

*DOING 'WELL' EDUCATIONALLY:*  
A TRANSACTIONAL INQUIRY FOR RE-  
CONCEPTUALISING “POOR” YOUNG  
PEOPLE LIVING AND LEARNING

A Thesis Submitted to The University of Manchester for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in The Faculty of Humanities

2021

ELIZABETH A MASON-HALE

SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENT, EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT  
MANCHESTER INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	7
DECLARATION .....	8
COPYRIGHT STATEMENT .....	9
DEDICATION .....	10
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	11
“HALLO” .....	12
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH.....	13
1.1 CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW .....	13
1.2 AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY .....	15
1.3 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM: AN OVERVIEW .....	22
1.4 CONTRIBUTING TO THE FIELD(S) .....	23
1.5 STRUCTURE OF THIS THESIS .....	24
1.6 A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY .....	26
CHAPTER TWO THE PROBLEM OF INQUIRY .....	29
2.1 INTRODUCTION .....	29
2.2 PROBLEMATISING THE FIELD: A DUALISTIC STATIC ONTOLOGY...29	
2.3 ‘POOR’ YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING AND LEARNING: A TRANSACTIONAL APPROACH.....	47
CHAPTER THREE TRANSACTIONAL TOOLS .....	50
3.1 INTRODUCTION .....	50
3.2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF PRAGMATISM: WHY DEWEY?.....	50
3.3 YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING AND LEARNING: A TRANSACTIONAL UNIT OF ANALYSIS .....	52
3.4 TOOLS FOR UNDERSTANDING ‘POOR’ YOUNG PEOPLE ‘DOING WELL’ .....	65
CHAPTER FOUR PRACTICAL INSTRUMENTAL INQUIRING .....	66
4.1 INTRODUCTION .....	66
4.2 METHODOLOGY AND DEWEYAN METHOD .....	67
4.3 ATTENDING TO UNFOLDING OCCASIONS .....	69
4.4 PRACTICAL INSTRUMENTAL INQUIRY: EXEMPLIFIED ACTIVITY ...75	
4.5 ‘AUTO-TRANSACTIONAL’ INQUIRING: EXPLORING AUTOBIOGRAPHICALLY .....	83
4.6 A ‘MESSY’ PROCESS .....	87

CHAPTER FIVE A NOTE ON ETHICAL CONDUCT: WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY? .....	88
5.1 INTRODUCTION .....	88
5.2 AN OCCASION OF BULLYING .....	89
5.3 CO-RESPONSIBILITY .....	90
5.4 ETHICAL CONDUCT: AN ACTIVITY OF CO-RESPONSIBILITY .....	98
CHAPTER SIX IMOGEN .....	100
6.1 INTRODUCTION .....	100
6.2 IMOGEN.....	100
6.3 AN OCCASION OF ‘FAILING’: THINKING ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING AND LEARNING .....	102
6.4 IMOGEN’S INQUIRING .....	112
CHAPTER SEVEN SERENA .....	114
7.1 INTRODUCTION .....	114
7.2.SERENA.....	115
7.3.THINKING ABOUT SERENA.....	123
7.4 SERENA: A BUNDLE OF TRANSACTING LINES .....	137
CHAPTER EIGHT ELIZABETH.....	140
8.1 INTRODUCTION .....	140
8.2 ELIZABETH.....	143
8.3 AN ‘AUTO-TRANSACTIONAL’ REFLEXIVE ACCOUNT.....	157
8.4 CONTINUOUSLY <i>BECOMING</i> : HABITUAL ADAPTATION.....	174
8.5 ‘AUTO-TRANSACTIONAL’ REFLEXIVE INQUIRING AS A USEFUL TOOL.....	181
CHAPTER NINE CONCLUSION .....	183
9.1 INTRODUCTION .....	183
9.2 DISCUSSING THE RESEARCH.....	184
9.3 CONTRIBUTING TO THE FIELD(S).....	190
9.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS / POLICYMAKERS .....	199
9.5 ATTENDING TO SOME CRITIQUES.....	203
9.6 A FINAL WORD .....	211
LIST OF REFERENCES .....	212

---

WORD COUNT: 72,375

## LIST OF FIGURES, TABLES, ABBREVIATIONS

### FIGURES

Figure 1 Interconnecting Tasks of Practical Inquiring	76
Figure 2 Imogen and Elizabeth Conversing: speaking and hearing	77
Figure 3 Imogen and Elizabeth Conversing: unpredictable turns	77
Figure 4 Serena and Elizabeth conversing: remembering past occasions	81
Figure 5 Serena and Elizabeth conversing: past occasions through novel occasions	81
Figure 6 'Auto-transactional' Inquiring: a messy process	86
Figure 7 Conversational Transaction: Imogen & Elizabeth	103
Figure 8 Serena: a meshwork	138

### TABLES

Table 1 Summative Overview of Research Claims	186
-----------------------------------------------	-----

### ABBREVIATIONS

UK – United Kingdom	7,17,31,37,88,114,143,148,176
ACE – Adverse Childhood Experience	34,35,171
CHAT – Cultural Historical Activity Theory	44,45
YCG – Young Carers Group	117

## ABSTRACT

Poverty and associated adversity are considered ‘barriers’ to young people’s learning resulting in poor aggregate educational and life outcomes. Those who then ‘do well’ despite such challenges are often seen as resilient – a resilience attributed to young people’s agency and/or the supportive interventions they receive. Policymakers and practitioners, both in the UK and internationally, focus on developing ‘evidence-based’ approaches to address various adversities, build resilience, and ensure ‘poor’ young people ‘do well’. Problematically, much of this ‘evidence-based’ policy and practice begins from a dualistic perspective that suggests that humans and their minds (as subjects), and their bodies and environments (as objects), are separate. Young people are then seen as cognitively and materially impacted by external and separate structural/cultural factors in their environments constraining their engagement with, and success in, education. Where educationally ‘disadvantaged’ young people do buck the trend, this is often seen as the result of individualised forms of reflexivity and agency that are mediated by impacting interventions. This research problematises such static linear and separated cause (object) and effect (subject) thinking by privileging a fully interconnected and integrated, temporally dynamic transactional (co-impacting/co-constituting) person:environment unit of analysis. Drawing on a Deweyan/Pragmatist philosophy and utilising conversation, reflection, writing, and autobiography as methodological tools, the living of three young people who experience poverty and various adversities and yet ‘do well’ educationally, are explored. This takes a deeply relational/transactional approach to living, with each unique narrative demonstrating that; (i) young people live and learn in complex ways, which requires a focus on integrated person:environment transactional activities whereby both young people and environments reciprocally impact one another, (ii) young people are not separate from social/cultural ‘structures’ (e.g. poverty/race/class) rather, these are deeply relational habits (activities), co-constituted by their correspondence with dynamic environments and, (iii) young people continually adapt through their life course interweaving with environments/other humans which are continuously evolving as they are, each simultaneously co-impacting such that neither young people nor their environments are ever static. By focusing on a transactional person:environment unit of analysis, it can be seen that ‘adverse’ problems in young people’s lives need not deterministically result in poor outcomes. Instead, it appreciates the transactional novelty and dynamic interconnectedness of holistic experiencing, highlighting how such activity can be disruptive to the functional co-ordination and associated habits of young people. This provides an impetus for change and new opportunities for learning and development. Taking such an approach recognises how specific school-based ‘educational’ needs must be seen as one part of the broader social/cultural/other fields that co-constitute a young person’s experiencing. This research does not suggest that patterns of activities are non-existent. Rather, it seeks to disrupt linear cause-effect thinking, which suggests a one-dimensional direct impact between ‘adverse’ experiences and poor outcomes. Without thinking of poor young people’s experiencing in full transactional ways, there is every possibility that engagement with young people through schools or more indirectly via policy might be inappropriately ‘theorised’, particularly by suggesting narrow/singular notions of learning/intervention/impact/cause of specified practice.

## DECLARATION

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

## COPYRIGHT STATEMENT

The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns certain copyright or related rights in it (the “Copyright”) and s/he has given the University of Manchester certain rights to use such Copyright, including for administrative purposes.

Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts and whether in hard or electronic copy, may be made only in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (as amended) and regulations issued under it or, where appropriate, in accordance with licensing agreements which the University has from time to time. This page must form part of any such copies made. Presentation of Theses Policy You are required to submit your thesis electronically Page 11 of 26.

The ownership of certain Copyright, patents, designs, trademarks and other intellectual property (the “Intellectual Property”) and any reproductions of copyright works in the thesis, for example graphs and tables (“Reproductions”), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without the prior written permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions.

Further information on the conditions under which disclosure, publication and commercialisation of this thesis, the Copyright and any Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions described in it may take place is available in the University IP Policy (see <http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=24420>), in any relevant Thesis restriction declarations deposited in the University Library, the University Library’s regulations (see <http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/about/regulations/>) and in the University’s policy on Presentation of Theses.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my Uncle Jim, whose belief grew.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first ‘thank you’ goes to my previous Tutor, Liz, who has undoubtedly been part of my developing. I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Carlo Raffo and Professor Laura Black for supporting the process and development of this research. I have appreciated every debate, reassurance, and laugh that we shared. Professor Raffo, you introduced me to the ideas I discuss in this research, and I must thank you especially for your part in the evolution of my entire project, and philosophy. I also thank Professor Julian Williams for reading early ideas enthusiastically and encouraging me to develop my thinking. I thank the staff at Serena and Imogen’s school for their facilitation. I am also grateful to the school and to NWSSDTP for providing the funding for this research. Equally, I thank John Dewey, for your legacy of ideas – it has been an experience.

To Lauren, thank you for building with me, for loving me, and for pushing me no matter how much resistance you were met with. To Tash, thank you for making me laugh uncontrollably, for always checking in, and for reminding me there is always more to life! You mean more to me than you know. Thank you to my ‘radiator’ friend, Rebecca, for the conversation that was a significant part to beginning this research, and for encouraging me throughout both my masters and doctorate journeys. Equally, I thank my family for their endless support, encouragement, and loving me even when I was not particularly loveable! To my brother, you have taught me things no book ever could. A special thanks to Christine for sharing your grammar-checking talents when reading my work. I hope you have enjoyed watching a ‘purple, fluffy, bubble’ grow.

A wealth of gratitude goes to my fiancée, Jessie. You have been with me through the hardest parts of reaching this ‘end’. You’ve debated ideas with me, you’ve read countless versions of my work, and you’ve become your own kind of expert on Dewey. You’ve also considered some of the most challenging moments in your life to consider the usefulness of some of the ideas I discuss here, and I appreciate what that process involved. This ‘end’ product is as much a testament to your strength and determination as it is to mine. I admire you, and love you, beyond words.

Most importantly, I thank Serena and Imogen for allowing me to inquire with them and record their living in words. And I thank all children who have, do, or will, *live* poverty: may your *experiencing* be rich, and your voices always be heard.

Ultimately, ‘thank you’ is not enough to express how grateful I am to four unrecognised heroes.

To Gran and Grandad, your memories live on through paths untrodden.

To Mum and Dad, all of it will always be for you.

## “HALLO”

This journey has no concrete ‘beginning’ or ‘ending’ and has become part of my living, interwoven with various parts of my experiencing. Thus, I invite the reader to come on a journey with me as we wander together through a few years of inquiring. Perhaps as the reader reaches the final pages of this thesis, they might see how my experiencing has become part of their own experiencing, for we humans are all connected in more intimate ways than we may have ever realised. Foremost, I hope this text is enjoyable and engaging.

This research is deeply personal for Imogen, Serena, and myself so it seems appropriate that my first words here are equally so. My Gran often said to me “saying Hello to someone can go a long way”.

For that reason, I welcome you, or in my Gran’s Scottish spirit, “Hallo”.

## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH

*I stand there with two loaves of bread in one hand and a bin-liner filled with tins in the other. And yet, I can walk away and write about this experience.*

This extract is taken from a diary entry I wrote near to the beginning of this research journey. As I reflected on a moment of delivering a food parcel to a family experiencing poverty, I was reminded of the privilege this doctoral position provides, despite once being described as ‘poor’ myself. Since then, I have vowed to use this platform to offer more concrete understandings of two young women who are experiencing poverty and a whole host of other challenges and yet are ‘doing well’ through schooling. Becoming connected through the memories we shared, I began to understand how I have also evolved from ‘that girl on the council estate’<sup>1</sup>. Together, we may reflect ‘anomalies’ in some general trends, but our living and learning ‘against the odds’ is far more than any figures, statistical data, or numbers that we represent.

These are our stories.

### 1.1 CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW

Poverty, and associated adversity, are ‘barriers’ to the schooling of young people which ‘determine their school, and life, outcomes’ (Loomis, 2021; Duke, 2020; Lafavor, Boer, & Poole, 2020; Choi, Wang & Jackson, 2019; Teyhan, Boyd, Wijedasa & Macleod, 2019; Almquist & Brännström, 2018; Platt, McLaughlin, Luedtke, Ahern, Kaufman & Keyes, 2018). This is a long-standing, general, consensus amongst scholars, policymakers, and practitioners concerned with young people and education, internationally. As everyday living becomes increasingly complicated, particularly given the multitude and complexity of challenges faced by ‘poor’ people – including how such adversities have become exacerbated by a worldwide pandemic recently – the breadth and intensity of any proposed

---

<sup>1</sup> A council estate refers to housing areas/complexes where the properties are predominantly owned/managed by the local council (and sometimes now, housing authority). Such properties are often rented by residents at a significantly lower price than privately rented properties.

policy/practice responses continue to challenge all those involved (Reimers, 2021; White & McCallum, 2021).

One evolving and central problem for those concerned with the educational engagement and attainment of ‘poor’ or ‘disadvantaged’ young people is better understanding their complex lives, particularly as it pertains to both in- and out-of-school factors, with growing attention to the experiences of such young people and their families (Treanor, 2020). Thus far, much focus has been about improving existing, and developing new, approaches to address the various adversities which pose barriers to learning, to ensure such ‘poor’ young people’s ‘outcomes’ meet a particular standard which is enabling for their future endeavours (Lampert, Ball, Garcia-Carrion & Burnett, 2020). More recently, there has been a concerted effort to focus on the distinctness of particular types of adversity in determining educational outcomes, and the extent to which any interventions of support affect such outcomes (DeJoseph, Sifre, Raver, Blair, & Berry, 2021; Pan, Zaff & Porche, 2020). Such research has increasingly examined what might be viewed as ‘anomalies’ to aggregate trends, those achieving ‘against the odds’ by doing well despite adversity (Crivello & Morrow, 2020) and in so doing, demonstrating how, and in what forms, they have developed ‘resilience’ (Gartland, Riggs, Muyeen, Giallo, Afifi, MacMillan, Herrman, Bulford & Brown, 2019). Explanations pertaining to notions of ‘resilience’ are often theorised as caused by the young person’s self-authoring (often understood as an individual’s reflexive intentionality), supported by interventions which create affordances, both material and cognitive, that are then enabling of enhanced levels of educational agency to navigate/overcome ‘adverse’ barriers.

Put simply, the field of educational disadvantage can be generally split around two rather distinctive levels of analysis. At one level such research focuses on the social determinants of educational attainment and other outcomes that demonstrate how ‘poor’ young people who face adversity tend not to ‘do well’ educationally, including research focusing on ‘closing this gap’. At a different level, arguments also focus on those disadvantaged young people who buck the trend suggesting that something caused their divergence from the norm which was either a result of something internal, or external, to the individual or both. This research is concerned with what I will argue are the limitations of such dichotomous thinking. Hence, I am

not suggesting that aggregate trends demonstrating a connection between poverty and poor/low educational outcomes are inaccurate. Rather, I am offering an alternative set of suggestions about how we might make sense of those ‘anomalous’ young people who continue to ‘do well’ educationally, through poverty and other challenges.

As will be elaborated below, this research draws on Deweyan-Pragmatic ideas of transaction to overcome the limitations of current research concerned with either deterministic accounts of educational failure, or with under-theorised understandings of resilience. It will do so by exploring examples of ‘poor’ individuals who are educational anomalies and appear at first sight to be individually resilient, through a deeply social and relational theoretical lens. Based on this, I will argue that understanding the educational journeying of young people needs to be done in a way that focuses on young people’s deeply embedded, relational, concrete, and evolving living in the fullness of one’s societal life. Fundamentally, such a focus sees the person and their environment as mutual, interconnected and reciprocal. I will exemplify this argument by drawing on the evolving and adaptive living of two young women – Imogen and Serena<sup>2</sup> – who are experiencing poverty and associated challenges deemed to be ‘adverse’, and yet ‘doing well’ through schooling. I will also engage with an autobiographical process of reflexive inquiring into my own living and learning as I journey through various social/cultural/educational environments.

I now turn to introducing the journey of this research, which will later be elaborated on in Chapter Four, beginning with how I met Serena and Imogen.

## 1.2 AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY

---

### 1.2.1 LAUGHTER, RAPPING, AND ‘DROPPED TOAST’

As I walked towards Serena (the first young woman central to my study) to introduce myself for the first time, I was incredibly distracted by the toast in her hand, so much so that my first words to her were “well, I didn’t know we were

---

<sup>2</sup> ‘Serena’ and ‘Imogen’ are pseudonyms chosen by each young woman to protect their anonymity.

bringing toast, I'm so hungry". As she went to offer me a piece from her napkin-wrapped handful, it fell to the floor butter-side down. A sad, yet funny, moment that somehow involved us both laughing so loud we were quickly ushered along the corridor by a passing member of staff. This 'messy' morning before either of us had even said 'hello' was just the beginning of what would become a scattered, unplanned, warm journey together that reflected a similar 'messiness' to our butter-down toast encounter. Indeed, some of the stories we shared brought tears of sadness to both our eyes, whilst others had us laughing so much that tears of joy rolled down our cheeks.

I first met Imogen (the second young woman central to my study) when I 'borrowed' her from her maths lesson, much to her delight. After a brief introduction to myself and the intended research, her decision to participate came down to two pertinent questions "Will I get out of more maths lessons?" and "Will there be cakes and biscuits?". Upon learning that our group sessions would be on Monday mornings instead, posing a disruption to a different lesson, she replied "that's just as good, I'm in".

Imogen was a confident contributor during the group sessions<sup>3</sup> with five other students, despite being the youngest, and often mentioned the latest news as she appeared to be an avid follower. Serena was less forthcoming in group contexts, but both girls would hang back at the end of the session to talk to me personally.

As Imogen and I walked to our first individual meeting some months after our first encounter, she asked "do you like rap music?". Confirming that I did, she followed with "can you rap?" Perhaps trying to come up with a few lyrics that rhymed, as we turned our final corridor, was what confirmed to Imogen the age gap between us. I must admit that I had never really felt 'old' in a school context before that moment. As our conversations evolved, Serena described me as "like an older sister you'd be a similar age to [sister] I think" whereas Imogen said I was "like an aunt because you're old" but quickly responded to my mock horror with "but like a really fun

---

<sup>3</sup> Group sessions refer to initial meetings with a group of students including Imogen and Serena aimed at establishing research relations/research engagement. Due to the several logistical/engagement issues, several students were unable to participate in the research hence, group sessions concluded and individual sessions with Imogen and Serena respectively began – discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

aunt”. These descriptions summarise what were short but warm relationships where the three of us unfolded the stories of our lives.

What follows is an introduction to our journeying together, which is elaborated on further in Chapter Four. This depicts how the journey began from an initial research plan aimed at better understanding their families’ experiencing to an evolving research relation with Imogen and Serena, specifically.

---

### 1.2.2 A SHIFTING PLAN

This section depicts the ‘messiness’ of this unexpected and unfolding research journey which became less *intentional* and more *attentional*, notions which shall be elucidated further in Chapter Four when discussing methodological processes.

#### INTENDING TO EXPLORE ‘INTERVENTIONAL IMPACT’

This research journey began with a specific focus on exploring the educational and community interventions delivered through a community-schooling operation intended to impact young people and their families’ experiencing of educational disadvantage. The school is located in a ‘high-poverty’ area defined as such by 200,000 young people living in households below the 60% median income after housing costs (gmpovertyaction, 2021). Moreover, ‘Educational disadvantage’, according to the initial research proposal, was defined as poor quality of, and limited access to, service provisions which are the ‘social determinants’ (Dyson et al., 2009) of poor educational outcomes and reflect wider inequalities. These definitions speak to more localised understandings of poverty in the UK, which are seen to manifest as,

not being able to heat your home, pay your rent, or buy the essentials for your children. It means waking up every day facing insecurity, uncertainty, and impossible decisions about money. It means facing marginalisation – and even discrimination – because of your financial circumstances. The constant stress it causes can lead to problems that deprive people of the chance to play a full part in society (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2021).

Noteworthy, such localised manifestations are relatively comparable in international terms, where poverty is defined as ‘more than the lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods’ and where ‘manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social

discrimination, and exclusion, as well as the lack of participation in decision-making' (UN, 2021). Indeed, such a 'lack of income' internationally is measured by living on less than \$1.90 per day (World Bank, 2021).

Premised on such understandings of disadvantage then, the initial research plan aimed to better understand the 'lived experiences' (discussed further in Chapter Four) of a 'case' selection of 'disadvantaged' families who were engaging with a newly available cohesive support package of interventions offered by the school in question. It did this in order to determine (i) the lived experiences of 'disadvantage', (ii) the impact of the multiple interventions and (iii) how the interventional support package, and individual interventional practices, could be improved. The general purpose of these interventional support packages was targeted at 'poverty proofing' young people and their families and 'mitigating educational disadvantage' as a result (notions referred to by the school funding/guiding the initial research).

In practice, this initial plan evolved in incredibly 'messy' ways which involved shifts in how my activities unfolded as a researcher in the school, and how this pertained to evolving encounters with both students and academic supervisors. For example, there were challenges at the outset of the research which pertained to the delivery of the interventional support packages being implemented by the school, the logistics of meeting with families and young people, and a change of supervisory team. Amidst such changes, I began to recognise that there were tensions in trying to explore the impact of schooling interventions on educational disadvantage in linear ways, without reflecting upon the whole host of dynamic, evolving and hence, relational ways young people and their family's living unfolded. Indeed, such tensions involved prioritising particular parts of these people's lives (e.g., engagement with an intervention) without attending to how a specific intervention (e.g., food parcels/extra-curricular lessons) was only one part of the family's/young person's evolving activities which included many other members and continually shifting activities through various environments. The deep sociality of such interconnecting, evolving activities shall be exemplified in greater detail in upcoming chapters, beginning with Imogen. This made me begin to view a more linear impact-orientated account as a potential separatist abstraction which did not attend to young people's interconnected, adaptive, and evolving living. Given further issues with



student/school engagement and logistics, the research then evolved to focus on the living of Imogen and Serena, specifically.

As the research progressed, what began to emerge further from my conversations with Imogen and Serena was the vast web of on-going, interconnecting occasions of their living that suggested shifting and evolving activities with various environments<sup>4</sup> and various protagonists. Importantly, such conversations further problematised the intentions of the initial project. Indeed, whilst the aims had been developed to focus primarily on young people, the initial focus was limited in capturing and understanding the complexity of these young people's full experiencing. Primarily, I became concerned about the static and linear assumptions that underpinned the original aims such as (i) that the young people are 'disadvantaged', (ii) that some 'thing' was causing this 'disadvantage', (iii) that it was possible for educational/community interventions to 'mediate' the 'disadvantage' and (iv) that the 'impact' of these interventions could be understood primarily through young people's 'lived experience of the interventions'. Fundamentally, I was concerned with how these assumptions separated persons from their environments (and activities with others) and hence, overlooked the complexity of unpredictable, continuous, and interconnected living, of which the 'intervention' activities were only one part.

As my thinking about these problems developed, there appeared to be some scope for attending to some of this empirical complexity and activity through the writings of Dewey and other Pragmatists, principally concerned with a transactional unity of persons-with-environments-and-others which appreciates these continuous, interconnected, complexities. During on-going dialogue with Imogen, Serena, and my supervisory team, the research plan evolved through a transactional/pragmatic framework, to take a more holistic approach to understanding young people, poverty, and education.

---

<sup>4</sup> Environment refers not only to 'natural' environments in terms of materiality, but also to 'cultural situations and surroundings that make up the world' (Sullivan, 2001, p. 2)

The transactional approach underpinning this research takes person and environment as one, whole, unit to begin practical instrumental inquiry. In so doing, the approach recognises that young people and their environments are reciprocal, each impacting the other, in an immanent unity. This differentiates from *interactional* ways of thinking about young people and their environments which underpinned the initial focus of the study. Such ideas often assume a one-dimensional causal impact (usually the environment on the young person) and overlook the merging of many environments (all fields of activity) which are co-constituted by the young person *with* their environments and others as a whole adapting continuum. Thus, humans are both *doing to* their environments/others whilst also simultaneously *undergoing* their environments/others, as all transact in reciprocal activity continuously and in unfolding dynamic ways, spatiotemporally. This evolving symbiotic co-constitution then encapsulates the ways in which person and environment (including other persons) are one whole unit which relate in a way that means both are potentially adapting and changing together through the nature of the evolving relation (person:environment).

To offer a rudimentary example, two people are in conversation (a shared transaction) about their morning activity. They are changing through the conversation such that neither are the same prior to the conversation, for example they have grown slightly older (even by minutes) given that time is not static, and they have information they did not have at the beginning of the conversation (i.e., Person A went for a morning run and Person B was in a meeting). The content of the conversation about their morning activities is only one possibility, however, conversations are unfolding occasions open to novel possibilities (i.e., Person A then says she saw a dog and Person B responds by discussing her own dog). The two have changed through their shared occasion and the information they have now, and the time that has passed, cannot be reversed. Hence, the two persons have changed rather than simply added together, and then reverted back to their previous state (i.e., slightly younger and with no knowledge of the other's morning activities and the dogs) – notions that shall continue to be exemplified throughout this thesis. As Abowitz (2000) succinctly puts it,

Transaction is the condition of seeing things not in isolation, nor in terms of their "true" nature or essence, but in terms of their systemic context, their tentative and preliminary status as points of inquiry, their places in an organic world of expanding space and time. (pp. 878-879).

By beginning with this transactional person:environment unit of analysis, the co-constituting/co-impacting (transactional) relation of a person *with environment (and others)*, which departs from static assumptions of one-dimensional linear causal impacts (i.e., poverty on the young person/intervention on challenges of poverty), is appreciated.

Regarding the substantive concern specifically, this Deweyan/transactional approach, together with my initial understandings of the young people who were experiencing various 'poverty' challenges and yet 'doing well' through schooling, provided a way forward to better understand their dynamic living. Indeed, such concepts/ideas of transaction, together with the empirical accounts, suggested how progress might continue through 'adverse' occasions by *attending* to these unpredictable moments as parts of Imogen/Serena/Elizabeth's full living. These 'unpredictable' moments (e.g., death of a loved one) which at times presented challenges to the (habitual) stream of the person's living (e.g., transacting with that loved one), connected with transactional ideas of habit. This notion of 'habit' recognises the habitual nature of human actions as they functionally correspond with environments and others (e.g., daily activities such as studying) and which, when disrupted by 'challenging' moments, force the person to reconfigure. Such adaptative reconfiguration can mean that whilst one habitual activity may break completely (i.e., person transacting/studying with a loved one), other habitual activities shift and adapt to this moment (i.e., studying continues without the loved one). Moreover, such 'disruptive' moments can also generate a problem that requires reflexive inquiring, thus providing a stimulus for learning new habits (e.g., developing ways of studying alone or with new others). Accordingly, attending to a person's (sociocultural) habitual activities, and how these shift and develop spatiotemporally, better attends to the dynamic complexity of their full living. This does not prioritise singular activities, but rather attends to the symbiotic interconnection of all activities which co-constitute the person's evolution/growth - notions which shall continue to be elaborated on in upcoming chapters.

It is with this change from ‘utilising tools aimed at specific *intentional* outcomes’ (e.g., ‘impact’ of a particular intervention) to ‘exploratory tools open to *attentional* creativeness’ (e.g., what actually happens in the living of a person that suggests moments of learning), that the current research problem emerged. Thus, this research is concerned with the potential fluid novelty of on-going living.

### 1.3 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM: AN OVERVIEW

The task of this research has become one of practical-instrumental inquiry, premised on metaphysical Deweyan/Pragmatist ideas, concerned with better understanding the complex living of young people experiencing poverty and associated challenges and yet who are ‘doing well’ educationally. This thesis is concerned with the experiencing of two young people, and myself, who seemingly associate(d) with this heuristic category. As noted above, the problem with much current thinking and policy making/practice is that it takes for granted a dualistic perspective of living that suggests an analytical separation of the young person from other individuals and/or the environment in which they live. The person is then said to be impacted on by external structural and cultural forces and/or other persons, adapting and changing to the mediating power of those forces (e.g., class-based arguments for educational ‘failure’). Or, depending on the explanation adopted, enabling those forces to be mediated by forms of cognitive agency - as will continue to be discussed in further detail in the following chapter. In taking for granted the dualisms of a young person’s separation of mind from body/others, a person’s cognitive reflexivity and self-authoring provides the means for potential control over the body and the other ideas characteristic in notions of resilience as a mediator between structure and an individual’s agency.

Departing from such dualistic notions, the position underpinning this research begins from a transactional premise which recognises the functional, reciprocal, unity of persons with their environments and others (persons:environments) that cannot be separated analytically when attending to concrete realities. Indeed, without a focus on mediators/atomised parts of an interaction (either person *or* environment), I am able to attend to the intransitive relation of continuous co-becoming of all parts of a person:environment unit – for example that which includes artifacts, tools, signs, and the human agent without prioritising any one part of this whole unit as linearly

*causal*. Thus, concern lies with the interweaving threads of these parts which come together to form a full meshwork of a deeply intimate relation of persons with natural/social/cultural occasions of their living with others. In other words, departing from mediators as a means to connect otherwise severed attributes (e.g., person and environment; person and schooling) allows us to pursue analyses in which persons are made salient by focusing on the irreducible developmental dynamics of the full unit, instead of on constituent, mediated parts. With this practical inquiry-orientated approach in mind then, two exploratory questions have directed attention to this research problem concerned with the full experiencing of ‘poor’ young people who are ‘doing well’ educationally:

- I. How are young people who are experiencing poverty and associated adversity living and learning?
- II. What does this mean for understanding ‘poor’ young people who ‘do well’ educationally?

#### 1.4 CONTRIBUTING TO THE FIELD(S)

Whilst the contribution of this research to the field shall be exemplified in Chapter Nine, it is useful to provide a summative overview here. By drawing on transactional ideas, this research provides a more useful and appropriate tool for understanding the complexity of human living by taking separately the full experiencing of two young people and my own living as the appropriate units of analysis. This abandons notions of ‘resilience’ (e.g., as a supposed mediator between subjective cognition and action) and ideas of ‘anomalies’ and rather, explicates how a person might be experiencing poverty and other challenges as they transact with environments and others, whilst also ‘doing well’ educationally. This experiencing includes learning through habitual activity, and adapting through disruptions to habitual activity, as a person transacts through various environments. I argue that this is developmental growth, one that cannot singularly be controlled or intervened in. Indeed, for some young people – through on-going forms of transacting with others – the process of habitual adaptation is providing transacted forms of experiencing within and beyond school that is enabling of school learning, development, and educational attainment.

Fundamentally, the piece offers an empirically rich illustration of how concrete realities are co-constituted by a mutual doing and undergoing of person with environments as the two functionally correspond in functional activity and hence, continue to unfold unpredictable occasions. This accentuates the limitations of dualistic/linear cause-effect explanations, which do not recognise the mutual reciprocity whereby a person is not primarily undergoing her environments, and those explanations premised upon static notions of living which do not appreciate the dynamic continuity of living persons.

Moreover, the piece offers a methodological contribution by demonstrating a process of ‘auto-transactional’ inquiring. This involves an autobiographical exploration which reflects upon my past in the present through an evolved depository of experiencing. This makes sense of particularly ‘painful’ occasions in understanding my own adaptation and dynamic journeying through several years of compulsory and further education, where I continue to ‘do well’ despite a myriad of challenges, some of which are associated with poverty.

### 1.5 STRUCTURE OF THIS THESIS

Given that the structure of this thesis does not necessarily take a ‘traditional’ form, it is necessary to read the chapters chronologically hereafter.

In Chapter Two, I scope the relevant fields concerned with young people, poverty, and education, and more specifically explanations concerned with those young people who ‘do well’ or are ‘resilient’ to poverty and associated adversity. In problematising these explanations, I introduce the overarching idea of transaction as one which refrains from separatist/dualistic notions of young people living and learning. Primarily, I present the problem of inquiry with which this research is concerned in more detail.

I then move to Chapter Three where I elaborate on the transactional ideas introduced in this chapter (One) and Chapter Two, including elucidating the specific transactional conceptual tools which frame the thinking of this research. This begins with a history of some of the ideas including the pragmatic/Deweyan philosophy, with reference to the work of scholars whose ideas have extended and/or developed some of this early thinking. This is followed by a more in-depth discussion of the

transactional approach and the specific concepts which I find useful in understanding the complexity of young people's living and learning. Fundamentally, the discussion rationalises how the transactional approach is more useful in understanding young people who are experiencing 'adversity' and yet 'doing well' through schooling, who might otherwise be narrowly considered as 'resilient' or 'anomalies'.

What follows is an exploration of methodological thinking through inquiring transactionally, presented in Chapter Four. Here, I begin by problematising the concept 'methodology'. I then outline what I suggest is the more appropriate approach – practical instrumental inquiring – in overcoming some of the methodological limitations of current explanations concerned with 'poor' young people who 'do well' educationally. I then expand on the journeying of this research as introduced in this chapter (one), by exemplifying the 'messy' co-constitutional nature of practical instrumental inquiring into concrete realities. I also outline what I term an 'auto-transactional' process of reflexive inquiring which discusses how I engaged with an autobiographical account of my living, to consider the shifts in how I make sense of such living, spatiotemporally.

Chapter Five becomes an extension of the methodologically-orientated Chapter Four, by considering the notions of 'ethics' and 'ethical conduct'. This problematises some more traditional ways of thinking/doing 'ethical' research together with an empirical account of unfolding 'research' occasioning. This involves further acquainting the reader with the transactional relationship involving Imogen and myself with others.

Chapter Six then presents the living of Imogen in greater detail. This builds upon the occasion outlined in Chapter Five and pertains to a particular occasion which Imogen describes as a moment of 'failing' a maths exam, through one classroom experience. In so doing, I introduce the reader to transactional thinking together with the empirical narratives and elaborate on the fundamental ideas of habitual activity and learning through transactional occasions.

In Chapter Seven, I further acquaint the reader with Serena beginning with an in-depth description of multiple occasions and diverse complexities throughout her living so far. This includes a development of the ideas outlined in Chapter Six pertaining to Imogen's one classroom occasion, by considering experiencing through various activities/experiences which speak to notions of race, grieving, and support.

I then move to Chapter Eight, where I introduce a biographical account of my living which offers a development of transactional ideas, but this time based on a longer period of living (than those outlined in the accounts of Imogen and Serena), through childhood/adolescence/adulthood and various activities/environments beyond compulsory schooling occasions. This also involves problematising some of my earlier thinking about my living that utilises more deterministic/separatist tools by adopting a transactional approach to reflexive inquiring.

This thesis then concludes with Chapter Nine where I begin by drawing together all of the ideas presented in the previous chapters. In so doing, I foreground the fundamental claims emerging from this research before outlining the contribution such suggestions make to the field. I also discuss some critiques associated with Deweyan and pragmatic ideas, before outlining potential areas for future research which may expand on the ideas presented in this thesis.

## 1.6 A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Before moving to the main body of this thesis, it is necessary to highlight a few areas of language with the potential for misconception. As with all scholarly work, it is not possible to account for all linguistic interpretations and so, I prefer here to point to the complexity of the concepts discussed and then elaborate/exemplify ideas throughout the remaining chapters.

This research is concerned with young people deemed to be ‘poor’ and as such, notions of poverty, disadvantage, and educational disadvantage are used interchangeably according to variations in research literature. Primarily, this research is concerned with three people who do/have experience(d) economic/food/housing poverty or insecurity as well as other associated ‘adversity’, as shall come to be explained. Additionally, Serena and Imogen are both part of the government-funded Free School Meals (FSM) scheme at their school, as well as receiving other support as shall be detailed in their respective chapters (Six and Seven). Moreover, ‘doing well’ is considered aggregately, according to schooling measures, whereby both Imogen/Serena/Elizabeth are in the ‘top sets’ in their respective years for their



subject classes and are achieving class/test/assessment grades in-line with, or more often above, school/FSM<sup>5</sup> averages in most subjects<sup>6</sup>.

The fundamental starting premise of this research is that person and environment co-constitute (co-impact) a single, whole, organic unit. Therefore, where I use the terms ‘person’ or ‘environment’, I do so in respect of the person:environment unit as a whole. Similarly, the connotations of ‘person’ are utilised fluidly in the literature as ‘individual’ and ‘human’ and so, I also use these terms interchangeably.

Where I refer to ‘thinking’, I do so in a way that incorporates thought, feeling, doing and cognition as an entire activity. This opposes any notion of thinking as a mechanism ‘internal’ to one’s mind and shall become clearer in the following chapter where I discuss a pragmatic/Deweyan approach to the human body. Specifically, ‘thinking’ refers to the process of pragmatic inquiring which directs this research and, as shall become clearer in Chapter Three, is a process of open-mindedness and creative problem-solving or as Dewey puts it, ‘to maintain the state of doubt and to carry on systematic and protracted inquiry - these are the essentials of thinking’ (Dewey, 1910, p. 13).

When referring to the transactional approach, I sporadically use terms ‘transaction’, ‘transactional’, ‘transacted’, ‘transactionalism’, as linguistic extensions of this term. I similarly refer to Deweyan/Pragmatic approaches which I consider to constitute the same pool of ideas pertinent to the arguments I present.

Moreover, I utilise what might be described as ‘fabric metaphors’ (e.g., threading, weaving, knotting). Sullivan (2001), drawing on the work of Nancy Tuana, suggests that such ‘fabric metaphors’ may distract from the concept of person:environment as one unit, by separating the unit into atoms which are ‘threaded together’. Whilst I appreciate this point, I clarify here that I use ‘fabric metaphors’ in a transactional

---

<sup>5</sup> Receiving free schools meals has, for some time, been used as an indicator of poverty/deprivation levels amongst young people in the UK. A plethora of literature has also been concerned with the relations of FSM and educational outcomes, particularly the ‘attainment’ gap between FSM and non-FSM pupils (cf. Education Endowment Foundation, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Imogen/Serena’s grades have been identified using the school’s assessment tracking system, as well as comments by teachers/themselves about their in-class test scores for subjects taken at Key Stage Three (KS3). My own grades are taken from previous assessments at KS3/GCSE/Degree levels.

sense which appreciates the distinctness of ‘person’ and ‘environment’ but understands these as *functionally* inseparable – notions which shall again become clearer in the following chapter.

It is also worth mentioning that in terms of referenced sources, names and years (e.g. Dewey, 1910) are used for abbreviated content; pages numbers are added where direct quotations are used; ‘cf.’ is used for content which has been considered in regard to the point being made and, ‘see also’ is used to refer the reader to additional sources which may be of relevance/interest.

## CHAPTER TWO THE PROBLEM OF INQUIRY

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter scopes the current fields of literature concerned with young people, poverty, and education. I begin the chapter by presenting a synthesis of the literature which have been heuristically organised in terms of self-actional, interactional, and relational approaches. In so doing, I highlight the limitations of many mainstream existing explanations concerned with young people, poverty, and education that are often premised upon a dualistic, static ontology. Such literature seems to begin from a premise that separates persons from their environments and suggests one-dimensional explanations whereby the person is impacted by the environment. Such explanations tend to overlook what I suggest is a more complete understanding of the actions of people, one that is premised on a two-dimensional, mutually reciprocating, person:environment relation. I then briefly introduce the transactional approach that, I argue, overcomes these static dualistic limitations by utilising a full unit of analysis that does not separate persons from their environments, and which appreciates the dynamic continuity of living. I conclude the chapter by discussing the problem of inquiry and the questions which direct attention to this problem.

### 2.2 PROBLEMATISING THE FIELD: A DUALISTIC STATIC ONTOLOGY

As noted earlier the substantive concern of this research pertains to ‘poor’ young people who are experiencing poverty and associated adversity and yet ‘doing well’ educationally, specifically attending to the ways in which poverty is unfolding through the interconnecting processes of their schooling and more general living. Thus, this section details a scoping and synthesising of relevant literature concerned with the associated challenges of ‘adverse experiences’ as they pertain to educational engagement and attainment. More specific literature concerned with concepts of ‘race’, ‘grief’, and ‘class’ emerging from engagement with the empirical accounts of this research, are discussed in relevant Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight respectively. Furthermore, this scoping activity was supported by the theoretical alignment of this research with a transactional approach and, in so doing, looks to the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of research which covers both theoretical and

methodological practice. Whilst the interconnectedness of theory and method is recognised as inseparable in a transactional approach, relevant literature concerned with particularly relevant ‘methods’ of practice are considered in more detail in Chapter Four.

Moreover, it is both difficult and somewhat reductive to establish theoretical (or ‘thinking’) categories and assign sometimes large groups of research based on similar ideas to each category. Indeed, there exists a plethora of research internationally concerned with policy, discourse, and practice as it pertains to understandings of, and responses to, poverty and education (cf. Raffo, Dyson, Gunter, Hall, Jones & Kalambouka, 2010; Raffo, 2014; Bibby, Lupton & Raffo, 2016). Hence, this activity of scoping the literature is a process of reviewing and categorising which involves the production of a heuristic to aid understanding without oversimplifying complexity.

Noteworthy, the extent of the literature is such that various terms are used which pertain to the substantive concern. For example, the term ‘poverty’ is at times interchangeably conceptualised alongside notions of ‘inequality’, ‘disadvantage’, and ‘adversity’. To appropriately consider the breadth of this literary field concerned with young people, these various concepts, and associated synonyms, were used during literature searching activities. However, for clarity in the scoping outline presented here, the term ‘poverty’ will be utilised to encapsulate each of these concepts, referring to other terms only where necessary.

In terms of searching for literature, the University of Manchester library search was the primary engine. This library search engine combines several cross-disciplinary databases (e.g., ERIC; JSTOR) and the ‘advanced search’ tool was used to focus searches on the substantive criteria based on keywords and synonyms (e.g., poor, young people/children/adolescents, attainment, learning, schooling interventions). However, specific journals were also consulted as the empirical narratives evolved (e.g., *Mind, Culture and Activity Journal*). Reviewing literature then became an on-going, iterative process with the empirical narratives. Indeed, this study initially focused on the causal impact of interventions on ‘disadvantaged’ young people, which is where initial literature searching/reviewing began. However, my engagement with Serena and Imogen highlighted a whole set of factors that were

unfolding in their lives that were emergent and evolving and required some sort of recognition by me as the researcher. For example, young people doing well, despite poverty, demonstrated an intricate set of relations that did not appear to be explained by some class-based/race-based or resilience arguments emerging from relevant literature concerned with ‘poor’ young people and their education/learning. Indeed, such literature tended to see the individual as separate, at some level or another, from the full complexity of life, as opposed to embedded in the complex problem of their doing and undergoing, through environments with others (transacting).

Consequently, I was drawn to more deeply relational ideas, and in particular Dewey, who had some intuitively interesting theorisations that seemed to connect much more strongly to the empirical narratives. Further reading suggested that a paradigmatic categorisation of studies around his notions of the self-actional, interactional, and transactional would be useful to understand how, and in what ways, the person/environment relation was being explained, particularly in regard to poverty and education. This was reinforced by other similarly orientated reviews (cf. Raffo & Roth, 2020) hence, this is the process of categorisation I utilised. What will become clearer in the following exemplified sections, is the ways in which current arguments – whether taking a more self-actional/interactional/relational approach – do not go as far as Deweyan/transactional ideas to recognise the reciprocal immanence of person:environment unity, that I suggest better attends to the full complexity of concrete living.

---

### 2.2.1 SELF-ACTIONAL

Some literature concerned with young people, poverty, and schooling may be described as taking a ‘self-actional’ approach ‘where things are viewed as acting under their own powers’, (Dewey & Bentley, 1973, pp. 132-33). Thus, it is assumed that young people are self-acting individuals, despite factors which may enable or prohibit such action. Such ideas may more recently be considered neo-liberal, which is often said to advocate for self-actualisation. Indeed, neo-liberal ideas view the self-acting individual as both responsible for, and able to, transcend poverty by acting in ways advantageous in the market (e.g., making appropriate choices) - as shall come to be exemplified.

An abundance of educational psychology literature has been based on self-actional premises. These include those based in the domains of (i) cognition, which assumes skills and knowledge are internal to the person and (ii) behaviour, whereby individuals seemingly mentally ‘construct identities’, ‘even in aspects of lives that are not inherently mental, such as gender’ (Roth, 2019, p. 3), as well as a school’s role in autonomous identity development (cf. Verhoeven, Poorthuis, & Volman, 2019). For example, notions of ‘motivations’, ‘feelings’, and ‘intelligence’ remain premised upon ideas of internal mental functioning, particularly where young people’s aspirations’, ‘attainment’, and how to intervene in their lives to promote these, are concerned (cf. Savvides & Bond, 2021; Vu, Magis-Weinberg, Jansen, van Atteveldt, Janssen, Lee, van der Maas, Raijmakers, Sachisthal & Meeter, 2021; Cockcroft & Atkinson, 2017; Zaff, Donlan, Gunning, Anderson, McDermott & Sedaca, 2017). Notably, Dewey’s criticism of simple ideas of, and means to measure ‘intelligence’, and advocacy for a complex understanding of the human mind, put his ideas at the periphery of psychology as a discipline (Glassman, 2004). Noteworthy, social, and cultural psychologies of education are considered in the following sections.

For example, measuring ‘intelligence’ by various means (e.g., class/schooling grades) underpinned by notions of ‘the mental’ continue to dominate psychological and educational domains. In the UK specifically, since the 1990s, continuing to the present, there has been a concerted (neo-liberal) political effort to ‘raise aspirations’ in order to increase ‘educational attainment’ (cf. McKenna, 2020; Spohrer, Stahl & Bowers-Brown, 2018). Widening participation debates, particularly in relation to elite universities, assume that there are ‘inherently’ cognitively intelligent working class/poor young people who must aspire for better futures (cf. DfE, 2014). These ideas then tend to link individualised biological/psychological constructs like intelligence to self-authoring ideas of aspiration. This then tends to treat intelligence as one internalised psychological construct amongst others, similar to notions such as ‘ability’, ‘gifted and talented’ (cf. Sternberg & Ambrose, 2021), ‘executive function’ (cf. Willoughby, Wylie & Little, 2019), and ‘cognitive load’ (Sweller, 1988; Sweller, van Merriënboer & Paas, 2019). Similarly, there is a long-standing consensus internationally, that ‘aspirations’ of young people are linked to their ability to obtain ‘educational outcomes’ in school and through the life-course,

whether their particular aspirations are ‘enabling’ or ‘restrictive’ to their individualised action (Lawson, Atherton, Ferrer, & Robins, 2020; Gao & Eccles, 2020; Du & Wong, 2019). Whilst other research more explicitly suggests that ‘aspirations’ are not the only factor worth considering in relation to educational ‘attainment’ but must also consider a ‘person’s personal and contextual capacities to act on, and therefore fulfil, such aspirations’ (Hawkins, 2017).

Correspondingly, other literature concerned with aspirations and attainment has attempted to shift from individualised notions of the ‘mental’ to contextual considerations. For instance, literature pertaining to the ‘Capability Approach’ (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993) and developments of this approach focus on factors ‘external’ to the individual (e.g., environments) which may cultivate a person’s capabilities (cf. Hart & Page, 2020; Grace & Eng, 2020; Hart & Brando, 2018; Campbell & McKendrick, 2017; Sandars & Hart, 2015). At times, such work discusses the ‘agentic freedom’ of the individual to develop a diversity of educational ‘capabilities’ and to pursue educational processes and goals they value, sometimes based on notions of ‘self-efficacy’ (cf. Ferdinand, Gebauer, Bos, Huelmann, Köller & Schöber, 2018). Notably, similarities have been drawn between Dewey’s ideas and the ideas of Sen and Nussbaum particularly, given the possibilities of persons to enact change and notions of democracy (Glassman & Patton, 2014; Zimmerman, 2006). However, these ideas seem quite different in metaphysical terms based on Dewey’s pragmatic, non-dualistic approach and the work by some capability theorists which maintain a dualistic idea of internal/external (person and environment), and which views conversion factors as a necessary mediator to enable action. For example, as Robeyns (2021) describes,

All conversion factors influence how a person can be or is free to convert the characteristics of the resources into a functioning, yet the sources of these factors may differ. *Personal conversion factors* are internal to the person, such as metabolism, physical condition, sex, reading skills, or intelligence [...] *Social conversion factors* are factors from the society in which one lives, such as public policies, social norms, practices that unfairly discriminate, societal hierarchies, or power relations related to, for example, class, gender, race, or caste. *Environmental conversion factors* emerge from the physical or built environment in which a person lives [...] Sen uses “capability” not to refer exclusively to a person’s abilities or other internal powers but to refer to an opportunity made feasible, and constrained by, both internal (personal) and external (social and environmental) conversion factors (no. p.n, original emphasis).

Therefore, the focus is on the mediating role of the conversion factors *within* and *between* person and environment, which does not appreciate the deep inter-permeability of persons *with* environments and other persons as a total/reciprocal unit (Striano, 2019). Other scholars attempting to account for contextual factors have argued that schooling is not necessarily pertinent in ‘explaining young people’s aspirations’ and rather such aspirations can be better explained by looking to their ‘individual characteristics’, family, and out-of-school resources (i.e., a work desk). They go as far to contend that ‘pupils who attend different schools but have similar individual characteristics will likely have similar aspirations for higher education’ (Sabic & Jokic, 2021, p. 200). However, despite work such as this expanding to include the various dynamics across societies and cultures (cf. Watzlawik & Burkholder, 2020), these remain focused on how various facets in the living of humans are navigated and cultivated by the individual (sometimes with the support of interventions), often using notions of ‘self-determination’ and ‘self-satisfaction’. This includes research centred upon how inequities emerge, such as through material distribution, relational recognition, and representation, which constrains individual’s participation in, and capabilities from, education (Raffo, 2014).

Moreover, even where scholars suggest a more ‘socioecological’ approach to understanding factors in the ‘micro and macro systems’ around young people, they do so to encourage locating where ‘potential improvements’ could help to ‘empower’ young people on the assumption that they are ‘not getting enough encouragement or access to resources that can motivate them to achieve more’ (Lee & Byun, 2019, p. 1504). Ultimately, such ideas remain premised upon the assumptions that the individual is ‘self-acting’ despite contextual factors, which they must navigate to ‘succeed’. ‘Agency’ and/or ‘aspiration’ in this sense is considered to be the driving force, external to the individual, which is *causing* them to act (cf. Ingold, 2011). Noteworthy, some developments of this work exist which aims to challenge some of the discourses of ‘aspiration’ and the ‘success’ of young people specifically as it pertains to the ‘interactional’ relation between person and their environment (cf. Harrison, 2018) – a position which shall be considered further in the succeeding subsection.



---

### 2.2.2 INTERACTIONAL

Developments of self-actional thinking became premised on ‘loosely’ relational ideas whereby person (subject-thing) and that external to the person (object-thing) *interact* ‘in causal interconnection’ (Dewey & Bentley, 1973, pp. 132-133). This makes a dualistic assumption about person and environment as inherently separate, despite their relation. Ingold (2015) refers to such ideas as ‘blobs’. To think of ‘blobs’ is to think in separatist ways of ‘internal’ (subject) and ‘external’ (object) whereby ‘in a world of blobs, there could be no social life, since there is no life that is not social - that does not entail an entwining of lines - in a world of blobs there could be no life of any kind’ (p.5). Thus, to think of ‘blobs’ is to think of atomised entities (e.g., person and environment) which are acting individually and, no matter how much assemblage, remain separately bounded and hence, in their essence, unchanged by their relation. For example, in such ‘blob’ thinking, a group of people (e.g., society) is a collection of bounded individuals relating to one another but remaining fundamentally unchanged (interacting), as opposed to a co-constituting formation of which all members are both undergoing the actions of the other members, and doing to these members and hence, changing through shared activity (transacting). Thus, the dynamic, interdependent reciprocity is not recognised in ‘blob’ thinking - notions which shall be elaborated on later.

Much of the literature concerned with young people, poverty, and education is underpinned by such dualistic notions that suggest for example, ‘adverse experiences’ in young people’s early living are predictive of future developments as it pertains to health, well-being, and education. Such experiences are said to involve causes external to the individual located *in* their various environments and relations with others (i.e., family), which are deemed to be ‘hotwired’ into an individual’s circuitry. This is then assumed to leave them almost no option in terms of being impacted by such adversity and their developmental trajectory affected in some way. Indeed, there is now a plethora of literature concerned with this frame of reference known as ‘ACEs’ (Adverse Childhood Experiences) including the original study where the term was coined (Felitti, Nordenberg, Williamson, Spitz, Edwards, Koss & Marks, 1998) and various developments of this study involving how such adversities may be understood and responded to more generally (cf. Asmundson & Afifi, 2021; Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020). Whilst the general overview of ‘ACEs’

thinking is seemingly holistic in understanding the various contexts from which adversity arises and impacts, some interventions are targeted at the individual, whilst others are targeted at groups, such as for issues widely defined as ‘trauma’ (cf. Murphy, Steel, Bate, Nikitiades, Allman, Bonuck, Meissner & Steele, 2015). Noteworthy, whilst much of this literature implicitly discusses adversities which may be considered to impact schooling or as they refer to it ‘educational’ attainment/development, through one ‘ACE’ such as ‘homelessness’ (cf. Radcliff, Crouch, Strompolis & Srivastav, 2019), there exists less literature which explicitly discusses the interplay of ACEs and schooling more specifically. The cause-effect and ‘blob’ premise upon which ideas of ‘ACEs’ are based is, perhaps, the most dominant umbrella concept under which much research concerning deterministic accounts of young people and poverty falls. However, there appears to be some nuance within ideas thought of as ‘interactional’.

Firstly, there are those ideas that relate more to the individual having some ‘agency’ over how such adversity unfolds in their living. This means there is an understanding that the young person will be impacted in adverse ways, but they can develop agency despite such difficulties by becoming individually ‘resilient’, perhaps through interactions (interventions) with a supportive adult(s) (cf. Yeung & Li, 2021; Bester & Kuyper, 2020; Bryna, Williams, & Griffin, 2020; Post, Grybush, Elmadani & Lockhart, 2020), or engaging with economic support such as ‘cash transfer’ programmes (cf. d’Errico, Garbero, Letta & Winters, 2020). Moreover, there exists a plethora of literature specifically concerned with tackling issues pertaining to ‘education and poverty’ and promoting resilience at various levels of analysis, by taking a similarly ‘holistic’ or ‘socio-ecological’ approach. For example, place-based initiatives target entire areas with interventions aimed at reducing the impact of/promoting resilience to adversities pertaining to poverty, health, or associated challenges which may prevent young people from developing or ‘succeeding in education’ (cf. Bower & Rossi, 2019; Raffo, Dyson, Kerr & Wiglesworth, 2012; Dyson, Kerr, & Raffo 2012; Dobbie & Fryer, 2011). Moreover, some of these place-based community interventions involving collaboration with various community services and schools are aimed at providing ‘holistic’ support from early schooling through to post-schooling education (i.e., university) known as ‘cradle-to-career’ designs (cf. Lawson & Lawson, 2020; Zuckerman, 2016; Joshi, 2012). Other

schooling interventions such as ‘extended’ or ‘community’ schools tend to take a similarly ‘holistic’ approach to intervening in challenges ‘inside and outside’ schooling through collaborative measures, though these tend to conclude when the young person leaves compulsory schooling (cf. Kerr, Dyson, & Gallannaugh, 2016; Lawson & van Veer, 2015; Dyson & Raffo, 2007; Raffo & Dyson, 2007).

Despite differences in ideas of how, when, and where young people should be supported, such ideas often seem to be underpinned by ideas associated with a particular understanding of Bronfenbrenner’s socio-ecological perspective aimed at ‘understanding holistically’ the micro, meso, and macro levels of adversity, by ‘engaging with’ young people’s ‘social ecologies’ in collaborative ways, with the view to intervening in these (cf. Kerry, Dyson & Raffo, 2014; Kerr & Dyson, 2016). These assumptions sometimes then underpin ‘theories of change’ which tend to construct a starting point of intervention. These are often based on a defined functional dissonance that young people and their families are experiencing with education and their lives more generally, and then outline the various stepped aims and practices which will ultimately ‘end’ with a particular outcome as caused by such intervention, usually improved ‘educational engagement/attainment’ (cf. Shalem & De Clercq, 2019; Tancred et al, 2018; Richardson, Phillips, Colom, Khalil, & Nichols, 2018; Cummings, Dyson & Todd, 2011). However, it has been argued that some initiatives using ‘theory of change’ methodologies involve ‘contradictions’ between policymakers and practitioners (cf. Rambla, 2018; Salonen-Hakomäki, Soini, Pietarinen & Pyhältö, 2016) or lack necessary engagement with young people when establishing such theories if they are going to be ‘successful’ (cf. Jocson & Martinez, 2020). Nevertheless, these ideas, broadly speaking, seem to share a common underpinning based on dualistic linearly casual notions which assume actions can be intentionally manipulated (or lives can be intervened in) to promote individual resilience/agency in stepped, guided ways.

Similar to the focus of the ecological functional dissonance perspective, documented above, there are those socially critical ‘interactional’ ideas which suggest that society together with its classed, racial, and gendered ways – and culturally articulated and mediated through the socialising influence of place – interact with the individual in powerful ways. These ideas tend to suggest that self-action is circumspect, constrained, orientated, and in many respects determined/mediated by ‘glocal’

dynamics of separated ‘place’. In maintaining this separatism, such work has sought to theorise youth educational experiencing in terms of geographical location, including their position in particular (often ‘working class’) communities. For example, Bright (2018; 2016; 2012; 2011a; 2011b) has primarily studied ‘UK coalfield communities’ and how the people of these communities remain ‘socially haunted’ (as a ‘socio-political-psychological state’<sup>7</sup>) by the historical ‘trauma’ of ‘working-class places/spaces’ (i.e., the closure of coal mines) which determine their feelings towards, and experiences of, education (also see, Simpson & Simmons, 2021; Dillabough & Yoon, 2018).

Other research has been concerned with social and cultural structures, which young people must navigate to ‘succeed’ in education. Moreover, it has been suggested that when young people navigate these structures successfully and ‘succeed’ in education, they are operating ‘against the odds’ (cf. Hernandez-Martinez & Williams, 2013), as though supportive practices were cultivated in the living of the individual and they were able to capitalise on this for educational ‘success’ (cf. Cheang, 2018). Such work is often guided by particular interpretations and applications of Bourdieusian ideas concerned with notions of class, race, and gender inequality<sup>8</sup>. Noteworthy, Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, for example, may come closer to recognising a deeper relation between person and environment that speaks to Dewey’s ideas of transaction. However, such ideas do not go as far as to clearly articulate the immanence of person and environment as one full, reciprocating unit (as I will show below). This is perhaps also seen with Bourdieu’s notions of capital (economic, social, cultural) which he argues are ‘convertible’ into materials or other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). This appears to suggest that capital is a mediator of, or between, person and environment which can be ‘exchanged’ in particular fields (i.e., the school) for ‘knowledge’ which can be in turn exchanged for ‘economic capital’ which can buy materials (cf. Bourdieu, 1986; Ingram, 2018). Thus, the ideas of habitus, capital, and field seem to remain premised on an interaction (albeit a more complex one than some other interactional ideas) by including notions of mediators which departs from an immanent unity of person *with*

---

<sup>7</sup> Bright, 2018, p. 110.

<sup>8</sup> See the work of Diane Reay (2020a; 2018; 2017; 2013; 2012; 2007; 2006; 2004; 2002; 2001) and Nicola Ingram (2018; 2011; 2009)

environment and other. As a thorough assessment of Bourdieu's concepts and ideas could form a thesis in itself, it is not possible here. However, it is necessary to consider some of the work relevant to this research which draws on his ideas.

Reay, Crozier & Clayton (2019), for example, conduct research with 'working -class students in an elite university [...] to understand the complexities of identities in flux through Bourdieu's notions of habitus and field' (p. 1103). Primarily, the researchers find that the students 'have managed to achieve considerable success as learners and acquire the self-confidence and self-regulation that accompanies academic success against the odds [...] fitting in as learners despite their class difference' (p. 1115). They argue that such success has been possible given the student's 'resilience',

resilience and coping with adversity are all qualities that are far more associated with working rather than middle classness [...] such qualities of resilience and coping with adversity become productive resources for working-class students in the middle-class contexts they have moved into (p. 1107).

In outlining their arguments, however, there seem to be two main points of concern. Firstly, there is no definition of what Reay et al. meant by 'working' and 'middle' class, only a suggestion that these categories represent opposing fields, particularly for educational journeying. This is a difficult categorisation of fields assuming a direct contrast where a context is either 'working class' or 'middle class' and assuming that the 'elite' university is middle class. Secondly, despite their focus on notions of 'resilience', particularly as a causal factor, they offer no clear definition or conceptualisation of what they meant by the term. Moreover, they suggest that resilience is the 'thing' causing such 'comfortable' adaptation whereby the working-class student 'fits in' with an 'unfamiliar field', and the 'resilience' is also something the students themselves are developing (pp. 1107-08). Hence, they present resilience as an individualised and internal function that operates outwards on the environment, one-dimensionally, and in linearly causal ways whereby students develop 'an almost superhuman level of motivation, resilience, and determination, sometimes at the cost of peer approval' (p. 1115). In so doing, they do not appreciate the notion of persons both doing and undergoing with environments that are dynamic and continuous in reciprocal transaction. Indeed, for Dewey, adaptation is the act itself (the practical concrete habitual and changing actions of the person with their environments and others), as I will come to explicate further in upcoming chapters. Therefore, Reay et

al.'s position seems to remain premised on self-actional ideas of the person predominantly acting *upon* the environment with which they *interact*.

This is an important point to the arguments presented throughout my thesis which suggest that there remains a dualism in existing literatures (some of which are discussed in this chapter) whereby either the person *or* the environment are prioritised. Indeed, Reay et al. assume that the working-class student achieves through 'work on and for themselves' (p. 1105). Hence, their overarching arguments seem to be that (i) class, and the student's 'working-class self' in particular is the reason they are unlikely to 'fit' in a 'middle class context', and that when they do, (ii) it is due to an individualised notion of resilience. This provides an explanation without (i) fully conceptualising what either class or resilience means in the context of their argument, and (ii) assuming a linear causal relation between the person and environment, whereby the person is prioritised as acting upon the environment. Thus, this undermines the mutual reciprocity of person with environment and other, in a transaction of doing and undergoing and thereby, suggests a weak sense of this complex transactional sociality. Put simply, 'resilience' appears to become a mediator *between* person and context which is used to explain how the self-acting individual navigates 'unfamiliar fields' successfully.

Alternatively, Ingram (2018) offers a more detailed conceptualisation of Bourdieu's notion of habitus, including outlining and responding to some of the critiques of Bourdieu's ideas as either deterministic or agentic which she describes as a 'false dichotomy' (p. 53). Ingram then utilises the idea of habitus, including developing her own extensions of the term, to explain how working-class boys may be succeeding in education. Indeed, whilst Ingram's development of the notion of habitus as 'the internalisation of experiences in the world that generates ways of being, thinking, and acting' (p. 206) may speak somewhat to Dewey's notion of experiencing (as shall come to be explained further in the following chapter), it still bears the mark of 'internalised structures' (p. 49) suggesting that the internal (person) and external (environment) are not immanent in each other. This becomes more perceivable through her utilisation of socially/culturally determined 'capital' as a form of 'use and trade' between differing fields such as school and home (p. 208). Indeed, Ingram argues that it is this combination of internalised, culturally determined, 'dispositions'

(i.e., working/middle class identity), together with different forms of capital which can be ‘used and traded’ between ‘fields’, that explains how some working-class boys do well educationally. As Ingram explains,

The boys found themselves in differing objective positions, with some facing more explicit contradictions, situations, and positions than others. These differing positions of contradiction, whilst mediating their subjective responses, did not determine them. The boys managed the internalisation of varying degrees of conflict in different ways, with some rejecting one or other of the two fields and the schemes inscribed therein, and others making an attempt to internalise contradictory schemes [...] The boys’ originary habitus, as engendered through membership of a family and a community, is therefore mediated through the institution, which will potentially support, confirm, erode, transform, reproduce, or conflict with the originary habitus [...] [This] shows differences in ways in which the structures of the field of home or the field of school dominate the habitus (pp. 208-209).

Thus, at one level there is an attempt to recognise the social complexity of differing ‘fields’ (or environments), which arguably views the individual ‘in terms of their holistic experiences of life’ (p. 47) as Ingram suggests. However, there is an assumption that environments are internalised by the person, and this mediates their ‘capital exchange’, determining how well they do educationally. Thus, there remains a mediator *between* person and environment which echoes Reay et al.’s (2019) notions of *either* the person predominantly impacting the environment (i.e., when students do well) or the environment predominantly impacting the student (i.e., not providing the appropriate context to develop capital, where students do not do well). In so doing, Ingram (and arguably Bourdieu to some extent) do not go as far as Dewey in recognising an immanent permeability of person with environment and other as one entire unit which is continually dynamic. Noteworthy, Ingram recognises that further articulation from Bourdieu would be necessary to overcome some of the dualist critiques about his work though, she appears to retain some of this mediator-based dualism in her own articulations. As will continue to be elaborated on throughout, the person and environment are mutually doing and undergoing continuously. This notion of transactional immanence shall continue to be discussed throughout, whilst a discussion of class specifically shall be returned to in greater detail in Chapter Eight.

According to self-actional and interactional ideas then, persons and environments (biological, cultural, political etc.), as with body and mind, are separate/bounded

entities which exist externally to one another. Moreover, an individual's cognition and hence, related action may sometimes change, perhaps through interactions, but the notion of the bounded individual as a separate entity doing that action with others remains uncontested. It is then the case that some 'magical' or mediating force, such as that termed 'agency' or 'aspiration' must come between the internal and external to cause action (Ingold, 2011, 2015). This may be enabling as in the former sets of ideas concerned with intervention in the 'social ecologies' of the person, or restrictive in the latter set of ideas concerned with cultural influence. This is the case even for scholars who attempt to combine Sen and Bourdieu's ideas, when in doing so they continue to advocate for the ways in which social and cultural contexts impact a young person's 'capabilities' and agentic ability to transform these into 'functionings' to achieve educationally (cf. Gokpinar & Reiss, 2016).

Where some interactional ideas appear to take account of the 'multiple factors' that 'impact upon' young people, these 'factors' are seen to be additive things which *cause* effect on human conduct. Such thinking is limited in believing that these structure-like 'things' which are external to the human body are primary in a body-structure relation which is one-dimensional (structure to body) whereby what constitutes the person is ontologically unchanged. As Roth (2020) puts it, 'when interactional ideas became more popular, the underlying epistemology remained self-actional, for the social is so only in a weak sense [...] The social is considered as an add-on to the self-acting individual, who contributes to the social construction' (Roth, 2020, p. 18). Similarly, 'agency' (or lack of it) is considered 'additive' in this way. The common approach to such ideas is to 'think backwards' by focusing on the 'end in view' or seemingly 'inanimate object', rather than recognising and engaging with the entire process from which such an 'end' emerged, which 'thinks forwards' attending to historical evolution (Ingold, 2011, 2015; Dewey, 1966). Thus, this overlooks the entire process including the materials and transformations which are continually evolving (to 'think forward'). To put it another way, 'we see wood that has been made into a ladder, rather than a ladder that has been made out of wood' (Ingold, 2011, p. 27). In such an analogy, the ladder is only one possibility which could have emerged from the wood, and so to understand the ladder, it is necessary to pay attention to all of the processes, materials, and tools (the entire processual



activity) from which the wood became the ladder - ideas that shall be discussed further throughout the chapter.

---

### 2.2.3 RELATIONAL

Embracing ‘relational sociology’ as a guide (cf. Emirbrayer, 1997; Dépelteau, 2018), some scholars have developed their inquiries to incorporate changing, multi-faceted challenges as it pertains to the daily living of people (cf. Hall, 2019), as well as how educational and other interventions become part of this daily living (cf. Larsen & Stanke, 2015; Dreier, 2015). It seems that such ‘relational sociology’ may have emerged as a critique of some earlier sociological ideas, particularly those which view the person as bounded and yet essentialised as part of something bigger (e.g., class or other stratifications of society) (Dépelteau, 2015). However, there appears – as with many epistemic communities – important nuances within the literature associated with the ‘relational’. Although, in the main, most relational sociologies remain premised on separatist notions focused on mediating forces between individuals such as the relational as an object between subjects, and caused by structures and cultures surrounding it, as Donati (2010<sup>9</sup>) explains,

we are underlining that the ‘relative’ character of a social phenomenon indicates a ‘relation between’ entities, where the relation has its own emergent structure, function, and articulation. That is to say that the relation is a unit of distinction and not an ‘arbitrary event’ of a situational process (p.72).

Illustrating this point in similar ways, Vanderberghe (2018) moves to a more complex version of person and environment relations, though remains premised on the idea that this relation is mediated by culture, ‘[Person and society] is a relational complex in itself; through their mutual implication, and thanks to the mediation of culture, both are continuously co-produced and co-constituted in-and-as social processes and practices’ (p. 46).

These ideas do not necessarily go as far as Deweyan notions (including Ingold’s ideas) where the person is transactionally co-constituting *with* environments that reflect the fluid, dynamic and eventual societal happenings that are always open to novelty and change. Indeed, Vanderberghe (2018) advocates for future theorising

---

<sup>9</sup> (see also, Donati & Archer, 2015).

which integrates nuanced ideas of relational sociologists, together with pragmatic ideas such as those of Dewey ‘dialogically and dialectically into a more encompassing framework’ (p. 52). In similar ways, Selg (2019) points out that whilst relational sociologists tend to be concerned with constitutive relations, they do not explicitly elucidate what they mean by constitution. Thus, Selg draws on the notion of transaction which departs from ideas of causation to account for this limitation and hence, clarify the relational focus.

Correspondingly, there have been moves by some other relational sociologists to enact such an integration of ideas. For example, Dépelteau (2015) refers to a ‘transactional, relational sociology’ which attempts to draw together Dewey’s ideas to overcome some of the separatist issues identified in what he describes as ‘standard’ sociological thinking. Whilst making this case, he does, however, seem to slide into ‘separatist’ ways of thinking particularly when referring at length to the ideas of Martin (2003) who does not quite overcome dualist notions. For example, whilst Martin outlines issues with dualistic thinking, he discusses Bourdieu and colleagues’ ‘field theory’ as something which enables phenomena to be explained through the lens that ‘there is some social force which constrains individuals externally and the feeling that we act on the basis of our motivations’ (p. 37). Hence, he maintains at some level a notion of that which is internal/external to the person and does not quite articulate the symbiotic relation of person:environment which are distinct, yet mutually functioning parts of one *whole* unit - notions which shall be exemplified later through the work of Sullivan (2001).

More specifically, the notion of the social field as a transacted one which represents a co-constitutive relation of person with environment as both continuously change together, appears to be missing in Dépelteau’s thinking as well as Martin’s and hence, reflects Selg’s (2019) point. Moreover, Dépelteau seems to suggest that a transactional pragmatic approach would enable some form of control over life. Perhaps what Dépelteau means is that through inquiry/observation with others, that in many respects concern some of the complexity of the relational person:environment unity, we can attempt to produce practical hypotheses to help generate ‘here and now’ solutions to our practical ‘here and now’ problems. These are then always open to further possibilities through inquiry, which would align

more closely with Dewey's ideas. However, what he means exactly is not necessarily explicit nor clear in this work.

Noteworthy then, relational sociology has many articulations of which the Deweyan transactional approach, which Dépelteau describes, is perhaps the most radical. However, given the history of sociological thinking which has been based on explaining social patterns through causal relations between subject and object, it seems difficult to depart from dualistic ideas. Thus, these ideas remain limited in addressing how young people engage with education as part of the relational fullness of their transactional lives. As such, much mainstream sociological thinking then struggles to explain why for example, some poor young people sometimes 'do well' educationally despite facing 'challenges'. It is then left to self/inter-actioning/ecologically-minded psychological ideas to suggest notions of individual (and related specific forms of collective) resilience as a core reason for such 'anomalies'. These tend to provide a weak version of the social by suggesting that resilience (whether individual or collective) is mediating between the person and their educational attainment and hence, departing from unfolding (transactional) concrete realities which are immanent and reciprocal.

Others still have sought to overcome these dichotomies or person/structure dualisms emanating from the field of cultural psychology rather than sociology. Perhaps most relevant here is some of the work of Vygotsky, and later Leont'ev, including some developments of this work, known under the bracket of 'Cultural Historical Activity Theory' (CHAT). Whilst I shall return to the idea of activity in a transactional sense, it is important to note Leont'ev's ideas. Essentially, Leont'ev argued that there is an *interaction* between the internal and external, which he called a dialectical relation. However, whilst he appeared to advocate for a focus on the relation, there remained an essence of some 'mediated' part which brought together the internal and external,

two principal interrelated features must be considered basic to psychological science. These are the equipped ("instrumented") structure of human activity and its incorporation into the system of interrelationships with other people. It is these features that determine the characteristics of psychological processes in man. Equipment mediates activity connecting man not only with the world of things but also with other people (Leont'ev & Hall, 1978, p. 94).

Thus, his ideas have been said to maintain 'the Cartesian polarity between consciousness and being' (Mikhailov, 2001, p 9) and hence, not recognise the

reciprocal co-constitution, or the ‘single process of mutual generation and mutual determination’ ( p. 21). As such, his work has been described as ‘opening up the possibility’ to think of practical activity and consciousness as separate and ‘mediated’, rather than constitutive parts of the whole (Roth & Jornet, 2019, p. 331). Developing the ‘Vygotsky-Leont’ev school’ further, Zinchenko (1985) suggested that the internal and external may have more of a relation than Leont’ev argued, such that the external may exist *in* the internal. This was articulated through the extended idea of ‘tool-mediated action’ where ‘external tool-mediated action can be transformed into internal, mental action’ (Zinchenko, 1985, p. 101). However, much like Leont’ev, Zinchenko sought to find a mediator which existed to relationally coordinate internal and external. In so doing, both sets of ideas have been criticised for posing separatist notions of subjective perceptions of reality (cf. Garrison, 2001).

Noteworthy, these ideas are only some of those which exist under the bracket of CHAT/activity theory and have been criticised in similar ways by other ‘activity’ theorists. For example, some have explained that Leont’ev may not have understood person-activity in the truly dialectical sense in which Vygotsky began to postulate in his later works, such that ‘dialectical relation’ appears as the mediator *between* subject/object or subject/structure which holds them together (Roth & Jornet, 2019). However, it has also been argued that the idea of mediators has emerged from some readings of Vygotsky’s work, despite there being no mediators mentioned (Zavershneva, 2014) and that this ‘unproductive’ focus on mediators has often dominated the field (Arievitch & Stetsenko, 2014).

Indeed, some activity theorists have argued from a more Spinozist view of dialectics which more closely aligns with transactional ideas by thinking of a unit as a unit, and not reduced to any of its parts. Some of these thinkers come incredibly close to transactional ideas by departing from dualistic notions and attending to the dialectical, functional living person (Stetsenko, 2009). However, as with relational sociology, there remains nuances throughout work aligning with Vygotsky and Spinozist ideas of activity and dialectical living, particularly ambiguities in understandings of ‘dialectical’ and ‘unit’. Indeed, Vygotsky was unable to fully develop his ideas of a whole person:environment unity in a more transactional sense before his death (Roth, 2019). For this reason, this research aligns with ideas which appear to come closest to dismissing separatist notions and attending to the full unit

of persons with environments as co-constituting and co-dependent – that of *transaction* which I shall come to explicate further in the following section and chapter.

### 2.3 ‘POOR’ YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING AND LEARNING: A TRANSACTIONAL APPROACH

The transactional approach upon which this research is premised overcomes the dualistic, static, causal notions outlined in the previous section, by attending to the full, deeply social, relation of person:environment as one whole unit of analysis. This departs from notions of mediators and rather appreciates the mutual reciprocity of this relation whereby person and environment are *immanent* in each other as they correspond together, mutually functioning, and co-impacting. It is an approach which focuses on the ways in which various units involved in transactions constitute, shape, or stabilize each other, in and through their dynamic relatedness in the course of unfolding actions and events (Pyysiäinen, 2021, p. 494). Put simply, the transactional approach refuses to think of persons and environments as separate or bounded, given that one is necessary for the function of the other in concrete social living. Indeed, Dewey argued that attempting to ‘find’ some mediating factor which makes internal and external ‘things’ relate, be it body and mind, or person and environment, arises from the simplicity of methodological necessity rather than ontological distinction (Garrison, 2001). The complexity of transactional pragmatic inquiry shall be outlined in Chapter Four however, what Dewey appears to be addressing is the way in which ‘simplistic’ analyses begin with separate parts (i.e., person *and* environment) and assume these are ‘snapshots’ in time, rather than co-constitutive parts of one entire evental process. It is perhaps more useful then, as I will come to advocate, to think of person corresponding *with* environment and environment corresponding *with* person reciprocally, rather than person (internal) *relating to* an (external) environment. Such ‘relating to’ often translates as environments one-dimensionally *doing to* (‘impacting’/‘effecting’) the person.

This separated, one-dimensional notion of the person *and* environment relation is often the assumption with which dualistic, causal literature begins (as discussed previously) which suggests that young people are *undergoing* the actions of their environments and others. This does not appreciate the ways in which young people

are also *doing to* those environments and others. Conversely, the transactional approach attends to this continuous transacting as young people are *mutually undergoing and doing to* their environments and others. As Sullivan explains,

To understand bodies as discursively constituted through their transactions with the world is to acknowledge that merely existing in the world is to have effects upon it. These effects can vary tremendously. They may be small or large, beneficial, or detrimental; they may just as likely further entrench as transform various cultural and societal standards. More to the point, they are not always things that people intend, and even when people intend them, their effects on the world often turn out to be different from what was planned (Sullivan, 2001, pp. 46-47).

This means that young people are co-constituting the material, social, and hence, cultural occasions (environments) with others through a complex, reciprocally oriented, transactional process. Thus, the full living of young people as they are transacting with environments and others becomes the unit of analysis from which this research begins – a unit which is discussed in further detail in the following chapter. This transactional process is encapsulated by Dewey in his notion of *experiencing* which attends to how young people are living and learning through transactions – as shall also be elaborated on in the following chapter.

Specifically, this research is concerned with the living and learning of two young people considered to be experiencing poverty and associated adversity and still ‘doing well’ through schooling, as outlined in Chapter One. The research also includes an autobiographical piece which offers a reflexive transactional account of my living and learning through similar experiences of poverty and adversity. Correspondingly then, this pragmatic transactional inquiry is underpinned by two questions which direct attention to the substantive concern of ‘poor’ young people, who ‘do well’ educationally:

- I. *How are young people who are experiencing poverty and associated adversity living and learning?*
- II. *What does this mean for understanding ‘poor’ young people who ‘do well’ educationally?*

The first question attends to the full living of Imogen, Serena, and myself which moves beyond initial causal assumptions of income/associated poverty and the

potential effects of ‘adverse’ occasions on learning opportunities. It instead focuses on the biographical narrated accounts of each person including ‘challenging’ occasions which may stimulate creative problem-solving as well as occasions of learning. This is a broad directive which guides inquiring through these empirical accounts to better understand the complex ways in which young people live and learn through deeply social, reciprocal, occasions with environments and others. In so doing, it departs from causal notions and begins from a premise of inquiry concerned with the ways in which poverty and associated challenges may be unfolding *parts* of full, dynamic, on-going lives. Hence, the question attends to the concrete occasions as described by each person, as parts in a part-whole relation of their lives that are continually evolving spatiotemporally, without prioritising any of these.

The second question looks to these rich empirical accounts as a basis from which to begin a process of a creative problem-solving and hypothesising which may lead to more fruitful understandings and hence, develop current thinking. This takes the entire unit of each person’s living co-constituted by their transactions with environments and other and considers the interconnected relation of ‘challenging’ occasions alongside ‘learning’ occasions, which cannot be separated nor prioritised as causal in a whole person’s biography. Therefore, the central problem of such inquiring focuses on how a transactional theorising of ‘poor’ young people’s concrete experiencing may offer a more appropriate explanation for those particular ‘poor’ young people who continue to ‘do well’ educationally. Creativity may then emerge from how understandings of these situations (i.e., empirical concrete experiencing) may be fruitful for adapting/new situations (i.e., the ways we understand this substantive concern).

Noteworthy, whilst the questions have been outlined here categorically, the non-linear process of inquiring meant attention to these questions became iterative. The theoretical specificities of the questions as these correspond with the transactional approach shall now be discussed and exemplified in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE TRANSACTIONAL TOOLS

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and discusses the Deweyan philosophy which underpins this research. This operationalises a transactional approach and defines the conceptual tools which frame the empirically led theoretical discussions in later chapters.

In outlining this approach, I begin with an historic overview of John Dewey's ideas of experiencing and transaction which helps to explain the limitations of many mainstream approaches that attempt to explain change and reproduction in the living of young people. In building on Dewey's ideas, I refer to other scholars that connect with his thinking both historically, and more recently, within and beyond the epistemic field of pragmatism. Noteworthy, my work here is not an historic anthology of these ideas, nor an exhaustive discussion of the transactional approach. Rather, this chapter is about developing a more theoretically focused argument about what appears important in developing an explanation about young people's living.

Through this discussion, a more comprehensive explanation of the unit of analysis with which this research is concerned is presented, specifically concerning notions of experiencing, functional correspondence, habits, and growing. This includes exemplified articulations of the ways in which young people are 'experiencing' as they functionally transact (correspond) with environments and others, all of which are parts of the organic evolutionary unity of organism-world continuity. Such functioning is possible through the cultivation and reconfiguration of 'habits' which constitute the growth of a person as they continue to transact spatiotemporally. The chapter concludes with a summary of the concepts and introduces how these might be useful for exploring the substantive concern of this research: 'poor' young people who are 'doing well' educationally.

### 3.2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF PRAGMATISM: WHY DEWEY?

Whilst Dewey may not have labelled or considered himself a 'pragmatist', the premises which underpin pragmatist ideas are somewhat similar to his ideas in that there is a core focus on the pragmatics or *actions* of humans (and other living



organisms). Thus, it seems important to begin with a brief outline of pragmatist ideas and how these differ from some of the ideas discussed in the preceding chapter.

Importantly, Dewey variously referred to his approach as ‘radical empiricism’, ‘humanism’, ‘naturalism’, ‘instrumentalism’, ‘experimentalism’, and later ‘operationalism’ in works throughout his life (Hildebrand, 2013, p. 58).

Nevertheless, as an exponent of pragmatism, some of which informed his own ideas, he has often been thought of as a pragmatist himself. Perhaps most explicating of this alignment is the way Dewey’s work is grounded in actions, rather than abstract/static theories that do not attend to evolving concrete realities. Put simply, Dewey was concerned with the *changing* nature of everything believing that everything – be it life, culture, language for example – are impermanent (cf. Dewey, 1925<sup>10</sup>). Indeed, he saw all psychological laws as ‘working hypotheses’ and argued that,

we should therefore test the validity of psychological theories not by comparing them to a reality that is allegedly independent of theories, but rather by examining whether those of our actions that are informed by such theories lead to fruitful consequences (Dewey, 1900, no p.n).

The focus on action outlined by Dewey in the above quote, appreciates the dynamism of human living as people are continually evolving and hence, *becoming*. Indeed, learning from Darwin, Dewey saw the human condition as transitioning and in flux. He did not however, view this as something to revere as Heraclitus and Bergson did, but believed human living as changing, risky, and unstable is something to be understood and used (Brinkmann, 2011). Moreover, learning from James, Dewey believed that studying humans must not transcend a human perspective. Unlike the ideas of many philosophers which he described has been taken ‘structurally and statically’, he, like James, preferred to think of ‘a life in action’, which appreciates the ‘transactional drama’ of person:environment (Hildebrand, 2013, p. 57).

Crucially, Dewey’s action-orientated approach refuted Aristotelian (self-actional) ideas concerned with ‘things’ and Newtonian efforts to uncover ‘causes’. Moreover, Dewey refuted Platonian and Socratic ideas of the ‘innate’ and more specifically, the

---

<sup>10</sup> Whilst this particular text is referenced here for the reader’s interest, the notion of change and impermanence can be seen across Dewey’s works.

early philosophical and psychological notions of humans as passively receiving (i) an ‘external’ world through perception or (ii) knowledge through acquisition. In so doing, he refuted dualisms particularly that of person *and* environment, or body *and* mind, believing instead that person:environment is a functional, whole, unit which must be the minimal unit with which we begin inquiry. Essentially, he believed person and environment to be in a deeply relational, dynamic, co-constituting, interdependent, *functional*, unit. This dispelled previous separatist, atomistic, notions and focused fundamentally on human living, or as he called it, *experiencing*.

Dewey’s work was firmly rooted in the everyday and he believed that any inquiry should be that of hypothesizing grounded in experiencing (*natural empiricism*), rather than abstract notions of ‘the external’ or ‘the internal’ as divorced from the everyday actions of humans. Indeed, his notion of inquiring is informed by previous pragmatic ideas of leaving no principles unchallenged and refusing to accept in ‘absolute truths’ – notions that shall be explored further in the following chapter. This research now turns to a more in-depth discussion of the transactional approach as this pertains to notions of experiencing, functional coordination, habits, and knowing.

### 3.3 YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING AND LEARNING: A TRANSACTIONAL UNIT OF ANALYSIS

As discussed in the previous sections, the unit of analysis here is young people’s *experiencing*. This warrants further clarification on two fronts in the context of this research specifically, firstly (i) what is a unit of analysis? And (i) what is meant by experiencing?

A unit of analysis is considered to be ‘one of the most important moments in any scientific endeavour’ which ‘distinctively reflects a study’s theoretical premises’ (Jornet & Damsa, 2019, p. 1). As was outlined in Chapter One, and shall be further discussed in Chapter Four, the unit of analysis and hence, problem of inquiry emerged through active engagement with concrete activities. In this case, the research direction evolved through engagement with Imogen and Serena during initial research activities. This is demonstrable of what Jornet and Damsa (2019) refer to as ‘finding’ a unit of analysis which ‘cannot be known in advance of inquiry’ (p. 4). Through coming to terms with the complexity of Imogen and Serena’s living

that was being overlooked by the parameters of the initial research plan, the research developed to consider their full dynamic living and learning with environments and others – or their ‘evolving social wholes’ (Jornet & Damsa, 2019) – as the unit of analysis. This then became about attending to ‘concrete life activity [...] as of *events*, *experiences* and *situations*, which are messy and holistic in nature (Jornet & Damsa, 2019, p. 4, original emphasis). Similarly, the ‘auto-transactional’ reflexive piece, which shall be discussed in the following chapter, began with the same ‘evolving social whole’ as the unit of analysis. However, the methods of autobiographical reflexivity emerging through this inquiring differed from working with Imogen and Serena, as shall come to be explained in Chapter Four.

In terms of this unit then, experiencing is what we do and feel (undergo), and is premised upon the indivisibility of person:environment. Dewey noted that James referred to it as a ‘double-barrelled word’ in this sense given that it is incorporating how persons are both subject and subjected: the integrated *doing* and *undergoing* of social living. The notion then ‘recognizes in its primary integrity no division between act and material, subject and object, but contains them both in an unanalysed totality (Dewey, 1958, p. 31). By ‘unanalysed totality’ it seems Dewey was again referring to the issues of separating subject and object during analysis as a common methodological practice and arguing precisely the opposite – to attend to the entire person:environment unit as the primary focus. Emphatically, to think transactionally is to take such *experiencing* as a whole, *functional* unit spatiotemporally, which does not prioritise any ‘part’ of a person’s living whether that be a particular ‘field’ where activity occurs, a particular ‘time’ when activity occurs, or a particular ‘protagonist’ with whom activity occurs.

Whilst Dewey used the concept ‘experience’, the concept *experiencing* shall be utilised hereafter as sharing the above definition but to emphasise the on-going nature of living as a reminder to the reader of the activity-focused approach underpinning this work. As briefly mentioned, Vygotsky came closer to establishing the indivisibility of person and environment, or as he called it ‘personal characteristic and situational characteristics’ (Vygotsky, 1934) when using the term *perezhivanie*. This term has sometimes been translated as ‘emotional *experience*’. For clarity, given the ambiguity in conceptualisation and use of the term (cf. Clara, 2016; Kozulin, 2016) including by Vygotsky himself (cf. Gonzalez Rey, 2016; Roth,

2019), as well as the limitations of what it is possible to cover in this thesis, I will continue to use *experiencing* as an encompassing term which includes ‘emotion’ or ‘what we feel’ as a part emerging from the full event of transactional living.

Thus, this research takes as its unit of analysis the pragmatic transacting of young people experiencing – that which attends to the *concrete actions of young persons as they are living (experiencing) every day in transacted ways as a meshwork of a bundle of interweaving lines with various environments and others*. Each of the concepts pertaining to such a transactional understanding shall now be exemplified in turn.

---

## EXPERIENCING

**Experiencing refers to the on-going stream of a person transacting (effects and is affected) functionally with their environments and others spatiotemporally.**

Unlike self-actional and interactional ideas which suggest persons and their environments are bounded, static, and separate ‘blob’ entities (as referred to by Ingold in the previous chapter), the transactional approach views person:environment as one entire continuous inter-permeating event. Ontologically then, persons may be better thought of as a bundle of lines each of which are parts protruding forwards, interweaving with environments, and knotting with others - all of which becomes a complex meshwork of their experiencing (Ingold, 2015).

To unpack this then, protruding forwards attends to the unfolding living of persons as they continue through their life course. This accounts for spatiotemporal passage – the literal passing of time and space – and acknowledges that persons protrude forward through a continuous event from birth until death from which there is no ‘time-out’ (Roth, 2019). This spatiotemporal passage involves lines going forth through different contexts with different individuals, as persons come to co-constitute the continuity of social and hence, cultural life. Such protruding forwards is dynamic, non-linear, and often incredibly ‘messy’ as each person interweaves with other persons. At times, such interweaving leads to knotting where those transacted with are not merely passing but become significant parts of our experiencing as is the case with family members, for example. As Ingold (2011) reminds us, this is a ‘web of life...not a network of connected points, but a *meshwork* of interwoven lines’ (p. 64, emphasis added). In such an ontology, persons as they protrude forwards do not

live *across* time and space but rather ‘issue forth *through* a world-in-formation, along the lines of their relationships [...] not as a bounded entity surrounded by an environment but as an unbounded entanglement of lines in fluid space’ (pp. 64-65, emphasis added). These relations are becoming the knots in our full living then, such that,

the knot [...] does not contain life but is rather formed of the very lines along which life is lived. These lines are bound together *in* the knot, but they are not bound *by* it. To the contrary, they trail beyond it, only to become caught up with other lines in other knots’ (Ingold, 2007, p. 100, original emphasis).

The ‘trailing lines’ are *persons experiencing* continuously as they interweave with environment and entangle with other persons such that knots are formed. Knotting then is what Ingold (2015) describes as a way of understanding how we live fluidly and in flux, yet not a ‘inchoate and formless flux’ such that we are floating through meaningless spaces. Rather, transacting in various fields as we knot with environment and others is how living is meaningful hence living becomes at once both stable and precarious as we continually adapt (Dewey, 1958). Thus, ‘knotting’ usefully articulates the tension and friction emerging from transacted activities through varying environments including, ‘how forms are held in place’ which then, ‘register in a number of domains of thought and practice by which patterns of culture are sustained [...]’. These include: the flows and growth patterns of materials [...] bodily movement and gesture [...] sensory perception [...] and human relationships and the sentiment that infuses them’ (Ingold, 2015, p. 18). The *meshwork* of a person’s life is then constituted by this *whole* process of active bundles of lines *interweaving, entangling, and knotting* as they are *experiencing*.

To think transactionally of living-as-bundles-of-lines then is to think of persons as ‘events rather than substances [...] characterized by histories, that is by continuity of change proceeding from beginnings to endings’ (Dewey, 1925, pp. 6-7). This shifts from thinking in static or seemingly permanent ways, to instead understanding that ‘every existence is an event’ (Dewey, 1925, p. 192). Attending to the impermanence of social living is to understand the novelty of unfolding occasions as persons continually transact with others and environments. Indeed, even the experiencing of seemingly inanimate material objects is constituted by spatiotemporal movement.

For example, this is the case for experiencing a ‘table’ as Roth (2019) points out whereby,

movement is required to sense what a surface texture is and feels like. Without movement, there is no texture [similarly] smell requires the passage of air, taste requires the passage of food over the taste buds (Roth, 2019, p. 28).

Thus, taking experiencing as the unit of analysis then ‘is designed to capture how the continuing, open-ended flow of a happening is reflected in the consciousness and affect of the participants’ (Roth, & Jornet, 2014, p. 115).

Proceeding from ‘beginnings to endings’ then, means persons must be recognised as one, whole, moving event. Indeed, ‘child’ and ‘adult’ are parts or phases in the *same event* of a person’s whole living and hence, cannot be considered separately. As Dewey contended, ‘the reality is the growth-process itself’ whereby childhood and adulthood are earlier and latter phases of a continuous event’ (Dewey, 1958, p. 283). Thus, the young person evolves into the adult through processes of growth as they transact with environments and others (interweaving and knotting) - without which, growth would be impossible. The young person does not ‘jump’ from phase to phase but rather, is co-constituting their continual renewal (as will be discussed further in the following subsection when considering functional correspondence). It is for this reason then that the empirical accounts discussed in later chapters begin with the earliest memories of each person and expand through occasions of their living as they grow. This, Dewey notes, is the task of the transactional inquirer to make sense of, and tie together, concretely experienced occasions which may otherwise appear disparate (cf. Dewey, 1938). Hence, the infinite occasioning becomes the entire meshwork of the person's full, dynamic, life. As will be exemplified in Chapter Four, attending to the full event of person transacting with other persons and various evolving environments as a whole unit of analysis which does not separate and hence prioritise parts (e.g., individual, environment, or other), is the essence of practical instrumental inquiring.

Noteworthy, ‘*an* experience’ differs somewhat from the stream of experiencing as an occasion with a beginning and ending that becomes part of an on-going life. What such ‘*an* experience’ might be, how it emerges, and how it can become fruitful

through reflexive inquiring is discussed in a succeeding subsection concerned with habits.

In sum, *experiencing* encompasses both doing and undergoing with environments and others whereby ‘when we experience something, we act upon it, we do something with it; then we suffer or undergo the consequences’ (Dewey, 1966, p. 139). Thus, ‘experience is the name for this whole process [...] where organism and environment are both transformed. [It is a] transaction that has a *temporal* structure, whereas classical empiricists and rationalists gave it a *spatial* structure with the outer world impinging on the senses (Brinkmann, 2011, p. 300). Whilst a person’s experiencing is intimately connected with varying environments and others, each person’s meshwork of experiencing is unique. Indeed, whilst occasions with others are shared, each person’s doing and undergoing (effect and affect) through that unfolding occasion is *experienced* differently given the historical journeying to, and beyond, that occasion – notions that shall be discussed further when considering the mind as a depository. Roth (2016) describes this ‘uniqueness’ when discussing personality transactionally,

Different personalities are possible in part because the participation of any number of persons in the same activity differs as a function of (a) the different traces of prior participations and (b) the different positions we (are made to) take up in participating. That is, the human body, as a result of the multiple forms of participations in many activities, registers a unique continuity of experience. Because experience leads to experience, any human life is path dependent and therefore unique, all the while including inherently shared aspects (p. 195).

This is crucial to understanding the empirical accounts discussed later which demonstrate how occasions of ‘poverty’ or ‘grief’, for example, manifest and are realised in different ways for different persons. Hence, assumptions which draw correlations between seemingly ‘similar’ persons and then propose generalised interventions targeted at particular (cause-effect) outcomes, overlook how such supportive mechanisms may become useful, and hence manifest, in different ways unique to each person.

---

#### FUNCTIONALLY CORRESPONDING (CO-ORDINATING)

**Functional correspondence refers to the ways in which person and environment reciprocally co-constitute the continued function of each other, as parts of an**

**organic process of evolution.** Put simply, the person depends on their environments to exist, and through such transactional existence also affects environments. As Dewey puts it,

Since no particular organism lasts forever, life in general goes on only as an organism reproduces itself; and the only place where it can reproduce itself is in the environment.[...] accordingly, a living organism and its life processes involve a world or nature temporally and spatially “external” to itself but “internal” to its functions (Dewey, 1958, p. 285).

Indeed, rather than a person living *in* an environment, or an environment having a one-dimensional effect upon the person, the two are reciprocally corresponding and thereby sustaining the continued function of the organic whole. This is to think of persons living by means *of* their environment whereby transactions co-constitute their functioning through utilisation of differing means. As such, persons:environments are functionally corresponding through uncertainty, change, and adaptability such that,

No creature lives merely under its skin; its subcutaneous organs are means of connection with what lies beyond its bodily frame, and to which, in order to live, it must adjust itself, by accommodation and defence but also by conquest. At every moment, the living creature is exposed to dangers from its surroundings, and at every moment, it must draw upon something in its surroundings to satisfy its needs. The career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way (Dewey, 1934/2005 p. 13).

Hence, the need to recognise person:environment as an organic whole becomes clearer since the person cannot exist separately from its environments. Moreover, a person’s existence is premised upon its ability to adapt and utilise changing environments in functional ways which concerns social, cultural, and political environments as much as it does natural. Indeed, much like ‘the heart is not in the body as a marble is in a jar’, neither are persons bounded entities loosely connecting to form a society (Garrison, 2001, pp. 290-291). Rather, the person (like the heart) ‘is a subfunction coordinated with other subfunctions to comprise a functional, organic unity’ (Garrison, 2001, pp. 290-291). It is through this process then, that person and environment (e.g., society) may be distinct, but their mutual existence is continued through a functional equilibrium of ‘back and forth’ activity meaning the relation cannot ‘translate into atomism [given] the constitutive permeability’ (Sullivan, 2011, p. 14). Functional equilibrium then is sustained by the reproduction



of habitual ‘back and forth’ transactional activity, or successful adaptation to a disruption of habitual activity, as shall now be discussed in further detail.

---

## HABITS

**Habits are acquired, contextually determined, functions emerging from person:environment transactional relation** (cf. Dewey, 1922; Garrison, 2001). To elaborate, habits become acquired through transactional activity where the person puts the environment to use for a particular purpose, relative to their functioning. Indeed, habits are the ‘arts’ by which a person engages with the world (Dewey, 1922). For Dewey, it is ‘through habits formed in intercourse with the world, we also in-habit the world. It becomes a home, and the home is part of our every experience’ (Dewey, 1980, p. 104). Thus, habits *are* functions and hence, are *repetitive* though not *routine*. For example, habits are acquired through doing (engagement with the material world) which requires ‘order and discipline’ and which ‘manifests technique’ through the doing,

We should laugh at anyone who said that he was master of stone working, but that the art was cooped up within himself and in no wise dependent upon support from objects and assistance from tools (Dewey, 1922, p. 15).

Habits are then cultivated through repetitive doing and hence are both (i) social and (ii) bodily, which requires due attention in turn.

Firstly, as habits are acquired through this transactional process, they are contextually determined by differing environments given that ‘individuals come to have the particular habits they do by being embedded [through] cultures and societies whose customs and institutions exist prior to the individual and the formation of her habits’ (Sullivan, 2001, p. 35). Thus, the young person is *subject* in that her habits are, initially, configured as part of larger (societal/cultural) habits. Fundamentally, cultures or cultural habits are evental in nature and are not ‘structures’ external to person:environment concrete transactional activity. Indeed, for Dewey, culture is natural (Dewey, 1934). Thus, as the young person develops through *doing* habitual activity, they begin to *contribute* to the social renewal of habits, hence the habits are not routine. In so, ‘as transactional participants in meaning, human organisms often help secure existing habits and cultural customs,

but they also are capable of transforming them' (Sullivan, 2001, p. 40). Or, as Garrison (2002) puts it 'culture has us before we have it; if we are ever to possess ourselves and realise our unique potential, we must critique and reconstruct our social context' (p.115) - notions that shall continue to be explored in a following subsection concerned with 'growing'. The 'back and forth' functional, and continuous, nature of transactional living then aids in understanding how societies appear to be 'reproduced' despite slow, distinctive changes. Such an understanding points to limitations in some scholars' works who seem misdirected by the 'fundamental essence' of groups of individuals (e.g., the 'working class'). For example, groups described as sharing 'characteristics' according to 'similarities' across generations, often attributed to place (e.g., 'working class mining communities') may be better thought of as emerging from reproduced and reconfigured habitual activities which unfold spatiotemporally, forming a historical backdrop, rather than *caused* by 'structures' or 'individuals'<sup>11</sup> which overlook person:environment reciprocity. These evolutionary processes which are both social, and personal, are constituted by habits and of which individuals are both subject and contributor in the continuity of the (i) human race and (ii) particular communities.

Secondly, as habits are repetitive, they involve what Dewey calls 'mechanisation' which, when 'running smoothly' do not 'produce consciousness' (Sullivan, 2001). For example, where functions are 'deeply ingrained' such as with walking and talking (Sullivan, 2001), these 'take the form of habituation, or a general and persistent balance of organic activities with the surroundings' (Dewey, 1966, p. 39). This habituation is the 'smooth' functional correspondence with the environment. However, habits also involve 'active capacities to readjust activity to meet new conditions' (Dewey, 1966, p. 39). Therefore, habits are not only ways of being in the world but are also responses to ever-changing environments whereby adaptability is required to ensure functional equilibrium, given that 'the very nature of life is to strive to continue in being' (Dewey, 1966, p. 8). Thus, living becomes a balance of habitual 'mechanisation' and creative improvisation. For example, if a person travels to a country where they are unfamiliar with the language, their habitual function of

---

<sup>11</sup> See the work of Geoffrey Bright who discusses the various outcomes of communities and places 'socially haunted' by systemic inequalities (i.e., under particular governmental rule) – discussed briefly in Chapter Two.

communicating (mechanisation) is disrupted. The person then must adapt to these new environmental conditions, reconfiguring their activity, to enable continued functioning, such as using gestures as a tool for communicating (creative improvisation). If the person then continues to transact in this unfamiliar environment (meaning the environment becomes familiar) and begins to use the language of that country repetitively, a new habit is formed (i.e., they now speak another language) (Dewey, 1922; Sullivan, 2001). However, the previous habit (prior to disruption) is not forgotten, rather the person becomes an evolving depository of habits which are sustained with use, and yet always open to further reconfiguration dependent upon further environmental changes which pose functional disruption. This disruption may then become ‘*an experience*’ which ‘stands out’ in the general stream of experiencing by having a beginning and ending. Such ‘*an experience*’ manifests in ways such as ‘a quarrel with one who was once an intimate, a catastrophe finally averted by a hair’s breadth’ which thus ‘stands out as an enduring memorial’ (Dewey, 2005, p. 275). The occasion which poses such a disruption to functioning and hence, produces consciousness, can sometimes (though not always immediately) stimulate reflexive inquiring. Hence, the way in which ‘*an experience*’ is made sense of can also shift – ideas which are discussed in later chapters.

Accordingly, habits are often sub-conscious and only become conscious when disrupted, which poses a threat to functional equilibrium. This means habits are not ‘within’ the mind but rather emerge from mind-body-environment transactions. It is necessary then to distinguish between ‘mind’ and ‘consciousness’ in this respect whereby ‘mind is contextual and persistent; consciousness is focal and transitive (Dewey, 1958, p. 309). As Sullivan (2001) elaborates,

Mind is the context and backdrop for the immediacy and focus of consciousness; the sharp focus of consciousness shades off into a field of increasing obscurity that is mind. Mind is the stock of meanings that humans and some other animals take for granted in their everyday doings, most of which they are never consciously aware. In contrast, consciousness can be understood as the portion of the cultural fund of meanings— mind—that is currently undergoing examination and transformation at a particular time (p. 26).

Hence, a conscious response, to undergo or *feel* something, emerges from a functional disruption. To then make sense of that feeling, is to have a ‘mental’ life as ‘higher beings’ such as humans do as Sullivan (2001) explains,

To make sense of feelings, rather than just have them, requires the capacity of language, which allows humans and some other animals to discriminate, identify, and communicate such that meaning is generated. Once organisms possess and respond to meanings, psycho-physical existence has become sufficiently complex to have a mental life as well (p. 26).

Therefore, the mind (with body/environment) becomes an evolving depository of meanings which is making sense of occasions, brought forward by conscious functional disruptions. As such, the ways in which persons make sense of occasions, including ‘*an* experience’ such as the death of a loved one, continues to evolve as the person does. This leads to different levels of ‘knowledge’ as Dewey articulated. Firstly, ‘had’ knowledge which involves learning and cultivating habits to ensure functioning and secondly, reflective ‘known’ knowledge emerging from inquiring into those ‘problematic situations’ where functional activity is disrupted, and which stimulates ‘creative problem-solving’ to make sense of such occasions (Bridge, 2020). Thus, as before ‘creative’ refers to trialling new ways of doing which may be of some use in given situations. Importantly, all knowledge is flexible rather than ‘absolute’, given that ‘had’ knowledge is adjusting as the person does through doing, and reflective ‘known’ knowledge is also open to further inquiring as the depository of meanings (through doing) evolves. These ideas shall be exemplified further in later chapters when considering the ways in which particular occasions are made sense of and how such meanings shift as the person continues to grow, as shall now be discussed.

---

## GROWING

**Growth is the cultivation and renewal of habits.** Habituation ‘furnishes the background of growth’ and responding/adapting to disruptions to functional habits ‘constitutes growing’ (Dewey, 1966, p. 39). Here, it is worth quoting Dewey at length,

Life is a self-renewing process through action upon the environment [...] the creature is not equal to the task of indefinite self-renewal. But continuity of the life process is not dependent upon the prolongation of the existence of any one individual [...] the life process continues in increasingly complex forms [...] “Life” covers customs, institutions, beliefs, victories and defeats, recreations, and occupations. [...] With the renewal of physical existence goes, in the case of human beings, the renewal of physical ideals, hopes, happiness, misery, and practices (Dewey, 2004, pp. 10-12).

Thus, ‘learning’ *habits* is at first a transacted activity between more experienced members of a group and less experienced members of a group, through the very *doing*. In turn, through continued *doing*, habits are reproduced and renewed and thus, ‘communities come to engineer educative environments that allow reliable and effective, broad bandwidth flows of ecological inheritance, skilled habits and information, from generation to generation’ (Kivinen & Piironen, 2019, p. 207). Indeed, Sterelny (2011) argues that it is this socio-cultural, co-evolutionary process of *doing* that supported the evolution<sup>12</sup> of increasingly intelligent or ‘cleverer’ behaviour, rather than brain growth or genetic mutations.

As such, habits are ‘expressions of growth’ or ‘efficiency in doing’ (Dewey, 1966). The transactional nature of growth depends on the sophistication of the person:environment dynamic. This means the ability of the person (with environment and other) to cultivate habits and develop new habits (through adaptation with environments and others), and in so doing, transform environments through plasticity (learning through doing) and elasticity (putting tools to new uses). Roth (2016) offers a similar analogy, utilising the concept ‘development’ when considering the living of a young person as she is experiencing spatiotemporally. He begins by introducing concepts of ‘quantitative cumulative shifts’ and ‘qualitative transformational shifts’ as a way of distinguishing between habitual activity and growth,

Learning constitutes those aspects where experience changes cumulatively, such as when [person] becomes better at waitressing or snowboarding. Development refers to those changes of experience that are qualitative in nature, changing the dynamic system of sense in a qualitative manner, entailing different forms of qualitative changes that follow (i.e., learning). These qualitative changes are more crisis-like, reconfiguring the experience of the individual and leading to a new form [...] for example, because she experiences the everyday work in low-paying jobs as increasingly grating (quantitative change), she takes up going to college fulltime (qualitative shift). The qualitative shift changes the life trajectory and provides very different forms of experiences than being in the workplace. That is, following the qualitative life change, different quantitative (cumulative) changes follow (Roth, 2016, pp. 186-187).

---

<sup>12</sup> For further reading on the evolution of humans, see Sterelny (2012).

Here, Roth offers a way of thinking about how habitual activity (quantitative changing) leads to qualitative shifts (growth) which in turn is followed by novel habitual activities and so on the process continues. Much like Dewey, Roth refers to ‘crisis-like’ moments of growth which Dewey argues arises from ‘*an* experience’ of habitual disruption. Moreover, Roth (2016, p. 189) offers a five-step descriptive analogy of quantitative conditions which may precede a qualitative change. Firstly, ‘the real historical conditions that determine the form of experience’ whereby participation in an activity is ‘reflected intellectually and emotionally’ (i.e., low paying jobs as ‘grating’). Secondly, ‘the objective changes in the environmental conditions that lead to a contradiction within the person part of the unit give rise to the emergence of a new form of experience (first qualitative change)’ for example studying is ‘necessitated by contradictions arising in work-related activities’. Thirdly, ‘experiences are related in ways even though the form of experience is the same; a second form of experience already exists beside the still dominant but to-be-overturned form of experience’ such as considering university courses whilst working (dominant activity). Fourthly, ‘there is a change in dominance from the previously dominant to the newly dominant form of experience (second qualitative change)’ for example studying full-time and concluding work-activity. Finally, ‘there is a different experiential trajectory following the transition to the new form of experience’ whereby ‘the cumulative aspects of experience change following the qualitative shift from work to school or school to work’.

Put simply, growth is not simply becoming accomplished at doing (forming habits) but continually developing these habits through adaptation and consequently, forming new habits or functioning in new ways. Therefore, growing occurs through the habitual doing and adapting but growth also occurs from ‘*an* experience’ which disrupts functional doing and hence, has the potential to stimulate reflexive inquiring where making sense of the experience can also shift. Whilst ‘*an* experience’ has ended by its very nature of being a significant moment in a stream of occasioning, how that experience is understood is open to evolving understanding as the person grows through further experiencing, as shall come to be exemplified in later chapters. The different ways of making sense of experiences, as the mind:body-as-depository evolves, is a matter of maturity. The complexity then lies in attempts to maintain ‘child-like’ curiosity and openness to learn whilst adopting ‘adult-like’

proficiency in developing executive skills, transforming environments, and redirecting skills to continue developing (Dewey, 1966).

### 3.4 TOOLS FOR UNDERSTANDING ‘POOR’ YOUNG PEOPLE ‘DOING WELL’

Fundamentally, this research aligns with the idea that the empirical essence of living is change. Therefore, the discussion in this chapter began with the possibility of the novel, and the different, whilst understanding that individuals are constantly practically adaptive to change to sustain elements of functional coordination which, given particular environmental conditions, can at times suggest notions of a ‘static’ reproduction or incremental learning. At other times however, and without full control by individuals, the person can be both subject and subjected to transactional activity that has the potential for more transformative development in a person’s continuous becoming, given that ‘all social life is educative’ (Dewey, 1966, p. 7). Thus, at one level, the notions of habit and functional coordination aid in explaining the reproductive actions associated with habitual transacted activity that is part of daily living. In a complementary and yet different way, functional disruption and growth elucidate how the dramatic nature of change/contradiction in one’s living can create challenges to habitual activity that bring about possibilities for enhanced consciousness, reflexive inquiry, and hypothesised new practical activity that has the potential for more generative relational/individual development over time and in particular contexts. The fact that ‘change is possible, albeit neither certain nor guaranteed’ (Sullivan, 2001, p. 53), points to the uniqueness of experiencing and indeed, the individual despite transacting in shared fields with seemingly ‘similar’ others. Such notions aid in developing ideas about how some ‘poor’ young people experience poverty and associated adversity and yet can sometimes ‘do well’ educationally, given that they present an ‘anomaly’ in the general trend. These ideas shall be developed further as the empirical accounts of Imogen, Serena, and Elizabeth are discussed in Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight respectively. Firstly, it is necessary to consider how observing these accounts unfolded through a process of practical inquiring, as shall now be discussed in Chapter Four.

## CHAPTER FOUR PRACTICAL INSTRUMENTAL INQUIRING

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The fundamental aim of this chapter is to foreground practical instrumental inquiring<sup>13</sup> as appropriate in attending to the problem of this research which concerns young people who are experiencing poverty and associated adversity, and yet ‘doing well’ educationally. This process of inquiring is one which is ‘naturally’ empirical by attending to the continuum of experiencing as it unfolds in concrete reality. Indeed, the process of inquiring is one which recognises the transactional nature of persons with environments and others who are co-constituting unfolding occasions as they continue. This appreciates the interconnection of ‘Researcher’ and ‘Researched’ whilst understanding that the transactional relation emerges from attention to the problem of this research and the conditions of the social/cultural environments of those involved in the research process.

I begin by considering conceptualisations of ‘methodology’ and ‘method’ before outlining the methodological underpinnings which constituted the journeying of this research. Following a brief overview of some of the limitations of methodologies associated with dualistic explanations, I outline practical instrumental inquiring as one which overcomes some of these limitations. Following this, I revisit the research journey (outlined in Chapter One) methodologically to consider the unfolding of practical activities, made sense of through the dimensions of inquiring. This journeying then leads to a more thorough discussion of specific methods utilised as part of this practical inquiring, including conversing, remembering, and writing. By discussing these methods in turn, I exemplify specific occasions of the research process which demonstrated the unfolding, unpredictable, co-constituted, and ultimately ‘messy’ process of practically inquiring into the problem of ‘poor’ young people who ‘do well’ educationally. The final section of this chapter discusses one of the specific contributions of this research by focusing on what is termed here as an ‘auto-transactional’ approach to practical inquiring. I will explain how this approach directed thinking about the autobiographical occasions of my living, including questioning previous tools I had been utilising to make sense of such occasions. In so

---

<sup>13</sup> Whereafter, I refer to ‘inquiring’ or ‘inquiry’, I do so in this practical-instrumental ways.



doing, I suggest that this ‘auto-transactional’ approach to inquiring can also be seen as a disruption to my habitual thinking which stimulated a developmental turn.

## 4.2 METHODOLOGY AND DEWEYAN METHOD

Methodology is often associated with rationalising the underpinning of research choices including the philosophical position or ‘beliefs’ to approaching research, whilst ‘method’ tends to refer to the ‘tools and techniques’ employed in the ‘collection of data’ (cf. Campbell, 2016). The most common purpose of outlining a methodology is to make transparent the practices one employed during a research process and in what ways. The aims of such transparency are often associated with carefully considering how ‘data was collected’, assessing the ‘validity’ of ‘data’ and ‘analysis’, and whether conduct was ‘ethical’. Quite often, such descriptions of ‘methodological practice’ are assessed for their ‘generalisability’ or ‘applicability’ in further research, or when considering if the ‘findings’ may bear relevance for other ‘similar’ contexts, though debates do exist concerning the generalisability of educational research (cf. Ercikan & Roth, 2014).

Indeed, there are an increasing number of ‘Research Handbooks’ which attempt to depict particular methodologies, specifically ‘dominant’ ways of doing research, often aimed at a researcher aligning with a particular set of ideals or following prescriptive guides (cf. Creswell 2018; Kumar, 2018; Dawson, 2019). Attention has also been drawn to the ‘repetition’ involved in ‘educational research curriculums’ that are often concerned with ‘conventional methodologies’ which are seen to ‘stifle invention’ (St. Pierre, 2016). More recently, there have been debates around ‘decolonising methodologies’ so that researchers are not ‘forced’ to align with dominant ideals. These problematise ‘ways of knowing’, particularly ways of producing ‘Eurocentric knowledge’ that overlook issues of power, colonialism, and ethics (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019). Whilst others have been critical of ‘rushing into pre-existing methodologies’ and instead, encourage ‘inquiry’ which ‘asks us to trust that something unimaginable might come out that changes the world bit by bit’ (St Pierre, 2018, p.10). This involves asking often overlooked, yet crucial questions: ‘Does thought need a method to steer it? Does inquiry need a method to control it? What might educational research become if it were free of the hegemonic

pretensions of methods, if it were *methodology-free*? (St. Pierre, 2016, p.10, original emphasis).

For Dewey, ‘method is a statement of the way subject matter of an experience develops most effectively and fruitfully’ (Dewey, 1966, p.130). Hence, inquiring as a method is not simply about the ‘doing’ of *practical* action but how this stimulates useful ideas which can be used to attend to problems of concrete realities – what he described as *instrumental*. This captures the essence of theory/method or thinking/doing as one entire process which both emerges from, and therefore, applies to, concrete living. As Sullivan (2001) encapsulates, the process ‘sees knowledge as a tool for enriching experience; is pluralistic, experimental, fallibilist, and naturalistic; and rejects the quest for certainty while taking a melioristic attitude - an attitude that human action sometimes can improve the world (p. 5). Thus, the plausibility of this method ‘rests upon observation and experience [...] to address problems rooted in daily life’ (Hildebrand, 2013, p. 59).

Given this ‘root in daily life’, it is possible that parts of the inquiring of this research may be deemed ‘ethnographic’. Nevertheless, my research will not align with this methodological/theoretical approach given the ambiguity in both conceptualisations and ‘applications’ of ethnography. Such ambiguities pertain to on-going debates, some of which challenge the ‘application’ of ‘ethnographic method’. For example, some research concerned with education view the ethnographic approach as a ‘method’ which can be ‘applied’ by involving activities ‘in the field’ and which can be ‘analysed’ ‘out of the field’ (Beach, Bagley & Silva, 2018), which appears to segregate the continuum of experiencing as it is unfolding. Indeed, in a transactional sense activity considered to be ‘in the field’ and ‘out of the field’ are intertwining transactions through differing environments with others which are moving forward in real time with the fluidity of living. As such, my research may be better thought of as a ‘crafting’ of sorts, which emerges from practical instrumental inquiry, and thus departs from dominant methodologies and prescriptive tools. Thus, it may be better thought of as ‘educational’ rather than ‘ethnographic’, as Ingold contends,

the purpose, dynamic and potential [...] is not to arrive at retrospective accounts of what life is like for the people of particular places and times: it is not ethnographic, in that sense. Rather, it is educational . To undergo this education

is to join with others in an ongoing exploration of what the *possibilities* and *potentials* of life *might* be. (Ingold, 2015, p. 158, added emphasis).

Practical instrumental inquiring then is an action-oriented approach which attends to concrete experiencing as these unfold with an ‘open-mindedness’ (discussed further below) about end goals such that as persons:environments evolve (and problems change), further inquiry is always possible to adapt to the new situations. This means the process is instrumental insofar as it is relevant to the problem, and in use to attend to the problem, what Dewey refers to as ‘fruitful’. Any ideas pertaining to open-ended inquiring through experiencing is thus based on hypotheses rather than absolute or standardised notions. Moreover, inquiring in this way is thoroughly and holistically contextual given that hypotheses attend to evolving situations and move forward in real time as living continues. Such an approach is thought to overcome challenges presented by rigour/relevance, theoretical/practical, or academic/practitioner debates (cf. Vo, Mounoud & Rose, 2012). Indeed, through this process where theory and practice are fundamentally inseparable, methodological ‘rigour’ develops through the instrumental relevance emerging from understanding concrete realities and hypothesising solutions - notions that shall be discussed further in Chapter Nine. In so doing, the methods and object of inquiry (unit of analysis) develop through inquiring rather than exist externally or prior to inquiry (Dewey, 1938; Jornet & Damsa, 2019), as was outlined in Chapter One through the evolving direction of inquiry.

For now, it suffices to note four ‘common problems’ of method or technique, which practical inquiring overcomes: (i) ‘the neglect of concrete situations of experience’, (ii) ‘the notion that method is separate from subject matter’, (iii) ‘the act of learning as a direct and conscious end in itself’, and that (iv) ‘methods can be reduced to following mechanically prescribed steps’ (Dewey, 1966, pp. 122-123). The more practical activities involved in overcoming these problems through inquiring are exemplified in the following sections.

#### 4.3 ATTENDING TO UNFOLDING OCCASIONS

In understanding how inquiring in everyday living unfolds, Brinkmann (2020) offers some useful formulations which are adapted here to guide the explication of this journey. Somewhere near the ‘beginning’ of this research journey,

was what might be called ‘choosing the topic’ which focused on young people, poverty, and education. Thereafter, the ‘problem’ for my general inquiry was established, and whilst this evolved, it broadly concerned young people experiencing poverty as part of their everyday living and learning. In both establishing, and evolving, the ‘problem’ focus and how I might go about inquiring, I began ‘collecting materials’ which became an ‘empirical corpus’ of ‘studying living’ which involved ‘something we all do as living human beings with the capacity to walk, talk, observe, and recollect’ (p.7). Throughout, I was ‘consulting literature’ in assisting my thinking about empirical materials and ‘developing [my] own imagination’ which in my case also included conversations with several ‘thought-partners’ in addition to ‘reading’ texts. Indeed, ideas were discussed at length both within my supervisory team and with persons with whom my everyday living interwove. ‘Collecting materials’ which aided my thinking ‘continued’ throughout the process, including writing which I see as a ‘form of inquiry in itself’ (St. Pierre, 2018) and which will be discussed further in section 4.4.3.

Whilst these formulations could be misunderstood as a ‘step-by-step’ guide to a linear process, it is crucial to advocate the opposite. Emphatically, these formulations are outlined not as prescriptive instructions but as tools for understanding the activities, the *actual doing*, of the research as it unfolded. Furthermore, it is also useful to draw on what Dewey refers to as the ‘traits’ of inquiring to exemplify the practical activities in more detail. What follows is an outline of the research journey introduced in Chapter One, now with a specific focus on practical inquiring as the journey unfolded, aligning with four fundamental ‘traits’ of inquiring. Thereafter, I attend to three main activities in turn in section 4.4.

#### Directness

Directness is ‘straightforwardness with which ones goes at what [she] has to do [...] an unconscious faith in the possibilities of the situation’ (Dewey, 1966, p. 126). This is perhaps the way in which inquiring departs most from prescriptive planning and rather, emphasises the art of ‘trying things out and seeing what happens’ (Ingold, 2016). An accurate articulation of this research journey then, is one which explicates the non-linear, unpredictable, ways activities unfolded through unforeseen concrete occasions. It is worth noting that the idea of organising some sort of purposeful

meeting/activity in a particular place at a particular time is part of the functional co-ordination with others as a recognised and hence, societal and individually reproduced, activity. Nonetheless, the reality of such ‘planning’ is often quite different and the way activities manifest often ‘moves forward in real time along with the lives of those who are touched by it, and with the world to which both it and [we] belong (Ingold, 2016, p. 11).

For example, this research began with a particular focus on intended ‘outcomes’, primarily concerned with the impact of a school’s educational interventions on families and young people, and how such interventions may be developed. The direction of the research evolved and adapted to unfolding occasions which exploited the possibilities to learn about Imogen and Serena’s living more holistically and how these might be understood by utilising transactional tools. Such developing and adapting included attending the school and being flexible with the availability of students and reconfiguring the project from focusing on six students to two. Imogen and Serena became the two students where the logistics of being in the school worked at its best and, who were the most enthusiastic in engaging with the research.

This also meant adapting the project during the Covid-19 global pandemic<sup>14</sup> when the planned fieldwork had to conclude earlier than anticipated due to school closures, and where sensitivity and logistics meant conversations with Imogen and Serena could not continue remotely. Hence, the project evolved to pay more attention to the connections emerging from Imogen and Serena’s accounts and the transactional literature, which highlighted questions about my own biography and how I had previously understood it. With the emerging interest and the reconfiguration of the project, it became a good opportunity to engage in an exploratory reflexive (autobiographical) piece. This engagement developed into something far more than initial explorations and has now become an autobiographical chapter of this thesis (Chapter Eight). A discussion of methods pertaining to this activity specifically are elaborated in a following section, as a contribution of this research.

Noteworthy, attending to the possibilities of unfolding occasions also brings into question ethical review processes which are, generally, premised on prescriptive and

---

<sup>14</sup> The global pandemic involved a national lockdown in England, where the school is based.

reviewable plans of activities. Indeed, the suitability of such review processes for less determinate research methodologies continue to be debated across fields of literature. The following chapter (Five) presents a clear illustration of when such processes may be less useful, through a discussion of an unpredictable occasion with Imogen, which foregrounds the notion of co-responsibility as one attuned to concrete realities and thus, inquiring.

### Open-mindedness

Open-mindedness is considered an ‘attitude which welcomes suggestions and relevant information from all sides [...] welcoming points hitherto alien [...] an active desire to entertain considerations which modify existing purposes’ (Dewey, 1966, p. 127). Dewey has also referred to this as embracing childlike astonishment and wonder which tends to reduce with growth into adulthood as we become more familiar with habitual social and cultural practices (cf. Dewey, 1966). Ingold (2015) suggests such an approach in similar ways when contending,

In a world of becoming [...] even the ordinary, the mundane or the intuitive gives cause for astonishment – the kind of astonishment that comes from treasuring every moment, as if, in that moment, we were encountering the world for the first time, sensing its pulse, marvelling at its beauty, and wondering how such a world is possible (p. 64).

In terms of welcoming ‘alien’ ideas with astonishment, Ingold offers further guidance to ‘not to accumulate more and more data *about* the world, but to better correspond *with* it (Ingold, 2015, p. 11). Hence, engaging with transactional inquiry is about embracing the ideas and suggestions of others and particularly those which may highlight/develop limitations in initial ideas, and recognising the simultaneous doing and undergoing transactionally as ideas are shared and discussed.

In practice, I welcomed Imogen and Serena’s stories and attended to their descriptions of occasions as they told them. This meant actively attending to their understandings of occasions, whilst recognising the other protagonists they were transacting with during such occasions. Such a process then attended to their transactional knotting with others, such as particular family members through shared activities, as well as how these occasions co-constituted their evolving biographical meshwork of experiencing thus far as they were both doing and undergoing complex moments in particular social/cultural environments. Equally, this process included

recognising the context of our transactions including my own biographical journeying and the problems the research is concerned with. These are parts in a process of transactionally researching together, where our experiencing could not be considered separately given these shared occasions.

Embracing open-mindedness also emerged through multiple conversational transactions with my supervisory team as well as an independent reviewer<sup>15</sup> with differing research specialisms, who offered constructive criticism of some of my ideas/hypotheses. Moreover, I was continuously consulting new literatures, including those critical of pragmatist/transactional approaches, as I engaged with the empirical accounts. These transactions with Imogen, Serena, and others became parts of an iterative process of hypothesising ideas as I developed my use of transactional tools through engagement with the empirical accounts.

Noteworthy, the ‘auto-transactional’ approach I utilised to explore my own biographical experiencing, also involved welcoming different ideas about how I understood past experiences, through an evolved depository of experiencing in the present. This approach shall be elucidated in section 4.5.

#### Single-mindedness

Single-mindedness is a ‘completeness of interest [...] absorption, engrossment, full concern with subject matter for its own sake’ (Dewey, 1966, p. 128). In practice, I became ‘single-minded’ with the substantive concern of this research problem through full, engrossing, engagement with the empirical accounts and the transactional literature. This meant becoming engrossed with the narrated accounts of Imogen, Serena, and myself including the occasions which constituted these. When attending to these occasions, concern focused on the full dynamics of our living with environments and others through some occasions considered to be ‘adverse’ and others less so. This also meant consistently following Imogen and Serena’s schooling activities and their gradings constituting the cultural notions of how ‘well’ they were doing. Hence, the transactional tools of attending to unfolding moments, habitual activities, and the adaptation of the person as their *whole* process

---

<sup>15</sup> An independent reviewer is involved in the progression assessment of students, which take place annually over the course of the doctorate programme.

of living became the most appropriate in recognising the complexities of our interweaving experiencing.

Practically then, this process involved engaging in an in-depth review of the relevant literature concerned with explaining young people's living and educational experiences more generally, and those concerned with 'poor' people who 'do well' specifically. These explanations were then problematised in an intimate relation with the unfolding narrated accounts of Imogen and Serena, initially. Attempting to utilise these explanations to make sense of Imogen and Serena's experiencing highlighted how such explanations seemed premised on notions which separated persons from their environments and activities with others and connected seemingly disparate occasions in linearly causal ways (see Chapter Two). Hence, I began to utilise transactional ideas which appeared to better attend to the fluid, dynamic, and complex ways Imogen and Serena's living had, and continued to, unfold.

As engagement continued with Imogen and Serena, I began to question some of the ways I had been making sense of my own living and began to engage with ideas of reflexive inquiring also. This in turn, offered further ideas about particular occasions of Imogen and Serena's living and how the process could be potentially 'fruitful' in developing how they understood particular moments (i.e., 'failing' a test). This process is perhaps best understood as continually unfolding, iterative, and developmental in terms of growth in understandings.

Moreover, various literatures were considered as the accounts of living emerged for example, those concerned with grief and substance abuse in explaining educational outcomes of 'poor' young people. Noteworthy, continued engagement with transactional/pragmatist literature illuminated a breadth of ideas concerned with broader notions of racial inequality, religion, politics, and evolution to name a few. However, these literatures were set aside so as to remain 'single-minded' with the substantive problem of 'poor' young people who 'do well' specifically. These 'additional' literatures of interest which spoke to human experiencing and poverty more generally were then saved for future consideration, some of which are drawn on in Chapter Nine when discussing further areas of research.



### Responsibility

Responsibility of inquiring pertains to ‘seeing a thing through [...] manifested in the firmness with which the full meaning of the purpose is developed’ (Dewey, 1966, p. 129). In the context of this research, this meant continuous engagement, reflection, and discussions with others concerning the empirical accounts and theoretical ideas throughout the process including during the final stages of writing. Moreover, directing the inquiry through the challenges associated with a pandemic also foregrounds the purpose with which the research was conducted. The responsibility of this inquiring process is then demonstrated in this written thesis as a cohesive piece to bring these ideas together and thus, offer empirical and methodological contributions to the field. Ultimately, the research process involved a responsibility to Imogen, Serena, and myself to tell our stories. A broader idea of responsibility shall also be considered in the following chapter when concerned with ‘ethics’.

Having provided a summative outline of the nature of practical inquiring, I now turn to exemplifying the main activities of this research in more detail, which seem to fall under the three categories of conversing, remembering, and writing.

#### 4.4 PRACTICAL INSTRUMENTAL INQUIRY: EXEMPLIFIED ACTIVITY

As mentioned in the previous section, this process of practical instrumental inquiring is an on-going process of corresponding with others and environments, directed at the specific problem concerned with ‘poor’ young people living and learning. As the following chapters will illustrate, this research takes a ‘storied’ (or narrative) approach to presenting and discussing the empirical accounts together with transactional thinking. Taking a ‘storied’ approach is an attempt to encapsulate the unfolding, dramatic nature of daily living with interweaving persons (multiple protagonists) transactionally co-constituting occasions of which those described, including the research occasions, are only parts (cf. Alsaker, Josephsson & Dickie, 2013). Through this creative process then, three tasks seem to be pertinent to describing the on-going practical activities. Noteworthy, whilst each activity is exemplified in turn for practical clarity, the three activities unfolded in overlapping, simultaneous, and deeply interconnected ways throughout the process of inquiring (as Figure 1 suggests).

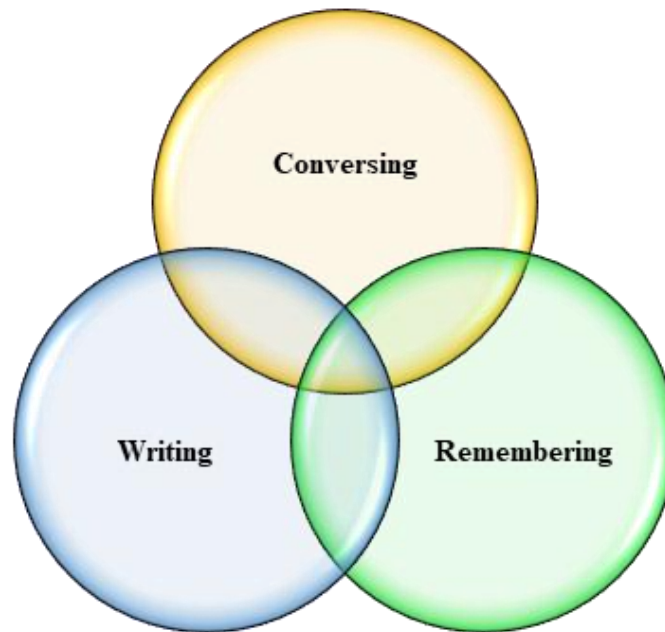


Figure 1 Interconnecting Tasks of Practical Inquiring

---

#### 4.4.1 CONVERSING

The primary activity Imogen, Serena, and I engaged with was conversing. Conversations have been articulated as ‘human encounters that involve the use of language, and which are based on a degree of reciprocity and responsivity’ (Brinkmann, 2020, p. 1). Indeed, ‘conversation understood widely enough, is the form of human transactions in general’ (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 179). For these reasons, I have chosen to talk of ‘conversing’ to emphasise the intimate, reciprocal, and on-going ways, these co-produced occasions emerge, which can sometimes be misleading when using terms such as ‘interview’. This attends to everyday acting of humans, as the transactional approach requires, given that ‘as thinking, feeling, and acting creatures in social and cultural worlds, we cannot escape being in conversational relations with others’ (Brinkmann, 2020, p. 2). Moreover, paying attention to the conversation as an active transaction is crucial to understanding the ‘storied’ person given that ‘both conversations in particular and human actions in general [are] enacted narratives’ (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 180). Thinking in this way then appreciates the transactional nature of the conversational moment, whereby both actors are changing through the process and are becoming parts in each other’s stories (living experiencing), respecting the two-dimensional reciprocity. Conversing with the young women may be better understood as improvisatory corresponding in that following our greetings to each other, I might direct a question to Imogen or

Serena such as “what’s new?” to which their response would be unpredictable prior to the relevance of the question requiring a response. What then followed was a whole host of unprecedented corresponding which neither of us could have predicted prior to each turn, as I will now exemplify.

As Figure 2<sup>16</sup> depicts, conversing involves a reciprocal corresponding whereby both parties are speaking and hearing (and hence, bodily moving) as part of the unfolding occasion. Thus, it is about appreciating the novelty of the turns of our joint correspondence that was both exciting and fruitful. In so, we ‘wandered together’ on a responsive, conversational journey (Brinkmann, 2020).

**Elizabeth to Imogen (E-I) (*speaking*)** > **Ok so does your Mum have a job or does she stay at home** < **Imogen from Elizabeth (I-E) (*hearing*)** **Ok so does your Mum have a job or does she stay at home** > **Imogen to Elizabeth (I-E) (*speaking*)** > **Yes at home** < **Elizabeth from Imogen (E-I) (*hearing*)** **Yes at home** **E-I (E-I) (*speaking*)** > **she stays at home ok**

Figure 2 Imogen and Elizabeth Conversing: speaking and hearing

**I-E** > **I dunno maybe hes seen something that looks like a cat** < **E-I** > [...] **where do you think the confusion came from was he looking at a picture book or has he seen a rat** < **I-E** > **So theres this rat that comes from my neighbours place they bite through the walls** < **E-I** > **Ohh** < **I-E** > **Yea it comes in we never had rats for the first few months of living there in that area but then they would always come from the walls [...]** < **E-I** > **Have you still got that problem do you still get rats sometimes** < **I-E** > **No they know we are dangerous** [*raises finger in front of her in pointing motion*]

Figure 3 Imogen and Elizabeth Conversing: unpredictable turns

<sup>16</sup> The corresponding nature of speaking and hearing shall hereafter be reflected by < > due to space limitations. Punctuation is not included in the excerpts to reflect the true sense in which words are spoken through everyday living.

Corresponding with both speaking and hearing, neither person can predict what the other will say and how the discussion will unfold. In the first excerpt above (Figure 2), Imogen's speaking answer is heard by me and then repeated in my own speaking. This demonstrates how each preceding and succeeding turn is defined by one another, and continuity is produced by this overlapping where there are no turns next to each other but rather a dynamic, interweaving, correspondence.

The second excerpt (Figure 3) better demonstrates the unpredictability of the unfolding conversation where I am learning as the speaking/gestures emerge such that I am unaware at the beginning of the excerpt why Imogen's younger brother might be mistaking a cat for a rat, so I pose a hypothesis, to which Imogen responds offering a more accurate hypothesis based on her shared (previous) experiencing with her brother. The conversation then continues to unfold and, whilst relating to the previous moment, emerges in unpredictable ways. This was often the nature of our conversations which emerged in various directions, at times spurred on by remembering which unfolded a new direction, as will be discussed in the following subsection.

Despite 'wandering together', it would be negligent to assert that I, nor Imogen or Serena, arrived at the beginning of our transactions without a backdrop of experiencing that can be divorced from any occasions which unfolded together thereafter. Indeed, the occasions were directed by the substantive concern of young people experiencing poverty and education, whilst the unfolding of this journey was attentional to a host of possibilities which emerged in the real *living* of the research-occasion. Given this unpredictability, neither person is in total control of how the occasion is unfolding, each are both doing and undergoing as they transact together co-constituting the shared moment. As such, both persons are speaking *to*, and *for*, one another which means that persons cannot be attended to independently of the occasion, 'without losing what is relevant to the occasion, for any (verbal) actions arises out of the preceding one and is directed to and for the reception of the specific listener' (Roth, 2020, p. 23). Thus, the moment cannot then be reduced to words that 'belong to' one actor (i.e., 'she said this' as constituted by one protagonist) but rather, the conversation belongs to both persons and the occasion as parts in on-going dramatic living. This is a co-penetration (inter-permeability) achieved by the reciprocal correspondence whereby both persons are becoming parts in each other's

experiencing through the shared occasion. For this reason, it is crucial to attend to the entire occasion, as well as the particular occasion as part of the wider transactional drama of living. As Dewey, Garrison, and Roth all remind us, attending to conversations is appropriate so long as we do not solely focus on word-signs (what is said) as a reflection of the person's experiencing without truly attending to context – which requires us to bear in mind the conversation becomes a part-abstraction of the continued experiencing of those involved. Thus, when attending to conversations as part of this research process, I was continuously reflecting on the contexts of the conversations, specifically remembering (i) the substantive concern of the research and (ii) the social and cultural environments the research activities were taking place and therefore, which conditioned the conversations. This recognises the transactional nature of 'researching' with Imogen and Serena whereby conversations were directed parts of the inquiry process and yet which remained 'open-minded' to the possibilities of what might emerge.

---

#### 4.4.2 REMEMBERING

Parts of our conversations involved what might be considered 'remembering' and 'reminiscing'<sup>17</sup> occasions. This was an important factor in the decision to take a 'storied' approach which explicates the evolving, unfolding nature of a living person by encompassing the interweaving of events in an on-going way, and emphasising the motion of unpredictable futures. Practically then, remembering and reminiscing emerged through conversations directed at the problem of better understanding the living and learning of young people. Often conversations would begin from 'looking backwards' to the most 'immediate past', for example to occasions that happened that morning or in the few days prior. As Imogen/Serena then talked of occasions, I would ask questions and often this would lead to remembering occasions in the less immediate past, particularly as I directed inquiry to understanding their entire living which included their evolving biography. For example, during an occasion with Serena, she mentioned her recent activity during an art class earlier that morning in her most 'immediate past', when responding to an initial question (e.g., 'what have you been up to?'). I then directed questions as she divulged detail about the occasion

---

<sup>17</sup> Reminiscing is considered to a process where 'remembering' occasions takes place with others involved in the occasion being remembered (cf. Roth, 2016).

(e.g., ‘can you tell me more about your art activities?’) which stimulated a directional turn to Serena talking about her mother, given that she feels art is both a memory with her mother and a way to help her ‘cope’ with challenging occasions. As the conversation unfolded, Serena talked of her earliest memories of art activities, who these activities were with and where, and how these expanded to her ‘love for photography’ as parts of her art classes during secondary schooling. When thinking about these conversations then, it was necessary to attend to the social/cultural environment of the schooling where the conversation took place, the content/direction of the conversation and why Serena was remembering these occasions. Equally, it was necessary to attend to the transactional nature of doing to and undergoing of (i) Serena with others as described through the remembered occasions which is *Serena’s* as opposed to other protagonists involved in the occasions she describes, and (ii) of myself and Serena through having the conversation where remembering took place.

Ultimately, the spoken words emerging from the occasion of remembering, which formed the storied accounts, only mean something within this context of researching as directed inquiry. Consequently, such words cannot be overlooked as something existing ‘outside’ of these reciprocally unfolding, transactional occasions that have a particular purpose: to inquire into the living and learning of ‘poor’ young people who are ‘doing well’ educationally. Thus, conversations pertaining to the past emerge ‘for some current purpose [therefore] the past and future come to be irremediably intertwined in the present’ and so, reflection is always an inherent part of remembering (Roth, 2019, p. 197).

In demonstrating the interweaving of past and present, Figure 4 depicts Serena *remembering* an occasion with her mother which concerned the current thread of our unfolding conversation. In this present moment, Serena is remembering a previous moment – that of her mother dancing – which comes to be intertwined in the novel moment which is our reciprocal conversation.

S-E < she was like the main person at obviously my birthday party <E-S> **Ahh the life**  
**and soul of the party** <S-E> [smiling] Yea and there was this one time she went to the pub  
 and Bruno Mars Uptown Funk came on and she just had everyone up dancing [laughing]  
 <E-S> **ahh bless her** <S-E> Yea she just went up on the table [puts hands up to her head,  
 covering face, shaking head, laughing]

Figure 4 Serena and Elizabeth conversing: remembering past occasions

Another form of remembering pertains to me remembering a past moment with Serena – a previous conversation – which becomes part of our novel occasion through the current conversation (Figure 5). Remembering through this occasion also points to the interweaving of past shared occasions into novel shared occasions whereby our lines-of-becoming are threading together as we continue transacting with one another. Therefore, whilst the correspondence was historical, intimately connected to previous correspondence which became parts on our on-going experiencing, each conversation thereafter took place anew involving further unpredictability until the conversation emerged. This is what might be described as the ‘opposite’ of a ‘method’ aimed at guiding a conversation to ‘remain relevant’ to a given topic (Ingold, 2016). Rather, this *exploratory inquiry* follows active conversing as it unfolds in the *living* moment with a directness towards a problem.

S-E < cause obviously I used to self-harm and that as well <E-S> **Yea I**  
**remember you saying that** <S-E> Yea and then [...] my dad taking drugs and my  
 real dad situation from years ago

Figure 5 Serena and Elizabeth conversing: past occasions through novel occasions

As can be seen, there is a complexity to our exchanges which include (i) remembering the events to which one refers, which are usually longer, descriptive narrations than the ‘event itself’ and include reflection upon the original event such as not only that the event happened but why it may have happened that way and (ii) remembering the prior conversations which consisted of remembering original events. This formed an almost double-layered remembering which was emerging as

part of the unfolding transactional journey where our meshwork of experiencing was intertwining, and the past was ever-becoming in the present and future. Hence, the practical activity of remembering and reminiscing through conversations became parts of directed inquiry through the functional corresponding of the research occasion, and which attended to the specific problem of better understanding the substantive concern of ‘poor’ young people living and learning. This directed inquiry then became the stimulus for more appropriate understandings which emerged from transactional observation, and all this entails, by attending to the full living of Serena and Imogen and attending to the contextual moments from which learning their stories unfolded. Remembering as part of the ‘auto-transactional’ approach to this research is discussed in section 4.5.

---

#### 4.4.3 WRITING

As part of this practical instrumental inquiring, I agree with St. Pierre (2018) that writing is a worthy activity to address given that it is ‘adventure, experimentation’ (p. 605). Indeed, the writing of this thesis was as much a part of the research as the conversations with Imogen and Serena and should be understood as such. Writing occurred throughout the process, at various places and times, and was not simply a ‘final’ task to produce this thesis. Rather, writing was inspired by the practical inquiring and hypothesis development and testing in what might be termed a pragmatic/practical problem-solving idiom. Indeed, there were many iterations of writing, particularly this thesis document, such that the writing (as practical activity) was developmental and integral to what has become an unfolding, evolving, non-linear, and rather ‘messy’ process.

There was not necessarily a specific aim of writing as the process unfolded initially, particularly during the earlier occasions of this journey and yet some writing emerged as a useful tool to direct further practical activity and hypothesising. Addressing ‘writing’ as a fundamental part of the process perhaps emerged more explicitly when exploring my living autobiographically where I began with ‘jotting’ occasions of my earliest memories and which became a ‘wandering’ exploration of many more occasions, sometimes one memory triggering another. More generally, writing was utilised as a tool for thinking about all of the empirical accounts together with theoretical ideas and was useful for tracking and developing ideas, particularly



in discussion with others. Thus, the writing became a part of transactions with others which were created and developed through the social/cultural conditions of all protagonists' environments, including those shared, and thereby co-constituted through evolving depositories of experiencing. Perhaps this process is explicitly demonstrable of 'radical, experimental empiricism' in action, which recognised that,

We have to trust in the world, trust that something different will come out of this radical, experimental empiricism [...] Inquiry should begin with the too strange and the too much [...] In writing, we can and do invent and reinvent the world (St. Pierre, 2018, pp. 606-607).

The following section will now explicate the dimensions and tasks of what is here termed 'auto-transactional' inquiring as the fundamental 'method' in stimulating the creation of an autobiographical chapter.

#### 4.5 'AUTO-TRANSACTIONAL' INQUIRING: EXPLORING AUTOBIOGRAPHICALLY

This thesis includes an autobiographical piece which was unintended at the outset of this journey. Indeed, the process of developing this account emerged from conversations with Imogen and Serena, some of which mutually resonated to discussions about specific occasions in each other's living. This then developed into an initial exploration of some of my own biographical occasions in conversation with my supervisory team and others, as I shall now exemplify. Before doing so, it is necessary to outline what Dewey considers to be a reflexive process of inquiring to aid in describing the journey of this autobiographical process.

Dewey refers to five dimensions of reflexivity which Young (2014) succinctly articulates as: 1) *suggestion*, where we find ourselves amidst multiple possibilities (and thus in puzzlement); 2) *intellectualization*, where we translate our puzzlement into a problem; 3) *hypothesis*, where we consider possible understandings, in light of the data before us; 4) *reason*, where we use what we already know in general to help understand the problem before us; 5) *testing* of our hypothesis and reasoning to verify whether what we infer actually holds (Young, 2014, p. 45). Moreover, Young helps to clarify the difference between reflection and reflexivity,

Reflection emerges as the explication and integration of those practical and theoretical commitments implicitly present in the range of everyday practices and vocabularies when those commitments are tested and questioned in light

of one another and the evidence available. Moreover, insofar as reflexivity involves rectifying one's commitments, it enables change in one's practice and further intellectual development, opening onto new modes of expression (Young, 2014, pp. 50-51).

Hence, for Dewey, reflection becomes part of everyday practices of 'looking backwards' (Dewey, 1910), whilst reflexivity is a more intimate process of reflection directed towards a particular problem and from which emerges a change/development of thinking (reflexive inquiring). The process I engaged with autobiographically may best be described as one which began reflectively and became reflexive as the process evolved, particularly with a growing appreciation of transaction as I directed my inquiry towards a specific problem. Thus, the term 'auto-transactional' inquiring seems to be one which captures the autobiographical, reflective, reflexive, and transactional parts and so, is the term I shall refer to hereafter.

In my 'auto-transactional' approach to this reflexive inquiring, I began by 'looking back' at some experiences reflectively which were becoming interesting and relevant during on-going transactions with others during the research processes. In terms of *doing*, I began writing about some of the experiences to have a platform to tangibly work through some of the ideas pertaining to understanding particular occasions. Various occasions and memories were surfacing as I continued to 'look backwards' and as such, the process of remembering evolved where memories and on-going conversations triggered remembering other occasions (cf. Roth, 2016). Whilst I was remembering occasions, some more significant than others, I was also reminiscing with others about these occasions. Firstly, this means that the process of 'looking back' was deeply transactional including the memories/thoughts/perspectives of others. Secondly, this form of reflecting became 'open-minded' in a way that appreciated how those involved in the similar occasions as we all transacted together, remembered, and felt about these moments (unique experiencing). This was part of recognising the transactional process of doing and undergoing with others and various environments as we all adapted. Thus, whilst I refer to this process as 'auto-transactional', I do not profess this process to be individual in any way. Rather, it was a deeply social activity in transaction with others through the social and cultural environments we were all transacting then (during past experience) and now (present experiencing). Where this reflecting began to take more of a reflexive direction was

when I began to think about how I had understood particular experiences – specifically, my grandmother’s death and growing up being considered ‘poor’ and then attending a ‘selective’ university. These experiences became the ‘problems’ of my inquiring where I began to question other previous methods/hypotheses I had been operating with to understand these occasions, primarily those associated with ‘grief’ (Grandmother’s death) and particular understandings of Bourdieusian notions of class-based inequality (attending a ‘selective’ university as a ‘poor’ person).

Through an intimate engagement with the literature, including reflecting in the present through an evolved depository of ideas (elucidated in Chapter Eight), I began to problematise much of this thinking. Like Imogen, I had long been struggling to ‘understand’ or ‘make sense’ of some of these experiences utilising these previous tools which, for me, left many unanswered questions (e.g., how did I, as a ‘poor’ person access ‘selective’ education? What could I have done to prevent my Grandmother’s suffering?). Thus, I began to further problematise the limitations of some of these tools which did not attend to my whole evolving transactional biography. In discussion with my supervisory team and engaging consistently with the literature I began to find transactional tools more useful when considering how I had been experiencing ‘poverty’ and adversity’ and yet continuing to ‘do well’ educationally – an in-depth discussion of these tools with the empirical account will follow in Chapter Eight. What the chapter highlights is how I worked through some of my previous hypotheses that utilised agentic/dualistic tools and how these developed into new hypotheses when I began to recognise and fully appreciate the transactional nature of living. Ultimately, my current hypothesis pertaining to these particular experiences is that agentic/dualistic notions are limited, and this perhaps explains why I felt blame/guilt/pressure through particular occasions given the focus on ‘me’ individually as separated from environments/others. Utilising transactional tools shifted my ideas to appreciating the reciprocal, deeply social, doing and undergoing and seemed to aid me in abandoning ideas of guilt and ‘individual’ resilience/determination, as will come to be discussed further.

Whilst Dewey (1910) suggests that the dimensions he articulates are neither linear nor straightforward, I can report that this process for me was incredibly emotional and laborious and continued over several months before I began to hypothesise some more ‘fruitful’ ideas towards the problem of past experiences. The process also

included similar activities of conversing, remembering, and writing that are detailed in the previous section. Indeed, I was writing about experiences, remembering and reminiscing about occasions, conversing with others, and writing/re-writing more descriptions and hypotheses as the process evolved. In the end, it may also be worth suggesting that this ‘auto-transactional’ process may be seen as an experience of disrupting habitual activity – the ways I was thinking about some past occasions – and the ‘painful reconfiguration’ of working through these occasions with different tools to arrive at new hypotheses thus, becoming developmental. This was equally non-linear and might better be described as an incredibly ‘messy’, and yet ‘fruitful’ process, as depicted in Figure 6. Put simply, the process involved ‘looking back’ at previous occasions through present experiencing and then emerging into a more directed problem of inquiry, becoming one which appreciates the evolution of biographical experiencing spatiotemporally as the person develops.

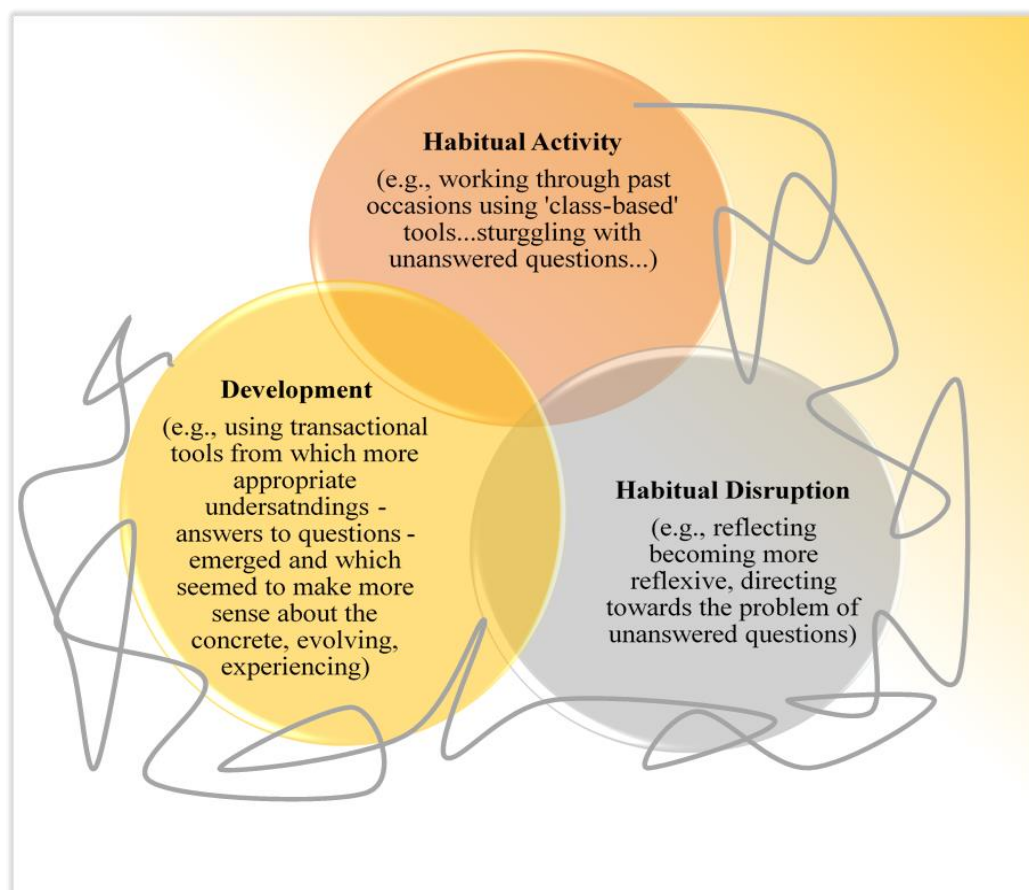


Figure 6 'Auto-transactional' Inquiring: a messy process

#### 4.6 A 'MESSY' PROCESS

In sum, I have outlined the shifting, 'messy' and hence, evolving journey of practical inquiring with unique humans as we all are journeying forwards. In so doing, I have demonstrated the need for tools which attend to this unfolding complexity and have argued that transactional tools are appropriate in this regard by recognising the intimate, inseparable, and impermanent relation of person with environments and others.

I began by outlining the methodology of this research which draws on ideas introduced in Chapter Two as the underpinning philosophy of this work. The overarching method of practical instrumental inquiring was then explained before attending to dimensions of the process to better understand how this research journey unfolded in incredibly dynamic and yet fruitful ways. Thereafter, the specific research activities of conversing, remembering, and writing were outlined and exemplified by drawing on occasions with Imogen, Serena, and myself. The final section of this chapter drew on one of the contributions of this research, outlining and exemplifying an 'auto-transactional' approach whilst also suggesting such a process speaks to notions of habitual disruption and development.

In the following chapter, I extend this methodological discussion by considering an occasion with Imogen, who is experiencing 'bullying' as one 'challenge' in her complex life. In the chapter, I discuss notions of ethical research and the potential power differentials between researcher and researched. This then leads to a more thorough introduction to the life of Imogen and engagement with her empirical account in Chapter Six.

## CHAPTER FIVE A NOTE ON ETHICAL CONDUCT: WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY?

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This short chapter serves as an extension to the previous methodological chapter to consider notions of ‘ethical’ conduct. Primarily, the chapter draws on the living of Imogen who is experiencing an occasion of ‘bullying’. Led by this empirical account, some taken for granted notions of what constitutes ethical research are challenged. More specifically, the chapter problematises ideas of who is responsible for ethical conduct when inquiring with young people and to what extent research can be ‘planned’ for. In so doing, it is argued that approaching research as a series of unfolding transactions better explains why some ethical review processes, as part of the cultural field of university, are in contradiction with unfolding living and hence, empirical inquiring/ ‘participatory’ research.

Whilst this section discusses notions of ‘ethics’ and ‘ethical’ conduct, it is important to clarify a few practicalities that were necessary for conducting research in partnership with a university, school, and young people. The context of the discussions specifically, and the research more generally, were explained to both Imogen and Serena, and their parent/guardian. Permission was obtained from the parent/guardian of both Imogen and Serena before any research activities began. Moreover, verbal permission to record our discussions was also obtained from Imogen and Serena at the beginning of each occasion (recorded permission). Recordings were stored securely according to university guidelines and destroyed upon transcription. Official names were replaced with pseudonyms upon transcription and no record of official names were used during recordings or have been stored. Pseudonyms (chosen by each young woman) have been used throughout this thesis to protect their anonymity and pseudonyms have also been used for any family members included in their storied accounts. Pseudonyms have also been used for any school staff mentioned in accounts (and their verbal permission was also obtained before any occasions were recorded). Moreover, a note on ethics with regard to my autobiographical chapter is discussed at the beginning of Chapter Eight.

Having clarified these practicalities, this chapter now turns to an outline of the ‘bullying’ occasion as described by Imogen and a discussion of ‘co-responsibility’ pertaining to this empirical account. Noteworthy, this chapter is written in first person given that the detailing of the ‘bullying’ occasions emerged from a conversation with Imogen which I was directly involved with hence, this is somewhat of a reflective piece about how ‘ethical’ processes unfold in concrete occasions.

## 5.2 AN OCCASION OF BULLYING

The day before the first UK national lockdown began in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, I attended the school to speak with Imogen and Serena. The intention of the visit was to notify both young women that the research would be pausing, for what I then believed would be a short while. When meeting with Imogen to deliver this information briefly outside her classroom, she responded with “but I need to speak to you now”. Confirming with Imogen that this was ‘urgent’ and hence, ‘could not wait until schools reopened post-lockdown’, I sought permission of absence from Imogen’s class teacher. Imogen and I then found an empty, private space to attend to her ‘need’ for a discussion. The following is a summary of the occasion based on part-recording and memory<sup>18</sup>.

Upon asking Imogen why she needs to speak with me urgently, she begins to tell me that she is ‘being bullied’. She describes several occasions with a group of peers who she says have been calling her various names, including ‘following me to the toilets’ and saying ‘I have AIDS’. Imogen says this has been going on for some weeks and is why she is sometimes upset when she comes to our sessions, but that she has not told anyone before now. I ask for Imogen’s permission to tell Joyce<sup>19</sup> so she can begin a reporting process to help Imogen, but she initially refuses. I ask her to continue telling me about the problem. I then tell her that I will relay her concerns to Joyce, specifically that Imogen is ‘worried’ that if ‘I snitch, it will get worse’. After some time chatting and periods of silence in the room, Imogen agrees that Joyce may join the conversation so she can relay her account of the problem situation. I ask Joyce to

---

<sup>18</sup> The conversation was part-recorded given the impromptu situation and the account emerging from the conversation was written later that day after leaving the school.

<sup>19</sup> A pseudonymised member of staff familiar to both myself and Imogen with a role in ‘student care’.

enter the room, and Imogen begins to repeat her account though in a slightly different order and missing out some of the details she told to me, such as the comments from her peers. Joyce asks some questions about who the peers are, and how long this has been going on. Joyce is familiar with the group of peers Imogen is describing and tells Imogen that she wants to tell another member of staff who will be able to help, whilst the bell rings to announce the morning break time. Imogen agrees and Joyce goes into the room next door. The door is left open, and staff and students are now walking around outside the room, crossing paths in various directions and it is noisy. I ask Imogen if she is ok and she nods her head, continuing to look out the door. A few moments later, Joyce returns to the room accompanied by another member of staff, Robert<sup>20</sup>, who greets both Imogen and myself. Joyce closes the door and briefly summarises what Imogen has told us. Robert is looking at Imogen whilst Joyce speaks, whilst Imogen is looking at her shoes. When Joyce stops speaking, Robert says to Imogen ‘don’t worry, we’re going to get this sorted’. Imogen is nodding her head and Robert then says to me ‘I will take it from here’. I see this as my cue to leave the room, so I ask Imogen if she is going to be ok here with Robert. She responds by nodding. Joyce and I then leave Imogen and Robert in the room. Later that day shortly before I leave, I am talking to another member of staff who has been told about Imogen’s problem. During a brief conversation with this staff member, I mention that ‘I’m not sure if I’ve done the right thing’ to which she replied, ‘you’re a human before you’re a Researcher’.

### 5.3 CO-RESPONSIBILITY

#### 5.3.1 PROBLEMATISING EXISTING IDEAS

There are several points of interest arising from this occasion which seem worthy of discussion. Firstly, I would like to problematise the comment ‘you’re a human before you’re a researcher’. Interestingly, the staff member seems to be referring to the ‘multiple roles’ of a person whereby a distinction is inferred between ‘Elizabeth as Human’ and ‘Elizabeth as Researcher’ as though the two are somewhat separate, at least in terms of ‘roles in different fields’. As has been outlined in previous chapters, attending to the transactional nature of living means beginning

---

<sup>20</sup> A pseudonymised member of staff with a role concerning ‘student behaviour’.



with the idea of the person as a bundle-of-lines. These lines then extend forward in different environments according to activities with others. However, the person is not a 'product' of any one of these activities (e.g., mother, teacher, student). Rather, the person is a whole unit in transaction with environments and others whose experiencing is co-constituted by such unfolding activities as an entirety. Hence, labels assigned to people's roles such as 'Researcher' tend to prioritise particular activities whilst undermining others and therefore, overlook the totality of the person's experiencing. Moreover, such labels tend to describe 'the person' rather than appreciating that these label-descriptions are indeed referring to activities the person co-participates in. In this case then, 'Researcher' is a label describing an activity in a social field that I am participating in as *one* aspect of my whole living. Moreover, for the purposes of this discussion it is appropriate to assume that the staff member uses the term 'human' to refer to moral/ethical practices whereby the welfare of the young person is always the priority over 'collecting data' as a 'Researcher'. Emphatically, I do not disagree with the importance of a young person's welfare. Rather, I seek to problematise notions of 'ethics' and in so doing, contend that the 'Researcher-Researched' relationship might be more appropriately conceptualised when attending to the transactional nature of living. I will begin such a discussion by considering the limitations of 'ethical' ideas premised on atomised, interactional, notions before presenting what I argue is a more appropriate transactional approach.

In considering the 'role of the Researcher' premised on more separatist/interactional ideas – as is often the case with a plethora of methodological literature concerned with ethical practice – the onus is often put on the Researcher as primary in (i) establishing a trusting relationship with 'Researched' persons and (ii) upholding their 'duty of care' to protect them from any potential 'harm' (emotional, or otherwise) that the research may 'cause' (cf. Bos, 2020). These are common conceptual notions across formal ethical review processes which assume a power imbalance between 'Researcher' and 'Researched', weighed in a one-dimensional sense toward the 'Researcher' (cf. BERA, 2018).

From such a separatist perspective which does not recognise the transactional nature of co-constitution, asking Imogen if I could alert school staff to 'bullying' activities may be seen as compromising the 'trusting relationship I had built with Imogen'

through our previous sessions (to ‘collect data’). This decision then may be thought of as raising an ethical conflict or ‘moral dilemma’ between a) protecting Imogen’s well-being thereby decreasing the chance of ‘harm’ and b) protecting the ‘trusting’ research relationship. Whilst it is not necessarily the ‘research’ which could be ‘causing’ the harm on this occasion, there would remain a question of ‘moral responsibility’ that I am told about the bullying and therefore need to act in the interests of Imogen and report this to the school, particularly given my agreement per my ‘ethical approval’<sup>21</sup>. This seemingly oppositional weighing of outcomes seems to align with the staff members’ thinking around being ‘human’ as protecting well-being and being ‘a Researcher’ as protecting the ‘research relationship’ to continue ‘collecting data’. Indeed, ‘establishing a trusting relationship’ with ‘Researched’ persons is a common notion across ethnographic research concerned with ‘lived experience’ (empirical research) and is often deemed ‘necessary’ to ‘enter participants’ lifeworlds’. For example, see Wang (2013) who contends,

The approach of ethnography entails intimate relationships between the researcher and the researched, so that the former is enabled to personally experience the latter’s world. According to my research experience, being immersed in the field for six months, the participants and I began to treat each other as total human beings with feelings, aspirations, and idiosyncrasies (Wang, 2013, p. 777).

Here, we see similar thinking of ‘human’ and ‘Researcher’ as separate and ‘intimate relationships’ as the basis for productive research which ‘enables’ the ‘Researcher’ to ‘personally experience’ participants’ ‘worlds’. Thus, the seemingly ‘conflicting’ role of the participatory work requires the ‘Field Researcher’ to (i) balance obligations to adhere to institutional codes of ‘ethical conduct’ according to their ‘ethical approval’ enabling them to conduct ‘field research’<sup>22</sup> and (ii) engage with ‘researched’ persons in a way which ‘breaks down’ Researcher-Researched barriers allowing a ‘trusting research relation’ to be forged to ‘collect rich data’. Indeed, this is the case for several lines of critique concerning the incompatibility of ethical review processes and ethnography, most of which are concerned with notions of ‘informed consent’ and the ‘power dynamics between Researcher and Researched’

---

<sup>21</sup> Ethical approval as granted by the university to conduct the research.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Field’ in this instance refers to any environment ‘research activities’ are unfolding which, in an interactional approach, is considered the ‘place’ where ‘data is collected’. This differs conceptually from the transactional social fields described elsewhere.

(cf. Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Armstrong-Gibbs, 2019; Mapedzahama & Dune, 2017; Tolich & Fitzgerald, 2006). What follows is an arguably more appropriate critique of ethical review processes from a transactional perspective which attends to the limitations of current processes and yet, does not undermine person:environment transactions and hence, the co-constitution of person-with-other encounters.

Firstly, ethical review processes are ill-defined given the emphasis on ‘planning’ for research. This is a critique also outlined by scholars (referenced above) concerned with the ethnographic approach who argue that the aim of an ethnographer is to ‘follow your nose’ and is unlike other qualitative methods such as interviewing which may have a prescribed discussion plan. The idea of some ethnographic research then is to be guided by occurrences ‘in the field’ which may provide opportunities for further research. Whilst taking a transactional approach questions the ‘planning’ aspect of review processes, it does so in a different way. As was outlined in Chapter Four, the unpredictability of persons living means *intended* ‘ends-in-view’ often differ from emerged ‘ends’ (Garrison, 2001). This is one limitation of ethical review processes where thinking is ‘theoretical’ rather than based in concrete transactional activity (Roth, 2018). Indeed, such processes seem to be underpinned by notions of control which do not recognise any ‘planning’ as hypothetical and hence, adaptable to the unfolding occasions of dramatic, concrete, living. Such concrete living is unpredictably complex, and unique, such that ‘theoretical’ demands are often divorced from the flow of living, as Fesmire (2003) puts it,

Pragmatist ethics turns away from such rigid abstractions and returns to the ordinary life-experiences of inherently social, embodied, and historically situated beings. In addition to interminable dealings with incompatible moral demands, we all daily and hourly encounter situations too unique— unique, not just complicated— for reflection to be exhausted merely by subordinating what is before us as an instance of an already sedimented classification. Plainly you cannot put your foot in the same river twice. It is equally true that you cannot unproblematically apply a rule to the same situation twice (p. 58).

Secondly, the unpredictability and complexity of living arises from sociality, in that human living is deeply, transactionally relational, and not the consequences of individual actions in additive ways. The separatist thinking that often underpins assumptions of ethical conduct through culturally specific review processes, places

the responsibility with the ‘Researcher’ to protect both the participant and themselves from any ‘potential harm’, thereby assuming that they have greater control/power over unfolding occasions. Conversely, recognising transaction begins with the whole situation as the unit of analysis, as opposed to the act of the individual (or the responsibility of the Researcher). This deep sociality means,

every action is a response to the summons of another person or situation [...] and therefore, *every* action comes with responsibility [thus] it forces us to move beyond ethics commonly conceived and move toward an approach grounded in collective responsibility and solidarity of researchers and participants (Roth, 2018, p. 2, original emphasis).

Put simply, ‘research ethics works two ways’ (Roth, 2018a, p. 2). This is a *transactional* way whereby *all* persons are *constituting* and *constituted* by the occasion and are hence, mutually responsible for how that occasion unfolds. However, neither can predict the response of the other until it has happened. As previously outlined in Chapter Four when detailing conversations/correspondence, this is the novelty that comes with an unfolding evental occasion. Notably, the emphasis is on the joint responsibility and not a suggestion that either the ‘Researcher’ or the ‘Researched’ has no responsibility, given that ‘every act is recognized to be cooperative, requiring two or more individuals working in concert’ (Roth, 2018a, p. 4).

Thinking in this way then, Imogen and I are jointly responsible for our actions given our corresponding. As Ingold (2015) puts it, ‘there can be no responsibility without responsiveness. To be answerable, we must be able to answer. Answering and being answered to: that, precisely, is correspondence’ (p. 156). Co-responsibility then, if understood transactionally, is the essence of human experiencing which is inherently social through the interweaving of person:environment in various transactional fields. This social co-production means that ‘planning’ – if understood as pre-empting a specific outcome – is of little use in the unfolding of everyday, concrete, living which is incredibly unpredictable. The encounter with Imogen whereby I learn about her ‘bullying’ problem is just one example of this complex interweaving, which is not controlled by any ‘part’ or individual involved in the unfolding encounter which moves beyond only Imogen and myself to include Joyce and Robert also. As has been outlined in Chapter Three, the nature of transactional living is both individual and social at once which, in its sheer complexity, means actions do not

‘belong to’ the individual alone (as some agentic notions may contend). Thinking transactionally about the occasion provides an opportunity to hypothesise what it is about (i) our ‘meshwork’ of experiencing and ‘knotting’ together that precedes the occasion (Ingold, 2015), and (ii) the ‘in the moment’ occasion where Imogen is experiencing a disruption to our habitual functioning (uncertainty of when we might next see each other) that unfolds into Imogen telling me about the bullying. Such a hypothesis will be more appropriate when attending to the concrete living of such transacting that includes shared activities through differing fields, which I shall now attempt.

---

### 5.3.2 A TRANSACTIONAL HYPOTHESIS

Firstly then, the conversation with Imogen emerges from our shared environment of the school and a backdrop of historical occasions (meetings/discussions) which form the habitual functionings of our relationship. This habitual relationship is premised upon Imogen as a (a) student in the school and a (b) participant in this research, and myself as a Researcher in the school. Moreover, our relationship has been unfolding through ‘research’ conversations rather than any other ‘schooling’ activities (e.g., classroom teaching/pastoral care). Hence, the occasion of Imogen telling me about the bullying cannot appropriately be considered in separatist ways but rather, requires attending to the very practical activities (historically and presently) which co-constitute the reciprocal transactions which underpin our relations.

To elaborate then, the ‘telling’ occasion is already integral to a historical thread of transacted activities involving reciprocal<sup>23</sup>:

- (i) presence in a shared environment (the school) and,
- (ii) corresponding with shared activities (‘research’ conversations) whereby our unique experiencing is interweaving such that we are becoming connected together through our activities (and hence,

---

<sup>23</sup> The following points are outlined in bullet format (as opposed to in-text formatting) for clarity in attempting to depict the complexity of the transactional occasion, of which several parts are discussed.

becoming part of each other's experiencing) which continues to unfold in this novel moment.

This novel moment continues from the historical backdrop of activities into

- (i) presence of Imogen and myself in the shared schooling environment at this particular time,
- (ii) the emergence of a global pandemic, school closure, and further uncertainty as to when we might next see each other,
- (iii) my *intention* to relay this information to Imogen by going to her classroom, and of course,
- (iv) the prior 'bullying' occasions which are equally unfolding from a backdrop of transacted activity of which Imogen, school, and the persons 'bullying' are parts, as well as,
- (v) my 'agreed responsibility' to both the school and the university to report issues concerning young people's well-being as per my 'ethical' approval to engage with this research.

Based on the previous activities, more separatist/causal ideas may assume that Imogen 'trusts' me given that we have 'built relations' which provides a 'safe space' in which she feels she can disclose this problem of 'bullying'. This assumes a linearity between activities which overlooks the complexity of the relational unfolding. Indeed, these notions of 'trust' and 'safe space' based on separatist/causal ideas are, more appropriately, labels for a series of transacted activities. For example, any notion of 'trusting' is an emergence of concrete actions which unfolds through our shared transactional encounters, meaning 'trust' is a constituting part of our doing and undergoing (feeling) through our transactions, not something 'external' to these shared moments. Thus, it seems more appropriate then to attend to these complex transactional fields and moments of which Imogen and myself are parts.

The moment Imogen tells me about the bullying (as an encounter in itself) might be better understood as emerging from an interweaving of past and present transacted activities: the *doing* of us and other (i.e., including Joyce, Robert, persons 'bullying' etc.) in shared fields (school). Indeed, the infinite transactional moments which lead to this point as several persons as bundles-of-lines interweave *is* the complexity of

human living. Whilst it is impossible to describe our entire experiential history (i.e., from birth until the occasion of concern, including how we each meet each other), I will try to highlight a few parts of our interweaving which are pertinent to this specific occasion. For example, there is a backdrop of experiencing with myself and Joyce where, to name a few,

- (i) we have been working together on ‘research’ activities,
- (ii) we have corresponded about previous ‘research’ occasions with young people (I have asked her advice and we have conversed), and
- (iii) she is the staff member outside the room ‘overseeing’ my conversation with Imogen in response to an on-going illness<sup>24</sup>.

All these parts form an experiential landscape which precedes me inviting Joyce to enter the room and join the conversation with Imogen and indeed, her acceptance of this invitation. Equally, Joyce and Robert are constituted by a backdrop of previous experiencing in the school which precedes Joyce’s invitation to Robert to also join the conversation. There is a whole host of additional complexity which pertains to all our ‘roles<sup>25</sup>’ in the school including Imogen as a ‘student’, mine as a ‘Researcher’, Joyce’s pertaining to a type of ‘pastoral support/student care’ and Robert’s ‘responsibility for student behaviour’ including ‘bullying’ activities. All these complex social parts co-constitute the unfolding occasion in which Imogen, Joyce, Robert and myself are in conversation about Imogen’s problem situation. Thus, some of the lines which constitute us (as meshworks of the totality of our experiencing) are interweaving both through preceding transactions and are continuing through this particular occasion. Moreover, Joyce, Robert, and the persons to which Imogen refers to as doing the ‘bullying’ are connected through a backdrop of experiencing highlighted by Joyce and Robert mentioning they ‘know who Imogen is referring to’.

Thus, the entire occasion makes little sense if one is to attend to, or prioritise, only one of these parts. This appears to be the limited position I begin from when being concerned with whether I had ‘done the right thing’. In that moment, I am assuming

---

<sup>24</sup> For a period of time, a member of staff would be nearby the rooms I met with Imogen and Serena. This was a joint decision between myself/school/supervisory team in response to an illness I was suffering from involving periods of unconsciousness, which posed a potential risk to myself/Imogen/Serena, if unsupervised.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Roles’ here covers a multitude of transacted everyday activities which constitute the umbrella term of a ‘professional job role specification’.

greater responsibility/agency than I have and overlooking the fact that I am only one strand in an unfolding occasion of which I am both doing and undergoing. Indeed, the unfolding occasion detailed here requires the various other parts such as the ‘bullying’ activities to have happened and Imogen to have told me which go beyond ‘my’ part in the occasion, which do not necessarily unfold in linear ways whereby one ‘moment’, or one person’s actions, linearly *cause* the moment that follows. The complexity is exacerbated further when considering the on-going fluidity of dramatic living within the schooling environment where many other transactions are unfolding simultaneously during the conversation, and hence, which *could* have shifted this occasion. Indeed, we see a ‘snippet’ of this when the bell goes and there is various activity outside the door or with any potential actions of Joyce and Robert which is again, beyond ‘my’ control. Indeed, the occasion might have involved different staff members and hence, different experiencing which would have altered the dynamics of the relational occasion. Fundamentally, this occasion unfolded in the schooling environment of which we share, although the unfolding occasion is co-constituted through variously differing historical backdrops and differing habitual activities in this particular environment. Moreover, the way in which this moment unfolded was only one possible way, given the unpredictability of dramatic concrete living.

#### 5.4 ETHICAL CONDUCT: AN ACTIVITY OF CO-RESPONSIBILITY

Following such hypothesising, we are reminded again, as Ingold (2015) put it, to think ‘forwards’ by attending to the dynamic unfolding of an occasion, rather than ‘backwards in causal ways’. In so doing, the thinking outlined here is just that: a hypothesis based on what I argue are the more appropriate thinking tools recognising transaction which works with what *happened* (the actual unfolding moment). This has involved reflecting on possible ways such an occasion might be utilised to think forward, rather than assigning ‘causes’ to the event or thinking backwards in terms of how the event may have been handled differently by any one of the protagonists involved. Thinking forward then means reflecting on how this past moment may be of some use which, in this case, is to problematise the ‘planning’ and ‘responsibility’ notions underpinning ethical review processes. This offers a way of thinking about how working with young people in a ‘research’ sense unfolds in daily living in non-linear ways which appreciates the co-responsibility of all protagonists. Such co-



responsibility, in this case, included those whom Imogen and I shared an environment with and hence, who would not have been discussed in any 'ethical review' procedures prior to this moment where the focus was on myself as the 'Researcher' and Imogen as the 'participant'. In the concrete living of this occasion, all parts of this relational unity (persons and environment) were both doing and undergoing the occasion as a whole, not simply the actions of one person or a static environment. This bolsters the earlier arguments outlined at the beginning of this chapter which pertain to the limitations of some forms of 'ethical review' and 'research planning' by exemplifying the co-responsibility of unfolding 'research' occasions. In so doing, it demonstrates that transactional occasions are under the control of no singular person and hence, to put the onus on the 'Researcher' to 'protect' others is to overlook this social complexity as it unfolds in culturally specific, dynamic, contexts (i.e., schools). Those responsible for designing and implementing ethical review processes concerned with empirical research may then benefit from recognising the transactional nature of concrete living and hence, the co-responsibility and flexibility of unfolding 'research' moments, to overcome some of the incompatibility of current processes with 'participatory' research.

I now turn to discussing the experiential living of Imogen in further detail.

## CHAPTER SIX IMOGEN

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Six develops the transactional ideas documented in Chapter Three, by drawing further on the life of Imogen. As was outlined in the previous chapter, Imogen is experiencing ‘challenges’, one of which is ‘bullying’ activities. Despite these challenges, Imogen is ‘doing well’ through schooling. This chapter provides further details of Imogen’s life, as detailed through her co-created narrated accounts. I begin by introducing parts of Imogen’s life which includes her birthplace, her family dynamics, and her home as one social field in which she participates with others. This provides the reader with some context about Imogen, including some of the environments she is transacting in, some of the protagonists she is transacting with, and some of what might be described as the ‘conditions’ of such environments. Importantly, this account provides a backdrop of understanding parts of Imogen’s living beyond the specific occasion with which I am concerned in this chapter, which is necessary to attend to the complexity of her transactional living.

I then move to describing the specific ‘maths’ occasion outlined to me by Imogen during a shared research moment. The occasion takes the reader on a ‘walk through’ a significant moment involving Imogen taking a school test and not receiving the grading she expected. Imogen’s narrative is then used to articulate some of the emotive actions taking place during that occasion, set alongside a dynamic set of transactions with others in that context that speak to the moment and as they unfold. The occasion, which Imogen describes as ‘failing’ the maths exam, is then utilised to elucidate ideas of habitual learning as persons grow through disruptions to habitual functioning, hypothesising potential practice, and suggestions about the potential usefulness of creative problem-solving through a process of practical reflexive inquiring. I conclude the chapter by suggesting how Imogen’s inquiring may become more useful to her if she were to utilise transactional tools which recognises how her experiencing unfolds in non-linear/casual ways.

### 6.2 IMOGEN

When we meet, Imogen is twelve years old and in her second year of secondary school. She was born in Nigeria, Africa, “but then something was about to

happen to me and my sister [...] we had to come here". Imogen does not "want to talk about it" but notes that it is "not safe to go back there". She is living with her mother, older sister, older brother, and younger brother in a "really small" house. She reports not "knowing who" her father is and notes she has "never met him". She is sharing a bedroom with her mother and younger brother where rats often run through, and her other two siblings are sharing a second bedroom. The house is in an area where Imogen describes a lot of the young people engaging in gang-related violence and anti-social activity and is a forty-minute bus ride from the school. Imogen notes that she was previously unable to attend a school singing concert which she "had been practicing for" during after school hours "because nobody could come to watch [or] collect" her and "because it's not safe" to travel into her area "after dark" alone.

Imogen and her siblings are engaging in caring for one another. She mentions that she often "has to help my mother care for my younger brother" noting that her mother spends most of her time at home and is "often sleeping" though Imogen reports "not knowing why". Further, Imogen reports that her mother "is a Muslim" but that she "is a Christian, because my Mum tells me I'm Christian [...] so I'm thinking maybe my dad was Christian". Imogen attends a Christian church "every other Sunday" with either her older brother or older sister - they are each "taking it in turns to stay home to help my Mum look after my little brother".

Imogen is arriving at school most days considerably earlier than her first class and is also collecting a "free breakfast" offered by the school on a Monday<sup>26</sup>. Imogen mentions that her mother is unable to give her money for extra-curricular activities associated with her schooling. Indeed, the costs of her swimming lessons are covered by the school as part of mainstream curricular lessons in physical education. Imogen's sister is "working two jobs to help with rent" amongst other costs. This involves "selling eyelashes and beauty products" and providing a service of "African catering" which Imogen sometimes helps with by preparing and packing food. Moreover, Imogen was "given school uniform one day" by the school and received Christmas gifts from the school's "Christmas Parcel Scheme", which she believes is "because I was doing really well last year". When I enquire about these schemes

---

<sup>26</sup> This is in addition to the school meals Imogen receives as part of the FSM scheme.

with a member of staff, I am told that Imogen was given school uniform after a staff member noticed she was wearing ill-fitting clothing and shoes with damaged soles. I am also told that the Christmas gifts were given to Imogen through a collaborative scheme with a local charity to offer presents to young people whose families may be 'unable to afford Christmas gifts'. Imogen recalls that one of her gifts was a book that she was "still reading and really enjoying". In terms of home learning, Imogen is sometimes borrowing her sister's laptop to study, particularly when revising for Maths using an online platform, 'MathsWatch'. However, she is only able to use the laptop and engage with these online activities (expected by her class-teacher), when her sister is not using it for work, or her brother is not using it for his GCSE studies. When the laptop is not available, Imogen tries to use the online platform from an "old" phone she has but that it often "glitches" making the programme inaccessible.

In the following account, some aspects of Imogen's living as detailed here, particularly those pertaining to what may be seen as 'adverse' conditions posing challenges to her learning, are discussed. Such a discussion explores the aforementioned 'maths' occasion as one moment in Imogen's complex living.

### 6.3 AN OCCASION OF 'FAILING': THINKING ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING AND LEARNING

Figure 7 below (continuing overpage) is an excerpt from a conversation involving Imogen and myself whereby Imogen detailed an occasion which she describes as 'failing' a maths test (hereafter referred to as the 'maths' occasion), including how she is feeling about the occasion.

< I-E > I think that was an end of term test in Math and I got everything like I understood it and I thought it was really easy and that Id get all the questions right but when I got the result I got 10 out of 40 and it was not expected < E-I > Right okay so had you studied quite a lot for this then < I-E > Yea < E-I > Ok so did you speak to your teacher about this then to try to understand why you had got a lower mark

<I-E> Erm no but she did tell me in lesson that it doesnt matter what scores I get  
 because it doesnt determine anything < E-I > Right ok and how did that make  
 you feel <I-E > A bit relieved because I thought that it would determine what set  
 I would be in afterward and I really didnt wanna leave that set because I was used  
 to that class < E-I > and why didnt you wanna tell your mum < I-E > Because I  
 asked my Mum if I got low scores on a test what would she do she said that she  
 would be mad at me because clearly I didnt study and I had spent too much time  
 on my phone she always brings my phone into this < E-I > Right do you spend a  
 lot of time on your phone < I-E > Yea but not really anymore because my little  
 brother always has it now so I dont really get a chance to go on it anymore <E-I >  
 so you think that you did study quite a lot for this test so why do you think that  
 you didnt get what youd hoped you would get <I-E > Because everything on the  
 test was easy questions and I was sure I did them all right and when I got 10 out  
 of 40 I was confused because I thought I would get at least 20 25 < E-I > was this  
 just before half term <I-E > no this was last year but I still cant forget about it Im  
 like how the hell did I get 10 out of 40 <E-I> how have your test results been  
 lately then <I-E > Great Erm really amazing <E-I> [...] youve been doing really  
 well then are you feeling better about that <I-E> No <E-I> Why <I-E> Because I  
 wish I could go back maybe study more like be able to see where I went wrong  
 <E-I > why do you think youre so bothered about it when youve got all these  
 better test results now that youve moved forward <I-E > Because I dont know  
 where I went wrong with that test

Figure 7 Conversational Transaction: Imogen & Elizabeth

---

### 6.3.1 CAUSES OF ‘FAILURE’

As can be seen from the conversation excerpt, Imogen is clearly troubled by this occasion of ‘failing’ a maths test. As such, it is worth exploring how such an occasion may be understood by (i) more separatist/linear ideas, (ii) how Imogen appears to be understanding and working through the occasion, and (iii) how transactional tools may be useful to Imogen’s current process of inquiring.

Firstly, it may be argued that there is much in both Imogen’s narrative about her contextual background and conduct of everyday living, and in her recounting of this particular occasion, that could suggest a variety of potential explanations for her ‘failure’. For example, Imogen’s mother seems to suggest that she is ‘not studying enough’ which in some ways is an observation suggesting that Imogen is in complete control of this situation. Hence, with appropriate self-action such as focusing more on her studies and less on playing with her phone, this situation of ‘failing’ could have been averted. Such accounts are often portrayed in the literature concerned with self-determination and self-regulation, as was discussed in Chapter Two.

Alternatively, the ecology of Imogen’s living as documented at the beginning of this chapter may also be seen by some commentators as providing explanations for this ‘failure’, perhaps premised upon a set of personal interacting challenges that have culminated in a difficult maths encounter. Such interactional explanations are replete in the research literature, for instance: issues emerging from one-parent families are viewed as a cause of low attainment (cf. Nonovama, 2017) that can be a ‘life-long disadvantage’ (cf. Mikkonen, Salonen, Häkkinen, Olkkola, Pesonen, Räikkönen, Osmond, Eriksson & Kajantie, 2016); the challenges of caring responsibilities<sup>27</sup>; the role of migration in Imogen’s aspirations and attainment (cf. McElvany, Ferdinand, Gebauer, Bos, Huelmann, Köller & Schöber, 2018), or indeed, the role of her housing conditions on her young life (cf. Clair, 2019). The combining of such adverse experiences might be viewed as providing a level of environmental ‘toxicity’ that suggests Imogen was always likely at some point to encounter such cognitive difficulties as those reflected by her lower maths test score on this occasion.

---

<sup>27</sup> See the extensive work of Saul Becker and colleagues.

Despite variations in focus, these ideas seem to share a causal underpinning which seeks to explain why Imogen ‘failed’ on this occasion, perhaps suggesting that this may become part of a declining trend for her, if appropriate interventions are not implemented. Whilst such suggestions may begin to offer a particular kind of answer regarding Imogen’s ‘failing’, they are less well placed to understand how, despite such disappointment, she goes on to ‘do well’ in Maths. The interacting challenges of Imogen’s environment, and all that this might suggest perhaps for self-action associated with self-regulation and self-determination should, according to much of the literature in this area, suggest that Imogen would ‘fail’ more often and more consistently than she actually does. They would perhaps then argue that a set of causal factors were pertaining to Imogen’s schooling specifically, and living more generally, that would make her success in Maths difficult to achieve. However, there are a set of contrasting literatures that suggest that perhaps Imogen has become ‘resilient’ to her circumstances (again, see ‘resilience’ literature discussed in Chapter Two). In such a view, her impacting ‘causal’ factors have been mediated and moderated perhaps by her school support, or her parent by encouraging education and disciplining poor performance as Imogen mentions (cf. Šimunović, Reić Ercegovac & Burušić, 2018; Kiernan & Mensah, 2011). However, such ideas of ‘resilience’ similarly remain premised on linear cause-effect thinking which assumes that one atomised entity (e.g., environment) can and will cause ‘effect to’ another atomised entity (e.g., Imogen), unless mediated by a third atomised entity (e.g., supportive intervention) that produces a different causal outcome (e.g., educational achievement). In attending to the notion of causes, it is worth drawing on the work of Price (2014) who articulates opposing perspectives in this regard.

Price suggests that it is possible to ascertain causality, even when this is based on only one example, or indeed no example (i.e., potential causes). This is argued from a point of ‘transfactuality’ which assumes that ‘the laws of nature exist and act independently of the systems which produce the effects’ (p. 389). Further, whilst Price is not against ‘the use of correlations to arrive at causal explanations [...] they need to be put into the larger (transfactual) picture and their significance or lack of significance must be determined by both reason and common sense’ (p.391). Price draws on these ideas to discuss the connection between poor attainment and poor attendance, suggesting that policymakers are wrong to believe that poor attendance

leads to poor attainment and rather poor attendance is an 'aggravating symptom' of poor attainment related to 'poverty and individual psychological factors' (p. 385). However, such ideas are rendered unintelligible once the full reality of the situation is appropriately documented, highlighting what is separated, and what is concrete, in the living of young people like Imogen.

Indeed, arguments such as Price's might suggest that Imogen's 'failing' a test might arise from several factors of her living pertaining to poverty, as well as her own 'psychological factors' which could include her attitude towards education, her aspirations, her willingness to engage or some other factor along these lines. This begins to point to various aspects of Imogen's living which are important in focusing on the totality of her living, but the issue remains that (i) these parts of her occasion of living are atomised and disparate, (ii) these atomised parts are added together creating a 'multiplex' challenge and (iii) these challenges are deemed to be *causing* occasions such as her schooling outcomes thereafter in linear ways. Again, this does not help in explaining how this 'failing' maths occasion seems to be an anomaly of sorts when considering the entire occasion of Imogen's living where she, generally speaking, seems to be 'doing well' throughout.

Interestingly, by arguing that there could be an almost 'reverse' causation to that proposed by policymakers, Price seems to be, though admittedly inadvertently, highlighting that causation can work more than one-dimensionally. However, when attending to concrete living which recognises transaction, causation is a 'fallacy' (see Dewey, 1930). Thus, whilst there could be a reciprocal relation between preceding and succeeding occasions (i.e., poor attainment and poor attendance), in the sense that the two are co-constituent parts of an entire occasion (life of a person), the relation is not linearly causal. This is due to the fact that living is continuously evolving, and the unpredictability of on-going occasions always includes the novel which cannot be tracked 'backwards', meaning there is no certainty to causal explanations as Price suggests (cf. Roth, 2018).

Thus, this atomised approach treats each of Imogen's 'challenges', even when considered under the umbrella of 'adversity', as 'discrete units' and therefore as 'conceptual abstractions in contrast to the continuous processes of actual experience' as an entire unit (Bennett, 1980, p. 226). During such abstraction, scholars tend to



‘conceptually isolate an antecedent part of a process and label it “cause” in relation to a later part of the process [labelled] “effect” and speak of these two elements as being “casually related”’ (Bennett, 1980, p. 226). This departure from concrete experiencing assumes that occasions are statically ‘fixed’ rather than continuously novel, which Whitehead called ‘the fallacy of misplaced concreteness’ (see, Bennett, 1980, p. 231). In Imogen’s case the continuous novelty of unfolding occasions is incredibly important in focusing on how Imogen may be ‘doing well’, then ‘failing’, then ‘doing well’ again which demonstrates that there is no fixity to her experiencing (Dewey, 1930).

Moreover, a transactional perspective offers a more appropriate way of thinking about ‘guided action’. For example, Price argues that a transfactual approach which is ‘more truthful’ and ‘acknowledges complexity’ can inform future action (Price, 2014, pp. 386-387). Beginning from a different position which appreciates the transactional complexity of on-going living, it is possible that prior action can guide future action in the sense that persons can learn from experience. However, this involves learning through the disruption to habitual activity and adaptation/reconfiguration of activities which can become a transformative process from which new habits can potentially emerge. This is how hypothesising and reconfiguring habits work, particularly in terms of thinking more appropriately about actions through reflective/reflexive processes. The following section will take this transactional approach to exploring Imogen’s occasions of ‘failing’ her test and discuss how Imogen might find rethinking her approach to exploring where she ‘went wrong’. Rather than ‘informing future action’ based on ‘truths’, such an approach is about inquiring with the motion of living in order to learn through, and from, experiences.

---

### 6.3.2 MATHS TRANSACTED ACTIVITY: HABIT AND REFLECTION

Imogen attends a school where assessment is part of what it means to ‘learn’ and ‘succeed’ which constitute the cultural habits of schooling. She attenuates to such habits of classroom ‘learning’, and these are reinforced in the activity of assessment of which she is both subject and subjected. This is her habitual activity in the interconnected environment of her classroom that is not solely *hers* such that,

The person not only acts but also is affected, both directly by events having their source outside the body (e.g., light impinging on the retina) and by its own actions in and on the environment. Experience is the experience of an environment and of acting in the environment (Roth, 2020, p. 227).

Foremost, habit cannot begin to be understood without first acknowledging the material environment therefore, remaining committed to overcoming the dualisms of person and environment as separate ‘entities’. As was outlined earlier, Dewey (1922) regarded the art of an activity to be dependent upon objects and tools as much as the person’s transacting with these, rendering any notion of ‘internal mastery’ false. The ‘unexpected’ assessment grade then poses a conscious disruption to Imogen’s habitual activity which asks questions of Imogen’s actions and hence, stimulates a process of reflection for Imogen, though this is not happening ‘within’ her mind. Indeed, it is worth recalling that for Dewey, ‘mind’ is a verb and should always be approached as such,

what we call “mind” means essentially the working of certain beliefs and desires; and that these in the concrete—in the only sense in which mind may be said to exist—are functions of associated behaviour, varying with the structure and operation of social groups (Dewey, 1917/1980, p. 59).

In expanding on this idea, Brinkmann (2011) contends ‘it is not the existence of something “mental” as such that enables the adult, unlike the child, to perceive the meanings of the world. Instead, it is the developed habitual comportment of the adult that enables her to perceive a rich, meaningful world (p. 308). This speaks to earlier notions pointed out in Chapter Three which concern the difficulty of approaching inquiring with the ‘openness’ of ‘child-like curiosity’ balanced with a more evolved depository of ‘adult-like established social/cultural meanings’. When habitual activity is disrupted then, ‘observing the world with a consciously reflecting – or theorising – attitude is something we can (and must) do’ (Brinkmann, 2011, p. 308). Such reflection is often ‘the painful effort of disturbed habits to readjust themselves’ (Dewey, 1922/1930).

So, Imogen has been doing habitual activity which in this case are transactions as part of her maths classroom environment. However, as we will come to see, whilst she seems to be realising that ‘something went wrong’, she does not yet seem to fully understand her unexpected grade as a *habitual disruption* which could become a learning experience. This seems to be because her reflective inquiries have not yet

come to fruition to enable meaning of the earlier experiencing, in the novel moment. This uncertainty appears to be a natural preceptive to conscious experience emerging whereby, ‘consciousness is the meaning of events in the course of remaking’ (Dewey, 1985, p. 308). As such, ‘consciousness of meaning is not a passive reception of the world’s structure, but that aspect of the system of meanings where something appears as being subject to change’ (Brinkmann, 2011, p. 214). So, it might be said that Imogen becomes consciously aware of her habitual disruption, *an* experience, which stands out in the monist stream of her habitual experiencing as everyday living in her math classroom environment: the moment she sees as ‘failing’ the test. However, she is not yet utilising transactional tools to recognise herself as a transactional body at one with her environment and others. As such, she is not yet utilising goal-directed activity as the starting point for her inquiries and thereby, fully appreciating what a habitual disruption does and can mean. Rather she appears to be considering herself ‘not as part of the agencies of execution, but as a separate object’ (Dewey, 1916/1966, p. 174).

Moreover, Imogen then begins to ‘do well again’ in the class tests which follow this particular one, as evidenced when she notes her recent test results for the past year since the ‘failing occasion’ have been ‘great, really amazing’ (excerpt). Thus, the experience of disrupted habit appears to become a connected, yet novel experience, through a process of reflection which Dewey refers to as a past experience becoming part of a novel experience through disruption which stimulates consciousness (cf. Dewey, 1922). In this way, Imogen’s reflections appear to demonstrate her becoming conscious that her habitual maths activity has been disrupted – through this past experience of ‘failing’ – given that it is becoming the theme of her new experience of doing ‘really amazing’ and hence becoming concerned with ‘where [she] went wrong’. Let this be considered further then.

Imogen’s previous activity in maths involves lessons, assessments, and how these are set up in the classroom. Therefore, what she is *doing*, and the feedback of ‘success’ is a habit of maths activity for her. This is then disrupted (occasion of ‘failing’ the test). What appears to be difficult for Imogen is that a new habit of success is in place (seemingly restored again when she does ‘great’ in following tests) with appropriate functional coordination of which she is likely to not be fully cognitively aware in any separatist way. Hence, she begins struggling with

connecting her previous ‘unexpected’ grade which she sees as ‘failing’ with her adapted (novel) ways of doing in her maths classroom environment where she sees herself as doing ‘great’ once more. Her tools for inquiring – as I shall elaborate below – then appear to become underpinned by thinking of stimulus, idea, and response which Dewey may have argued reflects early dualisms, as he did in his work around the ‘reflex arc’<sup>28</sup> where he contended,

the older dualism between sensation and idea is repeated in the current dualism of peripheral and central structures and functions; the older dualism of body and soul finds a distinct echo in the current dualism of stimulus and response (Dewey, 1986, pp. 358–359).

Given Dewey’s concern with the goal-directed activity, he believed that ‘it is the way we act that determines the character of the stimuli that appear to us. It is not the experience of singular sensory elements that determine our actions’ (Brinkmann, 2011, p. 306). Rather, Imogen appears to be working with particular notions of the ‘mind’ as ‘personal or even private’ (Dewey, 1925, p. 8) and as the ‘self’ defined by ‘internal characteristics’ as opposed to habits, whereby ‘persons are the habit[...] they constitute the self’ (Dewey, 1922/1930). This seems most apparent with her concern of understanding ‘where *she* went wrong’ and her wishing to ‘go back maybe study more’ which she sees as a potential solution to rectifying *her* ‘failing’ the test. Put simply, Imogen appears to be laying blame with herself personally/individually for not only ‘failing’ the test but also, for understanding what she could have done to avoid this outcome. Such a ‘fictional’ notion of the self ‘may lead us to think that we can change ourselves just by changing our inner, psychological constitution [...] [when] we can only change the self by modifying our habits, and we can only modify habits by modifying the social conditions that form our habits’ (Brinkmann, 2011, p. 310).

---

<sup>28</sup> The idea of the reflex arc, which Dewey criticized in the article, claims that behaviour can be understood as the result of a serial connection between stimulus, mental operations, and response. Stimuli and responses were thought to be realized in the central nervous system as sensory and motor neurons, respectively: that is, neurons that bring sensory information to the brain and subsequently tell the motor system to initiate movement [...] According to Dewey, this series of stimulus–idea–response was nothing but the philosophical dualisms of empiricism–rationalism and mind–body dressed up as science (Brinkmann, 2011, p. 305). Also see Dewey (1986) ‘The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology’.

Imogen's method of inquiring premised on individualised/deficit notions of her actions then becomes problematic because of the nature of practical inquiring as Brinkmann (2011) articulates,

when we think, it is quite rare that an end is clear to us and that we only need to find the most efficient means of reaching the end. It is more often the case that we are confronted with an unclear and problematic situation, which stimulates the development of hypotheses that can be tested in practice (p. 309).

This requires 'thinking' as 'active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and further conclusions to which it ends' (Dewey, 1910/1901, p. 6), often including 'getting clear about the nature of the problem in the first place' (Brinkmann, 2011, p. 309) which Imogen does not yet seem to be reaching.

In such a creative problem-solving approach which Imogen might find more useful than her current approach, Dewey offers an entire process of reflective thinking which Brinkmann (2011) explicates in five steps: (a) experienced problem, (b) localizing and defining the problem, (c) suggestion of possible solution, (d) reasoning that develops the wider meaning of the suggestion, and (e) further observation and experiment that leads to acceptance or rejection of the suggested solution (Dewey, 1910/1991, p. 72). These five steps are a similar articulation of what is outlined in Chapter Four when defining the process, tools, and methods involved in practical reflexive inquiring (referring to Young's articulation). In Imogen's case, she appears to remain unclear about the problem of the 'unexpected' grade because she seems to be testing various actions to confront the problem with individualised notions of deficit rather than coining more deeply relational hypotheses, accounting for her transacted activity with environment and others, which may be more productive for her establishing meaning. If 'meaning' is taken to be 'primarily a property of behaviour, when seen in the context of joint activity with people and objects' (Brinkmann, 2011, p. 312), it seems reasonable to assume that Imogen's lack of understanding 'about where [she] went wrong' arises from her limited starting point which overlooks her as acting-with-environment-and others (transacting) and seeks to locate a 'cause' *within* herself. Taking a transactional approach to thinking and reflecting might provide opportunities for Imogen to

expand her thinking and actions pertaining to her experience and hence, may become a learning experience for her.

#### 6.4 IMOGEN'S INQUIRING

This chapter began by outlining what could be a linear *causal* way of thinking about Imogen's 'failing' maths occasion. This involved discussing ideas which begin with atomised notions of person and environment. Hence, such ideas prioritise parts in the occasion of Imogen's living and/or assume these parts merge in additive ways, rather than focusing on the fullness of Imogen's dynamic, on-going, living as the appropriate unit of analysis. This outline then set up the discussion from a transactional perspective. This included outlining the notions of habit and reflection, introduced in Chapter Two, in more specific terms as it pertains to the occasion with Imogen. In developing the discussion, the notions outlined in the dualistic perspectives were problematised to consider how useful these ideas are in understanding how Imogen seemingly 'fails' an exam, continues to face 'challenges', and yet goes on to 'do well' in further schooling. In so doing, it is suggested that Imogen may find a creative problem-solving approach – such as that which is reflective of entire occasions as parts in her full life – more useful when attempting to answer the question of 'what went wrong?' (habitual disruption).

Indeed, as we have seen for Imogen currently, she does not yet seem to be engaging in a process of pragmatic reflexive inquiring which appreciates her as a transactional mind:body engaging in complex non-linear moments with social/cultural environments and others. Hence, she is overlooking the fluidity of her living and learning as she evolves, as well as the full complexity of such experiencing from which the particular maths occasion emerged. Rather, the experience is remaining '*an* experience' given that it stands out in the stream of her living, and is posing a problem for inquiring, though the tools of her inquiry are limited given her self-actional, causal/linear, assumptions. Noteworthy, Chapter Eight offers an account of practical reflexive inquiring which moves beyond this exemplification of Imogen's inquiry, by appreciating the transactional nature of the occasion concerned. This develops the ideas presented here and illustrates the usefulness of practical inquiring for learning through problematic situations when taking a transactional approach.

Primarily, this chapter serves as an introduction to transactional analysis on a small scale within one classroom occasion. The point of which is to emphasise that we live and learn in on-going, differentially complex ways, over time which requires a focus on transacted activity by locating such occasions in young people's evolving fullness of living. Furthermore, suggesting a process of practical reflexive inquiring which attends to habitual disruption and adaptation, as illustrated through the concrete experiencing of Imogen, offers a more appropriate way of understanding how 'poor' young people may experience 'adverse' occasions and continue to 'do well' educationally. This chapter structurally precedes the following chapter where the reader learns about Serena's life and continues this discussion. Specifically, this ensuing chapter broadens thinking by developing transactional analysis still further, moving from one classroom occasion to many occasions associated with the dynamic and fluid forming of a young person's living and learning.

## CHAPTER SEVEN SERENA

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Seven draws on the complex living of Serena to explore how young people who are experiencing poverty and associated adversity may still ‘do well’ educationally. This chapter begins with an empirical account of Serena’s living which has been co-created by bringing together narrated occasions that were detailed through several conversational occasions. The account begins with an overview of Serena’s family which emerged from the question ‘can you tell me a bit about yourself?’, evolving organically into several narrated occasions detailed by Serena including descriptions of herself, her family, and their dynamic relations. Specifically, Serena was most concerned with her ‘difference’ from her family and her ‘similarity’ to her mother in these early discussions, as shall be exemplified in the following sections. As conversations evolved, various details emerged which pertained to some more ‘challenging’ and other more ‘supportive’ occasions of her living. Whilst the conversations unfolded in non-linear ways, this account has been drawn together in a somewhat more chronological order to describe the living of Serena from early childhood through to the most recent moments. This draws together a storied account that attempts to provide an interesting non-additive, complex set of unfolding occasions/concrete activities that then stimulates a practical process of inquiry.

What becomes clear through the account is the ways in which Serena’s living unfolds through varying environments as she transacts with others whereby Serena (through concrete activity) cannot be separated from any of these environments or protagonists. A practical process of inquiring about these concrete occasions of Serena’s living follows the narrated account. This draws on notions of ‘race’ and ‘grief’ which emerge from significant occasions to explore how transactional thinking may offer more appropriate explanations based on deeply social/cultural processes which evolve through complex person:environment transactions with others. Further, notions of ‘intervention’ are discussed in similar ways which, whilst seemingly less significant in Serena’s account, are pertinent to the totality of her evolving biography. Through a consideration of these notions utilising transactional tools of inquiry, limitations of current explanations premised on dualistic, linear,



causal thinking are highlighted. A more appropriate set of explanations which attends to the dynamic transacting of Serena as she adapts through activities and continues to evolve are then exemplified. These exemplifications are then brought together in the chapter conclusion to reinforce three fundamental points pertaining to the limitations of explanations which, (i) separate persons from their environments and hence, suggest a person's race, for example, is either biological *or* socially structured but not both, (ii) do not recognise the person as a totality of their experiencing whereby the relation between occasions is not linearly causal, for example 'supportive' occasions do not directly 'counteract' adverse occasions and thus, (iii) overlook the idea that significant experiences which disrupt/break habitual activities are often on-going processes which come to intertwine transactionally with many occasions and others and therefore, are not always 'adverse' but may also provide an impetus for learning.

## 7.2.SERENA

*"I had a hard time growing up"*

Serena had a "hard time growing up" in a UK inner-city area deemed to be "poor"<sup>29</sup> (Taped Discussion)<sup>30</sup>. She is part of a family which includes her "Pakistani-British" Stepfather, "White-British" mother, and nine "mixed heritage" siblings, some of whom are older than her, others younger. She is "the only White one [...] cause I have a different Dad compared to everyone else" and her Stepfather "brought me up since I were two months". Serena notes that early on, she was unaware of these "visible differences" and "didn't think why we were different colours or anything". She described having a "close bond" with her stepfather who used to "play" with her, "support" her, and "do so much really". Serena suggests she became aware of "my difference" when her stepfather confirmed "he wasn't ma dad" during an argument and from then the two "had a really bad bond". This "bad bond" appeared to transcend their relationship to the broader familial unit of her stepfather's relatives. Serena's "grandma and aunty" (her stepfather's relations) whom she also once shared a "close bond", "started calling me White and all that

<sup>29</sup> The school Serena attends, aims to address issues of 'poverty' in the area.

<sup>30</sup> All quotes hereafter indicated by 'quote' are verbatim from taped discussions between the Researcher and Serena. This replaces '(Taped Discussion)' after each quotation. As a reminder, grammar is not used in verbatim quotes.

and saying I was different from the family. And they were telling him [Stepfather] to put me in care and everything and he was gonna do it". Similarly, "once my dad [stepfather] started being racist to me my siblings started being racist to me as well cause they thought it was okay". So, they'd say, "you're not our sister just go run off and kill yourself and all of that". She was also "bullied throughout primary for my stepdad and my dad not being there for me throughout like my real dad". Serena also mentions her stepfather exclaiming during arguments that "this is why your dad left you when you was young you're not my daughter and I don't want ya".

According to Serena, such comments and arguments with her stepfather seemed to follow periods of his drug-taking activity. She noted how he had "dabbled" before establishing a more frequent habit following the death of his brother and is now considered to have an on-going narcotic addiction,

I knew what he used to do with the Tin foil Heroin so then every time I used to see the tin foil above the bed I used to go and hide it to stop him from taking it cause he knew for a fact that I hated him taking it cause every time I used to see him taking it it would start an argument.

If he didn't take it there was obviously side effects to it like he'd get all angry and everything like at anyone for any reasons but he wouldn't get angry at his kids like *his* [emphasised] kids like by blood he'd only get mad at me like he had something against me

As the "addictive" activity pursued, Serena "told my Social Worker about it" who "didn't believe it at first". As Serena continued to report the behaviour, one of her older sisters began asking, "why did you have to go and tell the social worker you already told me and it's dealt with". She then described the ways in which her stepfather would also "encourage" the Social Worker's disbelief by stating "you can't believe her", which would often be followed by occasions where "everyone [was] just talking about me all day". Serena mentioned that she did not like to "talk to anyone I don't open up" and reached a point where "I used to self-harm and have suicidal thoughts and that". However, during one occasion, Serena "ended up breaking down" to her Social Worker who had changed since the drug-reporting. This particular Social Worker informed Serena's stepfather, and then "he'd take

everything out of the room that was sharp and everything” as a seemingly preventative precaution on the Social Worker’s advice.

As will come to be seen, Serena related her deteriorated bond with her stepfather to the “close bond” she shared with her mother since “we were the only white ones and she was always there for me”. This bond seemed imperative to Serena who reportedly has few other allies in her family which she feels is “due to” her “Whiteness”.

*“I heard my Mum’s laugh”*

Serena described how laughter was a common occurrence during activities with her mother, noting that when her mother “laughs she does them really loud laughs those really loud embarrassing laughs where its just funny at the same time”. She also described having an incredibly “close bond” with her mother and how she felt that this was due to them being “the only White ones”. Serena explained how this meant she “got to have special time” alone with her mother where she would help her with her homework, or they would draw together. Other “special times” involved trips to the local park where they would “do the butterfly with the swings”. Serena noted that it was these occasions with her mother, as well as her mother’s interests in the hobbies of drawing and art, that “inspired” her own “love of Art and Photography”. Moreover, during these “special” activities, Serena’s mother would also “tell me all about my real dad”. One such occasion involved Serena’s mother giving Serena old photographs she had found of her mother, biological father, and her. Upon receiving the photographs, Serena was asked by her mother “keep them safe” and “make sure your stepdad doesnt see that cause he will get a bit jealous”.

Similar to her “loud laugh”, Serena described her mother as having a “proper loud sneeze” whereby,

She scared my friend we was outside just walking past and we heard my mum sneezing and so we thought something happened so I had to run upstairs and be like ‘you ok Mum’ and she was like ‘yea’ and her face was proper red so I was like ‘ohh my God shes just been sneezing’.

Checking on her mother’s well-being was soon to be replaced by a more regular routine of care when Serena was nine years old. Due to alcohol dependency,

according to medical professionals, Serena's mother "started getting pins and needles in her feet and then when the pins and needles went the next day she just couldn't walk whatsoever". Later, she was diagnosed with Guillain-Barré syndrome<sup>31</sup> which Serena explained "stops you from walking using your hands and everything". Serena's mother then began "relying on her wheelchair to get about" and Serena began "helping my mum everyday". She recalled a trip with her school's Young Carers Group (YCG), which she explained helped her to "know how to help people in wheelchairs like getting people in and out of doors and that and it did help me progress with me Mum". Their "special times" continued throughout the period of ill-health, and Serena would "take her for walks in the park and everything". Serena described how these park-trips would continue despite a boy "bullying" her "because Mum was in a wheelchair". Serena reported the boy saying, "comments like 'Ohh you help that retard in the wheelchair'". Serena's Mum was then later diagnosed with liver damage and memory loss which Serena described as expanding her caring role to attempts at "protecting" her mother from her stepfather, "cause my mum got diagnosed with memory loss [...] he kept asking my mum for money on a daily basis so practically I had to be her reminder id be like 'Mum youve already given him ten pounds before'".

Serena's caring role came to an end on 23rd January 2019 when Serena's mother passed away. Serena was thirteen years old. One year later, when describing the occasion, Serena expressed that "you feel nothing youre numb". She disclosed,

Like to be honest today is just not my day of the year cause todays the day when my mum died [...] cause obviously she died in [local] hospital and I was there while she was dying as well so today I just try and concentrate but Im just like mmm.

Following the death of Serena's mother, her Stepfather's drug-use increased "because that was how he coped" according to Serena. Their "bad bond" evolved to involve physical abuse where Serena described occasions such as when "he pushed me to the wall and slapped me". She reported this abuse to her Social Worker and

---

<sup>31</sup> A 'rare condition in which a person's immune system attacks the peripheral nerves' which can 'result in muscle weakness and loss of sensation in the arms / legs' and affects nerves which 'transmit pain, temperature, and touch sensations'. Severe cases can result in 'near-total paralysis' (World Health Organisation, 2016).

was “relocated to my sisters house” that same night. Soon after, Serena’s familial unit as she had known it began to shift once more. She recalls this occasion as it unfolded in an inner-city Child Services building, “we were all sitting at the table and it went from one child to another asking who theyd want to live with”. Serena’s decision to “choose” her sister that she was then living with (Destiny) seemed to arise from conflicting places. Whilst she preferred to live with her other sister Hope, she felt obligated to live with Destiny who had been “kind enough to take me in”. She also wished to avoid difficult associations with her aunt,

Carol stepped in and said shed take me on in a heartbeat and would take on the other kids if they wanted to but then because I didnt have a close bond with her and she looks a lot like my mum it kinda made me quite upset [...] my mums sisters just look exactly like her theyve got her nose and her facial expressions and her laugh and everything.

Serena mentioned how these difficulties also related to her own resemblance to her mother whereby, “everyone used to think I was her twin”. Following the meeting, Serena recounted that “at first I went back to Destiny’s and the Social Worker had to work it all out and then a couple of days later we all went on different paths”.

Shortly after the unfolding occasions of her mother’s death and moving to live with her sister in a different area, Serena met her biological father and “stayed at his house for three days or so”. However, Serena described several occasions about how her relationship with her biological father unfolded thereafter,

I didnt have a phone I couldnt get in touch with him so we ended up losing contact for like a week and then I texted him but I dont think the text went through [...] then he said he didnt want any more contact [...] he was like its a good thing that my mums dead [...] then he sent a text saying “[Serena] is not my daughter”

As these occasions unfolded, Serena described “coping” through her love of Art and Photography rather than “turning back” to self-harm. She noted “choosing to remember” her mother in this way as she conveys, “cause when me and my mum used to do art it used to be a kind of inspiration and once I started drawing with her I

liked doing it so it just brings back memories and stuff'. She also reminisced about her mum with sister, Caz,

me and Caz found a video of me and my mum [...] but my mum wasn't showing her face in it cause she was camera shyish and then yea me and Caz were just messing around and I heard my mums laughter in the background.

During some of the more challenging occasions of Serena's living, she also reports some more 'supportive' occasions which are also pertinent to her full meshwork of experiencing, as shall be seen.

*"It helped a bit"*

Serena engaged with what might be described as both formal and informal support which she noted "helped her a bit". Pertaining to challenges in the home, Serena was assigned a "Support Worker" from a local charity. She described this support as, "where your parents used to take drugs or alcohol [...] if you're struggling with something you speak to them about it and then they'll come up with a way to [...] learn you about them things". Serena found this support "actually helpful to be honest" given that it taught her about the drug her stepfather was taking, "it's really addictive and the eyesight goes [...] they got these goggles and when you put them on, your sight [...] goes weird". Interestingly, Serena noted that prior to the support with the charity, she had become aware of the "behaviour" and "signs" that her stepfather was relapsing. Further, Serena learnt about "techniques [...] if I get stressed out [...] or other emotions like how to deal with those emotions" but found that these were difficult to implement,

usually I'd take a walk just to like clear my mind and everything but then if me and my stepdad were in an argument he'd lock all the windows and all the doors so that I couldn't get out and then the thing is he'd shout it louder to me like I'd walk upstairs and he'd follow me or he'd shout it up the stairs to make me more annoyed [...] they'll say [do] what I like doing to take my mind off things like drawing or like going for a walk or something and [...] if you need any help just phone somebody or text somebody and try and get help but usually when we argued he would turn off the internet or he'd take my

phone and hides it gives it to one of my siblings or snaps it in half [...] now I just try not to get angry and argue with him in the first place.

Additionally, Serena accessed a Counselling Service following a referral from her Social Worker which she found useful however, the sessions concluded reportedly due to resource limitations, “I had a counsellor [...] that went well it was helping a bit cause she went through different drug trials and that and we went through different drugs like what me dad uses [...] but then that trial had to finish because she only did a 4 week one”. When asked, Serena told her Social Worker that she would like a new Counsellor because she felt “that would help” but was advised that “there’s a long waiting list”.

Alongside this more ‘formal’ support from community services, Serena engaged with more ‘informal’ support. Specifically, Serena described how she “felt supported by my favourite teacher at Primary [school]”, with whom she described as having,

a close bond because my mum and her had a close bond too and she was one of them teachers that I could always talk to about problems my stepdad and everything else going on [...] she was just like ‘if you want you can come down whenever you want in your spare time and we can talk about your mum or whatever you want.

However, Serena found that it was more difficult to engage with her previous teacher when she relocated to live with Destiny in another borough whereby travelling time would make it difficult to “get home on time”. Serena emphasised that “getting home on time” was a “rule” enforced by Destiny which Serena attributed to the local knife crime and gang activity in the area which would often involve Serena “not going anywhere”, especially alone because she “knows what the area is like”.

Moreover, Serena – associated with her passion for Photography and already utilising this as “coping mechanism” – felt “supported” by her Photography Teacher at her current school, who she described as, “one of my favourite teachers because hes one of them teachers that you can get along with and you can have a laugh with him in class and [...] he keeps the class in rhythm”. She took additional classes after school with him to work on her projects and, “when Ive done all the work I just make different things with the edits and everything and then I show the teacher and

he says that im extra steps ahead of the class”. Noteworthy, this teacher reflected a similar warmth towards Serena when mentioning “I love her shes a little gem” (Researcher Notes<sup>32</sup>).

Serena also describes how she “used to love school when I was little”. This appeared to be another way in which she spent “special alone” time with her mother, where “I used to come back home from school and then she used to help me with my homework”. Serena’s siblings did not share a similar desire for learning and “did not do so well” according to Serena. She, however, is in the top tier sets for all of her lessons, is progressing “well” in lessons such as Maths despite feeling she is only “okay at it” and is “doing really well” in Photography according to her Teacher (Researcher Notes). Whilst Serena describes lessons as “helping” her to “concentrate and take my mind off other things”, her commitment seems to go beyond this given her choice to prioritise studying activities over spending time with her biological father when she cancels a visit with him, “I had studying to do so I had to cancel”. Whilst Serena seemingly enjoys Photography and Art and is ‘doing well’ in all of her school subjects, she describes how she would prefer to follow a career that allows her to, “work in a school but you talk to children about their problems and everything”. She describes her future aspirations as linked to her desire to care for others,

I do like helping people with their problems too listening to like whats wrong and trying to help them solve that [...] my social worker was saying youve gotta concentrate on yourself [...] to be honest I put other people before myself.

Serena explained that such actions are attributed to her personal experiences, “when I see other people in that situation I dont like it because I know its not a nice situation to be in its quite crappy”. When I asked whether she may utilise her top science grades to pursue a career in medicine, as another potential way to ‘help’ people, she confirmed that she would “prefer to talk to kids”. Notably, Serena seems

---

<sup>32</sup> Researcher notes refer to specific verbal comments made by staff members about either Imogen or Serena. The comments relating to Serena in this case occurred briefly at the door of a classroom when escorting Serena to her lesson, following a meeting. The teacher was aware that I was a Researcher working with Serena during the transaction.



to already have been pursuing her aspirations to ‘help’ through activities when visiting her previous primary school,

cause I usually finish around half 12 on Fridays I used to go down [to local Primary school] then there was this one kid that would never speak to anyone he didn’t know like he just has no friends or anything he just keeps himself to himself and he didnt know me whatsoever then he just got cards playing cards and just put them next to me and asked if I could play with him and I was just speaking to him and he was asking me if I was coming in next time and I was like ‘yea yea’.

Having outlined an account of Serena’s living which pertains to particular occasions with others through various fields, it is now necessary to consider how such moments, and Serena more generally, might be understood when concerned with ‘poor’ people living and learning. Specifically, notions of ‘race’, ‘grief’, and ‘interventions’ seem pertinent to inquiring with Serena. Noteworthy, the section that follows addresses each notion in turn to build a transactional understanding of Serena which might otherwise be atomised into these parts. These parts are then brought together in the final section of this chapter to explicate Serena as a full bundle of transactional lines which neither prioritises, nor overlooks, any parts of her living pertaining to her ‘race’, ‘grief’, or ‘support’. Such exemplifications which utilise transactional ideas to consider concrete occasions are then drawn on to consider the substantive concern of ‘poor’ young people who are experiencing poverty and associated ‘adversity’ and yet ‘doing well’ educationally’ as Serena is.

### 7.3.THINKING ABOUT SERENA

---

#### 7.3.1 ‘WHITENESS’: THE DYNAMIC TRANSACTING OF RACE RELATIONS

Throughout the account Serena refers to her ‘Whiteness’ on several occasions such as when she is describing a ‘bad bond’ with her stepfather, siblings, and some of her stepfather’s relatives as People of Colour and also, the ‘close bond’ she shares with her mother who is also White. Hence, it is necessary to consider notions of race and race relations when thinking of Serena living and learning.

Importantly, whilst this chapter is led by Serena's account whereby, she uses the term 'racism', the point of the chapter is to discuss Serena's 'race' (or 'Whiteness' as she describes it) as dynamic and a part of her full, transacted, living. Therefore, I neither agree nor disagree that Serena is experiencing racism, nor intend to invalidate her descriptions of her feelings/experiences. Rather, I am presenting an idea of 'race' as transactional and hence, neither a (i) redundant nor (ii) totally defining aspect of her living. Indeed, the point of this section particularly is to explore how Serena appears to associate only 'negative' connotations with her race (i.e., 'being the only White one'), whilst overlooking the seemingly more 'positive' relations with her mother (i.e., 'because we're the only White ones'). Hence, I suggest that what 'being White' means for Serena, when attending to her transactional experiencing, is varied and co-constituted by transactions with others through differing environments/occasions. Fundamentally, I seek to highlight the limitations of linearly causal explanations of educational experiencing premised upon atomised notions of 'race' (as opposed to a transactional notion of race as dynamic). Noteworthy, I continue the discussion of race as a topic warranting further exploration from a transactional perspective in Chapter Nine (9.5.2).

In terms of literature pertaining to notions of family and race, Zinn (2010) is a useful place to start. Zinn scopes and synthesises literature over several decades and through 'idea shifts' concerned with 'the family as a race institution'. Zinn contends that during earlier decades of emerging sociological thinking, scholars tended to focus on 'idealised' notions of the family and overlook race (Functionalist). This then evolved to 'Structuralist-Functionalist' ideas which 'glorified a historically specific, and race and class-specific, family structure as the benchmark for all families in modern society' (Zinn, 2010, p. 360). Ideas then shifted when critiques emerged towards these 'culturally deterministic' notions. For example, feminist critiques which 'drew on radical/ critical thought, especially Marxism to explain the relations between families, and the external forces of history, economics, and politics' (p. 362). Thereafter, more 'structural perspectives' offered an alternative critique which 'examined the social location of families within a larger social structure where social and economic imbalances shaped their opportunities and options', which grew and focused on 'race as a defining axis of family life' (p. 364).

What Zinn's work shows is that, despite shifting ideas pertaining to notions of 'family' and 'race' as social/cultural living evolves, such ideas appear to remain premised on dualistic notions of the family (persons) as 'external', or 'relating', to the 'structures' of race and racial inequality. Indeed, even more contemporary ideas focus on only parts of complex evolving meshworks when considering race to be a 'defining axis' of family life. Thus, ideas tend to overlook the co-constitution of racialised family relations which unfold in transactional ways. Such notions may then be considered in two ways. The first which considers race as 'skin deep' as separated/unrelated to biological/social/cultural transacted activities including those through the family unit, and the second which considers race/racism as 'structural' and thereby a 'thing' external to human activity which must be navigated or tackled. This assumes that race is either 'skin deep' *or* 'beyond the skin', not a complex interconnection of both. Therefore, these dualistic ideas overlook the intimate and co-constitutive relations of persons, families, and societies and thus, nor is race/racism considered to interpenetrate and become co-constituted through such relations, as I will come to show when drawing on the Deweyan ideas of Sullivan (2001). It is not the case that race simply and one-dimensionally constitutes the family, nor can the family be merely seen as an 'institution' which constitutes racial ideas and activities. Rather, the relation is reciprocal, as will now be exemplified through several occasions of Serena's living.

Serena describes feeling that the change in her relationship with her stepfather and other members of her family arose from the 'obvious' difference pertaining to her race, particularly when it became clear she was not 'his daughter' given her 'Whiteness'. This suggests that skin colour is both 'skin deep' and yet protrudes beyond the skin to affect activities with others. However, the issue with Serena's hypothesis lies in the premise of linear *causality* – that skin colour *caused* or was the reason for a particular set of following actions. More appropriately, attending to the full transactional nature of Serena's living means recognising her 'Whiteness' as simultaneously biological and social (and hence, cultural/political) and thus emerging through a deep interconnection of past and present occasions that may become part of her relationships, though not in any linear causal ways. For example, it might be more appropriate for Serena to consider what other occasions and protagonists may have been part of the unfolding issues with herself and her

stepfather. These were not discussed by Serena and equally, appeared to be being overlooked by her in her attempt to make sense of their 'bad bond'. Perhaps, Serena might benefit from understanding other occasions as potentially stimulating parts of unfolding occasions thereafter, such as those pertaining to her being the middle child with a different biological father to both her older and younger siblings who all share the same father (her stepfather). Understanding the full dynamism of many interconnecting occasions, including her 'obvious difference' from her family as being 'the only White one', may help her to make sense of their relations, historically and presently.

To elucidate then, each protagonist involved in shared occasions (i.e., Serena's mother/stepfather/biological father) may be co-constituting related unfolding events (i.e., Serena's birth and early upbringing) but not in any linear causal and additive way which could be utilised to explain how Serena's 'Whiteness' *caused* her stepfather's change in behaviour towards her later. Rather, Serena's relationship with her stepfather is co-constituted by a complex meshworking of unfolding occasions as they both share moments but, also knot with others in moments shared not only by the two of them (i.e., their relations with other family members). Moreover, thinking of Serena's 'bad bond' with her stepfather's relatives and some of her siblings as directly caused by her 'bad bond' with her stepfather, is similarly limited. Hence, explanations which do not attend to such complex sociality are limited by assumptions based on (i) the person/family/society as separated, warranting a focus on parts, (ii) the family as one-dimensionally undergoing 'external' structures, and ultimately, (iii) the person one-dimensionally undergoing the actions of the family. Thus, beyond separating social activities into parts, which overlooks co-constitutional person:environment fullness, it is also assumed that groups – in this case the family – are *formed additively* of individual persons. This undermines the transactional nature of family/group relations which emerge through occasions shared by unique individuals who are at once part of many environments, of which the family is only one. Each person who is involved in the family unit (both doing and undergoing) is themselves a unique meshwork of on-going experiencing. So, it is limited to think of Serena being only 'done to' by these people and overlooking (i) her *doing* and (ii) their *doing* in other environments, and what that might mean for their evolving relationships. Moreover, it prioritises the family and 'race' relations

with family in Serena's life, which has far more 'challenges' than only this (e.g., poverty, grief, and so on).

Furthermore, these limited explanations are not necessarily useful when considering that Serena is an evolving person where (i) her 'Whiteness' is not always part of 'negative' experiencing such as when Serena describes a 'close bond' with her mother 'because [they are] the only White ones' or (ii) why Serena describes only some of her siblings being 'racist' towards her, particularly after her stepfather and his family 'start being racist towards her', whilst she seems to have more positive relations with some of her siblings, such as the sister she wanted to live with. These less 'challenging' experiences seem to be overlooked by Serena's hypothesis specifically and separatist ideas more generally. To overcome such limitations, it is necessary to attend to Serena in a way that neither overlooks, nor prioritises her race, and considers the fullness of her evolving biography as she transacts with others through differing social/cultural environments. Put simply, it is more appropriate then to think of race as *dynamic* when considering young people living and learning.

Relating to these exemplified notions of transactional interconnectivity, Sullivan (2001) argues that persons are often thought of as separate and atomised pertaining to 'characteristics'. Indeed, she contends that,

Gender, race, and other characteristics of one's identity interpenetrate and co-constitute each other such that a white woman's experience of sexism in the United States will be very different from that of a black woman [...] It is not that black women have a burden of oppression provided by their race in addition to that of sexism but that they have a different kind of burden of sexism because of white privilege (Sullivan, 2001, p. 20).

This is incredibly important when considering that Serena views her 'Whiteness' as connected to her challenging relations with her stepfather/stepfather's family and some of her siblings but equally, does not view her 'Whiteness' as posing a challenge to her relations with her mother and elder sister. To explicate this biological-social interconnection further then, Sullivan draws on the work of Susan Wendell and the notion of disability. She explains that 'the biological condition of legs that do not move becomes a disability when a society makes that condition relevant through its construction of buildings only for people who can move their legs' (Sullivan, 2001, p. 21). This further demonstrates the ways in which persons cannot be atomised from their environments given the reciprocal permeability of persons:environments

evolving together (e.g., where a person's activity becomes a 'disability' as above) but, which also has the potential to change future social mechanisms (e.g., restructuring buildings with ramps where access does not require the use of a person's legs). Moreover, these intimate interpenetrations emphasise the way in which only limited understandings emerge when focusing on parts of a person's biographical composition that come together additively and seemingly exist independently of material/cultural/social environments.

Adopting a similar line of thinking then, Serena's 'Whiteness' as seemingly at once a 'problem' and a 'benefit', only makes sense when considering the social/cultural environments she is transacting through with others. It becomes inappropriate to think of Serena's 'Whiteness' purely biologically when concerned with her living experiences whereby she is also intimately interpenetrating with social/cultural environments and knotting with others. For example, if Serena's 'Whiteness' did not differ from her siblings, it may not have posed an issue for her in terms of her 'negative' relations with her stepfather but, may also not have been beneficial to what she sees as 'positive' experiencing through additional time spent alone with her mother.

Serena's skin colour then is not the cause of particular actions which she appears to see as 'done to' her (i.e., 'racism'/'bad bond' with Stepfather/siblings), or one-dimensionally constituting actions (i.e., 'bonding' with Mother) but rather is one part of her transactional body experiencing with others through various environments. This renders a singularly biological/atomistic premise of race, as beyond or separated from human activity, as limited and directs us to more appropriately thinking of race as transactionally dynamic and fluid.

Principally, the social/cultural environments in which persons are transacting are as crucial to understanding how Serena's 'Whiteness' is part of her difficult experiencing with her stepfather, siblings, and her stepfather's family, as they are about understanding the 'close bond' she seems to share with her mother as the 'only White one'. The issue of atomisation will continue to become clearer throughout the remainder of the chapter as other parts of what constitutes and is constituted by Serena's evolving biography as a totality, are explored.

---

### 7.3.2 GRIEVING AND LEARNING

The death of Serena's mother appears significant in Serena's account of her living, particularly as it pertains to unfolding occasions with others. A year on, Serena reports feeling 'numb' about the occasion whilst also describing a series of interweaving, relational, events such as her stepfather's increasing substance abuse, moving to live with her sister in an area with operational 'gang' activity, meeting her biological father, as well as 'remembering' her mother through art activities and with her sister and previous teacher. Hence, the 'grief' Serena faces following her mother's death is a part of her living worthy of exploration.

Importantly, grief appears to be an on-going process for Serena, intimately co-constituted through her transactions with others through various environments, beyond her mother's death. Hence, the term *grieving* seems more appropriate to encapsulate the continuity of this occasion as it unfolds in dynamic ways with others. This concrete unfolding of grieving, demonstrated through Serena's account, highlights the first issue with literature concerned with bereavement historically which has considered 'grief' to be an individual process (cf. Breen & O'Connor, 2007). Some scholars have more recently shifted to thinking of 'grief' as both an individual and collective process (Bartel, 2020) though such explanations remain premised on the separation of person and their environments, which does not appreciate the continuity or complexity of transactional activity which are inherently inseparable from environments or others.

Moreover, some current explanations pertaining to grief are equally limited suggesting how Serena continues to 'do well' through schooling despite her mother's death. For example, death in the family and subsequent 'grief' is considered a significant impactor of 'educational attainment and life outcomes', though a person's context and 'support' is considered significant in determining how these outcomes emerge (cf. Rosenbaum-Feldbrügge, 2020; Prix & Erola, 2017; Berg, Rastila, Saarela & Hjern, 2014). Additionally, the 'impact on life outcomes' are said to pertain to the 'type' (immediate or extended) and gender of the family member and differ according to a young person's race (Patterson, Verdery, & Daw, 2020); age (Kailaheimo-Lönnqvist & Erola, 2020); and how these factors link with other factors of 'inequality'. Indeed, some contentions pertain to 'grief' impacting upon young

people's engagement with, and ambitions towards, education which affects their school attainment 'in childhood and through adulthood' (Burrell, Mehlum & Qin, 2020). For Serena, the death of her loved one is significant – as Serena describes through the relationship with her mother – and is an occasion intimately interconnected with other parts of her experiencing pertaining to poverty, race, living with a substance abuser, and challenging relations with her biological father and other family members ('inequalities'). Therefore, according to some of these explanations, Serena's schooling and learning should be disrupted by these adversities or at least serve as 'significant impactors' which are detrimental to her educational attainment. But how do such explanations help us to understand Serena who is continuing to 'do well' through such 'adverse' occasions and subsequently, presenting an 'anomaly' in general trends? Perhaps, how her 'outcomes' emerge are conditioned by the 'supportive' aspects of her context which are stimulating her agency and hence, resilience to such adversity? The limitations of such an explanation shall continue to be discussed in the following section pertaining to 'interventions'.

Seemingly taking a more relational turn than the explanations outlined above, is the concept of *perezhivanie*, and also the notion of the 'affective niche', which come closer to recognising a more intimate intertwining of person with her environments. Whilst concerns with conceptualisations of *perezhivanie* have been outlined in Chapter Two, it is worth mentioning the concept as outlined in 'the problem of the environment' (Vygotsky, 1994) to explore how the interconnecting parts of Serena's living may explain how she continues to 'do well' educationally whilst grieving. Vygotsky explains *perezhivanie* (emotional experience) as the representation of the relation between person and environment and, using the example of a child experiencing the death of a loved one, suggests that *perezhivanie* is the 'prism' through which a child understands the situation. Whilst Vygotsky refers to 'an indivisible state' of 'personal characteristics and situational characteristics' (p. 342), he appears to remain somewhat limited by notions of one-dimensionality, which is the 'influence of the environment on the child' (p.338), and to 'find out which of these constitutional characteristics have played a decisive role in determining the child's relationship to a given situation' (p. 342). Seemingly sharing a similar interpretation, Clarà (2015) then attempts to develop Vygotsky's ideas, as well as



those of Vasilyuk (1988), by looking to cultural factors. He suggests that ‘feelings are caused’ by subject in activity but is ‘mediated by cultural means’ (p. 37) such that emotion (sharing Vygotsky’s explication of *perezhivanie*) should be understood as an integration of ‘feeling and representation’ such as ‘the-object-affecting-and-transforming-the-subject-by-means-of-cultural-mediators’ (p. 51). Thus, appreciating the reciprocal transactional relation of person:environment is not fully recognised in that he assumes that (i) the environment is primarily impactful upon the person and (ii) that the activities between the two are interacting through ‘cultural mediators’.

In similar ways, Brinkmann and Holte Kofod (2018) briefly allude to the ‘mutual influences’ of ‘organism-environment couplings’ which enable ‘affective states’ of grief. This develops beyond separatist ideas by recognising that grieving is a social process which varies between cultures and over time, according to evolving practices and tools. However, they do distinguish between ‘individual tools’ and ‘collective forms of scaffolding’ whereby the ‘affective niche is enabled and enacted [...] not only within the individual mind, but also between people, enabled and scaffolded by socio-material practices and technologies’ (p. 170). Hence, whilst this explanation appears to begin to appreciate a more intimate connection of practices through the ‘coupling’ of person:environment, it also appears to assume that grieving does take place ‘in the mind’ *as well as* collectively. The problem with such ideas is that none go as far as transactional ideas to recognise persons:environments evolving together through a reciprocally inter-permeable and continuous co-constitutional relation, whereby grieving *is* the activity which may emerge through particular cultural habits (reproducing and evolving spatiotemporally) with others. Moreover, the ‘mind’ in transactional terms is not considered to be ‘individual’ as was outlined in Chapter Two, but rather is better understood as an evolving depository of mind:body experiencing which is co-constituted through social and cultural habitual activities with environments and others. The use of these tools pertaining to the process of grieving shall be considered further in Chapter Eight.

The notion of habit also becomes useful in attending to Serena’s changing activities during her mother’s life and following her death, which also include potential occasions of learning. For example, when Serena helps her mother following the Young Carers trip, this might be seen as an occasion of drawing on prior experiencing in a novel occasion and learning through the doing, whereby the

activities of the trip (e.g., appropriate handling of a wheelchair through a door) are brought into new uses with her mother through the specific activities of pushing her mother through various doors in their home, and during ‘park visits’ (remembering the idea of ‘disability’ as transactional). Further, these ‘caring’ occasions also point to changes in habitual activity for Serena where she is transacting with her mother in particular ways prior to the illness. These habitual activities, which are constantly adaptive to new person:environment relations, are reconfigured when Serena’s mother becomes ill. Their shared occasions, and hence inter-permeable experiencing, evolves through novel habitual activities. Thereafter, when Serena’s mother passes away the disruption to habitual activity is so profound that it cannot be reconfigured and rather, breaks completely (it is no longer possible for Serena and her mother to engage in practical transacted activity). However, it is possible that such habitual disruptions, together with new interconnecting transactions emerging from the complete break, may provide the impetus for reflexive inquiry in the future and hence, novel/evolving habits. Whilst Serena does not yet seem to be engaging with such processes of reflexive inquiry, these notions are exemplified further in the following chapter (Eight) pertaining to an auto-biographical account of a grieving occasion.

For now, it seems that Serena is adapting to changes with her environments. Thus, the term ‘resilience’ is perhaps better replaced with Dewey’s notion of ‘plasticity’ here, which encapsulates the symbiotic relation of person with environment and others as each adapts together to continue functionally coordinating. This provides a more appropriate explanation of Serena’s current activities as she continues forward, adapting to the changes of her living. This highlights the difference of one-dimensional activity (resilient to) to transactional adaptability (doing and undergoing). Indeed, the death of Serena’s mother may have completely broken a particular habit – those that involved her mother in shared activities such as doing homework together amidst other activities – and yet she continues to study and do homework albeit in different ways (without her mother). Thus, whilst the death of her mother becomes a significant experience for Serena, and one which ends a habit, her plasticity through this break as she continues forward functionally means other habits continue, such as schooling and studying in different ways. Indeed, Serena’s engagement with art and photography activities continues whilst also becoming a

way of ‘remembering’ her mother. Put simply, the breaking of this habit does not mean the loss of function to *all* habits for Serena. Moreover, the occasion of her mother’s death is intimately interweaving with other occasions of Serena’s living as functioning ensues. For example, Serena is also adapting to her stepfather’s increased substance abuse and moving from the family home amidst other occasions. This suggests that whilst there is perhaps an ebb and flow of Serena’s experiencing where her mother’s death is currently predominant as related to several on-going activities, it may not necessarily remain so as Serena continues to adapt and evolve through novel transacted activities which are creating other novel habits, for example those related to her sister’s ‘rule’ of travelling home ‘on time’ to avoid gang-related activities in the area. This travelling on a new route via a bus for forty minutes, becomes a new form of habit/*doing* for Serena that has adapted from the ten-minute walk home to her previous address, for example.

Furthermore, such on-going experiencing for Serena will include other moments of learning and growth, stimulated through various transacted activities in natural/social/cultural fields, as she knots with others and continually adapts and hence, how she makes sense of the experience of her mother’s death and ‘remembers’ her mother, will evolve as she does – notions which shall be discussed further in Chapter Eight. This understanding of the totality of continuous transactional activity through various environments spatiotemporally includes the plasticity of Serena as she adapts to changes whilst continuing to function through other habitual activities (which may then become opportunities for learning and growth). Thus, this offers a more appropriate understanding of Serena experiencing what may seem a plethora of significant ‘challenges’ in her young living and yet continuing to ‘do well’ educationally. This suggestion is exemplified further in the following section when considering some occasions considered to be more ‘supportive’.

---

### 7.3.3 INTERVENTIONS OR REFLEXIVE OPPORTUNITIES

Having considered a number of ‘challenges’ pertaining to Serena’s living, it is necessary to consider some of the perhaps more ‘supportive’ mechanisms she describes as other parts of her fullness of experiencing, particularly in relation with others. Indeed, through the account Serena is describing ‘special times’ with her

mother which are occurring alongside more challenging occasions with her stepfather and his relatives. As has also been discussed in previous sections, Serena is learning through some of these challenging occasions such as adapting/reconfiguring her habits and also establishing new habits when her mother becomes ill, and when Serena moves home. Hence, whilst Serena is undeniably experiencing poverty and a host of associated ‘adverse’ occasions, she is also continually adapting to sustain functional coordination to her habit of studying/schooling.

This reciprocal undergoing and doing is not captured by explanations premised on dualistic causal ideas, for example, research suggesting that parent-child conflict and financial stress impacts ‘school readiness’ (Anderson, 2018), alongside the plethora of other research mentioned previously in Chapter Two. This suggests that Serena’s educational progress may be impacted in some way by the challenges she faces. Now, whilst such thinking might appear to go some way to explaining Serena’s siblings not ‘doing well’ in school (albeit through complex transactions rather than linear causal occasions), and how this may stimulate an interventional response, it does not explain the ‘anomaly’ of Serena who is experiencing similar familial circumstances/parental-child conflict/low-income and yet continues to ‘do well’ through schooling. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the limitations of such linear causal assumptions to explore how Serena might still be ‘doing well’ by attending to the complex transactions of her on-going experiencing.

As has been shown when scoping the fields concerned with ‘poor’ young people and education in Chapter Two then, there is a general consensus that interventions are useful for young people facing ‘adverse challenges’, underpinned by *causal* notions. However, the issue lies in the theorising of such ideas which are premised on causal ‘end in view’ outcomes. These tend to suggest that an intervening or ‘preventative’ measure – say Serena’s counselling sessions or her Social Worker’s suggestion that sharp objects be removed from her room – is going to *cause* a particular outcome. Often, analyses such as these ‘work backwards’ as has been previously discussed, by attributing the outcome, say that Serena has stopped self-harming, to a previous occasion, perhaps the removal of sharp objects. What such thinking does not account for, however, is the unpredictability of living as it unfolds in the drama of the everyday. Such unpredictability limits such causal, sequential thinking. For example,

had Serena proceeded to use another tool to self-harm, that had not been deemed a risk and removed (evidenced on prior tools she had used), or had continued to self-harm away from her room/house, then it becomes easier to see the lacunas in causal thinking which does not account for unpredictable, spatiotemporal flow, as the totality of Serena's experiencing who is continually reconfiguring with environment and other during unfolding occasions.

To exemplify this further, Serena mentions that she is engaging with counselling pertaining to the conflicting relationship with her stepfather but that some of the suggestions in how to manage or cope with the conflict situations are difficult to implement. This is due to the ways in which such 'end in view' interventions overlook the dynamics of unfolding transactional occasions, such as when Serena is advised to 'avoid conflict' or 'leave the house' and her stepfather locks all her means of exit. This means that, whilst it is useful to focus on Serena, it is also necessary to understand that her Stepfather is his own meshwork, whose lines are extending forward by participating in various activities, only one of which is drug-taking, and is continuing from a unique backdrop of historical occasions, only some of which may involve Serena. This then better explains why the principles Serena mentions, as suggested by her Councillor, are difficult to implement given that they tend to be premised on dualistic causal notions where an environment or at least 'personal' actions are under one set of control (usually the actor) and, which overlooks the reciprocal transaction and the unfolding unpredictability of shared occasions. Concretely, this intertwining of lines in a transacted field of activity with her stepfather demonstrates how Serena nor her stepfather are in *total* control, and neither can predict the unfolding of the occasion before it has *happened*. Rather it is unfolding in the moment whereby the two are continuously adapting and responding, and both doing and undergoing.

Counselling sessions may then prove a useful activity if understood as being a transactional occasion where Serena is able to reflect on previous activities and hypothesise with others about future occasions. However, these occasions are specifically that – reflective and hypothetical – not *causal*. These occasions may be occasions of learning but only when the reflective occasion comes to be a novel occasion of practical activity. Thus, the counselling sessions may become part of Serena's inquiring, which shifts from reflection to a more *reflexive* process whereby

the habitual break has stimulated an inquiry into the particular problem and novel habits may emerge from the creative problem-solving through her continued person:environment transacting with others. For example, when attempting to enact the hypothesis of leaving her home to ‘clear her mind’, Serena is confronted with another problem: her stepfather preventing her from leaving. So, she continues to act in that moment, adapting in ways that she could not have hypothesised, given that she had not accounted for this problem. Thus, she may try different tactics which involve adapting and re-hypothesising during the occasion, and which could involve escaping via another route, for example. Serena is continually only part of the unfolding occasion in that she is both undergoing the actions of her stepfather, whilst equally *doing* to him, and so both sets of actions are responsively adapting through the shared moment.

This is exemplified by a further example whereby Serena poses another hypothesis for future action, as emerging from discussions with her social worker, to ‘not argue with him in the first place’. Here, Serena again appears to be working through the occasion with casual notions by assuming that her actions (i.e., not arguing back) are under her full agentic control and will achieve a desired outcome (i.e., no confrontation with her stepfather). Again, this undermines the dynamic interplay of person:environment transactions with others. If indeed, causal analyses are pursued then, a likely suggestion might be that an intervention, or a combination of interventions, are either successful or unsuccessful in causing future outcomes for Serena. Hence, the onus remains on (i) the ‘effectiveness’ of the intervention and (ii) to Serena as an individual agent in interaction with the intervention. Rather, when focusing on the meshwork of occasions that are threading together as Serena’s living with others unfolds, both more ‘supportive’ and perhaps more ‘challenging’ occasions are addressed in totality, such that none are prioritised nor causal, and which recognises the symbiotic relation of knotting with others through the ‘push and pull’ of complex transactions.

It is also necessary to emphasise that often the focus is on the ‘challenges’ faced by young people, and that any ‘positive’ or ‘supportive’ relations are causally ‘counteractive’, based on assumptions of direct linearity. Rather, it might be more appropriate to suggest that a lived life, such as Serena’s, includes many interweaving occasions, with many persons, some of which might be more ‘challenging’ and some

more 'supportive'. Thus, whilst Serena may be knotting with more difficult occasions with her stepfather and some of her siblings, all the while grieving the loss of her mother, she is also experiencing other occasions. For example, she is co-constituting occasions of remembering her mother with some of her sisters, such as when her and Caz watch a video and reminisce a previous occasion. Serena is also remembering her mother and their 'special times' by continued art and photography activities which she 'loves', amidst other schooling/homework activities, whilst continuing to develop these skills through practical engagement (becoming more accomplished at a task through *doing*). Moreover, not all of the adults she is experiencing with present challenges for Serena for example, she is transacting with teachers whom she seems to have a good relationship. Noteworthy, even where visits with her primary school teacher are less frequent when she moves to a different area, there are no seemingly significant changes in Serena's continuous 'doing well' which highlights another way in which many occasions are interweaving, often coinciding, and at times concluding, such that none can be prioritised as 'counteractive'.

#### 7.4 SERENA: A BUNDLE OF TRANSACTING LINES

Serena is a complex meshwork of experiencing. This may be better elucidated as Serena as a bundle of lines which are protruding forwards through transactions with environments, including transacting/knotting with others. Thus, the nature of her living is deeply social and therefore, cultural which, if attended to, provides more appropriate understandings of how Serena may be experiencing poverty and associated adversity whilst continuing to 'do well' through schooling, and learning through other activities. This recognises the totality of her biography through continuously unfolding living and learning as she adapts and evolves.

To expand then, Serena is living and learning through socially and culturally specific environments, having been born into her specific family. This familial unit is then co-constituted by members who are in turn becoming evolving meshworks of relational experiences that evolve from particular local formations. However, by both undergoing and doing through complex transactions, Serena is involved in reproducing and yet also changing some of these formations. Whilst the dynamic flow of Serena's living has been discussed throughout, Figure 8 attempts to illustrate

the ‘messiness’ and deeply intimate sociality of a lived life. Noteworthy, this figure includes only some of the protagonists mentioned through Serena’s empirical account as opposed to all of those whom she is/has been transacting with. Similarly, only a few fields Serena is transacting through, and activities she is engaging with, are mentioned given that it is impossible to account for all of these in one diagram. The purpose of this diagram then, depicted through interweaving lines of living, fields, and activities, is to demonstrate the complexity of living and experiencing spatiotemporally which cannot be separated into parts if the whole person is to be understood. In highlighting this transactional complexity through discussions of several occasions, several points have been exemplified through this chapter.

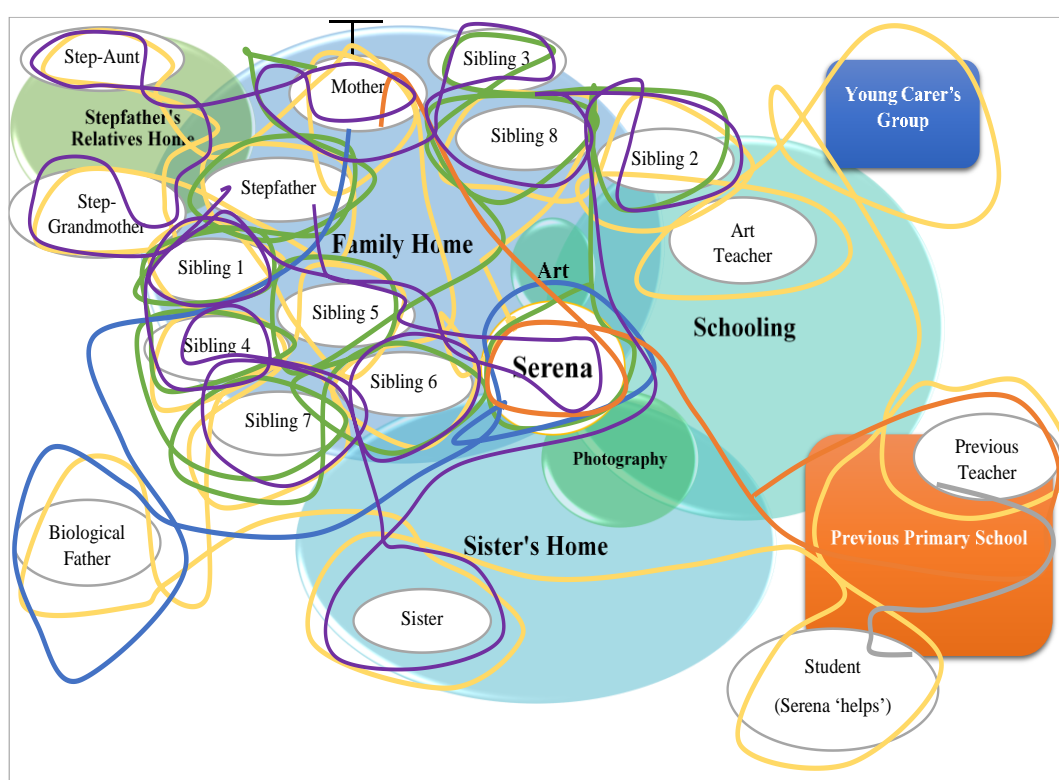


Figure 8 Serena: a meshwork

Firstly, a transactional approach is more appropriate in understanding race and how this plays out in the relational activities of humans, which departs from notions of race/race relations as either biologically (‘skin deep’) or ‘structurally’ constituted. Race, as articulated in this chapter, is part of a transactional body (mind:body) and must be given due consideration with all the other parts that constitute and are constituted by the totality of personhood. Thus, Serena’s race is neither a predominant nor subordinate part of her personhood but rather is dynamic and may



become prioritised at different times during various transactional activities. This has been exemplified by attending to more challenging occasions with her stepfather, as well as more supportive occasions with her mother which provide the opportunity for learning. Hence, Serena's Whiteness is made sense of in different ways according to her transactional activities.

Secondly, explanations prioritising other parts of a young person's living, such as grief episodes or the grieving process, particularly as it pertains to schooling and educational outcomes, are limited by not attending to the full dynamic totality of a person continually experiencing. Rather, looking to the person's plasticity as they adapt to changes in person:environment relations is far more useful in understanding, through Serena's concrete examples, how 'poor' young people experiencing adversity can still 'do well' educationally as they evolve, reconfigure, and establish new habits.

And thirdly, explanations which attend to Serena's 'doing well', by prioritising the more 'supportive' occasions which stimulate agentic resilience to 'counteract' challenges, are equally limited. What has been exemplified throughout is that both the more challenging and more supportive occasions are pertinent to Serena's living, and neither are primary in explaining how she continues to 'do well' despite challenging moments. Rather, some challenging occasions, and indeed some more supportive occasions, may come to be prioritised in her living at particular times. Moreover, these more challenging moments also have the potential to stimulate reconfiguration of activities and hence, become developmental. This is a more appropriate way of understanding Serena as she adapts her activities such as continuing to *do* studying, whilst *undergoing* the death of her mother.

In sum, this chapter develops some of the ideas presented in Chapter Six, by attending to a host of unfolding occasions as Serena's living continues through the dynamic every day. This further exemplifies the importance of attending to the totality of a person's experiencing rather than any parts no matter how significant. Chapter Eight will develop these ideas further still through an 'auto-transactional' process, exploring a longer period of living than has been previously explored with regard to Imogen or Serena.

## CHAPTER EIGHT ELIZABETH

### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the reader to an account of my living. Through many occasions, some of which may be considered ‘adverse’, some less so, the complexity of another person once considered ‘poor’ and yet who is generally ‘doing well’ educationally is outlined. This chapter takes an ‘auto-transactional’ approach to practical reflexive inquiring to problematise some of the ways in which I was historically understanding my living and learning when utilising separatist/causal analytical tools. As outlined in Chapter Four, what I define ‘auto-transactional’ refers to utilising transactional ideas including the concept of habit as tool for autobiographical inquiring. In so doing, the chapter expands on the ideas presented in Chapter Six which suggest particular forms of reflexive inquiry that Imogen might find useful. Indeed, I heed these earlier suggestions when considering my living autobiographically and hence, take the process of inquiring further than Imogen was able to yet do. This means perhaps reaching more ‘fruitful’ understandings as Dewey suggests, by attending to my habitual activities, reconfiguration, and adaptation over a longer period (i.e., childhood, adolescence, adulthood) that has not yet been considered with Imogen and Serena. In sum, I articulate the journey of my thinking from first aligning with what I now consider to be separatist/linearly causal ideas (Chapter Two) to developing my understandings of my own living and learning, including other ‘poor’ young people, when shifting to align more with transactional ideas. Noteworthy, the occasions discussed here were not necessarily remembered in a sequential order. The style adopted is similar to Chapter Seven where occasions have been ordered in a more chronological form from early childhood to the most recent occasions in order to aid clarity.

I begin the chapter by introducing the area I grew up in, some of my closest family members and dynamics, and some early experiences through familial relations and schooling. This sets the scene for some of my earliest memories and provides a starting point for the reader to begin to build a contextual picture of my early experiencing. I then take the reader on a walk through many occasions of experiencing through several years of my living. These include occasions associated with schooling, further education, and two degrees (undergraduate and masters)

leading to the start of this doctoral journey. In attending to more significant occasions as well as the general stream of my experiencing, I continue to demonstrate what I suggest is the complexity of on-going living as I shift activities and evolve, specifically highlighting the apparent fluidity of occasioning. More importantly, I attend to how my understandings of my personhood and the cultural environments I am transacting with, has shifted through such dynamic experiencing as my depository of meanings (body-mind) shift and develop.

As has been outlined methodologically in Chapter Four, exploring my own living through the writing of this chapter as a form of ‘auto-transactional’ inquiring, emerged from a series of intertwining transactional occasions with Imogen, Serena, my supervisory team, and my family, where I began to problematise some of the thinking tools I was utilising. Engaging with such a process has become an invaluable journey that required a departure from what I now see as the limitations of my earlier understandings. As I will now demonstrate, this chapter elucidates this process of considering my autobiographical doing and thinking spatiotemporally which provides a powerful articulation of my current theoretical positioning in this research. The chapter concludes with a discussion pertaining to how this autobiographical account offers further suggestions about more appropriate transactional ways to understand ‘poor’ people who ‘do well’ educationally. Before turning to a narration of my living, I provide a note on the ethical considerations.

---

#### 8.1.1 A NOTE ON ETHICS

Whilst this research is considered to be ‘educational’ (Ingold, 2015) rather than ethnographic as has been discussed in Chapter Four, looking to autoethnographic work concerned with ethical issues has been useful for writing this chapter. Moreover, I have discussed the relational nature of ethics and explored the idea of co-constituted ethical responsibility at length in Chapter Four. Premised on the ideas presented there, I reiterate that the dynamic and continuously changing ways in which occasions unfold transactionally with others through various environments means that future occasions are unpredictable. This also means that responsibility for the protection of protagonists (including myself) discussed in this chapter is co-constituted and hence, unguaranteed. Despite this, I have taken several

precautions to address potential ethical concerns of carrying out auto-/biographical work.

In terms of some of these concerns, Edwards (2021) discusses issues around permission with autoethnographic work, particularly issues of failing to obtain the permission of protagonists. Additionally, Ellis (2007) and Tolich (2010) have suggested checking whether protagonists have understood how their narratives will be discussed, including whether only parts of written content concerning protagonists have been shared with them. In attending to these potential issues, I have taken several steps. Firstly, all protagonists included in this chapter have been anonymised to protect their identity. Specifically, non-family members have been referred to as friend/best-friend/peer/colleague respectively, avoiding the use of names. Secondly, verbal permission was obtained from all family members who could perhaps be more identifiable given their relation to me and who are sometimes discussed at length. Indeed, all family members discussed at length have also read the chapter, discussed the ideas with me, and verbalised their approval. Noteworthy, all those concerned were above the age of eighteen and were able to provide their own permission (as opposed to a parent/guardian). Thirdly, the potential ethical issue concerning my brother, given that a criminal past is mentioned, was discussed at length with him, my supervisory team, and my internal annual reviewer<sup>33</sup>. My brother gave his verbal permission to have the accounts included given that no information about specific crimes is mentioned and that information about his criminal past is made available to future employers/relevant others through a Disclosure and Barring Service<sup>34</sup> check. Emphatically, his verbal permission was given after reading the chapter, including his approval of how the account was written and discussed.

Additionally, Lee (2018) raises the concern that at times narratives of people can become ‘fixed’ and as such, can potentially have detrimental consequences for their character and how they are understood. I account for this potential issue through my

---

<sup>33</sup> Internal reviews are conducted annually at the university to assess a student’s progress and provide an opportunity for the student to discuss their work with an academic outside of their supervisory team.

<sup>34</sup> The UK government service which provides information about an individual’s ‘convictions and conditional cautions’ (GOV.UK, 2018).

method of auto-transactional reflexivity which is premised upon the idea of continuous change and exposing the idea of development. Furthermore, the idea of humans as non-static (or non-‘fixed’) is exemplified and discussed throughout this thesis. Hence, I have taken care to avoid any potential understandings of protagonists as ‘fixed’ by the occasions/actions I discuss.

Moreover, Rambo (2016) considers how previous employment (i.e., her as an exotic dancer) could be reputationally damaging (i.e., to her career as a Professor), whilst others have considered whether an autobiographical account could be promoting ‘self-indulgence’, ‘self-importance’, or ‘shallowness’ (Armstrong-Gibb, 2019; Walford, 2020), including ‘whinging about circumstances’ (Edwards, 2021, p. 4). In considering these concerns, I have taken care to maintain an authentic and reflexive account. Indeed, my experiencing thus far does not include any occasions which I/my supervisory team could see as potentially damaging to my reputation (i.e., previous employment). Equally, the reflexive nature of the account works through a process of development in my thinking particularly through transactions with others hence, the account does not primarily focus on me as an individual. The discussion also includes self-assessment of earlier ways of thinking and therefore, is not avoiding self-critique, nor is the chapter written in a way that could be seen as ‘whinging’ about any ‘adverse’ occasions. I now turn to the narrated account of my living thus far.

## 8.2 ELIZABETH

### *SCOTTISH ROOTS*

My family home is on a council estate<sup>35</sup> in an urban area on the outskirts of London, UK. My parents have lived there for some twenty years now, and my Grandparents lived in the house next door for a similar period of time. As a child, I spent the greater part of my days in my Grandparent’s home which could be defined as the ‘anchor’ family house where all family members met weekly. I recall fond memories of gathering with my family whereby my gran would be preparing various dishes emerging from our ‘Scottish traditions’, and my grandad would be playing the

---

<sup>35</sup> Council estates are streets/areas with predominantly council-owned properties (social housing) which are rented by their tenants, often at a lower price than properties available in the private rental sector.

accordion to a fervent audience of singing and dancing around him. Indeed, my inept abilities for singing were not discouraged by my grandad when I would perform personal ‘talent shows’ beyond these family parties, to raucous applause. Such occasions were part of many hours I would spend with my grandad daily, which often led to Gran calling several times up the stairs ‘are you two coming for this dinner before it’s cold?’. After each school day, I would come home to a ‘wee glass of juice and a biscuit’ before running upstairs to tell my grandad about my day and begin reading aloud to him one of the several books I had been swinging in my bookbag on the way home. Reading aloud is something that continued without an audience when my grandad died. I was nine at the time, and some nineteen years later, I still read aloud.

Following my grandad’s death, I began to do my reading and other homework activities downstairs whilst my gran and mum cooked in the evenings, though my ‘wee juice’ habit remained intact. Dad was often working until the early evening so I would spend most of my time with him at weekends when he would pump the tires on my bike, as well as my best friend’s, so we could ride around the cul-de-sac. We continued to spend a great deal of time in my gran’s home, my best friend included, as both my parents worked long hours, with my mum also working a second job at weekends. My brother, several years my elder, was also working at this time and he would spend the summers building us ‘adventure courses’ through the garden or ‘huge’ water slides (with industrial plastic sheets) leading to my paddling pool. My best friend and I were rarely apart, beyond the few hours we spent at different schools each day. She would even come on holiday to the local seaside with us each year after both sets of our parents noted we were ‘just miserable without each other’.

#### *‘IT’S NOT HELPING’*

The second significant shift I recall after my grandad’s death unfolded during my transition from junior<sup>36</sup> to secondary school. My brother’s actions had started to change drastically which became the beginning of an evolving drug addiction, though I was unaware of this at the time. Alongside the challenges of familial disputes, disrupted sleep, and reduced finances associated with my brother’s habit, I

---

<sup>36</sup> As part of the UK schooling system, I attended Junior School from ages 7-11, and Senior school from ages 11-16.

was finding the transition from junior to secondary school difficult. Perhaps this emerged from the change in daily routine I had been used to for several years and/or that I was attending a different secondary school to most of my junior peers. My parents had enrolled me at this school given the 'higher' Ofsted<sup>37</sup> grading standards than other schools in the area, however, these standards dropped significantly during my second year and the school was closed permanently just a few years after I completed compulsory schooling.

The predominant activities I remember during this period involved attempting to work in class despite peer disruptions where teachers would often be attending to 'poor behaviour' and classwork would often become additional parts of homework activities. My best friend and I spent more time engaging with schoolwork as we prepared for respective examinations, and I also began to help with more domestic activities as my gran was developing dementia. This involved 'helping' my mum with cleaning tasks and developing my cooking skills both during Food Technology schooling classes and at home when preparing evening meals. My parents were still working long hours; however, my mum had resigned from her second job to take care of my gran (who was becoming less independent) and my niece. During this period of shifting activities, my parents and I were sleeping sometimes for only a few hours a night between attending to my brother's drug-related disruptions and bringing my gran back home after she began wandering in the night. My grading standards at school began to fall and my exhaustion was noticed by several teachers when my classroom activities were less responsive. Following an occasion of being questioned by a senior teacher at the school, I disclosed the challenges my family and I were experiencing associated with my brother's habit and my gran's deteriorating health. I was assigned to a 'pastoral support worker' at the school and was allocated a space in the pastoral support 'hub' as a place to complete classroom activities when peers were particularly disruptive. I began spending a great deal of time working alone in this room and was drifting away from the few school friends I engaged with, though I was spending even more time with my best friend.

---

<sup>37</sup> Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) is the governing body which inspects all UK education service providers and which has the authority to recommend the closure of institutions which are not meeting defined standards.

Approximately three years after these challenges began and through a continuation of drug-related occasions with my brother including my peers becoming more aware of these challenges and school becoming a difficult place to attend, I ran away from home. With my parents, my best friend, her parents, and other family members working with the authorities, I was monitored on my train journey several hundred miles away. I was then met by family members living in that city, who had been working with my home authorities and their local authorities to track me. After spending the night with those family members, I was collected by my parents, and I returned home.

At this time, I recall my refusal to return to school - I preferred to avoid my peer's ridicule about my brother's addiction and my attempt to leave the estate. I was then involved in a discussion with a senior schoolteacher and my parents, all of whom pleaded with me 'not to throw my education away'. After a few days, I returned to school though I was completing most of my mainstream and extra-curricular tasks in the 'hub' and often working through my break-times, continuing my attempts to avoid my peers. I was also engaging with a 'pastoral support worker' in school and a 'child therapist' outside of school, for a short while before I stopped attending both, feeling that 'it's not helping me'. My best friend and I were continuing homework tasks together as well as engaging in caring tasks for my niece who was now a toddler, as well as my gran. This included revising during weekends, sometimes at the local library, with the materials my parents had bought me to guide my preparations for GCSEs<sup>38</sup>. At the end of the school year, I sat my required examinations which received the 'required' grading to attend College and enrolled on Law, Sociology, and English A-Level courses. I recall what I then felt was a particularly perplexing moment during a college induction when I was called to the back of a room with a few peers and asked to sign forms for 'maintenance allowance'. When I queried what this entailed, I was told it was a service provided to 'poor' students to 'help' with the costs of travel and course materials. I remember this moment as one where I talked with my best friend at home that evening, disclosing that "I didn't know we were poor" and her replying "neither did I".

*"SHE'S GONE"*

---

<sup>38</sup> General Certificate of Secondary Education (UK).



Soon after I began studying, my brother's drug abuse and associated activities continued to worsen, and he was given a custodial prison sentence. Our sleeping hours then increased somewhat and I began working at home, more often than the library. My mum had reduced her working hours to part-time as her caring activities for my gran expanded when she was diagnosed with stage four (terminal) leukaemia, and I was assisting with such activities outside of college hours. During a regular medical examination, our General Practitioner suggested that my gran required medicine that could not be administered by family members at home given her cognitive incapacitation. Thereafter, Gran moved to a local nursing facility to receive continuous specialist care. We visited her every day after work/college, and I was spending less time studying in the evenings after classes.

The 26<sup>th</sup> of November that year then stands out as another significant memory for me. I was studying at home, when my mum and aunt disrupted me with news that Gran had deteriorated further overnight. All of my family met at the nursing facility, where we stayed for many hours, gathered around Gran's bed where her breathing was becoming slower and less frequent. I recall a particularly difficult moment when there seemed to be a significant delay in my gran taking another breath and my mum began to frantically scream. My gran then took another breath and several more after that for a few hours. Around nine pm that evening, my mum and I were holding one of Gran's hands, my uncle was holding her other, and other members of the family were sitting and standing in various spots around the room. My gran's breathing had become very shallow and there were increasingly longer periods between each breath. As her chest fell and did not rise again, I recall that my uncle leant down and pressed his ear to her chest before he whispered "she's gone".

Shortly after Gran's death, I began working part-time in a local care home at the weekends and some evenings. There, I was assisting residents with similar 'caring' activities I had carried out with Gran. I was also trained in palliative (end of life) care with some of the residents who were terminally ill. During this time, I recall a lot of tear-shedding and reminiscing with family and friends, whilst also clearing my gran's home. My mum continued to work part-time from then on, collecting my niece from school and caring for her until the early evenings when her mum finished working. Alongside, working part-time, I was studying in the evenings again just as I had been before my gran relocated to the nursing facility, and engaging in homework

activities with my niece. At the end of the college year after sitting my examinations, I did not receive the grades I had expected. A few different options were offered by the college, and I decided to start the first-year classes again with the new cohort. I then decreased my working hours and began studying for longer hours than before. I attended the library almost every day and some weekends when I was not working at the care home. During this time, my best friend was training to become a police officer so we often 'revised' our different materials together and 'tested' each other through mock examinations. I also read a lot of my essays to my parents in the evening when my dad had finished work. At the end of the college year, I received the expected grades and progressed into the next year of the course.

#### *'THOSE LIBRARIES'*

Alongside this next phase of the A-Level courses, I began my first research project concerned with the legal and social nature of euthanasia in the UK. I recall discussing the project at length with my family, college tutor, and best friend. I then reduced my hours at the care home and worked on my project and exam revision most evenings and weekends. As the end of the course approached, I began to discuss career options, engaged with 'university information events' and visited university 'open days' to explore courses and campuses with family. I recall one such 'information evening' as particularly significant. I was at my college with my parents and was rifling through some of the university brochures when I picked up one for the 'University of Cambridge'. I remember being drawn to the images of the libraries (my reading habit continuing) and noted to my tutor standing nearby that 'I would love to access those libraries imagine all the reading I could do there'. My tutor then responded with a comment that has stood out to me for several years, 'people from here don't go to Oxbridge I've seen one or two in my time but it's very uncommon'.

Thereafter, my parents and I visited several universities which offered the law course I hoped to study. During one visit, we heard about a course involving sessions in the university's internal courthouse, the opportunity to experience working in a legal position at one of several contact firms for up to twelve months, and learning-pathways which would lead to the Barrister training I intended to undertake. I discussed studying options with my family and then made this course the first choice

of the five required on my application. Later that year after many more hours of studying, revising, and mock examinations, I was awarded the grades ‘required’ at that university and received my letter of acceptance. However, the letter detailed financial expectations that were not outlined during previous correspondence. These financial obligations did not meet the eligibility criteria for the student loan I was intending to utilise, and my family’s financial income could not cover the course fees and associated costs. I then entered the university ‘clearing’ system<sup>39</sup> to find alternative courses eligible under the terms of the loan. After speaking with various university representatives, I enrolled on a local Sociology undergraduate course at a ‘non-selective’<sup>40</sup> and ‘new’<sup>41</sup> institution, where I became the first member of my family to attend university.

#### *A ‘NEW’ UNIVERSITY JOURNEY*

My college friend had also enrolled on the same course at this university, and we decided to share ‘additional’ costs of the course such as travel to campus classes and books. In September, I began sleeping at her parent’s home in a nearby town during the week and travelling to university lectures in her car. I was then sleeping at my parent’s home at the weekend where I returned to work at the care home. The part-time role remained a priority, despite studying, to financially support the small loan I had to cover travel and material costs. I recall being incredibly tired from travelling for long hours each day and working weekends. At this time, I was not studying for many hours outside of core course classes. At the end of the year, following the submission of assignments, I was awarded ‘pass’ grades but, these grades were lower than I had expected.

My friend received similar grades and both feeling ‘disheartened’, we applied for a larger loan which, combined, enabled us to afford a small room near to the university which we shared. I had also started a second part-time job at a coffee shop near to

---

<sup>39</sup> A UK system used by universities to fill available places on courses.

<sup>40</sup> Selective universities culturally tend to be those which have a low acceptance rate compared with the number of applications received. This is usually due to selecting the most highest achieving students from the applicant pool, which are suggested to be, generally speaking, from higher income quintiles (cf. Peck, 2016). Selective universities are often apart of the twenty-four UK Russell Group universities which are ‘research intensive, world-class’ institutions (Russell Group, 2021).

<sup>41</sup> New universities are former polytechnic colleges granted university status after 1992 (also referred to as ‘post-92’ universities).

my parent's home, and my friend was still working at her local takeaway restaurant, so we continued to travel to our homes at weekends for this work. I recall several changes to the care home management during this time, a high staff turnover, and several discussions with colleagues who were incredibly unhappy with their jobs (which were full-time). Following discussions with my parents where I relayed these conversations and talked about prioritising studying, I resigned at the care home and continued with one part-time role at the coffee shop, whilst also progressing to the second year of the university course. I was then studying much more outside of core classes and becoming increasingly interested in lectures on social class; inequality; capitalism; race relations; gender, and globalisation. My knowledge of 'sociological ideas' was growing, and I was spending additional study time exploring 'working-class' culture. My interest around this area seemed to have been sparked during a seminar activity outlining 'class categories' and a discussion about 'which class' we thought we were 'part of as individuals'. I was one of only three students who aligned themselves with the definition of the 'working-class' category and I became quite fascinated with learning more about this notion of 'class'. At the end of the year after writing several essays and reports, I was awarded 'first class' grades<sup>42</sup> across all my course units.

#### *'EMERGENCY' RESPONSE*

Whilst attaining 'better' grades at this time, I also recall that my friend and I were becoming increasingly sick, unable to retain food, and losing copious amounts of weight. Attending doctor's appointments respectively, the doctor suggested that we were showing symptoms related to a deficient home water supply. After contacting authorities as advised by the doctor, we were told that the landlord was unlicensed and had been under surveillance for mismanaging properties and mistreating tenants. In discussions with a university peer, my friend and I then made a hasty decision within a few days to combine our three student loans and rent a two-bedroom property (based on affordability). We left the property soon after and moved to a different area of the city. My friend and I were now preparing for third-year course units over the summer, amongst working, and partying with other friends. I

---

<sup>42</sup> First class is the highest of the UK university grading followed by second upper class; second lower class, and third class.

transferred to a coffee shop in the city, associated with the same company, and stopped travelling home every weekend for work. My parents, and other family members, visited the city at different times and we shared various activities together. I was seeing my best friend less at that time, as she had also moved from the estate and began her new career in a different town.

A further significant memory stands out amongst this period of second year studying, when my friend and I discovered our roommate was bringing drugs into the property. We asked him to find alternative accommodation, and this unfolded into a lengthy and risky process before he was removed from the property by authorities. However, before he returned his key, he damaged several parts of the property and destroyed almost all of our personal belongings whilst my friend and I were at university one day. Upon the landlord's discovery of the property damage, my friend and I were also asked to leave at short notice. We then discussed accommodation options with my personal tutor and visited the university accommodation services the same day. Following a series of applications over the next few days, we moved into a university property within biking distance of our campus. This was allocated to us as 'emergency response' accommodation which we were previously ineligible for based on the distance between our home addresses and the university campus.

#### *'POOR PEOPLE LIKE US'*

I was then entering my third and final year of the undergraduate course. My personal tutor (who had also been assigned as my dissertation tutor) and I were discussing the research project that undergraduates were expected to conduct to complete the course. During discussions my tutor noted my increasing attention to notions of class and class inequality from reviewing previous essays. She then asked questions about my background and previous education, as well as what other units I had been interested in during the two years of undergraduate study. During a reflective conversation about college and university choice, I described the occasions of discovering I was deemed to be 'poor' through the maintenance grant eligibility, as well as the occasion pertaining to the college tutor referring to 'people like us' and 'places like that'. I was now making sense of this occasion through the 'class' tools I was reading, as well as learning that there were university hierarchies which

involved ‘selective’ universities ranking the ‘best’ in the world (like the one I had seen the libraries of, in the brochure at college) and ‘non-selective’ universities (like the one I was attending). Following further discussions, we decided my research would explore class inequality, higher education, and social mobility.

My friend and I were then studying for long hours in the library, and she resigned from her job in her hometown, before she began a new job at a local takeaway restaurant near to the university campus. We chose shifts at similar times in our separate jobs and studied together in the library. Being enrolled on the same course units, we were also discussing various sociological ideas and writing our essays on the differing areas we were each most interested in. Different family members continued visiting the city throughout the year when they were not working, and we continued sharing various activities together. I was then spending much of my time studying for long hours in the library and decided to decrease my part-time working hours at the coffee shop. As we reached mid-semester, the course workload increased with competing deadlines for several essay submissions alongside research dissertation chapters. I then resigned from my part-time role and focused solely on these university deadlines for the final months of the course. I was sparsely partying or engaging with ‘leisure’ activities then, and was instead, working long hours throughout the night at the library. At the end of the academic year, after submitting my essays and research project, I received an email from my tutor: ‘You have received the highest first-class honours of your cohort’. I recall this as a significant moment in my family, where we all celebrated, and my uncle in his broad Scottish accent so like my mum’s, said to me “I didnae think youd survive away fae hame but you proved me wrong hen”<sup>43</sup>.

*A ‘STOP GAP’*

Shortly after the end of the course, our accommodation contract came to an end and my friend and I left the city to go and reside in our respective family homes. With little money left from the student loan, I began to search for jobs almost immediately, though with little direction towards a particular field as I was unsure of what I ‘wanted to do next’. I signed up with a temporary working agency and soon

---

<sup>43</sup> I did not think you would survive away from home, but you proved me wrong. ‘Hen’ is a Scottish colloquial term of endearment.

began a role at an insurance company. There I was working alongside several long-serving colleagues and several new graduates of a similar age to myself. I was travelling to work with another friend who works in a nearby office, and we were sharing the cost of petrol. In the evenings, Mum was cooking for us all after she finished work, whilst my niece and I were working on her GCSE preparation courses. My brother was out of prison then but had moved to live in another city, which my family and I visited sporadically. I recall several discussions with my parents, where I reported feeling ‘unchallenged’ at the insurance company and disclosed my conversations with my graduate colleagues where we all saw the job as a ‘stop gap’. During this time, I began to explore Master’s courses and upon realising the associated costs, I began to work overtime at the insurance company during evenings and weekends to raise the necessary funds. I then applied, and was accepted, on a course at a nearby ‘non-selective’ university where I could commute from and avoid accommodation costs. With the uncertainty of the temporary job, I deferred the course for one year intending to continue saving money which would then meet the course obligations.

My mum then had a major operation, and I stopped working overtime for a while whilst I was assisting her with personal care. I took over from my niece who was helping her after school until I came home, and then my dad took over from me in the evenings after work. During this time, household activities and helping my niece with her examination preparation took priority over the Master’s preparations I had deferred. After several weeks, Mum began to recover and my dad and I started working overtime in the evenings again, whilst my mum began helping my niece with her school activities once more. Alongside working overtime, I recommenced preparations for the Master’s course, mainly familiarising myself with current educational debates, and continuing my focus on class inequality. Indeed, I intended to utilise my knowledge from the undergraduate project in this area and develop these ideas through the Master’s course.

#### *APPLYING TO ‘THOSE’ LIBRARIES*

After a few months, the temporary role ended, and I began seeking work again. My previous tutor and I had been continuing discussions since leaving university and she suggested to her colleague that I might be suitable for an upcoming temporary role.

The colleague and I met and soon after, I began a role at the university I had previously studied at, which was set to end two months before I was due to start the Master's course. I was working primarily with the Deputy Dean of the faculty which involved organising his meetings, preparing materials, and liaising with various colleagues on his behalf. I was accessing the library again, this time with staff status, and keeping up with current affairs concerned with higher education and inequality, in preparing for the Master's course. In the evenings, I was continuing to work with my niece in preparing for her school examinations. I also began arriving at work early by travelling to the train station with Dad in the mornings on his way to work and staying at work later during the three evenings that my niece and I were not scheduled to study together. During these hours around working with the Deputy Dean, I was reading materials in the library pertaining to the Master's course and discussing some of my previous research activities with him. Later that year, another colleague joined the Faculty in a Deanery role and upon discovering that I had a research degree, she asked me to join a project she was leading. I was then working on this project alongside my other work with the Deputy Dean, and continuing conversations with my previous tutor who I met most Fridays to discuss what I was reading. My previous tutor then suggested that, whilst I had some time left given the deferred course, I should apply to a Master's course at a highly 'selective' collegiate university, ranking in the top two in the world (according to Times Higher Education University Rankings at the time). After a series of discussions and sharing preparation tasks, I applied and was later accepted onto an educationally focused research course. In September that year, I moved to the university college I had been assigned to and began the course with a new cohort of new peers.

#### *'CLASS' EXPERIENCES*

Given that my research proposal concerned class inequality and 'selective' university admissions, I was assigned a supervisor who specialised in sociological ideas pertaining to urban inequalities. I was then introduced to more materials pertaining to class structures and unequal university access and continued developing my prior ideas focused on particular interpretations of Bourdieusian ideas. Some peers and I were developing close friendships and we were socialising together at 'formal hall dinners', as well as other college activities (specialist lectures, college visits etc.).



Two friends and I specifically were exploring university museums and studying together at various university and college libraries. I was socialising predominantly with this group of friends when we were not attending lectures or studying, feeling that I had ‘little in common’ with others at the university’s college and faculty.

My various family members were also visiting me in the city and meeting some of my friends. My niece continued to spend the evenings at my parent’s home, and several evenings a week, we video-called to recount our respective activities. My first deadline approached, and my supervisor was increasingly absent across the term due to ill-health, so I was discussing my work with my previous university tutor who I was regularly in contact with. My peers and I were also discussing each other’s work given that my Master’s course was the first year of the PhD course that my friends were studying and hence, we are attending similar units. At the end of term, I submitted my first chapter which was graded a ‘first class’. During the Christmas term break, my friends and I travelled to our respective homes in Jamaica, Kenya, and London. We shared festive activities over the course of a few days before I travelled back to the city to begin my second semester. During this semester, I began ‘collecting qualitative data’ by interviewing Admission Tutors at a ‘world-ranking, selective’ university. As I engaged with these activities, I continued to read around particular interpretations of Bourdieusian and Foucauldian literature and began to draft dissertation chapters. At the end of the semester, I submitted my next requested chapter and travelled to Prague with my close friend. We spent a few days doing several activities including sightseeing, bike-riding, visiting museums, trying different foods and drinks, amongst other activities.

Upon travelling back to the university city following our short trip, we began our third and final term (of my entire course; of the first year of her three-year course). I was writing my dissertation and studying for long hours in the library, alongside joining my friends for dinner some nights and discussing our developing chapters over coffee some days. As I was approaching the final submission deadline, my supervisor became ill again, and she applied to the university to extend my deadline by a few weeks given that she was unable to read the work. My accommodation contract at the college was, however, concluding and it could not be extended as the new cohort of Master’s students were due to arrive, so I left the college and returned to my family’s home on the estate once more to complete my dissertation. I

continued writing at the kitchen table, studying for long hours, interrupted only by Mum making me cups of tea when she finished work for the day, and stopping to eat dinner with her, Dad, and my niece in the evenings. During weekend evenings, my niece and I were also working on her final GCSE preparations. At the end of the month, I submitted my thesis.

#### *THE 'STUDENT' EXPERIENCE*

One of my friends then finished her Master's course at a similar time, and before travelling home to Kenya, we shared a trip to Scotland together where we explored various cities, shared various activities, and visited some of my family members there. I then travelled home to my parent's house and began searching for work. I was searching primarily for 'research' work after enjoying my research experiences and wanting to continue developing my skills. I then began working on a project concerned with student experience and retention at my undergraduate university with the Vice Principal. I was commuting to the city each day (travelling to the train station with Dad in the morning on his way to work and dropping Mum to her work on the way). During this time, I had no intentions for further study. As the Vice Principal, another colleague, and I continued working on the project together, there was a dispute between other project-leaders, and the Vice Principal assigned me more tasks, also suggesting that I 'save time and money' by working from home. I began working on the project remotely and my niece and I continued working together in the evenings. My niece was also preparing to leave our hometown and move approximately two hours away where her mum had accepted a new job, and I was not working at weekends, prioritising these shared moments with my niece before she left. A few months after that, another significant moment stands out which involved a day where I was working from home and received an email which read 'Congratulations, you have been awarded a Master's with distinction'. This moment was followed by several celebrations with family and friends.

At that time, I was only commuting to the city I was working in sporadically once a week/fortnight for meetings with project members and other university members as part of my working activities. On these days, I was going to the home of a friend that I met during my Master's course, where we were discussing her PhD, her partner's work, and my current research project over dinner. One day, I received a message

from this friend containing the link to a PhD opportunity that she had seen whilst scrolling through her Twitter feed that day. Later in the week, my friend and I discussed the opportunity and then began preparations for my application, though at this point I was unsure if I wanted to embark on another degree. I applied and shortly after, was invited to an interview. Later, I was notified that the role had been given to a teacher who already worked at the specific school concerned with the research. A few days later, a member of the interview panel contacted me and invited me to meet with another school in a different city. Here, I was asked to conduct a PhD study pertaining to schooling interventions for ‘poor’ young people’s families (the initial research plan for this doctorate). Following some deliberation, I moved one-hundred and eighty miles away from home to a city I had never been to, where I began this doctoral journey.

In the discussion that follows, I consider my experiencing thus far, as narrated during this account, as well as attending to the significant moments that are highlighted. In so doing, I engage in a process of ‘auto-transactional’ reflexive inquiring which problematises some ideas pertaining to ‘poor’ young people living and learning.

### 8.3 AN ‘AUTO-TRANSACTIONAL’ REFLEXIVE ACCOUNT

Pertaining to my narrated autobiographical account, there appears to be several areas of interest relative to the substantive concern of this research: ‘poor’ young people who ‘do well’ educationally. Thus, I begin by considering some of my earlier understandings of my living based on atomised ideas of person *and* environment, and how this shifts to consider experiential occasions with less deterministic/separatist tools. This includes (i) reflecting on the ‘classed’ tools I was utilising to understand my living and exploring how I reconceptualise ‘class’ as reproduced habitual activities, and (ii) problematising some of the seemingly more ‘adverse’ occasions of my living by utilising the transactional tools associated with habitual adaptation, which depart from more linearly causal notions. I then move to elucidating my living and learning as a continuous occasion of becoming, before articulating the usefulness of ‘auto-transactional’ reflexive inquiring for understanding ‘poor’ young people’s experiencing.

---

### 8.3.1 IT'S A 'WORKING CLASS' THING

#### *UTILISING A DETERMINISTIC 'CLASS' TOOL*

As my narrative account illustrates, I was engaged for quite some time in processes of reflection about occasions concerned with growing up 'poor' from a 'working-class' culture, despite being aware of neither of these notions throughout my childhood. The shifts in my thinking may then be described in one of four ways which I shall here define as (i) unawareness of notions of class and poverty, then aligning with (ii) self-actional ideas, then (iii) interactional ideas, before evolving to what I now argue are more appropriate (iv) transactional ideas, as I shall now exemplify.

Firstly, I appeared to be unaware of notions of poverty as illustrated through my perplexity at being defined as 'poor' during college. Similarly, I lacked knowledge of 'class' and 'inequality' before studying for my Sociology A-Level. However, during college my focus remained on developing my legal knowledge with the intention of studying law at university. Having not engaged in the law course, my interests towards ideas of class and poverty specifically did not appear to grow until my first year of university where all of my mainstream course units focused on sociological ideas. Indeed, the literature we were introduced to through these early course units focused on 'the individual' and 'society' as fundamentally separated.

Secondly, through further engagement with sociological literatures, I appeared to view my living in what can only be described as self-actional/self-regulating ways where I deemed my 'individual' action of 'working hard' was the way to 'achieve an education', which I considered to be a university degree. Thinking of myself in such ways seemed relevant according to the political rhetoric at that time aimed at 'raising aspirations' which was being reiterated through the college environment.

Thirdly, as I continued to explore these notions of class and poverty through college and university education, my understandings became more aligned with interactional notions which separated person and environment in similar ways to my previous understandings. As I continued engaging with what I argue in Chapter Two is more separatist/linearly causal ideas, I directed my undergraduate research explorations to (i) better understanding *how* these structural 'classed' inequalities played out –

already taking for granted that these existed externally to individual, and impeded upon them in ‘adverse’ ways, and (ii) how I could become part of dismantling such structures to pave a clearer path to ‘selective’ university education for ‘poor’ people which I believed was their ‘way out of poverty’. Such thinking was then directed further by reflections upon my own experiencing, where I viewed myself as an example of a ‘poor’ person who ‘overcame barriers of inequality’ to ‘achieve a university education’ – thinking that was mirrored in several university arenas with academic colleagues, including the interview panel for the initial doctoral research (prior to being asked to consider this research).

This shift from self-actional to more interactional thinking maintained separatist/causal underpinnings premised upon ideas of ‘resilience’, which will be discussed further in section 8.3.2 of this chapter. Importantly, my ideas seemed to align with notions of ‘fixed’ structures which must be (i) navigated by ‘poor’ people and/or (ii) dismantled ‘within’ the elite institutions which privileged more ‘traditional’ students (i.e., those from middle-class/non-‘poor’ communities). Hence, my understandings may be described as thinking that admission/access to university education generally, and ‘selective’ university education more specifically, was determined by one’s ‘class’. Indeed, when considering the Commission Report on Race in the previous chapter, there is a suggestion that the means to overcome structural barriers is made considerably harder when people ‘absorb a fatalistic narrative’ about barriers ‘stacked against them’ (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, 2021). Whilst the report concerns race specifically, the underpinning assumptions speak to some of my own early ideas. For example, I could be seen as taking a similarly ‘fatalistic’ approach to the structural notion of class as a ‘barrier’ when I assumed that ‘people like me do not go to places like that’ during key unfolding occasions such as applying/transitioning to university courses and ascertaining the specific focus for pre-doctoral research. Noteworthy, the ideas underpinning the Commission’s report were problematised in Chapter Seven also and are further problematised in Chapter Nine.

During such explorations, I was utilising a tool premised upon deterministic/causal notions of ‘class structures’ in separatist ways, which appeared to be emerging from my reading of particular interpretations of Bourdieusian ideas (e.g., the work of Diane Reay) alongside other literature concerned with the sociology of education.

Such a view assumes class structure (one entity) is externally balanced and one-dimensionally impacting me (another entity) through a linear relation of ‘causal interconnection’ (Dewey and Bentley, 1999) (see literature discussed in Chapter Two). Thus, I was thinking of myself as a self-acting individual who exists in *interaction* with others and environment, and that ‘I’ may be ‘characterized by [my] knowledge, mental capacities, conceptions or conceptual frameworks, identity, motivation, interests, and so on’ (Roth, 2019, p. 6). In taking this view, I was assuming that it was my agentic responsibility to ‘overcome class barriers’ and ‘succeed’ educationally (based on cultural notions of university as the benchmark for this standard) and thus, help similarly ‘poor’ others to do the same, particularly as I had apparently ‘got out of poverty’. I then continued such explorations through my Master’s research.

Importantly, whilst I was concerned with deterministic notions of class structures, and what I saw as the inability of ‘people like me’ to access ‘selective’ universities, I was attending such a ‘selective’ university. Nevertheless, I appear to have been overlooking this, and when I did seemingly take note of it, I was similarly classifying myself as an ‘anomaly’. For example, I assumed that I did not ‘fit in’ at the ‘selective’ university, perhaps given that I did not possess the appropriate ‘cultural and social capital’ and therefore resonated with being a ‘fish out of water’, ‘in an unfamiliar field’ because of my working-class ‘habitus’. Yet I was ‘fitting in’ more there than at school because my ‘academic disposition’ was in opposition to the culture of the working-class secondary school<sup>44</sup> (cf. Reay et al., 2009). Utilising a particular interpretation of Bourdieusian ideas such as Reay’s then, I appeared to be assuming that ‘people like me’ do not ‘fit in’ because we do not usually ‘get in’ to such selective universities. Hence, I was adopting a self-actional lens which prioritised my own agency (and the agency of ‘people like me’) to both (i) be admitted to a selective university and (ii) ‘fit’ with the ‘selective university culture’ once admitted.

Based on such thinking, I directed my Master’s research focus to the means to ‘get in’ by designing a project which sought to better understand the admission practices

---

<sup>44</sup> This research paper was one with which I particularly resonated during these occasions of studying and one which seemed to ‘make sense’ in relation to my own ‘lived experience’ of class, as I referred to in my Master’s thesis.

of selective universities, specifically those ranked in the top five of world university rankings (again, defined by Times Higher Education World University Rankings). By doing so, I appeared to see my contribution as moving more firmly from (self-actional) ideas which assume that lack of access is based on a lack of ‘aspiration and achievement’, to using what I believed was a more appropriate ‘interactional’ lens focused on ‘structural’ systems and how these impeded upon the individual. Thus, at that time I was arguing that my research departed from ideas concerned with ‘fair’ and ‘meritocratic’ admissions processes whereby ‘non-traditional’ applicants are denied access to institutions based on ‘academic excellence’ they cannot achieve due to their socioeconomic disadvantage (cf. Nahai, 2013). Moreover, I was problematising suggestions pertaining to creating (interactional) opportunities through interventions such as widening participation activities that enhance the self-authoring capabilities of the individual to meet the standards of selective universities (cf. Shah & McKay, 2018). Opposingly, I was aligning more with the ideas that see admissions practices as favouring the culturally and socially ‘elite’ (cf., Golden, 2007) and seeking to investigate these further with the hope of dismantling such structures. The exploration of such ideas continued beyond my Master’s research despite struggling to the find ‘root causes’ of figures associated with low ‘non-traditional’<sup>45</sup> student participation at selective universities. This struggle is perhaps most illustrative when attending a job interview post-Master’s where I was asked “based on where you come from then, why you think that you got into [‘selective’ university]?”. To which I replied after some deliberation, “I don’t know”.

Having outlined my previous analyses through the use of a tool underpinned by deterministic/separatist notions of class, I now turn to what is my fourth way of thinking, utilising a transactional tool which departs from separating person, environments, and others as a starting premise.

---

## UTILISING A TRANSACTIONAL TOOL

Previously, I seem to have been analysing my living as deterministically ‘classed’ during occasions which pertain to the transactions of my continuity. I now

---

<sup>45</sup> Non-traditional students are considered to be those who are often under-represented in university admissions, sometimes pertaining to socioeconomic background, ethnicity, gender, and age (cf., Marshall, Nolan, & Newton, 2016).

argue that such deterministic ‘classed’ thinking perhaps emerged from the concrete activities with others in particular social/cultural fields where I was part of transactions which predominantly focused on structurally deterministic notions (i.e., some mainstream sociological ideas). Indeed, during transactions, I discussed with others how I did not know I was ‘poor’ until I was described ‘poor’ by college staff during A-levels. When I initially reflected on being deemed ‘poor’ during undergraduate studies, I did so by utilising the ‘classed’ tools I had been becoming familiar with through the educational/cultural fields where I was transacting. These are the same deterministic/causal/separatist notions I now consider to be limited. At that time however, these notions appeared to make sense in relation to my living. Nevertheless, upon further reflection in this novel moment through my evolved depository of body:mind as I have become increasingly engaged with transactional literature and the Deweyan philosophy, I consider such deterministic/causal ‘class’ tools as overlooking the social/cultural complexity of transacting with environments and others continuously, as I shall now elaborate.

Previously, I began with the premise that ‘I’ (person) and what I see as ‘the class structure’ (environment) are atomised and hence, external to one another. I also appear to think of this structural notion of class as having a one-dimensional, pre-determined, impact on persons during my undergraduate studying, as I outlined in the previous section. The development of my ideas might then be seen as more interactional where I began to think in two-dimensional/interactional (though not co-constitutive) ways during Master’s research. Where I took a more affirmative interactional approach which put the onus on the ‘structures’ as opposed to the individual, I began attempts to counteract the structure as directed by my research aims, though I remained unclear exactly how I would achieve such ‘ends in view’. I then followed this with actions of seeking a ‘root cause’ to explain why ‘poor’ applicants do not often access selective universities where I intended to contribute to dismantling such exclusivity. In so doing, I took a qualitative methodological approach, which offered what I assumed was a more ‘richly detailed’ and hence, more appropriate explanation than the general suggestions underpinned by quantitative methods. Despite the methodological distinctions in my direction which attempted to elaborate on quantitative ‘figures’ by exploring the ‘lived experience’ of Admissions Tutors, I remained focused on linear/causal ideas. Indeed, I was



overlooking the contextual complexity of Admission Tutor's living and decision-making, including the culturally-specific environments such decisions were made, by attending only to 'interview responses' and making non-linear occasions interconnect in linear ways (e.g., connections between Admission Tutors decisions and their own 'class' background). Hence, I continued to make suggestions which aligned more than I appeared to realise with the very explanations that I had found to be limited, albeit more 'detailed' ones. Thus, my underpinning ontological premise had not departed from existing explanations in the way I suggested. Given my limited starting premise then, it is perhaps easier to comprehend why, despite the research I was conducting, that I was growing continuously frustrated by a 'lack of answers' and therefore, a 'lack of solutions'.

Indeed, by beginning with such assumptions, I was defining the problem of inquiry in a way which undermined the transactional nature of persons with environments and others and hence, which looked 'backwards' to seek specific causes only. Thus, I saw 'poor working-class' people as the subjects, the fixed external structure of class as the mediator, and selective universities as the object. Put simply, I saw a linearly causal relation between myself as a 'poor' person and selective educational environments forged by the barrier of my 'working-class' cultural background which prevented 'people like me' from admittance. In such a view, I was unable to recognise and hence, conceptualise class 'structures' as reproduced habits of person:environment activity through cultural fields which were not external to human activity and hence, could be potentially transformed. Indeed, my thinking had not yet evolved through experiencing to utilise the transactional tools I present throughout as more appropriate.

In reflecting on both the original occasions, and the previous thinking pertaining to such occasions, I now suggest that I am a transactional body which began when I was born into particular cultural habits which pre-existed me. As was discussed earlier, social/cultural habits 'have us before we have it' and yet through our habitual activities we are also reproducing some of these habits. In so doing, I am both *undergoing* existing social/cultural habits whilst also *doing* to the continuation of these habits through my functional transactions with others/environment. It is then through these co-constituting (transactional) processes that Dewey, and later Sullivan, suggest persons can *transform* social/cultural habits rather than simply

reproduce them. This changes the conversation from notions of ‘being done to’ (one-dimensionally impacted) to ideas of co-constitution (transactional living),

To claim that people should seek greater control of their transactions does not mean that they have a relationship of one-way domination over nature or bodies because the direction of influence goes as much from environment to organism as it does from organism to environment [...] Recognizing the cyclical relationship of control between organism and environment allows humans to ask how they might transform for the better the various impacts that organism and environment have on each other without assuming that human organisms have total control (Sullivan, 2001, p 47).

However, whilst imposing a deterministic classed lens previously, I was unable to reach a useful hypothesis about how such transformation might have occurred, which I could then have tested. This ill-directed hypothesising perhaps emerged from my focus on external structures, even where I was concretely transacting with the very ‘structures’ (social fields) I deemed to be inaccessible, hence my frustrations. Indeed, I was not recognising that ‘classes’ *are* the historically reproducing and evolving habitual customs (activities) of particular co-constituted communities. Perhaps my analytical growth emerged from such frustrations with my thinking processes and the ways that I began questioning habitual practices, despite my initially limited methods. I will continue to develop this idea of transformation of habits in the following section.

For now, it is necessary to ascertain the inappropriateness of looking to deterministic notions of ‘class’ as *causal* to my living unfolding in particular ways. Rather, it is better to conceive of the concrete activities of persons as they transact (functionally corresponding with environments and others) and how these habitually unfold and evolve through social contexts which are culturally specific. Thus, notions of ‘class’ as fixed or as persons moving in block-like categories from ‘poor’/‘working-class’ to other ‘classed’ categories (e.g., an ‘educated middle-class’), are limited by overlooking the experiencing expressed through habitual activities in these culturally specific fields. To look to such journeying through habitual activity, in a more informed way then, it is necessary to consider the unpredictability of living, which includes habitual disruptions and adaptations as well as moments of learning and growth, as I shall now turn to. Emphatically, my previous approach of the singularly ‘fixed’ nature of my living as hindered by my ‘working class roots’ tended to

overlook such adjustment and learning particularly as I transacted through varying sociocultural fields.

---

### 8.3.2 ADAPTING TO THE UNEXPECTED

Some ideas pertaining to young people's living and learning, as outlined in Chapter Two, may suggest that some occasions of my life have been 'adverse' and may utilise these in explaining my low/unexpected grades at particular times (e.g., following my gran's death). However, as has been discussed in the previous two chapters concerned with Imogen and Serena's living, such ideas are less useful in explaining what such 'adverse' occasions mean as parts of whole lives where we tend to be 'doing well' through education more generally. Alternatively, when the focus is on habitual activities there is space to consider how oft-termed 'adversity' are firstly transactional occasions which the person is not one-dimensionally undergoing and secondly, how these occasions can stimulate learning, through shifting tensions as the person continues to adapt and evolve. Indeed, it is through the reproduction and reconfiguration of habits that growth continues across the life-course as expressions of habitual experiencing. This shall be discussed further in the following section, which develops previous exemplifications of habitual adaptation.

For now, it is necessary to attend to the processes of uncertain, continuously unfolding living, which highlight the 'plasticity and elasticity' (ability to learn and put learning to use) of humans as they both do and undergo occasions (cf., Dewey, 1966). This further demonstrates the inappropriateness of linear causal and therefore deterministic notions, assuming context is 'doing to' a person, which do not attend to the 'push and pull' of living. I now turn to a few occasions which may be considered 'adverse' or 'disruptive' to my on-going learning: the death of significant family members, living with a drug-user, and accommodation issues whilst at university to elucidate such thinking.

---

### TIME AS A HEALER?

As was discussed in Chapter Five pertaining to Serena, the death of a significant loved one is often considered to impact the person in various ways, usually conceptualised according to notions of 'grief'. Current literature pertaining to notions of grief, bereavement, and education were explored and a transactional

approach to thinking about *grieving* as an on-going process through environments with others was introduced. The chapter also touched upon notions of changes in habit according to the death of loved ones and how different activities come to be prioritised differently as a person's living continues to unfold. Moreover, in Chapter Four the notion of breaks in habit and reflexivity, through a growing mind-as-verb (evolving depository of mind:body), were discussed in relation to Imogen's occasions of 'failing' a maths test. Having introduced these ideas then, I now move to developing the ideas of loss pertaining to the notion of 'breaks' in habit, more specifically, considering how significant loss and changes in habit as *an* experience pertains to occasions of schooling/examination grading.

In considering the death of my gran, it is perhaps more appropriate to think of what might be commonly called a 'loss' as emerging from a change in habitual activities. When my gran dies, some of my habitual activities are becoming challenged given that transacting with her has – until her death – always been part of my on-going experiencing. Upon her death, the habit of *doing* and *undergoing* as I correspond with her ceases, given that we can no longer transact. Thus, this 'break' in habitual activities with a significant protagonist whom I have corresponded with throughout my entire living, at that point, becomes *an* experience which has 'a beginning' and 'ended' when her life did. As is the nature of habitual disruptions, the occasion is uncertain whilst it is unfolding such that none of us are aware that the last breath she takes, is the *final* breath, until it *is*. How I then come to understand or make meaning of that experience is an on-going reflexive process which becomes part of my continued *experiencing* as I (mind:body as depository<sup>46</sup>) develop, as I shall now elaborate.

Firstly, it is worth considering how my experience of Gran's death and Grandad's death differ in offering a more illustrative depiction of how reflection of experiences change as the person does. It is perhaps the case that the difference between experiencing Grandad's death at age nine, and Gran's death at age sixteen (which appears to 'stand out' as more significant) is not simply due to 'age' or 'lack of understanding' but through experiencing differently as I grow – referred to in

---

<sup>46</sup> mind:body which includes bodily affective emotions and how these develop with the mind as one - outlined in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three as the distinct (though not separated) experiencing of the ‘child’ and the ‘adult’. Here, it is necessary to recall ‘mind as a verb’ as was discussed earlier in Chapter Six. Thinking of ‘mind’ transactionally is to understand it as almost a depository which is continuously evolving through experiencing. Such experiencing is being co-constituted by the evolving depository of mind:body, which is creating a historical backdrop, and is also co-constituting novel occasions. How persons then come to make meaning of occasions is through this depository as a tool which is providing a historical, social, and cultural canvas to the on-going evolution of habits. It is this process of developing and refining habitual activities through a verb-like mind (which includes the body as one unit) that the child grows, *becoming* an adult rather than jumping in phase-like ways from immature to mature ‘mental capacities’ (cf. Brinkmann, 2011; Dewey; 1917/80). It is also worth remembering that ‘reflecting’ refers to the more rudimentary activity of ‘looking backwards’ whilst a ‘reflexive’ process is a more directed form of reflecting, based on understanding a particular experience and through which a development of earlier thinking emerges. One possible example of reflexivity can begin to be seen in the previous section where I inquire into earlier understandings of my living and arrive at new understandings. This process of practical reflexive inquiring in action shall now be demonstrated further.

In considering the difference in experiencing between these two deaths then, my grandad’s death was the first I had experienced and, therefore, was also the first time in which I corresponded with cultural practices of mourning/celebrating life which involved transacting with those around me who were co-constituting particular cultural activities (e.g., crying; reminiscing). During this first set of occasions, I did not necessarily yet have the historical backdrop to reflect in the way that I did when experiencing Gran’s death, so this is perhaps why I recall being confused at ‘how I was supposed to act’ and yet feeling incredibly upset that I was no longer going to see him. The ‘loss’ even then appeared to be in the loss of activity – the change in habit – given that my daily living of reading/talking/singing as Grandad and I corresponded were significant activities in my young living that I was ‘looking back’ over. Such habitual activities then began to be reconfigured as I continued to live following the conclusion of corresponding with my grandad during occasions when

my historical backdrop of experiencing was that of a nine-year-old, and which differs from my experiencing as a sixteen-year-old when my gran passes.

Experiencing my gran's death then became perhaps a similar process of 'loss' but one which was experienced quite differently through reflection (and which has perhaps now become reflexive through this practical process of inquiring as discussed below). As the process unfolded, early occasions involved remembering/reminiscing with others; engaging in cultural practices such as the funeral and mourning ceremony, and initially talking about feeling guilty and wishing I could have prevented her death. This is a shared, communicative process, which each family member is experiencing differently, given that all of our biographical-historical backdrops are different and our transactional occasions with Gran and Grandad were different. These transacted activities with others then likely differ from Grandad's death to Gran's death perhaps as my communicative corpus was less developed to transact with/make meaning of the experience as a child (aged nine) engaging with adults. Whereas at age sixteen my communicative practices were more developed (through transacted experiencing spatiotemporally) such that the tools with which I was arriving at reflecting on the occasion were different/more evolved. These mind:body skills/habits may be considered still more refined now where I am evolving from a potentially 'immediate and crude' feeling of loss to reflecting in more instrumental ways through the developed depository of my histories of experiencing. This process is then directed at the particular problems of better understanding grieving in transactional ways and how this might help to think about whether such an experience of loss 'caused' my unexpected grades hence, becoming reflexive.

This more instrumental approach, where I am both reflecting and hypothesising, seems a more appropriate way to understand the striking difference between believing the unfolding process which ended in her death was something I could have controlled or prevented, as I seemed to do when I was sixteen. Rather, with each reflective occasion, the past and present are intertwining but the past in the present inherently includes novelty, and some 'reconstruction' of past events, making the entire process risky, unpredictable, and therefore undergoing 're-direction and transitive transformation' as Dewey (1958) put it. So, this is the experiential process, which is on-going through an evolving depository of

mind:body, rather than a present ‘report’ of a past event in an atomised sense. This becomes a truly relational approach which is at once about my habitual reconfiguration (following a break in habit), continuous living/developing, and a reflexive instrumental approach to making sense of the occasion directed at a particular contextual problem – ultimately which includes the backdrop of historical occasions, and the emergence of novel occasions as the process is on-going. It also forces one to think of mind and consciousness (as emerging through habitual activity) in experiential/activity-focused ways as we transact spatiotemporally with others, rather than as something internal or private (hence, mind:body as a unit). Thus, such an approach begins to depart from agentic notions of ‘blaming oneself’ when ‘things seem to go wrong’.

It becomes clear then, that any seemingly direct *causal* link between the death of my gran and my undesirable examination grades shortly after are part of the reconstruction of past events in a future occasion, which are continuously unfolding unpredictably. This recalls points highlighted in Chapter Six, when Imogen is studying without disruptions to her habitual activities until she ‘fails’ her test, which *is* the break, posing an occasion for reflection. The fundamental point is that problems do not become conscious to persons until the habit is broken, by which time the occasion has passed. Any *casual* links assigned thereafter become reconstructions with an evolved depository of mind:body, and yet the occasions have to have *happened* for such reflection to be possible. Hence, there is little sense in seeking a reason *why* particular occasions unfold the way they do, outside of singular control. It is perhaps more productive to think forwards through the habitual disruption and habitual reconfiguration and how this is ‘fruitful’ in attending to the whole journeying through socio-culturally specific environments with others (evental process as bundles of lines protrude forward) as much as the ‘end’ outcome.

Thinking of ‘loss’ in this way also moves from the more spiritual/abstract notions of ‘time as a healer’ when demonstrating that it is persons as transactional bodies continuously experiencing who are changing, reflectively/reflexively developing spatiotemporally, rather than an external idea of ‘time’ (as a human construct) that causes an outcome (healing). Hence, attention is then paid to the specific concrete activities of person with environment and other which *shift through time*, rather than making connections between non-linear occasions from *points in time*. The focus on

activity, and more specifically the reconfiguration of habits as we grow, provides a more appropriate (and arguably productive) instrument for thinking about the loss of a loved one, how the experiencing of the ‘loss’ changes as we continue, and how such occasions relate to on-going activities such as schooling/education.

Given such unfolding change, which is inherently unpredictable, it is inappropriate to think of the death of a significant loved one as isolated from continued living and *causing* a potentially detrimental effect on schooling achievements. Such a cause-effect approach would appear to take a snapshot of time (i.e., ‘failing’ exams) and work backwards to seek the most plausible reason for such ‘failure’ (i.e., significant ‘adverse’ moment such as the death of a loved one). It might also be that such a significant loss is not taken in isolation but, rather, is considered as part of a host of ‘adverse’ occasions, such as living with a drug-user, in a ‘deprived’ area, which are creating a multiplex ‘barrier’ to my learning.

The limitation of such thinking remains that any part, or combination of parts, in a person’s living are atomised and can be assigned as a problem which must be attended to, without thinking of the person as a continually unfolding bundle of lines whose experiencing is not always ‘adverse’ despite several occasions which may be deemed as such. Rather, all occasions, ‘adverse’ or otherwise, are shifting tensions through the fluidity of continuous living and hence, are impermanent. Moreover, the learning that can emerge from reconfiguring habitual activities following contradictions provides a more appropriate hypothesis of perhaps how young people living ‘adverse’ occasions continue to ‘do well’ educationally more generally, even if there are moments of doing ‘less well’. Importantly, any hypothesising does involve reconstruction and reflection and therefore, is always open to further inquiry as opposed to ‘how and why’ exactly occasions transpired. These ideas of isolating adverse occasions pertaining to educational progress will continue to be explored in the following subsection.

---

#### IMPACTED BY OTHERS?

Following from the idea of fluid, continuous and hence, dynamic living, it is worth discussing other seemingly ‘adverse’ occasions which present particular challenges. Some separatist ideas may then consider such experiences as being ‘impacted by others’ in a way that should be detrimental to my educational progress.



Two occasions seem particularly relevant here, that of my brother's drug addiction and the university accommodation issues.

Firstly, there were many unfolding occasions pertaining to my brother's habitual 'addictive' activity which could be seen as a series of causal events, such as decreasing finances, disrupted sleeping, and peer conflict, which may be seen as 'impacting' my learning through the schooling environment. Pertaining to such challenges, there seems to be two sets of explanations. On the one hand, there are those analyses which prioritise these challenges, including the additional 'adversities' 'resulting from' the drug addiction (e.g., familial conflict, financial hardship etc.). These 'risk' factors are then seen as causally impacting educational engagement and outcomes, sometimes throughout the life course (see 'ACEs' literature, Chapter Two). On the other hand, there is a plethora of literature concerned with how the proportion of young people who face such factors and yet somehow 'do well' educationally become 'resilient' to such risk through (i) agentic and/or (ii) environmental factors (cf. Ledertoug, Tidmand, Las Hayas, Gabrielli & Carbone, 2021); Shafi, Middleton, Millican & Templeton, 2020; Giovanelli, Mondì, Reynolds & Ou, 2020; Duke, 2020; Mowat, 2019). For example, Zolkoski and Bullock (2012) synthesised the literature concerned with 'resilience' over some forty years. Drawing on a wealth of research, they suggested that 'resilience refers to achieving positive outcomes despite challenging or threatening circumstances, coping successfully with traumatic experiences, and avoiding negative paths linked with risks' (p. 2296). Moreover, they argued that resilience is 'inhibited by risk factors and promoted by protective factors' which are seen as 'individual characteristics, self-concept, self-regulation, family conditions, and community supports'. Whilst these factors are considered non-stationary, relational, and context-dependent, it is still assumed that such factors 'lead to different outcomes' (p. 2298). Hence, the causal underpinning is maintained.

Together, such explanations suggest that young people experiencing 'adversity' either (i) do not 'do well' because of 'risk' factors or (ii) 'do well' because 'protective' factors caused them to become 'resilient' to risk. Such explanations are then often associated with 'asset-based' approaches which attempt to intervene in young people's living to 'promote protective factors' as Zolkoski and Bullock (2012) suggest (see also, Forrester, Kurth, Vincent & Oiliver, 2020, and community-

schooling/development literature discussed in Chapter Two). When attending to such explanations then, the problem remains that these are underpinned by a linear cause-effect approach based on ideas of counteraction with either the risk or resilience to risk prioritised. What such explanations overlook then, is the co-constitutive nature of more and less challenging occasions as parts of the young person's continuum of experiencing.

As such, these explanations – whether leaning towards more risk or resilience ideas – would perhaps prioritise my brother's habitual substance abusing within my living. In so doing, the interweaving and knotting of several bundles of lines through familial and schooling environments are overlooked and hence, other occasions occurring simultaneously (e.g., Gran's death/running away). Moreover, such simultaneous occasions are not primarily 'adverse', some are indeed, less challenging (e.g., friendship, studying, family holidays) and the more challenging also have the potential to become developmental as has been discussed. Hence, such 'protective factors' may be seen as counteracting the risk, including the counselling/therapy sessions. However, the stream of occasions is not necessarily connected in linear ways where one acts or counteracts on the other. Rather, the person is shifting through different occasions which are at times 'adverse' and at other times 'less so'. The counselling/therapy sessions may also be less useful in explaining how I continued to 'do well' despite experiencing challenges, as I engaged with these processes for such little time.

Noteworthy, perhaps I felt that the educational interventions intended to be more 'supportive' (e.g., support worker/therapist) against the challenges were 'not working', given that I was approaching the activities with causal ideas. Indeed, it seems that I was putting the onus on the support worker/therapist (mediator) to impact me (subject) and hence, produce an outcome in my living (object). Hence, my starting premise was limited given that such interventions are not necessarily linearly causal and therefore, could neither stop unfolding occasions pertaining to my brother's substance habits or change my approach to unfolding occasions. Perhaps, the sessions could have become fruitful if utilised as tools for inquiring and thus, understood as a transactional occasion with others whilst appreciating the co-constitutional nature of (i) the support sessions and (ii) the unfolding occasions with my brother and others, as was similarly discussed in the previous chapter. However,

this process would not have necessarily been useful at such times when the occasions of concern were continuously unfolding. As such, the habitual addictive occasion had not yet ended and had not yet become *an* experience which could have been attended to reflexively, as it is now.

The fundamental point then remains that a person's living and learning is incredibly complex as they transact through various environments with various others in non-linear, non-causal, ways. Thus, it becomes more appropriate to attend to how the totality of a person's biography is continually adapting, reconfiguring, and growing through shifting tensions of unfolding occasions which they are contributing to as much as undergoing, as shall be attended to in further detail in the following section.

Moreover, the same might be said for the occasions of accommodation challenges whilst studying at university. The unfolding occasions involving renting from an unlicensed landlord, a swift move to another property, and another swift move following a series of occasions involving the third housemate (who was holding drugs at the property), could not have been predicted nor solely controlled. These occasions all involved several bundles of lines interweaving and knotting such that there were tensions for example, where insufficient property maintenance, ill-health, drug-related activities, studying, and property-damaging activities all unfolded in contradiction. It is also worth noting that such 'adverse' occasions were unfolding with perhaps more 'supportive' occasions which my previous tutor and the university accommodation team were co-constitutional parts of. However, moving on to a new property following the challenges was not linearly *caused* by such support nor did such a move linearly *cause* better grades. Rather, there was a transaction that requires attention to all parts to make appropriate sense of the unfolding occasions with others. Indeed, there had to be occasions of ill-health, a drug-related issue, a disruption to studying, damage to property from which us contacting accommodation services and engaging in further transactions of studying/learning/transacting in different fields emerged in non-linear ways. The unfolding occasions were continuously emerging, not only through the knotting of persons involved in this particular shared moment (i.e., peer, accommodation team, tutor), but also *their* transacting with others beyond the shared occasions which was also part of their on-going experiencing (i.e., tutor's/accommodation team's backdrop of experiencing together to find alternative properties for students over

several years). Such transactions were also unfolding in the culturally specific environment of the university where accommodation eligibility definitions were in place, (i.e., we were not originally eligible, then became eligible as defined by the ‘emergency’ need for accommodation in the middle of our final academic year where it would not have been financially practical to begin a twelve-month private renting contract, with less than seven months funding). Hence, the dynamism of the transactions discussed here could have unfolded in several different ways, of which the actual emergence (moving to a more secure property) was only one possibility, and therefore, were not necessarily *caused* by preceding activities in isolation. Attending to the continuity of unfolding occasions in this way is necessary to understand the concrete experiencing of young people, as shall continue to be elaborated in the following section pertaining to the totality of my biography.

#### 8.4 CONTINUOUSLY *BECOMING*: HABITUAL ADAPTATION

In the previous section, I engaged with a process of what I term ‘auto-transactional’ reflexive inquiring where I problematised some of my previous explanations by drawing on transactional tools of habit and unprecedented continuity. I will now develop some of these ideas further to exemplify how I have been continuously adapting and growing through the many occasions of my living. In so doing, I will further demonstrate the usefulness of transactional tools when considering how ‘poor’ young people are living (in motion) and can hence, sometimes be ‘doing well’ educationally.

##### *HABITUALLY RECONFIGURING*

To briefly recap an earlier section then, I have suggested that class is not a structure/barrier existing ‘externally’ or beyond person:environment transactional activity which is one-dimensionally ‘impacting’ a person’s educational trajectory. Rather, class may be better understood as a continual process of cultural-habitual activities which are reproduced and reconfigured spatiotemporally. Therefore, as a person is both undergoing and doing the reproduction of such habits, evolution/transformation of novel cultural habits is possible. Thus, becoming the first in my family to attend university (an occasion which seemed to dominate my thinking for several years in deterministic ‘classed’ ways) is more appropriately

understood as a whole host of historical, transactional occasions, from which my ‘first student’ activities emerged, rather than my ‘resilience’ to barriers my family had been unable to navigate. It might be more appropriate to suggest that attending university as the first in my family, and then going on to study at a ‘selective’ university were two parts of my on-going living and learning through several years of complex transactional occasioning through differing sociocultural environments, as I shall now discuss.

To elaborate then, perhaps attending the more ‘selective’ university broke the habitual activity of (i) my family specifically and (ii) the social/research trends of ‘poor’ people who were under-represented at selective universities, more generally. In so doing, it perhaps inadvertently tested the hypothesis of whether ‘people like us’ (poor/working class) could go to ‘places like that’ (world-ranking institutions). However, at that time I was overlooking my own attendance at this university whilst investigating other similarly ‘selective’ institutions. Indeed, it appears that I was attempting to make sense of what I believed were ‘class barriers’ hindering ‘poor’ young people’s admittance and struggling to explain the anomalies of those who *were* admitted. By seeking causal explanations through the utilisation of deterministic ‘classed’ tools which separated person and environments and hence, which were divorced from concrete living, it becomes easier to comprehend my struggle for ‘answers’. This includes the challenge of answering ‘I don’t’ know’ when asked an interview question concerning ‘how I got into a selective university as a poor person’.

It is now more appropriate to contend that transacting in particular fields with others perhaps disrupted/questioned the habitual cultural practices I had been born in to. Experiencing through these fields involved reconfiguring and learning new habits which also became part of my evolving depository of habits – which then contained *both* sets of cultural habits, utilised in differing fields with which I continued to transact simultaneously (i.e., familial/university fields). Sullivan (2001) refers to these differing habitual activities of one whole transactional body when she describes herself as both a ‘polite daughter and assertive scholar’. Hence, it becomes trivial to think of myself in structural ways as shifting from ‘working class’ to ‘middle class’ given that my habitual activities were co-constituted by my correspondence through differing fields with others. Thus, we are reminded of the

ideas of Roth (2016) referred to earlier, where I am the totality of my *becoming* biography rather than a ‘product’ of any one specific field where I am transacting. This offers a more appropriate suggestion than ideas of ‘multiple’ or ‘hybrid’ identities which remain premised on atomised views of the person. These are defined by their specific environmentally determined roles (as products) which coexist in bounded ways (cf. Webb & Sepúlveda, 2020; Crozier, Reay, & Clayton, 2019), rather than becoming experiential habits reproduced and reconfigured as one *whole* person continues living. Noteworthy, some ideas have begun to come closer to recognising these activity-determined parts of personhood from a Marxian/Vygotskian perspective, defined as ‘funds of identity’ (cf. Black, Choudry, Howker, Phillips, Swanson & Williams, 2021). However, such ideas do not yet appear to fully appreciate the whole person as a meshwork of co-constituted experiencing as they transact through varying fluid fields with others, not always in goal-oriented ways.

It is also worth mentioning that when utilising more separatist /‘classed’ tools, I was comparing myself with many persons who constitute ‘my family’, each of whose meshworks are threading in unique ways as they have/do transactionally correspond with others historically/presently, through various changing cultural fields. It is not as simple to assume then that they (i) chose not to go to university for lack of aspiration or achievement or (ii) were prevented from going as a result of externally impactful ‘poverty’ or ‘lack of access’, which align with more separatist ideas. Indeed, it is worth noting that perhaps some of the communicative transactions, or what I referred to as ‘political rhetoric’ in earlier undergraduate/masters research, may have been part of how I was making meaning of unfolding occasions through a depository that had not yet experienced transactional ideas. Indeed, there was a plethora of policy language/research/programmes aimed at ‘non-traditional’ applicants in a political effort to widen participation, particularly following the tripling of UK tuition fees.

The point remains that experiencing unfolds in incredibly complex ways as the transactional person interweaves and knots with others, through changing political/social/cultural fields. Thus, thinking of my living as concrete actions and changing patterns of habitual practices offers a more nuanced approach to the complexity of fluid evolution. It is perhaps this which Dewey, and later Sullivan,

discussed as realising that practices are not as rigid as I may have first anticipated. These transformations of patterns of habitual practices, which are reconfigured in correspondence with, and adjustment to, fluid environments, may be better comprehended when focusing on the entire life-course and developmental shifts as I discuss further below. Moreover, ideas of my living and learning as ‘impacted by’ the ‘adversity caused by others’ similarly overlooks the co-constitutional nature of transactional correspondence. Indeed, such adverse occasions often provide opportunities for learning through habitual disruption and reconfiguration, as was discussed in the previous section and which shall now be further elaborated.

#### *ADAPTING AND EVOLVING*

Whilst several more significant occasions appear to ‘stand out’ in the general stream of my experiencing, such occasions are only parts of my whole experiencing and therefore none are predominant. Rather, particular activities underpinning occasions become prioritised at different times as I shift and develop. Roth (2016) offers a comprehensive analogy of such shifts when discussing a person shifting both quantitatively and qualitatively. Remembering an earlier outline in Chapter Three of such an analogy then, quantitative shifts tend to be the often less significant activities of daily living (habits) which, when disrupted, sometimes become qualitative shifts where the person transforms activities and hence, novel habits thereafter. There appears to be several parts of my living which pertains to this thinking. For example, I am studying A-Levels and my focus, co-constituted by the cultural habits of learning, is on an ‘end goal’ where daily activities are guided by an unpredictable aim that I will pass examinations and move on to university. When I do not pass the first year of A-levels, my expectations premised on previous habits of ‘doing well’ through schooling, are disrupted. My activities are then reconfigured, again co-constituted by the cultural habitual processes of the college environment which co-enables me to not only resit the examinations, but to study for the year again and retake all the classes (i.e., the college allows full-year retakes and I engage with the classes/studying for a full year). This reconfiguration in activities which extended through another year, meant the second year of studying A-levels is postponed, such that I am studying for three years rather than two before I complete the course. These occasions coincide with changes in political leadership and the introduction of higher

university fees (which tripled), amongst other occasions. These relational occasions of persons in activities through varying fields co-constitutes the reconfiguration of possible futures where the possibilities of further study (e.g., higher costs/uncertain grades) are changing. Together with others, and changing environments, particularly where I am unable to accept a place at a Law School which is ineligible for the student loan available to me, my habitual activities directed towards studying law are reconfigured once more. This involved accepting a place at a different university to study sociology emerging from a whole host of decisions pertaining to loan eligibility, subject interest, reduced travel costs and shared additional course costs with my friend, to name a few. Hence, the emerging occasions could not have been predicted at the time I began studying for A-Levels. This host of quantitative moments involving studying for, and passing, examinations led to a qualitative shift where I graduated from college and moved on to university.

Moreover, from this transformational shift as I transitioned to university, emerged another reconfiguration of habitual activities in unfamiliar fields where I was learning new habits. A continued journey through university occasions, led to another qualitative (transformational) shift as I graduated with an undergraduate degree graded a 'first class' and hence, met the cultural-habitual grading standards of a 'selective' university required for admittance to later study the Master's course. This journeying through A-levels (as priority activity) and then university (as shifted/novel priority activity) involve infinite transacting with others through varying fields both familiar (e.g., family) and unfamiliar (e.g., university/new city). Thus, in non-linear ways I (as a meshwork of all my experiencing) am growing in terms of (i) evolution of practical 'doing' habits and (ii) evolution of mind:body depository in making sense of the 'doing'. Both my activities then, and how I make sense of these activities, are continuously changing.

Possible futures thereafter were also changing post-graduation that were perhaps not possible prior to experiencing the particular 'specialist' research degree I had studied for. Indeed, I first went to work in several temporary roles which I was unhappy with before moving to a more 'specialist' research-based job that I found to be more 'challenging' (to existing habits) and therefore more 'stimulating' (generating new habits) than the mundanity of the temporary roles. Journeying through this role, I was reminded of how much I enjoyed researching activities and I applied to



university to study for the Master's degree. Again, this application process was a co-constituted moment where both my previous tutor and I (and others involved e.g., admission tutors/university administrators) are co-constituting the whole processual activity. It is not the case that my previous tutor is translating her expertise (transmitting knowledge), which I then use to complete the application, and gain access to a selective university. Entering the selective university then, emerges from a host of transactional occasions co-constructed through transactional correspondence which no one protagonist in isolation can be held responsible for without attention to the entire relational event. This illustrates an important shift in my thinking from earlier analyses and research which focus upon Admissions Tutors as the gatekeepers to accessing selective universities (singularly responsible, channelling a 'class' structure).

Fundamentally, the possible futures which continued to be reconfigured following my degrees were always emerging from a non-linear developmental process as my bundle of lines continued to transact in varying fields in improvisational. This meant that any potential future activities (i.e., getting a particular job or achieving the grades to begin a doctorate program) were always uncertain until they unfolded, which speaks to Ingold's (2011) contention that,

education as exposure precedes education as attunement. Rather than a commanding mind that already knows its will trailing a subservient body in its wake, out in front is an aspirant imagination that feels its way forward, improvising a passage through an as yet unformed world, while bringing up the rear is a prehensive perception already accustomed to the ways of the world and skilled in observing and responding to its affordances (p. 140).

This continuous journeying forwards (living) involving many moments of learning and transformational development, through co-constituted correspondence where I am both doing to and undergoing, highlights further the limitations drawn out in section 8.3.2 pertaining to being impacted by 'adverse' occasions of loss and addiction. These significant moments, however, are no more important than the oft-overlooked dynamic living of daily activities *with others through changing environments*.

Given the evental nature of living then, any participative activities shift spatiotemporally, whereby some such concurring activities come to be prioritised at

different times, and some are more predominant than others. One example of this is when I was working with the Deputy Dean, preparing to start a postponed Master's course, and tutoring/studying with my niece, during which time I was not 'caring' for my mum. But then she had a major operation, so 'caring' for her becomes a predominant activity alongside continued working and tutoring. So, my daily routine, functionally corresponding with other persons (whose bundles of lines are also extending in unique ways), changes in the dramatic living of unfolding occasions. These knotting occasions with others through various fluid environments are then not forgotten but rather, are evolving the experiential depository of each person as they continue *becoming* through activities which shift across their life course such that,

the knot remembers everything [...] Untying the knot, therefore, is not a disarticulation. It does not break things into pieces. It is rather a casting off, whence lines that once were bound together go their different ways. Thus, it is with siblings in the family: having grown up together, their leaving home is not a disassembly but a dispersal, a shaking out of those lines of interstitial differentiation otherwise known as relations of kinship. And in the knot of the navel, every one of us retains a memory of that originary moment when we first came into the world, only to be cast off with a cut (Ingold, 2011, p. 29).

Therefore, knotting with others is fluid through changing activities and hence, any seemingly 'adverse' occasions with particular others (e.g., with brother or housemate) are similarly impermanent.

In sum then, I am the full unit of all I have experienced – I am a meshwork of these transactions as I, as a bundle of lines, protrude forward functionally corresponding with environment and others (as other bundles of lines) across various fields and yet these lines are always part of the whole person I am becoming. Whilst some occasions may then be more 'adverse', these are often coinciding with occasions which are less so and thus, as I protrude forward there is no certainty to any 'future' possibilities, adverse or otherwise, as I am continually *becoming*. Thus, 'humans, wherever and however they live, are always humaning, creating themselves as they go along [...] and since all human life is happening, so all creation is occasional: a moment-to-moment improvisation (Ingold, 2011, p. 141). Attending to the transactionally relational motion of living then offers a more appropriate tool to make sense of 'poor' young people who shift, adapt, and grow through more and less

‘adverse’ experiences, continuing to more generally ‘do well’ educationally, as I shall now conclude.

## 8.5 ‘AUTO-TRANSACTIONAL’ REFLEXIVE INQUIRING AS A USEFUL TOOL

I began this chapter by articulating the central idea of this thesis and this chapter more specifically, which is one that focuses on an ontological position suggesting that the human condition of learning and development is premised on person transacting with environment and other as they are experiencing habitually through culturally specific contexts. By engaging with a process of practical reflexive inquiring autobiographically (‘auto-transactional’), I suggest that outcomes (educational or otherwise) are not necessarily known at the outset as occasions evolve through a simultaneous and integrated doing and undergoing with other/environment that cannot suggest particular forms of causality. I did this specifically by attending to my own occasioning as both my activities, and how I make sense of these activities, evolve. Indeed, in the section following the narrative account, I attended to the journeying of my thinking as I corresponded with different tools to think about my living, shifting from a more deterministic/impactful-causal account to a deeply relational, temporal, and dynamic understanding. I then moved on to consider habitual activity in further detailing the limitation of deterministic/causal thinking which is associated with more separatist accounts. This then attended to the reproducing and reconfiguring nature of living, departing from notions of ‘adversity’ which are seen to one-dimensionally impact a person. In the section preceding this conclusionary part, I reflect on the journey of reproducing and reconfiguring habits as I am learning and shifting whilst continuously becoming.

At times, this journeying included significant moments which ‘stand out’ in the monist stream of remembering my living more than others, often emerging from a disruption to the on-going stream of my habitual activities. As I have exemplified, these occasions are non-linear in nature and instead, help to articulate the way living threads in many ways with other persons’ living as we journey forward (continually and non-linearly) socially/culturally as humans through shifting transactional activities. Indeed, there are periods of time where I am both working and studying, and at other times, one of these activities are more prominent. Similarly, activities

with others evolve, shift, and become prioritised at different times through the fluidity of dynamic, continuous living.

Ultimately, by way of many occasions premised on infinite transacting with others through various fields of activities, I present my experiential life thus far. In so doing, I further develop my suggestions outlined in Chapter Six pertaining to Imogen, by engaging with a process of reflexive inquiring autobiographically. This chapter then becomes a demonstration of the more developed ‘fruitful’ position I arrive at that Imogen has not yet reached, given my attention to the transactional nature of my living with environments and others. As part of this discussion, I also further develop the ideas of habit and grieving as discussed in Chapter Seven, pertaining to Serena. The following chapter will now bring together all of these interconnecting ideas presented throughout this thesis to articulate the contribution of this research and how it may inform further inquiring concerned with young people and education.

## CHAPTER NINE CONCLUSION

*Unused resources are now human rather than material [...] which puts a heavier demand on human creativeness*

(Dewey, 2002, p. 390).

### 9.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter brings the discussion of the research to a close by outlining what the reader has been exposed to in the cumulation of each preceding chapter. Ultimately, this research presents a more appropriate tool for understanding young people as they are experiencing poverty/‘adverse’ occasions and yet ‘doing well’ educationally, than those explanations which suggest that the reason for the ‘anomaly’ is the person’s individually owned, or intervention-induced, ‘resilience’. Rather, this research suggests that focusing on transacted activities as young people journey forwards, functionally coordinating with their environment and others as they continually evolve, is a more appropriate tool for understanding how their concrete realities unfold in dynamic ways. This departs from explanations which begin with an analytical/methodological separation of person from her environments, one that assumes that the two are *interacting* in some way, and instead posits the argument that persons and their environments are reciprocally permeating through functional correspondence as they both continue (evolve) together. Put simply, I argue that it is necessary to attend to the full unit of person:environment to understand the deep social complexity of humans living and learning that recognises this reciprocity and which (i) does not separate and sub-divide living into constituent parts, (ii) does not assume living is static, and thus (iii) does not see living in abstract ways that are divorced from the spatiotemporal concrete environment-focused realities of humans life.

In this chapter, I intend to reiterate the importance of a transactional approach to understanding young people with regard to poverty and education, and to encourage creativity through instrumental practical inquiry to attend to associated problems. As articulated earlier in the thesis, creativity refers to practical inquiry directed at a particular problem which is open to possibilities and utilises concrete experiences in instrumental ways to attend to the problem. Hence, creative inquiry is about learning from experiencing and adapting to novel experiencing. This is also referred to by

Dewey as being ‘inventive’ through thinking ‘forwards’ and utilising capacities through new situations (cf. Dewey, 1996; 2002). In advocating this idea then, I begin with a summative overview of the claims of this research before answering the research questions directly, with reference to some empirical examples. Thereafter, I attend to the empirical and methodological contributions in turn utilising exemplifications from the empirical discussion chapters (six, seven and eight) in more detail. I then present suggestions for policymakers and practitioners in the following section before considering some of the ideas which are critical of Deweyan/Pragmatist approaches. I end the chapter by considering potential areas for further research based on ideas which emerged from this journey but could not have been attended to here, before leaving a final note of concluding thoughts.

## 9.2 DISCUSSING THE RESEARCH

### 9.2.1 A SUMMATIVE OVERVIEW

Claim	Evidence
<i>Ideas (hypotheses/solutions) are useful only when based in concrete living which is fundamentally relational and hence simultaneously social and cultural. Thus, the transactional approach that recognises the integrity of person:environment as a holistic unit of analysis privileges a deep sense of the social and cultural and hence, is more appropriate for understanding the problem of young people, poverty, and education.</i>  (Empirical)	Chapters Four, Five, and Six which demonstrate an intimate relation of what are sometimes considered separate practices of ‘theoretical ideas’ and ‘empirical realities’ (data) to understand the complexities of young people living and learning.
<i>Practical inquiry, beginning with problems or disruptions in the habitual activity of persons, can stimulate personal reflexivity (consciousness) and agency as a means of reconfiguring activities to regenerate</i>	Chapter Six which demonstrates the usefulness of autobiographical inquiry, or, taking a ‘auto-transactional’ approach to

<p><i>functional coordination with environments and hence, a hypothesised, potentially fallible, resolution (idea) to the problem.</i></p> <p><i>(Methodological)</i></p>	<p>understanding one's own experiencing. This includes the foregrounding problem of better understanding occasions of problems and reconfiguration in one's own living where previous analyses (i.e., some ideas associated with social class) were limited. Also, Chapter Three which discusses inquiry and an autobiographical approach to transaction, methodologically.</p>
<p><i>Person and Environment are a transactional, whole, unit of analysis that should not be separated for analytical ease.</i></p>	<p>Chapters Four, Five, and Six which explain how understanding only parts of concrete occasions co-constituted by person:environment reciprocity overlooks the pertinence of the whole unit, often resulting in limited linear/causal explanations distant from 'real' living.</p>
<p><i>Literature (across disciplines) concerning young people and pertaining to problems of poverty, associated adversity, and education are limited by methodologically/analytically separating the young person and her environments/others, resulting in dualistic</i></p>	<p>Chapter Two which critically assesses relevant literature pertinent to the context of this research and highlights limitations before outlining the rationale underpinning</p>

<i>notions proposing linear explanations/solutions.</i>	this research, and which is revisited in this chapter.
<i>Research journeys specifically, and human living more generally, are unfolding occasions which are unpredictable and thus, any habitual activity can be disrupted at any time, meaning ‘planning’ for future occasions must always be openly flexible to the versatility of person:environment transactional unfolding (adaptive). Planning must also be conceptualised in a way that recognises the mutual responsibility of persons as they are reciprocally co-constituting transactions with environments and others.</i>	Chapter One provides an account of the unforeseeable occasions of this research journey to highlight the ways in which any prior ‘planning’ (habitual activities) were reconfigured as disruptions to activities unfolded (i.e., a global pandemic). This articulates the research journey as continually evolving/emerging in terms of activities. The journey account is then revisited in Chapter Three to discuss the reconfigurations of activities in relation to ‘methodology’. Chapter Four also outlines a transactional approach to ethical conduct based on co-responsibility and thus, highlights issues of ethical review/research planning processes which are often in contradiction with the dynamic continuing of unfolding occasions in person:environment daily activity.

Table 1 Summative Overview of Research Claims



---

## 9.2.2 ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research has been substantively concerned with understanding how ‘poor’ young people live and learn and what this means for those particular young people who experience such ‘adversity’ and yet continue to ‘do well’ educationally. The research began with a scoping activity of current literature concerned with young people, poverty, and education, and addressed limitations of these literacies by proposing the transactional approach to better understand and attend to the problem of ‘poor’ young people living and learning. What followed was an unfolding and evolving articulation of the transactional approach of practical inquiry permeated and enabled by rich empirical accounts of concrete realities. The fundamental claims which have emerged from this research pertaining to the specific research questions which directed inquiry, are as follows.

---

### HOW ARE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE EXPERIENCING POVERTY AND ASSOCIATED ADVERSITY LIVING AND LEARNING? (RQ1)

The essence of humans living (biologically, socially, culturally) is a *transaction* of persons (mind:body) *with* environments (and hence, other persons) where each are constituent parts necessary for the functionally corresponding activity of the reciprocal, inter-permeable whole as they evolve together. This is a deeply social and complex relation which cannot be understood appropriately if only constituent parts – either person or environment – are attended to or prioritised during inquiry. Such complexity has become clear through attending to the dynamic experiencing of Imogen, Serena, and myself as we transact with others through changing environments, continuously adapting to the novel. Indeed, attempts were made to explain each person’s living in more separatist/dualistic ways, utilising current ideas in the fields associated with young people, poverty, and education and yet there remained a host of unanswered questions (i.e., reflexive process considering my own ‘classed’ understandings).

The reciprocity of this functional transactional activity is habitual given that they operate through a ‘persistent balance of organic activities [...] and of active capacities to readjust activity to meet new conditions’ (Dewey, 1966, p. 39). Thus, daily living is co-constituted by person:environment transactions whereby persons are both undergoing the conditions of their environments (including others) and

doing to those conditions (reproduction and transformation) as each reciprocally change together. We see such adaptive evolving in Chapter Eight where I explore how I adapt and shift spatiotemporally through my entire experiential journey thus far.

Moreover, when habitual activity is disrupted/broken (i.e., the death of a loved one), persons begin a process of reconfiguration to adjust to the new conditions of their environments (the absence of their loved one) and continue forward, sometimes forming new habits. However, the occasion of disruption constitutes only one part of a person's experiencing spatiotemporally where many transactional occasions, through varying social/cultural fields with others, co-constitute their full dynamic living. This is exemplified in Chapter Seven where we see Serena experiencing the death of her mother amidst her schooling years, whilst simultaneously engaging with other schooling activities, such as continued studying, and utilising some of these activities (art) as a way of remembering her mother. Such activities also involve a dynamic relation with others close to the deceased as they evolve with the person (i.e., transactions of Serena and her sister/Serena and her previous schoolteacher). The habitual disruption in various relational environmental contexts stimulates adaptation so the person can continue to live without their loved one. Hence, whilst their habitual activities evolve and/or dramatically change (i.e., Serena can no longer do homework activities together with her mother), there is a possibility for learning new habits which can stimulate growth (i.e., the person learns new skills by doing homework independently or with new others). The death becomes only one occasion, in a life of many occasions, and which is not necessarily primary and thus, is not necessarily linearly causal to their educational outcomes. Although, for a particular version of one's fullness of life, it might be (i.e., perhaps some of Serena's siblings who are not doing so 'well' through schooling), though this would require further inquiring.

---

#### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR UNDERSTANDING 'POOR' YOUNG PEOPLE WHO 'DO WELL' EDUCATIONALLY? (RQ2)

Existing explanations pertaining to the substantive concern of young people, poverty, and education are limited by overlooking this inter-permeable, functional, reciprocity of transaction and thus, struggle to ascertain how 'poor' young people

experiencing adversity sometimes ‘do well’ educationally without suggesting notions of individual ‘resilience’. Indeed, a scoping review of various literatures (through Chapter Two and together with empirical accounts in Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight) highlighted a myriad of explanations pertaining to notions of poverty, schooling/learning, class, race, grief, as well as the interconnection of these factors in the living of young people as subjects over time. Moreover, a heuristic tool was utilised in Chapter Two specifically to conceptually/theoretically synthesise the substantive field which found similarities in explanations taking a ‘self-actional approach’ as those more concerned with the agency of the individual; an ‘interactional’ approach concerned with the interaction of factors (e.g., poverty, school, young person); and those taking a more ‘relational’ approach concerned with the multi-faceted complexity of interconnecting parts of a persons’ living. Despite pertinent differences in explanations according to discipline and approach, many of these explanations remain premised on the static separation of person and their environments. As such, these remained analytically distanced from the concrete activities of the daily living of humans where persons and environments are functionally transacting continuously, and inseparably. Such dualistic explanations account for only a weak version of the social and thus, overlook how problems – disruptions/breaks to habitual activities – stimulate adjustment/reconfiguration which can become an impetus for development through reflexive processes.

The empirical storied accounts of three young people (including a reflexive biographical piece) presented here demonstrates the need for practical inquiry which recognises the transactional complexity of persons evolving with environments through functional activity. More specifically, exploring the dynamic journeys of three people’s *unique* experiencing of poverty, and other ‘adverse’ occasions, whilst continuing to ‘do well’ educationally illuminates the need to attend to this full transactional unit premised on a reciprocal doing and undergoing. This then offers a more appropriate explanation for how some young people – as is the case for Imogen, Serena, and myself – may experience adverse occasions amongst other occasions and hence continue to ‘do well’. Indeed, such adverse occasions are not necessarily primary in a person’s experiencing even if the occasion is significant (*an* experience) and, adverse occasions also have the potential to become occasions of development as is shown through these unique persons. For example, we see this

with the disruption to my ‘classed’ ways of understanding my own living, and the development of my thinking when recognising that living unfolds in deeply transactional ways and hence where ‘class’ cannot be seen as a structure beyond/external to person:environment activity. We also see the potential for *an* experience to become developmental through reflexive inquiring when attending to the occasion of Imogen ‘failing’ her maths test and making sense of this through more linearly causal tools.

Fundamentally, such a rich engagement with the narrated empirical accounts of Imogen, Serena, and myself taking a Deweyan-Pragmatic transactional approach elucidates the limitations of dualistic notions which suggest a linear cause-effect relation between ‘poor’ young people and their educational outcomes. Emphatically, attending to the dynamism of a person’s evolving living as it unfolds unpredictably further exposes how notions of ‘resilience’ – as caused by individual agency and/or stimulated by interventional activities, without consideration of the full meshwork of transactions with various environments and others – are insufficient explanations regarding how some ‘poor’ young people still ‘do well’.

The following section discusses the claims of this research in more detail by elaborating on the specific exemplifications mentioned in this section, particularly focusing on how these ideas offer a novel contribution to current debates.

### 9.3 CONTRIBUTING TO THE FIELD(S)

---

#### 9.3.1 OVERARCHING CONTRIBUTIONS:

To my knowledge, this is the first research which applies metaphysical Deweyan ideas (as opposed to educational Dewey) to try and make sense of ‘poor’ young people’s living and engagement with education. Indeed, there have been attempts to bring more relational/‘dialectical’ ideas to the issue of ‘poor’ young people who ‘do well’, as was seen with Hernandez-Martinez and Williams (2013) for example, though none which go quite as far as this research in appreciating the deeply social, transactional, nature of humans living with environment and other. Moreover, several scholars have developed Deweyan ideas for example Garrison (2001) and Sullivan (2001), particularly in the domain of education/educational research (Garrison 1994; Roth, 2019/2021) as has been discussed. However, these

metaphysical Deweyan notions were yet to be empirically focused upon 'poor' young people who 'do well' educationally and hence, this research now offers a contribution to these fields.

In so doing, it demonstrates that young people live and learn in complex ways that require a transactional approach which accounts for the full dynamism of their experiencing as they continuously evolve. This is both a theoretical and methodological approach (inquiry), which is (i) *developed empirically through rich storied accounts of two young people*, and (ii) *attended to through of a process of 'auto-transactional' reflexive inquiry by considering my own biographical piece*. This rich empirical and methodological contribution attends to the concrete activities of three people's experiencing, or in other words, their 'real' lives. As such, Dewey's most fundamental legacy of ensuring philosophical ideas be created through concrete realities, is operationalised. This transactional approach to pragmatic inquiring and problem-solving delineates from other radical ideas and critical literacies which separate person and environment and/or which overlook the continuity of the functional process which is fundamentally impermanent (static).

Whilst I discuss contributions below as empirical and methodological, it is important to emphasise these contributions are inter-penetrative and have been sub-headed for discernment. Emphatically, the overarching substantive contribution is formed by these methodological and empirical parts, both of which are necessary to avoid individualised and dualistic understandings of everyday living and specifically, the living of 'poor' young people who 'do well' educationally.

---

### 9.3.2 EMPIRICAL

This research offers an innovative and original contribution to the field of education and poverty by integrating rich empirical storied accounts with a pragmatic-transactional tool of inquiry.

Notably, whilst this research has not intended to be analytically<sup>47</sup> or probabilistically<sup>48</sup> generalisable, it has some essentialist-generalisable qualities. Essentialist generalisability refers to research with a focus on ‘the particular’ (e.g., a case) and what this may mean for ‘the possible’ (e.g., another case/individual) which share ‘essential’ parts (Ercikan & Roth, 2014). Specifically, essentialist claims ‘tend to identify the work and processes that produce phenomena rather than the phenomena themselves (Ercikan & Roth, 2014, p. 11) and the support of claims is based on ‘testability’, whether a ‘tentative statement of generalization can be tested by examining any other concrete case’ (p.11). This research is concerned with three individuals who all share some form of population homogeneity (e.g., poverty/‘doing well’ educationally). However, the ways in which seemingly homogenous parts of our lives manifest through our transactional experiencing with others through various environments, is different and non-static. Thus, I suggest that thinking/practically inquiring transactionally, that attends to individual/collective habits of humans, is a way of understanding heterogeneity or ‘particular’ differences. I have demonstrated this by exploring and exposing the nuanced experiencing of Imogen, Serena, and myself by attending to the fullness of our on-going living.

As such, I offer a contribution to the literature by outlining and then critiquing ideas of linear causation (e.g., ideas articulated through the work of Price, 2014) in the lives of poor young people. I do this by highlighting, through empirical narratives, notions of complexity in living that cannot be atomised nor predicted (‘potential causes’). The entirety of this argument starts with explicating ideas about young people’s agency that relates to the self-motivated/-determined/-regulated person premised upon dualistic notions of the person and their environment as bounded and separate. As I have argued, much of this literature starts from the premise that such factors are seen as causally mediating between the individual and his/her outcomes (i.e., the outcome of educational attainment is achieved by levels of agency that are mediated by an individual’s level of self-efficacy and the like). Such mediating

---

<sup>47</sup> In analytic generalization, the key criteria are (a) whether a systematic difference between experimental and control groups can be supported by statistical evidence and (b) whether the change in experimental group outcomes can be causally linked to the intervention (Ercikan & Roth, 2014, p. 13).

<sup>48</sup> In probabilistic generalization, the key criteria are (a) whether systematic patterns in the sample can be supported by statistical evidence and (b) whether the sample is representative of the population (Ercikan & Roth, 2014, p. 13).

influences are also then potentially amplified by particular interacting structures and cultures associated with class that impact/socialise individuals. These are sometimes defined as moderating interactional variables that define the level or intensity of impact of any particular mediating variable. However, as I have argued, these separate moderating/mediating explanations fail to consider, and therefore understand, that one's doing does not reflect these explanatory factors that appear to lie between an individual and his/her outcome, indicative of causal action. Instead, where action appears to be reproduced by external 'classed' dimensions, my argument is that such action is related to notions of socially/culturally reproduced habits through person:environment transactions spatiotemporally, which do not one-dimensionally impact a person's ability to access and engage with education. This has offered a developmental contribution to the field concerned with class and education (e.g., Reay et al., 2009; Ingram, 2011/2018; Raffo, 2014), including those ideas premised upon more dynamic units of analysis utilising Vygotskian ideas (e.g., Black et al., 2021; Zinchenko, 1985). In addition, I have aligned with and contributed to ideas such as Sullivan's (2001), by exploring race as dynamically co-constituted through person:environment transactions with others (Chapter Seven). Such problematisation of causes/mediators has also involved reconceptualising 'adverse' occasions in a person's living (e.g., the loss of a loved one / 'failing' a test) as habitual breaks which have the potential to become developmental occasions through reconfiguration and generation of novel habits (as demonstrated in Chapter Six, Seven, and Eight). Thereby, I have taken issue with currently popular explanatory paradigms of the poverty-attainment nexus such as 'Adverse Childhood Experiences' (e.g., the ideas/developments of Felitti et al., 1998) that are often both deterministic and reductionist (c.f. Mooney, Bunting & Coulter, 2020).

In terms of the claims of this research being essentially-generalisable then, I present empirically-led, socially deep, understandings of how some 'poor' young people may do well educationally through the reconfiguration possibilities that habitual breaks present. However, focusing on the transactional habits of individuals also suggests a way of understanding those individuals who do not present 'anomalies' in the aggregate patterns of 'poor' young people *not* 'doing well'. For example, low levels of attainment for particular sub-/groups of people generally may be understood through the process of socially/culturally reproducing habits,

spatiotemporally. Put simply, whilst habitual reconfiguration makes ‘adverse’ experiences a *possible* opportunity for learning, it does not mean that all such experiences *will* be occasions of learning. Indeed, this is possible where a detrimental habit is broken and yet reconfigures into another detrimental habit. Rather, the formation of habits and hence, the possibility of habitual breaks becoming occasions of learning, is co-constituted (and thereby, relationally determined) through transactions with others through changing environments. Thus, focusing on the transactional habits of ‘poor’ young people provides a deeper, concrete, understanding of individuals who forge patterns of ‘not doing well’ educationally (habitual reproduction) as much as those individuals who present anomalies to these trends and ‘do well’ through habitual reconfiguration/novelty which becomes developmental.

The ‘essentials’ of such generalisable claims then are that inquiring into the habits of individuals is a way of understanding how both (i) patterns of human practices (i.e., low attainment) and (ii) anomalies to general trends of such practices (i.e., high-achieving ‘poor’ young people) are possible. The testability of such claims requires the inquirer to understand aggregate trends, whilst appreciating the nuances of particular individuals (who actually represent such trends) by attending to the spatiotemporal unfolding of habitual/novel practices through transactions with others.

---

### 9.3.3 METHODOLOGICAL

This research offers a methodological contribution to the field by engaging in what I term an ‘auto-transactional’ process of inquiry to explore my own biography. So, whilst I utilise the ‘classic’ transactional approach of inquiring with the empirical accounts of others to explore a substantive topic in novel ways, the methodological novelty lies in utilising these tools autobiographically through Chapter Eight where I revisit earlier understandings of my own living. Thus, Dewey’s idea of an ‘innovative contribution’ is met by devoting classic methods to new uses and in so transforming them (Dewey, 1966, p. 124). Primarily, this methodological contribution of ‘auto-transactional’ inquiring is constituted by four parts which are concerned with (i) the importance of co-inquiring, (ii) the potential for activist engagement and therapeutic recognition (iii) ethics as co-constituted and (iv) the



potential for auto-biographical approaches to be premised upon a person:environment unit of analysis.

*Co-inquiring transactionally*

Firstly, the process of ‘auto-transactional’ reflexivity is about focusing on the practical problem of thinking about my own experiencing as this emerged through research transactions with Imogen, Serena, and my supervisory team. Hence, one part of this contribution is highlighting the *importance of relationally engaging with ‘research’ subjects in a co-constitutive, co-co-inquiring (transactional) manner*. At one level, this speaks to issues of ethics (as discussed hereafter), and at another related level recognises a researcher’s work as interconnected with all other aspects of their evolving biography with others/environments in a non-additive, dynamic way. Thus, in one way the auto-transactional approach is empirical (as detailed above in relation to exploring notions of class) however, it is methodological in that it provides a mechanism by which to develop our thinking and approach to engaging with others when doing research – one that enables to both cognitively recognise and emotionally feel (body:mind) the research relationship.

Through my engagement with this process, I utilised a person:environment unit of analysis (myself with others through various environments spatiotemporally) that has both historical, present, and future orientations. Hence, the practical problem of inquiry (understanding my living) was the disruption to previous historical, memory-based (remembered) understandings of myself, given my current pragmatist thinking. Fundamentally, the journeying of this thinking process elucidates the impermanence of ideas which are always evolving hypotheses adaptive to novel experiencing. In my process, this emerged through shifting understandings – how I was/am making sense of my living – as my depository (body:mind) evolved through on-going experiencing. For example, this was exemplified in my move from a causal/mediator ‘classed-based’ understanding of educational attainment to one premised on pragmatist transactional thinking. These hypotheses were not developed by purely individual cognitive reflexivity but through the practical engagement with such ideas with others and various research literature in the context of particular times, places, and moments. My auto-transactional reflexivity provided a new way (hypothesis) for making sense of my journeying, through attending to transactions

with others/environment as a unified whole, as the underlying theoretical position. Put simply, there is an inbuilt integrated symbiosis in auto-transactional reflexivity of the individual (me) and all the others, moments, and environments that are part of my evolving fullness of life.

### *Activist engagement and Therapeutic recognition*

Secondly, I suggest that this ‘auto-transactional’ process of reflexive inquiring could become useful for Imogen (Chapter Six). Hence, this part of the contribution concerns the potential for *activist engagement with others, providing a tool that allows a therapeutic recognition that the self is not individually nor statically constituted, but is an evolving and dynamic process of non-additive relational engagements spatiotemporally*. For example, when attending to the occasion of what Imogen views as ‘failing’ her maths test and attempting to make sense of this habitual disruption, it seems that she might still be working through a process of inquiring – and indeed, a process not necessarily utilising the most productive tools, given the emphasis on her agency. In this sense, I suggest that she is reflecting backwards, and whilst it is directed at the particular problem of ‘understanding where she went wrong’, she is utilising separatist tools which prioritise an overly individualised sense of her agency in relation to what she sees as a ‘failure’. I then suggest how Imogen’s process of inquiring may lead to more fruitful understandings, instrumental to her problem, if she were to recognise the interweaving of many occasions as she transacts with others in socially/culturally specific and impermanent contexts. I do this myself (Chapter Eight) where I work through to a more fruitful part in a process of inquiry, attending to unfolding occasions of my whole living transactionally and not overly prioritising agency. This guides me to depart from agentic notions of blame/guilt as was the case with my earlier understandings (and is seen in Imogen’s current understandings).

Thus, the working through of the transactional analysis, in each chapter, is the enabling of an enhanced form of pragmatist practical inquiring that de-emphasises individual cognitive-based agency and instead, attempts to locate learning and development as relational, environmental, and therefore, interconnecting with varying social/cultural fields of living and engagement.

### *Co-constitutional ethics*

Thirdly, this transactionally co-constitutive approach to inquiring is highlighting that *research conduct is premised upon joint responsibility and therefore, ethical processes should be understood as co-constituted*. Hence, I contribute to the field of literature concerned with ethics from a transactional/Deweyan perspective (cf. Simpson & Sacken, 2016; Roth, 2018), as well as the broader literature base problematising ethical processes with young people (cf. Alderson & Morrow, 2011). I offer this contribution by demonstrating how conversations are developed together through a joint transaction of persons with environments, some of which are shared. For example, Imogen and myself share a part of the schooling environment and yet are part of wider transactional processes within and beyond the schooling field, where the occasion of ‘bullying’ involves various protagonists all of whom are co-constituting the unfolding occasions, and from which the discussions thereafter emerge. When attending to the complex transactions of the full occasion, it becomes clearer to see how the evolving dynamics of the unfolding occasion pertained to various other protagonists, the culture of the school, as well as the specific occasion of ‘doing research’. It is over simplistic to pay attention only to myself and Imogen and to talk of ‘building relations’ and ‘responsibility to the researched’ without attending to the unfolding context of school/research/culture/full living.

As such, understanding research occasions requires attending to the deep social complexity as it unfolds rather than considering only static notions of ‘power’ differentials seemingly between ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’. This notion of power is also considered further in section 7.5.1

### *Person:environment unit of analysis for auto-ethnographic/-biographical methods*

The final part of this methodological contribution pertains to the field concerned with auto-ethnographic/auto-biographical methods. Whilst this research is not considered to be ethnographic – as has been explained in Chapter Three and Eight – it may be useful to the field of auto-ethnography specifically, given the field’s concern with the ‘self/self-experience’ as ‘related to life events’ and ‘situated in socially/culturally specific contexts’ (cf. Edwards, 2021, p. 1).

Indeed, there has been a growing auto-ethnographic literature base utilising autobiographical narratives, some of which has – relevant to the substantive concern of this research – centred upon the family (Lahman, 2020), communities (Schmid, 2019), and bereavement (McKenzie, 2015). However, part of the challenge for elements of mainstream autoethnographic approaches is that they do not appear to theorise the issue of ontology in any explicit way, even those taking a more ‘critical approach’. This results in an approach to thinking and reflecting on the self and one’s experiences as methodologically central and yet at the same time sustaining an analytical separateness from others/environments therefore, sustaining a subject/object and person/structure dualisms. For example, Barak (2020) appears to come closer to recognising the ‘dialectical’ interconnect of (sometimes contradictory) experiencing with family members through shared occasions, whilst also suggesting that ‘I feel that I can only reach tentative conclusions, ones that are ever changing and evolving’ (p. 671). However, Barak does not appear to fully overcome the dualism of person/structure when discussing ‘multiple possibilities’ and ‘multiple identities’.

In offering a contribution to work located in the auto-ethnographic/-biographic field then, my research focuses on the deeply relational transactions which begins with the fullness of living. Thus, the focus is on the transactional nature of interconnecting environments associated with family/community/bereavement/class for example, and not on the specific parts of these experiences in isolation. Indeed, my account exemplifies and discusses many occasions over my entire experiential living with others, through varying occasions/environments, thus far. In so doing, it overcomes some of the dualisms in existing auto-ethnographic work such as Barak’s (2020) by prioritising the transactional unit which encompasses person, environment, and other as the stream of on-going/evolving experiencing. Additionally, those who avowedly take a more deeply socio-cultural approach to autoethnography continue to remain limited in overlooking the central importance of the person:environment unit of analysis and therefore, resulting in either an over aggrandised, or an overly structured, notion of the self. For example, Jenkins, Canaan, Filippakou & Strudwick (2011) utilise autoethnography to problematise the concept of class, though without a deeply relational appreciation for the ways social/cultural habits transactionally reproduce over time, as I do in Chapter Eight.

Noteworthy, Pinar (1981) discusses ‘autobiographical method’ whilst drawing on some of Dewey’s own commentary about his developmental thinking over time (e.g., about Dewey’s early alignment with Hegelian ideas and then future development of these ideas to account for person and situation holistically). I take a similar autobiographical reflexive approach to that discussed by Pinar (and described by Dewey) by exploring some of my earlier thinking. However, I do so by utilising Dewey’s later ideas of transaction, alongside his concept of habit, to consider occasions (e.g., grieving) and concepts (e.g., class) as part of a substantive concern with ‘poor’ young people who ‘do well’ educationally.

Fundamentally then, I utilise practical reflexive inquiring as my method together with metaphysical Deweyan ideas, and more specifically the concept of transaction and habit, to explore my living autobiographically. Thus, the combinative approach of (i) utilising Deweyan theoretical underpinnings together with (ii) practical reflexive inquiring as a method, (iii) habit and transaction as concepts, and (iv) considering these empirically through an autobiographical narrative, provides an approach that is enabling of a deeper understanding of issues, and in this particular case the ‘anomalies’ of ‘poor’ people ‘doing well’ educationally.

#### 9.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS / POLICYMAKERS

In translating some of the contributions outlined in the previous section, I will now offer some suggestions which may be of use to practitioners and policymakers concerned with young people, poverty, and education.

---

##### 9.4.1 PRACTITIONERS

Primarily, practitioners and schools would perhaps benefit from beginning with a more deeply holistic transactional approach which recognises social complexity as it manifests through persons:environments functional evolution. This could mean that both teachers and students begin to recognise the co-constitutional nature of their transacting together which overcomes notions of the ‘I’ as singular. Rather, it would mean attending to the complex habits of schooling as well as the habitual activities through other environments that coincide to co-constitute the meshwork of the whole person’s doing and undergoing. This may then begin to depart from agentic notions of either the teacher *or* the student as individually ‘in

control' or responsible for their learning/actions/behaviour/care. Fundamentally, it would foreground the symbiosis of teacher-students relations as mutually responsive, reciprocally co-constituted, habitually determined (social/cultural), and dynamically on-going. This may then lead to a focus on more adaptive practices where learning is considered to be an evolving process of occasioning, rather than emphasising 'end goals'. In so doing, this would complement some of the ideas located in the field of relational pedagogy which foreground the idea of co-constitution and co-existence, viewing the student-teacher relationship specifically as premised upon co-action (cf. Buber, 1958,2002; Gergen, 2009; Hinsdale, 2016). However, focusing on the full, transactional unit (person:environment with other) would also begin to address what has been considered necessary developments of relational pedagogy,

An important mission for relational pedagogy is to question the individualistic conception of education. In doing so, we need to show that educational subjects act and live in relationships of varying quality. But we also need to show that educational life and progress, in a deeper sense, involves personal, immediate meetings between man and man (Aspelin, 2011, p. 12).

Moreover, this would help in departing from decontextualised, simplistically-argued, cause-effect views about schooling practice, as well as 'educational interventions' targeted at particular outcomes. Beginning with this premise provides an opportunity for 'open-endedness' not only with targeted interventions but, more broadly to encourage exploratory learning. This could be engaged with by encouraging practical inquiry which appreciates the instrumental nature of attending to unfolding co-constituted problems of the schooling (and other) environments.

This practical inquiring as an instrumental tool for education more broadly has been highlighted throughout Dewey's work, and yet remains incredibly relevant today. Contemporary education practices would benefit from being more concerned with the experiential processes of transactional doing (habit/habit-breaking/reconfiguration/problem-solving), than assuming 'knowing' involves a didactic process of subject material being passed from 'teacher' to 'learner'. The empirical accounts in the thesis highlight the importance of attending to a temporal transactional inquiry of living that focuses on habitual reconfigurations as forms of problem solving and growth. These are contrasted to narrative accounts of individual agency and resilience that fail to recognise the centrality of evolving occasions and

experiencing with others/environments. Such failures therefore provide a limited or non-existent opportunity to practically inquire about young people's schooling - one that interconnects it to the various other social and cultural fields of transacted activity in their lives.

---

#### 9.4.2 POLICYMAKERS

Existing ideas concerning a pragmatist approach to policymaking suggest a fundamental focus on evolving habits as collective social transformation grounded in human action which begins with an appreciation of social complexity and an openness to outcomes (cf. Pedwell, 2017; Fladvad, 2021). This research has demonstrated how one might approach such reflexive processes to inquire about habits and 'thinking forwards' through continuing action, specifically about how habituation may become more transformative. The ideas put forward in earlier chapters are important in illuminating how such reflexive processes must begin with inquiring into personal habits, which are co-constituted socially and culturally, and thus can stimulate collective inquiring/problem-solving. From a policy perspective, it is important to *understand the co-constitutional, functional, processes of governing complex social groups which are formed by individuals enmeshed in complex knotworks with others, and whom are both undergoing and doing to the continuation of society/democracy*. This research outlines in detail how reflexive processes can be useful in better understanding our undergoing and doing in the world, and indeed how developmental change is not beyond human action. Thus, it is my suggestion to policymakers that *engaging in personal inquiry processes is a useful place to start whilst also encouraging reflexivity in their colleagues*. Such inquiring could also be promoted at national 'tables' where an investment in collective problem-solving is more necessary than ever as we emerge from a global pandemic and attempt to build a better, more equal, future. This means attending to current habitual activities which are less progressive to transform them.

Practical transactional inquiring is particularly useful in the way it does not discriminate between problems but rather, is a useful tool for any necessary problem-solving in an increasingly complex world. For example, whilst this research is concerned substantively with poverty, education, and young people, it is also my suggestion that *more research should be commissioned which is underpinned by a*

*transactional approach to attend to a wealth of contemporary, evolving, problems* such as climate change, mental health, and racial inequalities to name a few. This could then attend to the deeply relational and co-constitutional ways person:environment problems unfold such as with climate change which is an evolutionary process that can only be understood through the on-going functionality of humans interconnected with adapting natural/social/political/cultural environments (see also, Piso & Thompson, 2019). A more thorough articulation of one potential area of further inquiry is outlined in section 9.5.2 below.

Moreover, I suggest that it would be useful for policymakers to *reformulate ideas about the role of education premised upon individualised notions of meritocracy and equality of opportunity*. For example, this research provides an empirical-theoretical critique of the ideas of meritocracy underpinning much educational policy/practice (cf. Sandel, 2020). Such a meritocratic understanding tends to be underpinned by ideas of allowing individuals to display their talents (equality of opportunity through schooling) and promoting their efforts (resilience) to translate efforts into outcomes. This then results in achieving a ‘deserved’ meritocracy based on individual capabilities (i.e., success for those who utilised available resources, and a lack of success for those ‘undeserving’ persons who failed to utilise resources). My research suggests that such a linear/oversimplified understanding of meritocratic attainment is limited. Rather, policymakers may find it more useful to recognise the key to an evolving (educational) biography as one based on transactional doing and undergoing which includes practical inquiry, habit, dissonance, and reflexivity with others – as I demonstrate through this research. This would place a more deeply relational emphasis on societal processes generally, and the role of education specifically, as collectively co-constituted.

Primarily, the essence of any transformation lies in the capacity for open-mindedness, to invite the ‘new’ or welcome the ‘alien’ to better attend to evolving problems with creative solutions. This becomes a fine balance between assessing past activities (learning from experience) and continuing forward without pre-empted ‘end’ goals to be open to new, creative possibilities. This should then encourage/condition development rather than constrain it, recognising all the while that this is dependent to a certain extent on the lines of entanglement that one is part of and, evolving through. As Dewey (1966) puts it ‘the worst thing about



stubbornness of mind, about prejudices, is that they arrest development; they shut the mind off from new stimuli. Open-mindedness means retention of the child-like attitude; close-mindedness means premature intellectual old age' (p. 127).

## 9.5 ATTENDING TO SOME CRITIQUES

In the course of carrying out this research, several areas of potential critique towards pragmatist/Deweyan ideas have emerged and hence, must be attended to. Below, I consider three main questions pertinent to transactionally inquiring about young people, poverty, and education. Firstly, in terms of the 'validity' of ideas, I consider whether the functional unit of person:environment potentially dissolves the distinctness of a person from their various environments, and other persons. Secondly, in terms of the co-constitutional processes involved in conducting research, I consider whether the notion of power is overlooked by Deweyan ideas. Thirdly, in terms of emphasising the inseparability of theory and practice throughout previous chapters, I consider whether pragmatic ideas more generally are invested in the concrete (practice/practical action) to an extent which diminishes/erases the 'theoretical'.

---

### 9.5.1 POTENTIAL CRITIQUES

*Does Dewey dissolve the distinctness of person and environment?*

Dewey is sometimes misunderstood as dissolving person and environment into one unit where neither are distinct (cf. Sullivan, 2001; Garrison, 2001). As I clarify in Chapter Two, and indeed throughout, person and environment are one whole *functional* unit. Dewey did not intend to separate these analytically given their mutual/reciprocal constitution. That is not to say that the person is not distinct from her environments (material or otherwise) but, that the transactional body is co-constitutive and survives in functional correspondence with her environments, as do her environments continue through her (and others) being in the world.

Understanding concrete activities, in this mutually reciprocal way, is necessary when concerned with the 'validity' of any potential ideas/hypotheses concerning person/environment problems (in this case poverty but, also other pressing problems such as climate change). Validity according to Dewey's approach, or as Nelson (1995) puts it 'problem-solving effectiveness rather than representational

correspondence' (p. 33), attends to context-specific problems spatiotemporally by reflecting on the backdrop of past occasions in the context of current occasions, enabling growth through creative inquiry. This is exactly the sort of process I have been demonstrating and encouraging throughout this thesis, all of which begins from understanding that whilst person:environment may be distinct, their mutual survival is based on a (transactional) reciprocal, evolving, continuing, depository of functional relationality. Only by persons attending to the concrete transactional person:environment activities of themselves and others can non-progressive habits (i.e., activities which serve to reproduce inequalities) be reconfigured to enable growth, as shall now be elaborated through a discussion of power.

*Does Dewey overlook power?*

As was discussed in Chapter Four and earlier in this chapter, taking a transactional approach is about viewing every person involved in the research as co-protagonists. This develops ideas pertaining to addressing/writing about the ontological or epistemological positions of the 'Researcher' which 'impacts' how one conducts and then thinks about the data. Equally, it develops thinking about how the 'Researcher' practically (in the field - ultimately guided by positions) 'impacts', 'effects', or has 'power' over the (i) the collection and (ii) the interpretation of data. Both these points assume a one-dimensional approach to thinking of the research process which makes the 'Researcher' primary as the *thinker* and *doer*. What the transactional approach enables us to see is how the *functional activity* between all actors ('Researcher' and 'Researched') are co-constituted by the joint transaction of which they are all both *doing* and *undergoing*, as illustrated in Chapter Three. Whilst there is not the space for an exhaustive discussion, it is worth noting that Pragmatists, including Dewey, have been criticised for not addressing 'power' appropriately.

For example, Hildreth (2009) discusses the ways in which Pragmatism in general, and Dewey's ideas specifically, have been criticised for failing to address 'power'. However, in response to such critics Hildreth recognises that for Dewey and other pragmatists 'power is an integral, though often implicit, component in Dewey's conception of human experience' (p. 781). He argues that across the literary field, 'power' is often looked to as a label assigned abstractedly to provide 'reason' for

actions as though ‘it itself’ is some mediating force rather than looking to complex transactional relations in concrete living from which power emerges. The task then is to attend to ‘concrete situations and justifiable criteria, rather than *a priori* principles’ (Hildreth, 2009, p. 788, original emphasis) which would refrain from using conceptual labels ‘deployed to explain relations’ and would ‘use relations to exhibit the emergence of power differentials’ (Roth & Jornet, 2019, p. 328). In reconstructing Dewey’s ideas, and wider philosophy, pertaining to the notion of ‘power’ Hildreth points out,

Dewey’s basic working definition of power as the capacity to execute ends becomes complicated [when we realise] our capacities are not merely individual possessions, but are part of a complex transactional field of individual and social forces that constitute situations. Power literally saturates this field’ (p. 799).

Hildreth goes on to argue that experimental inquiry ‘offers a potential source of critical reflection’ pertaining to habits and experiencing which include power relations that are often taken for granted. It is such experimental inquiry, he argues, that will ‘direct us to the hard, slow work of changing conditions [and] will be more effective, critical and strategic if it incorporates a more explicit analysis of, and attention to, the dimensions of power that pervade the concrete conditions of our lives’ (p. 798). Further, he contends that Dewey is here offering a way of approaching problem-solving which attends to the transactional fields of concrete experiencing whereby ‘researchers would have a vantage point’ for understanding how multiple social forces, rather than one [...] interweave together constituting ‘conditions for action’ (p. 800).

Similarly, it is worth noting that Dewey may have been reluctant to utilise the concept ‘power’ explicitly for fear of misinterpretation (as his ideas often have been) as though ‘power’ is a ‘thing’ beyond human activity. This is sometimes how power is described by particular ‘interactional’ interpretations of Bourdieu’s ideas pertaining to educational research (see for example, Reay, 2020b). Rather, power seems best placed as a concept which describes the transactional, functional activities of persons with environments as an evolving process of balance and adaptation.

Moreover, Dewey is said to have been criticised for his ‘utopian’ ideas which put almost too much faith in the capacity/intelligence and ‘good faith’ of people to act ‘democratically’ or challenge systematic problems associated with power (i.e., poverty). To this, he argued that his ideas arise from concrete activities in which he has experienced the progress (and hence potential, or ‘power’) of peoples spatiotemporally (see Dewey, 2002) – a point elaborated further below.

*Is Pragmatism ‘anti-theoretical’?*

Pragmatism, more generally, has been criticised for distancing practice from theory and indeed prioritising practice over theory to the extent of being described ‘anti-theoretical’ in contexts such as the law (cf. Smith, 1990). Critics of Pragmatism are deemed to have found grounding for such a claim in the ideas of some neo-pragmatists such as Posner, and also Dewey himself, given that both appear to suggest some academic literature (understood by such critics as ‘theoretical’) is distanced from concrete realities (understood as theories based on empirical data) (cf. Sullivan and Solove, 2013).

Importantly, Dewey contended that the value of any philosophy lies in the ability to question,

Does it end in conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments, render them more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful? (Dewey, 1925, p. 7).

Based on this, Sullivan and Solove (2013) point to flaws in critics of Pragmatism which suggest a separation of theory and practice based on Posner’s articulation of Deweyan inquiry – and I am inclined to agree. They argue that Posner’s neo-pragmatic approach is ‘thin’ in dealing with, and attending to, the fundamentals of pragmatism, specifically in considering philosophy (as discussed by Dewey) as a solely academic practice. Such criticism actually points to a particular understanding of what is considered to be ‘theory/theoretical’ and what is ‘practical’. This also points to misreading Dewey (as Sullivan 2001 also discusses regarding other problems) as though Dewey intended a separation of practice and theory. Rather, Dewey was criticising a particular understanding of ‘theory/theoretical’ as

‘absolute/universal truths’ which he argued are in contradiction to the impermanence of concrete living.

I hope that the presentation of transactional ideas throughout this thesis has demonstrated the extent of such a misreading given that what Dewey proposed was quite the opposite of what certain critics seem to have understood. I contend that when writing the book quoted above, Dewey’s intentions were more likely aimed at highlighting issues with some philosophical ideas/articulations which posed what he considered ‘abstract’ ideas without considering the concrete living around them (now considered empirical ‘data’), or themselves as philosophers as parts in a co-constituting research process (also see Sullivan and Solove 2013, for similar suggestions). This defence is supported by Dewey’s (1917) essay ‘The Need for a Recovery in Philosophy’ where he suggested,

the retention by philosophy of the notion of a reality feudally superior to the events of everyday occurrence is the chief source of the increasing isolation of philosophy from common sense and science [...] philosophy in dealing with real difficulties finds itself hampered by reference to realities more real, more ultimate, than those which directly happen (Dewey, 2011, p. 133).

In fact, the importance of theory and practice (which in transactional terms are not separate), specifically where ideas are considered useful only when grounded in concrete living, is the essence of departing from ‘absolute truths’ contended by Dewey throughout his works. Similarly, quests for ‘absolute truths’ or ‘unshifting theories’ beyond empirical realities are exactly the opposite of what I have been arguing throughout.

Human living is so complex and fluctuating that one could never ‘know absolutely’ and without question. However, the transactional approach provides an instrumentally more useful way of understanding the realities of persons:environments living as unfolding, which thinks ‘forward’ – with actual occasions of concrete activities – rather than ‘backwards’ in imposed linear/causal ways that overlooks impermanence. Moreover, I must reiterate that the primary contribution of this research is the way in which I have engaged in an in-depth relation of empirical ‘data’ – the concrete living of three people – with transactional ideas. Thus, I not only ask ‘how can pragmatism generally, and transaction more

specifically, be considered anti-theoretical, unless the core principles are misunderstood?’ but, I also demonstrate the intimate, whole, relation of what is described separately as ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ (and thus, pragmatics as anti-theoretical) throughout.

---

#### 9.5.2 FURTHER RESEARCH CONSIDERATIONS

Further research might consider taking a transactional approach to addressing racial inequality by focusing on the actions of humans, for example. Such a focus on human transactional conduct may provide an opportunity to better understand the reproduction of habits pertaining to race/culture and thus, be better placed to inform how detrimental habits which serve to sustain inequalities might be transformed. This is an urgently important and evolving problem, particularly given the series of recent events involving deaths of young Black people, as well as the development of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) and other anti-discrimination movements.

It is worth returning to a point mentioned in Chapter Five: race is an area which requires much more attention. I would now argue, given the explication pertaining to Serena’s living, that a transactional approach would be more appropriate in better understanding race and race relations in contemporary society as living (including family formation) becomes increasingly complex. Indeed, further attention is needed to better understand race relations within and beyond familial units as people’s lives interweave with family members, and others, across their lifespan, through varying social/cultural fields. Serena is one example of how notions of racial and cultural ‘difference’ can be misconstrued or oversimplified as causing particular outcomes such as ‘poor relations’ with her Pakistani stepfamily, which could in turn be seen as disruptive to her learning.

The importance is more so given the lack of attention paid so far to ‘new’ types of family which better addresses the commonality of interracial relations. As Zinn (2010) reminds us when mentioning globalisation – including the migration of peoples, the advancement of technologies, and the ‘local’ becoming ‘global’ in many ways – it is necessary for novel relations of persons to be explored in more appropriate and in-depth ways, which do not oversimplify race/racism as ‘structural’ or ‘individual’. This must be attended to so as not to undermine the ways relations

will continue to unfold in novel ways globally as humans continue to co-constitute technological innovation (see Hornborg, 2018 for an introduction to some of these points).

Moreover, whilst interracial relations are not ‘novel’ given the extensive history of biracial persons, the way in which biracial persons/interracial relations have evolved socially/culturally in terms of ‘social acceptance’ has changed significantly (see Matthews, 2018 for one illustration of this). For example, interracial marriage/sexual relations are no longer illegal in several countries around the globe. This means that interracial relations have evolved not only biologically where definitive labels of ‘Black’ or ‘BAME’ are limited (cf. Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, 2021) but also, the complexity of living requires more appropriate tools for understanding evolving racial relations socially and culturally. This is given that transacting with different racial and cultural groups is perhaps more common/possible than it has ever been historically. Such changes in the composition of differing and dynamic persons/communities/societies are arguably related to the globalisation/innovation of transportation as much as ideas/thinking about race and culture in more appropriate ways that have previously been prohibited, sometimes by law. At a time when technology has also been part of the evolution of discussions/ideas about race, through expansive developments of media/social media, how can we overlook the rate that perhaps oversimplified analyses may be spreading? However, there is also an opportunity to use such platforms to change the discussions and focus on race as transactions which may unfold into opportunities for habitual activities including cultural customs to not only be reproduced, but *transformed* (see also, Sullivan, 2001). Without such appropriate understanding, thinking about what might be described as racially ‘discriminatory’ activities and how to address these may be misdirected.

For example, the recent Commission Report mentioned earlier suggests that in terms of ‘racial fairness’ (within and beyond education), ‘there are still real obstacles and there are also practical ways to surmount them, but that becomes much harder if people from ethnic minority backgrounds absorb a fatalistic narrative that says the deck is permanently stacked against them’ (p. 9). Whilst I am unsure of the assumptions and approaches which underpinned this suggestion, it is useful to discuss.

If, for example, we are to take a transactional approach then I can agree, not necessarily with the presentation of this statement, but more generally with the idea that structures are ‘permanently stacked against’ specific people such that no change/transformation is possible. To expand then, we as humans are not in total control, but we are each transacting biologically, socially, and culturally with environments and knotting with others such that there is always a co-responsibility in what emerges from the co-constituted nature of transactional activity, as has been discussed. This is part of person:environment transacted activity with others where what might be described as structures or in this case ‘the deck’ is not a ‘thing’ external to human behaviour. Thus, given the co-constitutive nature of transacted activity which is continually ‘back and forth’ and not one dimensional, reproduced habitual activities can only change through transacted human action. Put plainly, the reproductive nature of activities which have secured existing habits/cultural customs (i.e., those which have privileged specific persons / communities in some social fields) have unfolded through complex threading of continuing human activities and therefore, human activity has the potential to transform future patterns of activity in the same way it has secured them. Hence, the focus must be on the deeply social complexity of transactional activity, rather than on ‘structures’ or individuals.

This offers a contribution to the commission report which appears to be suggesting that agentic action is the way to overcome ‘fatalistic narratives’ regarding barriers. If more in-depth and empirically rich research could be conducted to consider contemporary racial issues particularly those of late, we might be in a better position to encourage reconstruction of unproductive habits, particularly those which reproductively favour ‘Whiteness’ (see Sullivan, 2001, 2006; MacMullan, 2009). What Serena’s account demonstrates is that race and ideas of ‘Whiteness’ are not generalisable and a more thorough understanding of the transactional nature of ‘Whiteness’, and indeed race/racial relations more broadly, as reproduced habits which have served to divide communities, is increasingly timely and necessary.



## 9.6 A FINAL WORD

*Everything that bars freedom and fullness of communication sets up barriers that divide human beings* (Dewey, 2002, p. 292).

This research has taken person:environment as the full transactional unit of analysis to consider how young people live and learn in complex ways particularly as they are experiencing poverty and associated adversity. In taking a transactional approach with a focus on evolving habitual activities, reconfiguration, and learning, I have suggested how some young people may experience challenges as one part of their whole living and thus, continue to ‘do well’ educationally. As outlined above, the contribution of this research is both empirical and methodological in encouraging future research which better attends to the concrete realities of full, complex living as it unfolds in unpredictable, dynamic ways.

It is my hope that the ideas I communicate through this thesis contributes to uniting us all, whilst appreciating our uniqueness, for a more progressive, equal, future *together*.

## LIST OF REFERENCES

- Abowitz, K. K. (2000). A Pragmatist Revisioning of Resistance Theory. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37(4), 877–907.  
<https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312037004877>
- Alderson, P., & Morrow, V. (2011). *The ethics of research with children and young people: a practical handbook* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Allison James, & Tradução Deborah Esther Grajzer. (2019). Giving voice to children's voices: practices and problems, pitfalls and potentials. *Zero-a-seis*, 21(40), 219–248. <https://doi.org/10.5007/1980-4512.2019v21n40p219>
- Almquist, Y. B., & Brännström, L. (2018). Childhood Adversity and Trajectories of Disadvantage Through Adulthood: Findings from the Stockholm Birth Cohort Study. *Social Indicators Research*, 136(1), 225–245. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-016-1528-6>
- Alsaker, S., Josephsson, S., & Dickie, V. (2013). Exploring the Transactional Quality of Everyday Occupations Through Narrative-in-Action: Meaning-Making Among Women Living with Chronic Conditions Transactional Perspectives on Occupation. In Cutchin, M. P. & Dickie, V. (Eds.), *Transactional Perspectives on Occupation* (pp. 65-77). Netherlands: Springer. 10.1007/97894007442956
- Anderson, R. (2018). And Still WE Rise: Parent-Child Relationships, Resilience, and School Readiness in Low-Income Urban Black Families. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 32(1), 60–70. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000348>
- Arievitch, I., & Stetsenko, A. (2014). The “magic of signs”: Developmental trajectory of cultural mediation. In A. Yasnitsky, R. Van der Veer, & M. Ferrari (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Cultural-Historical Psychology* (Cambridge Handbooks in Psychology, pp. 217-244). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139028097.013
- Armstrong-Gibbs, F. (2019). On becoming an organizational autoethnographer: Considering the ethical perspectives of the research application process. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography*, 8(2), 232–242. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOE-11-2017-0058>
- Armstrong-Gibbs, F. (2019). On becoming an organizational autoethnographer: Considering the ethical perspectives of the research application process. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography*, 8(2), 232–242. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOE-11-2017-0058>
- Asmundson, G., & Afifi, T. (2021). *Adverse childhood experiences: using evidence to advance research, practice, policy, and prevention*. Academic Press.

- Aspelin, J. (2011) Co-Existence and Co-Operation: The Two-Dimensional Conception of Education. *Education*, 1(1), 6-11.  
<https://doi.org/10.5923/j.edu.20110101.02>
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1993). *Toward a philosophy of the act*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Barak, A. (2020). My Childhood Neighbourhood: A Critical Autoethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 26(6), 667–673.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800419843565>
- Beach, D., Bagley, C., & Silva, S. (2018). *The Wiley handbook of ethnography of education*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Bennett. (1980). Dewey on Causality and Novelty. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 16(3), 225–241.
- Berg, Rastila, M., Saarela, J., & Hjern, A. (2014). Parental Death During Childhood and Subsequent School Performance. *Paediatrics (Evanston)*, 133(4), 682–689.  
<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2013-2771>
- Bester, G., & Kuyper, N. (2020). The Influence of Additional Educational Support on Poverty-Stricken Adolescents' Resilience and Academic Performance. *Africa Education Review*, 17(3), 158–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2019.1689149>
- Bibby, T., Lupton, R., & Raffo, C. (2017). *Responding to Poverty and Disadvantage in Schools: a Reader for Teachers*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Black, L., Choudry, S., Howker, E., Phillips, R., Swanson, D., & Williams, J. (2021). Realigning Funds of Identity with struggle against capital: the contradictory unity of use and exchange value in cultural fields. *Mind, Culture and Activity*, 28(2), 97–110.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2021.1908364>
- Blair, D. (2009). Learner agency: To understand and to be understood. *British Journal of Music Education*, 26(2), 173–187.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S02650517090008420>
- Bos, J. (2020). *Research ethics for students in the social sciences*. Springer.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-48>
- Bower, C., & Rossi, R. (2019). How Do Promise Neighbourhoods' Strategies Align With Research Evidence on Poverty and Education? *Education and Urban Society*, 51(9), 1172–1201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124518784651>
- Brennan, M. (2014). Perezhivanie: What Have We Missed about Infant Care? *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 15(3), 284–292.  
<https://doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2014.15.3.284>

- Brennan, M. (2016). Perezhivanie and the silent phenomenon in infant care: Rethinking socioculturally informed infant pedagogy. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 17(3), 317–327. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1463949116660953>
- Bright, N. (2011a). “Off The Model”: resistant spaces, school disaffection and “aspiration” in a former coal-mining community. *Children’s Geographies*, 9(1), 63–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2011.540440>
- Bright, N. (2011b). “Non-Servile Virtuosi” in Insubordinate Spaces: School Disaffection, Refusal and Resistance in a Former English Coalfield. *European Educational Research Journal EERJ*, 10(4), 502–515. <https://doi.org/10.2304/eeerj.2011.10.4.502>
- Bright, N. (2012). A Practice of Concrete Utopia? Informal Youth Support and the Possibility of “Redemptive Remembering” in a UK Coal-Mining Area. *Power and Education*, 4(3), 315–326. <https://doi.org/10.2304/power.2012.4.3.315>
- Bright, N. (2016). “The lady is not returning!†”: educational precarity and a social haunting in the UK coalfields. *Ethnography and Education*, 11(2), 142–157. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457823.2015.1101381>
- Bright, N. (2018). “A Chance to Talk Like This”: Gender, Education, and Social Haunting in a UK Coalfield. In *Education and Working-Class Youth* (pp. 105–129). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90671-3\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90671-3_5)
- Brinkmann. (2011). Dewey’s neglected psychology: Rediscovering his transactional approach. *Theory & Psychology*, 21(3), 298–317. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354310376123>
- British Educational Research Association. (2018). *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* [eBook] (4th ed.). London. Retrieved from <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018-online>
- Bryan, J., Williams, J. M., & Griffin, D. (2020). Fostering Educational Resilience and Opportunities in Urban Schools Through Equity-Focused School–Family–Community Partnerships. *Professional School Counselling*, 23(1\_part\_2), 2156759–. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X19899179>
- Buber, M. (1958). *I and Thou: with a postscript by the author added* (2nd ed.). T.& T. Clark.
- Buber, M. (2002). *Between man and man*. Routledge.
- Burman, E. (2017). Deconstructing Developmental Psychology. In *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315727127>

- Burman, E. (2019). Child as method: implications for decolonising educational research. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 28(1), 4–26.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2017.1412266>
- Burrell, Mehlum, L., & Qin, P. (2020). Parental death by external causes and risk of hospital-treated deliberate self-harm in bereaved offspring. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 30(4), 539–548. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-020-01534-3>
- Campbell, L., & McKendrick, J. (2017). Beyond aspirations: deploying the capability approach to tackle the under-representation in higher education of young people from deprived communities. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 39(2), 120–137. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2017.1293630>
- Campbell, S. (2016). Perspectives: Method and methodology in nursing research. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 21(8), 656–659.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987116679583>
- Cheang, G. (2018). Why some children from poor families do well-an in-depth analysis of positive deviance cases in Singapore. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being*, 13(sup1), 1563431–1563431. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2018.1563431>
- Chen, F. (2015). Parents' perezhivanie supports children's development of emotion regulation: a holistic view. *Early Child Development and Care*, 185(6), 851–867.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2014.961445>
- Choi, J.-K., Wang, D., & Jackson, A. P. (2019). Adverse experiences in early childhood and their longitudinal impact on later behavioral problems of children living in poverty. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 98, 104181–104181.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104181>
- Clarà, M. (2015). Representation and emotion causation: A cultural psychology approach. *Culture & Psychology*, 21(1), 37–58.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X14568687>
- Clarà, M. (2016). The Many Lives of the Word Perezhivanie. *Mind, Culture, and Activity: Symposium on Perezhivanie*, 23(4), 339–342.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2016.1199700>
- Clarà, M. (2016). The Many Lives of the Word Perezhivanie. *Mind, Culture, and Activity: Symposium on Perezhivanie*, 23(4), 339–342.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2016.1199700>
- Cockroft, C., & Atkinson, C. (2017). *The effectiveness of affective literacy interventions for adolescents: a review of the literature*.
- Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities. (2021). *Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities: The Report*. GOV.UK.

- Creswell, J. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches* (4th ed. International Student Edition.). SAGE Publications.
- Crivello, G., & Morrow, V. (2020). Against the Odds: Why Some Children Fare Well in the Face of Adversity. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 56(5), 999–1016. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2019.1626837>
- Crozier, G., Reay, D., & Clayton, J. (2019). Working the Borderlands: working-class students constructing hybrid identities and asserting their place in higher education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 40(7), 922–937. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2019.1623013>
- Cummings, C., Dyson, A., & Todd, L. (2011). *Beyond the school gates: can full service and extended schools overcome disadvantage?* Routledge.
- d’Errico, M., Garbero, A., Letta, M., & Winters, P. (2020). Evaluating Program Impact on Resilience: Evidence from Lesotho’s Child Grants Programme. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 56(12), 2212–2234. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2020.1746279>
- Dawson, C. (2019). *Introduction to research methods* (Fifth edition.). Robinson.
- DeJoseph, M. L., Sifre, R. D., Raver, C. C., Blair, C. B., & Berry, D. (2021). Capturing Environmental Dimensions of Adversity and Resources in the Context of Poverty Across Infancy Through Early Adolescence: A Moderated Nonlinear Factor Model. *Child Development*, 92(4), e457–e475. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13504>
- Dépelteau, F. (2018). *The Palgrave handbook of relational sociology*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9>
- Dewey, J. (1896). The reflex arc concept in psychology. *The Psychological Review*, 3, 357–370.
- Dewey, J. (1900). Psychology and social practice. *The Psychological Review*, 7, 105–124.
- Dewey, J. (1910). *How we think*. D.C. Heath & Co.
- Dewey, J. (1922). *Human nature and conduct: An introduction to social psychology*. Henry Holt and Company. <https://doi.org/10.1037/14663-001>
- Dewey, J. (1925). *Experience and nature*. Chicago, IL: Open Court.
- Dewey, J. (1922/1930). *The quest for certainty: a study of the relation of knowledge and action*. G. Allen & Unwin Ltd.
- Dewey, J. (1958). *Experience and Nature*. Dover Publications.

- Dewey, J. (1966). *Democracy and education*. New York, NY: Free Press. (Original work published 1916).
- Dewey, J. (1980). The need for social psychology. In J.A. Boydston (Ed.), *The middle works: Vol. 10. 1916–1917* (pp. 43–63). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. (Original work published 1917).
- Dewey, J. (2002). Creative Democracy - The Task before us. In Fisch, M. (Eds). *Classic American philosophers: Peirce, James, Royce, Santayana, Dewey, Whitehead : selections from their writings* (pp. 389-395). Fordham University Press. <https://www-fulcrum-org.manchester.idm.oclc.org/concern/monographs/9c67wn70r>
- Dewey, J. (2005). From Art as Experience (1934). In Capps J. & Capps D. (Eds.), *James and Dewey on Belief and Experience* (pp. 268-284). Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt1xcr6t.23>
- Dewey, J. (2011). The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy. In R. Talisse & S. Aikin (Eds.), *The Pragmatism Reader: From Peirce through the Present* (pp. 109–140). Princeton, United States: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvcm4fzv.10>
- DfE (Department for Education). (2014). *School and College-level Strategies to Raise Aspirations of High-achieving Disadvantaged Pupils to Pursue Higher Education Investigation*. Retrieved from [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/278117/RR296\\_-School\\_and\\_College-level\\_Strategies\\_to\\_Raise\\_Aspirations\\_of\\_High-achieving\\_Disadvantaged\\_Pupils\\_to\\_Pursue\\_Higher\\_Education\\_Investigation.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/278117/RR296_-School_and_College-level_Strategies_to_Raise_Aspirations_of_High-achieving_Disadvantaged_Pupils_to_Pursue_Higher_Education_Investigation.pdf) [access 2 April 2020]
- Diane Reay. (2004). “Mostly Roughts and Toughts”: Social Class, Race and Representation in Inner City Schooling. *Sociology (Oxford)*, 38(5), 1005–1023. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038504047183>
- Dillabough, J., & Yoon, E. (2018). Youth geographies of urban estrangement in the Canadian city: risk management, race relations and the “sacrificial stranger.” *Children’s Geographies*, 16(2), 128–142. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2017.1334113>
- Dobbie, W., & Fryer, R. (2011). Are high-quality schools enough to increase achievement among the poor?: Evidence from the Harlem children’s zone. *American Economic Journal. Applied Economics*, 3(3), 158–187. <https://doi.org/10.1257/app.3.3.158>
- Dolby, N., Dimitriadis, G., & Willis, P. (2004). *Learning to labor in new times*. RoutledgeFalmer.

Donati, P. (2010). *Relational sociology: a new paradigm for the social sciences*. Routledge.

Donati, P., & Archer, M. (2015). *The Relational Subject*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

dos Santos Bezerra, & Rossato, M. (2018). Relational Dynamics in Overcoming School Learning Difficulties. In *Subjectivity within Cultural-Historical Approach* (pp. 199–213). Springer Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3155-8\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3155-8_12)

Dreier, O. (2015). Interventions in everyday lives: How clients use psychotherapy outside their sessions. *European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling: The Use of Qualitative Research in Developing Users' and Providers' Perspectives in the Psychological Therapies - Guest Editor: Evrinomy Avdi*, 17(2), 114–128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642537.2015.1027781>

Du, X., & Wong, B. (2019). Science career aspiration and science capital in China and UK: a comparative study using PISA data. *International Journal of Science Education*, 41(15), 2136–2155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500693.2019.1662135>

Duke, N. N. (2020). Adolescent Adversity, School Attendance and Academic Achievement: School Connection and the Potential for Mitigating Risk. *The Journal of School Health*, 90(8), 618–629. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12910>

Duke, N. N. (2020). Adolescent Adversity, School Attendance and Academic Achievement: School Connection and the Potential for Mitigating Risk. *The Journal of School Health*, 90(8), 618–629. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12910>

Dyson, A., & Raffo, C. (2007). Education and disadvantage: the role of community-oriented schools. *Oxford Review of Education*, 33(3), 297–314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054980701324685>

Dyson, A., Hertzman, C., Roberts, H., Tunstill, J. and Vaghri, Z. (2009) Childhood development, education and health inequalities. <https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/projects/early-years-and-education-task-group-report/early-years-and-education-task-group-full-report.pdf>

Dyson, A., Kerr, K., & Raffo, C. (2012). Area-Based Initiatives in England: Do They Have a Future? *Revue française de pédagogie*, 178, 27–38. <https://doi.org/10.4000/rfp.3518>

Education Endowment Foundation. (2017). *The Attainment Gap*. Retrieved March 2, 2020 from, [https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Annual\\_Reports/EEF\\_Attainment\\_Gap\\_Report\\_2018\\_-\\_print.pdf](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Annual_Reports/EEF_Attainment_Gap_Report_2018_-_print.pdf)



- Edwards, J. (2021). Ethical Autoethnography: Is it Possible? *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20, 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406921995306>
- Ellis, C. (2007). Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives: Relational Ethics in Research With Intimate Others. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(1), 3–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800406294947>
- Emirbayer, M. (1997). Manifesto for a Relational Sociology 1. *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(2), 281–317. <https://doi.org/10.1086/231209>
- Ercikan, K., & Roth, W.M. (2014). Limits of Generalizing in Education Research: Why Criteria for Research Generalization Should Include Population Heterogeneity and Uses of Knowledge Claims. *Teachers College Record*. 116 (1). 1-28.
- Eyerman, R. (2019). *Memory, trauma, and identity*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Felitti, V., Anda, R., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D., Spitz, A., Edwards, V., Koss, M., & Marks, J. (1998). Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14(4), 245–258. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797\(98\)00017-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797(98)00017-8)
- Ferholt, B., & Nilsson, M. (2016). Perezhivaniya as a Means of Creating the Aesthetic Form of Consciousness. *Mind, Culture, and Activity: Symposium on Perezhivanie*, 23(4), 294–304. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2016.1186195>
- Fesmire, S. (2003). *John Dewey and moral imagination: pragmatism in ethics*. Indiana University Press.
- Fladvad. (2021). Rethinking democracy in times of crises: Towards a pragmatist approach to the geographies of emerging publics. *Social Science Information*, 60(2), 230–252. <https://doi.org/10.1177/05390184211007107>
- Fleer, M. (2016). An Everyday and Theoretical Reading of “Perezhivanie” for Informing Research in Early Childhood Education. *International Research in Early Childhood Education*, 7(1), 34–49.
- Forrester, G., Kurth, J., Vincent, P., & Oliver, M. (2020). Schools as community assets: an exploration of the merits of an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach. *Educational Review (Birmingham)*, 72(4), 443–458. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2018.1529655>
- Gao, Y., & Eccles, J. (2020). Who lower their aspirations? The development and protective factors of college-associated career aspirations in adolescence. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 116, 103-367. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2019.103367>
- Gartland, D., Riggs, E., Muyeen, S., Giallo, R., Afifi, T. O., MacMillan, H., Herrman, H., Bulford, E., & Brown, S. J. (2019). What factors are associated with

resilient outcomes in children exposed to social adversity? A systematic review. *BMJ Open*, 9(4), e024870–e024870. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2018-024870>

Gergen, K. J. (2009). *Relational being: beyond self and community*. Oxford University Press.

Giovanelli, A., Mondì, C. F., Reynolds, A. J., & Ou, S.-R. (2020). Adverse childhood experiences: Mechanisms of risk and resilience in a longitudinal urban cohort. *Development and Psychopathology*, 32(4), 1418–1439. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S095457941900138X>

Glassman, M. (2004). Running in Circles: Chasing Dewey. *Educational Theory*, 54(3), 315–341. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0013-2004.2004.00022.x>

Poverty Monitor: Child Poverty. (2021). Retrieved September 17, 2021, from <https://www.gmpovertyaction.org/poverty-monitor-child-poverty/>

Gokpınar, T., & Reiss, M. (2016). The role of outside-school factors in science education: a two-stage theoretical model linking Bourdieu and Sen, with a case study. *International Journal of Science Education*, 38(8), 1278–1303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500693.2016.1188332>

González Rey, F. (2016). Vygotsky's Concept of *Perezhivanie* in The Psychology of Art and at the Final Moment of His Work: Advancing His Legacy. *Mind, Culture, and Activity: Symposium on Perezhivanie*, 23(4), 305–314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2016.1186196>

González Rey, F. (2016). Vygotsky's Concept of *Perezhivanie* in The Psychology of Art and at the Final Moment of His Work: Advancing His Legacy. *Mind, Culture, and Activity: Symposium on Perezhivanie*, 23(4), 305–314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2016.1186196>

GOV.UK. (2018, June 22). *About us*. Retrieved April 3, 2021, from <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service/about>

Grace, K., & Eng, S. (2020). A capabilities approach to female graduates' post-secondary academic and career-related goal pursuit in Siem Reap Cambodia. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 19(3), 281–299. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10671-020-09259-5>

Hall, S. (2019). *Everyday life in austerity: family, friends and intimate relations*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-17094-3>.

Hammersley, M. (2018). Ethnography of Schooling in England: A History and Assessment of Its Early Development. In Beach, D., Bagley, C., & Silva, S. (2018). *The Wiley handbook of ethnography of education*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2019). *Ethnography: principles in practice* (Fourth edition.). Routledge.
- Harold, G., Shelton, K., Goeke-Morey, M., & Cummings, E. (2004). Marital Conflict, Child Emotional Security about Family Relationships and Child Adjustment. *Social Development (Oxford, England)*, 13(3), 350–376. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9507.2004.00272.x>
- Harrison, W. (2018). Challenging discourses of aspiration: The role of expectations and attainment in access to higher education. *British Educational Research Journal*, 44(5), 914–938. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3475>
- Hart, C., & Brando, N. (2018). A capability approach to children’s well-being, agency and participatory rights in education. *European Journal of Education*, 53(3), 293–309. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12284>
- Hart, C., & Page, A. (2020). The capability approach and school food education and culture in England: “gingerbread men ain’t gonna get me very far”. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 50(6), 673–693. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2020.1764498>
- Hawkins, C. (2017). Do aspirations really matter? *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 27(3), 39–54.
- Hays-Grudo, J., & Morris, A. (2020). *Adverse and protective childhood experiences: a developmental perspective*. American Psychological Association.
- Heather Joshi. (2012). From cradle to career: evidence from the British birth cohort studies on the family, education and employment - introduction. *National Institute Economic Review*, 222(222), R1–R6. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002795011222200101>
- Hernandez-Martinez, P., & Williams, J. (2013). Against the odds: resilience in mathematics students in transition. *British Educational Research Journal*, 39(1), 45–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411926.2011.623153>
- Hildebrand, D. (2013). Dewey's pragmatism: Instrumentalism and meliorism. In A. Malachowski (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Pragmatism* (Cambridge Companions to Philosophy, pp. 55-80). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CCO9781139022132.006
- Hildreth, R. W. (2009). Reconstructing Dewey on Power. *Political Theory*, 37(6), 780–807. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591709345454>
- Hinsdale, M. (2016) Relational Pedagogy. *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Education*. Retrieved 4 Nov. 2021, from <https://oxfordre.com/education/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264093-e-28>.
- Ingold. (2015). *The life of lines*. Routledge.

- Ingold, T. (2011). *Being alive: essays on movement, knowledge and description*. Routledge.
- Ingram, N. (2009). Working-class boys, educational success and the misrecognition of working-class culture. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 30(4), 421–434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425690902954604>
- Ingram, N. (2011). Within School and Beyond the Gate: The Complexities of Being Educationally Successful and Working Class. *Sociology (Oxford)*, 45(2), 287–302. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038510394017>
- Ingram, N. (2018). *Working-Class Boys and Educational Success: Teenage Identities, Masculinities and Urban Schooling* (1st edition..). Palgrave Macmillan UK. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-40159-5>
- Iyall Smith, K., & Leavy, P. (2008). *Hybrid identities: theoretical and empirical examinations*. Brill.
- Jaatinen, R. (2007). *Learning Languages, Learning Life Skills: Autobiographical reflexive approach to teaching and learning a foreign language*. Springer US. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-37064-4>
- Jenkins, C., Canaan, J., Filippakou, O., & Strudwick, K. (2011). The troubling concept of class: reflecting on our “failure” to encourage sociology students to recognise their classed locations using autobiographical methods. *Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences*, 3(3), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.11120/elss.2011.03030013>
- Jocson, K., & Martínez, I. (2020). Extending Learning Opportunities: Youth Research in CTE and the Limits of a Theory of Change. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 53(1-2), 165–176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2020.1763552>
- Jornet, A., & Damşa, C. (2019). Unit of analysis from an ecological perspective: Beyond the individual/social dichotomy. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 300-329. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2019.100329>
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2021). What is poverty? Retrieved April 3, 2021, from <https://www.jrf.org.uk/our-work/what-is-poverty>
- Kailaheimo-Lönnqvist, & Erola, J. (2020). Child’s age at parental death and university education. *European Societies*, 22(4), 433–455. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1719179>
- Simpson, & Simmons, R. (2021). Education and social haunting in post-industrial Britain: primary school pupils’ experiences of schooling in a former coalmining community. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2020.1870659>

- Kathleen E. Kiernan, & Fiona K. Mensah. (2011). Poverty, family resources and children's early educational attainment: the mediating role of parenting. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(2), 317–336.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01411921003596911>
- Kerr, K., & Dyson, A. (2016). Networked Social Enterprises: A New Model of Community Schooling for Disadvantaged Neighborhoods Facing Challenging Times. *Education Sciences*, 6(4), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci6030020>
- Kerr, K., Dyson, A., & Raffo, C. (2014). *Education, disadvantage and place: making the local matter*. Policy Press.
- Kerr, K., Dyson, D., & Gallannaugh, F. (2016). *Conceptualising school-community relations in disadvantaged neighbourhoods: mapping the literature*.
- Kivinen, & Piirainen, T. (2019). Updating Dewey's Transactional Theory of Action in Connection with Evolutionary Theory. In *John Dewey and the Notion of Transaction* (pp. 195–222). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26380-5\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26380-5_7)
- Kozulin, A. (2016). The Mystery of Perezhivanie. *Mind, Culture, and Activity: Symposium on Perezhivanie*, 23(4), 356–357.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2016.1230134>
- Kumar, R. (2018). *Research methodology: a step-by-step guide for beginners* (Fifth edition.). SAGE.
- Lafavor, T., Boer, D. D., & Poole, M. (2020). Intergenerational Effects of Early Parental Adversity on Child Developmental Outcomes among Families Living in Emergency Homeless Shelters. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 31(3), 1264–1280. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hpu.2020.0093>
- Lahman, M. K. E. (2021). Beneath the Lemon Tree: An Interrupted Family Story. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 27(1), 86–89. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800419897680>
- Lampert, J., Ball, A., Garcia-Carrion, R., & Burnett, B. (2020). Poverty and schooling: three cases from Australia, the United States, and Spain. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 48(1), 60–78.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2019.1602863>
- Lawson, H., & Lawson, M. (2020). Student Engagement and Disengagement as a Collective Action Problem. *Education Sciences*, 10(8), 212–.  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10080212>
- Lawson, H., & van Veen, D. (2015). *Developing Community Schools, Community Learning Centers, Extended-Service Schools and Multi-service Schools: International Exemplars for Practice, Policy and Research*. Springer International Publishing AG. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-25664-1>

- Lawson, K., Atherton, O., Ferrer, E., & Robins, R. (2020). The Development of Educational Aspirations and Expectations From Adolescence to Young Adulthood: A Longitudinal Study of Mexican-Origin Youth. *Social Psychological & Personality Science*, 11(7), 965–974. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550619893961>
- Ledertoug, M. M., Tidmand, L., Las Hayas, C., Gabrielli, S., & Carbone, S. (2021). Upright – Well-being & Resilience Education. In White, M. A., & McCallum, F (Eds). *Wellbeing and resilience education: Covid-19 and its impact on education systems* (pp. 51-76). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003134190>
- Lee, B., & Byun, S. (2019). Socioeconomic Status, Vocational Aspirations, School Tracks, and Occupational Attainment in South Korea. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 48(8), 1494–1505. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-019-01056-5>
- Lee, C. (2018). Culture, consent and confidentiality in workplace autoethnography. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography*, 7(3), 302–319. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOE-06-2017-0032>
- Leont'ev, A. N., & Hall, M. J. (1978). *Activity, consciousness, and personality*. Prentice-Hall.
- Loomis, A. M. (2021). Effects of Household and Environmental Adversity on Indices of Self-Regulation for Latino and African American Preschool Children: Closing the School Readiness Gap. *Early Education and Development*, 32(2), 228–248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2020.1745513>
- MacIntyre, A. (2007). *After virtue a study in moral theory*. University of Notre Dame Press.
- Magalhães Goulart, D. & González Rey, F. (2019). Studying Subjectivity in Mental Health Services: Education, Subjective Development and the Ethics of the Subject. In González Rey, F., Magalhães Goulart, D., & Mitjans Martínez, A. (Ed). *Subjectivity within cultural-historical approach: theory, methodology and research*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3155-8>
- Røn Larsen, M., & Hvidtfeldt Stanek, A. (2015) Young children and their conduct of everyday life, *Nordic Psychology*, 67(3), 195-209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19012276.2015.1062256>
- Mapedzahama, V., & Dune, T. (2017). A Clash of Paradigms? Ethnography and Ethics Approval. *SAGE Open*, 7(1), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017697167>
- Marshall, C. A., Nolan, S., & Newton, D. P. (2016). *Widening participation, higher education and non-traditional students: supporting transitions through foundation programmes*. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Martin Tolich, & Maureen H. Fitzgerald. (2006). If Ethics Committees were Designed for Ethnography. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, 1(2), 71–78. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jer.2006.1.2.71>
- Martin, J. L., 2003. What is field theory? *American journal of Sociology*, 109 (1), 1–49. <https://doi.org/10.1086/375201>
- Matera, V., & Biscaldi, A. (2021). *Ethnography: a theoretically oriented practice*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51720-5>
- Matthews, D. (2018). *Voices of the Windrush generation: the real story told by the people themselves*. Blink Publishing.
- McElvany, N., Ferdinand, H., Gebauer, M., Bos, W., Huelmann, T., Köller, O., & Schöber, C. (2018). Attainment-aspiration gap in students with a migration background: The role of self-efficacy. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 65, 159–166. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2018.05.002>
- McKenna, M. (2020). Improving Educational Outcomes through Getting It Right for Every Child in Glasgow. *European Review (Chichester, England)*, 28(S1), S86–S92. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798720000927>
- McKenzie, E. A. (2015). An Autoethnographic Inquiry Into the Experience of Grief After Traumatic Loss. *Illness, Crisis, and Loss*, 23(2), 93–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1054137315576620>
- Mikhailov, F. (2001). The “Other Within” for the Psychologist. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 39(1), 6–31. <https://doi.org/10.2753/RPO1061-040539016>
- Mooney, S., Bunting, L., & Coulter, S. (2020). Incorporating ACEs in relationship-based social work practice: The Family Life Stories workbook. *Scottish Affairs*, 29(4), 564–581. <https://doi.org/10.3366/scot.2020.0345>
- Mowat, J. G. (2019). Exploring the impact of social inequality and poverty on the mental health and wellbeing and attainment of children and young people in Scotland. *Improving Schools*, 22(3), 204–223. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480219835323>
- Murphy, A., Steele, H., Bate, J., Nikitiades, A., Allman, B., Bonuck, K., Meissner, P., & Steele, M. (2015). Group Attachment-Based Intervention: Trauma-Informed Care for Families With Adverse Childhood Experiences. *Family & Community Health*, 38(3), 268–279. <https://doi.org/10.1097/FCH.0000000000000074>
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. (2019). Provisional Notes on Decolonizing Research Methodology and Undoing Its Dirty History. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 35(4), 481–492. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0169796X19880417>

- Nelson, J. K., Hynes, M., Sharpe, S., Paradies, Y., & Dunn, K. (2018). Witnessing Anti-White “Racism”: White Victimhood and “Reverse Racism” in Australia. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 39(3), 339–358. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2018.1459516>
- Nelson, R. D. (1995). Pragmatic validity in Mannheim and Dewey: a reassessment of the epistemological critique of Ideology and Utopia. *History of the Human Sciences*, 8(3), 25–45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/095269519500800302>
- Nogueira, A. (2014). Emotional experience, meaning, and sense production: Interweaving concepts to dialogue with the funds of identity approach. *Culture & Psychology*, 20(1), 49–58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X13515939>
- Nussbaum, M., & Sen, A. (1993). *The quality of life*. Oxford Clarendon.
- Pan, J., Zaff, J. F., & Porche, M. (2020). Social Support, Childhood Adversities, and Academic Outcomes: A Latent Class Analysis. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 25(3), 251–271. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10824669.2019.1708744>
- Patterson, Verdery, A. M., & Daw, J. (2020). Linked Lives and Childhood Experience of Family Death on Educational Attainment. *Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, 6, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023120975594>
- Frenzel, T. (2016). What do we mean when we talk about selective universities? Retrieved April 17, 2021, from <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/what-do-we-mean-when-we-talk-about-selective-universities/>
- Pedwell. (2017). Habit and the Politics of Social Change: A Comparison of Nudge Theory and Pragmatist Philosophy. *Body & Society*, 23(4), 59–94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X17734619>
- Pinar, W. F. (1981). “Whole, Bright, Deep with Understanding”: Issues in Qualitative Research and Autobiographical Method. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 13(3), 173–188. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0022027810130302>
- Piso, Z., & Thompson, P. B. (2019). Dewey and Environmental Philosophy. In *The Oxford Handbook of Dewey* (1st ed.). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190491192.013.26>
- Platt, J. M., McLaughlin, K. A., Luedtke, A. R., Ahern, J., Kaufman, A. S., & Keyes, K. M. (2018). Targeted Estimation of the Relationship Between Childhood Adversity and Fluid Intelligence in a US Population Sample of Adolescents. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 187(7), 1456–1466. <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwy006>
- Poole, A., & Huang, J. (2018). Resituating Funds of Identity Within Contemporary Interpretations of Perezhivanie. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 25(2), 125–137. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2018.1434799>



- Post, P. B., Grybush, A. L., Elmadani, A., & Lockhart, C. E. (2020). Fostering Resilience in Classrooms Through Child-Teacher Relationship Training. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, 29(1), 9–19. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000107>
- Price, L. (2014) Hume's Two Causalities and Social Policy, *Journal of Critical Realism*, 13(4), 385–398, <https://doi.org/10.1179/1476743014Z.000000000034>
- Prix, & Erola, J. (2017). Does death really make us equal? Educational attainment and resource compensation after paternal death in Finland. *Social Science Research*, 64, 171–183. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2016.10.012>
- Pyysiäinen, J. (2021). Sociocultural affordances and enactment of agency: A transactional view. *Theory & Psychology*, 31(4), 491–512. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354321989431>
- Radcliff, E., Crouch, E., Strompolis, M., & Srivastav, A. (2019). Homelessness in Childhood and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 23(6), 811–820. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-018-02698-w>
- Raffo, C. (2014). *Improving educational equity in urban contexts*. Routledge.
- Raffo, C., & Dyson, A. (2007). Full service extended schools and educational inequality in urban contexts - new opportunities for progress? *Journal of Education Policy*, 22(3), 263–282. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930701269160>
- Raffo, C., & Roth, W., M. (2020). Learner agency in urban schools? A pragmatic transactional approach. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 41(4), 447–461. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2020.1748571>
- Raffo, Dyson, A., Gunter, H., Hall, D., Jones, L., & Kalambouka, A. (2010). *Education and poverty in affluent countries*. Routledge.
- Raffo, C., Dyson, A., Kerr, K., & Wigelsworth, M. (2012). *Developing Children's Zones for England*. Save the Children.
- Rambla, X. (2018). The politics of early school leaving: how do the European Union and the Spanish educational authorities “frame” the policy and formulate a “theory of change.” *Journal of European Integration*, 40(1), 83–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2017.1404053>
- Ramos M.V, & Renshaw P. (2017). The contours of Perezhivanie: Visualising children's emotional experiences in place. *ультурно-Историческая Психология*, 13(1), 105–128. <https://doi.org/10.17759/chp.2017130110>
- Reay, D. (2001). Finding or losing yourself?: Working-class relationships to education. *Journal of Education Policy*, 16(4), 333–346. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930110054335>

- Reay, D. (2002). Shaun's Story: Troubling discourses of white working-class masculinities. *Gender and Education*, 14(3), 221–234.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0954025022000010695>
- Reay, D. (2006). The zombie stalking English schools: social class and educational inequality. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 54(3), 288–307.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8527.2006.00351.x>
- Reay, D. (2007). “Unruly Places”: Inner-city Comprehensives, Middle-class Imaginaries and Working-class Children. *Urban Studies (Edinburgh, Scotland)*, 44(7), 1191–1201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980701302965>
- Reay, D. (2012). What would a socially just education system look like?: saving the minnows from the pike. *Journal of Education Policy*, 27(5), 587–599.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2012.710015>
- Reay, D. (2013). Social mobility, a panacea for austere times: tales of emperors, frogs, and tadpoles. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 34(5-6), 660–677.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2013.816035>
- Reay, D. (2017). *Miseducation: inequality, education and the working classes*. Policy Press.
- Reay, D. (2018). Working class educational transitions to university: The limits of success. *European Journal of Education*, 53(4), 528–540.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12298>
- Reay, D. (2020a). The Perils and Penalties of Meritocracy: Sanctioning Inequalities and Legitimizing Prejudice. *The Political Quarterly (London. 1930)*, 91(2), 405–412. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12829>
- Reay, D. (2020b). Sociology of education: a personal reflection on politics, power and pragmatism. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 41(6), 817–829.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2020.1755228>
- Reimers, F. (2021). *Implementing deeper learning and 21st century education reforms: building an education renaissance after a global pandemic*. Springer.
- Renshaw, P. (2019). The consequences of ADHD diagnosis: integrating scaffolding and perezhivanie to redesign pedagogy for ADHD-diagnosed children. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties: Diagnoses and Their Instructional Implications-Children's Agency and Participation in School Activities*, 24(3), 301–305.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2019.1630994>
- Rhodes, P. (2020). *Beyond the psychology industry: how else might we heal?* Cham, Switzerland: Springer.

- Richardson, E., Phillips, M., Colom, A., Khalil, I., & Nichols, J. (2019). Out of School Factors Affecting Indigenous Girls' Educational Attainment: A Theory of Change for the Opening Opportunities Program in Rural Guatemala. *Comparative and International Education (Ottawa, Ont.)*, 47(2). <https://doi.org/10.5206/cie-eci.v47i2.9330>
- Robeyns, I., 2021. The Capability Approach (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy). [online] Plato.stanford.edu. Retrieved September 3, 2021, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/capability-approach>
- Røn Larsen, M., & Stanek, A. H. (2015). Young children and their conduct of everyday life. *Nordic Psychology*, 67(3), 195–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19012276.2015.1062256>
- Rosenbaum-Feldbrugge, & Debiassi, E. (2019). The impact of parental death on the timing of first marriage: Evolutionary versus social explanations (The Netherlands, 1850–1940). *Demographic Research*, 40, 799–834. <https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2019.40.28>
- Roth, W. M. (2018). A Transactional Approach to Research Ethics. *Forum, qualitative social research*, 19(3). <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-19.3.3061>
- Roth, W. & Jornet, A. (2019). Theorizing with/out “Mediators.” *Integrative Psychological & Behavioral Science*, 53(2), 323–343. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-016-9376-0>
- Roth, W. (2015). *Rigorous data analysis: beyond “anything goes.”* Rotterdam, [Netherlands]: Sense Publishers.
- Roth, W. (2016). Personhood in Practice. In Roth (Ed.), *Concrete Human Psychology* (pp. 178-197).
- Roth, W. (2017). The invisible subject in educational science. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 50(3), 315–332.
- Roth, W. (2018). A Transactional Approach to Research Ethics. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 19(3). <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-19.3.3061>
- Roth, W. (2018). Challenging the Cause–Effect Logic: Toward a Transactional Approach for Understanding Human Behavior in Crisis Situations. *Human Arenas*, 1(3), 262–287. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-018-0025-7>
- Roth, W. (2019). *Transactional psychology of education: toward a strong version of the social*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Roth, W. M., & Jornet, A. (2014). Toward a Theory of Experience. *Science Education (Salem, Mass.)*, 98(1), 106–126. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sce.21085>

- Roth, W. Michael. (2020). *Adventures of mind and mathematics*. Springer.
- Russel Group (2021). About. Retrieved May 18, 2021, from <https://russellgroup.ac.uk/about/>
- Šabić, J., & Jokić, B. (2021). Elementary school pupils' aspirations for higher education: the role of status attainment, blocked opportunities and school context. *Educational Studies*, 47(2), 200–216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2019.1681941>
- Salonen-Hakomäki, S., Soini, T., Pietarinen, J., & Pyhältö, K. (2016). The way ahead for Finnish comprehensive school? Examining state-level school administrators' theory of change. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 48(5), 671–691. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2016.114353>
- Sandars, J., & Sarojini Hart, C. (2015). The capability approach for medical education: AMEE Guide No. 97. *Medical Teacher*, 37(6), 510–520. <https://doi.org/10.3109/0142159X.2015.10139>
- Sandel. (2020). *Tyranny of merit: what's become of the common good?* Allen Lane.
- Savvides, H., & Bond, C. (2021). How does growth mindset inform interventions in primary schools? A systematic literature review. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 37(2), 134–149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2021.1879025>
- Schechner, R. (1985). *Between theater & anthropology*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Schmid, J. (2019). Autoethnography: Locating the self as standpoint in post-apartheid South Africa. In Laher, S., Fynn, A., & Kramer, S. (Eds.), *Transforming research methods in the social sciences: Case studies from South Africa*. (pp. 265–279). Wits University Press.
- Schmit, W. (2017). Perezhivanie and the study of role-playing games. *Culture & Psychology*, 23(3), 391–407. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X16663006>
- School Learning Difficulties. In González Rey, F., Magalhães Goulart, D., & Mitjáns Martínez, A. (Ed). *Subjectivity within cultural-historical approach: theory, methodology and research*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3155-8>
- Selg, P. (2019). Causation Is Not Everything: On Constitution and Trans-Actional View of Social Science Methodology. In *John Dewey and the Notion of Trans-action* (pp. 31–53). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26380-5\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26380-5_2)
- Shafi, A. A., Middleton, T., Millican, R., & Templeton, S. (2020). *Reconsidering resilience in education an exploration using the dynamic interactive model of resilience*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-49236-6>

- Shalem, Y., & De Clercq, F. (2019). Teacher Development and Inequality in Schools: Do We Now Have a Theory of Change? In *South African Schooling: The Enigma of Inequality* (pp. 243–261). *Springer International Publishing*.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18811-5\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18811-5_13)
- Simpson, K., & Simmons, R. (2021). Education and social haunting in post-industrial Britain: primary school pupils' experiences of schooling in a former coalmining community. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 1–19.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2020.1870659>
- Šimunović, M., Reić Ercegovac, I., & Burušić, J. (2018). How important is it to my parents? Transmission of STEM academic values: the role of parents' values and practices and children's perceptions of parental influences. *International Journal of Science Education*, 40(9), 977–995. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500693.2018.1460696>
- Smith, S. D. (1990). The Pursuit of Pragmatism. *The Yale Law Journal*, 100(2), 409–449. <https://doi.org/10.2307/796620>
- Spohrer, K., Stahl, G., & Bowers-Brown, T. (2018). Constituting neoliberal subjects? 'Aspiration' as technology of government in UK policy discourse. *Journal of Education Policy*, 33(3), 327–342.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2017.1336573>
- Spyrou, S. (2011). The limits of children's voices: From authenticity to critical, reflexive representation. *Childhood*, 18(2), 151–165.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568210387834>
- St. Pierre, E. (2016). Untraining educational researchers. *Research in Education (Manchester)*, 96(1), 6–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034523716664581>
- St. Pierre, E. (2018). Writing Post Qualitative Inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 24(9), 603–608. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417734567>
- Sterelny, K. (2011). From Hominins to Humans: How Sapiens Became Behaviourally Modern. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 366, 809–822.
- Sternberg, R. J., & Ambrose, D. (2021). *Conceptions of giftedness and talent*. Palgrave Macmillan, imprint of Springer Nature. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56869-6>
- Stetsenko, A. (2009). Teaching-learning and development as activist projects of historical Becoming: expanding Vygotsky's approach to pedagogy. *Pedagogies (Mahwah, N.J.)*, 5(1), 6–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15544800903406266>
- Striano, M. (2019). Dewey, the Ethics of Democracy, and the Challenge of Social Inclusion in Education. In *The Oxford Handbook of Dewey* (1st ed.). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190491192.013.14>

- Sullivan. (2001). *Living across and through skins : transactional bodies, pragmatism, and feminism*. Indiana University Press.
- Sullivan, M., & Solove, D, J. (2013). *Radical Pragmatism*. In Malachowski, A. (Eds). *The Cambridge companion to pragmatism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sullivan, S. (2019). Dewey and Du Bois on Race and Colonialism. In *The Oxford Handbook of Dewey* (1st ed.). Oxford University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190491192.013.8>
- Sweller, J. (1988). Cognitive load during problem solving: Effects on learning. *Cognitive Science*, 12(2), 257–285. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0364-0213\(88\)90023-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0364-0213(88)90023-7)
- Teyhan, A., Boyd, A., Wijedasa, D., & Macleod, J. (2019). Early life adversity, contact with children’s social care services and educational outcomes at age 16 years: UK birth cohort study with linkage to national administrative records. *BMJ Open*, 9(10), e030213–e030213. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2019-030213>
- Tolich, M. (2010). A Critique of Current Practice: Ten Foundational Guidelines for Autoethnographers. *Qualitative Health Research*, 20(12), 1599–1610.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732310376076>
- Treanor, M. (2020). *Child poverty: aspiring to survive*. Policy Press.
- United Nations (2021). Ending Poverty. Retrieved June 9, 2021, from <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/ending-poverty>
- Vandenberghe, F. (2018). The Relation as Magical Operator: Overcoming the Divide Between Relational and Processual Sociology. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology* (pp. 35–57). Springer International Publishing.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_2)
- Vasilyuk, F. (1988). *The psychology of experiencing*. Moscow, Russia: Progress Publishers.
- Veresov, N., & Fler, M. (2016). Perezhivanie as a Theoretical Concept for Researching Young Children’s Development. *Mind, Culture, and Activity: Symposium on Perezhivanie*, 23(4), 325–335.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2016.1186198>
- Verhoeven, M., Poorthuis, A. M., & Volman, M. (2019). The Role of School in Adolescents’ Identity Development: A Literature Review. *Educational Psychology Review*, 31(1), 35–63. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-018-9457-3>
- Vo, L. C., Mounoud, E., & Rose, J. (2012). Dealing with the opposition of rigor and relevance from Dewey’s pragmatist perspective. *Management (Paris, France: 1998)*, 15(4), 368–390. <https://doi.org/10.3917/mana.154.0368>

Vu, T., Magis-Weinberg, L., Jansen, B. R. J., van Atteveldt, N., Janssen, T. W. P., Lee, N. C., van der Maas, H. L. J., Raijmakers, M. E. J., Sachisthal, M. S. M., & Meeter, M. (2021). Motivation-Achievement Cycles in Learning: a Literature Review and Research Agenda. *Educational Psychology Review*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-021-09616-7>

Vygotsky, L. S. (1934). *The Problem of the Environment*. Retrieved July 9, 2020, from <https://www.marxists.org/archive/vygotsky/works/1934/environment.htm>

Vygotsky, L. S. (1987). *The collected works of L. S. Vygotsky, vol. 1: Problems of general psychology*. New York: Springer.

Walford, G. (2021). What is worthwhile auto-ethnography? Research in the age of the selfie. *Ethnography and Education*, 16(1), 31–43.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17457823.2020.1716263>

Wang, X. (2013). The construction of researcher-researched relationships in school ethnography: doing research, participating in the field and reflecting on ethical dilemmas. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(7), 763–779. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2012.666287>

Watzlawik, M., & Burkholder, A. (2020). *Educating adolescents around the globe: becoming who you are in a world full of expectations*. Springer.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-37900-1>

Webb, A., & Sepúlveda, D. (2020). Re-signifying and negotiating indigenous identity in university spaces: a qualitative study from Chile. *Studies in Higher Education (Dorchester-on-Thames)*, 45(2), 286–298.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1512568>

White, M. A., & McCallum, F. (2021). *Wellbeing and resilience education: Covid-19 and its impact on education systems* (1st ed.). Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003134190>

Whitehead, A. N. (1920). *The concept of nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Whitehead, A. N. (1978). *Process and reality: An essay in cosmology*. New York: Free Press. (First published in 1929).

Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to labour: how working class kids get working class jobs*. Gower.

Willoughby, M. T., Wylie, A. C., & Little, M. H. (2019). Testing Longitudinal Associations Between Executive Function and Academic Achievement. *Developmental Psychology*, 55(4), 767–779.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000664>

- World Bank (2021). Measuring Poverty. Retrieved October 5, 2021, from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/measuringpoverty>
- World Health Organisation (2016). Guillain–Barré syndrome. Retrieved November 14, 2020, from [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/guillain-barr%C3%A9-syndrome#:~:text=Guillain%2DBarr%C3%A9%20syndrome%20\(GBS\),cases%20of%20Guillain%2DBarr%C3%A9%20syndrome](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/guillain-barr%C3%A9-syndrome#:~:text=Guillain%2DBarr%C3%A9%20syndrome%20(GBS),cases%20of%20Guillain%2DBarr%C3%A9%20syndrome)
- Yeung, W., J., J., & Li, H. (2021). Educational Resilience Among Asian Children in Challenging Family Environment. *Social Indicators Research*, 153(2), 675–685. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-019-02143-7>
- Young, W. W. (2014). The Shape of Reflexivity: A Pragmatist Analysis of Religious Ethnography. *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy*, 35(1), 42–64. <https://doi.org/10.5406/amerjtheophil.35.1.0042>
- Zaff, J. F., Donlan, A., Gunning, A., Anderson, S. E., McDermott, E., & Sedaca, M. (2017). Factors that Promote High School Graduation: a Review of the Literature. *Educational Psychology Review*, 29(3), 447–476. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9363-5>
- Zavershneva, E. (2014). The problem of consciousness in Vygotsky’s cultural-historical psychology. In A. Yasnitsky, R. Van der Veer, & M. Ferrari (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Cultural-Historical Psychology* (Cambridge Handbooks in Psychology, pp. 63-98). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139028097.005
- Zinchenko, V.P. (1985). Vygotsky's Ideas about Units for the Analysis of Mind. In Wertsch, J.V (Ed), *Culture, Communication, and Cognition: Vygotskian Perspectives* (pp. 94-119). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zinn, M. (2010). The family as a race institution. In P. H. Collins, & J. Solomos. *The SAGE handbook of race and ethnic studies* (pp. 357-382). SAGE Publications Ltd, <https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781446200902.n18>
- Zuckerman, S. (2016). Mobilization and Adaptation of a Rural Cradle-to-Career Network. *Education Sciences*, 6(4), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci6040034>