysis, considered to be covert data collection (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

Ferdinand *et al.* (2007) argue that employing methodological reflexivity, engaging with thorny ethical issues (Heath *et al.*, 2007), gives the research ethical validity by ensuring that a researcher does not succumb to an institutional myopia. This is achieved through managing closeness and distance at the same time, revisiting and re-establishing consent regularly, judging situations effectively and being accountable for decisions made (Bourke and Loveridge, 2014). I have taken the position that participants need something tangible to which to consent and hold researchers accountable. However, to be ethical, as non-partial and non-discriminatory, a research protocol also needs to be flexible to the research situation and allowed to change (Figueroa, 2000). It could be argued that my experience fits with Miller and Bell's (2002) notion of a dynamic negotiation of consent with the participants and the organisation.

#### **4.5 Data Collection Methods**

To provide an account of the development of children's political competence in a primary school by generating data which recounted and accounted for children's political participation and learning, I designed a three-phase, mixed methods research programme. The data collected are tabulated in *Appendix 2*. To make the adults' and children's accounts as reflective of their experiences as possible, the methods I used were participative and tailored to the substantive and theoretical aims defined earlier (Pole and Morrison, 2003; Walford, 2008b). Phase 2 was specifically designed to be responsive to the environment and research proposition and involved the greatest creativity and innovation in capturing children's experiences in particular – a similar approach is described by Leeson (2014) in her work with children on difficult issues. It was anticipated that my fieldwork would cover at least one academic year from September 2008 to July 2009, the timeline for the research programme can be found in *Appendix 4*. This was not rigidly fixed and had the potential to be extended

should the direction of the research require it. Indeed, data-gathering continued into 2010 when the final interviews were conducted. The table on the following page shows the data which were collected by each method with reference to the initial objectives.

#### **4.5.1 Fieldnotes**

Fieldnotes were made regularly between September 2008 and July 2009. The earlier entries reflect my initial interest in teachers' experience of and in school and how that impacts upon children's experiences. As the issues which became core to the present thesis came into focus, and the idea of teacher impact was rendered more contextual, the content of the field notes changed, reflecting the challenges of first-time fieldwork described by Delamont (2008b) and Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995). Additionally, as the subject matter is defined and refined, there tend to be fewer individual entries, but each is longer and more detailed. I encountered several difficulties with the practicalities of writing field notes: finding suitable, uninterrupted time and space; not knowing when and on what I should be initially making notes and so recording notes unselectively. Van Maanen (1988, p.118) reassuringly writes, 'the heavy glop of material we refer to as fieldnotes is necessarily incomplete and insufficient. It represents the recorded memory of a study perhaps, but it is only a tiny fraction of the fieldworker's own memory of the research period.'

With practice, and as the analytical themes were articulated, I developed more effective fieldwork habits (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995). I started making shorthand notes and then writing up my observations as soon as I could following that. This was much more efficient and easier to manage, although, there will have been some detail lost in transcription from the initial form to the expanded one. In response to this shortfall, I started making audio fieldnotes. This had the advantage of speed and being able to capture more detail more quickly and closer to the event. These notes also became more reflective and analytical than the written notes: as I listened to myself speaking, I added additional thoughts which included reference to events in other field entries and generating 'in-process memos' (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995, p.103). Simultaneous data-gathering and analysis became a feature of the latter stages of the fieldwork, and facilitated the shifts in direction both in the research questions and the subsequent analysis. An unexpected advantage to the audio field notes came in listening to them again months later: the sound and expression of my voice conveyed the emotion of the events and accounts, triggering very powerful memories which the written field notes did not.

**Data-Gathering Table**

<b>Data gathered</b>	<b>Objective from the research design – section 4.1</b>	<b>Research questions to be answered – Chapter 1/Section 1.2</b>	<b>Methods used</b>	<b>Timeframe within which the data was collected</b>
Children’s accounts and experiences of exercising political rights and competence	1 and 2	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Field notes Focus group interviews Independent data-gathering Review interviews	September 2008– May 2010
Teachers’ accounts and experiences of children exercising political rights and competence	1 and 2	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Field notes Focus group interviews Independent data-gathering Review interviews	September 2008– May 2010
Data on and descriptions of the school: physical and cultural	2 and 4	2, 7	Field notes Focus group interviews Photographic diary records	September 2008– May 2010
Examples of political interactions between teachers and children	1, 2 and 4	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	Field notes Independent data-gathering Review interviews	September 2008– October 2009
Adult and child interpretations and analyses of interactions and relationships	1, 2, 3 and 4	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Field notes Focus group interviews Review interviews	September 2008– May 2010
Wider national, educational context of children’s identity, sense of autonomy and agency and curricula expectations	1, 2 and 4	1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, and 10	Literature review Policy analysis School document analysis	September 2008– December 2014

See also the timeline for data-gathering in *Appendix 4*

However, this does bias the data towards my personal experiences and interpretations, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) explain of ethnographic work more generally.

I have used my fieldnotes for descriptions of the site and as supplementary accounts of events recorded elsewhere (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995). There is an additional subset of fieldnotes which reflects on my research practice and includes how my work impacted upon members of the school community through a number of illustrative relationships: a teacher, a governor, a parent and a small number of children. These research practice notes were made both using the voice recorder and also written in a series of five research journals which track and review the progress of my quest at regular intervals, as suggested by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007). These journals have ensured the critical reflection on and rigour through the research process as discussed in Section 6. Throughout the fieldwork, I kept records of all paper and electronic, internal and external school communications, including my communications to members of the school community about my research work and engaging participants. I also made copies of school policies, the school prospectus and other public documents. My professional teaching log books are also a data source for this research, containing notes made during student council, staff, year group, curriculum leadership and planning meetings. This includes management commentary which accompanied internal and external communications and my responses to them – for example internal school performance league tables and target-setting for the following year. Whilst all the above are important documents, they have had little impact on the development of my research foci, and I use them to contextualise other data gathered by and recorded with participants, recognising, but not over-emphasising, the documents' importance (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

#### **4.5.2 Phase 1: Focus Groups**

In order to distil what were relevant concepts and linguistic terms within school discourses as well as establish and frame my enquiry for members of the school community, I began with focus group interviews with teachers and children separately. As such, they represented 'instances of many of the kinds of everyday speech acts that are part and parcel of unmarked social life,' (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005, p.887). My intention was to employ non-directive interviewing as far as possible (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Each focus group session was stimulated by the question posed in advance of the interview: *If you were to take photographs of children showing awareness of or exercising their rights what would they be?* This question was formulated after discussion with a number of teacher-friends outside the

school during hypothetical conversations around the most effective way of stimulating open-ended discussion on the subject. However, follow-up questions on the development of children's political competence and agency responded to the subject matter of the individual focus groups, and largely left the subject of rights behind. Cerwonka and Malkki (2007) stress the importance of this adaptation and improvisation in fieldwork to make ethnography responsive to its situation.

The group discussions were rich in individual and collective beliefs and values about children and school, some of which were declared and made explicit, but many of which were not. However, as Hammersley and Atkinson comment:

The aim is not to gather 'pure' data that are free from potential bias. There is no such thing. Rather, the goal must be to discover the best manner of interpreting whatever data we have, and to collect further data that enable us to develop and check our inferences. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.102)

The diversification of the subsequent methods with which participants collected data was aimed at increasing reliability through comparisons of the accounts rendered: one illuminating another (Walford, 2008b). My intent was to use the data gathered from the focus group interviews in two ways: to construct accounts of participants' lived experiences; and as a guide to the relevant micro-discourses on children's political competence and participation. Such aims are described as both 'legitimate and complementary' by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.97). The analysis during Phase 1 led to a refocusing of my research intent and formation of new research questions as discussed in Section 6.

There were two particular challenges within the focus group interviews. Not unsurprisingly, from Westcott and Littleton's (2005) research experience, a number of both child and adult participants expressed a general concern for giving the right answer, asking questions such as: "Did you get the information you wanted from our discussion? We kind of strayed off the point," (Year 6 teacher, WFN 26.11.08). Both children and adults also commented on feeling more comfortable with others in a group situation. This seeking reassurance led me to question whether my participants saw my research as a form of examination, discussed in Chapter 7. Secondly, perhaps due to the larger audience within focus groups, I felt some recounts exhibited an element of sensationalism and a deliberate re-rendering of events. 'The possibility of distortion is always present in participant accounts, since...they are often worked up for the purposes where truth is probably not the primary concern,' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.113). Having been present at a number of the recounted events, I was able to identify



hyperbole in a few cases and this was valuable to my analysis. However, the vast majority of accounts were of events where I had not been present and so cannot identify such exaggerations in them. These data must be treated with caution in this respect and where possible are corroborated by other sources (Walford, 2008b).

During my analysis I have gone back to specific parts of the focus group conversations and transcribed extracts to enrich and expand my argument and discussion. However, the primary function of Phase 1 was to engage participants in the research and identify school micro-discourses and the questions they prompted. I have not analysed the interviews as a separate data set; although they would and do contain much valuable data, they are not the focus of this particular thesis.

#### **4.5.3 Phase 2: Independent Data-Gathering**

Phase 2 was designed to lessen the immediacy of my personal influence and scrutiny on participant accounts, described as the *Hawthorne Effect* (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). Child and adult participants were invited to record the events and emotions of one school day as a written diary (traditional or via email), a photographic diary, a video diary or by recording an 'audio day'. An audio day entailed participants wearing a voice-recorder and lapel microphone for the school day, thus creating an audio recording. Using diaries offers the ethnographer additional, personal participant detail and a degree of analytical reflexivity not so common with other methods (Moinian, 2006b; Pole and Morrison, 2003). I tested each method myself before participants engaged in data-gathering to ensure that all methods both conformed to my stated ethical protocol and collected the data I was interested in. This is where the recording of non-participant data presented the greatest ethical challenge, as discussed earlier. The aim of this varied set of data-gathering instruments was for each participant to be able to find a method they found relevant to their experience, were comfortable executing, and would provide meaningful data as discussed by Crivello, Camfield and Woodhead, (2009). The thought behind this was to be able to elicit more discussion and analysis through encouraging individuals' participation in and ownership of the data-gathering rather than merely informing it (Haudrup Christensen, 2004).

The written, photographic and video diaries were designed to give all participants control over what was recorded. The audio day, however, recorded every interaction rather than just those selected by a participant. As a rule, I did not discuss switching the device off, other than for

going to the toilet, and the majority of participants kept the recorder switched on from around 8.30am to 3.15pm. Whilst all participants will have been conscious of my looking at and listening to their recordings (Pole and Morrison, 2003), my hope was that my absence at the point of data collection would normalise the setting as far as possible. Of course, that is not to say that the data I did gather were not the product of another kind of performance as discussed by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007). In all video and some audio recordings children and adults addressed me directly or performed to an imagined audience, indicating that they were very aware of my presence. Pole and Morrison (2003) stress the researcher's defining role as a participant in the data-gathering as well as the instrument of it. My influence was also explicitly sought through questions from the photo, written and video diarists as to what I wanted them to record. My response became to suggest they record things that were 'important' or a 'significant part of their day'.

During the audio days, other children and adults brought my agency to the fore by questioning my research participants as to what they were doing and why. The actual questions are not always clearly audible due to the deliberately limited range of the microphone, recording only the participants' utterances where possible. These conversations generated some interesting and unexpected data by telling me what participants understood as my research intent. It suggests my aims and ethical protocol had been communicated effectively through the explanations they gave of the data and its analysis. This data will also go some way to addressing Sara Delamont's (2002, p.133) challenge to social researchers in that: 'whatever role one takes, it is important to think hard about how one is being judged and evaluated, and to make detailed notes on how one is received and how this may be interacting with the data being collected.' Some recordings showed that some children overtly found it difficult to divorce my school responsibilities from my research interests, for example apologising into the microphone for swearing or for others nearby swearing. 'Even when the researcher plays no role in generating the account, one can never be sure that his or her presence was not an important influence,' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.101). The evidence I have collected suggests that there are very few occasions where the researcher has very little influence, perhaps only when the participant is distracted and so temporarily unaware of the data being gathered.

Another difficulty in interpreting this data set is not having been present when data was gathered to witness the wider context of the encounter, other than when I was coincidentally

part of the account as a teacher. How far my absence impacted on my interpretation varied between the different methods as some revealed more environmental information than others. The audio days provided additional information through interaction with others, but no visual data such as facial expressions. The video diaries gave a lot of additional information through participants' body language and behaviour, but were essentially reflective monologues. Geoffrey Walford (2009, p.277) writes: 'while it is clearly correct that all accounts are selective and distorting, the aim of research is surely to reduce the distortion as much as possible.' It was my intent to contextualise this distortion as far as possible by critically engaging with it in the Phase 3 review interviews. These interviews also revealed other, unsolicited influences on children's data choices. A number of photo diarists reported being given suggestions from other members of staff as to what to capture. During the review sessions, however, they were able to identify photographs which were of their own choosing and those which others had recommended (AFN 28.06.09). This meant we were able to focus on what the participant had chosen to record. One difficulty arising from having created my own research programme of data-gathering, and so having no methodological proforma, was the need for constant improvisation in responsiveness to the field to maintain methodological and ethical integrity (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2005).

Creating new ways of gathering participant observational data has yielded much unexpected and thought-provoking data. Additionally, the volume of data generated was unanticipated and selecting what to use from the different data sets was difficult, as discussed by Pole and Morrison (2003) and in Section 6. Due to timetable constraints at the end of the academic year, I was unable to review independent diary data with some participants. Believing I could not contextualise the children's experience adequately without hearing their perspective on it, I have not used this data. This has resulted in one photographic diary of the fourteen not being used and one written diary of the total of four; both of these exclusions are of teachers' diaries. Additionally, it was not possible to interview twelve of the thirty-eight children's audio-day diarists. Details of all data sets included can be found in *Appendix 2*.

#### **4.5.4 Phase 3: Review Interviews**

Although the review interviews constituted the final phase of data-gathering, it quickly became apparent during initial analysis that they contained some of the most important and revealing data. The review interviews were constructed as an exploration and evaluation of the data that participants had individually gathered on one day at school. My aim within review interview

situations was to encourage the freer expression of ideas, beliefs and opinions based on the participants' greater sense authority over data *they* had independently gathered in Phase 2 (Haudrup Christensen, 2004).

The review interviews helped to create a secondary narrative, giving me the opportunity to question and verify my understanding of the data and its representativeness of the children's daily experience. With this I am following Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007, pp.108-109) argument that, 'while it is true that the perspectives elicited in interviews do not provide direct access to some cognitive and attitudinal base from which a person's behaviour in 'natural' settings is derived in an unmediated way, they may still be capable of illuminating that behaviour.' Participants bringing data they had gathered to the interview was designed to enhance this process of illumination through their responding reflectively and summatively to what was 'played back'. Additionally, in that review interviews were not routine, but had what was routine as their subject matter, the aim was to facilitate joint analysis and challenge common sense assumptions. As Vaughan (2004, p.398) puts it, the research experience can 'act as an interruption' or an 'undoing' allowing both the researcher and researched to take a step back and see what is underneath an action or representation: identifying what went before in order to deepen understanding. The interviews were also designed as an opportunity to identify, draw out and discuss if possible the commonalities with and divergences from the initial focus group discussions; I was able to return to questions which had been left unanswered in the first discussions and begin further analysis of institutional and individual beliefs and values. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.97), too, describe 'the tension between treating the accounts of the people being studied as sources of information about themselves and the world in which they live, and treating those accounts as social products whose analysis can tell us something about the socio-cultural processes that generated them.'

However, as an insider, one difficulty I encountered during both review interviews and focus groups was that of interviewees expecting me to draw on my assumed background knowledge in interpreting their responses and in doing so were less explicit in their recounts and explanations. Russell (2005) stresses the importance of acknowledging a researcher's relationship to participants and the resulting influence on the data collected in this context. Whilst the individual interviews benefited from good rapport, and particularly with children with whom I had close relationships, the conversation faltered when I asked for more detail or explanation of events at which I had been present. My engineering the full recount for the sake

of the recording seems to fit closely with the conscious, or subconscious, staged performance at interview (see Delamont (2002); Duncombe and Jessop (2002); Warren *et al.*, 2003). Highlighting this enactment is important in identifying what is volunteered upon the initiative of the research participant and what type of performance is being delivered and why: to please me as a teacher in the school, for example. This proved to be less of a problem in focus group interviews than individual interviews. Even if I had shared knowledge with an individual, he or she needed to explain ideas and accounts more fully to other members of the group.

As with all ethnographic research, my fieldwork and analysis took a great deal of time: months and years (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Whilst this ensured a vast quantity of rich data, it also has its limitations. Due to one academic year ending and pupils and staff moving on to new schools, the opportunity to complete my research programme with some participants and ask additional questions was lost. Additionally and unplanned due to my personal circumstances changing, I left the school shortly after the data-gathering officially ended in July 2010. Whilst limiting my ability to gather more data, this has also had its benefits. My view of the research site and experience is not clouded by subsequent events and changes at the school: a new head teacher started in September 2010 and the school became a full primary school, admitting a reception class in September 2011. Ethnographic research is located in a specific time and space and must be written and understood in that context (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Pole and Morrison, 2003; Walford, 2008b), and as Russell (2005) points out: the researcher has to leave at some point.

#### **4.6 Data Analysis and Presentation of Findings**

This section discusses the methodology of my analytical approach, describes my decision-making trail and establishes the 'trustworthiness' of the product by opening the process out to closer scrutiny (Koch, 1993). It was the process of analysing the review interview data in Phase 3 which prompted the organisation of the data into collections of personal accounts and recordings, documenting child participants' lived experience stimulated by one day in school. Thus, 'participant listening' largely forms the basis of my ethnographic work (Forsey, 2010). The interviews provided the richest and most unexpected testimonies, with children exploring how they understood and interpreted being at school as a social and political time and place. The presentation of the data in the latter part of the thesis follows a *Choose Your Own Adventure* narrative format, discussed in Section 4.6.3, stimulated by individual children's accounts and supported with extracts of complementary data within the subsequent analyses.

#### 4.6.1 Methodology for Data Analysis

My analysis began as I collected my first units of data, cataloguing and summarising the data, and has been tightly woven into the on-going development of research foci and questions. The research, being exploratory, had to allow for changes in expectations and direction: 'ethnography is, and always has been, an improvisational practice,' (Malkki, 2007, p.179). This required a carefully organised treatment of the data; following the introduction of each new data-gathering phase and method I closely reviewed and analysed the first examples to better understand the character and potential value of the information that was being collected. This also helped develop the most appropriate ways of dealing with the content and quantity of data gathered (Hammersely and Atkinson, 2007). The resulting data analysis could be described as a cyclical narrowing and widening of scope across each data set. Walford (2008b, p.3) refers to a, 'spiral of data collection, hypothesis building and theory testing – leading to further data collection,' describing a more generalised ethnographic process. When the fieldwork ceased, and work on the data sets as completed entities began, the pattern of analysis became more like a downward conical double helix, representing the distillation of the thesis argument. The twin helical grooves form the backbone of the structure and represent the interlocking nature of the data and literature. The structure is relatively flexible and experiences a circular dynamism about its core, illustrating the movement of my analytical focus as it swept through the body of data under consideration – see illustration on page 96. The bracketed numbers (#), ordered as they appear in the text below, refer to specific points on the diagram.

The key principles which drove my data analysis were firstly, to gain a thorough enough knowledge of the content of the body of data to be able to authoritatively determine what was relevant and should be included within the thesis to be able to make any given claim (Wolcott, 2005). Secondly, it was important to me to have engaged with each data set sufficiently enough to demonstrate to participants that I had seen or heard what they wanted to convey and thereby recognise and value the contributions they made to the research project. LeCompte (2000) argues that feedback from participants on a researcher's analysis is key to establishing this and was one aim of Phase 3 of the fieldwork. A final important aim was to create systematic processes which could be repeated and verified by others as a way of demonstrating the integrity of the research, transparency being an important aspect of the validity of ethnographic inquiry (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). As a result, I have been

## Downward conical double helix of data gathering and analysis

- 
- (2) Data gathering: field notes; focus groups and reflective post-interview notes (P1)
  - (3,4) Transcriptions, idea-clustering, thematic flow diagrams/mind-mapping
  - (5,6) Redraw mind maps using thematic hubs – new questioning
  - Independent data-gathering: audio days, photo, written and video diaries (P2) ...
  - (7) ... explored with themes articulated above
  - (8) Sojourn into political theory: justice, fairness, ignorance
  - (9) Key theme\*: i) trust and control
  - (10) Review Interviews: joint analytical venture (P3) ...
  - (11) ... prompting new analytical foci
  - (12) Thematic mapping and organisation of data
  - (1) Creation of data matrices aiding sweep of data corpus and easy retrieval of data
  - (13) Organisation into two data structures
    - a) Descriptions of school
    - b) Responses to environment
  - (14) Precipitation of two final key themes\*
    - ii) Conflict and resistance
    - iii) Participation and agency
  - Review data corpus through data matrix using key themes
  - (15) Decision to use Foucault's work
  - (16) Organise participant accounts using themes
  - (17,20) Collate additional extracts relevant to critical discussion of themes
  - (18) Search for specific instances of behaviour or lack of it
  - (19) Further transcription for analysis
  - (21) Participant accounts organised as politicised decisions/choices
  - (22) CYOA\*\*

\*\**Choose Your Own Adventure*, narrative representation

Numbering on the left-hand side refers to processes so numbered in the text. The width of the description of each analytical activity above represents an indication of the breadth of the analytical focus across the data corpus and the opening up or narrowing down of questioning in the interrogation of the data. P1, P2, P3 denote Phase 1, Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the data-gathering respectively.

careful to justify each decision made and new direction taken, spending time revisiting the data to verify that my interpretation of it merited the course of action I subsequently took.

The follow up to the initial fieldwork and early analysis and the need to organise a large quantity of data prompted me to create my 'data matrices' (1). This is labelled as (1) due to it being the most significant tool for my analysis and the place at which my focused analysis started. Chronologically, its creation occurs later in the journey and this can be seen on the diagram. The data matrices are a database to which I added brief, dated descriptions of each data unit, referencing the themes to which they most closely relate, the content of which is summarised in *Appendix 2*. Being focused, 'low-inference descriptions,' (Silverman, 2001, p.227), these later facilitated the retrieval and prioritising of the data for closer scrutiny and analysis. The value of this database as a tool was in 'structuring typically unstructured data,' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.161) allowing me to manage the data analysis more effectively. The data matrices also helped me overcome some of my ethical dilemmas regarding the inclusion and exclusion of sensitive data by quickly identifying alternative examples which might replace the data I felt it necessary to remove. There is one exception for which there was no obvious alternative: the unintentional recording of a number of Year 4 boys taking a trip to the boys' toilets during a maths lesson – this is discussed in Chapter 6. It would have added a useful extra element and example to the discussion in Chapter 7, but I judged that the recording was made outside the agreement of included data and should not, therefore, be used. The data matrices also facilitated the systematic selection of data for discussion in the thesis and leading ultimately to the chosen method of presentation, the *Choose Your Own Adventure* narrative.

The following description and evaluation of my data analysis should serve as a guide as to how to read the subsequent chapters on my findings and conclusions, mapping the journey to the point of presentation in this thesis. The diagram on page 96 is a visual representation of how I see the dynamic, overlapping process and how it became interwoven with the fieldwork. I have analysed the entries to my research journals to recreate the overall systems and processes used for the length and breadth of my data analysis. Finlay (2002, p.209) describes the process of reflexivity as 'full of muddy ambiguity and multiple trails.' I catalogued events chronologically to lend order to this situation following my predisposition to think this way. However, this does not necessarily reflect a linear process: some changes in my thinking were only realised retrospectively and the triggers for these shifts only identified with hindsight (Van



Maanen, 1988). My chronological organisation prompted my cyclical analysis and data-gathering, as well as my frequent overall research reviews. The re-engagements with my research journals identified key ideas and thinking. This helped make connections between literature, conversations, ideas and feedback, and stimulated the re-evaluation of questioning, specific methods and analytical foci, embodying the reflexivity of the research process and ultimately giving greater credibility to my claims and argument (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

In looking at the development of political competence and agency, I am taking a holistic view of a child's competence rather than working on a closer analysis of specific, individual competences. Responding to the field (Walford, 2008b), the transition in my focus to political competence came as I analysed data from the focus groups (2). I transcribed fully a few focus group interviews to read through and distil key, repeated themes (3). My next exercise was to create mind-maps (4) from both the transcriptions and post-interview notes to focus my reading and clarify my questions for the independent data-gathering which began before all focus group interviews were completed. The mind maps were originally drawn as flow diagrams following the direction of the focus group discussions, using terms and phrases from those conversations.

At this point it became clear that the notion of specific competences was premature to the understandings in the field. More fundamental ideas of children's capacity and competence were more relevant. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.171) write that, 'in developing categories that make sense of data, then, the focus must be on actions, the meanings that underpin or infuse them, the wider situations that these actions both respond to and shape. And all these different aspects are intimately related.' Two parallel themes emerged as important to both adults and children: transition from 'childhood to adulthood' and 'control'. Within these macro-themes were a number of key linking ideas: responsibility, age, competence and the relationship between children and adults. I redrew the mind-maps (5) with these ideas as thematic hubs and added to them whilst listening to and analysing further focus group discussions. These distillations redirected questioning in subsequent focus group interviews (6), for example: *where does the authority for adult punishment of children come from?* One such illustrative mind-map can be found in *Appendix 5*.

The mind-maps then formed the basis of my first 'tacit' theoretical formulations (LeCompte, 2000) and the direction for my explorations of the independent data-gathering and review

interviews (7). I also began reading theoretical works to help interpret and communicate the ideas I was articulating. One such example was returning to reading from my undergraduate studies, namely John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1972), exploring the children's comments on fairness and Rawls' ideas of a 'veil of ignorance' and 'justice as fairness'. This sojourn back into political theory highlighted the need to consider notions of ignorance and innocence in children and childhoods, how they are defined, linked, and used as a means of control. The outcome of this is the discussion in Chapter 2 of the positioning of children as in a perpetual state of becoming (James, 2009), of political actors-in-waiting. Surviving into the final stages of analysis, this also established the key theme of 'trust and control' (8). It is at this time that I first record the idea of sight and vision, or the lack of it: blindness. Observation, monitoring, and ultimately surveillance of children by adults (Foucault, 2003), began to gain importance in my analysis. Examining an institutionalised lack of trust also highlighted the difficulty in identifying and accessing child-initiated events, something which I had not fully anticipated in my research design.

The third phase of data-gathering, the review interviews, began shortly after the second to retain the immediacy of the independent data gathered for the review conversations, serving also as a joint analytical venture (LeCompte, 2000) with participants (10). Following Hammersely and Atkinson's (2007) guidance, I chose to take the analytical lead from the participant accounts in the review interviews (11), constituting the data set that is most comprehensively used within the thesis. These interviews generated the richest data both from their substance as commentary on political understanding and competence, and the apparent candour and trust with which participants shared their experiences. The themes generated from their initial analysis guided the use of the other data sets in a form of saliency analysis, described by Buetow (2010, p.123) as 'identif[ying] and keep[ing] visible what stands out from qualitative data.' The development of ideas and themes in the discussions was mapped (12) to facilitate easy retrieval of the data once added to the data matrices (1). What had stimulated children's comments, opinions, outbursts or revelations was also recorded so that they could be pursued later. For example, one boy was recorded swearing in his video diary prompting a long review conversation: the diary and interview discussion became important combined data (Walford, 2008b).

As is common practice in ethnographic work, I stored my data chronologically (Delamont, 2008b; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Van Maanen, 1988). I then categorised and

numerically coded accounts and sections of accounts as what I interpreted to be different manifestations of political engagement, participation and agency, for example, conscious rule-breaking. The numerical codes were entered into the database and used for data retrieval. After closer analysis and reorganisation, often more than once, these categorisations eventually formed the basis of the data structures (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) in Chapters 5 and 6 (13): descriptions and interpretations of the school as a politicised environment; and the children's responses to this environment. With each refinement, some data selections were reorganised, removed or retrieved from earlier deselection and a number appear under more than one categorisation.

It was during this analysis that the second and third themes crystallised: 'conflict and resistance', 'participation and agency' (14). Of data-gathering and analysis, Silverman (2001, p.70) remarks: 'we only come to look at things in certain ways because we have adopted, either tacitly or explicitly, certain ways of seeing things.' The three resulting themes of 'trust and control', 'conflict and resistance' and 'participation and agency' are close to my heart as a teaching professional and the impact of this bias is discussed at the end of Chapter 7. However, as Wolcott instructively argues, '[bias'] counterpart, prejudice, is our true foe, judgement formed without examining its roots. ...covet your biases, display them openly, and ponder how they help you formulate the purposes of your investigation and show how you can advance your inquiries,' (Wolcott, 2005 p.157).

Considering the structures and practices that would constitute children's sense of self and agency in school led me to Michel Foucault (15) and specifically *Discipline and Punish* (1995) and *The Will to Knowledge. The History of Sexuality. 1.* (1998). It was during the final phase of fieldwork with children that I began to navigate closer to their accounts of participation and agency and experiences of conflict and resistance in school (16). I was particularly struck by the strength of the children's expression of their ideas of discipline and punishment, interwoven with notions of justice and fairness, and coupled with an unexpected articulation of their own lacking the necessary agency and sense of responsibility in solving the challenges and conflicts they identified. However, it was only possible to articulate this clearly during the post-fieldwork analysis of the reviews with the time and space to look at the data sets as a whole (Van Maanen, 1988).

Trying to give as many people as possible an equal opportunity to access my research project and having incorrectly anticipated a fairly low response rate, resulted in far more participant

data than I had expected at every stage of the fieldwork. I am reluctant to use the term 'too much data', because the project was designed in such a way that it would define its own magnitude from the experience of the field (Van Maanen, 1988). However, organising, processing and analysing the corpus of the data for this thesis took a lot longer than I had calculated. During the subsequent process of *coming to know my data* (Wolcott, 2005), I encountered a number of tensions and personal struggles, suggested by Roulston, Preissle and Freeman (2013) as common to much doctoral research. One such frustration was feeling the need to complete an initial data assessment, identifying, recording and cataloguing all data, competing with a desire to develop particular ideas as they arose from the analysis and being diverted from the initial cataloguing. Once the first themes had been established this became easier, as I could classify data as being of immediate relevance or importance, or indeed as stimulus for post-doctoral work. I also struggled with the somewhat messy multi-tasking of this leg of the journey and the anxieties of my 'inner filing-clerk' who wanted to tidy up at every turn before progressing. I particularly enjoy Finlay's (2002, p.212) comparison in the context of my quest: 'in some ways, embarking on reflexivity is akin to entering uncertain terrain where solid ground can all too easily give way to swamp and mire.'

Selecting the data which would get me to the information I was seeking, i.e. accounts of children's political participation and agency in school, was a difficult process as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) describe. Using the data matrices to navigate a return through the data corpus, I collated illustrative extracts both supportive of and challenging to my initial theorising (17), refining my themes and questions to maintain the rigour of the analysis (Walford, 2008b). I found the process of letting children's stories go most challenging, feeling I was somehow devaluing their contributions. However, not every child engaged with the notions of political participation and agency: a number of accounts contained more narrative and evaluative commentaries on, for example, friendships and other curriculum content. This is not to say that the remaining data are not as valuable: it is simply not as salient to the discussion on the development of children's political competence at this school.

I next began my search for specific instances of children's perceptions and experience of political behaviour, or absence of it, and the frequency with which these instances occurred (Buetow, 2010). Examples of this would be: challenge, conflict or resistance in school; questioning, negotiating and problem-solving; arguments with others; personal claims and reasoning (18). The aim was to give me a picture of what forms political self-expression took,

how the children appeared to understand them, going to the heart of the development of competence as a political being. The result was a set of political choices or decisions (21), and this stimulated my choice of the *Choose Your Own Adventure* metaphor (22), discussed further below.

Although all data were repeatedly read, listened to, and viewed for a content description focusing on gaining a better understanding of participants' contributions (Silverman, 2001), only units which were relevant to analytical priorities were transcribed (19). This was done on the basis of having a secure enough knowledge of both the type and content of each data set to be able to make an informed decision about what was of most relevance to include and what could be excluded for the purposes of this thesis (Wolcott, 2005). However, as the analysis and writing of the thesis progressed and new and more refined turns to the interpretation of the data were created, I returned to several data units which I had previously set aside (20). This was particularly true in the latter stages of analysis in identifying data for presentation within the thesis. It is this continual returning to the data, further analysis and refining of purpose that I describe as cyclical: moving in and out of the data and taking direction from my re-interpretations of it (Walford, 2008b).

Within this cyclical movement through the data, my activity as a researcher must be opened to critical evaluation, alternative interpretations, and ultimately become the subject of that analysis, discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. Data-gathering does not stop when the last interview is over, but continues through the dialogue a researcher has with him or herself as the analysis and production of text generates further data and lines of enquiry into the researchers' own cognition and assumptions (Wolcott, 1990). Richardson (2000) extrapolates this argument by suggesting that research practice locates the agency of the researcher at the centre of enquiry by constructing the process of writing itself as enquiry. Whilst I understand Richardson's claims, I am reminded of Hammersley's (2006) call for research to be value-relevant: that is to hold meaning within the context of the research and the researched. Delamont (2008b) argues for the importance of maintaining reflective notes, but also for keeping them separate from participant observational notes where possible. I would question the value within education and social research, due to its interactive nature, of a reliance on the introspective journey alone as a relevant form of enquiry and have not taken this approach.

#### **4.6.2 Presentation of Findings**

The presentation of data in Chapter 5 is designed to give the reader an understanding of the school as an environment for the development of political competence and the issues which continually confound and frustrate the children within it: trust, control and inequality of treatment. This should be contextualised as the environment in which children are attempting and are expected to develop a degree of political competence (ten Dam and Volman, 2007). My retelling some of the children's stories which made me think twice or differently about an aspect of being a child in this school, and specifically what angered, saddened and frustrated some children, aims to convey that understanding (Van Maanen, 1988). Chapter 6 seeks to recognise the agency and emergent self-determination of children by presenting examples of how they respond creatively and often unexpectedly to their experiences of being in school. The chapter looks at what these children do when faced with the contradictions and inconsistencies of school life: how they accommodate and adapt their behaviour, and in doing so develop a new, versatile subaltern political competence.

#### **4.6.3 Choose Your Own Adventure**

Deliberating upon what form of presentation would render my interpretation of the data most illuminating and least complicated, I experimented with different organising principles: mirroring the phases of the research; a chronology of my development; critical research moments and discoveries; prevalence of themes or ideas in children's accounts. I came to the current re-presentation of data as an adventure narrative whilst on holiday and thinking about travelling and journeys. In asking myself the question, *How do I show the different choices and pathways the children describe in their accounts?*, I started experimenting with the idea of multiple choice scenarios and destinations and the type of 'tale' I could tell from my data (Van Maanen, 1988). It was at this time that I remembered the role-playing and game books of my childhood and specifically the *Choose Your Own Adventure* series (Anon., 2013). These stories contain branching plotlines so movement through the book is nonlinear. Choices the reader makes on facing a challenge or decision in the story will send him or her to different pages numerically ahead or behind in the book (Anon., 2013). The complexity of the books in terms of organisation, and the impossibility of reading straight through from start to finish, mirrors my interpretation of the children's articulations of the mystery of the different approaches and pathways presented to them by the adult world. The reader is given options to choose his or her own path through the narrative and influence which of several endings he or she will read.

The narrative in these stories and my thesis is written in the present tense and second person to give the reader a closer sense of involvement with the main character and allows me to communicate the immediacy and poignancy of the children's commentaries. Reflecting Van Maanen's (1988) description of an impressionist ethnographic tale, there is also a playfulness in the use of the *Choose Your Own Adventure* format which is designed to reflect the importance of children's participation in this work.

The stories can incorporate an element of combat, conflict or challenge and a battle system of gaining points from winning battles, befriending wise people, and understanding the rules of engagement (Anon., 2013). Gaining this knowledge and understanding, or prowess, aids in the management and manipulation of risk, but does not exclude the element of luck or chance. Different experiences are gained which prepare children differently for their next situation of challenge or conflict and leave them with a greater or lesser sense of achievement depending on the specific outcome. Additionally, the books can be read and re-read, changing elements of the plot on each re-reading. Herein lies an element of agency, but it is restricted by what has already been laid down by the author. The parallel with this and the framed choices offered children in the school is discussed in Chapter 5. With multiple choices and plotlines come multiple endings, some being more desirable than others, but with no definitive right or wrong (Anon., 2013). The opportunity to explore more than one possible outcome of a situation is appealing with the categorisation of endings as more or less successful in the quest for self-determination. There are socio-political rules and norms to be followed, but they are not always clearly explained, if at all. Indeed, sometimes they are left to be discovered during the unfolding of an encounter or its aftermath. One key element of the *Choose Your Own Adventure* idea is the focus away from individuals and towards the situations and structures which position and challenge them. The focus on the structures and cultures of an institution which construct and constitute the individuals within it is one of the reasons I am also using Foucault's work, specifically *Discipline and Punish* (1995), to help analyse and present these data.

Whilst there are a number of strengths to this form of representation, it also has its limitations and has had to be altered within the context of the research to retain its value as a metaphor for my interpretation of the data (Van Maanen, 1988). I have made the assumption that children recognise the situation of conflict and/or choice in which they find themselves as one which challenges the status quo in some way. The scenarios selected are taken from

conversations where this recognition was evident, however, that is far from a given in other situations and with other children. The recognition and interpretation of conflict, and risk, is important to the success and failure of the child in their self-expression and self-determination. There is also a difficulty in representing the difference between recognised and unrecognised learning with this plot format and this is drawn out in the discussion that follows the main narrative in Chapters 5 and 6, and is taken further in Chapter 7.

Additionally, for the purposes of this research I have written Chapters 5 and 6 so that they can be read straight through. Turning pages back and forth may enhance the communication of the children's experience, but it will detract from my primary quest and runs the risk of some content being missed. To add to this, the second person narrative removes the possibility of the protagonist's inner monologue which could illuminate a character's thoughts, feelings and motivations. This has been replaced with the presentation and analysis of further examples from the data to ensure my interpretation of the children's action is known and clear to the reader. It also usefully acknowledges and demonstrates the possibility of other interpretations. My conclusion is, however, that the *Choose Your Own Adventure* style provides an opportunity to convey the children's journeys through school in a narrative fashion within which they would recognise themselves and which they would corroborate.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

Chapter 4 has presented and evaluated the methodological journey I undertook in pursuit of my quest, detailing how it fulfilled my substantive and theoretical aims and changed my perception of the research's overall course and destination. The imperative for the research was first discussed, demonstrating how it led to the research design and initial questions. The resulting choice of qualitative methods within an ethnographic approach was then presented and critically evaluated. In justifying the relevance of the selected methodology, I detailed my position on research validity and reliability and discussed specific ethical aspects of the study which presented challenges and dilemmas: insider research, working with children and maintaining an ethical approach. The chapter then followed with an assessment of how the representations of children's accounts are made credible and transferable, or valid, through the reflexive, transparent approach I took to my analysis and the rigorous, systematic execution of my research.



Whilst the overall order of research phases and methods remained as I had originally planned, the substance and direction of secondary data-gathering changed and was refined as a result of the findings of my initial analyses. This was desirable for me as part of my exploratory approach, however, it did raise some concerns in terms of effective communication with participants in ensuring the clarity of my research intent. Indeed, communicating regularly with participants to maintain transparency and predictability became a feature of the research in resolving ethical dilemmas and circumnavigating potential problems. Additionally, in using children's participation and accounts to substantiate the claims I make, I am responding to the identified gap in their contribution to research (Alexander, 2010; Crivello, Camfield and Woodhead, 2009; Lister *et al.*, 2003; Lowe, 2012).

Although there was a great deal of valuable data generated through the execution of my three-phase data-gathering programme there, inevitably, are also gaps (Mercieca and Mercieca, 2013). I was able to fill some of these by revisiting the field and informants, but some omissions were only realised in the later stages of analysis when returning to the site and participants was no longer possible. However, despite these limitations, I argue that what follows in Chapters 5 and 6 meets my research aims in representing children's accounts and understandings of their political participation and agency at the school. Chapter 7 considers the resultant implications for developing sustainable political competence and confidence as outcomes of children's narrated experiences.

## Chapter 5

### Setting the Scene

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and interpret the location and context of the children's daily adventures and my quest: the institutional beliefs, practices and structures which define the boundaries of legitimate and illegitimate action and participation. As the opening of the *Choose Your Own Adventure* narrative, and based on participant observations and encounters, Chapter 5 establishes the historical, geographical and social context of the school in which children need to resolve the dilemmas they meet in Chapter 6. Gaining knowledge and understanding of the school's rules aids managing and manipulating risk and the development of political prowess, featured and defined in Chapter 6, and in the pursuit of self-determination. This chapter describes and analyses the position of children in the school as experienced and narrated by them, and the environment to which the children are responding in the following chapter. The thesis' main themes, namely trust and control, conflict and resistance, and participation and agency are woven into the discussion and reinforced by analysis which includes additional data as supporting evidence.

The primary sources of data for this chapter are my audio field notes (AFN), written field notes (WFN), child focus groups interviews (CFG), teacher focus group interviews (TFG), child review interviews (CRI) and, to a lesser extent, school documents. An example of how the narrative sections were constructed from my data can be found in *Appendix 6*. The chapter comprises two main narrative sections: Location and Actors. The structure of the chapter follows the opening format of a *Choose Your Own Adventure* novel, including instructions on how to read the text: a warning as to what to expect from the account. I have used *Fight For Freedom* by J. Leibold (1990), a politically oriented adventure set in Apartheid in South Africa, as primary source material for this model and adapted it with ideas from other stories. Character, place, policy and other distinguishing names have been changed to mask the identity of the research participants as far as possible. The narrative has been written such that the story can be read independently without needing the analysis sections. It is aimed at being brief and informative, setting the scene for the analysis. Tentative conclusions as to the character of the school as a site for the development of children's political competence are drawn throughout the analysis of the narrative to support the development of the story in Chapter 6. However, the main

findings and conclusions are discussed in Chapter 7. The next section explains how the following three chapters should be read and launches the adventure of spending a day at *Redbird Primary School*. I have used the Gabriola font where I am using the narrative format of a *Choose Your Own Adventure* book. The addition of supporting data and the subsequent analysis returns to standard font type and format of the thesis.

### 5.1 Instructions

*As the main actor in this adventure, you will need a little information about yourself to understand your position as a pupil at this primary school. You reached your tenth birthday in February, three months ago, and have been at Redbird Primary for a year and a half now. You have made a number of good friends since you joined the school and kept a few close allies from the four years you had at Mountaintop Infant School. This school is much bigger than your last which was a little scary at first. But you are used to it now and quite like having a lot of people around as it means you are not always the centre of attention and there are places you can hide at break time. You would not describe yourself as one of the 'naughty kids', but you are definitely not a teacher's pet either! Generally, you like the school and most of the people in it, but there are some adults and children who you find it is not so easy to get on with.*

#### WARNING!

*This experience is different from other episodes in your childhood.*

*You and YOU ALONE will decide what happens in your story.*

*These pages contain many different experiences that you will have as you persevere through a day at Redbird Primary School. Read these narratives carefully, thinking about the responsibility you hold for determining the outcome of your adventure in school. From time to time as you read along you will face a challenge and be asked to make a choice. Your choice could lead to a resolution to your dilemma or a disaster...*

*The adventures you have are the results of your choices. You are responsible because you choose. There are dangers, choices, adventures and consequences. You must use all of your numerous talents and much of your enormous intelligence. Think carefully before you make a decision. The school's behaviour policy and strong arm of its enforcement can make Redbird Primary a tense and frightening place to be at times. Your adventure may be*

exciting, but you might also find yourself in tricky situations. After you make a choice, follow the story to see what happens next.

I believe a child can be a credible political agent and I believe in children's ability to take personal responsibility for their actions, but the degree to which this level of personal autonomy can be realised and recognised at this school is questionable. Responsibility means different things to different people, one teacher I spoke to on initiating the research called it a "dirty, dirty word," (WFN 03.09.08). She was referring to the abuse the term suffers in its interpretation as accepting conformity and being held accountable to and for school norms and standards. This tension, however, created by the differing interpretations of 'responsibility' is not reflected in the unproblematic use of the word in *Choose Your Own Adventure* books. This use more closely reflects the uncritical exploitation of responsibility at the research school, and the force of 'normalising judgement' (Foucault, 1995) in instilling a culture of conformity.

## **5.2 Setting the Scene**

### **5.2.1 Location**

Redbird Primary was built in the 1950s as a secondary modern school. Later in the 1970s, as the grammar school system came to an end and new comprehensive schools were built in the area, the school became an upper junior school comprising three academic year groups and taking pupils from age eight to eleven years. At full capacity, the school could admit 630 pupils: a seven form-entry school with thirty children in each class. Redbird is located in a medium-sized town of almost seventy thousand inhabitants in the south-west of England and serves a largely white, middle-class population. The town was formerly a buzzing holiday resort in the 1950s. The year is now 2009 and the town still hosts tourists but many come only for a weekend and to celebrate hen-nights and stag parties. The resident population work largely in the service industry or for the local and regional councils; a number, particularly those living close to the adjacent motorway, commute to the nearest big city. The result is a school community of relatively little diversity. This is also true of the teaching and support staff who mostly grew up within a few miles of the school and a number of whom are former pupils themselves.

The school site is a large one for a primary, set back off the road in an imposing sandy-brick building. The main pedestrian entrance takes you on to the larger of two tarmacked

playgrounds in front of the main school building. The school's main entrance overlooks the playground and is clearly a more recent addition to the architecture, being almost entirely made from glass. Indeed, the foyer is something of a goldfish bowl having glass doors and windows in three of its four walls: looking onto the playground, into the main school office, and the adjacent corridor. Access to the inside of the school building is controlled by an electronic entry system and visitors must sit 'in the tank' until 'buzzed in' by a member of staff. The internal door leads straight onto the 'office corridor', a long, light, airy space with displays of children's work, photographs of staff and the student council and a notice board for music lesson timetables. The corridor is painted pale yellow with white wooden trimmings, the floor is clean and the skylights have been recently replaced. Doors to the school office, the headteacher's office and the staff toilets all lead off this corridor and are made from a pale pine-effect material. The contrast in décor to the rest of the building is marked: the importance of this space is apparent.

There are also two long, internal windows between the corridor and the school office. The school secretary, Mrs. Lovell, can see exactly who is going where, and timetables inside the office next to these windows allow her to work out where a child should be at any time. Tucked in a small blind spot in the corridor between the school office and headteacher's office is a heavy, old-fashioned radiator. Teaching staff can often be found huddled in this space at break times clutching cups of tea or coffee and talking quietly to one another. Conversations quickly die down if another adult walks by.

At the far end of the radiator is Mr. Armstrong's office door adorned with the plaque 'Headteacher' and a sliding vacant/engaged sign. Although it rarely reads 'engaged' there are often adults and children hovering outside, knocking tentatively, and waiting to be granted admission. This room is furnished as a modern office: pine effect chairs with turquoise upholstery, a meeting table in the centre of the room, and a desk and computer under the large window on the far wall. The window runs along the length of the far wall and looks directly out on to the playground. Whoever is in the office can see exactly what is going on in all areas at the front of the school from an elevated vantage point. This height advantage, coupled with the window blinds, mean that anyone looking out will not be seen by those looking up. The final, almost unexpected, addition to the office is a 'coffee corner' with three low, more comfortable chairs where private interviews with staff, children and parents can be held. The setting is informal, but being located within the head teacher's office in the space furthest from the exit, makes escaping from an uncomfortable interview back into the corridor very difficult: interviewees can feel trapped.

The school offices are located at the front of the school and are sandwiched in between four classrooms, two at either end. This arrangement forms one side of a quadrangle which is the basic architectural structure of the old school building. This shape is formed by rows of classrooms and has an inner corridor running along its four sides. The large open space in the centre of this square comprises two green areas with a pond, vegetable patch, shrubs and a chicken coup. It is divided in the middle by the staffroom building which is joined to the rest of the school via the main school hall and office corridor. The staffroom has windows looking out over the green areas and into the inner corridors in front of the classrooms. Whoever is walking from one end of the school to the other can be seen from the staffroom.

There are nineteen classrooms and teaching spaces within the original architecture of the building, the remaining classrooms are housed within a two-storey extension. A modern glass corridor links the two parts of the school and provides the only access to the library and computer suite. This is the most recent addition to the school, having been completed in 2006. Despite large glass windows and walls, its layout and position between the older school buildings mean that it represents one of the school's largest surveillance black spots. Moreover, the doors into the access corridor are so noisy that anyone in this library or computer suite has advance warning of anyone else approaching before they are seen and can see into the room.

The library and computer suite are painted in the same fresh, pale yellow as the office corridor and present a stark contrast to the other learning and teaching spaces in the school. Here the floors are a very worn grey-brown linoleum with painted walls of a tired off-beige, covered with scuff marks and other evidence of heavy footfall. A once-white wooden trim surrounds the windows and doors which are painted an unusual shade of grey-blue. All doors to the classrooms have windows onto their adjacent corridors and through which inspection teams can form a brief judgement on the activities of any group before entering a room. These observation windows tend not to be appreciated by the occupants of the classrooms, facilitating the surprise element of management monitoring.

Following a long-awaited, but personally disappointing Ofsted inspection for the school's leadership team, the school is driven by an external imperative to prove itself worthy of the status 'good', anticipating a further visit soon. Increased observation and monitoring of lesson time is geared towards preparing the school community, including children as interviewees, for future inspections. Additionally, as a focus of future inspections will

almost certainly be pupil behaviour, the management team are cracking down on deviance and disobedience by instituting new punishment systems under the auspices of 'restorative justice'. This is enacted through holding children to account for their misdeeds, confronting them with the consequences of their actions and encouraging them to 'make good' the situation. Another aspect of targeting the improvement of behaviour is the re-establishment of penalties for swearing and abusive language. Children have felt the reassertion of this punishment most keenly.

Children and staff experience this heightened surveillance as an increasing institutional lack of trust and learn to expect classroom interruptions in the form of management patrols or 'walk-throughs' at any time. The unpredictability of class visits is maintained by the management team in order to keep members of the population on their toes and ready for inspection at any time. The uncertainty and anxiety of these systems and processes of examination culminate in the yearly performance of the Standard Assessment Tests during the second week in May. Children and adults perceive these as indicators of personal performance and fear the consequences of a lower than expected set of results. Teachers fear the negative judgement of performance management and being labelled as incompetent; children fear the consequences of 'failure' manifesting themselves in not being given their first choice of secondary school.

At this time, teachers are also in the process of planning for large-scale curriculum change. However, this is competing with the established National Curriculum and local interpretations of a curriculum for 'key skills' for primary schools. In addition, this local education authority generally and Redbird Primary in particular are promoting the development of a 'Primary Skills for Employment Project': a set of beliefs and teaching practices crafted and packaged in the United States in the 1990s and brought to the UK in the past decade. The result is a teaching and learning experience which is heavily prescribed and does not allow for the inclusion of non-scripted learning experiences such as citizenship education.

Citizenship education at primary school is non-statutory, although at Redbird it is within the Personal, Social, Health and Moral Education subject leadership portfolio, together with Religious Education. Whilst teachers are expected to deliver the citizenship element of the National Curriculum for Key Stage Two, they are also permitted to make curriculum compromises where necessary to improve standards in Maths and English. There is no formal or informal monitoring of what citizenship education is being taught or not and no

specific policy for the citizenship learning or desired ethos of the school. Explicit engagement with citizenship related issues can be seen in enterprises such as the Student Council, the Green Group and the Let's Walk to School initiative, but these groups meet and are sustained by the interest of individual adults, not as a structural part of children's learning. Additionally, the school welcomes visits from organisations such as the Anti-bullying Alliance, but their contributions are not consistently followed up in the classroom or further whole-school initiatives.

This description was created largely from my fieldnotes, guided by children's and teachers' accounts for emphasis on particular aspects of the institution and its practices. This discussion focuses on children *being in school* and how children understand the day-to-day experiences that embodies. Notably, no child or teacher expressed a positive attitude towards the way the space and time were organised, the status quo is tolerated because there is no apparent alternative. A number of children said they enjoyed school, but this was largely due to the social nature of specific learning activities and the opportunity to spend time with friends. This supports Duffield *et al.*'s (2000) study where social rather than pedagogic elements dominated children's accounts of their school experience; relationships with teachers lacked a learning discourse, governed by instrumental and incidental imperatives of everyday schooling. Perryman (2012) argues such compromises are characteristic of the culture of performativity now well established in education and schools.

#### *5.2.1.1 School is about Getting a Job! Creating the Governable Pupil*

Reflecting the findings of the Cambridge Review (Alexander, 2010), it was almost universally accepted by children as well as many teachers that the fundamental purpose of education and schooling was to be able get a job: preparation for economic life, independence, betterment and improvement, replicating adult experiences (Watson, 2008). The harder you worked, the more successful you were and the better the job you could expect upon completion, the ultimate aim of school is preparation for the workforce (Lancy, 2008). This positions the child as perpetually deficient, not yet ready for employment. As Leitch and Mitchell (2007, p.56) argue, 'students are typically seen as the potential beneficiaries of change rather than as genuine participants in the process of change.' At the school, the purposes of two skills-based curriculum documents, *Key Skills for Key Stage Two* and the *Primary Skills for Employment Project*, were designed and interpreted to compensate for this utilitarian, economic deficit.



Jeffery and Troman (2012) claim European Union policy which explicitly states that education should be in the service of economic imperatives serves to limit interpretations of what education could be. Children have clearly assimilated this imperative and present these understandings in terms of the language of skills:

Mary: If you want to run a business when you're older and you want to pitch your idea, so that would help you, like, pitch. (Year 5 child, CRI 18.06.09)

Molly: You'll probably need to do presentations in life for work and I think it's important that you have that skill to, like, do it. (Year 5 child, CRI 12.06.09)

Beth: It would be good because when you get jobs you need to do stuff like this and when we go to, like, secondary schools you might need to do stuff like this. (Year 6 child, CRI 10.11.09)

Whilst the idea of the function of school being to gain employment was familiar, it was surprising to hear how children used that to justify the subordination of other considerations such as a child's comfort, happiness, or enjoyment of school. James and Prout (1997b) highlight the application of the term 'work' to children's educational activity in school echoed in my data, and cite it as evidence of the factory-like, routinized and hierarchical structuring of education. Children accept inequality and undemocratic practices, even welcome it in some cases, examples being setting, booster groups and exclusions, if it is for the greater good of getting a job, observed by Lancy (2008) as a current concern in many different cultures. No one mentioned school as a place to practise or develop civic responsibility or political competence. In the absence of a clearly defined citizenship ethos for the school, the utilitarian economic function of education dominates (Kjørholt, 2013; Watson, 2008).

As discussed in Chapter 2, Hendrick (1997) identifies school as having a fundamental role in the defining of children as 'pupils' and, I would argue, 'docile' (Foucault, 1995). The definition of the 'normal' child is constructed from within the regulatory discourses and practices which constitute *being schooled* (Walkerdine, 1986), reinforced by examination and inspection regimes. Foucault (1995, p.184) explains, 'the Normal is established as a principle of coercion in teaching with the introduction of a standardized education.' My data show that the position of the pupil, the idealised learner, conflicts with that of being an independent social actor as discussed above in Chapter 3. Allen (2013, p.216) argues that this is historically supported by 'examining practices [which] would help construct the kind of self-governing subjectivities required by the nation state.' The data illustrate different situations where being in a position of 'growing up' and 'being taught' are confusing and unsupportive of becoming independent.

The idealised learner is accepted as unattainable, but the model is presented as desirable in preserving the appearance of conformity.

The imperative to make every aspect of school experience purposeful and productive has crept into what were previously freer spaces (Jeffrey, 2014). Foucault (1995) argues that this controlling of the minutiae of the day is important for the creation of a disciplinary society from its normalising effect which ensures conformity, as discussed in Chapter 3. One result of this has been the structuring of break times and play, apparent as ideas of legitimate and illegitimate play within the children's discussion, and defined by perceived adult expectations as well as children's own ideas of what 'free' time in school should be. Richards (2012, p.373) study of a primary school playground similarly found 'adult regulation and surveillance framed [children's play] enactment.' Power is at once 'visible and unverifiable' (Foucault, 1995, p.201): evidence of observation is always in sight, and the individual will never know if he is actually being watched, but must always assume he or she could be at any given moment. Within this school, the position of the staffroom at the centre of the school's architecture and the headteacher's office above the playground mean that children cannot predict if anyone is watching these spaces or not. The normalisation of these structures and practices physically and culturally is what allows children to strategically self-regulate and resist, becoming the bearers of the power in this situation (Hope, 2010).

#### *5.2.1.2 Routine Surveillance: Control and Conformity*

Surveillance is ubiquitous, routinized and duplicated at the school. Mechanisms for monitoring and observation are fully integrated into primary teaching and learning objectives and behavioural management practices (Foucault, 1995). Recent examples of this surveillance include: internal and external exams; peer playground surveillance; self- and peer-assessment; relationship intervention and mediation by Learning Mentors (see Eccelstone and Hayes, 2009; Hope 2013; and Richards, 2012). Children are aware that they are being continually assessed, judged, categorised and labelled. Listening to the 'guided reading' section in his audio diary, Harvey commented,

Oh yeah, ... we had new, like, reading groups and some of the names were highlighted green ... Well, they were green with like yellow writing and the other ones were just like white background with black writing. (Year 6 child CRI 03.07.09)

The highlighting indicates specific children who need to make above average progress to achieve their valued-added SAT targets. He asked the teacher why some of the children's

names are highlighted in this way. In repeating some of the explanation to me, he appeared to accept the discrimination without objection.

Children articulated feeling constantly under scrutiny from the number and proximity of adults in their classroom, interpreting them as agents of conformity – also identified by Richards (2012) in a study of the primary playground. Class or group size seems to be very significant here: respondents explain actively seeking or preferring larger groups to be able to hide from the adult gaze and scrutiny. This does suggest that some children feel they can escape overt surveillance at times (Hope, 2010; Hope, 2013), but, a couple of older children explicitly described this as stressful.

Charlie: I wouldn't like it if we only had like 20 people in the class because it would be like not right ... Because there'd be like, I don't know, there'd be all the attention on you all the time and that's not a good thing, they'd always have their eyes on you.

Miss B.C.: That's interesting because I know as a teacher I prefer it when there are smaller groups so I know what you are doing and how much learning is happening ...

Charlie: That's not a good thing through my eyes. ... Not to like mess around or anything, but just to like get on with myself and not be ... and not be annoyed by teachers.

(Year 6 child CRI 03.07.09)

Children often expressed the desire to be trusted or left alone, not to be deviant, but just free from scrutiny. “Being annoyed” or “getting angry on the inside” was a common response to this conflict and perceived invasion. In response, children develop coping strategies to manage their frustration and anger without compromising conformity, subordinating internal conflict. Institutional surveillance leads to reluctant self-regulation, which is normalised, but not without some resistance (Hope, 2013), discussed further in Chapter 6. Learning to self-regulate, and alienating the behaviour of those who appear unable or unwilling to do so, is woven deeply into the fabric of pedagogical and behavioural discourse and practice at the school. Surveillance is both created by, and creates the need for, conformity with a resultant acceptance of governance, censure and control (Jeffrey, 2014), albeit reluctantly at times.

My data yielded examples of participants discussing and making sense of the disciplinary forces they felt within individual classes as responses to the Inclusion Programme. This is the policy and practice of including children with challenging behaviours in mainstream education who would previously have been schooled in specialised units. At the same time as resisting

surveillance mechanisms as applied to themselves, some children embraced the monitoring of others because they were untrustworthy: the “bad children”. Children expressed their dislike of personal surveillance, but very few suggested it should be removed. Conversations about monitoring children’s behaviour centred on how most effectively and efficiently to do it rather than whether or not it was a good thing: efficiency and obedience in a population gives it its utility (Foucault, 1995). When a population is malleable and docile, training produces ‘good behaviour’ (Foucault, 1995). Children advocated placing tracking devices in the school logo on their jumpers to be able to monitor the location of every child, raising the height of the perimeter fence, locking children in, and ‘multiplying’ or ‘cloning’ teachers.

There is little room for creativity in the expectation of conformity without challenge, essentially not to think about or question a situation, but to follow the rules. Children learn to view their agency and unilateral actions in certain situations as illegitimate through their experiences and treatment at school (Lam, 2012). Whilst discussing the playground improvement proposals in council meetings, student councillors unilaterally limited themselves in the scope of their creativity by excluding ideas based on not being able to comply with ‘Health and Safety’ rules or meet the decision-making requirements of senior teachers. Lam (2012) and Wyness (2006) argue that schools’ failure to take children seriously and support their social agency hampers their developing of political competence. However, Busher and Cremin (2012) describe this self-regulatory behaviour as children being somewhat ‘complicit’ in such limiting discourses, and with the encouragement of teachers. Whilst the ubiquity of surveillance structures and practices clearly promotes self-regulation, how far this extends to consistent self-policing is questionable (Hope, 2013). A number of the children to whom I spoke described an alternative to self-surveillance: resisting the perpetual gaze, albeit internally and unseen, but the body’s natural response to the exercise of power nonetheless (Foucault, 1995). Additionally, there was often little perceived need to self-regulate when children were rarely left alone. Of course, some children do openly challenge and resist, but they are alienated and ostracised for rude and obstructive behaviour. The expectations for ‘good behaviour’, from the ubiquitous commitment to improvement (Jeffrey and Troman, 2012b), and the intolerance of deviance are strongly felt by all, keeping what could be legitimate challenge in abeyance. I question what suppressing challenge and resistance does to the development of children’s political identity, and discuss this in Chapter 7.

### 5.2.1.3 School is Not for Children: No Sense of Belonging

Wang and Holcombe's (2010, p.652) study found that competitive learning environments oriented around 'performance goal structures' decrease participation, undermining the development of a sense of belonging and children's value of school. The explicit conclusion for some children in my study was also that, despite teacher rhetoric, school did not belong to children. For example:

Sarah: But like, like, we don't own the school because, we don't, I don't think we have rights because we don't give out our own emotions.

Nick: They teach us and we're supposed to do what they say, so it's not our school...we still have to follow rules.

Sarah: Who pays the bills? The government pay the bills, so it's their school. If we paid for it, then it would be our school because we'd paid for it!

(Year 6 CFG 10.02.09)

In their studies, Stables (2008) and Wang and Holcombe (2010) mention the want of children's discussion on curriculum content and the lack of engagement in and ownership over learning this represents. I specifically noted the absence of children photographing and discussing learning in my evaluation of the photographic diary review interview conversations (AFN 28.06.09 (05)). A lack of individual choice also appeared to be an important factor in the absence of a sense of ownership of the school. Several focus groups discussed wearing uniform as an example of an unnecessary decision being made for children and removing a child's individuality: "Why do we all have to look the same and do the same thing?" (AFN 10.02.09). Leitch and Mitchell's (2007) study found that while their adult respondents agreed children having a choice was desirable, when needs must it could be overruled or disregarded, for example, for the greater good of the school's reputation, supporting Meard, Bertone and Flavier's (2008) findings in French primary schools also. Children are ostensibly offered choice, but it is limited to a given number of options predetermined by the adults in the community, similar to the authorial power in a *Choose Your Own Adventure* narrative.

Additionally, a number of children discussed worrying about making the wrong choices and the consequent judgement upon them. The fear of the negative report or balance sheet of behaviour (Foucault, 1995) is explored in the final dilemma of Chapter 6. Foucault (1995, p.189) explains that 'we are entering the age of the infinite examination and of compulsory objectification.' He argues the amassing of written documentation around the examination,

designed to 'capture and fix' the individual, mark a first stage in the 'formalization' of the individual within power relations (Foucault, 1995, p.190). From his review interview, Tom clearly sees this as excessive,

We're doing extra stuff to go to secondary school and that, like you have to write another story and that. I mean, we've done our SATs – what more do they want?.  
(Year 6 CRI 24.06.09)

The Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) are 'ordeals' which establish the governmentality (Jeffrey, 2014) of children (and teachers), fix reputations and determine futures, but over which the individual has no control. The greatest myth which surrounds the SATs for primary school pupils is that they impact upon secondary school allocation. Explaining what the purpose of the test was, Callum said:

Um...to see...to see what you're gonna be when you go to the next school. To see what you're like, the top, bottom or middle set or something and which tutor [group] you're going to be in. (Year 6 CRI 22.05.09)

This misconception goes unchallenged by many teachers who appropriate the fear of poor performance to encourage compliance in the classroom and with the examination procedures. Perryman (2012) attributes the lack of schools' deviation from the terms of educational performance to the all-pervasive discourse of OfSTED. If schools are to be considered 'effective', they must demonstrate their conformity to the standards predetermined for them. The exam becomes both the means and the ends of manageable performance.

### **5.2.2 Actors**

*At the time of the action taking place, the school was experiencing falling numbers of children and staff. There were a total of 17 classes and approximately 540 children on roll through the academic year 2008-2009. For these children there were 23 members of teaching staff and approximately the same number of learning support staff. Despite the large number of children at Redbird Primary, it was possible for each child to be known to and by an adult in the school. In recent months and years the population of migrant workers in the locality has increased, many coming from Eastern European countries and Poland and Lithuania in particular. Initially, this had little impact on Redbird Primary, but in the preceding two years the numbers of children now coming to the town to join their parents and attend school has increased the ethnic diversity of the school, albeit at a low percentage of the overall population.*

Mr. Armstrong, the headteacher, and Mrs. Lovell, the school secretary, have been introduced earlier in this story; they are important individuals for every member of the school community, holding power over the daily lives of both children and adults at the school. Every pupil and member of staff holds an opinion on the character and effectiveness of these two people. Additionally, the closer other adults are to Mr. Armstrong and Mrs. Lovell, the greater influence they have over school and individuals' outcomes. For example Mr. Fogg, class teacher and senior manager, and Mrs. Drake, a teaching assistant, are known allies of Mr. Armstrong and are able to command more of his time and attention than Ms. Fiennes the deputy headteacher. The adults furthest from the sphere of influence are the lunchtime supervisors who share no in-school free time with either the headteacher or the school secretary and are not available for occasional 'radiator conversations' which would allow them to voice opinions and concerns effectively.

The perception of many teachers is that the management team, personified by the headteacher, is not interested in engaging with general teacher opinion. However, a few 'important' adults will be consulted if a decision is to be made or an issue resolved, and the impressions of learning support staff, as classroom eyes and ears, are often sought. Children are very aware of the resultant hierarchy and know which adults to approach or avoid in situations of conflict to maximise the chance of a positive outcome for themselves: no one wants to be sent to Mrs. Drake if they have got into trouble in the playground because their reputation will be permanently tarred. Conversely, there are adults who appear to turn a blind eye to some rules and systems of punishment and are keen to show they understand what it is like to be a child in the school. Their classroom doors are always open and they will intervene on behalf of children if they are approached in the right way.

Issues of deviance and disobedience are never far from the surface at Redbird Primary. Mr. Armstrong often mentions problems and incidents in whole school assemblies, reminding all children what is expected of them and that there will be consequences if rules are broken. However, it is accepted by both children and adults that although the headteacher addresses all children, there are some individuals of whom there are different expectations. The closure of a number of specialist schools as part of central government's Inclusion agenda means that Redbird, its pupils and staff must now accommodate children who would not previously have been in mainstream education. This presents behaviour management challenges for both children and adults as they strive to find new ways of including unpredictable and deviant behaviours. This can be particularly challenging and frustrating when individual children's unpredictable behaviour directly interferes with

*classroom routines and learning. The school philosophy is to ignore such behaviour as far as possible and to contain it within the particular classroom. However, this often means that resolving problems can take a long time and have a significant detrimental impact on the class and its teacher during the time elapsed.*

Wang and Holcombe (2010), from their study in the US, explain how children's perceptions of the characteristics of school and their schooling today affect their participation in subsequent academic years. With data largely from focus groups, review interviews and my fieldnotes, the following section considers how some of the beliefs about children and childhood are manifested in discourses, practices and relationships present at the school and how this frames the expectations and experiences of children there.

#### *5.2.2.1 The Untrustworthy Pupil*

When discussing behaviour, the almost 'natural' unreliability of children (Stables, 2008) was articulated as a lack of trustworthiness. One of the Year 6 focus groups explicitly considered the differences between children and adults:

Sarah: We should have like the right to have, not exactly the same things as adults, because adults have, like, things that they need...

Tom: They don't really, they don't have things that they need more than us. 'Cos like inside, it's not like they have a bigger heart or anything, we're like the same, but the outside looks different.

Harry: It's the development of the brain or something, because we don't have, we don't have much knowledge on, like, how to drive a car, like if you got in, you won't...

Sarah: But if they have driving lessons, the first time that they sit in a car, before they have driving lessons, they won't know, will they? I expect that you could learn how to drive at our age, it's not legal!

Harry: I think that's the thing. They don't trust us to do some of the things we want to.

(Year 6 CFG 10.02.09)

Between them, Harry and Sarah identify that what children lack is knowledge of being an adult and what adults do. Essentially, children and adults are human beings with similar capabilities, but experience and the law divide them and this immediately disempowers children. This view is supported by Robinson & Taylor (2007), Moinian (2006a) and Noyes (2005) in research



findings arguing that children do have similar capabilities to adults, but are limited by the social constructs of adult discourses.

Tom's point would suggest that the argument for treating children and adults differently is not always accepted as logical or inevitable by children. Quick to point out the inequality of treatment, children questioned why teachers were allowed hot tea and biscuits on the playground or to stay inside when it is cold when children were not. Somehow children's discomfort was not as important or real as *they* interpreted it. Watkinson (2012) challenges the inequality of treatment between children and adults before the law; using the example of smacking, she points out that denying adults rights, such as the right to physical integrity, in the same way would be criminal. At the end, Harry appears to have pinpointed the resulting frustration that the children were voicing: the lack of trust that this implies. Children are capable of similar action, but simply not permitted access to knowledge and experience of the adult world and this supports the research findings of Goswami and Bryant (2010), Lam (2012) and Lister (2008).

However, the child belief in the essential sameness of adult and child human beings was not shared by all; some did appear to see the separation of children and adults as stemming from inherent difference:

One child focus group brought up the distinction of a "community of adults" and a "community of children" as being separate and distinct. Adults and children are very much different beings and not necessarily related. This was presented and reinforced as an opinion, but not challenged by anyone within the group.

(WFN 02.12.08)

This essential differentiation was owned by some teachers as well. As discussed in Chapter 2, Cullingford (1992, p.vii) argues that children have been positioned as 'fundamentally different beings.' Taylor (2011, p.420) highlights the 'powerful naturalizing effects that essentialist nature discourses have had' in obscuring what is social construction in Western cultures. Stables (2008) attributes the resultant confusion of role and positioning to the context of the post-modern or late-modern society: the 'natural' assumption is no longer the obvious. This does not explain why many children in this study appear to see differences as less obvious, but it does highlight the contradictions and uncertainty facing the children.

Alexander (2010) and Wyness (2006) both report finding a sense of and expectation for children's empowerment lacking in schools. Many participants acknowledged that children

have competences and capabilities similar to adults, but the transition to using these effectively was still seen as remote: the arbitrary marker of adulthood, age eighteen, in most western countries (Lam, 2012; Stables, 2008). Field notes I made following a Year 6 focus group recorded:

Relationships with adults could be difficult because they didn't feel trusted, believed or taken seriously [for example when] feeling ill, going to the toilet, going back to the classroom for warmer clothing. Many admitted lying to engineer trips back to the classroom [from outdoor activities] or to the toilet when they needed it – expressly saying that this action was about exercising their rights.

(WFN 20.01.09)

Some children felt that they had to break rules and/or lie to get what they were entitled to and did not get as a matter of course, but this further damages the reputation of the child as trustworthy. As Lister (2008) points out, children are often only credited with autonomy in the context of wrong-doing. However, focus group members noted:

Henry: Sometimes they have a right not to believe you, because sometimes people fake it. Some people don't like school...

Louise: ...and they also want to get out of lessons.

(Year 5/6 CFG 20.01.09)

The abuse of school rules was what prevented teachers giving children the freedoms to which adults are entitled, holding tightly to the need to manage the school day and the unpredictable children they taught, and justifying the exercising of controls on movement and expression. Leitch and Mitchell (2007, p.65) also identify this need for teachers 'to have total control' in their study on school cultures and student participation. In the majority of both child and adult focus group interviews, the ritual of gaining access to the bathroom was given as an example of trust and control issues. One child vociferously protested "you can't wee in advance!" (Year 4 CFG 02.12.08). However, the organisation and management of bathroom space and use is an accepted controlling feature of school life, indeed, a site for the exertion of power, argue Cliff and Millei (2013). A Year 6 group explicitly named their 'right' to go to the toilet when desired, but children asserting their rights can also be seen as damaging: reinforcing the construction of the untrustworthy child and challenging children to decide between self-expression and self-suppression, discussed in the following chapter. The Year 6 group above continued their discussion on rights:

Dan: Some people in our class have managed to get themselves a detention by saying 'we have the right to do this!'

Miss BC: Can you give me an example of that?

Shannon: PE teachers won't like sometimes let you go and get your jumper when your classroom is like only two steps away...

Josie: Yeah, and if you say, 'It's like my right, 'cos I don't want to get ill or anything,' and you're doing outside PE and you'd get told off for saying that.

Dan: They'll just say 'why didn't you bring it out?'

Henry: That's why some people can't be bothered or aren't confident enough to say it, because they don't want to get a detention.

(Year 6 CFG 20.01.09)

The imbalance of power and the inequality within relationships continually confounds and frustrates children in the research. The power to name and create the rules that structure relations and legitimise activity are remote and impenetrable, both physically and in terms of children's spheres of knowledge, rendering accessing school discourse on the subject challenging (Foucault, 2002a). For children, this makes the transition to adulthood, and the gaining of competence towards this something of an enigma, a process which they cannot access independently, let alone autonomously. This position is one supported and perpetuated by adult and institutional constructions of the child as untrustworthy and subaltern (Wyness, 2006).

#### *5.2.2.2 Bad Behaviour and Punishment: Discipline at School*

The following incident illustrates how current understandings of childhood and adulthood prove both conflicting and inadequate, how adults can find managing relationships with children difficult as they are regarded as more adult-like, but not necessarily afforded equal respect (Lister, 2008).

The theft of a mobile phone and wallet from a [member of staff's] handbag had been the subject of much conversation this day. It had happened the day before, Monday, in the afternoon and the person concerned had discovered the perpetrator herself whilst driving home that evening having seen the child accused with her phone.

The response was swift, the police were to follow up the incident with the child and the class teacher was to take the boy "in hand". One unconnected teacher commented,

"I didn't think badly of him until now."

The child's behaviour was not out of character in many ways, he often challenged adult-child relationships and broke school rules, but he had crossed a new boundary: he had entered the adult world by breaking the law and choosing a member of staff as his victim. With this evaporation of his childhood innocence went any residual tolerance and goodwill. The final comment, "I didn't think badly of him until now," is illustrative of the easy alienation of children within society with adults judging them as responsible for their own actions and distancing any obligation to protect them (Goldson, 2001), as discussed in Chapter 2.

The boy ceased to be regarded as a dependent child, but equally was not treated as a responsible, autonomous adult either, there was no impartial hearing, for example. The child represented the 'abnormal' (Foucault, 2003) and this had to be known and acknowledged by the school community. Several months later a different child stole another child's bike. Both child-criminals were ten years old. Whilst the school assisted the younger victim in identifying the perpetrator, the theft remained a quiet, internal matter, and the police were not involved. The offence differs depending on the victim: the theft from the child was not treated as seriously. This illustrates the phenomenon of punishing the child and not the crime, and not the individual child, but the institutionalised model: the pupil. Punishment needs to correct behaviour, bringing it closer to the institutionalised norm (Foucault, 1995). As Downing (2008, p.77) argues, 'by making crime not simply a punishable act but a phenomenon to be investigated and its causes understood, it becomes a linchpin of the technologies for organising and ordering the modern population.' It also depersonalises the punishment, making it easier to administer. Busher and Cremin (2012) argue that this depersonalisation of the individual child is one of the costs to students and teachers as a direct result of the pressure to raise achievement through performative discourses. One Year 6 boy explained his observations of his teacher's depersonalised punishment with: "It's because she can't be bothered to look at what we're actually doing!" and suggested that the teacher should, "just actually see what people were doing before she has a go at them." (CRI 18.06.09). These comments echo the data in McCluskey's (2014, p.97) study, where participants complained that teachers should 'take more time to actually listen' before making judgements. My research participant appeared to be describing the routinised enactment of punishment, tolerated and accepted as inevitable, but not always legitimate or effective. Comments from other children supported this view:

Drew: It's like teachers, you feel intimidated by teachers if you get told off by them because they've got a stronger voice than you. You could give just as good a argument back to them, but you just don't, because when you're a child you get punished a lot more ...than what you should do, because sometimes you get punished for accidental things that you don't mean to happen.

Nick: They think if they get one thing wrong in class, the teachers will yell at them and if they yell at them once, they won't want to get anything wrong. And, according to some people getting stuff wrong can help you get more right.

(Year 6 CFG 10.02.09)

The behaviour of adults and their approach to punishment does not appear to support the development of independence in children from this perspective. Following another focus group with Year 6 children, I noted,

They endorsed punishment (sanctions) or "taking rights away" for improper (irresponsible) behaviour, particularly if it harmed others. Punishment was an important part of growing up and learning how to be an adult.

(WFN 27.01.09)

Foucault (1995) argues that gratification and punishment form two integral parts of the system of training and correction that establishes discipline. Incidents of behaviour are quantified and used to make a measured summary of a child's behavioural performance at the end of a defined period, creating 'a punitive balance sheet of each individual' (Foucault, 1995, p.180). Foucault (1995, p.181) explains, 'through this micro-economy of a perpetual penalty operates a differentiation that is not one of acts, but of individuals themselves, of their nature, their potentialities, their level or their value.' This describes the root of the concern and anxiety felt by both children and adults at the school through the continual assessment and monitoring they experience: 'it introduces, through this 'value-giving' measure, the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved,' (Foucault, 1995, p.183). The force of this drive to conformity is such that individuals will tend to self-regulate in the formation of performative identities (Jeffrey, 2014; Jeffrey and Troman, 2012c).

Children who refused or who were unable to self-regulate were described as being in a category of their own, as Foucault (2003) articulated, the 'abnormal' in society. This has become a more immediate concern of both children and adults with the policies of Inclusion. The community now had to deal with more obvious and open non-conformity from previously segregated and unseen children, featuring in several focus group discussions. Including these

non-conformist, abnormal elements resulted in obvious inequalities both in terms of opportunity and outcome and this jars with children's natural sense of fairness, as discussed by Butler, Robinson and Scanlan (2005).

Hennessy, Swords and Heary (2007) assert that from an early age children can identify deviant behaviour and provide explanations for it, and at primary school age these explanations centre on the internal nature of children. Some children at this school described such children as mentally impaired and unable to be trusted in a whole class situation.

[The children] believe that these children should be somewhere else physically. In the school, but taught together and not in the general population – holding others back. Segregation.

(WFN 02.12.08)

Children who exhibit deviant, abnormal behaviour were seen as both unable and unwilling to conform at the same time, "they can't help it if they are mentally ill" (Year 5 child CFG 02.12.08). Conflating the two rationalises the continued policing and control of their behaviour, positioning them as both needing and refusing help at the same time, so requiring constant monitoring and intervention (Goldson, 2001). Foucault (2003) describes this as a function of the psychiatrisation of childhood in the depiction of the abnormal. There were elements of a medicalised understanding and diagnosis of such behaviour by adults in the respondent group as well. The cultural view seems to be that if a child cannot or will not conform, there must be something wrong and in need of correcting: this does not support the fostering of a tolerant attitude towards dissent and difference.

However, not every example of self-assertive behaviour is viewed as 'bad'. But, one consequence of the increased structuring of school time and activity, described earlier, seems to be that autonomous agency is more readily or easily seen as disobedience. The performative culture requires knowing and justifying all that children do in school (Perryman, 2012; Stickney, 2012). As a result, a child who makes his or her own mind up about what they do, if different from what is expected, is disobedient rather than a credible social agent, regardless of the merit of their decision-making or action. This follows Busher and Cremin's (2012, p.4) findings that children are only able to assert themselves through 'resistance and rule-breaking.'

### 5.2.2.3 Children as Social Agents: Recognised Autonomy and Respect

This discussion is about *being* a political agent (James, 2009) and meaningful, independent participation, as discussed in Chapter 2. As Stables (2008, p.192) writes in his study of what constitutes the child and adult, 'first, children are as alive as adults; they are not learning to be alive, but live fully, interpreting signs and signals for their environments in their own ways, drawing on the resources of culture and adapting them to their own ends.' The opportunities available for children to be politically and socially active, participating in the political life of the school, are contingent upon whether others give them the authority for their action and agency. Busher and Cremin (2012) and Lam (2012) find this lacking in schools due to adults' inability or unwillingness to engage with children as political agents. From focus group discussions, there seemed to be an acknowledgement among adult participants that including children as stakeholders in their own learning is valuable in the development of an independent learner and the achievement of academic targets. However, how that inclusion is realised is unclear and challenged by other performative imperatives (Jeffrey, 2014; Perryman, 2012). Indeed, in some cases the tokenistic participation in educational and management practices serves only to reinforce the absence of genuine responsibility or authority through the limits placed upon it to preserve adult control (Busher and Cremin, 2012; Leitch and Mitchell, 2007). The role of councils and consulting bodies is one example of this. In this school phrases such as, "that'll be good in the SEF" (School Self-Evaluation Form, Ofsted document), came as the primary validation for action.

Despite the heavy weight of current institutional structures and practices leaving little room for children's credible action (Lam, 2012), a significant minority of children in my study retained their belief in the integrity of the child as a competent social agent. From the way they spoke, they clearly had confidence in their own judgement and its legitimacy and were frustrated when not taken seriously, supporting Bandura *et al.*'s (2001) findings of children's self-efficacy beliefs. This is a noteworthy, implicitly critical stand to take in an organisation that does not recognise that legitimate capacity. I taught a class of Year 6 children Personal, Social, Health and Moral Education (PSHME) during my data-gathering period and one session ended with a discussion on responsibility talking about 'Baby P'. This was the case of a small child, widely reported in the media, who had died through the neglect of his mother and her partner. The primary care-givers were only teenagers themselves. The notes I made paraphrasing the children's comments following the lesson contained:

One child was very convinced of the morality of the situation. The mother, even if she was 15 or 16, knows right from wrong. You know it is wrong to harm a baby, so you don't put it in a position or give it to someone who might harm it ... and in knowing that, the mother was responsible for what happened to the child.

[The child in the class was] very much using her personal belief that she knew right from wrong, and if she could distinguish between the two, then so could a 15/16 year old.

Rest of the children focused (like the media and general public) on responsibilities of social services and other official bodies (nursery, doctors etc.). None mentioned her parents or the father unsolicitedly [without questioning].

(WFN 26.11.08)

Arguments such as these had a powerful impact on the audience present, including me. However, in a group, children often talked themselves out of such strongly held beliefs, quietening, if not silencing the original speaker. This also positions children as agents in their own disenfranchisement, denying the authority of their own agency (Busher and Cremin, 2012). From research into young people's political participation, Fahmy (2005) reports on how the feeling of lacking political knowledge saw them devaluing their own opinions based on a perception of their own ignorance and incompetence. This supports Moinian's (2006a) findings that primary school children were able to accurately identify and suggest solutions to problems which affected them, but that the barrier to realising participation was doubting self-efficacy.

Belief in children's necessary dependence on adult authorisation or assistance for action to be meaningful or effective was well entrenched at the school. Challenging understandings of youth leadership capability in both research and practice, MacNeil (2006) suggests that these constructions simplify young people's capacities to the point where their leadership needs assistance or mediation. I recorded several occasions where uninvited adults intervened in originally child-lead projects. For example, two girls initiated a fence-painting project which survived independently for about three weeks before two teachers, a teaching assistant and an administrator got involved to help to "just get it done!" (AFN 02.04.09 (02)). Deuchar's (2009) findings of Scottish schools' approaches to citizenship education similarly concluded that teacher-led approaches predominated over children's participation in the interests of expediency and efficacy. One girl was quite indignant at the intervention, but said nothing openly: perhaps not knowing how to challenge it and regain authority over the project (Moinian, 2006a). She appeared to accept that such involvement was inevitable, subordinating her own leadership: 'self-policing' as described by Busher and Cremin (2012). The resistance



such children meet to their attempts at autonomous action make establishing themselves as social actors hard work, and more difficult than they perceived necessary. Wyness (2006, p.216) identifies a 'self-conscious distancing' of children from these political discourses, furthermore, he argues 'citizenship education does little to challenge the subaltern status of children in schools' (Wyness, 2006, p. 211).

The general lack of expectation for children to be able to act credibly and meaningfully results in disappointment at defeat, albeit prematurely when they have often not had the opportunity or time to realise goals (Lam, 2012). A greater challenge in this position, perhaps, is for children to take one another seriously. If children cannot see one another as legitimate social actors, they will not expect to be treated as credible themselves. The following was recorded one lunchtime in the school's main assembly hall during a dance rehearsal which was, in my opinion, very competently led by three Year 6 girls:

One [child] who I was sitting with ... gave a running commentary as we were sitting there and noted "They're not very well organised, are they? I don't blame that one for going because there's nothing happening!"

They really don't seem to see themselves as able to execute these roles. The children's view of the child is very limited, it's very 'incapable' ... a much lesser capability from adults, and there's no question about that. ... They can't do it the way adults do it. They can't do it properly ... It's funny that they apply that so readily to themselves.

(AFN 12.03.09 (02))

The *Cambridge Review* cites instances where children's competent participation had resulted in their improved confidence as social actors (Alexander, 2010), but these examples appear to be few and far between. The cumulative effect is a lack of experience of being trusted and taken seriously (Lam, 2012). This is problematic for credible political agency. Children must learn to trust their own judgement to become autonomous. However, this is not encouraged or taught at the school, perhaps fearing it may stimulate competent resistance, disturbing the status quo.

### **5.3 In Conclusion**

This chapter establishes the school as a site for the development of child political competence and participation, locating the findings in their historical, geographical and social contexts. In the shadow of the construction of the child as dependent, non-participatory and politically incompetent, conformity and non-autonomous participation is normalised through institutionalised beliefs, surveillance and examination. The positioning of children in relation to

adults at the school held a tension between their physical and cultural differences, described and reinforced by school practices, and the belief that the difference is not so great in reality: we all have hearts. However, children and adults more often accept and perpetuate the associated set of beliefs and behaviours, rather than challenge them (Fahmy, 2008; Moinian, 2006a). It is very important for children to be taken seriously (Lam, 2012), to be believed and trusted, but a major barrier to this is the construction of the untrustworthy child. I did not probe the issue of trust during my fieldwork to explore what it meant, and these data may be indicative of a more generalised lack of trust within the community: other field notes and teacher comments would reinforce this. Additionally, this supports Leitch and Mitchell's (2007) respondents' identified lack of trust as the single biggest issue for teachers and pupils across all schools in their study.

The resulting battle between care and protection, correction and reform (Hendrik, 2015) manifests itself in children's expectations and experiences of punishment. Similar crimes and misdemeanours perpetrated either by adults or against adults were treated differently from those involving children alone. Being put in a position in which they do not have the authority to be a legitimate arbitrator or judge of an appropriate behaviour renders the individual disempowered (McCluskey, 2014). This construction entrenches children's own view that other children are not authoritative political agents, because it is not their legitimate domain. Ultimately it is the adult who is responsible for effecting change or taking action as also described by Butler, Robinson and Scanlan (2005). As Komulainen's (2007) research concludes, children's voices are not perceived as equal in value to those of adults whose value frameworks continue to deny children a voice and authority of action. Further, as Loreman (2009) argues and my own data indicate, this is not based on children's intellectual capacity, but on their relative inexperience. Stables (2008, p.193) describes this as children being 'held back by the way things ought to be,' rather than how they are.

Evidence of children's political participation and achievement in school is not difficult to find, but independence of action is not evident. Even when a project begins as child-initiated, it will attract adult intervention and leadership before long to speed it up, make it more efficient or to improve it, and this will be with or without the children's understanding or consent. The resulting institutionalised subordination is largely accepted, albeit sometimes reluctantly, by children who do not have the knowledge or experience of leadership or taking responsibility

(MacNeil, 2006) and find it hard to know how to act or what action could be taken (Monian, 2006a).

Chapter 6 now places the reader in the contemporary context of the school, when the research was conducted, and as the action begins. One day at Redbird Primary is progressively narrated and analysed through five encounters between children and adults. The level of conflict and resistance increases gradually and the protagonist adapts, accommodates and learns from the situations, managing and then manipulating the school's surveillance structures and practices. However, this participation and agency develops as a response to the challenge of life in school rather than as a direct result of the intended learning from the curriculum. Chapter 7 then concludes the story, offering an evaluation of the different possible outcomes or story endings available to children who participated in the research and resulting from this narrative.

## Chapter 6

### Choose Your Own Adventure

#### Introduction

Following the description of Redbird Primary in Chapter 5, and narrated as one child's encounters with choice and conflict, Chapter 6 places the reader in the contemporary context of the school as the adventure of one fictitious school day begins. The chapter presents how the children respond when faced with the contradictions and inconsistencies of school life: how they deal with conflict, accommodate and adapt their behaviour, and in doing so develop a subaltern and unacknowledged political confidence or *prowess*. I introduce the term *prowess* as a refinement of competence to express a notion of this capacity being close to an art form: an outstanding ability incorporating skill and bravery. This represents both the spirit of adventure in the children's accounts and the institutional hurdles they must overcome in learning political participation and agency. Each encounter is a reconstruction of a child's account and is presented as a choice dilemma for the protagonist. The dilemmas represent the life- and lived-experience-encounters (Jeffrey, 2008) which require more creative, less routinised political responses than those set out in the curriculum, school norms or negotiated class charters. The adventure is constructed to demonstrate increasing levels of conflict and the consequent demands on a child's creativity in resisting the suppression by conformity through these encounters.

It is in this chapter that the *Choose Your Own Adventure* story narrative is realised, however, it differs significantly in certain respects. The choice of plotline is not actually given to you, the thesis-reader, but written as the individual child participants accounted for it in my data. The narrative is also written as a series of events, *all* of which have to be read rather than multiple encounters of which only a few are read (Anon, 2013): the reader is guided through the children's choices and participation rather than making the decisions themselves. Stimulated by five specific accounts, the fiction in my writing can be found in how I have woven together the different stories to create a 'believable descriptive narrative' (Jeffrey, 2008, p.141) and sought to anonymise participants by changing identifying details using additional data. Ethically, it is important to note that Lucy Peterson and the other named characters do not represent individual participants or community members. They are composite constructs created from the testimonies of children and adults from within the research group. Only I can

be identified in supplementary data as ‘Miss B.C.’ and as an actual person: this is how I was known at the school. I have included an annotated copy of encounter 6.2.2 in *Appendix 6* illustrating how the narrative was constructed from the data sources. As with Chapter 5, the data codes indicate the source which is detailed in the *Description of Data Table* in *Appendix 2*. The subsequent discussion analyses the choice made by the protagonist in terms of the relative success and failure of self-expression or the achievement of desired ends, and where I also use review interview data and further observations to illuminate children’s motivations for action. To aid narrative and chapter flow, some conclusions are drawn within this discussion, the full impact of which on political competence is addressed in Chapter 7 along with implications for schools and individuals.

## **6.1 Choosing Your Own Adventure**

### *Special note to the reader*

*You begin your adventure in the wake of the administration of the national Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) for Year 6 and the optional assessment tests for Years 4 and 5. There is a school-wide sense of relief that the tests are all over, but it is tempered by a tension in not knowing their outcome for several weeks and community fatigue from the long weeks of preparation. There is also another term of work to complete before everyone can relax over the summer. To add to this, the spectre of another Ofsted inspection is looming and this is making even the calmest adults anxious. Many teachers and support staff appear tired and tense at this time and the thoughtless, post-exam behaviour of certain children can really wind them up. Other teachers and adults appear not to take classroom work and other school activities very seriously anymore; they focus on the end of year tasks, school performances and celebrations. Your enjoyment of this part of the school year will depend on the approach of your class teacher and the attitude of other children in your class. It appears that everyone’s expectations are different and that can make judging the best course of action in the dilemmas you face quite difficult.*

*You arrive at the starting point of your adventure and are faced with a number of choices as to which way you will go. The choices you make will change the course of your journey through your school day and involve greater or lesser risk and conflict with those you meet. At each stage the result of your choice will be described and explained. Of course, there are always alternatives and having chosen one pathway at one time does not mean you are restricted the next. Others may try to persuade you to be more cautious or more conformist:*

it will require all your prowess and strength to make decisions for yourself. Moreover, not everyone you meet plays fair – there may be offers of bribes, and even sabotage! The way you normally approach the dilemmas you face in school may not always work. Be on your guard, the adventure is about to begin! Good luck!

## 6.2

Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2009

You run to school this morning, knowing you are later than usual, but hustle onto the playground just as the school bell goes to line up by the wooden fence. Ms. Fiennes watches closely as you and three others narrowly avoid collision with the fat, unruly line; she nods authoritatively and the mass of red jumpers oozes onto the path and through the double doors into the dark, old-smelling corridor. This school is so last season!

You are desperate to talk to someone about last night's Michael Jackson TV programme: he has had a REALLY weird life and there has been loads about him on the telly since he announced his New World Tour in March. You missed your opportunity in the playground before school. It will have to wait until morning break – the only slice of freedom until lunch. As you bundle through the classroom door, you notice your teacher is not her usual happy self; it seems like she has already had enough of the day and Lucy Peterson isn't even here yet!

You notice the timetable for a Thursday looks different as well: Maths; Literacy ... you wonder what happened to ICT. That's not fair: they always take your best subjects out when there is some 'important visit' or other to prepare for.

"Miss Verne, when we doin' ICT?" you hear someone else raise your concern.

"We have had to make some changes due to Mr. Fogg's class visit ..." she replies and trails off.

This means the teachers and LSAs will be on behaviour crackdown today. You will be lucky to get any decent conversation in before break, let alone about last night's telly. This always happens when there is an inspection due or other council-type people come to the school. Chloe told you that before the last lot came she and three others were taken out of a whole Literacy lesson (lucky people) to talk to Mr. Fogg about what the religious inspection lady

was going to ask them in an interview they were going to have with her. Chloe did not even know why she had been chosen, and the religious lady asked different things anyway, so it was just a waste of time.

So, today is going to be about persevering to the end-of-day bell without getting in trouble, although that is not as easy as it should be when sometimes you get in trouble for no reason at all, just talking, for example. Sometimes it can be so difficult to be yourself in school, let alone do your own thing.

### **6.2.1 Enactment of the Idealised Learner: Accommodating School Norms and Practices**

Okay, it's Numeracy first today and a group poster challenge. You have mixed feelings about this. Sometimes challenges can be fun when you are working with other children who are either your friends or who also want to work. At other times, if you get a rubbish group and you get no work done together, it can be quite annoying and embarrassing when you come to present your product to the whole class. It all depends on how the teacher decides to organise the groups. You prefer it when either you get to choose your friends, like in P.E. when Mr. Hilary chooses captains and they choose teams, or when Miss Verne uses the class's named lollipop sticks pulled randomly from a cup to create groups. You know this way is fair and you're probably going to get at least one girl with you if you're a girl, or one boy if you're a boy! The problem is when Miss Verne chooses the groups herself, because she puts you with people with whom she thinks you will work better, for example, a group of all boys if you're a girl. She will do this if she thinks you're going to talk. Sometimes it's okay when she does that, but sometimes it really doesn't work.

You give a quiet sigh: Miss Verne has chosen the groups already. Perhaps she has done it today because of Mr. Fogg coming round the classes, and she needs you to be sensible. You understand why the teachers do it: it's supposed to help you work better and learn to work with different people. It's just not as much fun as working with your friends. However, you know that sometimes children cannot be trusted to work sensibly with friends either. You wait to hear which group you are in. Miss Verne finally reads out your name alongside Harri, Chris, Jordan and George. It's the same people as last time. You are beginning to lose enthusiasm for the project and look for the clock to work out how long it is now until break time. The others have already found a table to work on together and have started

discussing the challenge without you. At least you can see Ashton is in the next door group, so you can chat if you get fed up with the others.

You have a few choices in this situation: you can choose to cooperate with the group and try to ignore the stupid jokes and the mess they always leave you to clear up afterwards. Alternatively, you could wait and see what happens. If they get on with the challenge by themselves and don't need you, you can just do some cutting and sticking onto the poster at the end. You can see what Ashton is doing in the meantime. The problem with this is that Miss Verne will be wandering round the room looking to see what everyone is doing. Finally, you could try to do something about it and prove to Miss Verne that it was not a good group choice for you. If you show her that they are leaving you out and arguing, she may let you move to another group. If this option does not work, though, and she thinks it's your fault, then you will probably miss break again!

What do you decide to do?

You decide to work with the people put in your group. It will be easier than having to explain to Miss Verne why you are not helping the group. You just hope that George does not try to steal your work again. As you predicted at the beginning of the day, this will just have to be one of those lessons you 'get through', even if it leaves you feeling a bit lonely and left out. At least you will get to have break with your friends, and it is only one lesson.

The encounter narrated above originated in a review interview discussion on the value of children's decision-making opportunities in school (CRI 25.06.09). This encounter represents the apparent management of self within school discourses and practices, resulting in some internal conflict and resistance, but nothing is acted upon. However, the outcome is not wholly unpalatable: the child accepts the status quo and the incentive to resist is lessened. No overt challenge to the practices of choosing groups or the outcome of the final choice is seriously contemplated. Generally, exhibiting this type of response demonstrates recognition that children can gain from conforming, understanding its benefits. This mirrors Moinian's (2006a, p.242) findings in analysing primary school children's writing in Sweden: she notes that they do not mention participating in decision-making processes or seeking to change 'unwanted situations.' The *idealised learner*, defined in Chapter 3 and discussed in Chapter 5, uncritically accepts the options presented as the only options available. With this approach, the relevance of critical reflection diminishes and the idea of choice as the limited and limiting set of framed



options described above is accepted unproblematically: when to do activities during the day; what colour worksheet to complete; which activity first. Even choosing team captains during sport lessons is structured by the teacher's choice of the captains: someone who will competitively pick team members according to sporting talents and not friendship, despite popular misconceptions.

The decision to comply with school's expectations and conform is characterised by an identifiable repetition of adult and pedagogic words and phrases in the children's accounts. For example:

Mary: It's good that we present to people we don't know because it might boost our confidence up... 'Cos if we present to our friends, we know they're gonna like it.

(Year 5 CRI 18.06.09)

And,

Molly: I don't really like doing maths, but I'm going to, um, this group ... [because] my teacher can't really *just* look after *me* and Mrs. Briggs can.

(Year 6 CRI 12.06.09)

And,

Pippa: I don't know what it was, but Miss Miles was determined to get us to do, er, I think it was with the thing with the numbers, the compass flat thing semi-circle...

Miss B.C.: Protractor.

Pippa:...yeah! She was determined to get us in, because we were doing that for SATs, so it was like really important thing for SATs to do that.

(Year 6 CRI 02.07.09)

However, the uncritical parroting of teacher talk was declared thoughtless by some other children, indicating an awareness of the act of conformity as identified by Hope (2013), but offering no alternative reading of the situation and stopping short of critical evaluation.

The reserve of the idealised learner manifests itself in accepting the standardised practices of lesson and classroom organisation, cooperating and compromising to avoid losing perceived free time. The fear of "losing break" represents a constant awareness of the penalisation of non-observance or non-conformity which, as Foucault (1995, p.183 – emphasis in original) describes, 'traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions it

compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes*.' Children might express a little verbal frustration, a sigh or groan, but internal resistance is not followed up by action, generating a manageable, low-risk outcome and compliant pupil.

The acceptance of framed or predetermined choice and patterns of behaviour is a function of the production of governable subjects (Busher and Cremin, 2012; Marshall, 1996). The following comment demonstrates this well.

I put my hand up more [when I'm learning]. It's like, it's not like when I haven't got my hand up I'm not learning, but when I do have my hand up, I know more and feel like I know more...because I know what I am putting my hand up for, if you know what I mean? [laughs]

(Year 6 CRI 24.06.09)

The child uses an external measure for and of herself, one a teacher might use, to judge her own learning and engagement: it is not an internal experience she describes but a recognised performance of a 'good learner' (Jeffrey, 2014; Perryman, 2012). This postpones the development of children's independent abilities to make judgements themselves and evaluate their own position and progress. Having a high number of pupils 'with hands up' was a measure of good practice if observed during a monitored lesson: a teacher with 'not enough hands up' in a session would have it targeted for the next observation. However, as the child describes it, this appears to be a sign of what she already knows, rather than what is new learning in a given session. The measure is of a form of pupil engagement, but not necessarily pupil progress, suggesting a reactive and not pro-active participation. Normalising practices governing the population (Foucault, 1995) lessen open resistance and conflict, but at the expense of child self-determination.

### **6.2.2 Self-suppressing Responses: Internalised Conflict**

*The next lesson for the day is literacy. You are carrying on with the stories you began writing at the beginning of the week and which need to be finished by Friday. This should be fun: you are sitting with two of your friends and are making good progress with the second chapter. You have also had Mrs. Christopher on your table helping with the writing which has been okay so far. She helps you sometimes, but she is always there watching what you are doing, so you cannot take a break and chat when you get tired. You know Miss Verne doesn't trust you to get on with it on your own. Today this means that Lucy will also be on your table so that Mrs. Christopher can keep an eye on her. Lucy is one of the people*

in your class who makes all the trouble and makes you all lose break. Today she crawls under the table pretending to be a cat. Miss Verne has told you not to let her distract you, but her behaviour sort of takes you over and you cannot control feeling disgusted. She is hitting you at your feet and licking you which is really nasty! It's really difficult to ignore what she does and getting work done is almost impossible.

You think about how to cope with Lucy. You know there is a high risk of losing out, missing break or even all of lunchtime if you cause a fuss: that is what happened last time. And you know from the earlier mention of Mr. Fogg's visit that today is not a good day to push Miss Verne, or even Mrs. Christopher who is sometimes a bit softer. You dwell on how unfair the situation is, making you feel resentment towards the teacher who does nothing to help **you** out in this situation and shows no understanding of your position. You are also feeling more and more frustrated with Lucy who is now meowing and seems to have no reason to stop: no one tells her to do anything different. In fact, the school in general seems like it cares more about people like Lucy than the normal kids like you. You understand the point that 'everybody is different,' and everybody has to accept that, but you get that already, why do you have to put up with someone licking your feet during literacy just because you are normally well behaved?

You think about your options as Lucy approaches your feet again. You could try and ignore her, moving your chair and your feet away from the table, hoping she will move on to someone else quickly. You could walk over to Miss Verne's table and stand in the queue to speak to her, pretending you are stuck on something. But she will want to know why you did not ask Mrs. Christopher and guess that you were trying to get away from Lucy. Alternatively, you could kick Lucy next time she touches you, hope that she learns her lesson and does not come back. But if you hurt her or she complains, you will have to justify your actions knowing full well you are supposed to be ignoring her no matter how difficult it is.

What do you decide to do?

You decide to push your chair back from the table as far as possible and start writing with your literacy book on your knees. Jordan sees what you have done and copies you. Mrs. Christopher catches on to what you are doing and looks at you sternly. A silent finger movement instructs you to move back to your place. You slowly nudge closer to the table, closing your eyes, hoping that Lucy will get bored soon and change her tactics. There is no hope now of fooling the adults that you are trying to do anything other than move away

*from Lucy. You sit there feeling angry and frustrated that there is nobody to understand your side of the argument, nobody to sort the problem out. You are supposed to be in school to learn, but Lucy makes that impossible sometimes. Everybody has to give her the chance to learn, but what about the rest of you? Who is helping you learn when she is messing around? However, you choose not to complain as you will probably get into trouble for it: you just have to learn to deal with the situation, they say that is what growing up is about.*

This section of the story was guided by a review interview conversation with a child in Year 6 (CRI 18.06.09). We were discussing good days and bad days at school after this child had talked about being “annoyed” on a number of occasions: this was an example of how difficult some days can be. This encounter presents children suppressing genuine responses, sitting uncomfortably under the adult gaze. This response suggests an understanding of the benefits appearing to conform, but feeling conflict with institutional beliefs and practices normalising conformity. These encounters leave children feeling frustrated with and alienated from the school and the individuals who represent it as described by McCluskey (2014) in her work on discipline. This demonstrates an understanding of the system and its flaws, and a choice *not* to resist. At some point in their interviews, most participant children describe having learnt not to challenge, but suppress what they do not understand or agree with, acting to avoid reprimand as identified by Lam (2012). I perceived some resistance to the inevitability of this subordination, but therein also lies a assumption of its presence and permanence.

Children and adults were directed to ignore the cat-behaviour in this encounter, but this is a tall order for ten-year olds. No one would expect children to concentrate if there were a real cat in the classroom: it would be removed. Indeed, I do not believe that many adults could ignore another person licking their ankles under a table at which they were trying to work: it *is* nasty! There is a sense in this account that children are not considered real people (Stables, 2008). The boy speaks with an air of normality when he describes the situation, resigned to the fact that it will happen and that he is expected to ignore it. Moreover, he understands that being distracted by it will get him into trouble: ‘penal mechanisms that establish the authority of the minutiae of the working day and ensure members of the institution feel the ‘offence’ of the transgression they have made,’ (Foucault, 1995, p.178). The expectation of punishment is a powerful enough stimulus to conform that children will accommodate considerable discomfort, requiring a high degree of self-regulation and representing a ‘transformation’ towards legitimate action or participation (Simpson, 2007). Children’s instinctive responses are

positioned as illegitimate, removing their personal authority in an encounter and confirming them as incompetent beings. Learning to suppress initial reactions to a situation, to regulate their self-expression as the normalisation of conformity to a 'regulated autonomy' (Ryan, 2011, p.764), generates damaging internal conflict and resentment. Children express their beliefs that they should all have the same right to education and do not believe it is fair that their education is compromised because of another's: the procedural fairness identified by Butler, Robinson and Scanlan (2005). However, they see no way to change the status quo and get on with school life as best they can; Ryan (2011, p.704) argues 'governing children is a way of acting on the future.' The result is a forced compromise of the self to the norm of the idealised learner. The particular classroom situation described, and for some the whole school as an institution, is not seen as a place where they personally are valued. Rose captures the tension and anger some children discussed from internalising such conflict:

Rose: If I'll have my say ... sometimes the lessons are boring. ... Sometimes I never get picked to do any of the games. Like, I'm putting my hand up for a really long time and like everybody that's been picked once gets picked again twice. I'm probably like the only one that hasn't had a go.

I only feel like that I'm being pushed aside and everybody's ... getting the ability to learn more and I'm like getting a bit stuck behind. I'm not very like confident in asking sometimes ... I want help, but I don't know how to say it type thing.

[Sometimes] I just feel like punching everything 'cos I'm just so angry. ... I've got a well stressy life.

(Year 6 CRI 02.07.09)

There is evidence of emergent critical thinking in this response, but children lack knowledge and confidence of how to express themselves effectively. Moinian's (2006a) study concluded that children who expressed negative attitudes towards school tended to blame themselves for those feelings. Whilst the children I spoke to did not explicitly say this, they were certainly assuming a personal responsibility for managing their behaviour in school and controlling their emotional responses, described as characteristic of the 'therapeutic' imperative of social education in primary schools (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009). If children are being coached into managing political encounters privately to accommodate conformity to the idealised learner, the challenge they face is from self-reinforcing powerlessness. As Moinian (2006a, p.245) concludes, 'it is not fruitful for children to explain their reality in a language that conveys unequal power relations between adults and children and regulates the natural and 'good'

child from an adult perspective,’ and in the desired reproduction of governable subjects (Ryan, 2011).

Another example of the expectations of the idealised learner forcing children’s self-compromise came from the school’s internal preparation of the children’s panel for the *National Society’s Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools* (an inspection of Voluntary Aided and Voluntary Controlled Church of England schools following an Ofsted inspection). Senior managers, like Mr. Fogg, monitor and regulate the inspection performance by coaching child interviewees in their responses. Of that experience, one child reported:

Chloe: It was horrible!

Miss B.C.: Why?

Chloe: ‘Cos I just didn’t know what to say. ‘Cos you didn’t wanna say that you didn’t really, don’t really get stuff, ‘cos then they’ll think that they’re not like teaching us correctly, but they are, and then like ... But the lady, though, all she talked about was RE, but like [Mr. Fogg] said she was gonna talk about like um ... how we learn and everything, but she only talked about RE. Which was a bit of a letdown. ‘Cos I don’t really like RE, so I don’t know why Miss Verne chose me!

Miss B.C.: It’s interesting that you say you don’t want to say the wrong thing, you don’t want to let ... [referencing an earlier comment]

Chloe: No, you don’t ... like, ‘cos sometimes it’s stuff that comes out wrong, if you know what I mean? So you don’t want something, like, to slip out, know what I mean, so ... [pauses]

Miss B.C.: What? The truth? [In jest!]

Chloe: [laughs] No, it’s just ...

Miss B.C.: Would you tell a lie? Would you fib? ... Did you fib?

Chloe: No, I think the others did a bit, though.

(Year 6 CRI 03.07.09)

This is also a good example of the rehearsing for the performance that Perryman (2012) describes schools enacting for inspection teams under the duress of discourses of performativity. The overt examination and surveillance practices, which also prompt the children’s conformity, are described as uncomfortable and intrusive by some participants: “they’d always have their eyes on you” (Charlie, Year 6). Charlie then gives a specific example,

The teacher’s always bending down and like looking over your neck and all the time, it’s like when we got split into Mrs. Dunn’s group ... it was always like checking your

work and everything ... So, I don't really like that in maths 'cos when I get it wrong I want to try and like redo it myself and with Miss Dunn, like with most teachers they're all like "no I'll do it."

(Year 6 CRI 03.07.09)

Charlie also highlights the adult's response to an incorrect or inappropriate response by completing it correctly for children, removing their authority or ownership of a task and positioning them as incompetent. This is something which causes Charlie frustration and conflict, but which she does not openly challenge. Charlie goes on to explain how she accommodates and seeks to avoid the monitoring with subtle resistance,

I don't like being told what to do in my work. If I say, "oh I'll go for the medium worksheet" and they [adults] turn round and say "no, go for the large one". I'd probably put it back down and take the medium one again.

(Year 6 CRI 03.07.09)

Charlie's account suggests she feels she can escape overt surveillance at times as also identified by Hope (2013). However, she is fully aware of what behaviour is expected and indicates that being watched prompts conformity.

The fear of the consequences of non-conformity, the loss of break as a manifestation of 'perpetual penalty' (Foucault, 1995) also features in this encounter and is reinforced by the feeling of continual surveillance. During his review interview, Paul described having recently stopped routinely swearing in school specifically due to heightened surveillance and punishment. Between the recording of his video diary and our review interview, the school had clamped down on the use of certain words which meant we could discuss a perceived change with some pertinent stimulus. Paul swore a number of times on the video, but told me that it was before the "swearing thing happened" and that he had now stopped despite disagreeing with the rule.

Miss B.C.: Do you deliberately choose to say certain words?

Paul: No, I don't deliberately choose, like, ... I've stopped doing that now 'cos you get detentions and the only time I would accidentally spill out a swear word is if I fall over and hurt myself or if somebody hits me with a football.

(Year 6 CRI 18.06.09)

The only reason for not swearing is that he might be heard doing it and get a detention, ‘socialised into indifference [or] accommodation’ (Hope, 2013), being observed and punished is the deterrent, not the nature of the act. The critical disagreement with the principle of the rule is subordinated to the imperative to adhere to it, discussed in Chapter 7. Hope (2009, p.901) asserts, ‘a key aspect of social control discourses is the promise of punishment, and in contemporary society the legitimacy of taking disciplinary action is often dependent upon the production of evidence.’ Therefore, a child needs to learn what they must not be caught doing, not why they should not be doing it, which does not support the development of a thinking, reasoning individual.

### **6.2.3 Confronting Internal Conflict and Resistance: Managing Self-expression and Self-censorship**

*As the literacy lesson comes to an end and Miss Verne sets you some homework, you wonder if this might be a good time to talk to her about homework generally. Every week you are given topic homework to complete: you have sheets and sheets of it! Then you get maths homework and reading and spellings practice. It is really quite a lot when you have been working all day at school and need a break when you get home. You have been wondering why this work is not done in school. If it is that important, surely the teacher should be doing it with you, and if it is **not** important, you wonder why you are doing it at all.*

*The teacher does not know you did this, but you’ve been round all five classes in your year and asked everyone if they ever got homework, and they said they didn’t! That means you are in the only class in the year which ever gets homework: that’s just not fair! Sunday afternoons can be really stressful at home when your Mum makes you sit down and do all the work you have been set: neither of you enjoy it. It means you really do not want to go back to school on Monday sometimes, too. You feel you have to say something, but do not want to appear rude or pushy in case she just decides then and there to give you more because she thinks you are one of those back-chat, disrespectful children.*

*One option is to just ask her about how much homework you should have and drop into conversation that you do not think other classes get as much as yours, then she might want to investigate it herself. This way she will not know you have already asked them all behind her back. However, she may just think you are trying to get out of homework and ignore the comment completely: teachers do that when it means changing things that have been*



around a long time. As an alternative, you could just tell her about the survey and see what she says. She is more likely to do something with some evidence, and more homework for us is more work for her (as she keeps saying). However, she may feel that you do not respect her because you asked other people before going to her and that is risky. She could decide that you are not trustworthy and not take you seriously. Your third option is to stop doing the homework, or at least as much as you do at the moment. Some children do hardly any and seem to get away with it, and if you don't tell your Mum what you have been given, she won't force you to do it on a Sunday afternoon. However, knowing your Mum, she would probably ask the teacher why she has stopped giving homework, and then you would be in trouble both at home and school ...

What do you decide to do?

You decide to confront Miss Verne with the findings of your survey, tell her what the other people said and ask her why this class gets so much. You can see she is thinking about it carefully and looks at you thoughtfully,

“So, they all said they didn't get homework, did they?” she repeats. “Maybe I need to have a word with the other teachers at break time. You should line up for assembly now; I'll speak to you later.”

You say nothing in protest, you do not want to seem like you are complaining, and obediently get in the queue forming by the door. You make your way to the hall for assembly and then straight out to break following that. The last lesson of the morning is on the local community project and you had almost forgotten about Miss Verne's promise when she calls you over to her desk for a chat. This is a little unnerving; you wonder whether you said too much. Sometimes children do not know when they have gone too far, do they?

“I spoke to Miss Cortes, Miss Aldrin and Miss Cook at break time and it appears that some of the other classes stopped getting homework a little while ago as you suspected. However, homework is an important and compulsory part of your learning and everyone should be getting it. Having said that, because you appear to have had more than the other classes, I think we will be a bit more relaxed about it until the end of the year. You must remember, though, that when you move up to your next class, you will be expected to be doing homework every night, so this year has been very good practice for that.”

*You give Miss Verne a small smile, you think the gamble to mention it to her has paid off, but you are not quite sure what 'compulsory' or being 'a bit more relaxed' means. At least she was not cross with you for mentioning it; she should not hold it against you in the future.*

This episode had its origins in a review interview conversation with a Year 4 child (CRI 02.07.09). The encounter has the protagonist juggling self-expression and self-censorship, battling with significant internal conflict and a desire to resist the situation. However, in contrast to the response in the last encounter, the child exhibits agency in their confrontation. It is not a direct challenge to the teacher's authority, but the child is aware that it might be interpreted as such due to institutional beliefs about children. The action is motivated by a desire for equitable treatment among children, supporting Butler, Robinson and Scanlan's (2005) claims of the sophistication with which the children made reference to and apply the concept. Additionally, the account fits with Allen's (2012, p.657) description of children working 'together in co-operative rivalry, using comparison with others as a vehicle for reflecting on their own development,' generated by the performative assessment culture and administered by teachers who remain the legitimisers of action.

This response also demonstrates how children are often not fully aware of why confronting an issue can sometimes work, as Moinian (2006a) discusses. Children try their luck with half-calculated risks, not understanding the rules of confrontation and conflict management, and so are unable to confidently judge for themselves what course of action to take (Lam, 2012). It can be successful as in the example above, but mistakes are also easily made, and the children in the study expressed frustration at being caught out or off-guard and unable to negotiate a compromise. As Becky explains,

*Like today I had to move because George was making me laugh and it's so unfair because George like never gets into trouble. It's always me because I'm always laughing, but it's always him that's making me laugh. I never get a chance to say my own say. She just says "move."*

(Year 6 CRI 02.07.09)

The result is a feeling of incompetence coupled with frustration that it was not possible to 'get it right': children do not have accurate knowledge of the situation or how to participate effectively. Meard, Bertone and Flavier (2008), researching how French primary pupils

internalise rules through school experiences, found an institutional preoccupation with efficiency which resulted in teachers subordinating explanations and negotiations of lesson intentions and practices. Similar findings from the *Cambridge Review* point to the necessary sacrifices in asking schools 'to do everything' (Alexander, 2010, p.68). Hope (2009) marks a shift away from 'reforming' pupils to most efficiently policing the school by enforcing rules: correcting conduct. The politically expedient need to run the school efficiently appears to be compromising the development of children's autonomy and competence (Busher and Cremin, 2012).

Children in this position are uncertain of their action and agency both as they act and as the outcome is known, limiting the development of their prowess or confidence. As described by Ecclestone and Hayes (2009), this internal conflict often remains hidden and unacknowledged, with children feeling unable to seek reassurances from adults as to the legitimacy of their thoughts and feelings. Further, the distance the children feel from legitimate political participation is extended by the adult-teacher rhetoric used in justifying the situation their position. In a number of interviews children explained that they understand what the expectations are of them, but not so readily the explanations given for particular aspects of conformity. A good example of this is Paul again, explaining his views on swearing:

Um, well I know that it can offend people and that, and I do get how it is wrong, but I just don't really understand how it is so wrong. 'Cos they're only just words that may offend people, but so do things. Like blood can offend a weak heart and there's not a ban to cutting yourself, which is weird but, yeah.

(Year 6 CRI 18.06.09)

Confrontation as a response is a risk for children, however, the injustice of expected uncritical conformity can also prompt them to act. As Hope (2009, p.895) explains of his study on school surveillance and social control, 'where social values are contested and alternative subcultural viewpoints flourish, normalisation through self-surveillance may break down.' Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz and Ross (2004) argue that the fundamental challenge for the learner in developing critical awareness is a process of dual learning and 'unlearning' and is set against the requirements to accept and conform to rules. Wilson Mulnix (2012) stresses the cognitive agency in critical thinking and it not being *what* individuals think, but *how* they think. 'Critical thinking involves ... a set of habituated skills possessed by the agent and applied to her thinking,' and is contrasted with 'merely constructing a logical argument, which can be done in a mechanical way' (Wilson Mulnix, 2012, p.465). For critical awareness and thinking to develop,

these skills and the process of developing them must be recognised as valuable: children must be given the opportunity to practise them legitimately (ten Dam and Volman, 2004). In the above encounter, I argue that the stimulus for critical engagement is present, unfairness or injustice, but the resultant learning is not expected (Wardekker, 2001) and therefore goes unrecognised and not reinforced: this is discussed in Chapter 7, section 7.1.6. When a child is able to critically assess and successfully negotiate a potentially dangerous encounter, they gain in both prowess and strength which allows risking repeating the action another time. Children do not feel the need to adhere as closely to the norm of the idealised learner for their own sake, but understand well the value of presenting the appearance of it to adults encountered (Hope, 2013). The further the child overtly strays from the norm, the less likely they are to achieve their ends.

#### **6.2.4 Active Political Engagement: Manipulating Surveillance and Monitoring**

*As you look out of the window at the end of the lesson, you see the wind is blowing hard and it is looking much colder than at break. You really do not want to go outside, but there are no clubs on Thursday lunchtimes and there is no space for children inside where they can just sit and chill, unlike the adults who can use the staff room, their classrooms, in fact any room in the school. The bell goes and the class tumbles out into the playground before heading to the dining hall for food. You hang around in the corridor, standing by your coat hook, pretending to be busy with your bag. There is just a chance you could delay going out for a few minutes and then go for a walk round school once all the teachers are either in the staffroom or have gone out to buy sandwiches.*

*Bobby sees you and comes over, "I don't really want to go outside; it is so cold!"*

*"Me neither, I was thinking of walking round the quad and looking for the chickens, do you want to come?" But just then Miss Aldrin and Mrs. Cabot appear at the end of the corridor.*

*You quickly start rummaging through your bag, pretending you have lost something, that usually works with teachers.*

*"Not again!" you say, making sure they can hear you, "I lost one of them and now the other one has gone. The cherry one." You look at Bobby to make sure what you are doing is understood.*

*"Guys, can you go outside and get some fresh air now?" Mrs. Cabot calls.*

"I brought in some Pokémon stuff and two of them have gone!" This is true, but it happened a few days ago and Mrs. Verne has already tried to help you find them.

"Where did you leave it?" questions Miss Aldrin.

"Umm, a bit underneath my peg," you reply.

"Right, we'll have to talk about it when you come back in, okay?" she continues. But Bobby has picked up the idea,

"People were looking at them the other day, but only one was missing then, and now another one has gone!"

"This is not a good place to leave them, the best place to keep them is your tray," suggests Miss Aldrin.

"Not these, they're bigger, a lot bigger," insists Bobby. The distraction seems to be working, they are not telling you off but trying to help sort the situation out.

"You can't leave them on the peg, can you? People collect them and if they are out there ... You need to have them safe," Mrs. Cabot jumps in.

"They're in a box because I have got a lot of them," you add. They seem to have forgotten you should be outside.

"You need to keep them in and where they are safe. Too many people wander around here and think they can help themselves. It's not nice, but um ..." Mrs. Cabot looks at her watch, you see they are losing interest now.

"You'll have to speak to your teacher after lunch and sort this out then, now is not the time, you should be outside now. Off you go!" says Mrs. Cabot. She is not cross, but they are not going to spend any more time on helping you. The teachers continue down the corridor and glance back to make sure you are on your way out, but you know they will not be back as they like their lunch breaks uninterrupted. You slowly walk the final ten metres to the door to the playground, checking around other people's pegs and looking for the lost Pokémon characters: you need to decide what to do quickly before another adult sees you.

You have a few options. You could just go outside and play, you have already lost about ten minutes of playground time, so it will not be long before you are back in to eat lunch and it is not that cold, really. Alternatively, you could go outside for a few minutes and then come

back in again, you might be able to sneak past a lunchtime supervisor or try asking to go to the toilet, but they usually say “wait until you are in the dining hall,” if it is before lunch. The risky option would be to turn the other way down the corridor and take a look at the chickens or head for the library. The problem is, you will be in real trouble if Miss Aldrin or Mrs. Cabot catch you and they will know that the Pokémon story was not as genuine as it appeared.

What do you decide to do?

You decide to take a risk.

You hang around the outside door for a minute before heading down the corridor to the library. This is useful. If you do have to go outside later, you will be allowed to go inside again to go to the toilet because you have not already asked. You chat inside the library for a few minutes and then head back towards the playground, but go the long way round via the chickens. There is only one window from the staffroom that looks onto that corridor, and you're in luck – no one has seen you. On your way back, you go via the coat hooks again just to check that your remaining Pokémon characters are still there. You stay crouched on the floor, out of sight from inside the classroom window, discussing the contents of your box and where you bought the different characters. The corridor stays empty for several minutes and you return to the playground just as everyone else is lining up to go and eat their lunch. Perfect, you won't have to go out again!

The substance of this encounter came from one Year 4 child's audio day recording (CAD 06.05.09). She drew attention to it and several other behaviourally controversial incidents during the day in the course of her review interview, her awareness demonstrating how children can manipulate systems and processes of monitoring and surveillance (Hope, 2010; Hope, 2013). In this encounter, the children manage to distract the adults' attention away from the fact that they should be outside and towards helping find a missing toy. The supervisors stop reinforcing the rule, allowing the children to achieve the aim of staying inside and avoid getting into trouble. There is power in the exercise of this subaltern agency and claiming the spaces in which the encounters happen: the corridor, the playground. Successfully avoiding detection or correction requires a thorough knowledge of the school geography, the places and practices of surveillance, supporting the development of 'counter-surveillance' (Hope, 2010): keeping watch for a teacher, for example.

Another example of similar agency was, during a maths lesson, three children in different classes engineering a meeting in the boys' toilets, the biggest surveillance blind spot in the school. The outcome of this adventure cannot be discussed in detail due to the research participant believing that part of the conversation had not been recorded in his audio day. The child thought he had turned the machine off when in fact he had not. I interpreted the intended hiding of the act itself as dissent (see Bourke and Loveridge, 2013; David, Edwards and Alldred, 2001): the child could not be said to have given his consent to the entirety of the recording made. Ethically, I can only use the material which was recorded before and after he thought the machine was off. What can be noted is that they had previously agreed a system for leaving their classrooms at strategic intervals to be able to socially meet up in the boys' toilets during lesson time and return unobtrusively. This event also begs the question *What else did I miss?* and reinforces the selective nature of the data which is gathered and presented.

Children involved in such deception understand that the situation they are in is close to being disobedient with a high risk of punishment, but their prowess and confidence are clear as they actively manipulate situations and the rules of engagement (Hope, 2013). Resistance to accepted norms is high, but it is hidden or disguised, and negative conflict is lessened by confronting the situation and other actors and taking greater ownership of the outcome. Being the subject or object of a system for a significant length of time, gaining a thorough knowledge of it, Hope (2013) argues affords some children greater power to self-determine, and certainly more than a superficial glance during a busy lunchtime might give them credit. The important development in these encounters is the child's awareness of their agency.

Responding to surveillance and monitoring in this way requires knowledge of the habits and predispositions of different adults: to whom they can appeal and with what reasoning. Additionally, knowledge of the adult hierarchy is important, for example, using the authority of a class teacher's permission works with some adults, but not with others. Children can claim ownership of the geography of the school in a different way, learning how to hide and remain hidden from surveillance (Hope, 2010). These children exhibit a belief in themselves as credible political agents and increasingly recognise their own competence, supporting the findings of the *Cambridge Review* (Alexander, 2010). However, children's actions remain limited by a restrictive adult view, governed by more fundamental views of their lesser capacities and consequent needs (see Alexander, 2010; Stables, 2008; Woodhead, 1997).

Hope (2009, p.895) explains that children must 'be able to make appropriate judgements and recognise the signs of a possible supervisor.' I would add to this the possible signs of supervision, such as reward systems, recording keeping and information sharing between adults. Hope (2009) suggests that a model of 'panoptic surveillance' is as much cultural as it is physical: children assimilate the norms, monitor surveillance practices, and learn to circumnavigate them. One Year 4 child, Sally, mentioned writing the same story twice:

Yeah, but once, this was funny, when I was in Year 2, I wrote this good story about a magical house with a cat next door. And when I was in Year 3 I wrote exactly the same story because I couldn't think of anything else and because it was a new teacher, she didn't know. So I just wrote exactly the same story.

(Year 4 CRI 03.07.09)

Sally also confessed to "plotting" in such situations, clearly aware of her agency in manipulation. One Year 6 boy owned up to swapping a house group assembly. All children were divided into three house groups for the purposes of inter-year-group activities, and collective worship on a Tuesday was held in these houses.

Mike: One time, I shouldn't really tell you this, but [Greg] went in to [Yellow House] assembly and I didn't really mind it because I was with him.

Miss B.C.: So he came with you to [Yellow House] assembly?

Mike: Yeah, just to try it out, but he hasn't done it since because he said he'd get caught.

(Year 6 CRI 22.05.09)

This was quite a common practice, dodging the teacher radar when two thirds of the class were responsible for getting themselves to their house assembly independently. Stowaways were rarely discovered, few adults knew where every child was supposed to be, and the children knew that. Teachers often do not have the time or energy to follow such matters up (Meard, Bertone and Flavier, 2008).

Knowing the surveillance practices and habits of members of staff, the lines of sight from various standpoints and windows, and the safer spaces with limited surveillance, children are able to find a way to move undetected between the watchtowers and achieve their own ends. Barron and Jones (2014, p.257), from their work with pre-schoolers, argue that 'despite powerful discourses that seek to contain childhood, children manage to exceed or interrupt sites of containment.' Resisting conformity by avoiding conflict allows children to maintain a



comfortable reputation close enough to that of an idealised learner not to be a concern to adults. This represents children at the height of their agency and political prowess in everyday school encounters. Not only do children critically evaluate practices to understand them and find their weaknesses, but they apply that learning to their actions. Wardekker (2001, p.113) describes this as a child's 'conscious co-authoring of his or her own biography.' From understanding the institutional tolerances of deviance, children can act before any transgression is recognised as disobedience and becomes an issue. Following these encounters children express a different type of relationship with the school site, buildings, layout and its surveillance practitioners: there is power in their ownership and exercise of these deviant behaviours, albeit limited by adult control of the domain (Busher and Cremin, 2012).

### **6.2.5 Deferred Decision-making and Action: Navigating Deviance and Disobedience**

*The success of your lunchtime exploits leaves you feeling emboldened: the disappointments of the morning are forgotten and the afternoon should be easy, it is much shorter than the morning. After lunch there is group reading as usual, and it's not your group's turn to read aloud today, so Mrs. Verne has surprisingly let you and your friend Jordan go to the library to change your reading books. Mrs. Verne is a new teacher and probably doesn't know that you are not allowed to go on your own during lesson time. She probably won't make the same mistake again ... There is no one else there today, so you decide to investigate the librarian's table. The fire extinguisher is hanging on the wall by the table and somehow it gets knocked off and the pin is jolted out. There is a soft hissing sound as the foam emerges from the end of the nozzle. First you panic and try to put it back, but as you do more foam comes rushing out. Jordan calls out in alarm and you turn the foam towards him: this is fun!*

*You have to make a choice now: you know that messing around in the library with the fire extinguisher is against the school rules even if it did start by accident. Are you going to carry on playing and hope that nobody finds you? Nobody is likely to come looking because there are not supposed to be any children in here on their own. It would just be bad luck if an adult walked in, and most of them will be busy with the inspection thing anyway. You could just leave things as they are now and disappear, someone will discover the fire extinguisher later and it would be difficult, but not impossible, to trace you. Of course, you could always own up to the accident and hope to avoid trouble, the only problem is you would have to explain to someone why you were in there when you know it's against the rules, even if Miss Verne let you go unknowingly.*

What do you decide?

But, is it too late: you have about twenty seconds before you are interrupted. Ms. Fiennes marches through the door!

“You’re coming with me!” she instructs.

This is not good: she will take you straight to see the headteacher. You know this as you had a run in with her about swearing in the playground last week. This could be it, the last straw. You wonder what kind of mood Mr. Armstrong is in: it is the end of term and an inspection-type day, so all the teachers are more tired and ratty than usual, especially the headteacher. How are you going to explain yourself?

When you arrive Mr. Armstrong is busy in a meeting, but he comes outside his office for a few moments and listens quietly to Ms. Fiennes’ report. Mr. Armstrong glances once at Jordan and then his gaze fixes on you.

“You again! We don’t need this ...” you can hear the irritation in his voice as he disappears back into his office. You look downwards and try to hide your eyes as they prickle with tears. You do not know why you did it, you do not understand how it happened, you could not help yourself, you did not mean to do it. It’s just what children are like. You are feeling more and more anxious and start pacing up and down the corridor, keeping out of sight of the school secretary: you do not want to annoy her as well.

A few minutes later you see your mum arriving in the waiting room. This is really not good. She hasn’t seen you yet and she looks worried. Mrs. Lovell comes out of the secretary’s office and walks over to Jordan. She speaks quietly to him and a few seconds later he walks away quickly in the direction of your classroom without looking back. Mrs. Lovell walks slowly and deliberately towards you.

“Your mother has arrived and is waiting to speak to you and Mr. Armstrong. Your teacher will also be joining them shortly. I suggest you think carefully about what you are going to say.”

Oh no! That is everybody involved now, this is really serious. What happens if they exclude you? You have one more year at Redbird and you wanted to go to Mayflower Comprehensive School, but you are betting that being excluded from Redbird would mean that Mayflower would refuse to take you. That would mean Santa Maria Secondary instead, especially if your SATs results are not good enough and that is quite likely from what

everybody says. You cannot believe that you have ended up in this situation. Your mum and dad will be particularly gutted: you have never been in this much trouble before.

“Do come in,” Mr. Armstrong beckons both you and your mum, “Mrs. Verne will be joining us in a few minutes.”

You figure out you have three choices. You can just tell the truth, that you don't know how it happened, and hope they believe you. The fire extinguisher just came off the wall, the pin fell out and it started spraying. You and Jordan are equally to blame and you feel genuinely very sorry. Alternatively, you could say that it was all Jordan's idea. You know you shouldn't have been in the library on your own, but you had no idea what he was going to do and didn't have time to stop him. However, if you say that he will probably just say it was your idea. Another idea is to just make up something as you go along, maybe say that you heard a strange noise and went to investigate; the fire extinguisher was already on the floor spraying and you were trying to tidy up the mess, but then you are not sure what Ms. Fiennes actually saw and what she said and you will need to make sure you speak to Jordan before they speak to him. And, if they find out about the lie, it will just make matters worse and they will be sure to exclude you. You just know they are not going to fully trust whatever you say, it may be better to say nothing.

What do you decide to do?

As you gingerly enter the office, you decide to do nothing just yet, but to wait and see what happens. Your tears have dried up now and you are feeling deflated and helpless. Mr. Armstrong and your mum start talking about your older brother and sister: how they are doing at Mayflower. Mrs. Verne rushes in, apologises for the delay and sits down beside you with a concerned look on her face. Mr. Armstrong sits on a big chair in front of his desk. He is a very tall man and the chair makes him seem like a giant. He has the appearance of a very important person, you feel just a little bit frightened, but then,

“Well. Tell me what you like doing in your spare time. What are your hobbies?” This is not what you expected! You wonder why he has taken this approach.

“Umm. Formula One?” you offer, hoping that is the sort of thing he is looking for.

“So, you are into your cars are you?” He tells you about his love of German cars and asks if you know that Mrs. Scott owns a Porsche. This is not the conversation you were anticipating at all. But then it turns,

*“We work as a team: your mum, your teacher and me. We work together. We work together to solve problems. Right now, you’re our problem!” Okay, that’s not what you were expecting either.*

*The head teacher talks for some while and mostly about lunchtimes, but does not mention the fire extinguisher. You are feeling a bit confused as to what the point of this conversation is. Clearly there is a school problem with behaviour at lunchtime, but you have not been in trouble for that today, it appears that the fire extinguisher and the library are almost forgotten. As you leave his room half an hour later to return to class with Mrs. Verne, you realise that there is no extra punishment coming your way and no mention of an exclusion: you are safe!*

*“Is that it? Really?” you ask aloud in disbelief, but Mrs. Verne does not hear you as the noise from the classroom distracts her.*

The material for this encounter is taken largely from my field notes (AFN 26.03.09 (1) and (3)), the primary data are therefore my observations and interpretations of participant encounters. This adventure includes an earlier uncompleted decision-making opportunity as an illustration of how events sometimes seem like they run away from children and out of their control, no matter what their initial intent was. The presence of a second decision demonstrates the opportunity to change the representation of events to different people and in different situations. However, more importantly, both decisions are proved to be redundant eventually. This is due to the assumptions made by adults of children in general and this child in particular, the inflexibility of the school rules in interpreting the situation, and the greater importance of other aspects of the school agenda: namely the upcoming inspection and preoccupation with behaviour as illustrated by Perryman (2012). The child’s reasoning in this situation is quite well developed and the response is characteristic of a deferral in decision-making. The protagonist understands the precariousness of the situation and that more information is needed to be able to make an informed decision. Sometimes waiting to see how a situation will develop renders the need for confrontation and self-assertion redundant. There is agency in deciding not to act (Ziglidopoulos and Flemming, 2008).

This encounter also highlights the importance of reputation, Foucault’s (1995) measured balance sheet as discussed in Chapter 3. There was no doubt in the child’s mind that the head

and deputy would think the worst in this situation and act accordingly. Another example illustrating the importance and impact of reputation was children swapping places in a Year 6 class, taking advantage of having more than one teacher and gambling that they would not discuss seating arrangements with each other.

Louise: We have to sit, like, boy-girl in our table groups, but, like, we're a bit naughty really, because all of us like, we all like switch tables when Miss Jane didn't know which table groups we had, so we're all like in tables that we wanna be in and that – [laughs].

Miss B.C.: ...and she doesn't notice?

Louise: No, but all the boys that were together... [she] just like said that "you're not all supposed to be together: I'm not having you lot together."

(Year 6 CRI 26.06.09)

The calculated risk to swap places succeeded, but the reputation of a few meant that they were not going to be allowed to sit together regardless of how the situation arose.

Children fear a bad reputation potentially damaging their future, but also feel a disheartening lack of control over it, described also by McCluskey's (2014) participants. Foucault (1995) identifies the multiple and duplicated examinations and negative assessments the particular child in this encounter feared. It was an exceptional situation and one for which he had no precedent, nothing to fall back on when deciding what to say to the examiner, the headteacher, as the interview proceeded. The child's anxiety about the impact of his SATs on secondary school allocation reminds him of the purpose of this phase of education and how he has failed to conform or have his course corrected, threatening his safe passage to the desired secondary school. The involvement of his parents reinforces the expectation of compliance as they also defer to the correctional imperative (Foucault, 2003).

The issue for the school is one of governability and conformity, bringing the child in line with the norm of the idealised learner. The discussion is not about the most appropriate learning for a child, but how to restore the normal workings of the system (Foucault, 2003). Being objectified as anomalies distances such children from adults, and adults from their responsibilities to those children. Unexpectedly, it also affords children a certain competence and self-determination which appears only when encountering these kinds of actions: resistance or rule-breaking (Busher and Cremin, 2012). Goldson (2001, p.40) argues, 'individual agency is profiled, personal responsibility is piously ascribed, and structural context is just as emphatically denied.'

Following the disobedient act, the child returns to self-regulation and conformity to the practices of examination and punishment. There appears to be no need to actually punish: the fear of judgement is taken to be penalty enough (Foucault, 1995). From a public perception, the culprit is held to account through an interrogation in the headteacher's office. However, the detail of the examination remains a mystery to the rest of the community, only the simulated act is needed to normalise these practices. The institutional response here mirrors that of the wallet theft described in Chapter 5: the enforcement machinery appears to have been mobilised, but no one actually witnesses what the outcome is. The political learning from such encounters is further complicated by the unpredictability of the enforcers of conformity in this school (Lam, 2012). Despite careful critical assessment, children cannot prepare for every situation, but they can still learn from such experiences (Wardekker, 2001). A child can gain greater knowledge about the enforcers of conformity: how the examiner, the headteacher, deals with deviance. However, the final discussion was depersonalised, leaving the child uncertain of his interpretation of the event and the actual consequences of this encounter. Maintaining that uncertainty ensures the child gains little prowess from the encounter. Further, he is powerless to renegotiate his reputation and must accept the interpretation presented to him if he does not want to damage it further, regardless of his own opinion, a frustration expressed by participants in McCluskey's (2014) research on discipline.

Additionally, despite the anticipation, anxiety and build up, the fear of further punishment was unwarranted as none was forthcoming. Children may well reassess such outcomes as not so negative and the risk they took as not so much of a gamble. Getting caught in this situation held a certain degree of bad luck! One recurrent conclusion and criticism recorded in my data was that certain children do not get punished, no matter how heinous their crime. Some children and behaviours appear beyond the reach of normal disciplinary practices, Foucault's (2003) formulation of the 'abnormal'. The difficulty I have in interpreting these behaviours is that children who exhibited them were not participants in the research, as discussed in Chapter 4, and my analysis lacks their particular testimonies.

In this response, children learn of their relative unimportance positioned as subordinate in relation to adults (Wyness, 2006). How the particular child later evaluated the encounter I do not know, it is an omission from the research data. Ethically, I was unable to probe any further without potentially compromising my teaching role at the school. The experience was not a pleasant one for the child, and I can speculate that it may have played some part in the self-

regulation of his behaviour in the following weeks and months: there were no further interviews with the headteacher. The episode did not change his anxieties towards the SATs or secondary school admission, but may well have lessened his fear of what the headteacher might or could do to impact negatively upon the next stage of his academic journey. As ten Dam and Volman (2004, p.375) conclude 'the quality of [children's] participation can be improved by reflection,' and critical thinking is a key competence for active political participation. The child gained an insight into the thinking and priorities of the headteacher which would allow him to make a better assessment of the relative risks of telling the truth or not at a subsequent similar encounter.

### **6.3 Conclusion: The End of the Day**

Through the adapted *Choose Your Own Adventure* narrative of one day at Redbird Primary, this chapter has presented and analysed the alternative forms of agency and developing political prowess of children at the research school. As the day progresses with increasing levels of resistance to the normalisation of conformity, the child's participation and agency increases and plateaus. The conflict with institutional structures and practices falls as the child is able to determine a course of action and find alternatives to self-regulation. The fire extinguisher scenario suggests the limits to this in the experiences of my participant group. The chance encounter which resulted in detection of deviance and holding to account, brings the narrative full circle and demonstrates the unpredictability and uncertainty of life at school. It returns the protagonist to a situation of expected self-regulation. However, this episode also demonstrates the subaltern learning a child can gain from the institutional lack of recognition of their perspective on events, the impact of which is explored in Chapter 7.

To demonstrate my interpretation of the findings, I have made several compromises to the *Choose Your Own Adventure* narrative which affect what has been presented. The protagonist has been created without a given gender. The principal reason for this is the relatively small sample of my study and not being able to draw conclusions about gender differences in behaviour from the data (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Additionally, all types of action and agency were exhibited by both participant girls and boys and in most year groups. I have chosen unisex children's names throughout the narrative which were popular at the time of the research to highlight the ambiguity in this representation. The further analysis of the difference in girls' and boys' competence would be valuable and add to the findings (see Christensen and

Mikkelsen, 2013; Hey, 1997; Mayall, 2002), but it is not within the scope of this particular analysis.

A further difficulty with this representation is the absence of the children's view of my organisation and presentation of their data. I developed this interpretation of their responses to the school several months after fieldwork had ended and having left the research site. I can only infer from earlier interview data and suggest that the children would acknowledge the credibility of these accounts (Wolcott, 1990). The response described in the homework encounter in 6.2.3 of balancing self-expression and self-censorship would have particularly benefited from a participant view, representing both a presence and absence of effective agency. At times children struggled to articulate their interpretations of these events from inexperience of such dialogue and a limited range of expression, and making it difficult to access their reasoning and intent (Punch, 2002). I felt the uncertainty of their position in school was reflected in the disconnectedness of some of their understandings. This particular narrative required me to be creative in using other children's accounts to meaningfully contextualise and narrate the experience in a way I judge meaningful as described by Van Maanen (1988).

Additionally, every encounter describes an interaction with one or more adults in the school, but I have not used their testimony in the creation of the narrative. The exception to this is the final episode where elements of the narrative are taken from my field notes and conversations with adults about the event. As a result, the accounts disproportionately rely on a degree of participant and researcher inference and supposition in the description of the adults' behaviour (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Whilst the focus is very much on the children's responses to their environment, the adult commentary would add significantly to understanding the context.

Finally, for ethical reasons I have also had to change some details of each encounter to protect the identity of children and adults at the school (BERA, 2004). My belief is that the individuals concerned would recognise the descriptions I have made, but that other members of the community would not immediately identify the incident or characters not having been personally involved themselves (Wolcott, 1990). The discussion in the next chapter depersonalises my analysis further, removing any tangible association with particular individuals. Chapter 7 is organised as six possible story endings to the adventure focusing on what children learn from their experiences at school in terms of developing political prowess



and courage. Placing the story endings in a separate chapter follows the narrative break after the main story action has ended and before the result is uncovered in *Choose Your Own Adventure* books (Anon, 2013). This structure also allows for the immediate contextualisation of the epilogue, myself in the research, alongside my conclusions.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Discussion and Review of Findings: Ending the Quest**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter 7 presents the fulfilment and evaluation of my quest as a critical analysis of the different possible endings to the children's adventures together with my ethnographic approach and the impact it has had on my research process and products. This chapter unifies Chapters 5 and 6, discussing six possible journey endings for the development of children's political competence at the school as approaches or dispositions towards future adventures and encounters. I refer back to the gap in knowledge identified in the initial definition of the quest – how far do children's accounts of school challenge or reaffirm the exercise and development of political competence and agency in school – assessing the implications for education and its participants. This ends my joint endeavour with the children, but acknowledges their on-going journeys and what their encounters at the school suggest for their future political prowess and confidence. In the epilogue at the end of this chapter I arrive at my quest's destination, describe my new surroundings and evaluate the journey in retrospect. The ending of one quest, of course, suggests opportunities for the next and these are discussed in Chapter 8.

#### **7.1 Story Endings and Onward Journeys**

The next part of the chapter is constructed as six possible story endings for the children who participated in the research that year at Redbird Primary. These outcomes are not characterisations of individual children; they describe different states of political awareness and competence. Additionally, each ending is not restricted to one per child or one per encounter or choice made, but available to any child at any time. The structure of the next section broadly follows the pathway through the day as narrated in Chapter 6 in terms of increasing political prowess and courage, but there is no necessary, direct correlation between these headings and those in Chapter 6. The story endings reflect my interpretation of the state of political readiness, in terms of future action, in which the children are left following their encounters. These endings originated in, but do not directly reference, children's own conclusions to their encounters reflecting their capacities and confidence as situated competence (ten Dam and Volman, 2007). The endings were crafted in their current form to emphasise the adventure and daring in children's narratives. I describe these endings as: the

will to conform; living with uncertainty; developing survival skills; learning the rules of engagement; developing critical expression; and developing political prowess and courage. As featured and defined in Chapter 6, I have chosen the term prowess to express a notion of this competence being an outstanding ability incorporating skill and daring.

### **7.1.1 The Will to Conform: School as a Correctional Facility**

The *will to conform* characterises a pupil disposition more comfortable with governance and the normalised forms of subjectivity (Marshall, 2002, p.413) than challenging a school's disciplinary structures and corrective practices or the adults who enforce them. The 'will' represents the 'the constant state of struggle that characterises human desire and endeavour' (Downing, 2008, p.13). I have borrowed this construction from Foucault in the *Will to Knowledge* who borrowed it from Nietzsche as the *Will to Power* (Downing, 2008). It is a play on their use of the term, but serves to express the inner struggle involved in exerting *the will*. The often uncritical acceptance of the positioning of the child as incompetent and untrustworthy allows children to tolerate and even embrace practices which are undemocratic and discriminatory at times (Busher and Cremin, 2012; Perryman, 2012), as demonstrated in Chapters 5 and 6. What children learn from this story ending is that there is a single, right choice to make when encountering challenge or conflict.

The best example of this is through the *Personal, Social, Health and Moral Education* curriculum where children are not encouraged to critically evaluate what type of member of society, or citizen, they would like to be, but are taught to recognise challenging situations and appropriate responses to them (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009). Loreman (2009, p.66) argues that the belief underlying this is that children 'lack the competency to guide their own learning.' Hope (2010, p.322) further contends that, in relation to *Key Stage 3 Personal, Social and Health Education*, 'processes of reflection, clarification, identification and articulating personal elements [values and beliefs] can be seen as engendering self-surveillance.' These same processes are evident in the Key Stage 2 curriculum (DfES and QCA, 1999). Schools will struggle to promote autonomous political behaviour where learning to challenge, dispute and ultimately resist is not valued (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009). It is my contention that this seriously weakens the child's personal authority to legitimise his or her own thoughts, feelings and identity.

The journeys to these endings involve little conflict and so little resistance and associated discomfort. Children learn that compliance and conformity make for a more peaceful environment, recognised and praised by the adults representing the performative structures and practices designed to nurture a will to conform. Children learn the importance of following rules without understanding them (ten Dam and Volman, 2007), their agency and power is in suppressing any drive to resist conformity and to correct their natural responses to social and political challenges. The construction of school as a correctional facility (Foucault, 1995), seeking the continual and universal improvement of the pupil (Jeffrey and Troman, 2012b), positions the child as deficient, incompetent. Moreover, defined as lacking self-control, children experience a state of perpetual mistrust and ensuing surveillance, removing their authority of self-determination over their own learning, privacy and, indeed, their bodies (Cliff and Millei, 2013; Jeffrey, 2014), the ankle-licking incident is a good example of this.

It is my argument that this construction of the untrustworthy pupil induces the suppression of the children's instinctive responses to situations, delegitimising their participation as equal, respected actors (Lam, 2012; Lister, 2008). This suppression of the self stimulates a passivity of thought which offers the institution a calmer more compliant behavioural experience, but does nothing to develop the children's self-determination as political agents. Indeed, autonomous behaviour is more readily associated with disobedience, resistance and rule-breaking, than an active engagement with the situation or subject matter (Busher and Cremin, 2012). Kehoe's (2015) recent research suggests children's reported agency in institutional change in schools should be treated with caution from their perceived need to enact performative norms. It is my contention that this does not produce politically engaged children 'preparing to play an active role as citizens' (DfES and QCA, 1999).

However, I question how far this ending stems from individual agency: many participants explained their acceptance of this outcome using pedagogic language and phrases reproduced from the current teacher repertoire, supporting Jeffrey's (2014) claims of pupils enacting performance rituals having internalised school norms. However, I query whether this is an active choice to comply, an active choice not to deviate, or a re-enactment of conformity. By the time the children in my study reached this school, they had already had four years of schooling: four years of disciplining and experience of what happens when lines are crossed and boundaries pushed. The governed pupil is not a critically engaged child: 'questioning power and the way it structures social relations and legitimises knowledge must be an inherent aspect

of critical thinking,' (ten Dam and Volman, 2004, p.37). This suggests that research should be extended to how and when this acceptance is internalised in the earlier years of schooling. Cliff and Millei's (2013, p.351) research on the 'civilising' effect of bathroom space and routines in early childhood settings stresses the importance of this 'rarely focused upon' stage.

### **7.1.2 Living with Uncertainty: In Perpetual Transition**

Living with uncertainty, children are aware of the unpredictability of their position as children in the institution, and particularly in relation to adults and the transition to adulthood. They begin to question some of the assumptions and compromises made in accepting the will to conform. Experience teaches them that the same situation may be dealt with differently on different occasions, depending on who else is involved, when it happens (what time of day, week, year), where it happens (classroom, corridor or playground) and what preconceptions the arbiters of the situation bring to their reading of it (Mayall, 2002). Children experiencing this outcome described a conservative attitude to risk and decision-making, aware of their own lack of knowledge and experience of possible outcomes as described in Fahmy's (2005) study. The courage or confidence to act is not enhanced by this type of outcome; children expressed a desire not to end up here, and often did not understand how they had got there.

Experiencing this outcome teaches children that personal relationships with individual adults can challenge the institutional norms (Mayall, 2002). Some teachers will trust some pupils to run errands around the school and take on responsibilities such as the music in assemblies. Despite this apparent trust, controlling measures which display a clear lack of respect for children's integrity as social beings are enforced: restricting access to the toilet for example. Children are perpetually on the cusp of being treated as credible social actors, but never actually recognised as such (Lister, 2008): always becoming (James, 2009; Lowe, 2012), always in transition, always illegitimate. In this context, political prowess can never be secure or substantially developed because it appears amorphous and unattainable. Exercising reason and logic in the knowledge that you are powerless to act upon any conclusions or decisions compromises the ultimate ability to be reasoned and logical, to 'be adult'. Hartsmar (2012) refers to this no-man's land as a result of a shifting identity in and out of childhood.

Children learn to live with uncertainty: with an identity which changes from one encounter to the next and not in an obviously predictable way (Lam, 2012; Mayall, 2002). This generates anxiety for children, aware of their insecurity, and induces a reserve or passivity in some as

they accept they can never 'get it right' (Alexander, 2010). A contributing factor to this uncertainty is the view that school is a rehearsal for life, not the real thing. Stables (2008) questions: so when does life begin for children? Responsibility for care, development and schooling is always assumed to be outside the child (Butcher and Andrews, 2009; McCluskey, 2014). Children's feelings of lack of empowerment described in the *Cambridge Review* (Alexander, 2010) should not, therefore, be surprising. The opportunities to exercise political agency will be severely limited if children are not encouraged to participate meaningfully in school life due to the time and energy it detracts from the curriculum (Meard, Bertone and Flavier, 2008) and the challenge it might present to the given order (John, 2003).

There is a certain strength and resilience, however, in the developing the ability to live with perpetual uncertainty and being able to function effectively as the institution demands, supporting Jeffrey's (2014) findings in the ability of children to assume performative identities. The children experiencing these types of story endings were not socially weak and worried individuals, but they did lack the political courage to be able to take the initiative feeling unsupported by institutional ethos and curricula as also identified by Kehoe (2015). The children did, however, express annoyance and frustration at their lack of control and ability to manage an encounter to their desired ends, making life at school barely tolerable at times. Children persevere when confronted with this internal conflict, but do not resist. However, in that children are choosing what they present to adults and what they keep hidden, albeit heavily influenced by institutional norms and expectations, they exhibit agency also in the false representation of themselves (Hope, 2010).

Following Leitch and Mitchell's (2007) argument, if we assume a purpose of education is to effect change and improvement upon its subjects or objects, it renders all children in the system in a necessary state of transition, of becoming something else. Being in a perpetual and dynamic state of transition whilst at school (Stables, 2008; Wyness, 2006) generates confusion for the children over what their legitimate capacities and competences are, rendering achieving an endpoint, completing a transition to recognised social actor, almost impossible (Wyness, 2006). One consequence of this construction is that the child can be comfortably positioned as a subordinate, passive recipient of education (Woodhead, 1997). This structural inequality releases adults from responsibilities to children as equal stakeholders in their own education, lying in tension with current education policy, as discussed in Chapter 2. Illustrating these contradictions in their evaluation of initiatives for 'personalised learning,' Leitch and Mitchell

(2007) argue that a dangerous misidentification between what schools think they are doing and what actually happens prevents opportunities to redress the imbalances being realised. Wilson Mulnix (2012) also encourages her readers to be 'deeply suspicious' of the structured and guided educational representations created by performances for accountability. Recognition of the child social actor of today becomes a potential casualty of creating the governable citizen for tomorrow (Ryan, 2011).

### **7.1.3 Development of Survival Skills: Agency in Successful Self-regulation**

This outcome is about children developing coping strategies, survival skills, to be able to better manage the unpredictability and powerlessness described above; it is the first of the more active outcomes as children begin to appropriate self-regulation for themselves in response to the normalisation of conformity. I have chosen the term survival skills to express these children's sense of enduring the school day to the point at which they can escape to the playground or back home and recover some freedom. Their first challenge is to control their emotional responses to situations of conflict (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009): taking themselves to another part of the classroom or school under a different pretext; making a joke or appearing not to take an issue seriously; or keeping quiet, leaving an issue until there is an opportunity to air it with friends, or in a research interview, perhaps! Children gain practical political experience, knowledge and prowess in this story ending, but do not yet have the sufficient courage from experience to consistently successfully resist (see Fahmy, 2005; Kehoe, 2015; Moinian, 2006a). They are aware of their lack of self-determination.

Developing this response to the structures and practices which normalise conformity reduces children's confidence in both the school's value as an organisation responsive to their needs and their independent ability to judge behavioural norms. Time and again my data highlighted children's uncertainty about the legitimacy of their contributions as equally valued members of the school community. Fahmy's (2005) research with older children suggested that the uncertainty of the legitimacy of student contributions was one of the main reasons for their lack of political participation, rather than the popular belief in political apathy. The degree to which the children in my study did not trust their own opinion and displayed insecurity in 'what they know', even being dismissive of themselves, their ideas and thoughts, was both surprising and concerning for this reason. It makes for a weak sense of agency if children cannot see themselves as autonomous, but needing to be checked, monitored and legitimised by another authority. Indeed, ten Dam and Volman (2007) assert that the common understanding of

competence in schools is the child's ability to reproduce appropriate, expected behaviour. Perryman (2012) and Busher and Cremin (2012) also point to performative discourses as prompting pupil conformity rather than critical engagement.

Children experiencing this outcome learn not only to tolerate perceived injustice or unfairness, but also how to personally manage the resulting frustrations and tensions. This represents a controlled response, self-regulation (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009) and eliminates the risk of confrontation with an adult which might result in punishment. Effective resistance is desired as a response to such an encounter, but not yet attainable due to the lack of certainty over how the institutional practices operate and how adults might behave. The tipping point stimulating active resistance might be encountering a teacher more consistent and predictable in their behaviour and with whom children were prepared to risk a confrontation (Mayall, 2002). Children's accounts of experiences with different teachers demonstrated a willingness to challenge and occasionally engage in open resistance when they judged it might be successful.

Children's agency is hidden here, but quite deliberately so and this is where, I argue, the springboard for further political learning can be found. Moreover, the ubiquity of surveillance helps prompt survival skills development by pushing action and agency underground (Hope, 2010) and generating a sense of unacknowledged injustice (McCluskey, 2014) which can stimulate action. The purposeful habits of self-discipline children develop through these experiences create an opportunity for developing more active participation and agency in future encounters. However, this is in spite of the disciplinary aims of the school, not because of them and contextualises the construction of children's effective agency in subsequent encounters as deviant or subaltern. It contrasts with the open agency of disobedience as the dominant form of recognised independent action at school (Busher and Cremin, 2012). From choosing to hide their agency, children are in a position to explore other forms of representation: false representation, misrepresentation, and ultimately manipulating representation (Hope, 2010), and this is the subject of the following ending.

#### **7.1.4 Learning the Rules of Engagement: Choosing Your Own Representation**

This story ending has children actively engaging with discourses which subordinate the pupil (see Lam, 2012; Lowe, 2012; Woodhead, 1997), as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, learning the rules of engagement is about anticipating adult behaviour and pre-empting action. Applying their previous experiences and knowledge of school structures and practices – adults'



predispositions, time of day/term/year, special events such as inspections – children confront feelings of conflict. This ending introduces a degree of flexibility in the notion of a child's position in the school and in relation to adults allowing an element of choice in the representation of themselves. Children see the opportunity to take greater ownership and control over their exchanges with adults (Mayall, 2002), managing risk and building political prowess for future encounters.

The successful management of an encounter gives children greater courage to be more assertive and begin to believe in the credibility of their own action as described by Butler, Robinson and Scanlan (2005). This emergent confidence is not secure, though, and requires reassurance to establish itself effectively within the child. However, that reassurance is not often forthcoming for several reasons: children do not often ask for it, or know how to ask for it even if they can identify that that is what they need or want (Moinian, 2006a). Interpreting adult responses still remains something of a guessing game when it is not framed in language which the children fully understand or in such a way as to explicitly recognise a child's meaningful participation (Stables, 2008). It is not in the institution or the regulating adults' interest to potentially destabilise the current order by elevating children as credible, political agents (John, 2003). Nonetheless, this ending teaches children that *it is possible* for them to behave as credible actors, albeit tempered by the institutional lack of trust of children and teachers' need to (re-)assert authority and deliver the curriculum (Robinson and Fielding, 2010).

Unexpectedly, this story ending shares a desirability for tension-free, effective communication in adult-child relationships with the school's behavioural expectations as apparent self-policing (Busher and Cremin, 2012; Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009). However, children's and adults' interpretations of this outcome are not always aligned, as exemplified in the homework encounter. This discrepancy again highlights the divergence between the children's actual experience of school and adult formulations of what their participation and agency should be, identified as potentially damaging by Leitch and Mitchell (2007). Further, the children's individual management of the outcome – how they interpret the result and what learning is internalised – demonstrates that the school does not engage critically with this discrepancy or children's political learning: there is no imperative within performative cultures to do so (Jeffrey and Troman, 2012c).

Acknowledging the children's agency in choosing their own representations of their accounts, the difficulty with my construction of this ending in particular is identifying what children actually took away from different encounters (Haudrup Christensen, 2004). The review interviews in my fieldwork may have presented an unintended opportunity for children to learn from an analysis of their own accounts, evaluating their school adventures and choose a different representation of events. Without the research interview, children's cognitive management of the encounters could have remained unremarkable to them, generating no apparent learning. The wider impact of my research on the school and its actors is discussed further in my epilogue.

#### **7.1.5 Developing Critical Expression: Mounting a Challenge**

In developing critical expression, children demonstrate a degree of cognitive freedom and confidence in their judgements to the point where confronting conflict appears manageable. They are becoming more independent, but have still not acquired sufficient prowess to give them the confidence to decide how to act without potentially damaging their position or reputation (Moinian, 2006a). The hesitancy and reticence comes from the ever-present construction of the child as untrustworthy and incompetent. Whilst at this point, children happily dispute that characterisation, convincing one another that children can be effective social agents is more challenging. Arriving at this ending, however, children in the study would not judge themselves or others negatively for exhibiting non-conformist, rule-breaking behaviour in school: children can be right and teachers can be wrong. If there is a valid reason for a transgression, children do not see why a rule or norm should be upheld and may well dispute its enforcement, supporting Butler, Robinson and Scanlan's (2005) findings in the family setting. Participating children described an unwillingness to compromise their principles and goals as a result of negative school experience, distinguishing this story ending from the next. Exercising political prowess with confidence includes an ability to evaluate and modify thought and action in the light of others' opinions and choices (ten Dam and Volman, 2004).

Using experiences of the outside world as well as the inside world of the school, children are making connections between the two and developing evaluative practices, allowing them to make judgements as to the reasonableness and value of a given encounter and its outcome (Wilson Mulnix, 2012). Accruing further experience of the school's structures and practices and comparing that with prior knowledge, either supporting or challenging initial positions, allows children to gain personal reassurance absent in other outcomes. Moreover, this developing

critical expression sees some children beginning to trust their own judgement and see themselves as credible social actors (Alexander, 2010; Butler, Robinson and Scanlan, 2005). In this ending children develop a muted form of critical awareness and expression within an institutional culture and curriculum which does not recognise critically evaluative practices, and leads to a corresponding feeling of lacking legitimacy, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 5.

The lack of recognition of children's ability to engage critically with the institution's structures and practices means that their opinions are never aired for discussion (ten Dam and Volman, 2007). Ignoring children's critical engagement allows for the development of the subaltern discourse that *school is not for me* (Wyness, 2006), giving greater non-institutional authority to action which derives from those beliefs. In seeking to neutralise anti-social instincts and eliminate dissent and difference (Foucault, 1995), the school can be blind to political participation which subverts and effectively by-passes its structures and practices (Hope, 2010). Children will exhibit their political agency in the form of strategically avoiding encounters and or hiding activity; political participation is carefully managed or deferred until a less risky occasion prompts it. The greatest barrier to moving from critical thought to political activism is still the belief that it will not be effective because children are not taken seriously as social actors (Fahmy, 2005; Lam 2012). The expected outcome is to be disciplined and disenfranchised (Kehoe, 2015). The established practice of deference to adults seriously weakens the expectation of both children and adults that children's action can be credible.

Hope (2010) questions whether effective resistance must be conscious or intended and challenges his readers to differentiate between acknowledged acts of resistance and what is merely playing with surveillance but not actually challenging it. He suggests there is a form of *hidden* agency in the subversion of known surveillance technologies and practices. However, I question how far genuine agency can be hidden or concealed. The questioning or critiquing of a norm, practice or authoritative body can only be effective if intended, if what is being questioned is known and can be seen by the agent. Challenge cannot be focused and meaningful if its object cannot be seen or known. It is this distinction which makes the transition from social actor to agent, as described in Chapter 2, one who has a recognised capacity to intentionally effect change on their environment (Mayall, 2002).

### 7.1.6 Development of Political Prowess and Courage: Recognising Political Activism

The final possible adventure ending I consider here is the development of political prowess and courage which could be understood as the conditions for 'political activism' (Ross, 2008), as discussed in Chapter 2. This outcome sees children achieving their desired ends or being able to control the compromises they may need to make to achieve an acceptable outcome in their terms (ten Dam and Volman, 2007). However, as with much politically and socially self-efficacious behaviour at the school, this political competence goes largely unrecognised by adults. Children become adept at manipulating what is seen and keep deviant activity away from known surveillance systems and practices (Hope, 2013). They have learnt to read, interpret and anticipate adult behaviour (Mayall, 2002) based on their experience and knowledge of how surveillance is operationalised and norms are enforced at the school. This self-sufficiency and freedom from the assumed dependence on adults is the cornerstone of the confidence or courage children with high political prowess begin to demonstrate.

There are great rewards for the creativity which brings children to this ending. They have learnt to work with the slow and ineffective operation of the disciplinary systems and practices at the school and are prepared to defer gratification to another time, place or encounter if needed. These invaluable life skills and attributes develop outside the curriculum's direction and adult gaze (Hope, 2010; Wardekker, 2001) and so are currently outside their influence and control. Of course, the time spent in the classroom and on directed activity will have an impact on children's political learning. However, the absence of child-initiated discussion on political or citizenship lesson content in focus group and review interviews was marked and a possible indicator of its lack of importance to them, as discussed by Duffield *et al.* (2000).

Children experiencing this outcome have acknowledged the construction of the child as untrustworthy and incompetent and have both disregarded its substance as fictitious and embraced the stereotype as a cover for other, subaltern thought and action. The perseverance and political tenacity that some children's schooling adventures foster, albeit unintentionally and hidden from view (Hope, 2010), may be some of the most valuable learning the children acquire at school. They have developed political prowess and understanding which renders the issues of trust and control less significant. Further, they have created ways of managing their conflict with restrictive school structures and practices and resisting the disciplinary forces of normalising conformity. Children have learnt that they can be autonomous in how they choose to participate in school life, but that their effective agency will have to remain unacknowledged

where it deviates from the expectations of the institution's structure, practices and enforcing agents (Hope, 2013). Enacted as subaltern (Wyness, 2006), accessing children's political competence and participation as an educational resource may not be possible and alternative approaches are considered in Chapter 8.

## **7.2 Epilogue: My Part in the Adventure**

This final section considers how my agency and participation, through my research approach and practices, have impacted on the participants, research site and the progress of my quest. I set out to identify what form children's participation and agency within school took and how it was understood and interpreted by those children. In exploring the structures and practices governing children's political behaviour, I wanted to create an opportunity to rethink the nature and meaning of that participation and agency in school and how it impacted on the children's development of political competence and confidence as independent social agents.

### **7.2.1 Setting and Actors**

My personal and professional experience with children as a primary school teacher and belief that children's competence is often underestimated by school personnel and practices will have inevitably impacted upon my research questions and approach (Hammersley, 1995). Believing that children are as capable and trustworthy as other individuals, I have encouraged them to do as much as possible independently, and this has characterised my teaching and extra-curricular contribution to the school and my research approach. I see this as my pursuit of *trying to trust children* in a system which, in the name of educational expediency, seeks to govern and restrict autonomy in the moulding of a docile pupil (Marshall, 2002). My concept of the child has not been significantly altered by this study but more clearly articulated and understood, which has drawn my attention to the differences between my outlook and that of colleagues in particular; an experience not uncommon to novice researchers in Roulston, Preissle and Freeman's (2013) work.

However, I believe my elevating the integrity of children as research participants reciprocally enhanced the trust which participants had in the integrity of the research process (Leeson, 2014), something which could have been threatened by my more established role as a teacher (Russell, 2005). A significant number of participants (adults and children) implicitly or explicitly communicated that their comments in the research interviews would not have been made to anyone else, referring to my position as an insider-researcher and the promise of confidentiality, as discussed by Chavez (2008). Whilst this gave me confidence in participant understandings of my ethics protocol, I query how far the stories I was told were representative of school life or a creation of and for my research: the participants' performances described by Duncombe and Jessop (2002) and Delamont (2002) and discussed

in Chapter 4. My being a teacher at the school at the time may well have prompted responses from children which gave false representations of conformity and particularly from children I did not know so well.

The climate of accountability has prompted different kinds of performances in schools (Jeffrey and Troman, 2012a): teachers feel very wary of giving personal and professional information from how it might be used and judged (Ball, 2003; Perryman, 2012), releasing it sparingly. This cautiousness is illustrated by one participant who very deliberately only talked openly about her assessment of and feelings about the management team and structures of accountability once the voice recorder was off, clearly identifying what was for research purposes and what was not. Warren *et al.* (2003) discuss this unmarked time 'after the interview', and use it to challenge how the interview itself is perceived and consequently what is revealed, or not, therein. To lessen any anxiety about how data were to be interpreted, as described by Stickney (2012), I was keen to limit the overt questioning of children and, in particular, teachers.

My concerns about my work being seen as a form of surveillance were brought to the fore when certain research practices, child focus group interviews, were emulated by other members of staff at the school to record and monitor pupil perceptions. As part of the School Self-evaluation process (Ofsted, 2005), a pupil survey was conducted to ascertain children's views on subjects such as pupil behaviour, relationships with staff and extra-curricular opportunities. Despite being promised that the questionnaires were to be anonymous, children were required to put their names on the paper and those who gave 'unsatisfactory' answers were then selected for follow-up focus group interviews. Following this, the adults who conducted the interviews reported back to a teachers' meeting quoting individual children's responses from within the group interview. The promised confidentiality was openly and unapologetically broken in the staff meeting. My attempt to assert the children's entitlement to anonymity was disregarded. The survey team were focused on the performative value it added to the Self-evaluation process (Perryman, 2012) and could not understand my anxieties and discomfort with the way interviewees' data was being treated. The notes I recorded at the time questioned whether this reflected apparent lack of regard for the children, my study or both due to the familiarity of my 'insider positionality' (Chavez, 2008, p.474). If I repeat similar research in the future, I will be more persistently assertive about the ethical treatment of children as equal research participants, specifically around the issues of how research data is

used, and research interviews being regarded as closed meetings and not interrupted. My aim would be to forestall the inconsistent and unethical emulation of research practices.

As a direct contrast to the above, children in the student council impressively reasserted the importance of the research's confidentiality agreements when debating the same subject during the council meetings which had also come up in focus groups interviews. This could be explained by my having taken more care in the use of language when explaining the ethics protocol to children, as highlighted by Punch (2002); it could also be characteristic of the children's less assumptive approach to new situations (Punch, 2002). This supports Moinian's (2006a) findings about children's comprehension of such issues and Noyes' (2005) conclusions about their ability to contribute meaningfully in such fora, and with more apparent respect for the process than some of their adult counterparts. As previously indicated, some research participants were also members of the student council, which I facilitated at the time. Issues raised during focus group interviews were also introduced into student council meetings. I was invited to contribute to these discussions having been present during the focus group interviews which led me to believe that my presence in both situations had influenced the choice of discussion within the wider community and generated an expectation that I would immediately feed research learning back into the community (Lewis and Russell, 2011). However, the children set the agendas for each student council meeting independently, I was not present at these decision-making meetings and cannot assess the extent of the influence of focus group discussions.

Whilst I approached my research with an assumed legitimacy of children's voices, their perceived elevation through the student council, pupil survey and School Self-evaluation process (Ofsted, 2005) could also be interpreted as the subordination of teachers' voices (Robinson and Taylor, 2007; Ruddock and Fielding, 2006). At the very least, it could be argued that they are being put in competition with one another, and this was commented on by a number of teachers reflecting Robinson and Fielding's (2010) findings in the *Cambridge Review*. It is my experience that, although many teachers feel they have something to say on education, many do not feel anyone in power is interested in listening. One resulting tension is expecting teachers to actively promote political competence from a position of perceived marginalisation (Noyes, 2005). This situation constructs teachers as subaltern to the legitimate decision-making processes (Lincoln and Denzin, 2000), and is problematic when also the primary role-model for pupils. Raising this issue in the research highlights my personal commitment to the recognition



and importance of teacher participation at school, but also the limitations of approaching the research with my own political baggage. The research has inevitably been informed and tainted by my political position and beliefs, but reducing this to a minimum should make it more accessible and relevant to a wider audience (Walford, 2009). Yet, it could be argued that I have also become an agent in suppressing teacher voice at the school and in my own work, and this is something of a personal disappointment.

However, just as I observed children developing subaltern forms of agency, some successful teachers also exhibited similar behaviours in hiding and manipulating their agency to achieve particular ends; Stickney (2012, p.657) describes such behaviour as working from 'hidden scripts', but 'performing public scripts.' This was evidenced in participant observation only and not recorded in any interview data. The instances I note specifically are: radiator conversations, clandestine meetings where decisions are made but not acknowledged; befriending and flattering influential people, for example. It would have been crossing too many professional and ethical lines to pursue this in interview without participant invitation: I could not guarantee a common understanding of my research positionality over this issue (Chavez, 2008). As a result, how far these strategies were consciously executed as subaltern agency and known to be deviant, or how far they were accepted operations of power, is unclear.

### **7.2.2 Research: Process and Product**

As discussed in Chapter 4, my initial research proposal set out to explore teachers' as well as pupils' political competence and effectiveness in school. However, I had not appreciated the complexity and significance of children's experiences at school but outside the curriculum, and the internal struggles of navigating adult and politically treacherous terrain. Equally, I had not realised the ingenuity and determination involved in the creation of alternative forms of participation, demonstrating children's agency in self-determination. As a result, teachers' political competence became of contextual importance to the study within the wider discourse of performativity through their enactment of governance of the disciplinary structures and practices in place at the school (Foucault, 1995). My consequent research questions centred on trying to establish children's understanding of their experience of active political participation and agency within primary school and how far this was challenged or reaffirmed by institutional structures, practices and agents.

In imagining my own endeavour to be a quest, it could be argued I was predisposed to see children's experiences as engaging in challenge and adventure also (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Silverman, 2001), and this was reinforced by their enthusiastic, pioneering approach to the independent data gathering as indicated in Chapter 4. Constructed as a journey into the unknown, my quest made the assumption that the knowledge I was interested in gaining was not readily available or identifiable and positioned all participants as similarly searching for what was not obviously known or seen – an 'epistemic value judgement' which needs acknowledgement (Hammersley, 2014, p.495). I am reminded of Silverman's (2001, p.70) caution, 'we only come to look at things in certain ways because we have adopted, either tacitly or explicitly, certain ways of seeing things.' On reflection, my approach may have resulted in some participants doubting their immediate responses to questions and discussion, thinking what I was looking for was more difficult to obtain. This was reflected in teacher comments such as: "Is this the sort of thing you were looking for?" (TFG 26.11.08) and "But that is not what you were asking, is it?" (WFN 26.11.08). Moreover, my work with the school's student council and in supporting independent projects initiated by children was well known and will have influenced my participants' expectations of my areas of interest. However, in clarifying the object and purpose of my quest and communicating it to others, the nature and value of the knowledge to be generated became easier to articulate. Whilst clear to me, this flexibility of apparent direction and endpoint may have confused some of my participants and institutional sponsors (the Governing Body, Management Team and headteacher), and rendered the process and product somewhat opaque (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

Another early assumption I made was as to the significance of participants' conceptualisations of children's rights, using such ideas to stimulate discussion in focus group interviews. Taking this approach was the result of careful deliberation as to how to initiate meaningful discussion with both children and adults, as discussed in Chapter 4. However, it delivered a specific linguistic and assumptive political framework (Hammersley, 1995) to the early parts of the discussion and may have inadvertently excluded some areas of debate. For example, despite the high level of participation of both adults and children in the research, the relevance or usefulness of children's rights was never challenged perhaps from the assumed authority of the research from my institutional positioning (Griffiths, 1998). Furthermore, it introduced a term and set of associated ideas (Hammersley, 1995) to some children who may not have chosen to use the word 'right' to describe aspects of their educational experience or entitlement. The focus group interviews in particular record children using the term consistently, and

meaningfully, but this was often following a discussion about what 'rights' meant, the power of the interview and interviewer must be acknowledged (see Connolly, 1997; Griffiths, 1998). Additionally, the term was not so prevalent in the review interviews. Executing focus group research with children in another school first might have highlighted the issue of using the term rights before fieldwork began, and I would seek to do this if conducting similar research again. Moreover, introducing a politically contentious term so early in the research may have put some potential participants off. However, the aim was to stimulate debate, and that was achieved.

Retrospectively, I can see how my methodology and methods could have been interpreted as soliciting a form of confession from participants. Foucault (1998, p.59) writes, 'next to the testing rituals, next to the testimony of witnesses, and the learned methods of observation and demonstration, the confession became one of the West's most highly valued techniques for producing truth. We have become a singularly confessing society.' My holding small group and individual interviews, stressing the confidentiality of participant testimony and control over the resulting data may have been perceived as confessional truth-telling. What was revealed and what was kept hidden must be contextualised in the medium through which it was elicited (Warren *et al.*, 2003). I played the part of plausible witness to pupils' and teachers' confessions, their participation in the research creating a consensual obligation to truth-telling which would otherwise have remained secret. I question what would have happened to those thoughts and feelings had they not been articulated in the research interviews. It is a matter for speculation as to whether participants subsequently acted differently, my having inadvertently legitimised their criticisms of school by not judging them as inappropriate in the research context: being seen to have 'taken a side' (Russell, 2005). However, Foucault (1998, p.60) suggests, 'the obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, "demands" only to surface.'

Not only is telling the truth about oneself congratulated, but making public your confessions has become established social practice: facebook, Gerry Springer, autobiographies written by barely 20-year olds to name but a few. Marshall (1996, p.99) describes this consensual exposure to public examination as a form of therapy 'which can itself involve vicarious pleasurable and liberating effects.' Children appear not to fear, but embrace this public gaze. Moinian (2006b, p.65) describes this as being 'reluctant towards anonymity' from her internet-

based research with children. This assessment fits my experience of the child video diarists in the participant group. The 'at risk' child who was the focus of the ethical dilemma discussed in Chapter 4, was one of the few who chose the video diary, possibly the most intimate form of data recording as well as the most revealing. The video was an opportunity to talk about herself to a captive audience where she could determine the relative importance of the content. I believe my fieldwork presented the children with an opportunity to exert some control over the representations of themselves free from prescriptive norms of conformity.

This idea also suggests a new interpretation of the behaviour of two particular children during the interviews. They responded differently from others, overtly resisting aspects of the interview process, a form of dissent Bourke and Loveridge (2013) highlight as being of the same significance as informed consent. Of the verbal exchange resulting in a confession of a secret, Foucault (1998, p.68) writes, 'the agency of domination is not in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing; not in the one who knows and answers, but in the one who questions and is not supposed to know,' (p.62). By refusing to speak about their school experiences in the interview, these two children were able to challenge my position, forcing me to be the speaker and transferring power to themselves as interviewees. One child declared, "You can't make me talk about it!" I reminded her that participation in the research was her choice and that we could end the interview then if she wished, but she did not. I felt at the time she was positioning me as a disciplining teacher, constructing the event as one to which she was obliged to conform or be punished. Unfortunately, I did not discover what either child's motivations were for their actions during the interviews. I attributed the experience to being one of the particular challenges of negotiating trust relationships as both researcher and teacher (Russell, 2005).

Another instance of a child to seeking to exert power and challenge my authority came whilst I was teaching. He confronted my enforcement of inconsistent school rules on when and how often children could go to the toilet, reiterating a point he had made in a focus group interview a few weeks earlier. This time a wry smile suggested he realised the challenge he was making (AFN 27.06.09). My inference was that he had made the argument because I had acknowledged it as legitimate in the interview. Most child and adult participants did acknowledge and differentiated between my different roles. However, experiencing participant resistance, multiple interview interruptions and requests for confidential data did make me question the regard in which my research endeavours were held. In retrospect, my at times almost

apologetic approach – ‘sorry for the inconvenience’ and ‘thank you for doing me this favour’ – may not have created a situation conducive to the regard I sought, as discussed by Walford (2008b). I could have been more assertive in establishing the authority, and maybe even legitimacy, of what I was doing. However, this may well have reconfigured my participant group, made it considerably smaller, and changed the nature and tone of some of the accounts given. Participants may have been less relaxed and more guarded in their responses with my constructing a less familiar research position (Chavez, 2008).

Presenting children’s accounts of their school days as a *Choose Your Own Adventure* format has allowed me to foreground children’s participation and agency through their active decision-making. The gaming metaphor also reflects the idea of continual challenge (Anon, 2013) and school being an experience that has to be persevered with as a child. The result is a narrative that elevates conflict and resistance and children’s struggles in accommodating the demands of the institutional structures and practices to achieve a degree of self-determination. However, children also described events which were not so dramatic, where conformity to the school norm was almost ritually accepted and performed (Jeffrey, 2014). This could be interpreted as a form of self-actualisation through conformity: accepting curricular and institutional objectives as desirable (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009). There is no apparent conflict or resistance in this response: the children are happy with the outcome. This ending is an omission from the narrative, but a calculated one. It was difficult to stimulate discussion following accounts where children described conforming without apparent active decision-making or critical engagement with school norms. Instead I chose to focus on accounts where children were politically engaged and where they had actively made a choice to conform or not, and these were plentiful, especially from the independent data-gathering in Phase 2.

I attribute the quality and richness of the data from Phases 2 and 3 of the fieldwork to the genuine value and importance the research participants felt in gathering their own data (Graham and Fitzgerald, 2011). This is largely due to the personalisation and accessibility of these participative methods (Leeson, 2014). The ownership that children in particular felt over the data *they* had collected themselves about *their* school day, stimulated valuable discussion in the review interviews. Whilst a researcher can never knowingly access what a child is actually thinking, he or she can get a lot closer to understanding children’s worlds by allowing them to guide the research process and product where possible (Lowe, 2012). Repeating similar research, I would involve children earlier in the research design process and specifically in the

creation of methods for gathering data on their experiences. My aim would be to emphasise and foreground children's choices about the representation of information about themselves rather than merely offering them my pre-formed choices. To this end, I would have liked to spend more time with the audio day participants in particular. Their recordings generated a lot of rich and unexpected data, but the sheer volume of it meant there was no opportunity to explore it in great depth. As suggested earlier, I would not have limited the data gathered, but would have liked the opportunity to spend more time with the children discussing the particulars of their school day.

Evaluating the research product and process, I feel the *Choose Your Own Adventure* presentation of data would have greatly benefited from reviewing it with child participants, specifically getting their assessment of its credibility as a narrative for other children as well as my adult research audience. Creating other children as the audience of their school day accounts and representations, could also lead to a reprioritising of the data (Moinian, 2006b). The judgements children make as to what is important and relevant to other children could produce new insights into their political identity and sense of agency. However, I only came to this form of presentation of data, after I and most of my participants had left the school.

### **7.2.3 My Professional Self: Being and Becoming**

This section represents the conclusion to my individual quest, the journey I have taken in becoming a researcher. It discusses how my status as researcher interfered with and enhanced my experience as a teacher and, conversely, how my teaching impacted on my researching. Dealing with familiarity and strangeness and confronting previously unacknowledged beliefs and values, I reflect on what the thesis argument challenges me, as a teacher and researcher, to think about my professional practice. I consider how the process of learning to become an independent researcher has shaped the progress of the quest and distanced my thinking from my pedagogic imperative. The themes of trust and control, conflict and resistance, participation and agency are poignant in the context of my teacher experience as well as the children's experience, and I draw these parallels to highlight the disciplinary forces acting on all members of the community (Troman and Jeffrey and Raggl, 2007) and the struggle it will be to change this (Noyes, 2005).

As a practitioner, I approached this research questioning the value of the model which teachers presented children of effective political agency. Positioned by government rhetoric, local

authority and school leadership practices as untrustworthy and lacking in competence (Troman, Jeffrey and Ragg, 2007), I felt disenfranchised as a political actor in my own institution: unacknowledged or under-acknowledged. The challenge for me was to reassert my authority as a practitioner and political agent believing in the value of democratic and participative experiences for children at primary school. However, being assertive is difficult in a challenging and sometimes hostile environment. Teachers experience performance management processes and observational practices which foster self-doubt and the questioning of their own judgement (Perryman, 2012). The micro-discourses of best practice, coupled with the normalisation of conformity, breed fear of teacher failure as non-observance to the norm (Foucault, 1995). The elevation of a dominant pedagogic approach can be interpreted as expedient in improving institutional efficiency and exerting control over what happens in every classroom (Foucault, 1995; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Jeffrey and Troman, 2012a), as discussed in Chapter 2. If teachers do not make independent choices, there is no need to engage in the insecure and uncertain practice of trusting individuals to make the right choices (Gu and Day, 2013). If a teacher encounters a problem, it is interpreted as a failure on their part to enact best practice: an individual choice not to conform and for which they can be held accountable. Behaviour, target-setting and test scores are most commonly cited here. One consequence of this culture is the increase in competition between members of staff: a mutual suspicion and lack of trust and regard which renders the population insecure (Leitch and Mitchell, 2007), and making it easier to govern.

Management intrusions into teachers' personal and professional lives (Perryman, 2012) were justified by way of the phrase 'satisfactory is not satisfactory anymore' following a recent Ofsted inspection at this school. Everyone was to aspire to change, individual and institutional, as an end in itself. However, there is no real reform or revolution anticipated (Jeffrey and Troman, 2012b) or desired, but adherence to the defined standardised best practice and with this, penalisation for non-observance. The research process has made me examine the difficulty and disappointment of seeing myself as lesser in the eyes of my colleagues, challenging my confidence both in myself and their professional support. This is something I had anticipated might be a concern for my research participants in my ethical protocol, but not that it might also apply to me. It brought to the fore my own personal conflict with educational surveillance practices and specifically examination. I found the contradiction of observers monitoring best practice, but not enacting it in their observation practice very frustrating, and

record my increasing cynicism of others' behaviour and motives, noted in Stronach, Pickard and Jones' (2010) research for the *Cambridge Review*.

During the discovery of these uncomfortable truths, the tensions within my teaching role increased. My field notes record my increasing self-awareness of how I managed my own self-expression and self-censorship in school, mirroring the participant experiences described in Chapters 5 and 6. Instead of voicing my opinions, I note my attempt to lighten the atmosphere in staff meetings to reduce tension between colleagues when there was clearly going to be no resolution to an issue at that time. My response as a teacher, and even more so as a researcher, was to distance myself socially and emotionally from other adults at the school: strategically removing my participation and agency. These personal tensions were exacerbated by colleagues not respecting the division in my work time: when I was teaching and when I was researching. Teaching began to represent a constraint to my fieldwork and the freedom to think differently with which I associated it. I still feel the research benefited from my embedded positioning (Lewis and Russell, 2011), but would have liked more time to focus on it in school free from distraction by my teaching role. Retrospectively, I should have been more disciplined about my time and tolerances. However, it is only now that I have the confidence to assert myself in that way.

Re-learning to take myself seriously and trust my own judgement was an important part of my journey's quest, and a challenge when not encouraged or taught in the school. In fact, quite the opposite is true, in that during the process of enacting best practice in reflective teaching, a teacher undergoes a process of learning to question and doubt him or herself (Gu and Day, 2013). This is something that I have also experienced in learning to become a researcher. However, the critical difference is that a research student is afforded the time and space to resolve these issues. One purpose of the research degree is the creation of an independent researcher who can pose relevant questions and who also has the capacity to find an answer to them (Roulston, Preissle and Freeman, 2013). It would be a significant step towards the establishment of a healthy democratic education system if teachers were afforded the same autonomy of professional action after completing their induction.

### **7.3 Conclusion: Continuing Journeys**

In this chapter I have explained and expanded upon how the findings of this study make a distinct contribution to the debate on the development of children's political competence at



primary school through how they recount and account for it (see Alexander, 2010; Pike, 2007; Lister, Smith and Cox, 2005). I demonstrate how dealing with conflict and risk in their interaction with adults challenges children to both strategically conform and resist in the pursuit of their own self-determination. The experience of the children in the research school highlights the wider issues of trust and control (Leitch and Mitchell, 2007), conflict and resistance, and participation and agency (James, 2009) and questions the suitability of this environment for the promotion of political activism as it limits what a child needs to know and be able to do to participate (Ross, 2008). However, I further argue that the children's responses to the pressure of the school's normalising structures and practices creatively build an effective, but subaltern political prowess. Being unrecognised, outside the surveillance of the curriculum and its police, this learning is not readily available to teachers and the school to engage with and nurture. This presents both a missed opportunity for education and a threat to the stability and sustainability of children's credible political agency.

The six alternative endings to the *Choose Your Own Adventure* narrative represent what children can gain from their exploratory adventures at the school. The level of political prowess and courage increases with every outcome. From *The Will to Conform* where observance to the norm does battle with other feelings of fairness while preserving conformity, I move on to consider *Living with Uncertainty*. In this outcome, children are coping with apparently arbitrary restraints to their behaviour and the inability to predict institutional responses. Through *Developing Survival Skills* children are managing their responses to the restrictive environment, learning when to persevere with and when to relinquish a personal pursuit. As children *Learn the Rules of Engagement* their confidence and prowess increase to allow some agency in choosing when to participate or withdraw. *Developing Critical Expression* sees children both understanding and able to articulate their conflicting responses to school structures and practices and selecting safe opportunities to express themselves. Lastly, those who begin to *Develop Political Prowess and Courage* are learning to self-determine through their calculated, strategic participation and agency.

I conclude the chapter with an epilogue critically evaluating my part in the story. Several aspects of my quest proved challenging including my relationships with participants, the school and my research process and product. Here I assess the outcomes of these dilemmas and suggest what I would change in future research. The epilogue also discusses my personal and professional journey as a researcher and teacher as the quest reaches its end. Chapter 8, the

thesis conclusion, represents the fulfilment of my quest and evaluates its own story ending in the practice and research contexts from which it was conceived. I re-locate this study in its specific historical and social context, arguing that it represents a current concern for policy-makers, professionals and my participants. The ending of this adventure presents opportunities for further endeavours and enquiries for the development and promotion of children's political prowess and courage, and this concludes the chapter and thesis.

## **Chapter 8:**

### **Conclusion: Fulfilling the Quest**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter 8 concludes this quest, relocating the study in its relevant academic and professional contexts. I highlight the most significant findings and conclusions supporting the thesis's main argument and the distinct contribution to the debate on the development of children's political competence at primary school. Through an evaluation of the substantive, theoretical and methodological research aims, this chapter discusses how far I achieved my quest in exploring the extent to which children's accounts of participation and agency in primary school challenge or reaffirm the development their political prowess and confidence as social agents. This research is located within a specific historical, social and geographical context, but I argue that it nonetheless represents a current concern for policy-makers, professionals and my participants. Lastly, the chapter suggests the initiation of further quests and lines of enquiry prompted by the product and process of the research.

#### **8.1 The Fulfilment of the Quest**

The substantive aim of the research was to explore and theorise primary school children's participative experiences and political learning as they recount and account for them and the consequent implications for developing sustainable political competence and confidence. The research questions detailed on pages 4-5 of Chapter 1 set out what I wanted to accomplish. However, not all were explicitly answered by the data I gathered or my analysis, for example:

*How do children understand their rights and responsibilities as members of the school community?*

*What is the experience of exercising rights and responsibilities in school?*

In focus group discussions it soon became evident that discourses of rights and responsibilities were predicated upon prior assumptions of children and childhood and relationships to adults and adulthood (Goldson, 2001). Moreover, the language *asserting rights* held connotations of challenging adult authority, and *accepting responsibility* of demonstrating desirable, conforming behaviour. Additionally, an emphasis on political responsibility over rights, supporting Lister's (2008) argument, means discussion is skewed towards only one dimension

of participation. The limited value of these terms to the discussion of children's political competence meant other questions became more salient to the resulting core focus, namely:

*How do children understand the structures and practices for participation in schools?*

*How do children understand their political agency within school structures and practices?*

*What do children understand as legitimate participation in school life?*

*What is the experience of agency and being an actor in the school community?*

*How does the school promote children's political participation and agency?*

*How is childhood and are children constructed by different agents? Why?*

Responses to these questions have been addressed through the narrative and discussion in Chapters 5 and 6, a summary of which can be found in section 8.2. As my focus narrowed, the remaining two questions became central to the findings, discussion and presentation in Chapter 7:

*What political learning is happening? How does it happen? What is learnt?*

*(How) Is the above transferable to society and civic life and responsibility?*

Furthermore, as the analysis progressed three more questions pertinent to the examination of power relations in primary schools became relevant to the final discussion:

*How does children's experience in primary school challenge or reaffirm established positions in wider society?*

*In whose interests is it to maintain the status quo?*

*What are the implications for primary schools and education?*

Whilst I have been able to suggest some possible answers to these questions, they also highlight the need for further research and this is discussed later in this chapter.

Facilitating the investigation of the substantive topic, the theoretical aim for my quest was: to provide an account of the political structures and practices which generate and normalise the beliefs and behaviour around children's political participation and agency in the research

school. This was accomplished using the conceptual tools of Michel Foucault, primarily *Discipline and Punish* (1995) and *The History of Sexuality. Part 1* (1998), as well as adaptations and derivations by others and my own interpretations. Additionally, as the research progressed and changed direction, my theoretical framing had to adapt and accommodate the changes, demanding substantial 'analytical nerve' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Further analysis challenged the relevance of some of the initial concepts I had selected and required the introduction of new ones to better explain and develop the ideas I was discussing. Reading Foucault's later theorising (Foucault, 2002; Paras, 2006) with the developments and changing emphasis in his thinking (Deleuze, 1995; Downing, 2008; Paras, 2006), see Chapter 3, prompted me to give greater clarity to the exact definitions I was to use and from which texts I was to take my primary references. I arrived at the description of *post-structurally informed* research as a reflection of both the shared and differing elements of my study with post-structural theory.

The methodological aim was: to identify a means of accomplishing the quest and specific methods in the realisation of both the substantive and theoretical aims. In writing the first incarnations of my research design, the ontological and epistemological fit of ethnography with my research aims and objectives was quickly apparent. However, taking my lead from the data as my analysis progressed, the research focus altered the relative importance of my different methods. I began to work more with interview recordings and transcripts and rely less on my field notes, traditionally the primary source of data for ethnography (Delamont, 2008b; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; van Maanen, 1988). This made me question how far I was actually executing ethnography. During discussion at the *Ethnography in Education Conference* in 2008, the conference organisers argued that interview-based ethnographic work did not constitute ethnography, explaining that such papers had been excluded from the conference. This position was and is not uncontested (Forsey, 2008; Forsey, 2010), and my methods are mixed, but it made me reframe my research as an 'ethnographic study' rather than being a traditional ethnography. The approach I took, with its redirections and amendments, allowed for the fulfilment of the methodological aim, but not in the way I had anticipated. However, as Cerwonka and Malkki (2007) suggest, improvisation is inherent in exploratory qualitative research. The use of the *Choose Your Own Adventure* narrative for my data is demonstrative of this approach also: unconventional, but responsive to data and participants and what could not be anticipated in their contributions.

As argued in Chapter 4 the validity of my ethnographic work is in its methodological credibility: the systematic nature and reflexive rigour of my research approach (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Walford, 2008b; Wolcott, 2005) from the creation of a cyclical, structured, yet flexible three phase data-gathering programme with continual integrated analysis (see the conical helix diagram on page 97). This methodology was supported and reinforced by the use of my research journals: tracking and evaluating the progress of the quest and ensuring my critical reflection on the process. As Wolcott (2005) argues credible, meaningful qualitative research demands a methodology and form of representation which suit the particular research situation and question. I argue my approach constitutes a systematic and reflexive methodology which results in the derivation of meaningful theory (Hammersley, 2006); the presentation of the data in the form of a critically evaluated *Choose Your Own Adventure* narrative is both credible as representative of the children's accounts and transferable from its accessibility to my potential audiences.

## **8.2 How the Story Ends: Conclusions and Claims**

Ending this quest and launching new endeavours coincides with the ending of the primary schooling for many of my child participants, by 2011 they were all in secondary education. This highlights the dynamic nature of every site of social research and the resultant historical specificity of any study (Vaughan, 2004). What is more, the school is quite a different place now having made the transition to a full primary school and accepting children from their reception year (at age four) onwards. A number of the adults who participated in the research are still at the school, but, under the direction of a new head teacher and governing body those remaining may not recognise the description of the setting in this thesis.

The national policy context for political education in primary schools has also moved on. A new *National Curriculum* (DfE, 2013) began its first phase of implementation in September 2014. It presents new opportunities for learning and teaching citizenship and history, explicitly identifying critical reasoning and thinking as aims (DfE, 2013). However, with the continued heavy emphasis on Maths, English and Science and the changes to those curricula, it remains to be seen whether schools will have the capacity to deliver broader curriculum aims (Beck, 2012). The response of academics and teaching unions alike has been that too much is being introduced too quickly and too early in children's education and may potentially result in damaging educational compromises (Richardson, 2014).

In addition to this, the relative importance of political education has changed. Citizenship is not compulsory in academies which now form the majority of English secondary schools (Richardson, 2014), and the expectation in primary schools has virtually been removed with the phrase: 'schools often also teach: PSHE, citizenship, and modern foreign languages (at key stage 1),' (DfE, 2013). But, perhaps this is also an opportunity. Ross and Dooly (2010) assert that children's assumed political apathy represents a lack of endorsement of the formal operations of politics, not a lack of political engagement. Further, and reflecting on my findings, the search for new and different vehicles to promote political competence could result in the recognition and development of children's alternative forms of participation and agency. However, schools and teachers would have to be prepared to take a risk and do additional work to achieve this (Beck, 2012); despite the shifting focus of educational policy, continuity remains in the governmental approach to the performative management of schools (Jeffrey, 2014; Jeffrey and Troman, 2012; Kehoe, 2015).

The construction of the child as deficient, incompetent and powerless severely limits the effectiveness of initiatives to engage children in active political participation (Lam, 2012; Woodhead, 1997). This, coupled with the perceived need to control the temporal and spatial organisation of pupils (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998), enforcing it with multiple and duplicated forms of surveillance (Hope, 2013), results in children's freedom of expression and agency being tightly prescribed for performative imperatives (see Busher and Cremin, 2012; Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009; Perryman, 2012). Political competence and critical awareness are not legitimised in the primary school, representing opportunities for dissent and potentially frustrating the delivery of the high curriculum standards required by discourses of performativity (Perryman, 2012). A child's goal becomes to learn the rules of the engagement to be able to navigate encounters with the institutional structures and practices and get through to the next break or change in the timetable.

Defining children as non-adult and by what they cannot yet do rather than what they can do (Stables, 2008), prevents their completing the transition to credible social agents. They remain forever on the road to adulthood in a continuous state of 'becoming' (James 2009; Lowe, 2012). The limited capacity of adults to see children as legitimate political agents restricts the children's own view of themselves, destabilising any emergent confidence in the credibility of their own political action (Stables, 2008). Children want to be taken seriously (McCluskey, 2014), but their positioning as untrustworthy and unreliable means that both children and

adults more readily accept and perpetuate beliefs and practices which undermine credible political agency (Fahmy, 2008; Moinian, 2006a). Many child participants were dismissive of their own ideas, expressing little trust of their own judgement. This presents a tangible threat to the establishment of autonomous agency, if children are dependent on adults validating their action.

This, though, is not a situation which all children passively accept: the idealised learner is an acknowledged fiction. Indeed, the conflict this situation stimulates causes children annoyance and frustration with the institution and its police. Children experience limited success in avoiding the adult gaze and *not* being seen without concerted acts of deviance (Hope, 2010), feeling the constant surveillance of their behaviour as an intrusion into their lives and a form of punishment. The normalisation of conformity is such that few children exhibit open resistance having become adept at enacting performative rituals (Jeffrey, 2014): they learn to self-regulate and/or give the appearance of it without actually complying with the norm. However, despite the barriers and challenges, some children do create and exploit opportunities to strategically challenge and resist school structures and practices, achieving a degree of self-determination as reported in the *Cambridge Review* (Alexander, 2010).

The children's responses to encounters within the school's normalising structures and practices ranged from quietly accommodating school norms and practices and suppressing instinctive responses to more actively manipulating situations, exerting a degree of control over them. Gaining confidence from their knowledge of the school's operating systems, children play with manipulating its surveillance and monitoring structures and practices and begin to take calculated risks to achieve their own ends (Hope, 2013). Of course, taking a risk always means that there is a possibility of disappointment, punishment and facing a confrontation with an adult which is beyond the child's obvious control (Mayall, 2002). However, the political prowess that some children's experiences foster, albeit unobtrusive and unrecognised, might be the most significant political learning in school.

My findings indicate that children are encouraged to develop a conservative, self-preserving form of agency hidden from view and often characterised by self-doubt and self-suppression. However, I argue that some children's responses to the pressure of the school's normalising structures and practices creatively build an effective, but subaltern political prowess. The development of this political competence is not to be conflated with becoming a recognised adult or citizen. Through a critical approach to knowledge of where and what legitimate



participation is, children can exercise subaltern agency in concealment, misrepresentation and manipulation of situations and encounters within school (Hope, 2010). However, being unrecognised, outside the surveillance of the curriculum and its enforcers, this learning is not readily available for teachers and the school to engage with and nurture. This presents both a missed opportunity for primary education and a threat to the stability and sustainability of children's credible political agency. There appears to be little room in the primary school for the self-determining, personally autonomous individual which neo-liberal education ostensibly desires (Marshall, 1996). Coupling political competence back onto citizenship, if schools are going to offer meaningful, participative experiences for children, teachers and school leaders need to acknowledge and build on the importance of citizenship both within and outside the curriculum and school (Pike, 2007).

These conclusions should serve to challenge those involved in primary teaching and learning to question current structures and practices and the assumptions behind them to assess, evaluate and improve local arrangements for the development of political competence. In broader terms, it should stimulate debate on the relevance and efficacy of current policy and guidance for political education and participation in primary schools with specific reference to the adequacy of the learning environment and school ethos for developing this competence (Pike, 2007). It will take great shifts in national and local assumptions of the incompetence of children and the adequacy of schooling to be able to recalibrate current structures and practices (Noyes, 2005). I believe the responsibility lies with all participants in education, but the power to initiate change lies with those whose status and experience makes them more influential within the system. This will often be adults and includes me.

Although children's accounts and adventures feature heavily in my research quest, this is very much my story, my interpretation of living and learning at the school: the foregrounding of such autobiographical imperatives in research, Roulston, Preissle and Freeman (2013) argue, needs to be an on-going concern for emergent researchers. My story is characterised by struggling with being and becoming a researcher and teacher. The simultaneous frustration and pleasure that post-structural ethnographic work induces through making the familiar strange and the strange familiar can be greatly rewarding (Deleuze, 1995) for the adventurer. Challenging personal beliefs and assumptions and revealing the limitations they conceal presents opportunities to rethink and re-evaluate what being at school can offer children in the development of their political selves.

### 8.3 Future Quests and Exploits

Political participation is a healthy and desirable facet of any organisation, association or community through the relevant and legitimised leadership it provides. I believe that education has an important role in promoting children's political agency by giving pupils meaningful opportunities to critically engage with political processes within their school or institution (Alexander, 2010). I believe that if more children experienced authentic political participation at school, more communities would see healthier democratic practices, governed by relevant community interests rather than the perception of what is good of a small ruling group. This study was prompted by both practice and research concerns regarding the development of children's political competence at primary school and my quest concludes by suggesting further lines of academic enquiry and opportunities to develop and enhance pedagogical practice.

Extending this line of research to comparisons with other schools and education systems, both nationally and internationally would provide valuable insights into how far the experience of children in this study is localised, as well as alternative approaches for the development of political competence at a primary level. In particular, international comparisons could prompt a healthy challenge to assumptive constructions of political identity and citizenship learning, as demonstrated by Ross' (2014) findings from research within Europe, and making the strange both familiar and engaging. Additionally, extending the research beyond education to look at children's comparisons of school with the outside world (Mayall, 2010) could provide valuable new knowledge with which to improve their experience in school and the transferability of learning from it. Examples of this would be: how children compare freedoms and controls; how they understand conflict and resistance and its perceived effectiveness; and how they approach political participation and understand their agency. Additionally, as noted in Chapter 7, investigating the effect that normalising conformity has on children in the often neglected early childhood settings (Cliff and Millei, 2013) could illuminate how and when children begin to independently develop critical approaches as political competence (ten Dam and Volman, 2004). An extension of this would be to explore how and why some children appear better able to manage their experiences of conflict and resistance, and trust and control.

I have argued that closer attention needs to be paid to the impact that attending school, a politicised institution (Connolly, Smith and Kelly, 2002), has on children and their development of political competence. This is particularly important when conflict exists between either expectations of the outside and inside worlds or different representations of the inside world

(Lam, 2012), for example between what the curriculum teaches and how children and adults behave and are treated in school. I believe this is about respecting and valuing children more as individuals of integrity, not so very different or far away from ourselves as adults. We need to view children as capable, not deficient in competence (Stables, 2008). There needs to be a more assertive response to the changes in society which already recognise children's competence as consumers, service users, independent information-gatherers (Lister, 2008; Watson, 2008), and those who tomorrow will inherit the consequences of decisions we make today. This goes to the heart of what education is for, what both children and adults want *for* our young people through and as a result of an education, and this is not the same as: What sort of people do we want *from* our education system? (Stables, 2008).

In an endeavour to maximise the learning opportunities for children in schools, it would be good practice to evaluate not only the delivery and effectiveness of curricula learning, but also to consider how institutional norms and practices position and define the child as a political agent or not (Pike, 2007). National and individual school policies should look at how whole-school ethos impacts upon children's participative experiences concealing a 'hidden curriculum' (Wardekker, 2001), and not just what is formalised in citizenship education. Such dialogue between educational practitioners might also stimulate wider engagement with assumptions about what children and their childhoods are, and how far they can be considered independent political agents and a structural part of society. Whilst this may be seen as a luxury by some teachers, particularly those with more managerial responsibilities, I argue that a closer, more critical engagement with children's experiences is of fundamental importance to our understanding of what they learn when they are at school, and this is not always in the classroom or through the curriculum.

The first step to a greater recognition of children's competence would be to include them in local and national policy-making discussions and decisions (Lister, 2008; McCluskey, 2014; Watson, 2008): talking to and with children rather than about them, recognising that they are experts in their own lives (Lansdown, 2001; Lowe, 2012; Stables, 2008). Additionally, designing or adapting programmes of study which more closely reflected children's geographical localities and out of school experiences, as suggested in the *Cambridge Review* (Alexander, 2010), would allow children to openly and legitimately explore their political competence in meaningful contexts enhancing the relevance of classroom learning.

I would like to channel my learning from my findings into something productive for children at this school and elsewhere. When discussing children's accounts in the review interviews, I was struck by the power of the images in the photographic and video diaries for the participant and me: a single image can appeal to all irrespective of age, albeit in different ways. Creating a visually-based set of tools, an adventure game or interactive book, to stimulate group discussion around the themes of trust and control, conflict and resistance, and participation and agency presents an opportunity to have the same ideas or phenomena discussed by adults and children in a way that treats participants as equals. Of course, much depends on how such a resource is interpreted and used, but it could create the forum in which familiar assumptions about the position of children in society can be made strange and questioned. Such a resource would be for schools, families and other social groupings alike, but has obvious applicability to the classroom environment.

In relation to the research school, I would like to acknowledge what teachers do well and how they are valued by the children and one another. I would like to feed back the findings of the research in a constructive way that can be used to emphasise and reinforce the positive, but also opens a window onto a different interpretation of 'life in school' from the point of view of the children. Specifically, I would like to explore what made a number of children feel angry and frustrated about some of their experiences and relationships at the school.

A number of colleagues and friends have said to me: "I'd like to read what you write." The thesis, however, is not a suitable medium for the non-academic reader; it is my intent to produce something more easily digestible, a pamphlet available in multiple formats might be effective, especially if it exploited images as visual tools described above. This product could also be used to feed back to my research participants and the school community.

Contemplating Wolcott's (2005, p.147) central question: 'what do you want to accomplish?' I am keen that my findings do not remain hidden in a PhD thesis, but are reintroduced to the community from which they came. I would like to use this insight into the children's experience of school to challenge other teachers and decision-makers to think anew about their relationships with children in school and the assumptions they make about the capabilities and competence of younger people.

## *Appendix 1 Research Design*

### **Context: foreshadowed problems**

- Political reserve amongst children and young people.
- Conflicting notions of childhood and expectations of children.
- Increasing centralisation of education leadership within central government removing political legitimacy over education decision-making from schools.

**Primary Research Question:** How do children (and teachers) understand their participation and agency within the institution and cultures of the primary school and how does this impact upon the development of political competencies?

### **Focused Research Questions:**

- How do children (and teachers) understand their rights and responsibilities as members of the school community?
- How do children (and teachers) understand the structures and cultures for participation in schools?
- How do children (and teachers) understand their political and social agency with school structures and cultures?
- (How) Is the above transferred to society and civic life and responsibilities?
- What do children (and teachers) understand as legitimate participation in school life?
- What is the experience of exercising rights and responsibilities in school?
- What is the experience of agency and being an actor in the school community?
- What is socio-political learning? (about/for/through/to...) How does it happen? What is learnt?
- How is childhood/are children constructed by different agents? Why?

**Research sample:** Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6 pupils (and their teachers).

**Aim:** to explore children's and teachers' experiences and perceptions of political agency, autonomy and associated rights, responsibilities and political competencies (e.g. decision-making, problem-solving, relationship management, taking responsibility and personal and collective advocacy).

**Objectives:**

1. To identify perceptions of and examples of children and teachers acting as socio-political agents, exercising rights and responsibilities (as political competences) in the primary school environment;
2. To explore and provide a description of the structures (institutional and cultural) governing political/social behaviours of children (and teachers);
3. To provide an opportunity to rethink power relations, the nature and meaning of participation in school and the expectations of children, teachers and the curriculum.
4. To derive theory explaining the structures, participant agency and the resulting behaviours;

**Data to be collected**

- Children's perceptions and experience of socio-political agency, exercising rights and competencies – defining political/social identity (Obj 1 & 2);
- Teachers' perceptions and experience of children's socio-political agency, exercising rights and competencies – defining political/social identity (Obj 1 & 2 );
- Descriptions of the school - institution and culture (Obj 2 & 4);
- Examples of (political) interactions between children and teachers (Obj 1, 2 & 4);
- Child and teacher interpretations and analyses of interactions and relationships (Obj 1, 2, 3 & 4);
- Analysis of the wider national, educational context of child and teacher identity, sense of autonomy and agency and curricula expectations – literature and policy review (Obj 3);

**Methodological approach: Ethnography**

To access, understand and explain participants' perceptions of their own autonomy and agency and the structures within which they operate, the methods used will need to be qualitative: interviews, observations, and analytical discussions. To go beyond the participants' individualised views and to be able to describe and explain the context of their behaviours, I will need to study and observe school life and its environment over a significant period of time, recording what I see and hear in field notes. Developing theories of structure and agency from these explorations, and how they impact upon children's and teachers' behaviour will constitute the ethnography. An ethnography will allow me greater depth and more meaningful

description and understanding of the situation where other methodologies may not interrogate participant experience to the same degree.

Participation in this research project will include:

- contributing to the refinement and review of research foci through group discussions and interviews;
- providing data on personal understandings, perceptions and experiences in school through independent data-gathering (explicit), interview (explicit) and observation (inferred);
- verifying and authenticating data through discussion, and contributing to the analysis.

Explicit, structured contributions will cease after a given period of time, approximately one academic year, when the next stage of analysis begins. The processing and analysis of the data becomes my sole responsibility from that point onwards.

### **Selection of Case and Setting**

The selected site for this exploration is the largest primary age school in its local authority with approximately 180 children in each year group at the time of the research agreement with the school. This provides an opportunity to gather data from a number of children and teachers in very similar roles. Further, it is a school which encourages staff to pursue research interests and has offered me access to all levels of leadership and management. Having worked as a teacher at the school on a temporary basis during the negotiation of research access, I was made a permanent, part-time employee in September 2007. Being a teacher at the school will lend further credibility to the study in allowing me to more easily take on the role of ethnographer as well as presenting new ethical challenges.

### **Sampling within the Case:**

Most of the data was gathered during the academic year from September 2008 to July 2009, with a small number of analytical interviews being carried out and focused field observations during the subsequent academic year 2009-10. Children and teachers in Year groups 4, 5 and 6 were all invited to participate in the research project. My research proposal was presented to the majority of teaching and support staff at the school in July 2008 at an in-service training day and follow-up more detailed information during three smaller sessions in September 2009. A number of teaching staff were engaged in focus groups interviews as a result of this and through this participation I gained access to their classes to engage children in research. A small number of teaching staff did not wish to participate and the children in their classes were

offered the opportunity to contribute through the Student Council, a group which I facilitate. Focus groups with support staff were carried out in January 2010. All fieldwork was conducted at the school.

### **Ethical considerations**

- Ensuring consent is informed, comprehended, voluntary reflecting the competence of participants to engage, children's parents will also be asked for their consent;
- Managing relationships and balancing power differentials with colleagues, children and their families;
- Managing the dual role of teacher-researcher and 'insider' status;
- Maintaining equal opportunity for access to the research project;
- Researching politically sensitive and potentially personal issues;
- Keeping other community members informed and ensuring no detriment to them;
- Processing and storage of data in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998;
- Protecting participants' privacy and anonymity within a small community;
- Publishing research work and maintaining non-identification of participants: matching appropriate reporting and analysis to audience.



## Appendix 2 Qualitative and Quantitative Description of the Data

Data – qualitative description	Data – quantitative description with in-text reference codes	Processing (getting to know the data)	Analysis
<p><b>Field Notes (WFN/AFN/MIN)</b> Describe events within school over the course of the year (Sept 08-Dec 09) – largely from an adult/employee (my own) point of view, but also reports on conversations and interactions with children and other adults giving responses to events in school.</p> <p><i>Mixture of audio field notes (AFN), written field notes (WFN) and meeting notes (MN).</i></p>	<p>Written field notes (WFN): one book with 83 entries. Audio field notes (AFN): 320 recordings. Meeting notes (MN): one whole-school teacher meeting a week for the duration of the fieldwork (40); one year group meeting a fortnight for the duration of the fieldwork (20); one subject team meeting a month for the duration of the fieldwork (10); one whole-school student council meeting a month for the duration of the fieldwork (10); ad hoc student council meetings following independent projects approx. one a fortnight for the duration of the fieldwork (24).</p>	<p>Written field notes collated Audio field notes listened to and catalogued All field notes classified by content/subject matter within the data matrices</p>	<p>Sort and code content of notes using highlighted terms, ideas and issues Diarrise my specific take on situations mentioned, i.e. how change affected me (in PhD journals) Match and map themes against focus groups Create a physical description of the school and locate sites of interaction, e.g. playground, corridor, boys' toilets!</p>
<p><b>School Communications</b> Copies of internal and external communications from 'the school' and school leadership to others. Also communications issued by other community members, but there are significantly fewer of these.</p>	<p>Letters Meeting minutes Memoranda Requests for data Management/School Improvement tasks, e.g. predicting grade outcomes for children. See <i>Fieldwork Timeline</i> for detail</p>	<p>Organise and set alongside field notes relating to the same subjects Include notes as to relative importance (formal/informal) and the context in which they were disseminated, e.g. staff meeting, dropped into lessons etc.</p>	<p>Distil key language and terms used Note also timings – map across data gathering exercises Match and map themes against focus groups</p>
<p><b>Research Communications</b> Record of how and when I have had communication with the school participants and non-participants, incl. language used and any direction given.</p>	<p>Presentations to adult and child groups: introductory and feedback Letters: informative; invitations to participate; consent-seeking; thank yous Written research statements, e.g. ethics protocol Reports to participants and school community</p>	<p>Organise and record these communications systematically</p>	<p>Distil key language and terms used Note also timings – map across data gathering exercises</p>
<p><b>Personal Research Reflections</b> My own on-going observations of the progress of the research project – incl. comments on perceived impact of research activities on children/adults</p>	<p>Five research journals contain these notes and discussions from when I engaged with the project in 2007 to the final draft of the thesis 2015.</p>	<p><i>First stages of analysis</i> Transcribe audio notes Explore my own trialling of the different methods Create/amend participant profiles alongside other data, esp. by participation method and extent - incl. my relationship to participants Re-examine timeline in light of and highlight changes</p>	<p>by participation method and extent - incl. my relationship to participants Re-examine timeline in light of and highlight changes</p>
<p><i>Audio field notes and annotated timelines</i> <b>PHASE ONE (P1): Focus Group Recordings (TFG/CFG/NTFG)</b> Group discussions with adults and children to set the tone of the research for me i.e. to distil what were relevant concepts and linguistic terms and referents. Also served to start discussion amongst members of the school community. Started with a discussion on observing children's rights and responsibilities in action.</p>	<p>5 Teacher focus groups (TFG) 16 Child focus groups (CFG) 2 Adult non-teaching staff focus groups (NTFG)</p>	<p>Transcribe group sessions and create overview of discussion-flow and content to be able to locate specific topics later Link focus group participants who continued with independent data gathering to their review conversations Highlight key themes and words (tally to start) during a listen through Highlight my input, specifically what I introduce to the conversations and why</p>	<p>Distil, explore and explain key terms used and what they represent to participants, then ... Define/redefine analysis terms, ideas, events and issues – first filter (dynamic cyclical process begins)</p>

Data – qualitative description	Data – quantitative description with in-text reference codes	Processing (getting to know the data)	Analysis
<p><b>PHASE TWO (P2): Independent Data Gathering</b> Participants to gather data on their day in school for discussion later. Idea to explore the products of these exercises within the context/framing of the initial concepts terms of reference from first group discussions.</p> <p><b>Audio Day Recordings (AD/CAD/AAD)</b> Participants record a day at school using a voice recorder. This is <i>not</i> a diary, participants do not narrate their day, the control they have over content is by turning the machine off at certain times.</p>	<p>40 child participant recordings (CAD) 2 adult participant recordings (AAD)</p>	<p>Map of the day overviews to use during review conversations and gain an overall picture of the day for me Maps of the day entered into data matrices Transcribe sections when and where appropriate Highlight key themes and words Highlight my input Unintended data gathering Participants explaining to others what they believed themselves to be doing in relation to my research project and what the aims of the project were. Catalogue and number photographs using the order of importance the participants gave to each picture and their descriptions of the content (from review sessions) Catalogue entered into data matrices</p>	<p>Dynamic cyclical processes: Matching group interview responses to recorded and described actions/behaviour Monitoring/calculating frequency of focus terms, ideas, events and issues – redefining/modifying Looking for links/commonalities and divergences Summarise in the context of the whole</p>
<p><b>Photo Diary Records (PD/CPD/APD)</b> Participants record a day in photographs to share with me at a later point. No specific guidance – emphasise their choice of what is important. Finite number of shots on a disposable camera is the restriction, and non-digital, so they cannot be erased.</p>	<p>11 child participant recordings (CPD) 1 adult participant recordings (APD)</p>		
<p><b>Video Diary Recordings (VD/CVD/AVD)</b> Big Brother style diary room recording events of the day and participants' responses to them at strategic points (breaks and lesson changes).</p>	<p>3 child participant recordings (CVD) 2 adult participant recordings (AVD)</p>	<p>Transcribe the diary with a commentary of what the participant does during recordings (incl. describe setting) Highlight key themes and words Highlight my input</p>	
<p><b>Written Diary Records (WD/CWD/AWD)</b> Written record of events of the day and participants' responses to them throughout the day.</p>	<p>3 child participant diaries (CWD) 1 adult participant diary (AWD)</p>	<p>Describe what and how the participants recorded information Synopsis of day entered into data matrices Highlight key themes and words Highlight my input</p>	
<p><b>PHASE THREE (P3): Review Interviews(RI/CRI/ARI)</b> Conversation with each participant about the data they had gathered – creating a secondary narrative and also questioning its authenticity as representative of their daily experience. Also asked for their reflective and summative responses to what they were presented with: surprises? Patterns? etc.</p>	<p>43 review interviews (RI) 38 child participants (CRI): 22 audio days 11 photo diaries 2 video diaries 3 written diaries 5 adult participants (ARI): 1 audio day 1 photo diary 2 video diaries 1 written diary</p>	<p>Transcribe these discussions Describe the review situation Highlight key themes and words Highlight my input Match the commentary with the data gathered - point for point using data matrices</p>	<p>Dynamic cyclical processes: Content of these discussion is both descriptive and analytical – participant and me – exploring ideas Identify challenge/questions participants pose for my analysis Looking for links/commonalities and divergences Summarise in the context of the whole</p>

## *Appendix 3 Ethics Protocol*

This document is a statement of the ethical principles governing the execution of my research over the academic year September 2008 to July 2009. The aim of the document is to centralise the rights of the participants within the process and reassure all concerned that nothing shall be knowingly done or allowed to happen which compromises their well-being.

My research work is governed by

- British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines
- Data Protection Act 1998
- University of West of England research ethics protocol
- Principle of Voluntary Informed Consent (wherever possible)

### **Storage, use and protection of data**

Participants will be informed of what and where personal data is to be stored, including sensitive personal data, in what format records will be held and for what purposes the data will be used. They will also be given an indication of how long the data will be held and assurances that it will be not used for any other purpose than the identified research. Explicit consent to the specific form of data processing will be sought and reaffirmed throughout the research process.

Participants will know me as the 'data controller' and know how and where to contact me for any queries. Participants will have the right to request and view any data relating to them, the right to withdraw that data or ask for its destruction at any time. Should data be compromised by information on or from another individual, then consent must be sought from both parties to disclose the data to the one. If that is not possible, data must be cleansed of all other references before release.

Neither the research participants nor school will be identified in the subsequent publication of research material or discussions with academic colleagues. Within the sets of data I gather, all contributions will be referred to using pseudonyms, known only to myself. Data will be held confidentially and will not be disclosed to any third party under the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998. Further, parents and children will be informed that no data gained from the research will form part of the child's academic record.

In a small institution, however, anonymity within the specific school context cannot be totally guaranteed. It is possible that certain statements could be recognisable by other members of the same organisation. This will be made very clear at the outset of the research and at significant points of data gathering, analysis and feedback to ensure participants are aware of the situation. As per the Data Protection Act 1998, anyone unhappy with the result will have the right to withdraw their data at any time.

## **Ensuring an ethical approach**

When establishing the research project within the school, the methods used to collect and analyse data will be made explicit and be open to discussion and interrogation. Further, there will be an agreed process and schedule for timely feedback to participants ensuring all are kept informed of the research's developments. The principle of Voluntary Informed Consent is used to guide participation and is understood as being constituted by the following principles:

**Competence:** adult participants are assumed to have the capacity, with full information and comprehension, to make decisions for themselves with respect to their participation in this research project. Voluntary Informed Consent with children is considered later.

**Voluntarism:** whilst participation will be encouraged and facilitated, no form of coercion will be used.

**Full information:** through presentation at an in-service training day and open discussions with all staff at the school, a further follow-up meeting with volunteer participants and subsequent individual and group interviews through the data collection process, participants will be made aware of the scope, remit, status and progress of the project.

**Comprehension:** I will ensure that comprehension of this situation through discussions with the participants at initial interviews, through the analytical stages of the project where participants are involved, and also by asking participants to review examples of how their contributions are being reported and recorded.

It should also be noted that in conducting an ethnographic study, where the outcomes of the research are going to be unknown by design, informed consent to the defined process and anticipated participant experience is all that can be achieved at the outset. Consent to the actual form of participant representation can only be sought later in the research process.

## **Impact on the research participants**

### **Potential positive impact upon participants and others:**

- opportunity for staff and children to voice their opinions and ideas and potentially contribute to change within the school environment;
- experience of working collaboratively on a research project, for some members of staff this could present opportunities for future CPD;
- recognition of the voice of participants – being heard and valued.

### **Potential negative impact upon participants and others:**

- conversations may result in disclosure of data unanticipated by participants, potentially causing discomfort or distress;

- all participants, and especially children, will be placed in a situation of imbalanced power with respect to me as the data gatherer, potentially challenging our relationships outside the research process;
- reporting potentially identifiable testimonies may 'expose' individuals' opinions to their teachers, colleagues or managers, leaving them vulnerable.

**Measures to manage and mitigate the above:**

- regular discussion of the research process and the participants' experience;
- reinforcing clear expectations as to the research relationship, research experience and processing of the data;
- facilitating the verification and acceptability of testimonies through review and feedback sessions and in response to requests;
- reinforcing participant rights and responsibilities, including the right to withdraw from the process at any time.

Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw at any time for whatever or no reason when the project is first introduced to the staff at a school in-service training session. This will be reiterated and explained further when volunteers have been recruited; a meeting of all participants will be held to explain the process in detail and answer questions. When individual interviews take place and during feedback and review sessions participants will also be reminded. Additionally, should the participation of any individual appear to compromise their personal well-being in any way, the option to withdraw will be explicitly made.

There is a possibility of emotional discomfort or distress through exploration of the subject matter. In deconstructing individuals' understandings of the political and social environment, I will be explicitly exploring potential sources of institutional and cultural stress and anxiety related to participants' personal, professional and political identity. This could have a destabilising effect for both children and adults and potentially cause disillusionment with their current situations. I will seek to lessen this potential impact by monitoring these situations closely and being clear in the focus of the research questions as well as the anticipated experience of participants through their engagement with the project.

**Incentives to participate**

The incentives offered are more to reduce inconvenience than advantage participants.

**Adults:** other than the initial meeting, no time will be taken out of individuals' personal schedule - I will teach compensatory lessons so that no one is personally inconvenienced; insights into post grad work; contribute to teaching and subject leadership in Personal, Social, Health and Moral Education and Citizenship.

**Children:** time out of timetable, not away from playtimes.

Further, participants' contributions will be acknowledged and recognised personally and publicly where they can remain non-identifiable.

### **Enabling children to participate with sufficiently informed consent**

**Competence:** children will be treated equally as participants as far as possible, they will be able to consent to the process and experience of the research, and their parents will be asked to take responsibility for giving consent where children may not have access to the understanding of the handling of the data: they will be supported in taking responsibility for their own involvement.

**Voluntarism:** no child will be coerced into participation, explicitly or tacitly. It will be made clear that there will be no advantage or disadvantage gained through participation, that it is something they can choose to do or not and retain the right to withdraw at any time.

**Full information:** the information available to all participants will be made available to children but adapted to suit their language and comprehension. As with adult participants, children will have the opportunity to question and interrogate what they are given.

**Comprehension:** before the data gathering process begins, I will seek to ascertain that child participants understand what is being asked of them through group and individual discussions. When the children can recount and answer questions with adequate competence, I will be satisfied that they have sufficient comprehension of the process. If I have cause to doubt this at any point, I will address misconceptions and seek verbal consent once more.

Children will be invited to participate through their teachers' involvement in the research. They will be given an overview as to what the project is about and what to expect. Children will then be invited to participate independently as individuals or groups in interviewing sessions. Children whose teachers choose not to participate will be offered the opportunity to contribute through other vehicles such as the school's student council.

The parents of children who would like this level of participation will be contacted with a letter containing a brief outline of the project and asking for their permission for participation and description of what that means. The letter will also contain an offer to discuss the project further with me and an open invitation to follow-up with further questions at any time. Parents will then also be informed of the right to withdraw at any time. Where a parent or guardian does not give immediate consent to a child's participation, but the child is keen to get involved, I shall strive to negotiate a situation where he or she can participate to some degree that is acceptable. Ultimately, however, I must respect the wishes of the parents in this matter.

The school where the research will be undertaken is also my place of work. This has particular implications for the dynamics and power dimensions of the relationships I have with colleagues and pupils: balancing dual roles of teacher and researcher. The issue of 'what happens next' will demand particularly sensitive handling: dealing with and presenting the findings in such a way as not to compromise or prejudice participants or the research itself. Further, exiting the research

field but remaining a teacher in the institution and returning to previous set of arrangements must be carefully negotiated.

**Rosie Bosse Chitty, September 2008**  
**r.bossechitty@googlemail.com**

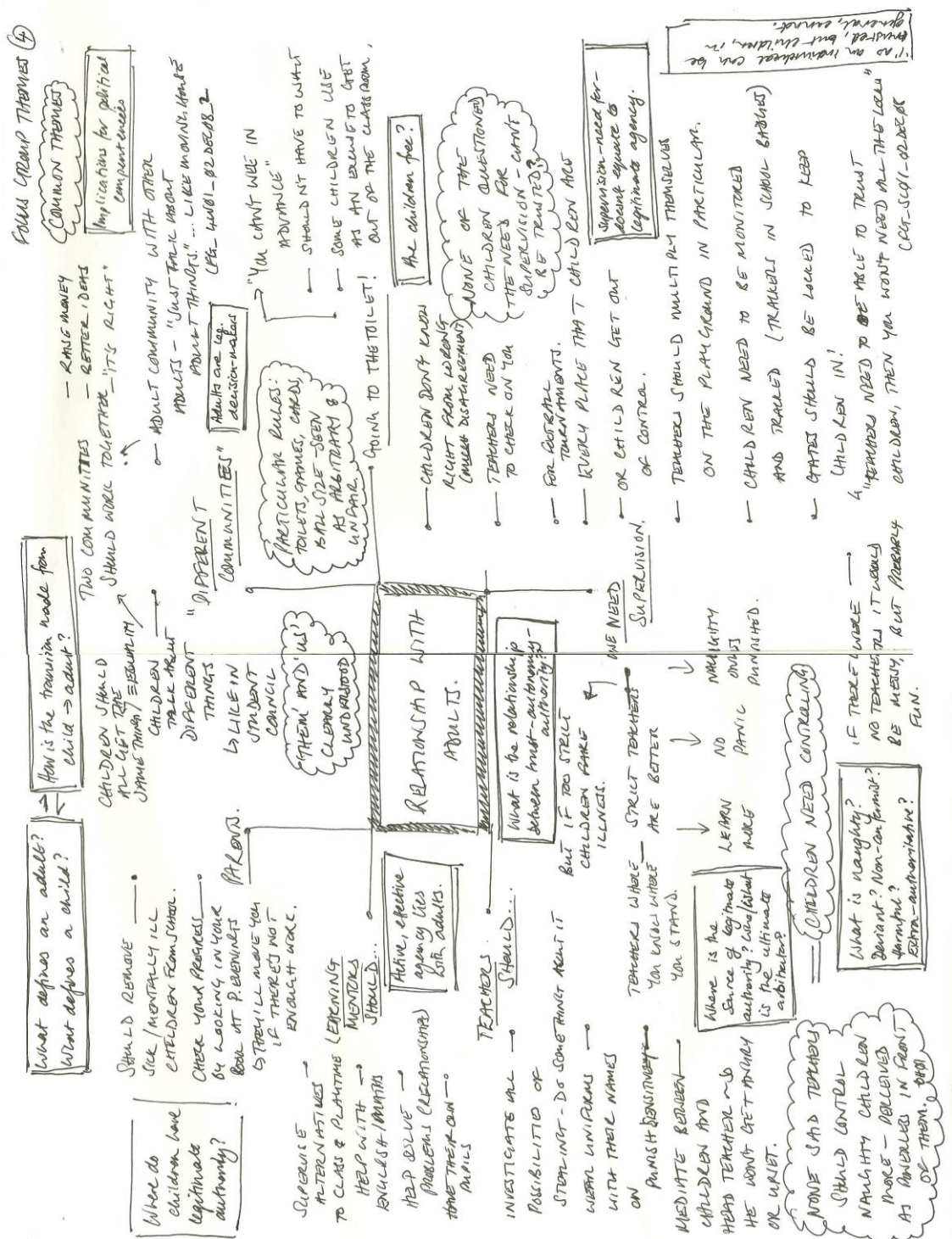
This statement of ethical intent was agreed by the UWE Education Faculty Ethics Board (05/08)

# Appendix 4 Fieldwork Timeline

	Sept 08	Oct 08	Nov 08	Dec 08	Jan 09	Feb 09	Mar 09	Apr 09	May 09	Jun 09	July 09	Oct 09	Nov 09	Dec 09
<b>Objectives</b>	Engage participants	Identify perceptions of exercising rights and responsibilities (as political competencies) in the school environment Distil, explore and explain key language terms used and what they represent to participants Define/redefine analysis terms, ideas, events and issues ( <i>first filter - primary source of coding key terms and ideas for all subsequent analysis</i> )		PHASE ONE (P1)				PHASE TWO (P2) Explore and provide a description of the structures (institutional and cultural) governing political/social behaviours of teachers and pupils Explore and describe expectations for learning, the curriculum and agents within and associated with the school community.		PHASE THREE (P3) Provide an opportunity to rethink power relations, the nature and meaning of participation in school and the expectations of teachers, learners and the curriculum		ANALYTICAL FOCUS To derive theory explaining the structures, participant agency and the resulting behaviours.		
<b>Data gathered</b>	Descriptions of the school Teacher perceptions of children demonstrating political competence	Child perceptions children demonstrating political competence							Teacher and learner interpretations and analyses of interactions, behaviours and relationships from data they gathered. Incl. review of data-gathering methods.	Teacher and child examples and experiences of (political-social) interactions within the school day – recording a school day		Support staff perceptions children demonstrating political competence		
<b>Methods</b>		Personal research reflections – my notes on my own development and relationship with the research participants; process and analyses – distinct from observational field notes Interviews and focus groups and follow-up notes Focus groups and follow-up notes								Observational field notes				Interviews and focus groups and follow up notes
<b>Communications</b>	Church of England Inspection Primary Skills for Employment Project	Performance management	Parent meetings	Christmas!	Primary Skills for Employment Project	Pupil progress reviews & parent meets	Head resigns	SLT reorganisation	SATs & year end assessment	Ofsted Inspection (one day)	Re-engage support staff Consents sought & letter to parents for second and third phase: specific data gathering methods selected by child participants. Also included brief update of activities to date.	Gov Body proposes move to primary status	New head recruited for Sept. 2010	Thank yous - participants & school community Christmas!
<b>School Events</b>	Church of England Inspection Primary Skills for Employment Project	Performance management	Parent meetings	Christmas!	Primary Skills for Employment Project	Pupil progress reviews & parent meets	Head resigns	SLT reorganisation	SATs & year end assessment	Ofsted Inspection (one day)	Deputy head retires	Gov Body proposes move to primary status	New head recruited for Sept. 2010	Thank yous - participants & school community Christmas!



# Appendix 5 Sample Data Analysis Mind-map



## *Appendix 6 Sample Construction of the Narrative*

### **Data traceability: use of data sources in constructing the narrative**

The data source is referenced with the code from *Appendix 2 Qualitative and Quantitative Description of the Data* (e.g. WFN for written field notes). Where there were multiple references and additional sources, these have been included also (e.g. WFN/CFG). The data source is followed by a brief description of its content and sections have been underlined where my text comes directly from a child's account. Additionally, I have included the individual code (PB6) for the child whose accounts were the primary source material for this encounter. These data came from a focus group he was part of, his video diary and the subsequent review interview.

### **6.2.2 Self-suppressing Responses: Internalised Conflict**

*The next lesson for the day is literacy. You are all carrying on with the stories you began writing at the beginning of the week and which need to be finished by Friday.*

**(WFN/CRI: multiple references to immediate deadlines)**

*This should be fun. You are sitting with two of your friends and are making good progress with the second chapter.*

**(CFG/CRI: enjoyment of sitting next to friends and how that helps with learning/making progress)**

*You have also had Mrs Christopher on your table helping with the writing which has been okay so far. She helps you sometimes, but she is always there watching what you are doing, so you cannot take a break and chat when you get tired.*

**(CRI: taken directly from quote in a discussion on LSA/TA support)**

*You know Miss Verne doesn't trust you to get on with it on your own.*

**(CFG/CRI (PB6): repetition of teachers' lack of trust of pupils, also pupils' lack of trust of pupils)**

Today this means Lucy will also be on your table so that Mrs. Christopher can keep an eye on her.

**(CFG/AFN: LSA/TA dual behavioural and learning support roles)**

Lucy is one of the people in your class who makes all the trouble and makes you all lose break.

**(CRI (PB6): taken directly from quote in a discussion on children with behavioural challenges)**

Today she crawls under the table pretending to be a cat. Miss Verne has told you not to let her distract you, but her behaviour sort of takes you over and you cannot control feeling disgusted. She is hitting you at your feet and licking you which you think is really nasty! You know you are supposed to ignore what she does, but it is really difficult and getting work done is almost impossible.

**(CRI (PB6): taken directly from quote in review interview discussion on this particular incident and the consequences to the rest of the class)**

You think about how to cope with Lucy. You know there is a relatively high risk of losing out and missing break or even all of lunchtime if you cause a fuss: that is what happened last time.

**(CFG/CRI (PB6): missing break and/or lunchtimes was a repeated punishment for non-conformity both in this particular incident and other similar ones)**

And you know from the earlier mention of Mr. Fogg's visit that today is not a good day to push Miss Verne, or even Mrs. Christopher who is sometimes a bit softer.

**(CRI: discussion on teachers' behaviour with another child in this particular class)**

You dwell on how unfair the situation is, making you feel resentment towards the teacher who does nothing to help **you** out in this situation and shows no understanding of your position.

**(CVD (PB6): response to a specific lesson during the child's diarised day)**

You are also feeling more and more frustrated with Lucy who is now meowing and seems to have no reason to stop: no one tells her to do anything different.

**(CFG (PB6): discussion on school behaviour management)**

In fact, the school in general seems like it cares more about people like Lucy than the normal kids like you.

**(CFG (PB6): relates directly to the behaviourally challenging child concerned)**

You understand the point that 'everybody is different' and everybody has to accept that, but you get that already, why do you have to put up with someone licking your feet during literacy just because you are normally well behaved?

**(CFG (PB6): taken directly from quote in focus group from the class of the children concerned)**

You think about your options as Lucy approaches your feet again. You could try and ignore her, moving your chair and your feet away from the table, hoping she will move on to someone else quickly.

**(AFN: observations from teacher of the same class the previous year)**

You could walk over to Miss Verne's table and stand in the queue to speak to her, pretending you are stuck on something.

**(CRI: discussion of avoidance strategies from another child in the same class)**

But she will want to know why you did not ask Mrs. Christopher and guess that you were trying to get away from Lucy. Alternatively, you could kick Lucy next time she touches you, hope that she learns her lesson and does not come back. But if you hurt her or she complains, you will have to justify your actions knowing full well you are supposed to be ignoring her no matter how difficult it is.

**(CRI (PB6): discussion of the most desirable option for the child concerned (PB6))**

What do you decide to do?

*You decide to push your chair back from the table as far as possible and start writing with your literacy book on your knees. Jordan sees what you have done and copies you. Mrs. Christopher catches on to what you are doing and looks at you sternly, using a silent finger movement instructs you to move back to your place. You slowly nudge closer to the table, closing your eyes, hoping that Lucy will get bored soon and change her tactics.*

**(WFN/AFN: fictitious ending constructed from participant observation)**

*There is no hope now of fooling the adults that you are trying to do anything other than move away from Lucy. You sit there feeling angry and frustrated that there is nobody to understand your side of the argument, nobody to sort the problem out.*


**(CRI: three children in this class mentioned this independently)**

*You are supposed to be in school to learn, but Lucy makes that impossible sometimes. Everybody has to give her the chance to learn, but what about the rest of you? Who is helping you learn when she is messing around?*

**(CFG (PB6): relates directly to the behaviourally challenged child concerned)**

*However, you choose not to complain as you will probably get into trouble for it: you just have to learn to deal with the situation, they say that is what growing up is about.*

**(CRI (PB6): conclusion to the particular discussion on the behaviourally challenged child in the class)**

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## **Understanding children's citizenship, participation and agency in the primary school: An English ethnographic study**

*Rosie Bosse Chitty  
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### **Abstract**

*This paper presents the progress and analysis to date of doctoral research into primary school pupils' experiences and perceptions of political agency, autonomy, and the development of associated rights, responsibilities and political competencies. The selected site for this ethnographic work was the largest primary-age school in its region within England. To access, understand and explain participants' perceptions of their own autonomy and agency and the structures within which they operate, the methods used were qualitative: interviews, observations, analytical discussions and ethnographic field notes.*

*Data analysis to date demonstrates how being a pupil, political participant and child in this primary school can mean many different things, yet all curricular and cultural expectations apply to the same individuals. The inconsistencies within their learning both challenge and confuse the children. In addition to this, relevant knowledge and understanding appears not to be gained through the received citizenship curriculum, but a more subtle and nuanced experience of political practices within the school community, largely outside teaching time. The question guiding the on-going analysis is: How does the experience of developing political competence in school challenge or reaffirm established positions in wider societal democratic arenas?*

**Keywords:** *children, citizenship competence, primary school*

### **Introduction**

Examining the experience of children at primary school as a site for citizenship development furthers previous studies undertaken as a political scientist and education professional, combining theory and practice from both disciplines. The foreshadowed problems I seek to understand are: apparent political apathy amongst children and young people and the conflicting notions of childhood and expectations of children as citizens. My belief is that the primary school has great potential for citizenship learning and experience, but that the opportunity is not being fully exploited. I would like the results of my research to be used to enhance the democratic and participative experiences of primary age children at school.

A child voicing his or her opinions, ideas and questions is a function of healthy democracy and, indeed, an educational, legal and moral entitlement (DfES 2004, Ofsted 2005 and UN

1989). As a societal ‘good’, the ‘coming to power’ of children enhances the legitimacy of democratic institutions and practices, and defines a specific educational outcome: a citizenry enabled by political and social learning and experience. Viewing children as independent social and political agents reflects how the balance of responsibility for safe-guarding their rights has shifted from home to school; the expectations of both parents and government, through policy for the development of children’s political competencies, is that schools should now provide that socialising function that was once the prerogative of home and before that the church. School is increasingly expected to be a model for society and teach what appropriate behaviour is. Reporting in the Cambridge Primary Review, Alexander (2010) indicates the challenge within this situation,

Every society has to determine the respective responsibilities of the state and of parents for the care and education of children, but the English response has been distinctive. ...In other European countries, such as France and Finland, there are clear divisions of responsibility, with parents doing the caring and socialising, and schools doing the schooling. (Alexander 2010:64-65)

He concludes that in the UK these divisions have never been easily recognised or uncontroversial, making them difficult to navigate for parents, children and schools (Alexander 2010).

This discussion also highlights the problem of viewing childhood as a single entity or experience. As Goldson (2001) points out, the discourses which construct children and their childhoods in particular ways – e.g. innocent babes or tiny tearaways - do not take into account their economic, social, mental, physical, educational differences. Prout (2005) summarises the situation as follows,

The tendency for contemporary social life to be marked by dissolving boundaries and heightened ambiguity is a general one and, partly in response to it, new frameworks for understanding the world after modernity are being brought into existence. (Prout 2005:70)

Discourse theory allows us to see the world as constructed through human interaction: by and through differing and competing social discourses. It frees interpretations of ‘the way the world is’ from notions of alien, unchangeable forces and objects which define and control us. Of course, with this freedom also comes insecurity. We lose a sense of ‘natural order’ and can no longer depend on a predictable and secure past, present and future. This has been described by Usher and Edwards (1994) as the breakdown of what we have constructed as ‘modern’ or ‘modernity’, and challenges researchers to make new sense of the time and space in which we now find ourselves. It presents us with an opportunity to re-evaluate our understandings of children, their childhoods and relationship to adults and adulthood.



The aim of my study is to explore pupils' experiences and perceptions of political agency, autonomy and the development of associated rights, responsibilities and political competencies in a school. In using the term 'political competencies' I am referring to, for example: decision-making, problem-solving, relationship management, personal and collective advocacy and taking responsibility for oneself and others. The consequent objectives are to:

1. identify perceptions and examples of pupils acting as political agents in the primary school;
2. explore and provide a description of the structures governing political behaviours of pupils;
3. provide an opportunity to rethink power relations, the nature and meaning of participation in school;
4. derive theory explaining the structures, participant agency and the resulting behaviours.

From an ethnographic study in a primary school, my aim is to provide a value-relevant representation (Hammersley 2006) of the citizenship experience of children as pupils. In making this declaration, I acknowledge its many limitations and contestability. The knowledge created will be as a direct result of my value-commitments in deciding to pursue this research as well as my agency in the data gathering and analysis. It will be but one view of many. The nature of the knowledge which will be generated from my research will be, therefore, a representation of the personal and individual perceptions of the participants involved in my research, including myself.

### **Methodology and Selection of Participants**

To access, understand and explain participants' experience of autonomy and agency and the structures within which they operate, the methodology which offered most to this research was ethnography: where 'a unique sense of embodied existence and consciousness [is] captured.' (Willis and Trondman 2000:6). I believe ethnography allows for greater depth and more meaningful descriptions and understandings of the research situation where other methodologies do not use or interrogate participant lived experience to the same degree.

The selected site for this study was the largest primary-age school within its region in England with approximately 500 registered pupils at the time of my research. I worked with 80 children aged eight to eleven and 30 adults, teaching and support staff.

From the objectives stated above, the data I set out to collect can be summarised as follows:

- Children's accounts and experience of exercising rights and competencies (Obj 1 & 2);

- Teachers' accounts and experience of children exercising rights and competencies (Obj 1 & 2 );
- Descriptions of the school - institution and culture (Obj 2 & 4);
- Examples of (political) interactions within the school community (Obj 1, 2 & 4);
- Teacher and learner interpretations and analyses of interactions and relationships (Obj 1, 2, 3 & 4);
- Analysis of the wider national, educational context of children's citizenship, sense of autonomy and agency, and curricula expectations – literature and policy review (Obj 3).

To gather this data, I designed a three-phase participatory research programme, supported by the recording of observational and analytical field notes. The research design included participants:

1. contributing to the refinement and reviewing of research questions through focus group discussions and interviews, resulting in a distillation of relevant concepts and linguistic terms within school discourses;
2. providing accounts of personal understandings, perceptions and experiences in school through independently gathering data on and during one day at school, aimed at reducing the researcher's influence;
3. verifying and authenticating data through discussion within individual interviews, and contributing to initial analysis.

This generated a vast amount of data necessitating some tough decision-making about the themes to pursue in my subsequent data analysis: what to pull in as core material and what to leave as contextual information. This process is still on-going.

## Results

I am coming to the end of my primary data analysis, summarising the most salient themes and deciding what to re-examine in greater detail. I have selected three of these themes to briefly illustrate the results so far. What I am presenting is tentative and in its infancy. Each theme is introduced by a quote from a participant and the analysis it reveals.

### *'You can't wee in advance!': trusting or controlling children*

Many participants describe the tension and frustration they feel in negotiating and understanding the divergent trusting and controlling nature of relationships and rules at the school. The ideas of responsibility and accountability seem particularly confused and confusing to children. On one hand, children are seen as competent in understanding perceived errors in thought and action and can be held accountable: they know right from

wrong. However, at the same time, they are not sufficiently competent of thought and action to be free from the continuous oversight of an adult: not trustworthy or responsible enough to be able to act autonomously in school. This issue arose most often when talking about 'being allowed to go to the loo (toilet)' or to go back inside the school building from sports or playtime to fetch something. Whilst discussing the practicalities of organising when you went to the toilet, one girl declared: 'you can't wee in advance!' - expecting anyone to have that degree of control over their bodily functions was thought of as ridiculous: the rule of 'no toilet visits during lesson time' was unreasonable. Interestingly, however, no one mentioned the indignity of having to request 'permission to pee': something an adult would find challenging.

Both children and adults in the study stated categorically that children could not be trusted and needed 'to be controlled'; although individuals were acknowledged to be different, as a collective, children would always seek to be deviant. The conflicting notions of what 'I am' and 'we are', and how behaviour changes when children are seen as part of a group, feature in all the data sets. The responsible individual becomes untrustworthy and in need of constant monitoring and controlling when identified as an anonymous child, rather than an Ella or a James who can act autonomously with consideration for others and institutional norms.

This has a number of consequences, one of which is the acceptance of surveillance, censure and control. Children accept that they are not trustworthy by virtue of being children and, in some cases, despite an inner belief that they as individuals are. There is a lack of faith in his or her own judgement. I believe the degree to which these children do not trust their own opinion – their insecurity in 'what they know', dismissing themselves, their ideas and thoughts as illegitimate - makes for a weak sense of agency because it can never be truly autonomous, needing to be checked, monitored and authorised by an adult. I do wonder how we expect children to become *trustworthy* if they are never *trusted*. Despite lessons in personal health and well-being, assuming responsibility for yourself, you are not allowed to decide when to go to the toilet.

***'They can't help it if they are mentally ill!': normalising conformity and compliance***

Much discussion in the research interviews included a consideration of normal and deviant behaviour: knowing how to conform and exhibiting 'normal behaviour' was an important part of being responsible, indeed of 'growing up'. Children who appeared unwilling or unable to conform are seen as unwell: 'they can't help it if they're mentally ill', one girl explained. This appears to be one way some children learn to accept non-conformity in a minority of others.

The more I think about the scenario described below, the more improbable it seems. We were discussing good days and bad days at school when this child gave an example of how difficult some days can be:

Like Mrs Z being called in and all of us having to miss playtime and that, 'cos (because) usually there's some people in our class who just make all the trouble and make us lose break, 'cos they would crawl under the table and Miss X would tell us off for letting her take us over, if you know what I'm getting at, ...but she's like hitting us at our feet and licking us which is nasty. (Paul, aged 11, Review Interview)

One child in his class with acknowledged behavioural issues would occasionally pretend to be a cat and crawl under the table, scratching and licking other children's ankles. Children and adults were advised to ignore this behaviour, but this is a challenge for ten-year olds. Indeed, I do not believe that many adults could or would sit and ignore another person licking their ankles under the table, especially when trying to work: it *is* nasty! The boy speaks with an air of normality when he describes the situation, resigned to the fact that it will happen and that he is expected to ignore it. Moreover, he understands that if he is seen to be distracted by it, he will get into trouble. Problematically, there is an assumption that the process of learning to conform is something children must accept, but not necessarily understand.

I question what this sort of experience does for the imagining of the present and future self for children. There is little room for autonomy or critical thinking in the expectation to conform and not to question. Where is the learning to dispute, critique, challenge and ultimately resist? These are all important facets of citizens and functions of a democracy. What could be legitimate challenge is effectively kept in abeyance. Widening this context, I query what suppressing an opportunity to challenge or resist does to the development of children's political identity. How is the expectation and acceptance of such a malleable child in school squared with the promotion of active political participation through the curriculum and other school initiatives?

Michel Foucault (1975) argues that through systematic temporal and spacial control and the creation of regimes of training, (soldiers, school pupils, citizens), obedience and efficiency can be instilled within a population. He tracks the changes in cultural belief from the historical selection of the most appropriate individuals for a function (e.g. strongest, fittest soldiers) to the current idea that through rigorous training any individual can fulfil that function. The population is malleable and docile and training produces 'good behaviour'. I can see and hear this in participant accounts and observations. Moreover, children cite ways of enhancing surveillance and disciplinary practices in order to promote greater conformity for example:

- Tracking devices for children embedded in the school logo on children's uniforms;
- Raising perimeter fence heights and locking children in;
- 'Cloning' teachers to control children.

***‘What did you tell her you were going to do?’: developing agency despite surveillance***

I have examples in my data where some children are moving beyond mere conformity and are developing autonomy in an agency outside the surveillance gaze. Having assimilated what needs to be seen by the adult surveyor, some individuals have learnt how to give the impression of conformity without compliance. One child’s individual data recorded him successfully leaving a lesson on the premise of going to the toilet, but actually meeting two friends for a break and a chat. They did not use the bathroom facilities, but instead discussed how they escaped, whether they were seen or suspected, and how they planned to get back in again unnoticed: ‘What did you tell her you were going to do?’

Andrew Hope describes similar activities in a secondary school as a form of resistance and ‘counter-surveillance’ (Hope 2010:326). Hope discusses whether the development of resistance practices must be conscious or intended: the experience still contributes to developing political competence whether the pupil is aware of it or not. I understand this argument, but wonder at the longer term contribution to citizenship competence which hidden learning makes. If a child is not aware of the techniques and practices they are allegedly developing, applying them to new situations and consciously engaging with the critical cognitive process of resisting, I question whether this is genuine resistance or merely playing with surveillance. Are they aware enough of the power they have to be able to transfer this competence to another situation? This, however, is an exciting area to investigate. The evidence of resistance practices in operation against the background of a system seeking to neutralise anti-social instincts and eliminate dissent and difference (Foucault 1975) is positive for the establishment of an active agency.

**Conclusion**

Data analysis to date demonstrates how being a child in this primary school can mean many different things, yet all curricular and institutional expectations apply to the same individuals. Having agency within the school’s communities and structures is about becoming literate in diverse and sometimes conflicting political and social practices. The inconsistencies within this learning both challenge and confuse the children. Additionally, relevant knowledge and understanding appears not to be gained through the received citizenship curriculum, but a more subtle and nuanced experience of political practices within the school community, largely outside teaching time.

I am still in the throes of analysis, however, these emergent themes appear to question the potential for developing stable and sustainable citizenship competencies:

1. Children’s multiple and contradictory understandings of political identity: specifically a divergence between notions of agency of the child as an individual and as part of a group;

2. Conflicting and damaging imperatives within the school environment: times and spaces where the expectations and experiences of children appear to simultaneously facilitate and restrain children's opportunities to practise citizenship learning;
3. The divergence of citizenship teaching and learning provides both an opportunity for children to develop a hidden agency, but at the same time threatens the establishment of institutionally recognised legitimate participation.

The questions I am now grappling with are:

- Is disobedience the only active agency present here? What of the conforming child? Is there agency in conformity?
- How does the experience of developing political competence in school challenge or reaffirm established positions in wider societal democratic arenas?
- In whose interests is it to maintain the status quo?

### ***Further Work***

The research is both enhanced and limited by the use of ethnographic methods and a single case study: further work should seek to broaden the field of study to beyond the single institution in the South West of England. Such research should seek to establish how far the experiences of the children within this study are localised or representative of wider social phenomena.

Additionally, research into older children's perceptions of their experiences of primary schooling, having transferred to secondary school, would also be illuminating: identifying the perceived relevance and value of primary school experience to later schooling and life in the wider community.

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