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Freedom and Reinvention:
The experience of disengagement from education for young people and their educators

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate in Education

by

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Abstract

The aims of this study were firstly to investigate the concept of disengagement with a focus on how society can be seen to problematise young people who are disengaged from mainstream education. Secondly, the study scrutinised the effects of this problematisation on young people by exploring the links between young people's experiences of being disengaged and their subsequent construction of their own identities as learners.

The study positions its research within three alternative education settings, each of whom cater specifically for young people disengaged from education and are all located in a city in the North of England. Young people and their educators engage in participatory visual research activities alongside informal interviews. Each individual setting's use of different pedagogies and creative activities such as art, music, environmental/nature based education and skate-park activities are also examined to identify how they are each utilised to reintegrate the young people back into education and learning.

The study found that young people, disengaged from mainstream school and now attending alternative education provision maintained a positive personal identity even though their lived experience of education has been typically negative. These young people were found to be existing as educational liminads; occupying the space between their previous school and the space in which they are planning to move into, whether that be further education or employment, but yet, they momentarily inhabit the environments of neither. They are status-less 'becomings', rather than socially fixed beings, existing in a space which, at its best provides the freedom to redefine and reconstruct themselves, ready to become the person they are capable of being, a space in which to experience the freedom for reinvention.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Fundamental objective of the thesis

This study sets out to explore and analyse the concept of disengagement from mainstream education in terms of how young people and educators in alternative education environments construct, understand and make sense of being disengaged from education. It explores the relationship between how the representation of young people as ‘disengaged’ impacts on individual young people’s construction of their identity as learners. The study also examines how different initiatives and approaches are used to re-integrate these young people back into learning through visiting three alternative education settings in the north of England.

With the present educational system in England operating in such a way as to marginalise some of the most vulnerable of its pupils, past rationales of young people’s disengagement from mainstream school often attributes causes to the young people themselves – the deficit model. “*It is a system which produces disaffected, excluded youngsters as part of its waste.*” (de Pear, 1995, p.125). McGregor et al. (2012) viewed the most effective alternative education for young people who had disengaged from mainstream education as those which do not work with a deficit model of young people. Instead they focus on work which “*construct supports, environments and learning activities to attract and retain disengaged students*” (p.848) rather than have as their intent a “*fixing up or disciplining*” (p.843) of young people.

It is envisaged that this study will, through addressing the following research aims, identify the effect that the acceptance (or not) of the deficit model by educators and young people in alternative settings will have on their approach to re-engaging with learning. The study also examines and analyses some of the responses to disengagement in terms of different approaches and pedagogies used, as exhibited in three different alternative education settings.

1.2 Specific aims of thesis

The specific aims of this thesis are:

1. ***To investigate the concept of disengagement with a focus on how society can be seen to problematise young people who are disengaged from education.***

2. ***To identify the effects of this problematisation on young people (i.e. how young people view themselves and are viewed by society).***

3. ***To examine some of the initiatives and methods used to re-engage these young people back into learning (focusing specifically on their approach to/concept of disengagement).***

1.3 Research questions

To work towards the investigation of these specific aims, the study will explore the following research questions:

1. ***How do 'disengaged' young people and their educators, construct, understand and make sense of being disengaged from education?***

2. ***Is there a relationship between the representation of young people as 'disengaged' and individual young people's construction of their identity as learners?***

3. ***How are different initiatives and methods used to re-integrate young people who have become 'disengaged' back into learning?***

1.4 Background

The concept of 'disengagement' is complex and can be linked to the disconnectedness of young people from many different structures within society, such as, educational, social, moral, legal, political, economic, environmental and technological.

Disengagement, in terms of disengaging from education, refers to the process of a young person withdrawing from, or separating themselves from involvement in the activities as set by the school (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016). This can manifest itself in a variety of ways from simply not attending school, to refusing to take part in classroom activities, attention seeking, avoiding challenges or social interaction either with peers or teachers, displaying defiance to rules and regulations, being aggressive or antagonistic in the classroom setting or physically displaying an indifferent and ambivalent attitude to the school setting (McMahon and Portelli, 2010; McGregor et al., 2017; teRiele, 2006, Hancock and Zubrick, 2015)

Young people might become disengaged from mainstream schooling for a variety of reasons, such as formal school exclusion, behavioural issues, chaotic family settings; caring responsibilities, short or long-term illness, school refusal or teenage pregnancy. Research indicates that it is usually a mix of many different factors which cause school disengagement (teRiele, 2006; Mosen-Lowe et al., 2009)

The reasons why young people become disengaged from education are often complex and it is important to consider not just the young person in isolation but also the interaction between themselves, their peers and their parents as well as the school environment (Hancock and Zubrick, 2015).

In investigating the concept of disengagement it is evident that society can be seen to problematise young people who are disengaged, in particular from education, and how the creation of this category can be seen to:

> *…pathologise [disengaged] groups as abnormal and aberrant. They are seen as deviant, resisting the normalising agencies of the dominant society.*
>
> (Kakos et al, 2016; p.5).

Yet there is also evidence to show that there are many young people who actively choose to disengage themselves from the processes of education either partly or fully, yet still achieve the grades and qualifications that they are studying towards. These able and high-achieving students warrant less attention than those who are under/non-achievers, perhaps because these students are not posing a threat to the school's ability to achieve the results necessary to maintain financial stability and inspection kudos (Demerath et al., 2010). So, if the act, or process, of disengagement is not necessarily detrimental to the education system then perhaps it is when the act of disengaging affects the financial and educational stability of an institution that it becomes a real problem.

In terms of the effects of disengagement on society, the education system is perhaps the largest structure in our society through which the enculturation of its citizens takes place and whereby, along with familial influence, people learn the requirements of their surrounding culture and acquire the values and behaviours appropriate to meet the needs of that society. Therefore, for, as far as possible, all young people to engage in the processes offered by this structure is vital to the success of both society and school. The cost of disengagement is publicly promoted as high, whether it be the effects on the labour market in terms of reducing the amount of qualified, prepared young people into the work force or the costs analogous with social exclusion such as loss of income taxes, payment of benefits, increased health risks and other associated costs (McNally and Telhaj, 2010).

As outlined above, the reasons behind a young person's disengagement can be wide-ranging and include social, economic, cultural and motivational factors and may result from a combination of these factors and influences (LSC, 2006; York Consulting Ltd, 2005). Sidorkin, (2014), identifies the problem of disengagement as the result of reaching a critical mass for the "*theoretical limit of mass schooling*" (p. 121), that is, the limit has been reached to what a "*one best system*" has the ability to accomplish for society's youth (Tyack, 1974, p.132)

The prevailing '*ephebiphobia*' (fear of youth) that appears to dominate education discourse is consequential for the lives of young people, specifically in how they position themselves in relation to the wider society. Hence, an exploration is required of the self-concept of young people who are not engaged in mainstream education, in particular, the extent to which the application of the deficit affects this self-concept and ability to engage with learning in the future. It is within this landscape that the fundamental question addressed in this thesis emerges: how do young people construct, understand and make sense of being disengaged from education?

1.5 Researcher Background

It is useful to identify my professional background in order to place myself in the context of this research study. I am a JNC[1] qualified youth worker with over 20 years of experience in working in youth work settings and alternative education environments with young people who are typically at risk or vulnerable. The majority of these young people have been disengaged from education and I have been involved in varying capacities with several projects and organisations whose aim has been to 'reintegrate' these young people back into education, training or employment.

Throughout my work, it has been of utmost importance that the person-centred/educator as facilitator approach as advocated by Carl Rogers (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994) and the youth work values (NYA, 2004) of engaging with young people equally and with a view to facilitating their personal, social and political development have been central and continuing tenets of my engagement with young people. It is these principles which have also informed and now underpin my work as a researcher and it is the quest to find the best ways in which to serve the needs of young people disengaged from education utilising these core values that this study seeks to identify.

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[1] The Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) for youth and community workers is the body that validates the professional qualifications for youth work and sets the national framework used to grade and pay youth work jobs in the UK.

1.6 Structure of Thesis

The thesis is divided into seven chapters of which this section is **Chapter 1**, the remaining chapters are set out as follows:

Chapter 2: Literature Review begins by taking the concept of 'disengagement' and exploring its historical roots. It traces the discourses that have been associated with 'problem' youth from the post-war period in England to its use today. It investigates the ways in which youth has become conceptualised, and focuses on its characterisation as a transition between the fixed identities of child and adulthood. The review of literature also explores the concept of 'liminality' (Turner, 1967) and the importance of the liminal phase (i.e. that between child and adulthood) in providing young people with an 'in between' space which is characterised by its ambiguity and fluidity. In doing so, chapter 2 situates this study as an historical 'snapshot' of the lives of young people disengaged from school in 2018. Chapter 2 also focuses on 'disengagement' as a 'new' concept. It traces the emerging prominence of the term in political discourse, its resulting passage into legislation, and the expanding view of young people as the main perpetrators of their disengagement (the deficit model). The chapter examines some of the most current literature about young people and disengagement whilst examining the impact that measures to deal with young people who have become, or are at risk of becoming, disengaged from mainstream school have on young people's lives and how the young people themselves reflect upon the representation as being disengaged. This chapter also outlines the key concepts which have informed the research questions and theoretical underpinnings of the research. In particular it explores Goffman's (1963) identification of social stigma and the resultant effects that this may have for the individual. It refers to the work of labelling theorists (particularly Becker, 1963) in order to explore the process through which a deviant label is attached to an individual, and what the resultant social consequences of that label may be. It makes a case for understanding labels such as 'disengaged' as stigmatising events and explores, on an individual level, the potential responses to that label, specifically, how these labels may be resisted or avoided.

Chapter 3: **Methodology**, specifically outlines the research methods utilised in this study and the influencing methodological approach adopted. It positions the research in the broader disciplines of youth and education research, and adopts a constructionist epistemology rooted in participatory research. The chapter also specifies why qualitative semi-structured interviewing and participatory research activities were chosen as the most appropriate way in which to involve young people in the research process. The chapter also addresses some of the ethical issues and considerations involved in research with young people, with particular focus on those issues relating to young people, who by virtue of being disengaged from school, may be typically more vulnerable or more challenging to engage in research.

Chapter 4: Overview of Settings and Participants provides a brief demographic of the research sites chosen and also an outline of the participant characteristics.

Chapter 5: Findings is organised around the emerging themes raised by the young people and their educators during the interviews and research activities. It investigates young people's experiences and perceptions of factors associated with being disengaged from education. In doing so, the chapter explores both the ways in which the participants define disengagement and their accounts of the impact that being disengaged from mainstream school has on their own lives.

Chapter 6: Discussion addresses the main research findings of the study in relation to each corresponding research question and debates the significance of the findings in relation to the aims of the study. It discusses suggested dimensions relating to young people's experience of being disengaged from mainstream education which focus primarily on:

- Young people maintaining a **positive personal identity** even though a stigmatising label and experience has been applied to them.
- That it is not only the young people but the **educators themselves** in alternative education who have become disengaged from mainstream schooling.
- Young people seeing alternative education as a **liminal, transitory period** between mainstream school and their next steps.
- Young people positioning themselves as **peripheral to the processes** around their disengagement from school and **involvement in the choice** of alternative education provider.

Chapter 7: Conclusion, Reflections and Recommendations presents the contribution and originality of the research study, reflections on the research process, recommendations for future research, and implications for education and practice.

This study contributes and builds on existing literature around school disengagement, specifically the effects of this disengagement on young people's identities as learners. The findings from this study have implications on the practices of and approaches to alternative education provision for young people for whom education within a mainstream setting has become unsustainable. In particular, the study identifies strategies utilised within existing alternative education settings which have been shown to strengthen the young people's engagement in learning and positive activity.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1: Introduction

This chapter begins by drawing on current and recent literature to look at some of the **philosophical issues** which underpin young people's disengagement from education through examining some of the **language and definitions** used to describe disengagement. Also covered in this chapter will be an examination of **how disengagement from mainstream education is measured**, often presented as a continuum (Newmann et al., 1992 and Steinberg, 1996) from full engagement to complete disengagement from education, with an overview of the ways in which different levels and types of disengagement are most often categorised.

The chapter will also identify some of the **reasons why young people might become disengaged** through looking at individual and cultural factors as well as structural dimensions which have all been located as causal factors for disengagement.

In order to identify the parameters within which this study is operating, the chapter then moves on to provide a brief **historical overview** of where young people disengaging from mainstream school can be **perceived as a problem** by society and explores the **negative effects** that some forms of disengagement from school can cause both to the individual, the family, the school and the wider society.

Finally, the chapter will explore how, as a society, we **tackle disengagement** in the UK and looks at ways in which young people who have become disengaged from mainstream education are encouraged to either reintegrate back into mainstream or to pursue education otherwise using alternative education facilities. Various **definitions and typologies of alternative education** are analysed and the chapter provides a brief snapshot of some of the different forms of alternative education currently operating in the UK along with an overview of some of the typical **pedagogies** utilised within some of these alternative education settings.

2.2: Philosophical underpinnings

The concept of ‘disengagement’, is complex and can be linked to the disconnectedness of young people from many different structures within society, such as, educational, social, moral, legal, political, economic, environmental and technological ones (Byrne, 2005).

Across the world, education and the opportunity to learn is typically sought after and revered and few would deny the transformative power of education in changing the capabilities of individuals to choose lives that they value (Freire, 1972). The availability of opportunity to take part in education and learning is recognised as a fundamental human right (UNCRC, 1992) that is essential for the practicing and subsequent exercising of all other human rights. It is a right that is enforced in participating countries such as the UK, through the implementation of laws requiring children and young people to be educated, whether at school or otherwise, with a pervasive societal expectation that they take up the opportunity of attending mainstream educational provision until the age of 18, whereby they legally become an adult. It is likely however, that an ‘education for all’ approach, as purported through the presentation of one model of schooling, will not suit the differing needs of all young people. It is those young people who have become disengaged from this system and the ensuing impact of that disengagement that this study focuses on.

Disengagement is a construct which is open to interpretation, and one which is strongly influenced by the context in which, and by whom it is discussed. As such, it is useful to situate the concept of disengagement from mainstream education in relation to the following areas where disengagement can occur:

- In its' relationship to **engagement** (with education) as an ideology and/or aspiration: usually linked to a human rights and/or inclusion agenda;
- As a place: usually mainstream versus alternative provision;
- In a policy: normally originating from central or local government;
- In its impact or expression as professional practice: i.e. 'inclusive teaching'; 'alternative' pedagogies;
- Through personal experience: how an individual experiences disengagement (also how the experience affects family/close friends).

(adapted from a model of inclusive teaching practice presented by Ellis et al., 2008)

Disengagement can be identified as being responsive to both individual and societal influences and its conceptual roots in social psychology suggest that the act of disengagement is demonstrated in the "*behaviours and cognitions of the actor*." (Kelly, 2009, p.450). Vittaro et al., 2001, found that most studies that investigated the predictive variables of school disengagement focused on personal (i.e. behavioural, academic, intellectual) and familial factors, whereas others identify the disengaged as:

> *hapless victims of inexorable meta-forces of deindustrialisation, globalisation and, most recently, of impenetrably complex and contagious transnational financial crises* (Byrne, 2005, p.10).

What is clear is that the term 'disengaged' is most often used to describe a fundamentally negative process and presents a deficit model of young people. The deficit model sees the problem as residing within [the disengaged] themselves rather than as being systemic (Osgood et al., 2013, p.25).

‘Deviancy’ theorists (such as Becker, 1963; Cohen, 1966; Lemert, 1951, 1967; Schur, 1980) infer that the negative impact of labelling an individual as ‘deviant’ (or ‘disengaged’ for the purposes of this study) has resultant consequences for their self-esteem and efficacy development. They suggest that the identification of a young person as ‘deviant’ can halt their life chances, taint them as a social ‘other’ a process which eventually results in the creation of a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby the individual adopts the ‘deviant’ label as their identity. Whilst the term ‘deviant’ is an historic one, the negative effects of stigmatising labels such as being ‘disengaged’, are outlined by Becker (1963) as causing the withdrawal of the individual from mainstream society and making them a social ‘outsider’. It is this concept of identity and specifically how becoming disengaged from mainstream education affects the identity of the young person that this study is focused on.

2.2.1: Definitions of disengagement

Disengagement, by nature, is difficult to define with no one, single, universally accepted definition of either disengagement or engagement. Christenson et al., (2012), for example, dedicate five chapters of their book to simply defining (dis)engagement and the term is described and measured in many different ways across different disciplines. This results in a certain ambiguity and confusion around the way terminology and related concepts are used in the literature, where the same term is often used to refer to different things, and different terms are often used for the same construct (Reschly and Christenson, 2012). Newmann (1986) declared:

> *Engagement is difficult to define operationally, but we know it when we see it, and we know it when it is missing*. (p.242)

Skinner et al. (2008) view engagement and disengagement as being separate constructs, each existing on their own continua, whilst others view engagement as existing on one continuum, from engaged to disengaged (Reschly and Christenson, 2012, p.4). Whichever approach is adopted, two definitions could be offered; one for defining engagement, and one for disengagement.

Newmann et al., (1992) and Steinberg (1996) portray engagement as a linear perspective represented by a continuum from*"...less to more, not as a dichotomous state of being either engaged or unengaged"* (Newmann et al., 1996, p.13).

Whereby, Newmann et al. (1992) and Schlechty (2002) depict engagement with mainstream education as existing on a continuum rather than as an either/or phenomenon, Vibert and Shields (2003) provide a conceptualisation of engagement as a continuum by defining conceptions of student engagement as:

> *Ranging from relatively rational and technical approaches to those that are more constructivist, to those reflecting a critical democratic worldview. We would suggest that not only is this a descriptive continuum, but that a move from the rational, through the interpretivist, to a more critical understanding, also approaches a more socially grounded construction of engagement'* (Vibert and Shields, 2003, p.237)

Although there is lack of agreement on whether student engagement and disengagement exist starkly on a single continuum or they present themselves as running across two separate continua (Christenson and Reschly, 2012), disengaged students are generally seen as those who do not participate actively in class and school activities leading to learning. They may display behaviour considered to be inappropriate such as being disruptive in lessons or not being willing to participate at all. It may be that their disengagement is presented itself as varying degrees of emotional detachment, involving disassociation from or non-participation in certain elements of school life. Disengaged young people may also be less likely to develop or maintain a sense of school belonging (Fredricks et al., 2004 and Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Christenson and Reschly (2012) wrangle with the problem of how disengagement should be analysed into logical components, for example, into several sub-type models; whether it should be conceptualised as *process* or *outcome*; and, whether it should exist on just one single or on separate continua.

As this study is largely concerned with young people who have been identified by their schools as being fully disengaged and are no longer attending mainstream school at all, it adopts the Newmann et al. (1996) model of disengagement as presented on a linear continuum. However, it is important to be mindful that disengagement is multi-faceted and nuanced. It would be inappropriate, and likely impossible to point to a group of young people in a school and label this one as wholly engaged and this one as disengaged. There are definitions of disengagement which place the young person’s behaviour and attributes as the cause for non-engagement:

> *Disengaged students are those who do not participate actively in class and school activities, do not become cognitively involved in learning, do not fully develop or maintain a sense of school belonging, and/or exhibit inappropriate or counterproductive behaviour. All of*

> *these risk behaviours reduce the likelihood of school success.*
>
> *Disengaged students may have entered school without adequate cognitive or social skills, find it difficult to learn basic engagement behaviours, and fail to develop positive attitudes that perpetuate their participation in class, or they may have entered school with marginal or positive habits that become attenuated due to unaddressed academic difficulties, dysfunctional interactions with teachers or administrators, or strong ties to other disengaged students.* (Finn and Zimmer, 2012, p. 99).

A helpful approach for this study towards defining disengagement which highlights that the following five key aspects need to be considered in order to fully understand what the construct means is offered by Hancock and Zubrick (2015):

1. Students can be **disengaged at different levels** (e.g. with content, in class, with school, and/or with education as a whole).
2. There are **different types or domains of engagement** (e.g. emotional, behavioural, and cognitive).
3. Where levels of disengagement intersect with types of disengagement, **different indicators of disengagement can be identified** (e.g. behavioural disengagement with a certain area of the curriculum or a particular teacher may be indicated by poor classroom behaviour; emotional disengagement with school in general may be indicated by poor school connectedness).

4. **Disengagement is both a process and an outcome**. For example, student absenteeism may reflect disengagement from school, but it is also a risk factor for other disengagement indicators such as early school leaving.
5. **Contexts beyond the educational setting** (i.e. family) are integral factors in disengagement processes for children and young people.

2.2.2 Terminology

Throughout this study, the experiences of students who disengage from education are examined, along with the corresponding processes, reasons for and impact of disengagement. The reviewed literature often uses the term '*disengagement'* interchangeably with '*engagement*', where each term represents a point at the end of the same continuum which could be termed a continuum of engagement (or disengagement).This is the terminology that is used throughout the study although a number of different terms are used throughout the relevant literature to describe young people who, for a variety of reasons, do not take part, or engage in, the mainstream schooling system.

The very word '*disengaged*' when used to describe a state of being, could be seen to imply that a person must have had to be engaged at some point in order to be seen to disengage, as a move away from that state or level of engagement, or it could also be used to describe somebody that is simply less engaged than the person sitting next to them. In this way, disengagement can occur in a multitude of forms in a multitude of settings and specific terminology may be used as indicators of disengagement (e.g. being excluded, being suspended and/or truancy). This study attempts to use a consistent terminology throughout, but acknowledges that as the broader literature uses multiple terms, such as disenfranchised; disengaged;

marginalised and so on, in multiple ways, hence, the terminology that it uses may also change to reflect not only what is represented in the literature but also the language that the young people themselves use.

The literal meaning of disengagement "*To release or detach oneself, as from the mothership. To withdraw…*" (Merriam Webster, 2017) infers that it is a conscious act to release the self from something that engages or involves. This definition infers also to the entity from which one disengages as a *mothership,* which creates an image of an all encompassing behemoth from which individuals can either become released or can choose to detach themselves. It suggests that in order to become disengaged, the person must have had to be engaged at some point and that they have intentionally detached themselves, not that they were detached through the actions of others. Here we find the first clear indicator that in utilising this term to describe young people who are not engaged fully in education, the implication is that they will have been engaged at some point, but they have become detached, they have separated themselves, they have stopped being involved or they have ceased to take part, to participate. If they have made this choice themselves or have been forced to disengage due to external forces then the outcome is still the same, they are outside the norm, detached, disconnected, isolated with the implication that they will not be able to survive away from the 'mothership' and therefore must return, or be returned, as soon as is possible.

This process of 'othering' implies a deficit model which assumes that those that are disengaged are resistant to the normalising agencies of the dominant society and need the help of the other, the mainstream or 'engaged' in order to proceed with the enculturation process (Kakos and Ploner, 2016). Yet, this presents a simplistic view of the world as consisting of just two groups, the engaged and the disengaged.

Disengagement, however, is complex and nuanced and cannot always be viewed in these simplistic terms due the myriad of stress indicators, risk factors, contexts and issues that can cause a young person to move away from ‘mothership’ that is education. This idea of ‘otherness’ is at the core of analyses into how majority and minority identities are constructed. To fully understand the notion of ‘The Other’, within the context of being ‘other’ through becoming disengaged from the norm that is mainstream education, we need to focus critically on the ways in which social identities are constructed. Our identities can often be viewed as being something we are born with or have inherited, but this view of social identity as being innate rather than acquired can be contested (Clifford, 1998).

Social identities reflect the ways in which individuals and groups focus in on established social categorisations within their societies, such as their cultural or ethnic identities, sexual or gender identities, class or socio-economic identities and so forth. These are all social categorisations which shape our ideas about who we are as a person, how we wish to be viewed by others and also the nature of the groups to which we belong (Bialostok and Whitman, 2012).

Mead (1934), in his classic text, suggested that social identities are created through our ongoing social interaction with the people around us and then ratified through our subsequent self-reflection about who we think we are according to these social exchanges. Mead’s (1937) work showed us that identities are produced through negotiation with others within our society and/or particular community. If we are shunned or become disengaged from our community/ies, perhaps because of our behaviour, then, based on Cooley’s (1902) theory of the ‘looking-glass self’, it follows that we will then adjust our behaviour and our perceived self-image based upon our interactions and our self-reflection upon those interactions.

Alternative education programmes are often also seen as ‘other’ to mainstream school (Gale and Densmore, 2000; Mills and McGregor, 2013). The dominant model (the mainstream) operates as the norm, against which any other option is seen as not only different but somehow lesser, inferior, deviant (Slee, 2011; Valencia, 1997). This stigma of the alternative as being lesser is not just confined to the young people and the setting, there are also reports of staff working within these settings who experience stigmatisation from being and working in alternative education (McNulty and Roseboro, 2009). This area of exploring the experience of educators within these settings is one which is largely unexplored in terms of academic scrutiny and one which this study aims to address.

Raywid (1994); Heinrich (2005) and Kellmayer (1995) all call for the employment of a different framing when referring to mainstream education to avoid the inevitable ‘othering’ and stigma afforded by the language utilised. A suggestion may be ‘traditional’ rather than mainstream. In Australia, the terminology ‘flexible learning choices’ is used to denote alternative education, a term which takes the emphasis off the types of learners that attend the provision and the issue that they have previously attended ‘mainstream’ learning and onto the type of learning offered instead (Mills and McGregor, 2014).

The language used to describe young people that have become or are at risk of becoming disengaged from education is varied, terms such as marginalised, disenfranchised, disaffected, disadvantaged, vulnerable, alienated, disconnected, unengaged and ‘at risk’ youth are commonly used (Skinner et al., 2008; McMahon and Portelli, 2004; teRiele, 2006).This range can become problematic as some of these terms infer that it is the young person themselves that holds responsibility for their lack of engagement in mainstream schooling rather than them being beholden to unyielding structures and processes within a system that cannot accommodate the needs of all. Critics (Munns and McFadden, 2000; Donmoyer and Kos,1993; Bullen, Kenway and Hay, 2000; Bessant, 1995 and Barone, 1989) put forward the case that the use of this terminology implies that the young people in question are fundamentally different from those others who appear to be coping with the (mainstream) school setting. The use of language such as ‘vulnerable’ and ‘at risk’ suggests these are factors attached to the young person, their behaviours, their social environment, their personalities rather than to the structures and processes within the education system. Thomson (2002) felt that rather than talking about the young person being ‘at risk’, we should ask what it is about the schools functions which is placing those young people at risk and makes them vulnerable. Some academics attempt to find ways to avoid the use of this language altogether, Swadener (1995), for example, used the phrase, young people ‘at promise’ rather than ‘at risk’. Kitty teRiele, in her work concerning young people who do not access mainstream education in Australian settings, prefers to use the term ‘disenfranchised’ or ‘marginalised’ (teRiele, 2006) as she sees these terms as indicating that the reasons some young people find engagement with school difficult is due to external pressures:

> *Disenfranchisement is done to them by factors within schooling and society more broadly, rather than by themselves (*teRiele, 2012, p.7).

It is common to find that the terms ‘disengaged’ and ‘unengaged’ are used interchangeably across much literature on engagement, with the term ‘unengaged’ used by Newmann et al. (1992) and Steinberg (1996) as the opposite to engagement when depicted as a linear *“continuum from less to more, not as a dichotomous state of being either engaged or unengaged*” (Steinberg, 1996, p.13). McMahon and Portelli (2004) find this assumption that the terms ‘disengaged’ and ‘unengaged’ are identical as problematic, they asserted that:

> *Conceivably being disengaged includes the notion of a disconnect or a marginalisation, whereas being unengaged indicates a passive, and perhaps more temporary, withdrawal* (p.64)

For the purposes of this study, I have chosen to use the term ‘disengaged’ throughout as, although agreeing with teRiele’s (2012) sentiment that the young people may not be engaging in education due to external pressures to which they are responding. I prefer to explore disengagement from a more neutral perspective at this point, relying instead on interpreting young people’s understanding and experience of being educated outside of the mainstream education system.

2.3 Measuring Disengagement

Along with the problem that persists with defining the concept of disengagement is the variance relating to how disengagement is measured. Christianson and Reschly (2012) name this variance the ‘*conceptual haziness’* of engagement and declare that the ‘*jingle and jangle’* of engagement/disengagement emerges from three disparate schools of thought *“(1) dropout prevention literature, (2) general discourses of school reform, and (3) motivational literature”* (2012, p.12). Regarding the measurement of engagement, survey instruments seem to be the most favoured amongst research in the area, and such tools have ‘*proliferated dramatically*’ (Christenson and Reschly, 2012, p.15). Crick (2012) provides a scathing critique of research on young people’s engagement/disengagement with education by identifying a racial/ethnic bias of engagement research in that "*most engagement research is founded upon a predominantly White, middle class sample"* (Crick, 2012, p.135). Lawson and Lawson (2013) request an expansion of the definition of student engagement to go beyond the narrowly defined behaviourist (Mc Mahon and Portelli, 2012) tripartite model. They call for a broader '*socio-ecological framework*' (Lawson and Lawson, 2013, p.471) of student engagement that goes '*beyond the walls*' (p.473) of the classroom to include community, family and social influences on engagement and disengagement. This view provides an opposite to the deficit model in its inclination to situate engagement in diverse relationships, social, institutional, economic and historical rather than focusing primarily on individual attributes.

In attempting to define disengagement, in terms of that relating to education, it is important to consider the parameters within which the levels of young people's engagement in education is currently defined. Many writers and thinkers have endorsed a critical stance in this area, (Vibert and Shields, 2003; Fielding, 2006; McMahon and Portelli, 2012) and across these critical perspectives, student engagement is generally understood as

> *Everyday joint active participation of students (together with other agents) in learning and school, to challenge ingrained inequalities and injustices and to make transformations in education and beyond.* (Fielding, 2006, p. 304)

McMahon and Zyngier (2009) summarised student engagement from a critical perspective using the categories of *Instrumental, Social Constructivist* or *Individualist* and *Critical Transformative*.

- *Instrumental* engagement measures engagement by what can be seen, surmising that teachers or educators just know engagement when they see it, hence, this understanding of engagement is grounded in an external, objectivist world view, that of the teacher/educator.

- *Social Constructivist/Individual* engagement on the other hand is more student centred and relates to the student's own exploration and individual experiences rather than the interpretation of those experiences by the teacher. McMahon and Zyngier (2009) acknowledge that this categorisation of engagement will certainly produce more dignified and interesting classrooms but will not necessarily raise substantive (and critical) student inquiry that questions the acceptance of official knowledge, aspects of engagement that Apple (1993) and McMahon (2003) see as crucial in establishing a critical perspective for engagement.

- *Critical Transformative* engagement takes the student-centred pedagogy of the *Social Constructivist Individual* engagement approach a step further through engaging the student in a dynamic and transformative way that encourages them to critically rethink their learning and development experiences in order that they are related to the development of a more socially just and democratic community rather than just for the advancement of the individual.

Although other definitions and demarcations relating to the classification of engagement/disengagement exist, it appears that it is generally a combination of the above definitions from a critical perspective along with the classic tripartite model of engagement on the following domains: behavioural, cognitive and affective (Bloom,1956;1964).

- *Behavioural* engagement refers to the positive behaviour displayed towards learning in general by the young person and is reflected in their levels of participation in classroom activities and in the systems and structures within the school generally (Bloom, 1964).

- *Cognitive* engagement considers the ability of the young person to engage with academic tasks and to invest the effort required to understand complex tasks and the persistence to overcome difficulties and work towards comprehension (Bloom, 1964). Lawson and Lawson (2013) also identified an important factor of '*willingness*' on behalf of the young person to invest such effort.

- *Affective* engagement refers to the level of emotional engagement with the school and considers the level to which the young person connects emotionally with activities in terms of whether they gain enjoyment, interest and have low levels of anxiety when involved in activities and also whether they feel a sense of relatedness and belonging to their school and their peers (Bloom, 1964). Fredricks et al. (2004) assert that "*the idea of commitment or*

> *investment*” is “*central to the common understanding of the term engagement*” (p.61)

These definitions delineate from the critical perspectives as put forward by Fielding (2006), Apple (1993) and McMahon and Zyngier (2009) amongst others, in that they focus on the measurement of engagement in terms of levels of the student’s personal investment in academic achievement as opposed to the levels by which the young person’s personal development has moved them towards gaining their own emancipatory power to transform their own lives and even of their communities. McMahon and Zyngier (2009) do not dispute that there are connections between engagement and academic learning as illustrated in the behavioural; cognitive; affective model of engagement and agree that there are some merits to viewing engagement/ disengagement as two diametric points on a continuum, but they do find that “*the notion of engagement that emerges from this perspective is too limited and linear”* (p. 64). They feel that the notion of a continuum conceives of engagement in strongly behaviourist terms and that it presents a narrow psychological understanding of the concept of disengagement. In this sense, using the continuum approach, could lead to the disengagement of some students merely because they do not happen to conform to the ideals as promoted by this conception. Giroux (1983) saw this conception of engagement as being only advantageous to those students who accept the mainstream, functionalist conception of education (p.180).

It is interesting to note that whilst Bloom’s Taxonomy is a central tenet in the majority of teacher training programmes in the UK and beyond, it focuses mainly on developing those teaching activities which fall under the cognitive domain. Lynch and Baker (2005, p.137) found that:

> *whilst Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive skills has gained global recognition, the taxonomy of emotional skills devised at the same time has received little attention*.

It may be, that the incessant focus on the development of cognitive skills needed to attain optimal standardised test results can contribute to the disengagement of young people from education. Studies that have identified the factors that are most likely to cause a young person to re-engage back into education consistently find that a move away from developing cognitive skills to focusing more on emotional intelligence skills are successful in promoting engagement in education (Thomson and Pennachia, 2016; European Commission, 2011; Bingham and Sidorkin, 2004). Lawson and Lawson (2013) call for an expansion to the narrow definitions of engagement as exemplified in the tripartite model and recommended a framework for measuring engagement that goes *"beyond the walls"* of the classroom to include *"community, family and social influences"*. This call is backed up by Skinner et al. (2008), who are more inclined to *"situate engagement in diverse relationships social, institutional, economic, historical and more".* Bloom himself admitted that:

> *objectives in this [affective] domain are not stated very precisely; and, in fact, teachers do not appear to be very clear about the learning experiences which are appropriate to these objectives*." (Bloom, 1956).

This suggests then, that it is the incessant focus on the development of cognitive skills in order to increase the ability to perform well in standardised testing that is operating in detriment to the development of emotional skills which are best placed to prevent disengagement.

In contrary to the focus on the students in order to measure the parameters of engagement/disengagement, there are those who put forward the idea that it is also the teachers or educators who may also be disengaged from learning. Freire (1998) and hooks (1994) argue for the importance of teachers being engaged themselves with learning in order for their students to be also. Based on the premise put forward by Freire (1972) that there is no teaching without learning, he later said that:

> *…as a teacher, I cannot help the students overcome their ignorance if I am not engaged permanently in trying to overcome my own* (Freire,1998, p.89*)*

Likewise, hooks envisions engagement as a vehicle for empowering both students and teachers alike and sees engaged pedagogy as meaning that:

> *teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualisation that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students.* (hooks, 1994, p.15)

2.4 Reasons for Disengagement

Probably the most widely referred to study on levels of disengagement in mainstream schools and policy reports is that completed by the National Centre for Educational Research (NFER) in 2009. Interestingly, the NFER have also been commissioned to deliver the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2018, the world's biggest international education survey, involving schools and pupils in over

80 countries. NFER will be carrying out this survey in the UK on behalf of the Department for Education in England, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government, and the Department of Education in Northern Ireland. Findings from the survey will provide internationally comparative data which is used to inform education policy in the UK and across the world. Its aim is be used to improve teaching and learning in reading, science and maths and to provide valuable insights into background factors such as pupils' attitudes, school resources, teachers' practices and qualifications and how they relate to pupil achievement. Critics of the survey claim that its findings are arbitrary and that a small change in question choice or weightings could result in a big change in a country's overall rankings (Sjoberg, 2012).

The NFER (2009) study identified the following as primary indicators of disengagement:

- student attitude; personal investment in education
- individual factors: academic failure; illiteracy; mental health issues; substance misuse; medical/psychological ill health
- structural dimensions i.e. socio-economic disadvantage; poor housing; crime; family breakdown; parental education level; class/race/gender/sexuality
- Cultural factors, such as not having English as the first language

The disengagement of young people from school is often strongly associated with the family context of the disengaged young person and the extent to which parents can provide social, emotional and indeed financial support for their children and young people to engage at school. A large portion of both UK based and international research consistently shows that children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to experience some level of disengagement (Pruano, 2014; Simmons and Thomson, 2013; Thompson, 2011; House of Commons Education Committee, 2010; Coles et al., 2010; Byrne, 2005; Macdonald and Marsh, 2005)

According to these studies, children and young people at risk of disengaging from school, generally experience one or more of the following indicators:

- Being members of families with limited resources (human as well as financial)
- Starting school without the necessary capabilities to cope with situations and tasks (school readiness)
- Inability to form connections with peers or teachers
- Frequent and persistent absence
- Having a chronic illness, disability or mental health issues
- Not able to speak English as a first language
- Living in a remote/rural area
- Living in an area of disadvantage (independent of family level disadvantage)
- Attending schools who already have a high concentration of disadvantaged students.

Empirical research and government census data in the UK shows us that the young people that participate in alternative education programmes for those designated as disengaged from education do share certain personal and social characteristics:

- Boys are more likely to be disengaged from mainstream school than girls (Institute of Education (University of London) and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), 2013; McCluskey et al., 2013). However, girls truant at roughly the same rates (Gov.uk, 2016) as boys and the rate of girls being missing from school and recorded as 'unauthorised absence' is consistently higher than of boys (Osler and Vincent, 2003; Stanley and Arora, 1998)

- Young people who have been formally excluded from school or who become fully disengaged from school, are more likely to be living in poverty (Institute of Education (University of London) and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), 2013; Parsons, 2011)

- Disengagement is generally, but not always, associated with lower levels of academic attainment. There are, however, very academically able young people in attendance at alternative education providers (Thomson and Russell, 2007)

- Those young people who are disengaged from school but not necessarily formally excluded from school are more likely to be Black, minority ethnic and young people of mixed race (Wright et al., 2009).

The statistics and information presented above do show that there appears to be a complex combination of social, individual and systemic educational processes at work in the production of a 'disengaged' young person. Also, as Ross (2009) points out, disengagement from school does not necessarily mean disengagement from education. Those who work with young people who have become disengaged from school want to give those young people an opportunity to make a fresh start but they often find themselves faced with young people for whom the processes of disengagement or formal exclusion they have been through have been traumatic and/ or whose lives are very troubled and troubling (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2017; Arnold et al., 2009).

2.5 History/Background

In terms of policy development directly linked to tackling the disengagement of young people in the UK, the identification of young people as disengaged first emerged in public policy documents in the early 1990s when, as reported by Furlong (2004), the concept of NEET was first used to replace "Status Zer0" in 1994. This was a term which was commonly used at the time to record 16 and 17 year olds who were not eligible for welfare benefits because they were underage and who were also not accessing any government funded education or training programmes. The acronym NEET described young people who were "not in education, employment or training" and aimed to present a more heterogeneous view of these young people than was being assumed through the negative connotations of "Status Zer0". Tony Blair, then Prime Minister, was heavily influenced by sociologist Anthony Giddens whom he cited as his 'favourite guru' (Martell, 2002: 122). Giddens saw the achievement of equality as through narrowing the gap between *exclusion* and *inclusion*, concepts which he saw as being related to the top and the bottom of society, to the poor and the rich. He accepted the neo-liberal view of the welfare state as needing remodelling to become more compatible with the creation of wealth and an economically globalised world "*Inclusion as a value requires not only employment strategies but also universal social services"* (Giddens, 1998: p.109). He saw this goal as requiring an "*increased investment in human capital"* through education and training (Giddens, 1998: p.111).

Blair, in the New Labour Government's '*Bridging the Gap'* report (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999) stated that:

> *the best defence against social exclusion is having a job, and the best way to get a job is to have a good education, with the right training and experience.* (p.6)

The government thus embarked wholeheartedly in establishing the Welfare to Work scheme. The key priority was to "engage the disengaged" and "*getting a job was seen as a way of avoiding exclusion*" (France, 2007, p.64).This initial focus was on assisting young people disengaged from education, training and employment on overcoming the barriers associated with exclusion and disengagement that they faced. This holistic approach however, proceeded to move towards identifying "being NEET as a negative situation, conceptually connected to a locus of disadvantage" (Yates and Payne, 2006). This was illustrated by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) as young people with NEET status being typified by:

> *Educational underachievement; unemployment; inactivity/not currently in the workforce; poor physical or mental health or disability; substance abuse; and crime were identified as being associated with being NEET*.
> (DfES 2002, p.ii)

This depiction again offers a deficit view of young people who are disengaged by putting them at the margins of society and assuming that their position there has been established due to their "*low levels of aspiration and little motivation*" (Popham, 2003, p.8). Yates and Payne (2006) argue that this view is distorted as "*'NEET' is a problematic concept that defines young people by what they are not.*" Yet, it is clear that the categorisation of disengaged young people continues and the NEET label now captures some of the stigma directed towards these young people within society.

2.6 Effects of Disengagement

Standing (2011), identified those young people not engaged in education or employment as being a primary contributor to the emergence of a new class distinction, that of the:

> *precariat, a fast developing class of people who have in common a lack of stability, a lack of solidarity and belonging and above all a lack of hope for the future*. (p.5)

The notion of disengaged young people being seen as a threat to societal values and interests is not new. Cohen (1972) in his seminal work *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, explored how every era has had groups of young people, such as the mods and rockers in the 60s, the hippies in the 70s right up to the present day 'hoodies', who challenge the status quo and are subsequently demonised and vilified by the media and those in political power. Cohen suggests that this approach results in further marginalisation which inhibits the rational discussion that could be focussing on solutions to the social problems that such groups often represent. Furthermore, he argues that the existence of young people disengaging from society acts as an identifier to the very fault lines of power in society.

Perry et al. (2001) identified that most children present positive attitudes to learning when first beginning school at primary level that act as a powerful internal motivation to learn. However, as they become increasingly aware that their performance is being measured in comparison with their peers (both within the classroom and nationally), external motivation becomes increasingly important (Harter, 1996). This pressure, compounding with other developmental changes commensurate with adolescence, tends to evoke a negative effect which results in the lowering of academic self-concepts (Dijkstra et al., 2008).

The effects of this can lead to de-motivation and disengagement from school. Main and Whatman (2016) showed through their research in schools that the clarity of an individual's goals and expectations, the ability to value learning positively, their innate beliefs about their self-efficacy, believing that ability is incremental rather than innate, and having a strong personal identity as a learner all impact positively on educational success. The link between the effects of disengagement on the presence of a strong personal identity are examined closely through this study in terms of whether having a negative experience of education will subsequently affect the young person’s identity and engagement with learning.

It would be pertinent at this point to put forward the suggestion that those young people who are depicted as disengaged, may actually perceive the world as the opposite, that it is they who present the norm and it is the ‘us’ or those that would class themselves as being ‘engaged’ that are assuming the deficit position, through presenting systems and structures that are ultimately not relevant enough to the lived experiences of young people to warrant their engagement. Demerath (2009) identified the phenomenon of ‘*alienated and savvy*’ students who, although high achievers in terms of academic success, actively choose to disengage from the classroom activities, social structures and leisure opportunities offered to them by the institution, preferring instead to self-select aspects of the school which meet their learning needs and advance their progress towards academic attainment. These students, although effectively disengaged, are not identified as causing a problem within the school as academic targets are being achieved. Furthermore, Fisher (2011) found that disaffection with education could often be concealed by students, behind a '*veil of compliance'*(p.136) leading to a situation whereby students appear to be engaging in education, at least in terms of actually being present but in effect are disengaged from those behavioural, cognitive and affective domains by which engagement is often measured. Fullarton (2002) claims that*:*

> *Some students simply endure thirteen years of schooling at minimum participation levels, If we are to encourage lifelong learning skills in young people then we need to address low engagement with school.* (p.31)

Ranciere (2010) proposed that school disengagement, rather than representing a wholehearted disregard to engaging with the school, is actually a key form of political agency in education, schools and the broader environments in that it presents an alternative form of 'citizenship' or political engagement in these environments. That is, those disengaging from school are in fact demonstrating a form of political engagement as enacted through the act of dissent. Hence, a form of 'alternative citizenship' is generated. The whole notion of citizenship, for which the education system is the primary introduction point for, is dependent on the active involvement and engagement of young people therein. Biesta (2009) identifies participation as the "*key idea*" (p. 148) of active citizenship. That is, young people taking an active role within their school rather than passive involvement. Interestingly, evidence has been raised to suggest that early school leavers are "less active citizens" (European Commission, 2011, p.3). Scheerens (2011) considers school as "*a context to exercise 'school citizenship' – a context which constitutes a micro-cosmos of society and, thus, serves as a "bridge to societal citizenship and state citizenship*" (pp.201-202). The importance of citizenship to democracy is well documented (Biesta, 2009; Bosniak, 2006; Smith, 2002) so for young people to actively disengage from school could be seen to also indicate the disengagement from the accompanying structures for which engagement with is necessary for a democratic society to survive. This view is supported by Ranciere (2010) who writes that the institutions that serve the state (of which school is one) rely on the active engagement of the people within them in order for democracy to function. The public institution has a need to be all inclusive "*everyone has a particular place, role or position within it*" (p.34). Most importantly, in terms of the implications for those that do not engage "*In this matching of functions, places, and ways of being, there is no place for any void*" (p.36). This view raises an important question about the legitimacy of the disengaged – if there is 'no place for any void', and those disengaged must be returned forthwith to the 'mothership', then what space is there for those that have become, either through choice or circumstance, disengaged from such an institution? It is within, or outside of, this 'void' that Ranciere identifies that disengagement emerges as a form of democratic, political activism as those disengaged enter into 'a dispute about what is given' (Ranciere, 2004 p. 304). Tanke (2011) suggested that those who have become disengaged from a societal structure experience a "subjectification" (p.67) which results in "*a disidentification and creation of a new subjectivity*" (p.68). Giroux

(2016) refers to disengagement as a not necessarily negative construct and speaks of actually "*welcoming exile under certain circumstances*". He suggests that:

> *maybe the space of exile is one of the few spaces left in neoliberal societies where one can cultivate a sense of meaningful connection, solidarity and engaged citizenship that goes beyond allegiance to interest groups and an immersion in a deadly conformism and culture of mediocrity.*(Giroux ,2016, p.174)

This approach would therefore need society to construct, or offer the freedom to create, alternative spaces that work to not only reconnect these young people with a sense of citizenship, perhaps with their fellow exiles, but also to counter the stigma many of these young people face in their schooling and in the local community in order to counteract the deficit view that they currently face. It is the search for such spaces that this study is dedicated.

Standing (2011) iterates that:

> *Disengagement might be understandable, but it is the worst case scenario, the precariatised mind, and precariousness in general, creates fear and loss of hope. Youth who lose hope may easily lose interest in the political process, which would be wrong. We need to struggle for a much better type of society. We must forge a new form of political engagement.*
> (p.64)

The question as to whether this is happening (or not) already in alternative education settings, pupil referral units, free schools and the like is one which shall be further explored within the research findings section of this study. Kim (2011, p.124) feels vehemently not, with his scathing description

> *at the other end of the schooling spectrum lies the alternative school, where a last-ditch, arts-anaemic school experience awaits those who 'fail' in mainstream traditional public schools*.

Young people who are disengaged from these mainstream schools are at risk of a range of adverse academic and social outcomes. Most forms of disengagement, such as absence, disruptive behaviour, and poor school connectedness, are associated with lower achievement (Reay, 2017), all of which have significant implications for their school experience. Reay sees the relationship between engagement and educational achievement as tending to be cyclical and repeatedly reinforced meaning that while low achievement may be represented as an adverse outcome of disengagement, it can also contribute to the process. It is important to identify problems with disengagement as early as possible as it is more often the end-point of a long process of disengagement over time. To become disengaged from school also has negative implications for young people's life course trajectories beyond the compulsory school years. Young people who become disengaged from school are at greater risk of unemployment, low income, social exclusion, risky health behaviours, and engaging in crime (DfE, 2016a). If the young people become parents in the future, their ability to support their children at school is diminished and the children are also faced with an increased likelihood of disengagement (Grasso et al., 2017). Of course, not all young people who ever disengage from school will end up on such a trajectory (see Stevenson and Clegg, 2011), but, in terms of the intergenerational persistence of disadvantage, disengagement from school remains a significant and recurring issue in these young people's life stories.

Some of the risk factors which are associated with disengagement include lower socio-economic status, low academic achievement, parental unemployment, low self-confidence, mental health problems, and young/teenage parenthood (Public Health England, 2014; Dorsett & Lucchino, 2014). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development found that internationally, young women in particular are more likely to be disengaged, perhaps due to having children at a younger age or a higher prevalence of familial caring responsibilities keeping them from school (OECD, 2015), whilst in the UK and Europe it is young males who are statistically more likely to be disengaged from school (Reay, 2017, 2012; ONS, 2017; OCC 2012, 2013a, 2013b). Of these young people, it is generally those from low socio-economic backgrounds that are more likely to become disengaged (Genda, 2007; UCL Institute of Health Equity, 2012).

Although some young people are only disengaged from mainstream education for a short time, others experience long-term disengagement. To be fully disengaged once increases the risk of becoming so again, pointing to the potential longer-term consequences of disengagement from employment, education and training (Public Health England, 2014).

Being disengaged from mainstream education is associated with numerous negative economic, psychosocial and health impacts and also constitutes a substantial financial cost to the individual and to the economy (Public Health England, 2014). Additionally, evidence shows that the self-rated general health status of young people out of education is generally of a lower level compared to fully engaged young people (Nordenmark et al., 2015).

Disengaged young people also display a higher incidence of mental health and substance misuse problems, including depression and self-harm, as well as criminal offending (Baggio et al., 2015; Benjet et al., 2012; Fergusson et al., 2014; O'Dea et al., 2014).

Goldman-Mellor et al. (2016) imply that the causal relationship between disengagement and mental health problems is two way: being disengaged can be a risk factor for developing mental health issues, perhaps as a consequence of exclusion from social structures, conversely, mental health issues can themselves be a risk factor for becoming disengaged in the first place, as young people with mental health symptoms may struggle to engage in the education setting as a consequence of these symptoms. Goldman-Mellor et al. (2016) also found that disengaged young people have increased incidence of mental health issues than engaged young people and that they experienced more of these issues before becoming disengaged. It was also identified that they tended to be more pessimistic about the future than engaged young people, those who had been disengaged from education were also more engaged in seeking employment, suggesting that it was not a lack of effort or commitment that led them to becoming disengaged from school (Goldman-Mellor et al., 2016); this finding, that the status of being disengaged from school does not necessarily correlate with underlying personality traits (Baggio et al., 2015), but rather with psychological and social challenges such as low socio-economic status, disability, and other psychosocial difficulties (Dorsett & Lucchino, 2014; Public Health England, 2014). These challenges led to the observations made by Goldman-Mellor et al., (2016) that young people who have previously been disengaged from mainstream education, are, upon becoming leaving school age, already prepared and committed to finding work, but typically discouraged and lacking the skills and confidence required to integrate themselves into the job market, which is unfortunate since a lack of basic employment skills has been shown to predicate unemployment among young people (Lundetrae et al., 2010).

2.7 Tackling Disengagement

Under Section 436A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, as introduced by Section 4 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, Local Authorities are under a duty to identify all children not receiving an education. Local Authorities must make arrangements to identify children of compulsory school age in their area who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at school.

The government issued the statutory guidance “Children Missing Education” (DfE, 2016a), which states that:

> *Children of compulsory school age who are not receiving a suitable education should be returned to full time education either at school or in alternative provision. (p.5)*

Whether an education is suitable or not will be ascertained through a Local Authority educational assessment which will take place at the home of a young person whereby s/he is deemed as being ’homeschooled.

Whilst schools do have responsibility for the young people on their rolls, including those who they exclude on a short-term basis, they are able to call on the local authority to assist them with identifying and referring to specialist services such as

CAMHSS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Support Services), and also with transferring young people from one school site to another. In some locations, this function has been taken over by clusters of local schools which have come together under academy status (Abdelnoor, 2007; Thomson et al., 2005). The local authority are able to use a range of alternative education providers in order to provide enhanced options for young people.

There have been a huge range of concerns expressed about the arrangements for continuing the education of young people who have become disengaged from school (Centre for Social Justice, 2011; House of Commons Education Committee, 2011; Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2017, 2013, 2012; Ofsted, 2017, 2013, 2011).Specifically, these concerns range from inconsistency in approach across schools and local authorities; the variable times young people are left out of education altogether; the varying times they spend in various alternative education providers; lack of effective reintegration; costs of provision (and who is paying); and the quality of provision on offer, how and who is monitoring it and how inappropriate provision is identified and dealt with.

2.7.1 Exclusion

The Department of Education's policy on pupil exclusion is set out in statutory guidance: Exclusion from Maintained Schools, Academies and Pupil Referral Units in England (2017).This document states that "*good discipline in schools is essential to ensure that all pupils can benefit from the opportunities provided by education*" (p. 15). The guidance also states that the Government supports head teachers in using exclusion as a sanction "*where it is warranted*" (p.24), emphasising that:

> *Permanent exclusion should only be used as a last resort, in response to a serious breach, or persistent breaches, of the school's behaviour policy; and where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others in the school*. (p.12)

Other key aspects of the Government policy on exclusion are that the decision to exclude a pupil must be *lawful, reasonable* and *fair*; schools have a statutory duty not to discriminate against pupils on the basis of protected characteristics, such as sexuality, disability or race; and schools should give particular consideration to the fair treatment of pupils from groups who are vulnerable to exclusion.

Under the existing rules on exclusions and pupil registrations it is permitted for schools to:

- Formally exclude pupils for a fixed period for reasons of poor behaviour
- Formally exclude pupils permanently for reasons of poor behaviour.

(DfE, 2017, p.14)

2.7.2 Offrolling

Ofsted has announced recently (Bloom, 2018) that it is to conduct an investigation into exclusion figures, in particular trying to establish why two regions in the north-east of England have higher rates of excluded pupils than anywhere else in England. Six of the 10 worst offending areas are situated in the north-east, with exclusions running at more than 1 in 10 pupils, a statistic which offers a pertinent justification for the positioning of this study in a large city in the north of England.

Schools already have to make statistics on behaviour and pupils removed from the school roll available to Ofsted. They also have to show records of exclusion, together with reasons. There are various types of exclusion, with clear rules about how the sanction can be applied. Pupils can be excluded for fixed periods of time – anything from part of a day to a maximum of 45 days in any school year. More than one fixed period exclusion can be applied within the year. In the extreme, exclusion can be permanent, in which case a local council has to provide education for excluded pupils from the sixth day after exclusion. Parents are invited to appeal against both types of exclusion using a clearly defined process which should be made available to them by the school (DfE, 2017).

There is growing concern that schools are ‘offrolling’ students whose behaviour may be becoming so disruptive as to be detrimental to the success and engagement of other students (Mansell, 2018). Evidence from the recent NFER (2018) report shows that there was just over a fifth (22 per cent) of school leaders participating in their research who believed that it was acceptable and indeed legitimate that they could encourage parents to withdraw their child and apply to another school, as an alternative to a permanent exclusion. Their primary reasons for doing so were due to the potential impact of disruptive pupils on exam results, in that they are likely to harm the school’s exam performance and therefore its league table positions; there is also some evidence that schools are using fixed period exclusions to make sure that disruptive students are not in school at the same time as Ofsted or other inspectors (Ofsted, 2017). There is certainly evidence that some parents are being told that if they remove their child to home education, they can avoid a full-time exclusion that will remain on their child’s record and harm their future prospects (Smith et al., 2018; Nye and Thompson, 2017).

Robert Halfon, current Conservative party minister and chair of the Education Select Committee, has recently been conducting an enquiry into alternative provision (Parliament.uk, 2017). With exclusions running at about 35 pupils every school day (Busby, 2018), Halfon claims that

> *Parents and pupils face a system which isn't designed for their needs, too often being left to a Wild West of exclusions with too many pupils in alternative provision who shouldn't be there, and those who are there not receiving the right support or the early intervention needed to make a difference to their lives. (Busby*, 2018, p.1)

With both pupils and their parents unprotected in cases of wrongful exclusion (such as offrolling), he suggests that a Bill of Rights for pupils would create greater transparency around the process, as schools would be subject to close scrutiny. Although statutory guidance says that exclusion should only be used for serious breaches of a school's behaviour policy or if the student's continued presence is a threat to the safety of other students, schools interpret this in very different ways. Academies control their own admissions and can refuse to take pupils with a history of poor behaviour, so students living in areas where most schools are academies have no access to a fresh start in another school. There are also no national standards governing the quality of the alternative provision which local councils are obliged to provide, so the quality of support and education can be variable (Ofsted, 2017).

2.8 Alternative Education

Historically, alternative forms of education have co-existed with the mainstream education system ever since its inception in the first half of the 19th Century (Raywid, 1999). Religious leaders and other critics resisted the efforts of educational pioneers to centralise schooling as they believed education was the responsibility of the individual, the family and the local community rather than a political programme mandated by the state (Sliwka, 2008). The early 20th Century saw the arrival of the Montessori child-centred approach to education in 1907, the first Waldorf school founded by Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner was established in 1919 and the Freinet school in France opened in 1935. The progressive education movement in North America, founded by John Dewey and others was a powerful development in the field of education with its strong belief in education based on the needs of the individual and focus on experiential application of knowledge being the best way to learn rather than the methods of learning by rote and memorisation popular in the public schools at the time.

A widespread social movement emerged in the 1960s and 1970s that bolstered the field of alternative education. With Ivan Illich and A.S Neill in Europe, Paulo Freire in South America and John Holt and Herbert Kohl in the United States all questioning the role and practices of mainstream schooling, many schools were set up across the world developing and practicing student-centred and independent learning which focused on project based learning experiences which encouraged cooperative learning as well as individual study.

> *Wherever educational alternatives combine customised learning with collaborative group learning in authentic, inquiry-oriented projects, provide*

> *their students with access to diverse knowledge sources and assess them for deeper understanding and further learning, alternative schools seem to be ahead of mainstream education and can serve as meaningful models for the renewal of mainstream education across the globe.* (Sliwka, 2008)

The term ‘alternative education’ is a catch-all term used usually to describe any education which takes place outside of the mainstream schooling system and there have been several attempts at answering the question of what makes a particular learning practice ‘alternative’ (Kraftl, 2013, Sliwka, 2008; Woods and Woods, 2009). In its broadest sense, alternative education encompasses all those educational settings and activities that fall outside of the mainstream schooling system. These include the many options for families to opt out of the formal education system to attend alternative education which is selected by parents and children through their own preferences and choice such as Montessori, Steiner, democratic education or home education. Thomson and Pennachia (2014) conducted a literature review that spanned both UK and international perspectives about alternative education provision and identified the following points:

1. The range of alternative education on offer in the UK is not dissimilar to that found in other places.
2. Alternative education is not a new phenomenon – it has existed alongside mainstream public education since the first half of the nineteenth century (Miller, 2007; Sliwka, 2008)

3. They found no single definition of alternative education, and that there were significant tensions and differences in the task of imposing some kind of order on the diverse range of alternative education provision that exists.

However, it is the education programmes and initiatives which cater specifically for young people for whom attendance at a mainstream school is seen by the school as being no longer tenable that this study is focusing on. This may be due to them presenting disruptive, or challenging behaviour within the school and/or poor/non attendance culminating in an overall lack of engagement. These behaviours and actions will have resulted in the school removing those young people from the mainstream setting, usually to prevent long-term exclusion and to avoid further disruption within the classroom to other pupils in the school. The destinations for these young people are generally referred to within the UK as alternative education provision or alternative provision which is generally separate to those alternative education settings such as democratic schools and the like that tend to have been chosen as an alternative to mainstream school by parents and their children.

The government has published statutory guidance (DfE, 2013) on alternative provision, which is used by local authorities and schools for information and guidelines for making decisions about the future education of young people either disengaged or at risk of disengaging from school. The first part of this document (paragraphs 1-27) explains the statutory powers and duties that apply in relation to alternative provision. The second part (paragraphs 28-47) contains statutory guidance to which the parties specified ‘must have regard’. This means that they should be able to demonstrate that they had considered this statutory guidance, and where it is not followed have reasonable grounds for deciding not to follow it.

It includes:

- Education arranged by Local Authorities for pupils who because of exclusion, illness or other reasons would not otherwise receive a suitable education;
- Education arranged by schools for pupils on a fixed period exclusion;
- Pupils directed by schools to off-site provision.

The guide specifies that the education should be the same amount as a young person would receive in a maintained school and can be made up by two or more part-time provisions. The education can take place in a Pupil Referral Unit, at another school or another form of local authority registered alternative education provision. In some circumstances, a parent may decide to remove their child from the school entirely and would then become responsible for the education of their child.

With regard to the expected standards of alternative provision, providers will be expected to be available for Ofsted inspection at any time and the DfE (2013) guidance states that it should:

- Aim at good academic attainment on par with mainstream schools in key subjects (English, maths, science and ICT with the appropriate qualifications);
- Identify and meet the specific personal, social and academic needs of pupils;
- Aim to improve a pupil’s motivation and self-confidence, attendance and engagement with education; and
- Have clearly defined objectives including future options of education, training or employment.

In terms of the UK statutory guidance (DfE, 2013a), to which the majority of mainstream schools confer, the definition of that form of alternative education, usually known as alternative provision, designed to cater for the education of young people who have become disengaged from mainstream school is as follows:

> *Education arranged by local authorities for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education; Education arranged by schools for pupils on a fixed period exclusion; and pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour.* *(*DfE, 2013, p.1)

It is defined slightly differently by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) as:

> …*something in which a young person participates as part of their regular timetable, away from the site of the school or the pupil referral unit and not led by school staff*. *Schools can use such a provision to try to prevent exclusions, or to re-engage students in their education. Pupil referral units are themselves a form of alternative provision, but many students who are on the roll of a pupil referral unit can also attend additional forms of alternative provision offsite.*
>
> (Ofsted, 2016, p.4)

Alternative education, in this respect, is for children and young people who have struggled to attend mainstream schools and have thus been described as ‘disengaged’, ‘disconnected’ or ‘excluded’. This might be for a variety of reasons, such as formal school exclusion, behavioural issues, short- or long-term illness, school refusal or teenage pregnancy.

The Institute of Education (University of London) and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER, 2013) lists fifteen types of alternative education provision on offer to those young people that are at risk of becoming disengaged/excluded. These are:

1. Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)
2. Specialist targeted support e.g. CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Support Services)
3. Individual Work Placements
4. Additional services provided by the Local Authority e.g. traveller education support
5. Time spent in FE (Further Education) college either full time or part time
6. Time spent in another school
7. Private sector organisations offering learning and training opportunities
8. Home tuition service
9. Independent specialist providers e.g. behavioural
10. Voluntary and third sector organisations
11. Youth work organisations
12. Sports clubs i.e. boxing academy; football club
13. Hospital school
14. E-learning provision
15. Other

What is not clear, and what is almost impossible to standardise across such a range of providers is whether enrolment of a young person into any of these settings is voluntary, by choice or whether it is by a formal referral process generating from the school as part of a structured intervention into the young person's educational progress. It *is* clear however, that what counts as alternative education is not straightforward and covered by one clear-cut definition. Thomson and Russell (2007) in an effort to rationalise this problem, created a typology of alternative provision:

Figure 1: A Programmatic Typology (Thomson and Russell, 2007)

Nature of Programme	**Type of Activity**	**Examples**
Vocational	A programme that is specifically gained towards a particular occupation/profession/career. Often offering an actual qualification that will help a young person to enter the 'world of work'	Construction Motor vehicles Hair and Beauty
Work skills	Generic work skills are developed such as 'being able to follow instructions'	General experience on farms
Basic skills	English, Maths, Science and IT are offered (not necessarily at GCSE level)	e-learning sites
Life skills	General skills needed to function in society are developed such as, social skills, cooking, talking without swearing	Team-building exercises
Activity based	The programme has an activity/leisure focus	Fishing Cycling
Environmental	The focus is on teaching young people about nature and how to utilise materials in the outdoors and survive outdoors	Work in forests
Arts	Has a focus on teaching and learning the arts	Dance, media, music and drawing, pottery
Therapeutic	Focuses on offering a remedial option	Anger management, family therapy
Work experience	Various work placements that form part of a young person's educational package, some are offered as part of actual programmes	
Academic	Has a strong scholastic focus, with and emphasis on known educational qualifications such as GCSE	One-to-one tuition

Raywid (1990) identified some of the most pertinent and ongoing debates about alternative education by noting that the various alternative education programmes differed:

> *According to their missions (providing a more humane and effective education, segregating, containing and reforming a disruptive population, healing the wounded). They differ as to what to look to and begin working on when education fails (the student's misbehaviour, the student's psyche, or the school's environment). They differ according to the functions formally assigned to them, and the expectations and demands of those to whom they report…* *(*Raywid, 1990, p.31)

This excerpt highlights some of the key debates which abound in the arena of alternative education and centre on the key questions around enrolment and purpose. Thomson and Pennacchia (2014, p.9), identify these as:

1. *Whether alternative education is only for those who do not fit into the mainstream.*
2. *Whether the problem for those young people is the result of something about them, or something about the schooling system, and*
3. *Whether the goal of alternative education is to 'fix' the young person in order that they can re-enter mainstream education, or offer a different pathway to outcomes which includes education but also encompasses citizenship, spiritual and aesthetic development and other personal and social development outcomes.*

Raywid (1994) felt that the most ‘authentic’ form of alternative education was that which offered a full-time and permanent education option to anyone who chose to take a different route from the mainstream. However, she contended that there were also numerous education options which were available as an alternative to mainstream for those young people who really struggled to engage. She divided this type of alternative education into two genres – that of the ‘quick fix’ and the other more holistic, long term version. She was in favour of the full-time, permanent version of alternative education but conceded that the holistic, more long-term versions of remedial support were better than none. She developed a three part typology of alternative schooling which was criticised for it’s assumption of a deficit on behalf of either the young person or the school. Heinrich (2005) maintained that success in alternative education could never be fully achieved while young people were being segregated from the rest of their peers in mainstream schools. He contended that these peers should also spend time in alternative provision whilst those from the alternative should maintain regular contact with the mainstream. He argued for “*an alternative education which combined a humanistic philosophy, a progressive pedagogy with insistence on behavioural compliance and an overall goal of emancipation*” (2005, p. 27). He was adamant that the notion of ‘second chance’ education as purported by Raywid’s (2005) typology, was coercive and that the notion of ‘another chance’ was preferable. Kellermayer (1995 and 1998) mirrors this position by arguing that most alternative provisions are:

‘*pseudo-alternatives, ineffective and often punitive, they isolate and segregate students from peers in the mainstream*.” (Thomson, 2014, p.6)

Kellermayer concurs with Raywid (1995) through suggesting that ‘genuine’ alternatives are voluntary, distinctive from traditional education and offer a student-centred learning environment and a comprehensive set of outcomes and objectives.

Aron (2003, 2006) however, rejected Raywid’s three-part typology as being problematic in creating three distinct types when, in reality, the practice in real alternative education settings displayed blurred and overlapping elements of each of the three. She provided a definition of alternative education which offered:

> *…students who are failing academically or who may have learning disabilities, behavioural problems, or poor attendance, an opportunity to achieve in a different setting and use different and innovative learning models. While there are many different kinds of alternative schools and programmes, they are often characterised by their flexible schedules, smaller teacher-student ratios, and modified curricula.* (Aron, 2006, p.6)

Aron’s definition, however, does not take into account young people who are not having any specific problems in mainstream school but who might be choosing to attend an alternative school or education setting simply on the grounds that it is different and they are attracted to its particular pedagogy.

TeRiele’s (2007) mapping of educational alternatives from an Australian perspective (Figure 2) adapted the typology developed by Aron and Zweig (2003) which focused on:

> *General type, target population, focus/purpose, operational setting, educational focus, sponsor/administration, credentials offered, and funding sources*. (teRiele, 2007, p.72)

She based the first dimension of her map on the purpose of the alternative education programme, and is linked to the two perspectives relating to the locus of change (either the young person or the educational provision) and the relative stability / instability of the project. The aim at one end of this dimension is to change the young person in some way. The assumption being that the young person is presenting as a deficit in some area, be that in their knowledge, skills or inability to present ‘acceptable’ behaviour, and that once this deficit has been tackled and effectively removed then the young person can successfully complete their schooling, preferably by returning to a mainstream setting. The aim therefore at the other end of the dimension is to change the provision of education. The assumption here is that through changing the curriculum or adopting an alternative pedagogical approach will better meet the needs of young people, and thus enable them to learn and gain educational qualifications (Thomson and Russell, 2007).

The second dimension is based on the stability of the alternative education programme. One end of the dimension refers to projects with low stability, usually due to uncertain funding. These educational programmes tend to be connected to a charity or community organisation and often (but not always) offer short-term projects with an ad hoc nature on a part time basis. The other end of the dimension consists of more stable educational alternatives. These are usually established schools or units/annexes within schools that offer either full-time alternative education programmes for a short term period, or a long-term programme offered as an alternative to mainstream schools, usually leading to accredited qualifications.

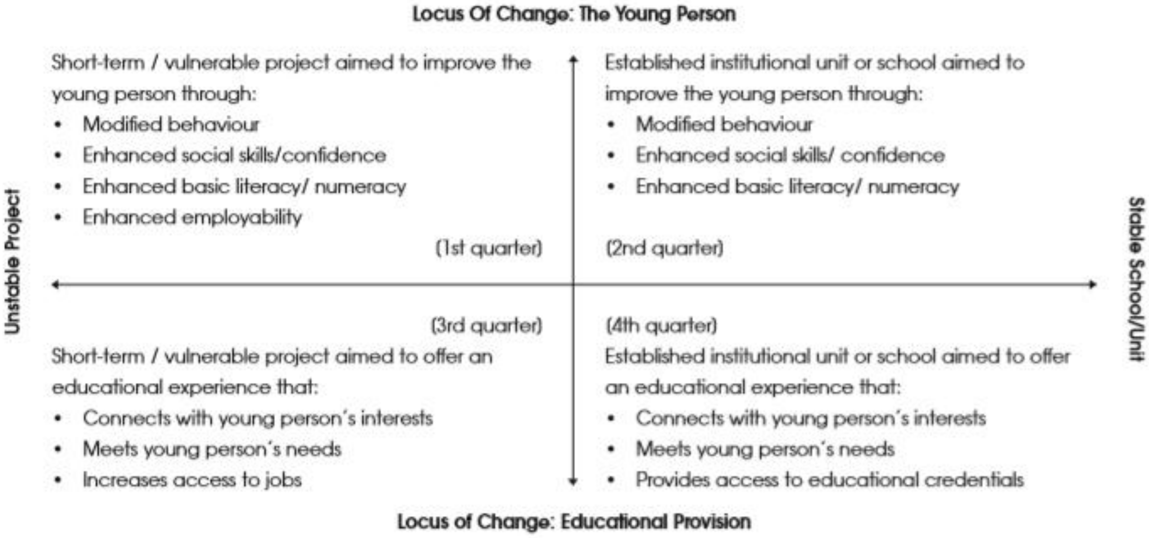
Locus Of Change: The Young Person
Short-term / vulnerable project aimed to improve the young person through:
• Modified behaviour
• Enhanced social skills/confidence
• Enhanced basic literacy/ numeracy
• Enhanced employability
(1st quarter)
Established institutional unit or school aimed to improve the young person through:
• Modified behaviour
• Enhanced social skills/ confidence
• Enhanced basic literacy/ numeracy
(2nd quarter)
Unstable Project
Stable School/Unit
(3rd quarter)
Short-term / vulnerable project aimed to offer an educational experience that:
• Connects with young person's interests
• Meets young person's needs
• Increases access to jobs
(4th quarter)
Established institutional unit or school aimed to offer an educational experience that:
• Connects with young person's interests
• Meets young person's needs
• Provides access to educational credentials
Locus of Change: Educational Provision

Figure 2. teRiele's (2007) Map of Educational Alternatives

2.8.1 Pedagogy

Alternative education exists in many forms and there are a plethora of creative and exploratory pedagogies at play within those that work solely with young people who have become disengaged from education. As explored previously in this chapter, there are a multitude of reasons for a young person's education within a mainstream education environment to become untenable. These reasons may be personal, related to a chaotic family background, subject to peer group pressure or indeed medical, and they may also be that the young person just cannot subscribe to the 'one size fits all' model offered by mainstream schooling. This is where alternative education can really come to the fore as its ability to stand outside the restrictions of the mainstream curriculum and pressures of constant standardised assessments offer it the freedom and censorship to be able to try things a little differently to meet the individual needs of the young people it serves. Young people facing multiple complexities in their lives often require different ways of being from their educators and education settings (Morgan et al, 2013), and there is evidence that the smaller alternative education providers are frequently more able to provide the enriching and individualised placements for children and young people who struggle to engage educationally and socially within the mainstream environment (McCluskey et al., 2015; O'Gorman et al., 2015; Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016).

Meta-analysis studies on the best interventions aiming specifically at young people who have disengaged from mainstream (e.g., Oliver et al., 2014) indicate that the provision of an *"optimal integrated service hub that is well positioned to serve NEET youth"*(p.365)is conducive to the successful reintegration into education for these young people. In other words, an environment which includes the resources needed to successfully support and signpost the young person not just into education, but with housing, substance misuse, financial advice, independent living skills and any other areas which the young person may need support with in order to move forward with their lives. Much evidence also shows that involving young people directly in the planning and delivery processes of the setting, through equal youth-adult partnerships may help to make education services more relevant to the young people they target (Public Health England, 2014; Osilla et al., 2013; Henderson et al., 2017).

Some of the most effective learning takes place when teachers support students to achieve their learning goals and to articulate their development through scaffolding, which is "*gradually added, modified and removed according to the needs of the learner"* (Collins, 2006) and a level of deep understanding develops when learning is integrated with reflection or meta-cognition (Carver, 2006). Sliwka (2008) points out that given the range of features at alternative education settings that seem to make sense from a learning theory perspective, alternative schools could well serve as models for a broader renewal of mainstream education in our current knowledge based society. To a certain extent, it could be seen that alternative education has already been playing that role in the way that so many of the instructional strategies and assessment techniques they have developed that I shall be discussing further in this chapter, have already impacted on learning and teaching in the mainstream schooling systems across the world.

Sawyer (2008) presented the case for sound evidence to show that alternative education settings supported and developed learning experiences which were *“connected and coherent [knowledge], rather than compartmentalised into distinct subjects and courses”* (p.58). He outlined some of the key findings from the field of learning sciences (an interdisciplinary field that studies teaching and learning) that offer implications that alternative learning environments are often at the forefront of these methods of learning. He saw the most effective learning environments as having the following characteristics:

- *Customised learning:* Each child receives a customised learning experience.
- *Availability of diverse knowledge sources:* Learners can acquire knowledge whenever they need it from a variety of sources: books, websites and experts around the globe via various online platforms.
- *Collaborative group learning:* Students learn together as they work collaboratively on authentic, inquiry-oriented projects.
- *Assessment for deeper understanding:* Tests should evaluate the students’ deeper conceptual understanding, the extent to which their knowledge is integrated, coherent and contextualised. (Sawyer, 2008, p. 60)

A systematic review of alternative provision carried out by O'Gorman et al. (2015) to gather marginalised young peoples' perceptions concerning "*contextual factors that contributed to and interfered with their decisions to stay in alternative education*" (p.34) suggested that alternative education provision which provided a sanctuary for students increased student engagement. Settings were sanctuaries when they offered "*physical, emotional and psychological safe spaces; fostered a sense of community; enabled students to affirm their racial/ethnic pride and employed flexible behavioural supports."* (O'Gorman et al., 2015, p.536).

Kraftl (2013) described a good education as being

> *most often underpinned by the attributes of the teacher, the willingness of the learners, the appropriateness of the curriculum and the quality of the relationship between teachers and learners.* (p.1)

It is some of these alternative pedagogies or ways of engaging young people with learning that this study is interested in exploring and the settings visited have been chosen precisely because they do offer something different from the mainstream, whether this be in terms of curriculum and/or pedagogical approach.

2.9 Summary

To summarise, this chapter has outlined the key concepts issues and concepts relating to the disengagement of young people from mainstream education that have informed the empirical study. The chapter has also examined how, in the United Kingdom, disengagement is addressed through identifying some of the alternative education approaches which have been found to be integral to the successful reintegration into learning for young people for whom attendance at mainstream school has become untenable.

As is apparent, the alternative education sector incorporates many very diverse delivery models. This particular study excluded schools/education settings structured solely around an educational ideology (e.g. Montessori, Steiner, democratic) as these schools tend to be tailored more towards young people who, along with their parents/carers have chosen these educational settings as an alternative to attending mainstream school and these schools would not necessarily cater exclusively for young people for whom attendance at a mainstream school had become untenable. Education settings with a predominantly behaviour management focus were also excluded as their imperative for working towards modifying student behaviour moves against the want of this study to focus on more creative and exploratory pedagogies.

This section has looked at some of the common characteristics in terms of pedagogies operational within alternative education, which include small size, one-to-one interaction between teachers and students, student-centred curriculum, flexibility in structure and a supportive environment (Aron 2009; Thomson and Pennacchia 2015). Heinrich (2005) found that student attendance, academic grades (where tests/qualifications were taken), retention rates and decreased behavioural disruptions were all improved within an alternative school setting. With this in mind, , a nuanced understanding of the philosophy and practices that underpin alternative schools has been examined herein which will then inform the chosen methodologies for this study.

The construction of disengagement from education as a deficit model of young person's behaviour towards education in the mainstream school has been examined in this chapter in terms of the impact this may have on young people's construction of their identity as a learner. This is an area where there is a particular gap in research which this study aims to enhance along with developing insight into the stigmatising nature of being defined as disengaged. This chapter has discussed the effect that this can have for young people’s self esteem or self concept as a learner which can have far-reaching consequences into later life and indeed into the lives of future families and dependants. This study will again enhance research in this area by focusing on the understanding of both the young people and their educators of the extent and effects of this potential stigma.

The following chapter presents and justifies the methodologies utilised in collecting the relevant empirical evidence informed by the conceptual frameworks outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 of the thesis described how the concept of ‘disengagement’ (from education) emerged as a socio-political category and how it has come to represent young people for whom engagement with mainstream school education has become untenable. In this chapter, the purpose of this study is outlined along with the methodological approach adopted in the carrying out of research for this study.

Section 3.2 begins by describing the philosophical considerations which have been taken into account to form the framework upon which the research design was built. It explores my own ontological and epistemological principles and how these position my work as sitting somewhere on a bridge between constructivist and critical theory paradigmatic viewpoints.

Section 3.3 outlines the subsequent research design along with the primary research aims and the specific research questions that informed the study. It considers how my own background as a youth worker coupled with my commitment to the values and principles of youth work have informed my methodological considerations as a researcher.

Section 3.4 provides an overview of the sampling strategy which identifies the particular features along with the rationale for choosing each of the educational environments visited for this study and an overview of the research participants therein.

Section 3.5 outlines and explains the chosen research methods utilised in carrying out case studies at three alternative education providers and justifies the reasons for choosing the various methodological approaches. The principle methods of data collection are discussed and subsequently linked specifically to each research question.

Section 3.6 provides an overview of the research schedule detailing the activities that took place during each research visit at the various alternative education settings.

Section 3.7 discusses the ethical considerations that were applied to this study, with particular reference to the ethics involved in researching with often vulnerable young people. It discusses how the issues of power and control were considered and approached and also how I could best incorporate the principles and values of youth work throughout my engagement with the young people participating in the study.

Section 3.8 identifies how the data collected were analysed thematically by identifying possible patterns and themes (Robson, 2011). This session also presents the coding system whereby data was contextualised for presentation.

Finally, in **Section 3.9** a summary of the research procedure is provided encompassing how access to the settings was gained and information collected; a description of each of the research activities and what information was collected from each; how the analysis was structured and themes and headings identified; an outline of the systems used to represent data i.e. coding, referencing and anonymising.

3.2 Philosophical Considerations

How we perceive the world very much depends on those inherited ideas that are passed down through ‘traditional’ discourse. Our perceptions will be affected by the different societies and social groups in which we inhabit, therefore we will all conceive the world differently based on any number of factors that may be environmental, political, economic, medical, technological, biological, social or otherwise (Cohen et al., 2000). A carpenter may look at a tree and notice the grain of the wood, the hues of the bark and see any number of objects that they could make from the tree, the artist may be presented with an arrangement of light and shade interacting together to create a textured surface whilst the biologist may see only the array of creatures and micro-environments existing on the tree. But the fact that these distinctions in perception, knowledge and understanding may take place depends upon there being aspects of the world which exist independently of the perceiver. This is the distinction between the knower and the known so famously promulgated in the Aristotelian doctrine that "what understands and what is understood are the same" (De anima iii.4;430a4) which explores the identity between the knower and what is known and asserts that by providing for the identity of our thoughts and their objects we are guaranteed access to reality.

Being clear about the philosophical position that a researcher will be adopting in their own area of research will subsequently determine the methodology of their approach, the nature of the questions they shall be asking and ultimately the methods they shall be using. This is an area which the researcher needs to explore through addressing the following questions in relation to their own approach to their research subject:

1. What is the form and nature of the social world? (Ontology)
2. How can what is assumed to exist be known? (Epistemology)
3. What procedure or logic should be followed? (Methodology)
4. What techniques of data collection should be used? (Methods)

(Coe, 2012)

Ontology is a branch of philosophy concerned with the theory of existence, with specific reference to the nature of reality and being. Ontology poses the questions ‘what is real?’ and ‘what is the form and nature of the social world?’. The answers to these questions will indicate the distinction between whether the view of reality is that it is detached or independent from human knowledge or whether it is socially constructed and culturally organised. These two ontological positions are distinguished as *positivist* ontology and *constructivist* ontology. For positivist ontology, the world already exists under all circumstance, it is out there, operating in a systematic and predictable fashion with multitudinous discrete and observable events in which reality is separate from human beings trying to make sense of the world (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Constructivist ontology, conversely, sees the world as neither objective or singular, but rather as presenting multiple realities that are semiotically constructed and reconstructed by individuals, with different ways of meaning fused together and communicated through the attribution of meaning to signs and symbols, these are then interpreted by individuals, understood independently and communicated accordingly, the central role played in which is language (Ma, 2016).

It is this view of the nature of reality, or the ontological view, that most differentiates constructivism from positivism, in that it attributes that social reality is apt to change. It sees reality as a product of the human intellect and as this intellect develops in response to external stimuli such as education and other life experiences then so does the perception of reality as experienced by the individual who is co-constructing that reality. In this way, it is the environmental stimuli and external influences which depict the way a person reacts to a certain situation and it is this area which I focus on in my own exploration of the experience of young people who have become disengaged from mainstream education.

It is on the basis of the answers to these ontological questions of ‘What is real?’ and ‘What is the form and nature of the world?’ that we can then ask the epistemological question of ‘How can what is assumed to exist, or what is real - be known?’ Epistemology is concerned with the theory of knowledge and asks ‘What is knowledge? How is it acquired? and How should we know what we know? The two broad approaches to answering these epistemological questions are positivism and interpretivism. Depending on which viewpoint one adopts would influence the view to whether knowledge can be observed by any individual at any time and always be the same (positivist), or whether an individual’s interpretation of the world is subjective and this always has an influence on the what is being observed by the individual (interpretivist).

> *Realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible, mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature.* (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p54)

In my own approach to research I gravitate towards the interpretivist view with a leaning towards Dewey’s (1891) philosophical perspective whereby he espoused that that traditional epistemologies, whether interpretivist or positivist, drew too sharp a distinction between *mind* and *world* (Hickman et al., 1989). Dewey instead, set out to construct a new epistemological model, which was known as ‘pragmatic epistemology’ (Boisvert, 1998), Dewey himself eschewed the term ‘epistemology’ and preferred to call his studies into the questioning of what is reality and what is knowledge as ‘theories of inquiry’. He posited that “*the objective world is not separate from thought but is defined within thought as its objective manifestation.” (Dewey, 1891)* and perceived that *“the world is not passively perceived and thereby known; active manipulation of the environment is involved integrally in the process of learning from the start*” (Hickman et al, 1998, p.151). I find that this view allows a little leeway between the interpretivist and positivist viewpoints, to allow individuals to actively interact with reality, in that for young people to learn, they must adapt to each other and to their environment and that all learning is dependent on the context of place, time and circumstance.

These ontological and epistemological considerations, served to influence my own approach to research within the social and educational field, and specifically within those required for the parameters of this study, which is conducted from a qualitative viewpoint in terms of research approach and methods. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified that there were four research paradigms, these being: positivism; post-positivism; critical theory and constructivism. There are also the paradigms of post-modernist and post-structuralist viewpoints which present an almost post-theoretical view of the world with a refusal to accept a single coherent ontological world view (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Cohen (1997) describes what he terms ‘the post-modernist overview’ as one “*which does not privilege any of the elements in play … but juggles around trying to keep as many ideas in the air at once as it can’ (*p.67).

It is difficult sometimes for a researcher to align oneself with just one paradigm as the nature of qualitative inquiry is:

> *Multi-paradigmatic in focus. Its practitioners are sensitive to the value of the multi-method approach. They are committed to the naturalistic perspective,*

> *and to the interpretative understanding of human experience. At the same time the field is inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical and political positions.* (Nelson et al., 1992, p.4)

The critical theory paradigm also aligns with my own theoretical framework in the way that it provides valuable insights for studying the relationship between theory and society. Critical theory refers to a school of thought and a process of critique which takes into account "*notions of money, consumption, distribution, and production, all of which are promoted by relationships of domination and subordination"* (Giroux, 2001, p.62). Giroux (2001) also stated that critical theory stressed the importance of critical thinking by providing an argument that it is an indispensable feature of the struggle for self-emancipation and social change. Critical theory provides a focus on the contradictions of society rather than social harmony as well as providing an argument against the suppression of subjectivity, consciousness, and culture in history. The ability to look at the contradictions of society and those of education in particular, are seen by critical theorists as starting points for developing and building forms of social inquiry that question what is real versus what should be.

Critical theory is a central force in addressing my own research questions because it helps us (through my study), as researchers and educators, to understand what sense young people are making of the process and experience of being disengaged from education together with the effects of any potential problematisation impacting on the self-concepts of these young people. The alternative education settings I am focusing on have been chosen explicitly for their use of creative pedagogies to engage young people and I have intentionally extricated those which more closely replicate those pedagogies and curricula utilised in mainstream settings. However, my exploration of the use of creative pedagogies to engage young people for whom attendance at a mainstream school is not tenable, should not detract from the question of whether there should be a need for such settings at all. Thus, the focus of my analysis, which links to the critical theory inquiry aspect, is on investigating how young people's experience of being disengaged from mainstream education functioned either to thwart students' concepts of themselves as learners working towards their aspirations and goals or whether it has encouraged them further to achieve their goals, or indeed, whether those goals have changed or been initiated through the process of disengagement, i.e. through the subsequent engagement with the alternative education setting. In addition, I sought to determine whether attendance at the alternative education providers observed within this study, was beneficial to the young people by helping to break the cycle of educational inequality that they had become bound within.

3.3 Research Design

The design of this study has focused on identifying the most appropriate methods for drawing out the experiences of young people who have experienced disengagement from education along with examining the responses and views to disengagement of those working with these young people. Therefore, it was imperative to consider ways in which both sets of viewpoints could be elicited in the most effective way through using a qualitative approach.

The qualitative approach was chosen as it enabled me to acquire a detailed description of each of the alternative education settings studied and focus on the meaning that people within the settings attached to their lives and experiences. I aimed to produce narratives and rich descriptions which would then be analysed for key themes.

It was through my previous work as a youth worker and educator working in alternative education environments with young people who had become disengaged from the mainstream schooling system that I developed an interest in how the experience of becoming disengaged had affected the young people's concepts of themselves as learners. I found that there was a gap in the literature in this area which I then set out to fill.

It was important to me, with a background in youth work, to ensure that my research design conformed, as far as possible, to the key youth work values of:

- Participation and active involvement
- Equity, diversity and inclusion
- Partnership with young people and others
- Personal, social and political development

(LSI YW00 Youth Work National Occupational Standards, 2007)

The young people with whom I would be working would have likely had negative experiences within the mainstream schooling system and, as such, may subsequently have had negative experiences with adults/educators within these settings. Therefore the research methods I chose were designed to engage young people in the research process as far as possible.

Considering the ways in which the research design can fit the needs of the young people, and the context that they are working in, ensures that, at the very least, the research is engaging and where possible, that young people have ownership and power in the process. Prosser (2009) advocates using creative methods because they make the research process more playful, engaging and motivating.

To this end, I aimed to ensure that all of my methods had a creative approach and adopted the *"researcher as bricoleur"* (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p.4) approach, by including three case-studies, informal discussions/interviews with young people and educators, participant observation and creative participative visual methods all of which are detailed later in this chapter.

3.3.1 Research aims and questions

The following section outlines the key research aims and questions which informed the collection and analysis of the data.

The specific aims of this study are:

1. *To investigate the concept of disengagement with a focus on how society can be seen to problematise young people who are disengaged from education.*

2. *To identify the effects of this problematisation on young people (i.e. how young people view themselves and are viewed by society)*

3. *To examine some of the initiatives and methods used to re-engage these young people back into learning (focusing specifically on their approach to/concept of disengagement).*

The research aims then led to the following research questions:

1. ***How do ‘disengaged’ young people and their educators, construct, understand and make sense of being disengaged from education?***
2. ***Is there a relationship between the representation of young people as ‘disengaged’ and individual young people’s construction of their identity as learners?***
3. ***How are different initiatives and methods used to re-integrate young people who have become ‘disengaged’ back into learning?***

3.4 Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy that I selected in my study was in response to a natural flow from my chosen research design and research methods, as well as through taking into account issues of research ethics (see Section 3.7 of this chapter).

3.4.1 Research Settings

The settings were all chosen as they represent a variety of types of alternative provision that employ differing creative pedagogies and resources to cater for young people who have become disengaged from mainstream education. Alternative provision has several definitions and the term is discussed and defined, in terms of the parameters of this study, in the Literature Review, Chapter 2.

I aimed to explore settings which were not necessarily recreating the curricular experience and physical environment that young people may have had within the mainstream schooling environment. The settings were chosen for the respective focus on music and arts activities, outdoor/environmental learning and skate park activities (i.e. skateboarding, scootering, climbing).

The research was carried out within three alternative education settings all situated in the north east of England which, as discussed in Chapter 2 (p. 51), was relevant due to the area being that with the highest incidence of school exclusions in the UK. These settings each formed the basis for the case studies, all of which were education settings which cater exclusively for young people who have become disengaged from education. I chose to conduct three case studies as opposed to just one as it would have been possible that the findings from just one setting, although interesting, may have been unique to that particular setting. The three settings were anticipated to function as "*comparison groups" (*Glaser & Strauss, 1970, p.290) and a comprehensive overview of each of these settings can be found in Chapter 4.

3.4.2 Research Participants

Purposive sampling, also known as subjective, judgemental or selective sampling (Sharma, 2017), was utilised in the identification of research participants. Purposive sampling relies on the experience and insight of the researcher to choose the sample of participants, in this case, my own experience of working with young people in various youth work and alternative education settings was utilised to identify those young people who had become disengaged from education. Within the purposive sampling cohort, a further strata of homogenous sampling was employed, whereby, research participants are specifically selected based on their having similar characteristics because such characteristics are of particular interest to the researcher. In this case, the research participants were all young people of secondary school age (11-16) who had become fully disengaged from the mainstream schooling system and who were now participating in an alternative education environment.

A range of gender, ethnicity, sexuality and socio-economic backgrounds of research participants were chosen in order to enhance the diversity and scope of the study

(Thompson & Thompson, 2008, p.123). The young people who participated in the study had all become disengaged from education for a variety of different reasons, for example, behavioural issues, bullying and chaotic lifestyles (see discussion in Chapter 2). A compilation of more detailed research participant characteristics can be found in Chapter 4.

3.5 Research Methods

My chosen methodological approach for this study was to carry out case studies at three alternative education providers in order to explore the research questions above. Within the case studies, participatory visual research methods, informal discussions and interviews along with participatory observations have been used as the principle methods of data collection. The research questions were explored through carrying out informal interviews with young people and educators in the settings, collecting information through natural conversations and discussions with the research participants. I also carried out and recorded constant intensive observations of the young people, the educators and the use of resources and activities within the settings.

I also worked with small groups of young people and educators using various creative participatory research methods to elicit collaborative responses to all of the questions. These methods included creating mind-maps and images to depict their responses to how they viewed both school and the alternative education setting they were now attending (see Appendix 1). Young people were also encouraged to record our group work activity findings and any impromptu discussions that we often engaged in over lunch and break times (see also Appendix 1).

The figure below illustrates which methods of research contributed to the evidence gathering to address each research question:

Research Question	**Research methods utilised**
How do 'disengaged' young people and their educators, construct, understand and make sense of being disengaged from education?	• Semi-structured interviews and discussions with 'disengaged' young people. • Semi-structured interviews and discussions with educators. • Observation of young people and educators participating in/facilitating activities. • Participatory visual methods/creative group work activities
Is there a relationship between the representation of young people as 'disengaged' and young people's construction of their identity as learners?	• Semi-structured interviews and discussions with 'disengaged' young people. • Semi-structured interviews and discussions with educators. • Observation of young people. • Participatory visual methods/creative group work activities
How are different initiatives and method used to re-integrate young people who have become 'disengaged' back into learning?	• Semi-structured interviews and discussions with 'disengaged' young people. • Semi-structured interviews and discussions with educators. • Observation of young people and educators participating in/facilitating activities.

Figure 3: Presentation of research methods as attributed to each research question.

3.5.1 Case Studies

> *The aim of the case study is to illuminate the general by looking at the particular. (*Denscombe, 2010, p.52)

The case study approach was chosen as the encompassing research tool for this study primarily for its flexibility, as it allows the researcher to use a variety of research methods in order to collect information. With the research participants consisting of young people and educators (i.e. teachers, support workers, teaching assistants) it was important, particularly in the case of the young people, for the research to be human-scale, to be flexible and responsive in order that their differing needs could be easily taken into account and adapted to. Another factor considered was that case studies will tend to be holistic rather than focusing on isolated factors (Denscombe, 2010) which is important as it still allows the study to maintain an exploratory element rather than focusing on just one aspect. Gray (2009) claims that an exploratory study is useful '*when not enough is known about a phenomenon'* (p. 35), which is the current situation of knowledge about how far the representation and experience of young people as being disengaged from education, impacts on their identity construct as learners.

This study also aimed to gain insight into the complexity of how disengagement is viewed by both young people and educators, including how the view of being disengaged affected the initiatives and strategies used to re-engage young people back into learning. To achieve this, a case study approach would allow me (the researcher) inside the 'lived experiences of the research participants' (Maxwell, 2005, p. 44), to gather '*thick description'* (Geertz, 1973, p.6) of how being ‘disengaged’ affects the construct of self as a learner for both young people and educators in *‘realtime’* (Yin, 2009. p.62). In other words, I expected that the case study approach could help me generate data creating ‘*a picture of a case for others to see’* (Stake, 2006, p. 3).

3.5.2 Interviews

> *…we must simply listen to what young people themselves have to say when making sense of their own lives.* (Stephen and Squires, 2003: p.161)

This study has an interpretative focus, aiming to uncover the meaning and understanding that young people ascribe to disengagement, this focus being the primary reason for employing semi-structured interviewing to gather the qualitative data. Through interviews, narrative forms of meaning are emphasised and participants are empowered to tell stories on their own terms (Byrne, 2004). The research was also concerned with providing young people with a ‘voice’ in the literature about youth disengagement, thus semi-structured interviews with a central core of questions with allowance for additional unscripted questions, probes and follow-ups (Kellet, 2011) provided a space in which the young people could voice their opinions on their own terms and enabled the production of rich and detailed data (Heath, et al., 2009).

Research questions 1 and 2 are concerned with identity constructs in terms of being both *disengaged* from and simultaneously *engaged* with learning. The young people may have become disengaged from one setting but are they now engaging with another. It was important therefore, that this study could capture the feelings and thoughts of the young people to make sense of how they experienced becoming/being disengaged and how this experience affected their identity as learners. This insight, whilst it may also have been captured through the participatory research activities, could be further clarified through interviewing the young people; listening to them about how they interpreted their reality. A semi-structured interview format allowed me to explore a list of key questions (See Appendix 2) I wanted to discuss with them, whilst also maintaining the flexibility to be guided by their responses (Robson, 2011).

The interviews were organised to take place towards the end of my time at each setting to ensure that I had the opportunity to establish a relationship with the young people and educators at the setting. The participant observation aspect of the methodology aimed to enhance the authenticity of dialogue imparted through the interviews through already developing a rapport between myself and the young people before the interviews took place. I chose to conduct loosely structured discussion type interviews that were largely led by the young people in order to encourage them to be relaxed, reflective and to tell their stories. At the same time I hoped that this methodology would have the effect of drawing attention to the lived experiences of young people who had experienced disengagement to explore and explicate their experiences.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with the educators at each setting (See Appendix 3) and these proved a way of gaining rich information about their own personal constructs of disengagement on a level that they may not have been able to offer through the creative participatory research sessions, where their roles may be more facilitative than fully participative.

3.5.3 Observation

Observation was a useful element of my research methods as it allowed me to ascertain to a certain extent whether or not the young people were engaged in learning (bearing in mind that young people can often *look* as if they are engaged when in fact they are not, see Chapter 2, p.43) through the different pedagogical methods and activities offered. My observations could then be compared with the responses that they gave me in any informal discussions or interviews that they had with me. This served to strengthen the evidence and emphasised the robustness of the study.

To overcome the notion of the "*detached, watchful observer who invades the personal and sacred space of others*" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 16), I found that I naturally switched between the role of participant observer and the "*naturalistic*" (Kellet, 2011) or "*unobtrusive observer*" (Stuart et al., 2015). Participant observation allowed me to gain an insider's perspective into the different pedagogies and methods used to engage the young people in various activities. It also allowed me to ask the other participants questions in situ. This meant that 'why' questions could be asked, reducing the assumptions that may be made through the naturalistic observational approach. The peripheral position of the naturalistic observer prevents them from posing clarifying questions. Claims that the participant's behaviour will be less distorted by contact with the participant observer (Moeran, 2007) and that the observer's involvement will make the participants more willing to share their experiences are often counteracted by the assertion (Thomas & O'Kane, 1999, p. 824) that it is hard to avoid the bias of your own perspective as a participant, and that, as researchers, we do not always understand the culture we are observing when we are so submerged in them.

3.5.4 Participatory Methods

In section 3.3 I discussed the importance to myself of maintaining alignment with the values of youth work in order to correlate with my own professional and personal values. One of the key values of youth work is that of ensuring that all practice is participatory and promotes the active involvement of young people. Also of importance is that practice is designed, developed and delivered in partnership with young people and others (NYA, 1997).

Participatory research is a methodological stance which is rooted in the belief that knowledge can be produced only in collaboration and in action (McNiff, 2002). This method recognises that the research participants harbour critical social knowledge and in order for them to impart that knowledge, employs them as active architects of research by repositioning them as subjects and engaging them directly in the design, delivery and depiction of social and educational research (Fine and Torre, 2004; Torre, 2005). Thus, it is apparent that the underpinning values of participatory research can be seen to be aligned to those informing youth work practice.

Participatory research has emerged from a variety of research disciplines, one being the Action Research model originally purporting from the psychologist Kurt Lewin (1946). Lewin first described Action Research as a way of generating knowledge about a social system while, at the same time, attempting to change it (Lewin, 1946).

Whilst, for the purpose of this study, the research is not attempting to necessarily *change* the educational system, it is certainly hoping to involve young people and educators in the research as participants and it is the collaborative, co-operative element of participatory research that is incorporated into this research design. This study is very much informed by the approaches put forward by participatory research yet aligns with the sentiment that participatory research is "*not a theory but an* *approach to praxis that uses any and all tools that co-researchers find helpful*" (Greenwood and Levin, 1998, p.181). That is, participatory research may include any number of qualitative and/or quantitative analysis tools such as case studies, questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, but it is the *approach* utilised by the researcher in implementing these that would determine it as being research which holds at its core the essence of participation.

The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states in Article 12 that children have the right to express their opinion on matters and decisions that affect them directly and to have that opinion taken into account corroborates with the use of research methods which involve young people through a range of participatory activities and consultations. This approach has led to a plethora of studies which have focused on the involvement of children and young people as active participants and co-researchers (Kirby and Bryson, 2002; Sinclair, 2004) and generated a wealth of literature on the importance of children having an active role in research (Fraser et al., 2005; Clark, 2005; Punch, 2002). Pain and Frances (2003) identified that participatory methods have a particular advantage when working with children and young people who are 'hard to reach' which supports the appropriateness of these methods when working with young people who have become disengaged from the mainstream schooling system.

One of the underlying philosophies of participatory research is that it gives a voice to those being researched and that the researcher needs to acknowledge that voice, in terms of a person's ability to express their thoughts, feelings and back up their actions, and the production of that voice is an interpretive process and involves an interaction between the researcher and the researched. (Silverman,1993; Clough and Nutbrown, 2002). This requirement for an interactive, interpretative research process especially suits research with young people that have become disengaged from education, in that it offers the flexibility to work with them on their own terms, to come up with the best ways of interpreting the voice of the participants, in this case, young people.

3.5.4. i Participatory visual methods

Participatory visual methods will include some way of facilitating the production of an image by the research participants. This may be a photographic image, a painting, collage, cartoon, sculpture, graffiti art, video or digital image, any method which can be used to encapsulate information in a material visual form. It encompasses a range of methods which can be used when the research aims to encourage participants to *show* how they perceive the world rather than just *tell* us their perceptions (Stuart et al., 2015).

In each of the settings, I facilitated group work sessions which posed some of the questions as outlined in Appendix 2, in each of these sessions I encouraged the research participants to either write down their responses or to create their own images in response to a research question, these sessions were also audio recorded and later transcribed. It was important to me, as the researcher, that I hand over control of the image making to enable this to be controlled by the research participants themselves. However, enabling participation is not merely concerned with ‘handing over control’ (Morrow & Richards, 1996, p. 34), which many participants, particularly young people who have had negative experiences within education settings, would find daunting or requiring a certain level of confidence in their own ability, enabling participation also requires listening to and being receptive to differing levels of need, interest and competence and tailoring activities appropriately to meet those needs as far as is possible (Stuart et al., 2016).

It was not intended that this research study would be fully participatory, to do so would be to exceed the level of resources afforded to this project in terms of cost, time and human resource. However, in aiming to address the research questions, particularly the question looking at how disengaged young people construct, understand and make sense of being disengaged from education, it was anticipated that to ask them how they viewed themselves and how they felt they were viewed by society would provide an additional visual aspect which may have revealed additional insight into how being disengaged had impacted upon their own identity.

Utilising visual methods in research can encourage the participation of young people, as images often prove more accessible to people, particularly young people, than dense academic text (Smiciklas, 2012). Encouraging young people to choose their own visual medium (for example, photography, painting, drawing, sculpture/model making and/or filming) was a key tenet of this research aspect and care was taken to be aware that some young people may struggle without a structure or a stimulus so the views of the research participants were solicited at the outset and the image-making sessions tailored accordingly. Participant's interpretation of the images they produce, as well as those produced by/of others during the research project, were also solicited and incorporated into the analysis where possible.

3.5.4. ii Practical aspects of using visual methods with young people

In order to anticipate and plan for any potential challenges that may have arisen through incorporating visual research methods for some aspects of the study, some of the following areas needed to be addressed:

- Research questions, it was important that these were introduced to the group(s) and discussed to ensure that these were understood. Any questions/challenges to these questions were addressed. Participatory values were discussed and opportunities for participants to give feedback on an ongoing basis were built into the research sessions.
- Not everybody finds it easy to be creative, especially when being asked to ‘create’ an image as part of a peer group which may depict feelings or opinions that may open the young person up to criticism or ridicule. The aspects of respecting and valuing each other’s contributions needed to be discussed at the outset and laid down as ground rules in order to create a safe space for the production of any personal and/or revealing images..
- There was not sufficient time to be able to give a full course of tuition in the various media on offer. Participants were encouraged to focus on coming up with a concept rather than focusing on the perfect execution of their image(s)
- A range of visual prompts which could act as stimuli for the images were shown if people were struggling for ideas about how to execute their image.
- Images were reviewed regularly in order to prompt ongoing interpretation from the participants. This was done during and at the end of the session.
- Any young people who were struggling to express themselves visually were supported to try a different media such as creating a piece of writing or spoken word.
- At the end of the workshop/data collection period, it was ensured that participants had clear expectations of ‘next steps’ – both in terms of what I, as the researcher, would be doing with the research findings and images and how their involvement in the project might continue/develop. One project, for

example, suggested that any resulting work may be displayed in their gallery space if the young people felt they would value this.

It is worth mentioning at this point that the researcher had a background in the arts, particularly painting, printmaking, photography and sculpture along with many years experience working as a community and youth arts worker in which skills in various community art forms such as graffiti, comic art, drama and collective art making skills were developed, all of which contributed to the confidence of the researcher in using visual methods to elicit information from young people which may otherwise be more difficult to garner.

3.5.4. iii Benefits of using participatory visual methods

One of the main benefits to this study of using participatory visual methods will be that through encouraging the young people to create an image which depicts how they view themselves as learners and how they feel that society views them will enhance the quality and range of information already gained through interviews and observations. Visual outputs produced can be analysed for what they reveal about the way the young people choose to represent themselves to others and how they identify what is significant about their identity as learners. This is a different type of information than that deduced through speaking to and listening to research participants, where it is the researchers’ interpretation of the subject’s world which is paramount. (Moeran, 2007)

Using participatory visual methods as an element of the study’s methodology will also allow the research process to be influenced by the very people who are providing the evidence on which research findings will be based. It assumes a more equitable approach to conducting research and takes academic research out of the ‘ivory tower’. Giving young people, particularly those who may have been disengaged from other consultation mechanisms whilst at school due to their disruptive behaviour perhaps offers a sense of ownership over the research process. This is more likely to encourage them to invest the time and energy required to make the study a success. It maybe that, as they have been involved in the co-creation of the images, the participants may produce more revealing/more heartfelt images as a result which will ultimately benefit the research by increasing the insights gained. Superceding verbal communication with creative activities not only optimises the abilities of the young people to impart information but also enables them to set the agenda, have greater control and participate on their own terms (James, 1995), an approach which is again conducive with my own youth work values of supporting empowerment and the valuing of personal experience (Smith, 2013)

3.6 Research Schedule

The data collection phase involved spending four full days at each setting structured as follows:

Initial Site meeting	A meeting was set up at each site with key team members and myself. The meetings were generally attended by the Project Manager and a senior staff member. I had previously emailed across information about the study including the research aims and questions. I had also given a brief overview on the telephone in order that both myself and the project team could ascertain the suitability of the site for the purposes of the study. In the meeting, I outlined again, the primary research questions that I was aiming to explore during the research phase and also discussed my planned research methods. In terms of the participatory visual methods which I hoped to use, I presented my ideas to the team at each site and asked for their input as to the suitability of these methods for the young people who	**Methods used to record data** Minutes from meeting Emails. Notes from telephone calls.

	used their setting. I explained that these could be adapted for each individual/group and that I would bring a variety of resources so as to be able to best respond to these needs. Similarly, I presented the interview technique as an adaptable tool and one that could be used flexibly in order that the young people would not feel coerced into taking part in an interview in a space or situation that would make them feel uncomfortable. An example of how the interview method could have been adapted to suit the needs of the young people was at City Farm whereby the young people were used to spending the whole day outside, the option was discussed as to whether the interviews should take place as a 'walk and talk' type activity outdoors. The staff decided that, due to the weather (January) the interviews would be likely to be more productive if the young people could come inside and sit down in the warmth. Also, they associated coming inside with 'academic' work as this was where they came to write up any activities for their accredited aspect of the programme. Also discussed at the meeting was how consent was to be gained from the young people. I was keen to spend some time with the young people upon first starting the research to explain the project and also the issues relating to consent to take part in the study. Dates and times for my attendance and planned activities at the site were set, all of which I confirmed after the meeting by email.	
Day 1	Introductions to staff and young people. In each setting, I spent time with the young people introducing myself and talking about the research project with them. After talking through the research questions and explaining the research methods I would be using, I asked whether they would like to be involved. I then explained that their contributions would be anonymised in order to protect their identity and that their participation was voluntary. I also explained about the 'law of two feet' whereby, if they decided during any activity they were participating in, that they no longer wished to be involved, then they could simply stop taking part or walk away from the activity and I would not use any of their contributions unless they were happy for me to do so.	Field notes Observations

	Day 1 was spent observing the young people and the activities they participated in. I ensured that I also spent break times and lunchtimes with the young people as far as possible, if I felt that this was appropriate and accepted by the young people. In this way, I was able to observe their actions and conversations away from the project workers.	
Day 2 -4	Naturalistic and Participant observation of young people participating in different activities from 9.00am – 3.00pm. Informal discussions took place throughout the day, and especially at break times and lunchtimes, with young people and staff – these were recorded using field notes and mind maps. Semi structured interviews with young people (I aimed for between 4-6 at each setting) Semi-structured interviews with educators (I aimed for between 2-4 at each setting) Creative activities using participative visual methods.	Field notes of observations Field notes Recorded discussions Visual images created by young people (drawings, diagrams, mind-maps) Interview records/transcriptions Interview records/transcriptions Visual images created by young people (paintings, drawings, diagrams, mind-maps) Literary artefacts i.e. poems, spoken word transcriptions, video and audio recordings

Figure 4: Research schedule

3.7 Ethical Considerations

There are a host of issues that need to be carefully negotiated when carrying out evaluation with children and young people. These include the ways power and control are negotiated, how the children and young people's personal experiences are shared, and how the different needs and expectations of the participants are balanced in the design of the research process (McTaggart, 1996).

Bassey (1999) argues that there are three main ethical values:

- Respect for democracy
- Respect for truth
- Respect for persons

It is useful at this point to refer again to the ethical principles of youth work, as again these correlate with those promoted through qualitative participative research with young people and are conducive to the approach in which I work with young people as far as possible in any capacity:

- Supporting personal, social and identity development
- Raising critical consciousness
- Supporting empowerment
- Anti-oppressive practice
- Valuing of personal experiences
- Voluntarism and participatory practice
- Being responsive to young people's needs, interests and preferences.
  (NYA, 2004)

If a research project does not contribute to these values then it is highly likely that ethical principles are already being infringed (Stuart et al., 2015).

Working from the youth work values base, at the core of the design and delivery of any activity with and for young people is the underpinning respect and consideration for the persons participating. The researcher has a duty of care to their participants, particularly to those who may be more vulnerable, as the case may be for children and young people who have become disengaged from education, for whom an effort needs to be made to limit risk and offer opportunities for frequent review by those who are facilitating the research. Researchers involved in collecting information through carrying out participatory research activities should, therefore, strive to be socially responsive, compassionate and reflexive, at all stages of the research process (Alderson and Morrow, 2004).

This study was guided by the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research formulated by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011). The research proposal was processed for approval following the ethics procedures in place at the University of Hull (See Appendix 4). The primary ethical considerations for the study focused on:

- Whether there is *harm to participants;*
- Whether there is *a lack of informed consent;*
- Whether there is *an invasion of privacy;*
- Whether *deception* is involved.

(Bryman, 2012).

The research participants in this study are young people who have become disengaged from the mainstream schooling system so, are potentially emotionally vulnerable in light of the circumstances that have led to them becoming disengaged. This '*structural vulnerability'* (Lansdown, 1994, p.126) of young people who are disengaged or excluded from education (especially those under the age of 18) can make it hard for them to give informed consent in a process which may well be initiated, if not dominated, by adults. Another concern is that, in recounting potentially negative experiences, young people may become exposed to distressing emotions which may need to be managed by the researcher (Saunders and Broad, 1997; Kane, 1996; Morris, 1998 and France, 2000). De Koning and Martin (1996, p.3) assert that the experiences of participants in participatory research should not just be a situation where *'local people work with a researcher for the latter'*s *convenience*.' This then implies that careful consideration to the needs and potential vulnerabilities of the research participants is paramount in the research design process.

The communities in which research with young people is to be undertaken are not ever going to be static (Stuart et al., 2015), nor do they only comprise people who are like-minded in all respects. This is particularly applicable to research with young people who have often been excluded from mainstream education due to behaviours which have proved difficult to manage and sometimes dangerous to others within the school setting. Conflict may well be already present or may indeed even be generated by the research process. Research using participatory methods in particular, often involves working with conflict, which needs to be acknowledged and can, of course, potentially be very creative. In being aware of, and almost expectant that situations containing conflict may be arising, I, as a researcher, need to be mindful of fostering, through any activities I may be facilitating, potentially escalatory situations between young people and/or staff. I also need to be aware of and work within the parameters or ground rules of the setting to manage that conflict if it should so arise.

Another issue to address in the design of this study was that of questioning the impact that adult gatekeepers may have, particularly on the participatory aspects of the research. Morrow and Richards contend that `*the biggest ethical challenge for researchers working with children is the disparities in power and status between adults and children*' (1996, p.98). Thomas and O'Kane (1998) identified that particularly when working with children and young people who are deemed as vulnerable, it is more difficult sometimes to redress the power imbalance between them and the adults in their lives due to the complicated relationships at play which may fall between professional and client or even abuser and abused. These deeply entrenched connections around power and control within the adult/child relationship may prevent the full participation of the child/young person in the research.

Within the alternative education settings visited for this study, it became apparent in one setting that my access to young people who were looked after by the local authority was to be restricted. In the initial meeting with the setting, the project manager was clear that young people who were in the care of the local authority would not be able to take part in any recorded interviews. However, in another setting, although there was one young person who was 'looked after' who had already taken part in my research, the fact that this young person was 'looked after' was not alluded to at all by the project manager. A subsequent conversation to check up with this manager whether there were any issues relating to this young person's involvement in the study in light of the comments made by the manager of the other setting, resulted in the response that "*we don't treat anybody any differently here, regardless of their background... it's up to K if he wants to be involved*". This disparity in the approach of these settings to how much control the setting is executing over the participation of certain young people in activities is interesting. The setting who had restricted the involvement of young people ‘looked after’ had done so under the banner of executing their duty of care. This problem of conflicting opposites within ethical approaches is not uncommon in research with young people (Hood et al, 1999; Alderson and Morrow, 2004) and there is often a fine line between encouraging young people’s participation and protecting them by excluding them from participating. The dichotomy that emerges between respecting the rights of young people to make their own choices in whether or not to participate in research combined with the need to protect them from harm (Alderson, 2005) often raises some real issues for the researcher in working out how best find a balance and compromise to ensure that, as far as possible, access to participation is equitable.

3.7.1 Informed Consent

Kellet (2012) has identified that it is only relatively recently that young people have been asked for their consent rather than purely relying on parents and carers to provide their consent to young people being involved in research.

Obtaining informed consent is a central element of most work with young people and generally, consent should be gained from young people and also their parents/carers if they are under the age of 16 although the Gillick competency and Fraser guidelines (Wheeler, 2006) advises that the young person has a right to make her own choices dependent on her level of maturity and understanding of the choice to be made. This decision, however, then relies on the researcher carrying out the study activities being able to make an informed judgement themselves about the capacity of the young person to make a fully informed decision (Alderson and Morrow, 2011).

For the purposes of this study, the researcher ensured that consent was gained both from parents/carers (see Appendix 5) or an appropriate adult *in addition* to consent from the young people (see Appendix 6). In the event of a young person not wishing to participate in the research despite gaining consent from an appropriate adult, then the young person's consent superceded that of the adult. If an adult were to deny the participation of their child/ward in the research then, this decision would supercede that of the young person as had been agreed through the ethical approval process.

For a young person to give informed consent, they were provided with the following information about the research before making their decision:

- **Purpose of research** – including research questions and the intended use of the information.
- **Confidentiality and anonymity** – including a choice around the use of pseudonyms.
- **Security of information** – including who will have access to the information gained during the research, where the data will be stored and for how long and how the information will be disposed of.
- **Access to data**- young people will need to be assured that under the Freedom of Information Act (2000) they will have the right to access any of the information collected involving them at any time.
- Their **right to withdraw** their information or involvement in the research at any time.
- **How the research will be written up** and who will see it.

It is the researcher's responsibility not only to provide relevant information about the research, but also to ensure that this is understood by the child (Shaw et al., 2011. p.65).

This information was provided in a verbal form so that questions could be asked and answered. The verbal presentation was then accompanied by a written information sheet (see Appendix 7) in order to consolidate the above points, this was written in accessible language to ensure the information was as inclusive as possible. It was taken into consideration that some young people may feel coerced into consenting to participate, this may be through peers, teachers, parents/carers or even by the researcher themselves. It was imperative therefore, for the purposes of this study, that the young people understood that there would be no repercussions should they decide to implement the ‘law of two feet’ and either not engage at all, or remove themselves at any time from the research activity. This was difficult to negotiate at times, particularly if this approach went against the ethos of the setting. Squirrell (2012) identifies how this may be a particular issue with ‘captive’ young people, for example, those in a school, an issue which also relates to those young people attending an alternative education setting.

3.7.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

As with informed consent, guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality is not always possible, especially in research involving participatory activities. This is partly due to the group nature of the work. Because of the ways that participatory research works, in that participation must sometimes be negotiated among group members, others within the group will be aware of exactly who is participating in any particular instance and hence, what aspects of the research they are generating. Because of this, it is a public form of research in some respects.

It was important in this study that the researcher raised issues around confidentiality and anonymity at an early stage in the research process, and that the group agreed and adhered to this agreement. It was also important to keep checking that any agreements were being maintained as it can become detrimental if only the researcher upholds these agreed standards, while the young people or others who are involved do not.

Finally, it was made clear to young people that confidentiality could only be assured up until there is a safeguarding issue, at which point, the researcher would have been bound by their duty of care to pass this information on to the named safeguarding contact, the police or social care services as appropriate.

Ethical concerns were discussed in the initial meetings with each alternative education setting, it was agreed on using multiple safeguards to protect the anonymity of both the educators and the young people. First, I have only used broad geographical area descriptors when referring to the settings context, such as “an alternative education project in the north of England”. Second, the young people and educators have chosen pseudonyms, however, it is acknowledged that the use of pseudonyms does not necessarily guarantee anonymity (Robson, 2011). As Yin (2009) points out, “*confidentiality should extend beyond not naming participants to not revealing personal details which might reveal participants’ identity*” (p. 208). It is not possible within the confines of this study to keep the research participants’ anonymity in all contexts (Malone, 2003), because their identities are still known by the gatekeepers to the study (Robson, 2011); namely, the people providing access to the young people. To this end, a third consideration was made which was to limit the personal information that may have been provided through interviews and participatory research activities which related to the young people’s background in order to make them less identifiable.

Finally, the issue of confidentiality and anonymity was discussed with the educators/ project managers again at the end of the research phase. The safeguards to be applied to the thesis were reviewed, and they were invited to review a draft of the thesis; member-checking (Yin, 2009), this served to offer them the opportunity to highlight any information they believed could pose a risk to themselves, the young people or their organisation. The organisation also completed a consent form within which they agree to the information being gathered during the course of this research to be used responsibly (See Appendix 8). I concur with Yin (2009) who argues that offering research participants to peer review the study is not just a matter of professional courtesy, but that this process will also ‘enhance the accuracy of the case study’, and hence ‘increase the construct validity of the study’ (p. 183).

3.8 Data Analysis

Data were analysed thematically through identifying any potential patterns and themes (Robson, 2011) across each of the interview transcripts, field notes/observations and participatory research activity evidence.

The interviews were all audio-recorded and fully transcribed using specialist transcription software by the researcher. In total 10 educators were interviewed with each interview lasting between 30 and 40 minutes and 16 young people were interviewed with interview length ranging from 8 minutes to 24 minutes. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their feelings and thoughts associated with their various experiences and, as such, to *“generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers”* (Reissman, 2007, p.23). These participant numbers relate only to those who participated in the semi-structured interview process, the numbers of participants overall were in fact, much bigger than this as is illustrated in Chapter 4.

Once data collection was completed, I created three ‘mind maps’, one for each of the evidence generating formats: interview transcripts, field notes/observations and participatory research activity evidence. These ‘mind maps’ were then analysed and cross referenced in order to generate any correlations across the evidence field. The generated themes are explored further in Chapter 5 and the subsequent critical analysis presented in Chapter 6.

3.8.1 Coding

A coding system was designed to identify the location of each quotation, observation, or participatory research product. In the presentation of any observational or contextual data, information is provided about the location in which the information was secured and also the method by which the data was gathered. This approach also applies to any quotations supplied by young people or educators.

For coding purposes, the three settings visited have been coded according to their pseudonyms as follows:

- **Artworks = AW**
- **City Farm = CF**
- **Skate Park = SP1 and SP2**

Skate Park had three separate educational provisions which were situated in different geographical locations across the city. For the purpose of this study, two of these sites were visited, these being the Key Stage 4 site (based on the fourth floor of an old mill) and the Key Stage 2 site (based at the skate park). These are referred to in the study as Skate Park 1 and Skate Park 2 (SP1 = Key Stage 4; SP2 = Key Stage 2).

The method of data collection corresponding to each item of evidence (i.e. quotation or image produced during participatory research activity) is depicted within the coding mechanism as follows:

- **Field Notes (used to record observations and informal discussions) = FN**
- **Interviews = I**
- **Participatory research activity = PRA**
- **Observation = Obs**

In the presentation of quotations, names may have been used but these are not the real names of the young people or educators who participated in the study. Genders may also have been changed in order to protect the anonymity of the participants.

In order to ascertain whether a quotation is from a young person or an educator the codes **YP (Young Person), Ed (Educator) and Res (Researcher)** are used.

Hence, a coding for a quotation from one of the young people which took place in Skate Park 2 and was recorded through a participatory research activity will appear as: **YP: SP2/PRA**. An interview with one of the educators at Artworks would show comments coded as **Ed: AW/I.**

3.9 Summary

This chapter has presented the rationale that underpins the methodological considerations taken into account for this study. It included the research approach; research design; methods for data collection; and analysis of techniques used for data analysis. The rationale supporting the decision to adopt a qualitative approach including the use of participative visual methods is addressed along with the considerations given to working with young people that may present challenging behaviours. The main challenge related to the analysis and presentation of findings, which sometimes presented differing perspectives of ‘disengagement’ from the participant observations when compared with the comments made by young people in the semi-structured interviews and informal discussions. The next chapter presents the findings of the study in response to all three research questions.

Chapter 4: Overview of Settings and Participants

4.1 Outline of Settings

This section presents an overview of each of the settings visited for the purpose of conducting research to collect qualitative evidence for this study. All of the settings were situated in or around a city in the North of England.

Each setting is referred to by a pseudonym in order to protect its identity.

4.1.1 Artworks is a charity, established in 2008 and based in an industrial area on the fringes of the city. The charity works with people at all levels of development within the arts – from young people taking their first steps in education right through to professional artists. Through engaging with artists at different stages of development, the setting enables people to share their skills and experiences amongst each level of expertise within the project.

As well as providing space for professional artists to rent and use as a space to create and/or exhibit their work, the project's education facility works with 11-16 year olds at risk of exclusion from mainstream education. The setting describes its offer as aimed at "*students aged 11-16 who are having difficulty accessing mainstream education"* (Charity website)

As a local authority approved provider, the setting offers a range of accredited qualifications, that suit individual needs for young people who have an interest in digital music and creative arts, and, it is intended, that all learners are supported in re-engaging with mainstream education by progressing to further education or returning to school.

The charity is staffed by a full-time project director who has been involved in the setting up and running of the organisation, since its inception in 2008. The education arm of the charity is managed on a day to day basis by a full-time project manager who has a background in working with young people in the now defunct Connexions youth service. A music tutor runs the courses in digital music production from a designated music area within the building and an arts tutor facilitates the creative arts elements of the programme. Training in functional skills (maths and English) is offered on a one to one basis by one tutor who delivers both at predominantly Entry level and Level 1. The project is supported by volunteers and interns who tend to work within one specific area i.e. arts or music. At the time that the research for this study took place, a volunteer was working to support the project director with marketing, publicity and fundraising.

The music and arts tutors, both also worked independently outside of the project. The arts tutor worked delivering arts projects within her local community and also regularly exhibited her own artwork. The music tutor, as well as producing and recording music for local artists and groups, worked as a youth worker in the local community.

The setting, whilst securing funds through direct payments from schools, supplements its funding through hosting an innovative party/club night, for which participants buy tickets to attend, once a month on the charity premises. The club night, renowned across the UK and Europe and often attracts big name DJs who are happy to play a free set, raising funds for the charity.

The long-term aspirations of the project are to raise the funds to buy the current premises which are currently up for sale at £2.4 million with a view to expand on the training provision by introducing apprenticeships and vocational placements which would act as a progression route for the young people participating in the project. The project has already started working towards this, through beginning to construct a greenhouse and a hydroponic growing area in the basement of the building.

4.1.2 City Farm is located at what was a large plot of derelict land that had variably been used as the site of a botanical distillery and later as a deposit for ‘night soil’ from the thousands of back to back houses which made up the surrounding area. The 1970s saw the burgeoning City Farm movement which emerged in a response to the large swathes of derelict land surrounding inner city areas which were seen as being better made use of by the local communities that surrounded them. Once established as a City Farm, this green corridor which linked countryside to one of the inner cities in Northern England, was formally established as a registered charity in 1980. It describes itself as an ‘urban farm’ which provides educational services to

> *Vulnerable and socially disadvantaged young people and adults with learning difficulties through ground breaking projects*. (Charity website)

The farm grows organic fruit and vegetables and also has large public amenity gardens and allotments which are all maintained by the staff and project participants. The project participants work together across all of the various projects as an inclusive group with young people who are disengaged from school working alongside young adults with learning disabilities. This is seen as an integral part of the ethos of the project, in that people are encouraged to cooperate, work together as a team and also develop tolerance for people who may find some tasks difficult or respond to certain situations differently.

The farm offers a range of different projects including:

- Environmental education workshops for groups of primary and secondary schools including mini-beast hunts, pond dipping and messy mud play.
- Summer and school holiday play schemes, with activities based around outdoor play and the natural world.
- Therapeutic gardening project for people with learning difficulties.
- Hands-on training and work placements in horticulture.
- Education project for young people disengaged from school.
- Accredited qualifications.
- Allotments for local people.
- Leisure amenity open every day to visitors.
- Conference and events facilities.

The young people who attend the project are aged between 11 and 16 and can attend anything from one to three days a week. The rest of the week will be spent at other alternative education providers or perhaps engaging in a phased return to mainstream school.

The setting's day is not divided into specific lessons as such, but rather into sections of time, two sessions in the morning (separated by a break time), lunch, and then again, two in the afternoon. The activities for the day are dictated more by which tasks need doing on the farm rather than by completing a task specifically to generate evidence for a qualification.

Qualifications are worked towards by the young people on the project. The centre is registered with the awarding body National Open College Network (NOCN) to deliver

Entry Level and Level One Progression Awards. Young people develop a portfolio of their work for accreditation and units include Introduction to Teamwork Skills, Understanding a Work Experience Placement and Developing an Awareness of Soil Types and Garden Habitats. This evidence can also be cross-referenced to qualifications such as ASDAN[2].

The activities that the young people are involved in on the farm are varied and change with the different seasonal requirements. These include the following:

- **Wild Food** – Young people harvest crops from their own allotment and also develop foraging skills through gathering wild foods, which they then cook on an open camp fire in the outdoor kitchen.
- **Recycled Mountain Bike Project** – Young people are taught how to repair mountain bikes, they build one for themselves and then work on building and/or repairing others that are sent to countries such as Romania and Ukraine or sold on the farm in order to contribute towards the project and farm running costs. The young people undertake a mountain bike skills and Bikeability[3] Level 2 test and, at the end of the programme, take their free bike home.
- **Woodland Management** – A wide range of activities which change seasonally such as tree felling and planting, wood chopping, building wildlife boxes and other habitat improvements.

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[2] ASDAN is an education charity which supplies curriculum programmes and low level/entry level qualifications which help young people develop knowledge and skills for learning, work and life. These qualifications are delivered both in the UK and internationally by secondary schools, special schools, colleges, alternative education providers and youth organisations.

[3] 'Bikeability' is a cycling training programme delivered in schools, colleges, alternative education providers and youth organisations to enable children and young people to gain the practical skills and understanding to support them to cycle safely on roads and cycle paths.

- **Allotment** – Young people plant and grow organic fruit and vegetables of their choice which they then either sell on the farm or cook together in the outdoor kitchen.
- **Farm Animals** – Under the direction of the farm manager, young people are responsible for collecting eggs, feeding and maintaining the livestock on the farm which include sheep, cows, goats, pigs, chickens, llamas, donkeys and ducks.

The education delivery element of the farm is staffed by a full time Education Manager and full time Assistant Education Officer. They are supported by volunteers, at the time this research was undertaken, there were three volunteers, each working between two and four days a week to support the various education projects delivered at the farm.

4.1.3 Skate Park

Skate Park is a charity which provides education programmes for young people who have become disengaged from mainstream school and is based within a large skate park. The facility houses an indoor skate park for skateboarding, BMXing, scootering and rollerblading, a gym, dance/fitness studio, classrooms, climbing wall and large cafe area. The programmes are delivered across three main sites including an old mill and the skate park, all situated in industrial areas on the outskirts of a city in northern England, the skate park is situated on one of these sites and each site also houses a well equipped gym which is used by the young people.

The skate park operates with charitable aims to make alternative sports facilities accessible and affordable to all children, young people and adults with an emphasis on reducing obesity levels, building community cohesion and targeting disaffected young people through sport.

The education centre which is housed within the skate park, aims to support young people who, as described on their website, have "*not achieved their potential in mainstream education"* through vocational training/apprenticeship programmes.

This project differed from the other two settings visited as it worked not only with young people who had become disengaged from secondary school, but also, those from primary school. The groups of young people who attended the provision were separated by age into three groups, Key stages 2, 3 and 4. **Key Stage 2** (commonly abbreviated as KS2) is the technical term for the four years of schooling in maintained schools in England and Wales normally known as Year 3, Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6, when the pupils are aged between 7 and 11 years. **Key Stage 3** (commonly abbreviated as KS3) is the legal term for the three years of schooling normally known as Year 7, Year 8 and Year 9, when pupils are aged between 11 and 14 and ***Key Stage 4*** is the term used for the last two years of school education (Years 10 and 11) which incorporate GCSEs, and other examinations.

Each age group (or Key Stage group), the largest of which consisted of 28 young people (Key Stage 4) attended one of the three sites for five days a week. The Key Stages 3 and 4 groups are split up into 4 smaller groups, each supported by a tutor and a mentor, and attend 4 structured lessons each day (Maths, English, Science and Personal, Social and Health Education). The Key Stage 2 element of the project, at the time of visiting, had only been running for two weeks and had just two young people aged 9 and 10 attending. Their day was again split into structured 'lessons' with a literacy session in the morning taking place in the library space and then numeracy in the afternoon. A notable aspect of this provision was that, despite being based within the skate park facility, the use of the facilities relating to skateboarding, scootering, BMXing and climbing were accessed only intermittently by the young people and were not an integral part of the learning programmes provided.

4.2 Characteristics of participants

	Young people observed	**Educators observed**	**Young people participatory research participants**	**Young people interviewed**	**Educators interviewed**
Artworks	16	5	12	6	3
City Farm	9	4	5	6	3
Skate Park 1 (Key Stage 4)	28	8	28	4	2
Skate Park 2 (Key Stage 2)	2	4	0	0	2
TOTALS	**55**	**21**	**45**	**16**	**10**

Figure 5: Number of research participants and associated activities

As outlined in Figure 6, a total of 55 young people and 21 staff across the three settings were observed, 45 young people took part in various participatory research activities completed as group activities and 14 young people and 11 staff were interviewed. All above activities took place between December 2017 and April 2018. The research involved interviews with young people (male and female) from the following age categories:

- 3 x 16 year olds
- 5 x 15 year olds
- 2 x 14 year olds
- 2x 13 year olds

- 2 x 12 year olds

Five of the young people interviewed were currently being looked after by the local authority.

Five of the young people identified that they had been diagnosed with and/or were being treated medically for ADHD (Attention Deficit, Hyperactivity Disorder).

One said they had been diagnosed with Aspergers.

One said they had been diagnosed as dyslexic in the primary school and provided with additional support but that this diagnosis was not accepted in their secondary school.

Three said that they had had support from the special educational needs provision in school.

One young person identified health problems that had led to them missing a significant amount of schooling.

The majority of the young people who participated in the research were ‘fully disengaged’ from mainstream school, in that they did not attend school at all but were currently involved in some form of learning provision for at least part of the week, whether through a special unit within school offering a reduced curriculum outside mainstream classes, or an alternative education provision.

Three were involved in a mix of provision, attending school for some lessons or days and alternative education provision for others.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1: Introduction

This chapter outlines the main findings from the research carried out through using information gained through semi-structured interviews, participatory research, observations (recorded through taking extensive field notes) and informal discussions (again recorded in field notes) with young people and educators across three alternative education settings, each of which caters for young people who have become disengaged from mainstream education. The findings have been analysed and categorised in accordance with the study's three objectives:

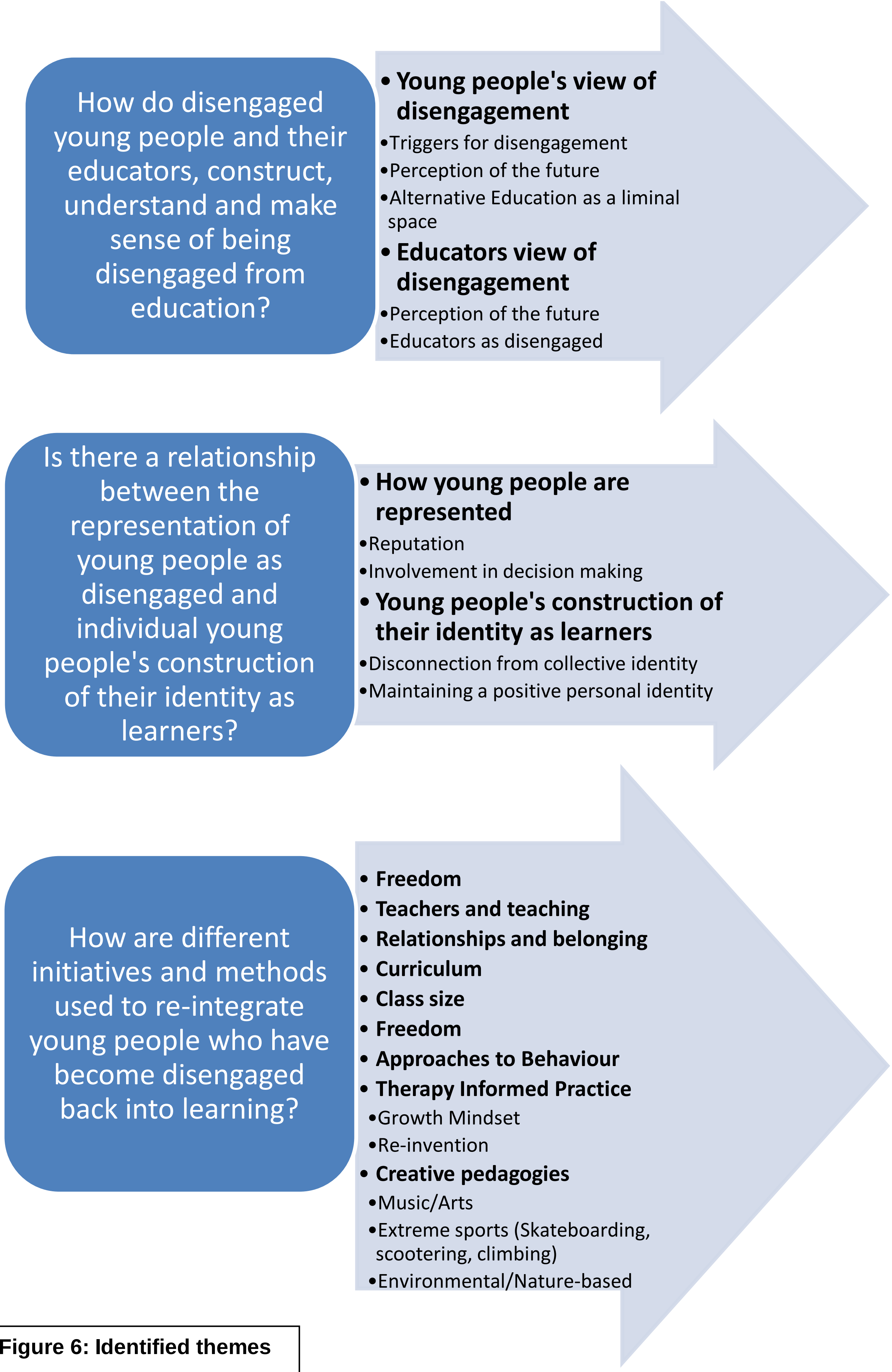
- To explore how disengaged young people and their educators, construct, understand and make sense of being disengaged from education;
- To investigate whether there is a relation between the representation of young people as 'disengaged' and individual young people's construction of their identity as learners; and to
- To examine how different initiatives and methods are used to re-integrate young people who have become disengaged back into learning.

In order to honour their voices, participants in this research are either quoted verbatim or their comments and views are paraphrased, drawing upon the researcher's field notes. The participative research element of the study also resulted in drawings, spider grams and other visual manifestations of information some of which are presented herein. To protect the anonymity of all participants and settings, any names and otherwise identifying features have been changed or removed.

The evidence in this chapter is not presented as separate case studies, but rather as individual quotations which are identified by the coding mechanism as presented in Chapter 3: Methodology, p.108.

5.2: Relating themes/findings to the relevant research questions

This section presents the themes that emerged from the data analysis relating to each of the three research questions. The themes were identified through a process of coding observation records, transcriptions of interviews and product evidence from participatory research activities. The themes were linked to each corresponding research question (see **Figure 6,** p.123). Each of these themes are then presented individually along with corresponding data in the next section of this chapter.



How do disengaged young people and their educators, construct, understand and make sense of being disengaged from education?

- **Young people's view of disengagement**
- Triggers for disengagement
- Perception of the future
- Alternative Education as a liminal space
- **Educators view of disengagement**
- Perception of the future
- Educators as disengaged

Is there a relationship between the representation of young people as disengaged and individual young people's construction of their identity as learners?

- **How young people are represented**
- Reputation
- Involvement in decision making
- **Young people's construction of their identity as learners**
- Disconnection from collective identity
- Maintaining a positive personal identity

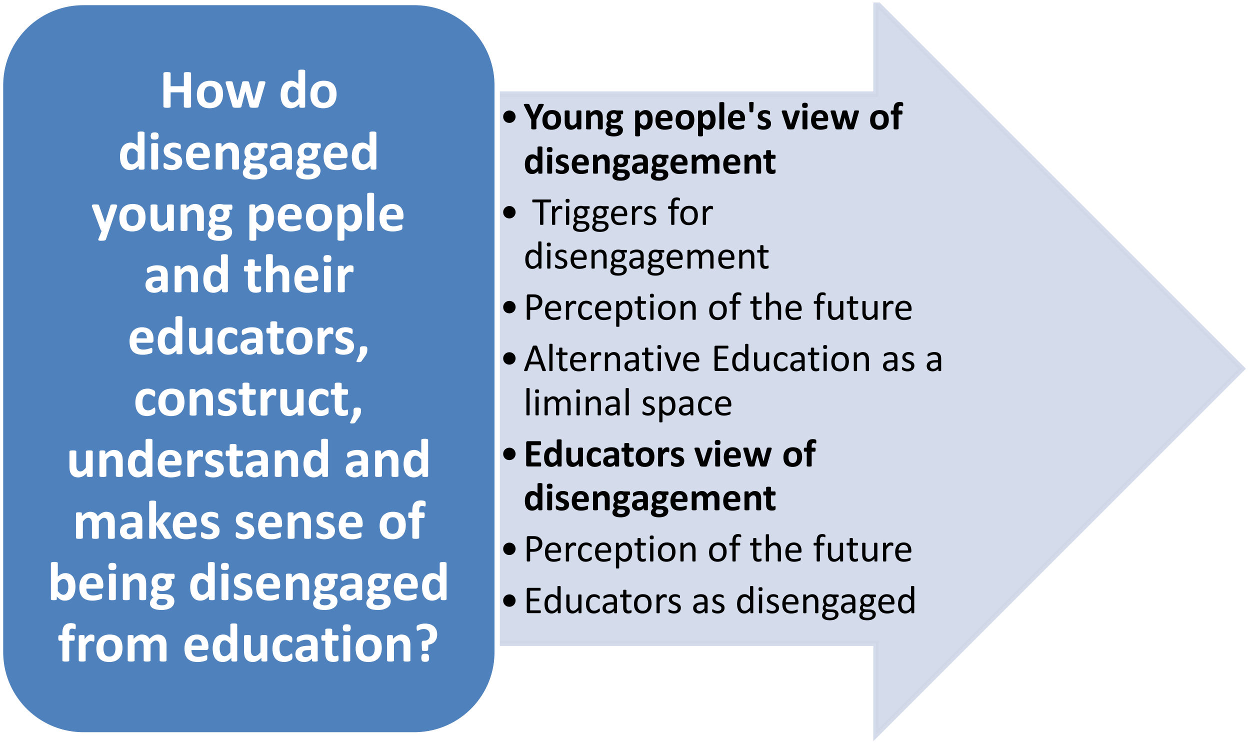
How are different initiatives and methods used to re-integrate young people who have become disengaged back into learning?

- **Freedom**
- **Teachers and teaching**
- **Relationships and belonging**
- **Curriculum**
- **Class size**
- **Freedom**
- **Approaches to Behaviour**
- **Therapy Informed Practice**
  - Growth Mindset
  - Re-invention
- **Creative pedagogies**
  - Music/Arts
  - Extreme sports (Skateboarding, scootering, climbing)
  - Environmental/Nature-based

Figure 6: Identified themes

5.3: RQ1: How do disengaged young people and their educators, construct, understand and makes sense of being disengaged from education?

This section presents the key findings that emerged upon analysing the data and identifying the themes which corresponded to research question 1 as follows:


How do disengaged young people and their educators, construct, understand and makes sense of being disengaged from education?
Young people's view of disengagement
Triggers for disengagement
Perception of the future
Alternative Education as a liminal space
Educators view of disengagement
Perception of the future
Educators as disengaged

5.3.1 Young people’s view of disengagement

An important area to ascertain in this study was whether young people actually saw themselves as being disengaged and how they constructed their position in terms of the use of such terminology. In order to identify whether this was the case or not, firstly, the language relating to disengagement needed to be explored. Did the young people actually relate to and identify with the use of the language most commonly occurring around disengagement? As part of each of the interviews and also as the introductory element of the participatory research activities, the young people were asked what language was used to describe young people in their situation, i.e. not attending mainstream schooling provisions and whether they viewed or labelled themselves using that language.

> *Res: So, what words do you think are used to describe young people like you who don't go to school anymore?*
>
> *YP: Well, it depends doesn't it, because some kids like me that don't go, it's because they really don't want to go, they don't feel safe, they don't feel like they really need to be there. So they're one thing…then there's those who like it* [not going to mainstream school] *because they can get away with not doing work and they can talk how they want, they can act how they want and there'll be no consequences. So it just depends like, if you're the kid who doesn't feel safe then you're different to the one who is just basically lazy. You can't just have one word for everyone. (YP: CF/I)*

The overall results from this activity showed that not one of the young people related to or identified with the term 'disengaged' or indeed any of the other terms such as 'disenfranchised'; 'disaffected' or 'marginalised'.

> *They're all just words used for kids like me with no money. I know for a fact that if people have got more money and then their kids get kicked out they can afford a tutor or they can afford to take them to a private school. They can afford all these things that other people can't. Kids like us just get sent to these places and given names like what you're saying.* (YP: AW/PRA)

These words appear to exist only in the adult lexicon, specifically those adults that were linked to mainstream school i.e. teachers, social workers, support staff. However, as can be seen later in this chapter, the terms are rarely used either by any of the educators within the alternative education setting who are working closely with these young people every day.

> *Yes, there's disaffected, or excluded or suspended. You know there's all this kind of terminology that's used around young people but with the young people themselves they don't seem to be using any of this language.*
> (Ed: CF/I)

The terms that were mentioned most often by the young people themselves, in relation to them not attending mainstream school such as '*suspended*' or '*excluded*' were only mentioned in the context of the way that they had been, or perceived that they had been, described by teachers of their mainstream school. This was interesting as the use of terminology such as 'suspensions' and 'exclusions' were not technically applicable to this group of young people who were still all on the school roll and, as such, were still students of the school and were classified by the school as being 'educated offsite[4]'.

> *It just seems like I get suspended or excluded or whatever and then I go back in then I'm excluded again then I'm back in. It's like I just get used to it now.*
> (YP: CF/I)

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[4] 'Educated offsite' is a term used to describe off-site activities which take place during the school's normal day and can be recorded as approved educational activity, but only if the activities meet the legislative requirements [see section 6 (4) of The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006]

> *Yeah, well the kids who come here are either suspended or excluded, we don't really pay attention to what it is; whichever way we treat them all the same.* (Ed: AW/I)

In terms of whether the young people saw themselves as being disadvantaged due to becoming disengaged from mainstream school, a number of young people were critical of what they perceived as assumptions being made by teachers that because they had found engaging with mainstream school untenable, they were not capable of gaining GCSE qualifications.

> *They all think I'm dumb now I'm here, I was an A star student before [at school] but now I'm dumb and it really pisses me off that I'm not gonna get my exams coz they won't let me back in.* (YP: AW/I)

Some young people felt that since they had been attending the alternative education provision, their academic ability had actually declined, especially in the areas of maths and English:

> *I really like maths and used to enjoy it when I'm doing it but because I am in this place now I'm just losing it, we only use a ruler all lesson and just do stuff on the website and that. I am pretty quick but I'm stuck with the 'thick' people, I'm not saying everybody but…you know… so I get bored. Because I only come here now I'm doing Functional Skills, but I am definitely capable of doing my GCSEs but I can't because they don't do them here.* (YP: AW/I)

It appeared that the availability of maths and English tuition was sporadic across the settings, indeed, one of the settings did not do Maths and English at all (City Farm), although the researcher was informed that external tutors could be brought in to work with a young person if the school agreed to fund it. In one case, the young person thought that this support would now be too late to enable him to succeed in his GCSEs.

> *I've missed too much and she [the tutor] is good but she can't teach maths, she does things all different to how my teacher showed us.* (YP: CF/I)

5.3.1i Triggers for disengagement

In addressing research question 1, particularly how the young people and their educators made sense of being disengaged from education, it became apparent initially, in any interviews or discussions, that the young people wanted to share with the researcher, their stories about why they had become disengaged from school. Hence, this section presents these stories to identify the factors that appear to contribute to how a young person's disengagement from school is understood by them and also by the staff working in the alternative education environment.

However, understanding the extent to which the experiences and issues described were triggers leading to disengagement and/or symptoms of that disengagement was not always straightforward. For example, a commonly raised issue that contributed towards disengagement was low attendance at school and nearly all of the young people interviewed across all of the settings had been through at least one period of poor attendance, the causes for poor attendance, however, were different for each young person. Factors such as problems with teachers "*they didn't like me the* *teachers and stuff so I just stopped going"* (YP: AW/I) were common, as were difficulties in sticking to the rules, particularly those relating to the young person's appearance:

> *just all these stupid rules, like no piercings, like, I had my nose pierced and that wasn't allowed but ears are ok – it's just one rule for one and one for another.* (YP: AW/I)

However, it was not just the experience within the school which affected attendance, factors at home and outside the school also had an impact which did not necessarily point to a negative experience once at school:

> *I just didn't go, I don't know why coz it's alright when I'm there…just can't be fucked to get up an' get the bus an' everything. (YP: SP1/I)*

Whatever the reason for their low attendance, young people did describe how missing school had a cumulative effect which resulted in a stressful situation:

> *The harder it is to catch up the more I miss, then the more behind you get, it's just like there's no point, then you're more likely to cause trouble and be sent out and then you can just get away from it all.* (YP: AW/I)

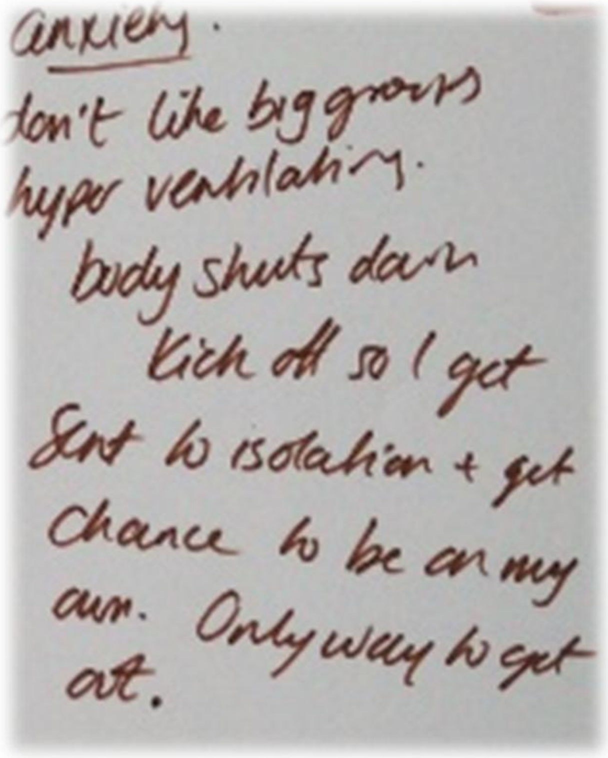
They felt that there was little support, when having missed lessons due to non-attendance, to catch up with what they had missed:

> *... when I missed school I was just told to copy someone elses work, but then you never understand what it is, you just copy it. Then it's difficult to get on with the rest of the class because you've missed a load of stuff that never gets covered.* (YP: AW/I)

There was a sense that it was sometimes difficult to keep up with the work even when present in the class:

> *All the classes are well big, about 30 in there, there's too much going on, when you get stuck or don't hear or summat, the only time the teacher bothers is when you've done summat. All through Year 9 I was in the unit and then they started sending me home, so I'd miss my lessons and then they expect you to know what's going on next time you're back.* (YP: SP1/I)

There were also other areas cited as contributory factors to their disengagement from school: several young people identified that they were bullied at school; one had missed long periods of schooling due to ill health; five said that the level of the work suddenly increased and became too hard for them once they moved into Year 10 (the year they began their GCSEs); four said that they had non-defined learning difficulties which made it difficult for them to concentrate; four said that other young people provoked them deliberately to make them 'kick off' in lessons. Another common factor was a general dislike and fear of the noise levels and large class size at school and found generally moving around a busy school environment was a problem for them as is illustrated by the image below which was created during a mind mapping activity:



anxiety.
don't like big groups
hyper ventilating.
body shuts down
kick off so I get
Sent to isolation + get
Chance to be on my
own. Only way to get
out.

(YP: AW/PRA)

The most common factor that young people raised when describing what had caused the most difficulty for them at school was the attitude and behaviour of their teachers towards them (16 young people mentioned this as a contributory factor to their feeling of not wanting to engage with school).

> *I got put in isolation all the time coz of the teachers, the teachers don't give a crap they really don't coz they're all young and all they care about is how much they're getting paid, coz they get paid a lot, they don't care about the caring aspect or whatever, they just care about trying to teach you coz that's what they get their money for. It's like 'I get my money anyway whether you are here or not so you'd better just leave'.* (YP: CF/I)

This notion of ‘care’, or the lack of it, was something that emerged repeatedly across all of the three settings when the young people referred back to their time at school and the reasons to why they had become disengaged.

> *YP: No one really cares.*
>
> *Res: No one really cares?*
>
> *YP: At school. None of the teachers*
>
> *Res: You feel that the teachers at school don’t care about you – how do you know?*
>
> *YP: Don’t know (laughs) they don’t care about anyone except their stupid work*
>
> *Res: And how does that make you feel?*
>
> *YP: Like I’m a nobody, like nothing matters anyway, whether I’m there or not.*
>
> (YP: AW/I)

The observation that teachers only cared about their work and anything outside of that being a nuisance or a distraction had made one young person feel very angry:

> *feel like picking their stupid fucking laptop up and smashing it off the wall. All they do is sit on their laptop all lesson and don’t give a fuck about what’s going on. As long as they are getting their reports or whatever done. That’s all they fucking care about innit right.* (YP: SP1/PRA)

The feeling that nobody cared and that the young people who displayed disruptive behaviour in the classroom at school were not valued within the school by either the other pupils or the teachers made one young person feel as if nobody cared in general about those who were disruptive within the school:

> *with kids like me, no one really cares. Yeah, when I go back we'll have a bit of a laugh saying oh I'm back stuff like that, and then a couple of weeks everything is normal again, then a couple of days later something happens and it's like "yeah I'm gone again".* (YP: CF/PRA)

Three of the young people relayed the feeling that their teachers at their mainstream school had pre-conceived opinions about how they were likely to behave based on the reputation of family members.

> *The teachers said I would leave school and be on the dole, just like my brother.* (YP: AW/PRA)
>
> *I know I kicked off at school… but the teacher said I was just copying my Dad and my uncle and trying to be the big man like them or something.* (YP: CF/I)

Teachers in the mainstream setting were also described as "*giving up on you"* (YP: AW/PRA) if you were slow at completing work or found the work difficult:

> *I already had a reputation from primary so I had a really bad time at high school. I've got ADHD but the teachers just thought it was an excuse to mess around and they wouldn't listen to me.* (YP: SP1/PRA)

> *I never learnt how to read so I didn't know what to do. The teachers didn't like me coz they thought I was just lying when I said I couldn't read and that I wasn't trying.* (YP: CF/I)

In the course of this research, it became apparent just how influential factors outside of school life contributed to the young people's disengagement. Whilst young people were not asked directly about the influence of home life or other external/outside school pressures, it was clear when they talked about their experiences that a link between such triggers for disengagement as poor behaviour and attendance and traumatic events and chaotic lifestyles outside school could be seen. The young people themselves were often dismissive of these factors and tended to be protective when discussing their families:

> *Me Mam got pulled in all the time and it weren't fair coz it weren't her fault. They said she should be getting me up in the morning and that… and that I should be going to bed at 9.00* [pm]. *It's like, what the fuck has it got to do with them. Me mam were raging, she were dead upset and that. I tell you, if I don't want to get up I ain't getting up, not for no one. It weren't fair that though, getting me mam in.* (YP: AW/I)

It was common, however, when discussing the reasons why they had become disengaged, to see deterioration in behaviour at chaotic and traumatic times in their lives, for example, at the time when parents/carers split up, a family member died, or proximity to familial crime and/or drug/alcohol misuse became a disruptive issue:

> *I used to like it* [school] *but then my parents separated then everything went all over the place coz I were all over the place.* (YP: CF/I)

> *Me Nanna died and me Mam just went off on a mad one, she were devo'd* [devastated]. *I just had to be here for me Mam. I just couldn't leave her coz she couldn't be trusted on her own.* (YP: AW/I)

Life experiences, at times, clearly affected the young people's ability to focus on their education as they focused their attention on more immediate day to day survival.

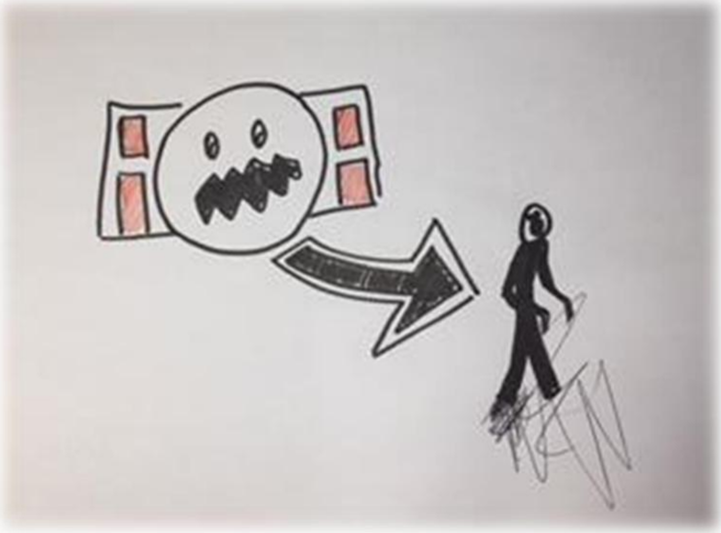
> *This is my 8th home* [foster home] *this year; I don't even unpack anymore. The one I am in now is in* [place name] (12 miles away from alternative provision attended) *and I've only been there a few days, but they're all pricks, the taxi came real early to get me this morning and I hadn't had no breakfast, no drink, no nothing. They weren't even bothered, just wanted to get me out of the door.* (YP: CF/I)

Finally, it is notable that several of the young people who participated in the research seemed to interpret their experience of becoming disengaged from school as being initiated by the school rather than by them.

> *Everyone goes on about it as if it's us deciding not to go to school no more. It's more like the school decides it doesn't want us so it kicks us out to places like these. Then we get treated by everyone like we don't wanna go to school no more.* (YP: AW/PRA)

> *Well, since all the situations…I'm not saying that I'm completely innocent obviously, but, since most of the situations were under no fault of my own – I do think it was the schools fault in that situation but if it was me instigating fights then it would definitely be my parents fault but it was under no fault of mine that I left all of them* [schools]. *I know for a fact that isn't the case. I'm not innocent, I'm not saying that, but I would not, if it was not for what happened in the school, I would not have left. So it was definitely the schools fault.*
>
> (YP: CF/I)

One young person produced this particularly poignant image which he described as showing the school shouting at him to "*fuck off and don't come back".* (YP: AW/PRA)



(YP: AW/PRA)

However, young people were appreciative when it was apparent to them that the school, or more specifically, individual teachers within the school, did not give up on them. Even though these young people had now been removed from the school, there was a tendency be very positive about certain aspects of their school experience and they were very appreciative of any efforts that had been made to help them. One young person, for example, had been excluded fully from school but maintained that this was not the fault of the school:

> *They did really try for me at school, especially Miss K. She did loads for me and talked to the Head and everything. It wasn't their fault really, it's just everything else that was going on. I just couldn't do it. I'm best off somewhere like here really.* (YP: CF/I)

Another young person acknowledged that the school had given her another chance to engage with education through referring her to an alternative provision and felt that although she did not attend school anymore and now attended the alternative education setting full time, at least she had not been excluded which showed they had not given up on her:

> *The school told me they could have chucked me out of school altogether but they given me another chance by paying for me to come here.* (YP: AW/I)

Issues around the managing of their own social and emotional development, especially in how they coped with responding to aggressive behaviour from other young people appeared important. Young people talked about the link between fighting (four young people said that getting into fights with other young people was a regular occurrence and eight others mentioned seeing fights at school as a common part of their experience) and their inability to control their moods.

> *They just used to wind me up on purpose* [other young people], *like set me off and watch me go. I just get the fucking rage though I do, it's like when you eat a chilli or summat, [laughs] it just burns right through me. (*YP: AW/PRA)

The young person who supplied the previous quote had, by his own admission, "*calmed down a lot since coming here"* (Artworks) yet, at each of the research visits, was observed to be extremely volatile in many of his interactions with other young people. It was only through the skilful employment of de-escalation techniques by the staff at the setting which enabled both him and the other young people involved to avoid further conflict.

> *We are just constantly on alert when he is around, I'm listening out all the time and it's always his voice. Saying that though, he is getting better, he nearly smashed the place up when he started. He was just testing us though, I guess we must've passed!* (Ed: AW/I)

5.3.1 ii Perception of the Future

The young people were asked how they feel that their no longer accessing mainstream schooling provision was likely, if at all, to affect their future aspirations. One of the young people interviewed outlined his future ambitions thus:

> *I want to make a lot of money. I want to put a lot in my savings. I want to save up, buy a house and retire. I want to be able to go on holidays whenever I want. I want to be able to go into shops and be able to buy whatever I want without having to think what I have got in my account just in case I have paid*

> *this off and haven't paid this off. I don't want to be on benefits either. I'm one hundred per cent not going to be on benefits. I'd work at Morrison's before I'd be on benefits. I think people moan too much about what they can change.* (YP: CF/I)

Other participants also viewed their futures in terms of working in a job that pays well and owning their own home. Other ambitions included going to college and/or university (an indication that disengagement from secondary education does not necessarily impact on entry into tertiary) having a partner and/or being married and having children. A few held ambitions for their future that are becoming increasingly accepted as valid career aspirations in society (Smith, 2014); one said he would be famous *'You-Tuber'* (YP:CF/I); another said she would win the X-Factor and one young female said what she wanted more than anything else was to be on the reality television programme 'Love Island', an ambition which she felt that no longer going through the mainstream schooling system from school would impact upon the achievement of *"You just need to go to the audition and be as fit as! They don't care what school you went to."* (YP: AW/I)

5.3.1 iii Alternative Education as a liminal space

As has been illustrated through the lack of distinct terminology used to describe the young people's state of becoming disengaged from mainstream school, it appeared that both the educators and the young people were not placing importance on naming the state of being disengaged, perhaps as they saw this as a temporary state that would potentially be at risk of being afforded a more permanent status if acknowledged with a label or assigned a specific terminology. Also, there was not one specific ‘type’ who would become disengaged, just as there was not just one ‘type’ of alternative education setting.

> *Res: So, do you think that some people don’t want to be here and some do?*
> *YP: Well, you wouldn’t choose to come here because you don’t know where you’re going to be put so you could be anywhere, but yeah, some of them choose to be chucked out definitely.*(YP: CF/I)

The young people who participated in the study were asked what it felt like not to be attending their mainstream school anymore. One young person made it very clear that he was still a student of the school he had been excluded from (although he was now attending the alternative education setting, in which he was interviewed, on a full time basis)

> *They say that I have just been suspended, that just means it’s for a bit, not for ever. I’ve been "part time excluded". (*He said this in a raised voice as if he was mimicking somebody [perhaps a teacher] saying it to him, as if he was quoting it, or had heard it a lot.) *but I’m still a student of that school and* ***will*** *[young person’s emphasis] be going back.* (YP: AW/I)

Another young person, when asked why he thought he had become disengaged from mainstream school asserted:

> *I wasn't doing what I needed to do…erm… to do well. At that moment in time. This is just for now* [attending the alternative provision] *coz I want to go back but it's hard to go back so I don't know if I can. I just don't know what's happening really.*(YP: CF/I)

Feeling it may be difficult to go back to school, despite each of the settings assertions that in the first instance, all young people will be supported to be reintegrated back into school[5], was a commonly voiced worry. Not all of the young people wanted to go back to school as they often felt very let down and angry about their experiences within school and the cumulative experiences that had led to them attending the alternative education setting.

> *They treat you like shit, my teacher hated me, she used to rag me for anything. I'm never going back there, no way. I'm going to college to get my diploma as soon as I'm old enough I am.* (YP: AW/I)

Of those that did want to return to school, they often cited a growing feeling of disconnection from school as a barrier to reintegration. One reason for the disconnection was the feeling that they had grown apart from old friends at school.

> *I haven't seen any of my mates since I left school and well one of my mates erm he keeps on asking me to come over and I'm like erm, yeah but, I feel*

---

[5] Each of the settings visited asserted in their promotional material (For example on their website; social media biographies; publicity brochures etc.) that it was intended that the young people be reintegrated back into mainstream education.

> *like he'll just be talking about what's going on there and it's all like none of my life anymore.* (YP: CF/I)

A sense that the young people who were no longer attending mainstream school were somehow different now was often alluded to:

> *Everyone thinks there must be something wrong with you - I call us normal because I'm always excluded and suspended and I'm just normal [laughs] but sometimes they [other people] don't think that you are right in the head, like you're a right weirdo or something.* (YP: CF/PRA)

An example of how a young person could feel dislocated from their peers with whom they had engaged previously whilst at school could be displayed through being disconnected from social media networks:

> *I'm not part of it all anymore, no one really bothers like, when they don't see you, they just don't add you anymore or tag you in anything* [referring to social media]. (YP: CF/PRA)

The young people were asked questions and engaged in discussions around what they wanted to do in the future and how these aspirations may have changed or been affected since they had become disengaged from school. There was a wide range of ideas put forward for future jobs. What was clear, however, was that the majority of the young people identified that they would need qualifications in order to realise their future aspirations, yet there was no evidence that they felt that their time at the alternative setting was preparing them for those roles or qualifications. So, even when young people were clear that they were not going to achieve any GCSE qualifications, often still aspired to a vocation or higher level qualification at college which would have required a higher level of qualification to gain entry. Another example was where a young person may have had a criminal record, yet aspired to work with children, not acknowledging (or perhaps knowing) the implications that their record may hold.

> *Yeah, I got done for aggravated robbery but shit like that gets taken off when you get to 18. It all just gets wiped.* (YP: SP1/I)

The majority of the young people expected to continue their education into further education or an apprenticeship. This suggests that they were less disengaged from education now than they were when they were at school. It appeared that some young people had put their education '*on hold'* (YP: AW/PRA), not expecting to gain any qualifications whilst at the alternative education setting, but accepting this and planning to start again properly upon reaching the end of Year 11 and moving onto further education at a college or other training provider. However, there was little awareness of the entry requirements for a college course and while the strengths of the small groups and less pressurised curriculum had succeeded in re-engaging them into an environment and developing skills which they would not have otherwise had chance to learn, it was not clear how prepared they would be for mainstream college courses.

> *Well, the stuff I've done here is good for just normal life and that, like, I can mend a puncture on a bike, I can make a fence if my garden ever needs a fence… I can weed a pond. But it's not really helping me get a job or anything. I still need to go back to do my exams.* (YP: CF/I)

Less than half of the young people coming up to leaving age (Year 11) said that they had received any information, advice or guidance with their future progression since being in the alternative education provision. Some said that they did not need to because they had already decided what they wanted to do. *"I'm gonna be a mechanic like my brother anyway so I only need my maths and English to get on an apprenticeship."* (YP: CF/I) others said that they would seek out this advice when they needed it. *"I'll just go into college and ask them when I finish here."* (YP: AW/I) Those that had received support said, generally, that this had been informal advice and information, rather than specific help in completing application forms for college, or support to reflect on their skills and preferences in order to identify a future path that best suited their needs.

Over half of the young people said that they expected, to go to college after leaving the alternative provision and did not feel that they were likely to face difficulties getting onto a college course of their choice. This seemed surprising as none of the participants were due to leave their setting with a GCSE in Maths or English. It seemed, therefore, unlikely that a college place at Level 3 (the level that school leavers typically enter onto at Further Education level) would be available to them. When asked whether they felt that not having these qualifications would affect their future aspirations, comments such as the following were common:

> *No, maybe if I just wanted to do something like banking or something major but then yeah but to be fair no, not for photography and engineering, erm, yeah, I don't really need any stuff for what I want to do.* (YP: AW/I)

This view, as well as depicting an ambivalent approach to entry requirements for further education qualifications, also seems to indicate that the young person feels that their choice of future career is less important than other professions.

What was particularly notable, in scrutinising young people's comments for evidence of how they understood and made sense of being disengaged from mainstream education, was the lack of interest in their current situation in terms of what opportunities it could offer them for either a) re-engaging with the schooling environment or b) building up currency for progression to further education, employment or vocational training.

> *I'm over school now, realistically I'm never going back there so I just need to go to college instead and get my qualifications.* (YP: AW/I)

This feeling of inhabiting a liminal space which seemed to be existing almost between education could be seen to indicate that it was within the space between mainstream school and further education, in this case, the alternative education provider that disengagement was actually happening. This observation is discussed further in the next chapter.

5.3.2 Educators views of disengagement

In scrutinising the language used by the educators in the various settings to describe the young people that they worked with, this differed across the settings. At Artworks and City Farm, for example, the educators working in these settings avoided the use of terms such as “disengaged” or “excluded” and avoided any language which associated with a deficit view of young people. City Farm even disregarded the ‘*paperwork*’ that accompanied each young person “*unless they’ve done something really dangerous that we need to know about”* (Ed: CF/I), preferring instead to treat each young person as *“a blank slate”.* (Ed: AW/I).

> *I don't even think they are disengaged myself. I don't read, I never read what they've done in the past. I'm supposed to do but I don't coz I'm not judgemental. I don't like being judged myself so I'm not going to judge them. They come and their slate’s wiped clean as far as I'm concerned and they buy into that. They're thinking, oh what I've done at school, do they know about it or what do they all think I’m like here. But I just...I don't know. I just ignore all that.* (Ed: CF/I)

At Skate Park, the educators often referred to the young people using language such as *“they are all behavioural kids”* (Ed: SP1/I), meaning that the young people have become disengaged from school due to their negative behaviour whilst in the school, and *“I use the term disaffected”* (Ed: SP2/I). However, this setting also acknowledged that the schools too, often used language which positioned the young person as the deficit element:

> *When I'm talking to the school, the TAs* [Teaching Assistants] *and the teachers are talking about him* [the young person] *using language like "he shows no respect" and "he's just badly behaved", it's just like they have made their minds up already that this is a "bad" person they're dealing with – I mean, these are just children, he's only 10 for god's sake!* (Ed: SP2/I)

It was interesting to note that many of those educators working within alternative education who participated in the study, had previously worked within mainstream formal education either as qualified teachers or support staff, others had come from a youth work/social care background and some had experience of both.

The way that educators viewed disengagement seemed to vary across the different settings. The educators at Artworks, for example, identified heavily with the young people they worked with as they inhabited, professionally and personally, the same environments were part of the same communities in which the young people lived and in some cases, also identified as being disengaged from education themselves. With two of the educators at this setting both living in and also working (as youth workers and community arts workers) in the local community, they were engaging otherwise with the young people, through other settings outside of the 'school' environment. As such, they had established connections with many of the young people on a wider and deeper level than if their knowledge and interactions were based merely within the education setting. This enabled them to view the reasons for the young people's disengagement as being wider than just relating to their negative behaviour within the school. Through having first-hand knowledge of the young people's backgrounds, their families, their communities, these educators understanding of disengagement encompassed a field of vision far wider than that based on information relating to detrimental behaviour at school.

Artworks and City Farm, although still with a focus on the achievement of accredited outcomes for the young people attending, had a more relaxed approach to qualification achievement than did Skate Park, for which the focus on GCSE achievements was an inherent and consuming aspect of their ethos. This resulted in the educators at Artworks and City Farm having more time to engage with young people in a less structured way and therefore to be able to focus more on developing relationships with the young people based on mutual interest. They tended to have more time available to focus on discussions around issues of current relevance to the young people rather than having to focus predominantly on a quantifiable educational outcome.

Skate Park however, as an organisation, treated disengagement, on the whole, very much as a behavioural issue. At Skate Park 1 (the Key Stage 4 setting) there was an overall lack of trust in the young people, they were not allowed mobile phones, purses and wallets which were given up at the beginning of every day and all young people were given a full body scan with a hand-held metal detector upon entering the building. This was due to an incident earlier in the year where a young person had brought a knife to the setting which he had threatened to use on one of the other young people.

One of the educators at this setting described the young people with whom he worked as:

> *… damaged in some way, that’s why they can’t fit into school. It’s usually their family or background and stuff that’s made them misbehave.* (Ed: SP1/I)

At the same setting, another of the staff members felt that it was the school that was the cause of the young person's disengagement and subsequent attendance at their setting:

> *These kids are great when you get to know them but they don't take the time at school, they just write them off and get rid of them and send them [to] places like these don't they. We're just a glorified babysitting service really.* (Ed: SP1/I)

In general, the educators within this setting emphasised that they were focused on getting the young person back into school and ensuring that whilst they were at the setting, the onus was on working to support the young people towards the achievement of the core GCSE curriculum of Maths, English and science. The young people at this setting were also clear about why they attended this setting:

> *We come here to get exams, otherwise we wouldn't come.*(YP:SP1/I)

One of the educators at the setting emphasised that the reason they were so focused on the accredited learning was to respond to the requirements of the local schools.

> *They won't use us if we don't do GCSEs with them. All they are bothered about is that these kids get exam results and that they don't have to have them in school.* (Ed: SP1/I)

The same educator expressed that he would prefer to work with the young people on developing softer outcomes and focus on the aspects of learning and personal development which would assist them to integrate better and progress within society. He felt that despite the setting he worked at being an 'alternative' to mainstream school, with the constant pressure for young people to achieve accredited outcomes and closer monitoring of their curriculum offer and timetable, the setting was becoming more like school

> *We're supposed to be adapting what we do to suit the individual, that's what these kids need, but it's more and more about the maths and the English and the science.*(Ed: SP1/I)

Several of the educators questioned the value of the qualifications they were doing with the young people. At City Farm, one educator stated:

> *Yes, so the content is a bit bullshit you know but I think it doesn't reflect what the kids are learning and I think they learn a lot and what they are learning is things like how to live in a community and how to work together. I don't necessarily think that this type of learning is tested by the qualification. There is so much that we do with them that helps them grow, I suppose qualifications can help them grow in that they can help them move on and progress but it is the least important aspect of what we do here.* (Ed: CF/I)

At Skate Park 2, the young person (age 10) who attended the programme, was required to wear the uniform of the school, from which he had become disengaged.

The intention was that he be reintegrated back into the school as soon as possible. The school and the project manager had agreed that this, along with the requirement that he address the educators as Ms or Mr rather than by their first name, was an integral part of his reintegration programme. The educators were really struggling with this situation, especially the issues of the uniform and having to be addressed as Ms or Mr. They were unused to this practice as none had worked in a school setting previously and were uncomfortable with not only having the young person refer to them this way but also that they were required to refer to each other this way rather than by using first names *"It's weird, It's like being a proper teacher!" (*Ed: SP2/I). However, they did agree unanimously that this was the best way for the young person to maintain a psychological link with mainstream school and hence, be more likely to reintegrate. This rule, that the uniform of the referring school be worn in the Key Stage 2 programme of the Skate Park project was however, not required in the same setting for the older learners.

> *If we don't do this with the younger ones, they will become de-schooled and it will just be ten times harder to get them back there if we get them into bad habits.* (Ed: SP2/I)

This use of the phrase *'bad habits'* to refer to their own practice of not requiring uniforms (as applicable to the older learners) was interesting as it contended that somehow the move away from the expectations and requirements of mainstream school would result in negative behaviour which would hinder a return to education.

At Skate Park (SP1 and SP2) where there was pressure to ensure that the young people achieved qualifications as close to those they would be working towards at school, the educators, in general, felt that the young people they were working with were at a disadvantage through not attending school "*When they're outside mainstream, they're outside society"* (Ed: SP2/I) and that it was their role to try and reintegrate them back into mainstream schooling as soon as possible:

> *If we don't get them back in quickly then this just becomes the norm, they start to struggle socially, the longer they are with us the less likely they are to be able to integrate.* (Ed: SP2/I)

It was Skate Park, for whom the pressure for the young people to achieve qualifications was uppermost in comparison with the others visited, that suffered the most with extreme examples of disruptive behaviour. Attention spans waned extremely quickly and the young people found it difficult to concentrate as they appeared to be in a constant state of hyper-arousal. Chairs were thrown, walls and doors were damaged and a metal storage cabinet pushed over. The threat of violence and risk of physical harm was constant. The educators were clearly exhausted at the end of each day by the constant battle to challenge and maintain behaviour standards *"Thank god that's over, time to get out of here!"* (Ed: SP1/FN)

When the educators were asked at this setting, why the young people they worked with presented such challenging behaviour, they replied that this was due to the young people that they worked with being the most difficult in the area that no other alternative education providers could work with:

> *These are really high-tariff learners, I mean, these are the ones who nobody else will take. They've been through everywhere else and been kicked out.* (Ed: SP1/I)

However, a similar sentiment was expressed by educators at both of the other settings also:

> *The kids we get are the ones that they can't keep anywhere else. We're the only ones who can work with them.* (Ed: AW:I)

> *Did you see Luke* [not real name] *yesterday? Did you see him litter picking? Well, he was excluded from 3 schools, 3 schools and then he's been to them all, all of these external provisions or whatever you want to call them. Here is the only place he's stuck at. We get all the worst ones you know, the difficult ones who won't stay anywhere else.* (Ed: CF/I)

This statement, somewhat contradicted this settings insistence that they avoided labelling or using deficit language and that they disregarded any prior information about the student as they felt they were often working with *"the worst ones…the difficult ones"* (Ed: CF/I)

Often the educators reinforced the feeling expressed by the young people that the alternative education sector was a *"last resort"* (Ed: AW/I) and in Skate Park, where they catered for primary and secondary pupils, the intention was clear that pupils from the primary setting were to be integrated back into mainstream school as soon as was possible:

> *I'm absolutely adamant that X will not be moving into our Key Stage 3 and 4 provision.* (Ed: SP2/I)

The reason for this was that *"once they are disengaged at the beginning of high school, that will be it! It will be very difficult, just about impossible to go back into school after that."* (Ed: SP2/I). The main reason given for the increased likelihood that the young person would remain disengaged was that:

> *Once they get a name for themselves that's that, They will always be viewed by the teachers and all the other young people as difficult and that they are going to be hard work so they just don't want them back.* (Ed: SP2/I)

5.3.2 i Perception of the future

The educators, although keen to stress that they treated each young person as an individual or as a blank slate, often had very clear cut opinions about what type of role the young people they were working with would move into as an adult or upon leaving their provision:

> *I think that if they get a job later on it will maybe be a job that's poor pay, poor reputation you know maybe zero hours contract, maybe no stability, maybe short term contract then the lack of security and money means you can't*

> *participate fully in society because everything nowadays costs money.* (Ed: CF/I)

> *Well, they're one step away from prison really, or life on the dole most of 'em. That's what they would of been heading for if they weren't here.* (Ed: AW/I)

When asked for examples of jobs that the young people they had worked with previously had moved into, an educator from City Farm acknowledged that success could be measured on an individual basis:

> *Yeah, well we get a lot of them coming back and lots of them are successful in their own ways and when they first came you would have said oh, you know, you've not got much of a future.* (Ed: CF/I)

He listed a variety of jobs that various young people had moved onto including two who had moved onto university:

> *Yeah, the only two ever, that I know of anyway…that's very rare though. It's mainly that they get a job and settle down and you know, they're not criminals or overweight or sat in a room doing nothing or causing trouble, being abusive. They're actually contributing in some way yeah.* (Ed: CF/I)

The feeling that *"they'll be alright when they get out of school"* (Ed: CF/I) voiced by one of the educators at City Farm reflected the views of some of the young people that they were just waiting until they reached the legal school leaving age before they could really begin their life. An educator at Skate Park echoed this sentiment*:*

> *Some of them hate coming here, they only come to keep the school off their back, they just want to get to leaving day and they'll be off.*(Ed: SP1/I)

There appeared to be an acceptance amongst the educators that the young people they were working with were not likely to move into the careers for which the curriculum they offered would be expected to lead towards:

> *We need plumbers and mechanics and electricians you knew, desperately need them* [laughs] *so that's the kind of thing they'll go into. You know we're not expecting anyone to go into farming or the environment or save the world or anything, but they're little things that lead onto other projects and stuff but it's building trades and things like that.* (Ed: CF/I)

> *No, none of these will be going into the music industry anytime soon* [laughs]. *We have had one recently though who has gone on to do media at college, she made the film on our website.* (Ed: AW/I)

Although the educators acknowledged that their setting was not necessarily preparing them for a future career, or life beyond school, there seemed little investment generally in those areas which would aid progression to further education and/or apprenticeships/employment. At City Farm, for example, the failure of the setting to be able to offer maths and English education to the young people was highlighted as a real failure to meet the needs of at least one young person.

> *It's sad because I think that there's so much potential in all of the children we have here and that's not going to be realised. You know, like S, he basically can't read and write. You know for so many jobs today you need to read and write but he – and like he doesn't go to school anymore and doesn't do maths and English because we don't do it here and it would mean the school engaging different people here like a teacher or something. You just know he's not going to get a job because he doesn't have the qualifications.* (Ed: CF/I)

When asked why the setting was not able to offer these qualifications, finance and lack of resources was cited as reasons along with a feeling that due to the setting being very much a real-life working environment:

> *We can't do everything here. If we start doing maths and English then it means we will have to cut back on some of the outdoor time and the jobs that need to be done.*(Ed: CF/I)

At Artworks, one of the educators expressed regret that the curriculum that they offered was not contributing to the future career aspirations of some of the young people they worked with:

> *He's great you know, he will be when he's finished here. He really wants to do an apprenticeship or something in mechanics you know, when he finishes here. It's just a shame we can't do nothing like that for him.* (Ed: AW/I)

The same educator acknowledged however that although the young person had not been able to do mechanics at the setting, they had developed and been given opportunities in other ways, such as through:

> *being given space you know, he's the big man here, he just goes from room to room now and then, checking on everything and everybody. If there's any trouble or anything that needs sorting, he's the man.*(Ed: AW/I)

At City Farm, one of the educators referred to class distinctions and gender expectations as one of the reasons why a) the young people had not engaged with mainstream schooling and b) found this alternative education setting as more in keeping with the learning needs, in particular of young working class males.

> *These are all working class boys here and they are growing up to be breadwinners so they get prepared for that role and at school there is nothing for them that meets those needs. So they come here and they are doing a job and it's a job that needs doing so this makes a difference to their masculinity or one of the expectations of masculinity so they feel good you know.*
>
> (Ed: CF/I)

The same setting showed that they understood how the young people's behaviour at school which may have been developed as a protection mechanism could be seen as a barrier to them moving either back into school or into further education:

> *They just don't realise how loud they are and stuff. But some of them need to because they really throw their weight around, you know, at school, and that's how they survive in school, yeah, become bullies and most of it is just talk usually but that's how they survive.* (Ed: CF/I)

This setting acknowledged that the young people had perhaps never been given any responsibility before and that to do so would be developmental:

> *Yeah, he is really good, we kind of use him as a leader, you know, and make him an example to the others so he's kind of saying, well, he's not saying it directly, but he's saying to them you know, it should be done like this and they look up to him and think "ooh yeah, ok" so he's a good, you know, it's about role models isn't it but good role models and stuff like that.* (Ed: CF/I)

5.3.2 ii Educators as disengaged

Of particular interest was the observation that several of the educators across the different settings felt themselves to have been or become disengaged from the mainstream schooling system, whether intentionally or not. These experiences ranged from having previously worked as teachers in mainstream schools and realising that the role was not suited to them, having problems with and becoming disengaged from school as a young person and in the case of one educator, never having attended mainstream school at all due to being homeschooled.

One of the educators at City Farm had initially trained as a geography/ geology teacher and had secured a job teaching in secondary school with a view to then moving into something "*outdoorsy, I was a bit of an eco-warrior and all that*" (Ed: CF/I). When his contract with the school had come to an end he had been happy that his current job had come up as he had felt that he had not fit into the rigidity of the school structure.*"I was looking to move into something like this, teaching was ok but I knew it wasn't for me."* (Ed: CF/I)

At another setting, one of the staff members had previously been a deputy head teacher at a large academy school locally, and had felt that the role did not correspond to his own values:

> *I just felt all the time, that I was imposing a set of values on the children that I didn't agree with myself, what is called – cognitive dissonance?* (Ed: AW/I)

He talked at length about how he was expected to maintain quite strict levels of behaviour and to give out sanctions to young people for behaviours which he did not necessarily feel warranted a punishment. He found that this aspect of his work was particularly difficult as he felt that to sanction behaviour was against his own beliefs.

> *I just felt like it was the worse thing to do, I agree with having rules, I'm not saying that no rules is good. But, I don't think the culture of punishing someone and putting them up on a podium where everyone can see what*

> *they have done is a good thing. I fact, I think it's the worse you can do to people, especially kids, that's what causes all the problems.* (Ed: AW/I)

Another staff member was also a fully qualified teacher and had taught for a while in mainstream school but had found the environment very alien and whilst enjoying working with young people had really struggled with the rules and regulations associated with the role.

> *I totally understand the kids because I am disengaged too, I don't fit in either, never have done. I don't like big groups, It's all too loud for me at school and it's just too much for me. That's why I like it here because I can just do my thing.* (Ed: AW/I)

Several of the educators spoken to in the course of the research had, as young people, themselves been disengaged from school. They often felt that this experience had enhanced their ability to connect and empathise with the experiences of the young people they were now working with.

> *I've been through all this myself. There isn't anything any of these can tell me that I haven't done myself. It helps you connect you know…and to stay one step ahead [*laughs*].* (Ed: SP1/I)

Although not identifying as previously disengaged there were several of the educators who had a strong faith-based background which included various affinities to the Christian, Muslim and Quaker religious beliefs. When asked whether their religious beliefs had any bearing on their understanding of or approach to disengagement, one of the educators, who identified as a Christian, offered the following explanation for her chosen vocation:

> *I just feel like it is so important to me to be doing something that is making a difference to the world. My mum and dad have always run a youth club in our village and I used to work with them a lot. Now, I just think it's important that these kids get a good experience as they have been treated badly by school.* (Ed: SP2/I)

5.4 RQ2: Is there a relationship between the representation of young people as disengaged and individual young people's construction of their identity as learners?

Is there a relationship between the representation of young people as disengaged and individual young people's construction of their identity as learners?

- **How young people are represented**
- Reputation
- Involvement in decision making
- **Young people's construction of their identity as learners**
- Feeling (dis)connected
- Maintaining a positive personal identity

5.4.1 How Young People are Represented

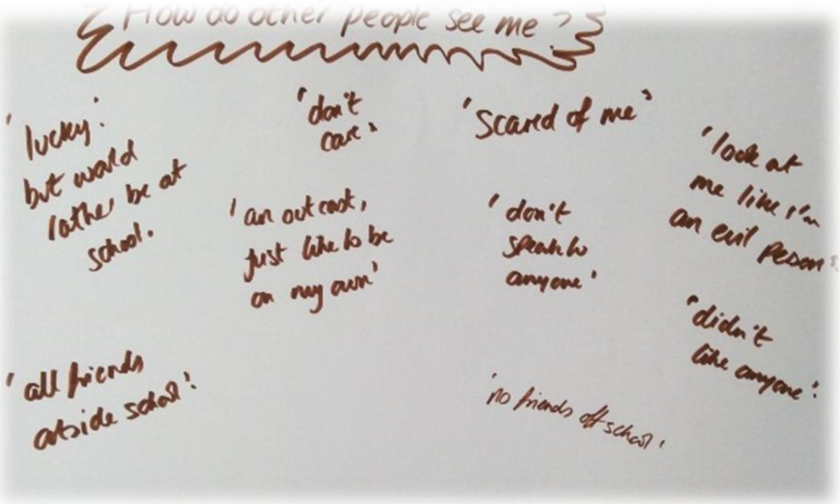
A primary aim of the study was to identify some of the effects that becoming disengaged from mainstream school had on those young people’s identity as learners. One of the lingering effects on the young people seemed to be the detrimental viewpoint that they felt that those still at the school had of them, i.e. the view that the teachers and peers had of those who had become disengaged.

> *They just you know, just think nothing like, they just think I’m bad and stuff. Well, the teachers just think I’m bad and I don’t listen or anything so they just think I’m bad.* (YP: CF/I)

Feeling as if others were seeing them as ‘*bad*’ was a common theme in young people’s accounts of how becoming disengaged had made other people view them differently.

> *It’s like I’m a bad person or something, people don’t wanna know no more. My mate who I went to primary school, he’s not allowed to lark with me anymore. He hasn’t said that exactly but… I’m still the same person though aren’t I…I dunno.* (YP: AW/PRA)

The image below which was created as part of the participatory research activities carried out with young people at Artworks identified some of the different ways that the young people felt they were viewed by others. These included that one young person perceived that others viewed them as being ‘bad’ because they felt like an outcast, felt others were scared of them and felt other young people looked at them as though they were evil. (YP: AW/PRA)



How do other people see me?

'lucky' but would rather be at school.

'don't care'

'Scared of me'

'look at me like I'm an evil person'

'I am an outcast, just like to be on my own'

'don't speak to anyone'

'didn't like anyone'

'all friends outside school'

'no friends off school'

(YP: AW/PRA)

One young person explained that the reason that they were now attending an alternative learning setting was because they were seen as ‘bad’ at school.

> *I come here because it’s a smaller school and stuff and it’s just for people who’s supposed to of been bad and stuff.* (YP: SP1/PRA)

This feeling that being ‘good’ was rewarded with doing well in school and being ‘bad’ resulted in having to leave the school was common in most of the discussions across all three settings. Interestingly, being ‘bad’ did not necessarily manifest itself just through presenting negative behaviour, but also in a young person’s academic ability.

> *The way it works is that if you’re good you just like stay at school and everything’s alright and you get the rewards at school, but you know, if you like struggle at school and you’re like bad in your lessons or something, they just bring you like to places like this.* (YP: CF/I)

It is interesting to note here that the young person intimates that s/he has had no part in the decision making processes involved in choosing where they will be educated. This aspect of the element of choice afforded to young people who have become disengaged from school is discussed previously in this chapter. Also of interest is the way in which none of the young people appear to internalise the notion that they are ‘bad’. They describe how others view them and how they feel they are appearing to others but at no point did any of the participants express that they agreed with, or felt that they were in any way intrinsically bad. This suggests that although they are aware that they have been allocated the label of being ‘bad’, they were certainly not owning or applying that label to themselves. In fact, they appeared to maintain a positive personal identity despite the presence of often stigmatising labels being applied to them.

> *They think I’m all this and just causing trouble and that. But, they don’t know the real me. They don’t know me at all, I just let them see what I want them to see.* (YP: CF/I)

In interviewing one of the educators at City Farm he pointed out that one area that he had to contend with whilst working with the young people on the farm was how they were perceived by others:

> *It’s all about breaking down barriers, so you’ll get visitors to the farm who might come across a group of my lads and they’re all big lads and they’re loud and they’re carrying sharp tools* [laughs] *and they look dirty and grubby so, yeah, it’s not surprising people are a bit alarmed.* (Ed: CF/I)

He then went on to describe how the young people, through their behaviour, challenged the assumptions that had often been made about them through displaying behaviour which was the contrary to those expectations:

> *But then when they, you know, like X will say “Do you want me to get a chick out for you for your little kid to stroke?” and that barrier is suddenly completely gone.* (Ed: CF/I)

Actions like this were encouraged by the educators at the farm through facilitating situations where the young people had to interact with other groups:

> *The public have a perception of what these young people are and how they're going to behave so we want to change that. But it's also that young people have to learn how to behave out of school where they have learnt that to get by they need to behave badly, they see that as normal, so yeah, it's good to mix them with the special needs people who come here and the visitors and the primary school kids who come on trips here. We actually get these guys to run the sessions, they work with the primary school kids, teaching them and they're fantastic.* (Ed: CF/I)

5.4.1 i Reputation

> *At school I have a reputation at school so people treat me like more cautious cos they're like "Oh, he might like run" or something like that but here I don't have a reputation well I do but I don't have a bad reputation I have a like a kind of a good reputation, or could call it a 'no' reputation here rather than there so no one really does treat me any different...*(YP: CF/I)

Throughout the study, and across all of the settings equally, young people often referred to their reputation both at the mainstream school they previously attended and at the alternative provision they now attended, and how this had changed from a negative reputation to, if not positive, then at least to having *no* reputation, since they had been attending the alternative provision.

It felt, when discussing reputation with the young people, that, as well as perhaps offering a layer of protection from other pupils and teachers in the school, having a reputation could also be an additional pressure that the young person had to put effort into upholding.

> *YP: It's hard sometimes always kicking off at school, like, all my mates there, they'd be like, go on go on, wind 'em up like. Even the teachers'd be like "You can just turn right round and leave if there's any trouble" or make me sit at the front. It's like everyone wants me to kick off.*
> *Res: So, you felt you were expected to behave in a certain way?*
> *YP: Yeah, all the time. It's like if I weren't there there'd be nothing to make the lesson good for the others [laughs].* (YP: AW/I)

The young people often seemed to feel that, since attending the alternative education setting, there was no longer any need to uphold a reputation as it was not having an impact on either the staff at the setting or the other young people attending.

Some of the young people saw that to put the energy into upholding a reputation could be detrimental to their enjoyment whilst attending the setting:

> *erm. I don't know about a reputation here…because, I like it here and there's no point in being bad cos if I'm bad I lose all the opportunities like cutting down a tree which was pretty fun.* (YP:CF/I)

At City Farm in particular, it could be seen that the educators actively employed the young people in situations, particularly in public facing roles, which challenged the perceptions that others may have held about them:

> *Yeah, they'll help the kids who come here as part of their curriculum from primary school and help them catch creatures and tell them what they are and stuff so, yeah…they are so polite and helpful, they're just brilliant with little kids. I'm talking about all of them, these are kids that we have been told have hit teachers and stuff. The primary school teachers go "you know, these kids are just great" and then we tell them what they were like at school and they can't believe it.* (Ed: CF/I)

5.4.1 ii Involvement in decision making/choices

Whilst there appeared to be a broad range of activities and learning experiences available within the field of alternative learning provision, within each individual setting the elements of choice available to the disengaged young person were frequently quite narrow since they were limited to what each setting could offer or what was available locally within the travel radius of the school on roll. There was evidence again here that the young people were not always involved in deciding what they could do. One young person, for example, at 16 years old was in an alternative education provider that specialised in art and music, but had not been involved in identifying the best setting for him and was unclear why this particular setting had been chosen for him:

> *I was just told I was coming here, don't know why. I do art or music every day because the teacher put me on it – what do I want to do that for? I'm not wanting to be no artist or summat. I just feel like they just do it to get you out of the way. (*YP: AW/PRA)

The extent to which young people were involved in their choice of alternative education setting was negligible. Only two out of the young people interviewed felt that they were attending their respective education setting due to requesting that particular curriculum area as their area of interest. Other young people felt that:

> *We just get put here, we don't get no say in any of it.* (YP: AW/I)

Only three of the young people spoken to identified that they had had any input into the choice of alternative learning provision that they attended.

> *Everyone goes on about it as if it's us deciding not to go to school no more. It's more like the school decides it doesn't want us so it kicks us out to places like these. Then we get treated by everyone like we don't wanna go to school no more.* (YP: AW/PRA)

The majority of the young people spoken to in the course of the study said that they were happy to be where they were and preferred it to school regardless of whether they had chosen to be there or not. In general, very few of them had been involved in the meetings in which their education had been discussed and most of the young people said that they felt they were told where they were going to go rather than being asked if they wanted to go there:

> *Without talking to me or anything, they just put me straight into like behaviour unit or something and then I kicked off big time and they put me here and they're lucky I don't kick off here too coz I never chose to come here.* (YP: AW/I)

In terms of the involvement of the young people in decision making or their ability to make choices in regards to their education, this varied according to the setting attended. Skate Park, for example, presented a structured timetable from which there was no deviation. When asked where the justification for this timetable had come from, one of the educators at this setting stated:

> *It's just what the school want, if we don't have this then the schools won't send their kids here, it's as simple as that. We only get on the APR*[6] *if we do what the schools want.* (Ed: SP1/I)

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[6] 'APR' the Approved Providers Register. The title of this register differs across different Local Authorities but in general denotes a register which includes all of the alternative education provision which has been approved by the local authority. Schools are advised to only use providers which appear on the register.

5.4.2 Young People’s Construction of their identity as learners

This section outlines some of the areas which contributed to the young person’s perception of themselves as learners.

5.4.2 i Feeling (dis)connected

In general, with the exception of some of the young people at Skate Park, most of the young people participating in the study showed despite attending the alternative education setting, they still felt disconnected from education in general. *“I’m just glad to be out of it all to be honest.”* (YP: SP1/Obs). The young people at Artworks and City Farm, both of which placed less onus on the achievement of accredited qualifications than Skate Park, felt particularly that they were *“not doing education anymore.”* (YP: CF/PRA)

Thirteen of the young people, had attended more than one mainstream school and some had attended more than four. There were many different reasons why the young people had moved or left schools. In at least eleven of the cases, the young people were moved due to being excluded for persistent disruptive behaviour. However, this was not the case for all the young people interviewed. One young person said it was because his mother kept on moving to get away from his father, and others talked about frequent family moves due to debt or trouble with neighbours or moves from one foster carer to another. A consistent feature was that the young people felt that their transitory lifestyles, which also involved moving schools a lot, contributed to their inability to engage fully with learning, and with a school that they felt they would not be attending for long.

> *I just never really settled down anywhere you know. It's like everyone already has their friends and stuff and so they don't want to know me.* (YP: AW/I)

> *I was always just going through a hard time in my life. I was moving a lot. I was…it was just a kind of quite emotional stage for me at that point. I wasn't doing what I needed to do erm, to do well. I, at that moment, I didn't care about what I just said to people, I didn't care about erm, doing well in life. All I cared about was moving and technically I just cared about stuff like that. Like, I mean, inside I cared about that and stuff but I didn't really think about learning and stuff.* (YP: CF/I)

In general, even though they often felt let down and misunderstood by the teachers in particular within the school, the young people seemed reluctant to give up the security provided by being part of a school, even if they did not attend it. Amongst almost all of the participants across all of the settings, they identified themselves as being students of the particular mainstream school which they had become disengaged from, rather than with the alternative learning provision they now attended.

One way in which this was illustrated was where at each of the settings, the young people were not required to wear uniform, however, at Artworks, several of the young people continued to wear the uniform of the school of which they no longer attended but who had referred them to the setting. This was not a requirement of the setting but was a choice that had been made by the young people themselves. When questioned about why they chose to continue to wear their uniform, it seemed clear that the uniform symbolised a continued link with the school and reinforced the hope that they could return there in the future.

> *It's still my school. I'm still a student of that coz here I still have to wear my old uniform and then if I moved on I'd have to wear their uniform so I'm still a student of there.* (YP: AW/PRA)

One young person seemed to feel that the uniform represented some of the structure and regulation of her old school that was no longer present in the setting she now attended.

> *I just like being told what to wear really. It's like here, I can wear what I want and don't have to wear the uniform if I don't like it. But, I just like it, like a black coat like and then black shoes and black socks and like the normal school uniform that I'm wearing now, what I'm wearing now yeah, well everyone wears these at school. It just feels smart and like you are getting up and getting dressed to come to school.* (YP: AW/PRA)

Apart from the safety that the wearing of a uniform seemed to provide, this young person seemed to find her uniform protective in that she didn't have to think about what she was wearing and feel pressured into wearing clothes and most importantly to her, avoided the pressure she felt to wear make-up like the other girls at the setting.

> *Res: So, why do you prefer to wear your uniform when you don't need to?*

> *YP: To be honest yeah, like here you have to get told to wear summat like and if you don't want to wear it like so I just like to wear this because then I know where I am. And I can't wear make-up with my uniform and all the girls here wear the make-up and all that, I like it that you can't wear make-up and anything with your uniform.* (YP: A/I)

This particular young person was a lot younger (Year 7) than the other young people attending the setting, a factor which may have increased her feeling of disconnection with the setting and subsequent wish to maintain connections with the school.

For some young people however, attendance at the alternative education setting began to contribute to a feeling of communality, this sense of belonging was apparent amongst some of the young people in all three of the settings. Despite being disengaged from the mainstream school population, these young people felt no longer alone, there were others, having had similar experiences which resulted in a feeling that they understood each other.

> *A lot of people find me annoying actually. Erm, except for my mates and everyone here coz they're used to me we all do the same thing that's why we're mates coz we're all in the same thing.* (YP: CF/I)

So, whilst a connection with one another was in many cases maintained, a factor which appeared to differ significantly across the settings was the feeling of connection that they had with the setting. With City Farm in particular, the young people felt *"it's like we're part of something here, like – all in this together."* (YP:

CF/PRA). At Artworks, another young person demonstrated the feeling of shared experience in the following conversation:

> *YP: No, no one really says anything to me coz the people that I see here have all partially been through the same thing, in some kind of way.*
>
> *Res: So do you think you understand each other here because you've all been through similar experiences?*
>
> *YP: Yeah definitely, we all know what it's been like at school and how we've been treated*
>
> *Res: Do you think it's a good idea then to have people who've found school difficult all to be coming to one place like this?*
>
> *YP: Yeah, definitely.*
>
> *Res: Why is that?*
>
> *YP: Cos, we all understand each other and there isn't as big classes so it's easier to like calm down and stuff. Teachers aren't all judging us and waiting for us to kick off all the time.* (YP: AW/I)

However, at Skate Park, a number of the young people were keen to express that they felt no affiliation either to each other *"They're fucking idiots here, I shouldn't be here with this lot."* (YP: SP1/I) or to the setting "*As soon as I'm 16 I'm gone from here, I'm getting out of this shithole and going to college."* (YP: SP1/I)

At City Farm, one of the young people felt that although enjoying his time there on the whole, he was not working towards the study of the subject that he was really interested in for his future career.

> *Engineering was my favourite at school but I couldn't stand the teacher – I got into, like a fight but not bad or anything, just like a bad argument with him and was chucked out of his lessons – but I still want to do the subject, but they don't do it here and I'm not allowed back in school now so I'm just waiting to go to college.* (YP: CF/I)

5.4.2 ii: Maintaining a Positive Personal Identity

It seemed that on the whole, despite becoming disengaged from mainstream school, the majority of the young people felt that this was *"just a blip"* (YP: SP1/PRA) and that they would "*get back on track"* (YP: CF/I) as soon as they could. For most, this would not be whilst at the alternative education setting but would be rather *"as soon as I get to 16, I'm out of here."* (YP: SP1/PRA).

One young person felt that he had *"fucked up school"* (YP: AW/I) and expressed that he was really annoyed with both himself for his behaviour and his teachers for not trying to understand why he was behaving that way "*it's like they never been young and that, my girlfriend was playing me and I was just mad"* (YP: AW/I). He felt frustrated because he was doing well at school *"I was in all the top sets for maths and that"* and that the setting he was now in did not have the capability to support him to work towards his GCSEs *"they don't do no proper exams here man – it's all just shit that I don't need"*. (YP: AW/I) However, despite the potential to view his educational prospects negatively, he maintained that upon being able to leave the alternative education setting at the end of Year 11, he would then be able to "*start again from where I was…I know what I need to do now"* (YP: AW/I). This confidence in his ability to achieve academically in the subject he was interested in pursuing had not seemingly been affected by his experience of disengagement from mainstream education.

Another young person talked about how he was going to *"get my head down when I'm 16 and get all my exams that I've missed" (YP:* AW/I). He felt that the experiences he had been through in becoming excluded from school for persistent disruptive behaviour had resulted in *"one real positive and that's how resilient I've been through the years, that I have bounced back no matter what"* (YP:CF/I) but he acknowledged also that there had been negatives in the way that he could be perceived by future employers:

> *They could be like, well he's been through quite a few schools what if he's not a nice person, what if he's bad? I don't want to come across like that because I'm not. I am quite…when I'm here if someone tells me to do something I do it straight away, I listen. I am good at taking orders. From people that treat me with respect and are older than me though. If someone was younger than me I'm not listening, not at all.* (YP: CF/I)

A feeling that the most negative aspect of being disengaged from mainstream school was that they had "*wasted so much time"* (YP: SP1/Obs) was mentioned on several occasions:

> *I just feel like I could have been doing something so much better. I spent 10 years in school and got nothing, then I came here and got nothing. I'm leaving in about 6 weeks and I can't even do my GCSEs. Now I've got to go to college and do it all again.* (YP: AW/I)

Although the above statement depicts a sense of despair at time wasted, it also suggests that the young person still maintains a positive identity as a learner as he does not question his ability to either get onto an education programme at college or to then succeed in it.

5.5 RQ3: How are different initiatives and methods used to re-integrate young people who have become disengaged back into learning?

How are different initiatives and methods used to re-integrate young people who have become disengaged back into learning?

- **Teachers and Teaching**
- **Relationships and Belonging**
- **Curriculum**
- **Class size**
- **Freedom**
- **Approaches to Behaviour**
- **Therapy Informed Practice**
  - Growth Mindset
  - Re-invention
- **Creative Pedagogies**
  - *Music/Arts*
  - *Skate Park Activities(Skateboarding, scootering, climbing)*
  - *Environmental/Nature-based*

Upon observing the ways in which the different settings visited engaged young people in learning, it became apparent that a variety of different pedagogies were being employed across the settings. It is within this section that some of these pedagogical approaches are explored in terms of their usefulness and appropriateness in re-integrating young people who have become disengaged from education back into learning.

Artworks used arts and music as a core element of their activity, City Farm landscape management, nature and environmental education as its base, and Skate Park, being based in a large skate park facility, purported to use skateboarding, scootering and climbing as activities through which to engage the young people it worked with.

Whilst these activities were an important way to actively engage young people in learning through using non-formal routes, it was often the relationships with the educators which proved invaluable in building secure foundations with these young people, upon which the seeds of curiosity and learning could begin to take root.

This section outlines some of these ways in which the settings visited are working to provide environments with which these young people are engaging and discusses some of the concepts and practices at work within each to reintegrate the young people back into education.

5.5.1 Teachers and teaching

> *Everybody learns in different ways don't they, and one of the things we try and do is teach in a different way* (Ed: CF/I)

The relationship with teachers in the mainstream school was the most commonly cited contributory factor for their previous disengagement from school amongst the young people participating in the study. Often, a negative relationship with one teacher could result in a disproportionate impact upon the young persons attendance at school in that they described avoiding school on those days that they were due to meet that teacher, subsequently missing the other lessons on that day as well.

Conversely, the relationship with the teachers or educators in the alternative education setting was the most commonly cited contributory factor to the positive engagement of the young people in that setting. *"If it wasn't for X, there's no way I'd still be coming here. He used to ring me in the morning to see where I was if I didn't turn up."* (YP: CF/I)

As all of the young people participating in the research were in some form of alternative educational setting, they were able to contrast the teaching/learning they were currently experiencing with that of their previous mainstream schooling experience. They appreciated the individual attention they received from the educators *"she knows what winds me up and just calms me down somehow."* (YP: AW/I) and *"they're not like teachers here, they're more like friends"* (YP: AW/I). This individual attention also impacted on their lives outside the setting: *"He knows all about my dad and that – we talked about it a lot when it was all kicking off."* (YP: AW/I). The attitudinal qualities of the educators were also seen as being conducive to maintaining a calm atmosphere which promoted learning:

> *The school provision was so boring, the teachers were shit, we didn't do anything, but the guys here are the best because they don't shout or do boring stuff. I learned much better that way.* (YP: AW/PRA)

Young people described how important having a positive relationship with one of the educators was to them and for some, this was a new experience for them. When asked for an example of a positive experience of learning in the alternative education setting, for example, one young person at Artworks remembered when one of the educators had told them they were intelligent "*No teachers before had ever said anything like that"* YP: AW/PRA) and others described how they would adapt their behaviour to please, a teacher/educator that they liked.

> *If I like the teacher they will know coz I'll be good and won't give them no shit (*YP: AW/PRA)

The characteristics of good educators and other key adults, as identified by the young people, were kindness, reliability and consistency. One young person, for example, said they had an excellent social worker who calls on him and '*drags me out of bed to do things'* (YP: CF/I). He felt that his attendance at the alternative education provision had improved and that he ensured that he put as much effort as possible into activities at the setting because he wanted to please the social worker.

> *I promised him that I'd sort it all out here and not mess up. He checks up on me while I'm here, you'll see him today probably coz he just turns up when he's doing work and stuff near here and just likes to keep an eye on me.*
> (YP: CF/I)

In one of the settings, a member of staff who was a qualified teacher felt that to reveal this to the young people he worked with would potentially alienate him from them, instead he chose not to reveal this information:

> *I mean, the kids don't know I'm a teacher because I'm in such a different disguise I suppose, but I am, I'm a trained and qualified teacher which really helps because I know why I'm doing what I'm doing but nobody else needs to know that!* (Ed: CF/I)

In discussing the background of the educators in the settings visited and how they got to be working in this environment, several of the educators spoken to had a background in youth work. Artworks and City Farm actively recruited youth workers for the role of education workers within their projects. A manager at one of the settings described why:

> *Yeah we always look for youth workers, we even ask for a youth work qualification coz then we know they really understand the youth work values*[7]*. Youth workers work in a way that is not like any other. You can tell a proper youth worker a mile off coz they are on the kids level, they really listen to them you know.* (Ed: AW/I)

At Skate Park, the project manager stressed the importance of the educators' ability to develop positive relationships with the young people. He stated that a desirable criteria for new staff was that they had experience and preferably a qualification in youth work although this was in part due to the difference in wages that a Youth Worker and a qualified teacher would demand:

> *They* [Youth Workers] *are more likely to have had experience of working with challenging young people in a positive way and usually have less of a school vibe about them. They know how to talk to young people. We find that people with an academic* [teaching] *background use language that young people can't understand. Also, we can't afford to pay the wages that people with a PGCE would demand and we can't afford to put people through the PGCE.* (Ed: SP2/I)

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[7] The Youth Work Values as depicted by the National Occupational Standards for Youth Work developed in conjunction with the National Youth Agency are underpinned by the guiding principles of Participation and Active Involvement; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion; Partnership with Young People and Others; Personal, Political and Social Development. Source: http://www.nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/National-Occupation-Standards-for-Youth-Work.pdf

5.5.2 Relationships and belonging

In identifying what factors they particularly liked about the setting they attended, nearly all the young people focused on relationships both with staff and with their peers as being both the primary factor in enjoying their experience.

> *Coz I never really got along with most of the people at my school coz like they just think I'm a bitch and that lot yeah. They just go round chatting shit about me really like, but then here, there's some people that I can just sit down with like if I need, like if I've got any problems or anything.*(YP: AW/PRA)

> *The people at school are just boring like they don't you know, they're just there to tell you something and that's it. They don't care to like talk to you or anything like that. But here like, they get to know you and stuff.*(YP: CF/I)

As discussed previously in the responses to research question 2, relationships with peers were identified as being stronger in the alternative education setting than they had been at school.

> *The other kids at school. when I was at school, they just mess around with me like. Like we didn't think anything of each other (laughs) we just mess and mess around and then, compared to here, we like, I don't know – understand each other or something. Like we know what it's been like. (*YP: CF/I)

This shared experience of becoming disengaged from school was common across all of the settings and created an inclusive atmosphere of feeling that they belonged somewhere, that some of the young people had not experienced before:

> *It's like I'm actually normal here coz everyone's the same. I know we're all different and that but I mean, we all feel the same inside somehow.* (YP: CF/I)

The relationships with the staff at the settings seemed particularly important in the way they:

> *…actually like listen to you and they actually, you know, like help you out when something's wrong but like in schools they like, they just write something down, they just sit on the chair and they do whatever they need to do on their laptop and they just kind of ignore what you say so you stop saying it. (YP: CF/I)*

> *…actually care here, like at school, it's the teachers what, even if you haven't done anything wrong they just, they don't really care. They just want you to learn coz it's a job for them isn't it? It's not like, they don't take it to heart or anything. But here, they care, they actually care. They remember stuff too, like when my Nanna was in hospital, X took me to pick some fruit off the allotments for her.*(YP:CF/I)

At City Farm, a member of staff described how they worked hard to make sure that the young people felt:

> *….like they are part of a community in which people can be safe and whole and home and involved and in which they belong as they are, not as someone else wants them to be. And in which they can grow, and I think that you don't find that in schools. I think that we open our arms very wide you know, to people who society thinks are not real people, you know, people with learning disabilities or people with mental health issues or people who don't succeed at school or people who are unemployed.* (Ed: CF/I)

Common to all settings was the importance of relationships and belonging in engaging the young people back into learning. These factors were not dependent on the size of the setting, or the resources, these were secondary to the importance of time spent with the young people by experienced staff to develop the environment in which security and trust were key. As an educator at one of the settings summarised:

> *You can do this model anywhere you know. You don't need lots of money or lots of equipment or, you know, anything like that, you could do this in any landscape. Yeah, this is all transferable, it's just having, you know people like me and S or yourself. You've got to have the right people to you know, relate to young people. You can't drop anyone in to do that you know, or else you'd get real problems coz we've had it before. People trying to push their own agendas – it's got to be real. People have just got to be genuine. (*Ed: CF/I)

These qualities of being genuine, working from the needs of the young people and the ability to develop and maintain positive relationships with young people were precisely those outlined in the previous section as being linked to the values of Youth

Work. The above quote also intimates that the role of the researcher had become somewhat blurred as the educator intimated that they saw the researcher as one of them and not as an outsider. This interview did take place at the end of the researcher’s tenure at the setting and as such, this ambiguity between insider/outsider status had not become apparent until this, the latter stage of the research phase.

5.5.3 Curriculum

There were several examples of young people at both Artworks and City Farm who had to ask staff what subjects they were studying and who did not know that they were working towards accredited qualifications. The relevance of the curriculum for them was minimal and they had not previously questioned whether or not the activities they were taking part in were linked to certificated outcomes

> *I’ve never really thought about it, I’m just here so I don’t have to go to back to school.* (YP: CF/I).

Skate Park on the other hand was very much geared towards the delivery of GCSEs in maths, English and science with complementary subjects available such as Citizenship and Healthy Lifestyles (both also accredited). The pressure that both the educators and the young people were under to fit all of the curriculum areas into each day was intense. *“it’s just bang, bang, bang, bang all day. We’ve just got so much to get through in each session.”* (Ed: SP1/I). Another of the educators at this setting felt that they had moved away from spending time developing relationships with the young people and on developing their *‘soft skills’.*

> *We used to do this, we had so much more time but now we have to deliver GCSEs because this is what the schools want, if we don't give them what they want they just won't use us, it's as simple as that.* (Ed: SP1/I).

The pressure to be responsive to the requests of the mainstream schools (who provided significant funding for the young people's places at the alternative education setting) was approached differently by each setting. City Farm for instance, was adamant that the schools accept them for *"what we are and what we CAN do"* (Ed: CF/I) and that they were not equipped to deliver GCSEs or a wide range of vocational qualifications. *"This is us, this is what we do and we do it well, if they want maths and English then they can send a teacher down here to teach it because we're not doing it, we're too busy doing other things!"* (Ed: CF/I). This approach, out of all of the other settings, seemed to work best in engaging young people for whom the qualification driven approach of mainstream school had been the main aspect that had led to their disengagement

> *This is the only place I've ever stayed at coz they don't push maths and English and stuff at you all the time. Don't they know that some people just actually aren't interested in that stuff? (*YP: CF/I)

There were significant variations in the curriculum that young people were following across the different alternative education settings, so that a young person in one setting was accessing a vocational curriculum whilst another with a similar background and interests at a different setting was accessing a personal development curriculum only. There also appeared to be variations in the access to and level of numeracy and literacy support young people were receiving, from some who were getting one to one support with maths and English (albeit at a low level), to others who had very low literacy and numeracy levels but for whom these areas were not provided by the setting. One young person spoken to, for example, at the age of sixteen could not read and received very little support in this area, whilst in another setting, another young person has good literacy levels but was now doing basic Functional Skills[8] maths and English when she said she had been in higher grade GCSE classes when at school.

> *I've always been really good at maths and was down for a higher level GCSE at school The teachers here don't know maths though, I know more than them [laughs]* (YP:AW/PRA)

As the majority of the young people participating in the study were coming towards the end of their life at school, most had thought about what they wished to do next. In some cases this had given added relevance to the curriculum. One young person, for example, said that his attendance had improved since he started his GCSEs at Skate Park and that he has become more sensible, largely due, he thinks, to the shock of being removed from his previous mainstream school. Another young person kept saying he was '*on the right road now'* (YP: CF/I) after years of poor attendance and that he knew where he was going:

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[8] 'Functional Skills' are qualifications in English, mathematics and ICT that equip learners with the practical or 'functional' skills needed to live, learn and work successfully. They are generally worked towards by young people and adults for whom achievement at GCSE A-C level is not yet viable.

> *The school was no help, I couldn't get on there, but I know I need GCSEs to get onto the mechanics apprenticeship and they don't do them here so I'll have to do them at college or something after here instead.* (YP: CF/I)

At Artworks, for some of the young people in year 11, the realisation of the relevance of achieving GCSEs had, they felt, come too late. One young person described how she had wanted to be a lawyer when at school but because Artworks didn't offer GCSEs, she felt that working towards Functional Skills qualifications now was useless and that she had resigned herself to start again in college the year after.

> *There's no point in doing these things* [Functional Skills qualifications] *it's GCSEs I need but I just have to wait until next year. I don't know why I can't just go back to school and do them. (Y*P: AW/I)

The publicity material and website information for the alternative education settings often emphasised the curriculum was individualised to meet the needs of each young person and the variety of different activities available would suggest a flexibility to respond to young people's needs.

In fact the only time young people described being involved in choosing what learning they were involved in was only evident at Skate Park which offered a choice of GCSE options. The accounts of young people suggested that the availability of places at alternative education settings had a greater impact in shaping the curriculum available to them than the settings being chosen in response to their individual needs.

> *I wanted to go to XXXX to do mechanics but they didn't have no places so I come here instead – it's ok, the teachers and stuff, but the stuff they do is not really what I'm into.* (YP: CF/I)

Some young people embraced the opportunity to be following a curriculum which did not include GCSEs as its goal. When asked whether, if they had the choice, they would take GCSEs whilst at City Farm, one young person responded:

> *Yeah I'd do them here. But erm there'd be no point in doing them here coz there'd be no point in coming here if I'm just gonna be doing my GCSEs. That's the whole point of me being here, to not do GCSEs and learn other stuff.* (YP: CF/I)

5.5.4 Class Size

Class size emerged as an issue that had caused a problem for the young people whilst at mainstream school amongst almost all of the participants. These young people, in particular, those who had identified as having ADHD and/or autism, described finding large classes difficult as they felt they had needed one to one support. Three of the young people said that they had always struggled with large class sizes, mostly due to the noise levels which made it difficult to concentrate. Two young people said that they never felt safe in school because of what they perceived as the lack of discipline and the feeling that "*something could kick off any minute."* (YP: AW/I). Interestingly, both of these young people admitted that they had each been instigators of bullying and/ or had attacked others at school, they had felt pressured to behave this way to survive in what they saw as a dangerous environment. Even where young people did not describe directly involved in bullying or violence, they saw a lack of control in the classroom as a negative experience.

> *The teachers at my school, they would just lose it big time man. They'd be like screaming man. One teacher she threw a board cleaner at my mate and bust his lip. Ha ha she was out of control man.* (YP: AW/I)

The reason for the classroom environment being so difficult was almost invariably due to the larger class sizes at school. This was a factor that nearly all of the young people participating in the study, across all settings, identified as a positive aspect of the alternative education setting that they were now attending.

> *Here, there's like 4, 5 or 6 people in the class. At school there'd be more like 30. It's good coz you can just like concentrate. In here there'll be 3 in my class, then like 5 in another, then 4 in another and another 2 downstairs and we all know each other and there's no like stuff at break times and at lunch we all just kind of go to the shop.* (YP: CF/I)

5.5.5 Freedom

The concept of freedom was mentioned several times when discussing with young people what it was about the setting which they particularly valued in their setting. This was especially apparent at City Farm where virtually all of the activities took place outside, in all seasons and weather.

> *The difference is that you're free here. Doesn't feel like a prison. Coz I could walk out the door right now and go home if I wanted coz there's nothing holding me back. In a school if you're stressed out there's nowhere to go. All you can do is walk around the corridors at the most. Here, you can go all the way down to the meadow and just walk around or just sit here and think about everything. There's always somewhere to get away to no matter where like if everyone's over there, you can come over here and to the allotments. If everyone's down there, you can come back up here into the meadow. There's always somewhere to go*. (YP: CF/I)

This illustrated that the feeling of freedom which was inherent for the young people at City Farm was a factor which actually promoted their establishment of self-circumscribed limits:

> *YP: I used to run from school all the time but I'd never run from here, I'd come straight back coz I'd never run even if I had the worst day ever I'd still stay.*
>
> *Res: And why is that? What stops you from running?*
>
> *YP: Well, there's no point in running here, you'd just be running forever coz there's no walls.* (YP: CF/I)

This feeling of freedom was quite different to what most of the young people had experienced before. Schools in general are protected by security screens and devices to restrict entry and exit to staff, visitors and pupils, often, the in-school exclusion units are often even more secure in terms of containing the young people for whom they cater.

Here, a young person talks about his experience in an ‘exclusion unit’ which was based on the grounds of the school he previously attended and was where young people who were particularly disruptive in school were sent:

> *Res: What about the teachers from the school before came here, how did they see you?*
>
> *YP: I kind of had a reputation for being bad so I wasn’t allowed in school, I was always in the unit. If I was on my own with a teacher they’d have the radio always in their hand coz they’d know I was going to do something stupid. They were like scared of me [laughs] Here, I’ve never done ‘owt like that though.*
>
> *Res: What do you mean by ‘something stupid’?*
>
> *YP: Mess about, run off.*
>
> *Res: And what would the teachers do?*
>
> *YP: Sometimes try to stop me but mostly they just leave me. Which is a good thing, coz I can’t really run out of the unit anyway and if they follow me it just makes me madder.*
>
> *Res: Why can’t you run out?*
>
> *YP: Because the gates are locked but well they’re not locked, it’s not like someone goes round and locks them with a key, it’s like they have a lock down. There’s a magnet on every door and window, and you have to have the fob to get through. But here, I can just walk straight out the door if I want.*
>
> *Interviewer: And do you ever want to?*
>
> *YP: Why would I? There’s nothing to run from.* (YP: CF/I)

One of the educators based at City Farm in which the conversations above took place explained how freedom was important to both the educators and the young people there and was keen to point out that although the young people had a lot of freedom, this was not without responsibility:

> *Yes, I do think that they have a lot of freedom here, that doesn't mean that there are no rules here you know, there are lots of rules, it's just that they don't notice them because they are rules that they want to have in place too. The rules make them safe, literally, they are all mostly to do with health and safety, like wearing gloves when sawing.* (Ed: CF/I)

The feeling of freedom was certainly linked to the amount of space available to the young people. In the outdoor, urban-farm setting staff observed that:

> *The physical space really helps…they can really explore and feel the feeling of being free. Most of them have never felt it before. They don't even have a perception of freedom like somehow they don't realise, maybe they feel it's freer here because they don't run up against borders and barriers all the time. Maybe they just want to run around, then let them run if they want. All these things, they are not allowed at school. He wants to look out the window – not allowed. He wants to just have a bit of fun, to be silly for a while – not allowed.* (Ed: CF/I)

One idea put forward as to why the young people benefitted from having freedom is that with a removal of things that the young people are not allowed to do, this negates the need to rebel, to disrupt and to challenge those boundaries which, in the eyes of the young people are often unfounded.

> *Maybe at school he has to sit down all day, maybe he always wants to do the things he isn't allowed to do, chat to his neighbour, just have a break from something he is doing, go get a drink or just go and sit on his own. Maybe here, he doesn't even realise the rules because they are all meaningful and not just about control.* (Ed: CF/I)

This notion that freedom was important, but that freedom did not exist without rules was described by one member of staff as:

> *Maybe he wants to use his dangerous tools, like his knives, and hammers and saws, so he is like happy to do it safely because he also does not want to get hurt, and he actually doesn't want anyone else to get hurt. So he doesn't realise that he is keeping all these rules because he wants to use it, so he feels like he's doing what he wants and doesn't realise that actually I have to do this and I have to use this tool in this safe way, I have to put on my gloves and I have to put this away and screw this back up.* (Ed: CF/I)

It was acknowledged at City Farm that whilst there were rules in place which were overt and all of the young people were made aware of these during their induction period. There were also unwritten rules, rules that the young people were expected to learn by default and were based around mutual respect:

> *I think that these rules that we say all the time like put on your boots, put on your gloves, are not really the rules that matter. The ones that really matter are like learning how do we live together, how do we treat each other, how do we work in this place. Like, that's the really important thing and that we don't say, I think we just live it.* (Ed: CF/I)

The key factor, in City Farm particularly, was that the young people were taking responsibility for their own learning:

> *It's interesting because here, they all perceive themselves as being free, but I don't think this is just the physical space. They want to use the tools and they are happy to do it safely because they don't want to get hurt. They always feel like they are doing what they want and they aren't seeing the rules as "I have to do this" or "I have to take my gloves off and put them back on again" These are not seen as rules or as infringing their freedom because they are choosing to do them. That's the difference here.* (Ed: CF/I)

An abundance of space was not always a pre-requisite for creating a sense of freedom. Artworks was positioned close to a busy main road and had a policy of young people not leaving the building through the front door until they were due to leave at 3pm. They were permitted to smoke in a gated yard at the back of the building, but this was also used as a car park by other residents of the building so could not be used for any activities. The space occupied by the young people inside the building was fairly small – approximately 1000m^2 and split into three main activity areas. Three activities would be running throughout the day and, despite a cohort of young people being allocated to each for a specified session time, the young people would move between the areas with little remonstration from staff. As long as they were not disrupting the session they were moving into and were participating to some extent in the activities available, then it was seen as acceptable for them to follow this fluid learning pattern.

A staff member described the way that the young people could come in and out of her sessions as:

> *I don't mind too much you know, as long as they are respecting this space then that is all. They all know what they need to be doing and so they can just get on with it. Sometimes they get bored doing just one thing or sometimes they just need to walk.* (Ed: AW/I)

This acceptance, that the young people do sometimes feel bored with focusing on one activity and to take some time to move onto something else or to walk around for a while indicates not only that the staff in this setting, know what is needed to engage these young people positively in learning, but also the need to respect the way in which individual young people learn best.

Skate Park however, offered very little scope for the young people (or educators) to develop a sense of freedom within either it's physical parameters or the space accorded to the young people to explore their learning through experimentation. The opportunity for opting in/out of learning experiences as provided by both Artworks and City Farm was also non-existent. When the young people wanted to leave a session, they generally did so by displaying disruptive behaviour which would result in them being asked to leave the session. This could explain why the behaviour of the young people at Skate Park 1 was more challenging and disruptive than at the other settings. No evidence was found to show that individual freedom was encouraged at all in this setting, attempts were indeed observed to restrict the freedom of the young people through accompanying them outside the building at break times and lunchtimes to smoke and also through the use of a hand-held metal detector to fully scan each young person before entering the building each morning.

5.5.6 Approaches to behaviour

The young people who attended each of the settings had often become disengaged from their mainstream school due to the disruptive behaviour that they presented there. Some of the reasons for this behaviour have been discussed already in this chapter but what is of further interest are the different approaches to working with these young people utilised in each of the settings. One of the strategies employed by Skate Park in particular was to administer sanction and reward systems such as the use of a reward pyramid (Fig.7) and recognition board (Fig. 8). These were methods which are often used in mainstream school, particularly primary school environments and entail any positive behaviours being recorded throughout the session and these being rewarded either at the end of the session with a chocolate bar for example. Rewards may also be collated throughout the week, or the term and be rewarded with something more substantial such as an activity chosen by the group or class. The approach to managing behaviour at Skate Park, was influenced strongly by a text published by a former teacher, Paul Dix (2017), which three of the educators within the setting cited as their *“bible”.* This text presents a variety of techniques for transforming the culture within an education establishment from one which offers punishment for negative behaviour, to one which celebrates and promotes positive behaviour. The book takes its view of positive reinforcement from a teacher-centric viewpoint and adopts the view that it is the approach towards the behaviour of some of the young people within the setting which needs to change rather than the systems and processes which may be influencing or facilitating this behaviour.

Figure 7: Example of Reward Pyramid as used at Skate Park

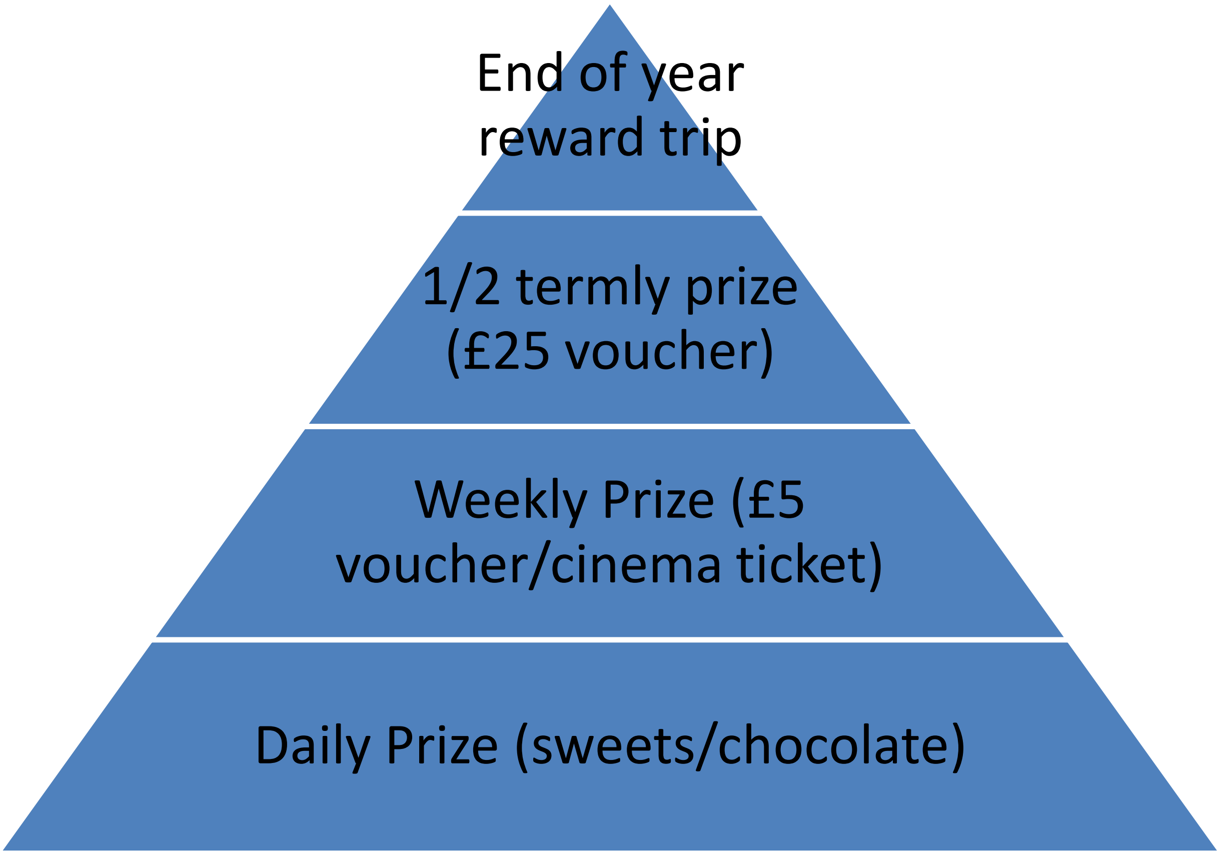
End of year reward trip
1/2 termly prize (£25 voucher)
Weekly Prize (£5 voucher/cinema ticket)
Daily Prize (sweets/chocolate)

Figure 8: Example of a Recognition Board as used at Skate Park

Name	😬	😫	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Total
Jack		**III**	**-3**					
Poppy	**IIII**		**+4**					
Lola	**II**	**II**	**0**					
Daisy	**I**	**III**	**-2**					
Ruby	**IIIII I**		**6**					
Charlie			**0**					

These sections wipe clean at the end of each day and scores recorded in columns to the right.

This approach was utilised by all of the educators in the setting with varying levels of enthusiasm. One described the recognition board as:

> *a really useful and immediate way to positively engage them in the lesson, especially if I give sweets out as we go along to everybody who gets a positive point.*(Ed: SP1/I)

One saw the use of the board as *“childish and patronising”* (Ed: SP1/I). A response from one of the young people in regards to the use of the recognition list was to say “I *aren’t even bothered if I’m on it or not, it’s like being back at primary!”* (YP: SP1/I) whereas another said *“It just makes you look a dick in front of the rest of them when they pick you out, it’s like they’re treating you like a kid”* (YP: SP1/I).

Young people at Skate Park demonstrated vehemently through their actions that they were not happy with the tightly structured ‘lessons’ that they were required to attend. A section from the observational field notes completed during one of these ‘lessons’ describes the experience as:

> *I’m in a small room, six young people, tutor, support worker and me…feels very crowded, no windows, no heating, it’s very cold – everyone has their coats/hats on. Only two young people are sitting on chairs, others on window ledge and tables, one has climbed on top of high metal cabinet and is rocking it back and forth. I’m feeling nervous that it is going to tip over and fall on somebody. One young person is calling out constantly, really loudly in a monotone voice, sounds almost animal-like... a high pitched howl.* (Res: SP1/FN)

The young person who was howling was asked to leave and go to the reflection room. She left the lesson immediately on her own and walked straight into another classroom on the other side of the hall. The educator said at the end of the session:

> *Oh that’s just xxxx, she does that to get attention, we just ignore it most of the time or send her to the reflection room.* (Ed: SP1/Obs)

This scene illustrated one of many incidents whereby the young people were using negative behaviour in order to remove themselves from a situation in which they did not wish to engage in. This approach has been mentioned previously as one by which the young people had used in mainstream school.

5.5.7 Therapy Informed Practice

At each of the settings, the educators talked at various times about how their approach to working with young people was informed by their knowledge and experience of therapeutic interventions *"I'm always aware that any display of negative behaviour is a demand for us to offer our attention to the source of discord."* (Ed: SP2/I).

Figure 9 below depicts the variety and incidence of therapy informed phraseology and terminology that was identified through analysis of interviews and observations of practice with educators across all three settings.

Phrase/Terminology Identified (Setting where phrase identified in brackets)	
Therapeutic intervention **(AW; CF; SP1/2)**	*Growth mindset* **(AW; CF; SP1/2)**
Attachment theory/Attachment disorder **(AW; CF; SP1/2)**	*Self-care techniques* **(SP1/2)**
Young people's neurological development **(Aw; CF)**	*Self-awareness* **(AW; CF; SP1/2)**
(Value of) therapeutic communication skills **(CF/SP1/2)**	*Accelerated learning techniques***(CF)**
Emotional literacy **(AW; SP1/2)**	*Reflective practice* **(AW; SP1/2))**
Role modelling **(AW; CF; SP1/2)**	*Neuro-linguisticprogramming* **(AW; SP1/2)**
Reinvention **(AW; CF; SP1/2)**	*Person-centred approach* **(AW; SP1/2)**
*Professional/therapeutic supervision***(AW)**	*Being genuine/genuineness* **(AW; SP1/2)**
(profiling from/ identification of) multiple intelligences **(SP1/2)**	*Art therapy/psychotherapy* **(AW; CF)**
Resilience **(AW; CF; SP1/2)**	*Trauma-informed practice* **(AW; CF; SP1/2)**

Figure 9: Incidence of therapy informed terminology being identified at each setting.

The prevalence of these references to such methods and approaches was indicative that many of the educators were familiar with therapy informed approaches and were aware of how such practices could benefit the young people that they worked with. In identifying the therapy informed terminology as illustrated in Figure 6, it was clear that whilst the different terminologies were mentioned in conversation and also on various forms of publicity associated with the various settings, the implementation of these techniques and strategies was not demonstrated in practice throughout the duration of the research phase. An exception to this observation was made however for the practices of Growth Mindset[9] and Reinvention[10], both of which were demonstrated as clear examples of therapy informed practice and are discussed in more detail forthwith.

5.5.7 i Growth Mindset

As can be seen from Figure 6, the phrase 'growth mindset' was mentioned across all three of the settings but it was only at City Farm that practical applications of the theory behind the 'growth mindset' approach were observed.

> *Yeah, we've come across this growth mindset stuff recently and this is exactly what we do here anyway. B said it to me today. He shouted "I can't do it" and threw his tools down, then he stopped and thought and actually said "I can't*

---

[9] Developed in 1998 by Claudia Mueller and Carol Dweck who explored the consequences of how different types of praise affected students development. Growth mindset summarised the idea that intelligence can be developed rather than it being pre-determined or set in stone (fixed mindset). Through praising effort and the strategies used to achieve a task, students are given a template for improvement – not gained through praising intelligence alone. (Mueller & Dweck, 1998)

[10] Whereby, as a therapeutic technique, reinvention is used as not just a means to limit or overcome psychological 'illness' or 'trauma' but as a *redesign* of the self as a means of achieving a sense of greater personal autonomy. (Source: Elliott, 2013)

> *do it YET" because we'd been banging on about it you know. Anyway, he just carried on.* (Ed: CF/I)

One of the educators at the setting explained that the young people that attended the project often had very low self-esteem and were not prepared to put any effort into any of the tasks they were involved in because they felt that they would not be able to achieve the task anyway. This attitude then further affected their motivation to complete tasks and activities as they lacked the confidence to embark upon anything new. This 'fixed mindset' was combated through working with the young people on a one to one basis discussing quotes and analysing images which all depicted the growth mindset approach.

> *There are some nice simple pictures that we've presented to them and they've decorated their files with quotes and things like that that make them think. So then, slowly, we change that mindset of "Oh, I can't do this and I can't do that" to a can-do approach.* (Ed: CF/I)

City Farm did acknowledge however, that adopting the 'growth mindset' approach was difficult as they were relying on knowledge that they had gleaned from reading themselves about this method and had not received any direct training in this area. One of the educators there felt worried at first that they were trying to adopt an approach that they did not fully understand.

> *You can't just put a poster up in a room about this stuff, it really requires everyone to reflect on what they are doing, how they act, speak, everything.* (Ed: CF/I)

But then she saw the difference that adapting their approach to the young people had on their own approach to learning as adults:

> *We've all got a 'can-do' attitude, Not, I don't know how to do this or I can't do this, it's about I don't know YET or I can't do it YET. Let's work out how we can do this together.* (Ed: CF/I)

5.5.7 ii Reinvention

Each of the settings alluded to the importance of *"giving everyone a blank slate when they come here"* (Ed: AW/I), *"they are turning over a new page when they come here."* (Ed: CF1/I). City Farm took this approach one step further through actively implementing an approach they called 'reinvention', described by one of the educators as follows:

> *Well, the first time we did it was about 10 years ago, this lad came and his teacher said he's very disruptive in school, stuff like that. So he came and I could just tell that he didn't want to be that person that the teacher had described coz he said, at school they think I'm horrible and all that, so I said that my favourite Manchester United goalkeeper was so and so and you'll be so and so from now on and he loved it. He just loved it and I thought this was just fantastic. One day, we were throwing logs across the beck because we'd*

> *cut down an Aspen and he said "yeah the champion XXXX (the name I'd given him)scores a goal" and I thought, "you've just been reinvented here, it's not just a nickname". Then he said, "when I come through here I prefer being him" and I thought is it an isolated case, and so I tried it again with someone else, and it's not, you've seen it yourself, it's not, it's everyone, across all these years, they all just want to be reinvented.* (Ed: CF/I)

The same educator then went on to explain how he had chosen the 'reinvention' name for one young person in particular:

> *Well, as soon as I saw him I could tell that he was really hiding his light under a bushel. He could hardly meet my eye but he seemed theatrical somehow. I called him Lord Byron, in honour of the famous poet who was really the equivalent of the pop star of the day, he was so good looking and dashing, all the ladies would throw their knickers at him when he walked past kind of person*. (Ed: B/I)

Whilst at this setting, it was observed that one of the educators called a young person by their real name rather than by their 'reinvention' name and the young person immediately retorted sharply *"what you calling me that for, I'm xxxx".* He was actually annoyed and upset that he had been called his real name and wished to be associated with his new name.

When asked later, by the researcher, why it was so important to him to be called by his 'reinvention' name, he explained:

> *So the idea is that you get a new name and like a new start right. It's like you've been given a new personality here and you're not being judged for what you've done before in the past. It's like this is who I am and you can trust me and I can be who I really want to be. It's like being re-birthed!* [Laughs] (YP: CF/I)

One of the educators at the setting explained that he had no interest in the history of behaviour of each young person before they arrived at the setting:

> *I don't read, I never read what they've done in the past. I'm supposed to do but I don't coz I'm not judgemental. I don't like being judged myself so I'm not going to judge them. They come and their slate's wiped clean as far as I'm concerned and they buy into that. They're thinking, oh, what I've done at school – they're going to think I'm a right so and so but then you just let them start again – just quietly mind, don't make no big song and dance about it and be like say B, he's been there 2 years now, this lad who's supposed to be dangerous, disengaged, disaffected – whatever you want to call him…you've seen how he is, he's my right hand man and his gentleness with the special needs, you've seen him, his patience is amazing.* (Ed: CF/I)

At Skate Park, the educators also adopted the process of reinvention, albeit in less literal way*. "I try to take each day – or lesson, or minute, or second – as a clean slate and start again. Otherwise you will remain stuck in the reputation reinforcement cycle forever."* (Ed: SP2/I).

To a lesser extent due to being less overt, but still nonetheless present, the concept of reinvention was also integrated into the practice at Artworks. Here, ‘gang-culture’ was prevalent in the lives of the young people at the setting. The term ‘gang culture’ is used here to frame the understanding of the type of group signifiers and associations linked with what we commonly associate with ‘gang culture’ but it is important to point out that “*this term can be seen as a convenient but misleading catch-all term used by those with little idea of how to deal with those young people increasingly excluded from mainstream society*” (Joseph, 2016 p.4). At Artworks, reinvention was practiced by the young people as they allocated false names to themselves and each other in the fashion of those of the Trap and Drill artists they listened to and also as a graffiti artist will paint under a pseudonym or ‘tag’. These names would often be related to a physical attribute of the young person or perhaps linked to their name or an interest or activity they were strongly associated with. Examples of names would be *Grubs; Young’un; Hazard* and *J-Boy*. In this way, the young people could be seen to be reinventing themselves, no longer associated with the name that teachers used for them at school, this was their name, used only by their close friends in their community.

> *When you get given a tag you’re woke man! It’s like this is who you really are and now you like belong where you supposed to be.* (YP: AW/PRA)

The educators at the setting also used these ‘gang’ names for the young people - an indication of how powerful these names were and also perhaps that they had been accepted into the close circle of associates around them.

An educator at Artworks explained her own ‘reinvention’ approach as applied to the most disruptive or difficult to engage members of her group whereby she treated each day as a reinvention of the last:

> *After a particularly difficult experience in the classroom, I make sure to seek out the young person in question, maybe at lunchtime, I just go right over and sit with them and start eating my lunch and asking about their day. The shock is often clear on their face, but they almost always stay there; you can feel their hostility begin to lift. If it’s the end of the day then I make sure I make them really welcome the next day and make a fuss of them. I might bake some biscuits the night before and bring them in. It just teaches them that today is a new day and yesterday is best left where it is – in the past. (*Ed: AW/I)

5.5.8 Creative Pedagogies

The use of creative methods to engage and encourage learning for young people who have found more formal, often didactic forms of education difficult to engage with are examined in more detail within this section. Each of the settings visited offered activities different to those with which they would have engaged in at mainstream school and the effectiveness of these to engage the young people is discussed further in this section.

5.5.8 i Music/Arts Activities

Artworks focused primarily on delivering accredited qualifications in music and creative media. They also delivered functional skills qualifications in maths and

English. The young people attending the programme all had a choice about whether to focus on arts or music or both and all worked towards their appropriate functional skills qualification as identified through initial assessment.

Some young people were ambivalent about the arts/music element offered by the setting and cited the overall atmosphere and the relationships between them and the staff members as their primary reason for attendance.

> *I'd come here whatever like. I don't know about no art and that, I'm not bothered by it, music is ok sometimes but I'm just here coz it's chill innit and the staff are chill. No messin' about and chiding and stuff.* (YP: AW/I)

It appeared that it was not necessarily the music/arts curriculum here that was engaging these young people, although for some, this certainly was an important aspect of their continued engagement with the project.

> *The main thing I like about it here is that it's like I can just sit and draw and talk to people. That's the main thing that we don't get told to be quiet all the time and we get to just do what we want really. I like to draw and graffiti is my thing really so they got this really famous graff artist from America and I helped him paint the gates* (YP: AW/I)

Despite not all of the young people being interested in the creation of their own music using the creative media facilities available, it seemed that music was indeed a strong factor in the engagement of and bonding between the young people within the project. The young people constantly played music on the computers in each room.

The music tutor explained that the Trap and Drill style genres were particularly important to some of these young people. However, this particular type of music was banned from being played and listened to at the project was due to its ability to '*de-programme'* (Ed: AW/I) the young people. He felt that the lifestyle denoted both through the lyrics of this music and the aggressive, gang style images presented by the 'crew' members in the music's videos were conducive to encouraging young people to take drugs and engage in criminal, violent and/or offensive behaviour. However, other music was encouraged and was played at all times across all of the areas within the project. That the adoption of the young people's own pseudonyms and personas were encouraged (see previous section 5.5.7.i) by the educators was somewhat at odds with the banning of the associated music yet it appeared understandable that the music, peppered as it was with offensive words and videos depicting violent and sexual imagery would be deemed unacceptable in an educational (and public) setting.

What was notable at this setting was that the arts and music activities offered were almost subsidiary to the main activities engaged in by the young people which were to gather round computers to access music videos on You Tube whilst talking to each other. The majority of the young people would perhaps intermittently engage with an arts or music activity upon being encouraged by the respective educator in that area, but this engagement would last perhaps ten to fifteen minutes before moving back to speaking with other young people. Upon leaving an activity, the educator would often be observed continuing to work on the young person's work until they came back to it.

5.5.8 ii Environmental/Nature-Based Activities

> *The natural environment suits, particularly suits young people that find mainstream education difficult. (*Ed: CF/I)

The curriculum at City Farm was focused wholly around the activities that being based in an outdoor education environment which also operated as a working farm enatailed. The setting, provided education and inclusion programmes for young people and adults with differing levels of needs and abilities as well as being open to the public as a setting for children to meet farm animals and participate in outdoor/environmental activities.

Young people disengaged from school were engaged in activities alongside young adults with varying degrees of special educational needs such as autism, aspergers, Prader-Willi and so on, who attended the setting as part of their day centre programmes.

The activities at the centre were practical, hands on tasks which were required in order to entail the day to day operation of the farm. Many of the tasks were repetitive but necessary such as emptying rubbish bins daily (the centre was also open to the public), chopping wood (bags of logs were sold to the public as part of the income generation strategy) and feeding and moving animals (sheep, cows, llamas, goats, chickens, pigs and donkeys were kept on the farm). These tasks formed the mainstay of the daily activities and were all carried out with a great degree of skill, enthusiasm and pride by the young people.

Other tasks such as chopping trees down, planting woodland, draining and clearing out wetland were part of the curriculum but these were very much seasonal and built into the rhythm of the natural environment. For example, autumn and winter would be spent chopping back, chopping down, pruning vegetation, planting new trees and bedding up animals whereas spring and summer would be spent maintaining and cultivating produce in the allotments, thinning out saplings and caring for pregnant and baby animals.

It appeared that the necessity of the work negated any reluctance or refusal of the young people to take part. They saw themselves as responsible for the well-being of the environment and could see that the tasks that they were doing were meaningful and the end goal was visible to them.

One of the educators described one of the reasons why they enjoyed the work:

> *Well, it's the practical work isn't it. When you give them a sharp axe to put a point on and they love that, all the tools and the dangerous stuff, or at least the stuff that could be seen as dangerous.* (ED:CF/I)

Health and safety was a very important element of the young people’s programme and they had all undertaken an induction into the rules at the farm and the use of protective clothing and safeguards. The young people were expected to wear heavy duty gloves, goggles and wellington boots when chopping logs for example and used wood axes, bow saws, loppers and heavy duty pruning tools on a daily basis.

This provided an interesting comparison to Skate Park where young people were ‘frisked’ upon entering the setting each day with a hand-held metal detector due to the incidence of knife-crime. This posed the question of whether the young people at Skate Park were simply more likely to be carrying a knife than those at Artworks and City Farm, and if so, why, as these surely are the same demographic of young people who are being referred to each setting. If these are the same young people then why is that they can be trusted with what could ostensibly become lethal weapons in this, a different environment?

Evidence that the young people really invested in City Farm was apparent through some of the conversations with both the educators and the young people:

> *They think, I've planted a tree and I can come back in 10 years and see what it's like you know.* (Ed: CF/I)

> *I like the idea that I can even come back when I have children and show them the trees that I have planted. (YP: CF/I)*

This evidence that the young people are looking towards the future and imagining themselves in a position whereby they may have children was described by another of the educators at the setting as:

> *You know why he's thinking about the future? It's because he's making a difference. You know there's nothing better. I mean you get big corporate groups paying big money to plant trees and there's no difference between these big corporate groups and K. You know they think I've planted a tree and I can come back in 10 years and see what it's like you know. It's just such a nice feeling and some of them don't get many of those.* (Ed: CF/I)

The feeling of freedom that the young people felt at City Farm is described earlier in this chapter and the link between freedom is linked closely to the feeling of responsibility here through the evidence of the investment that the young people are making in the project and the knowledge that the actions they are taking now are going to have an impact on the future:

> *A lot of them come back and lots of them are successful in their own ways and when they first came, you would have said they've not got much of a future. So, it's that building of self-esteem thing and then, I mean, that's why they come back because they come to see what they did, what they've done, all the stuff they've built. This building's been built by young people, everything you see on the farm has been built by young people, everything, so it's all here, still standing. They've built things that are good and they can come back and see and they're proud.* (Ed: CF/I)

5.5.8. iii Skate Park activities (skateboarding, scootering, climbing)

At Skate Park, the educational provision was actually delivered over three sites, only one of which housed the skate park, scootering and climbing activities. This was the site used by the Key Stage 2 (age 7-10) re-engagement project (Skate Park 2). The use of the skate park area was used by the young people as an incentive to reward the young people for completing their learning sessions.

The other two sites did not have access to these facilities due to being located a considerable distance from the skate park but could access them by public transport if required. However, for the duration of the research phase, the other setting (Skate Park 1) observed did not make use of these facilities. Skate Park 1 was housed in a former textile mill which had been converted into separate units to house various businesses and social enterprises and the young people were encouraged not to leave the building due to potential complaints from other businesses. The young people attended a number of 30 minute classes in maths, English, science, citizenship and healthy living skills. The educators within the project were very adept at engaging with the young people who were often presenting quite disruptive and challenging behaviour. Behaviour was managed through using de-escalation techniques and also through the use of behaviour recognition tables and reward pyramids. These are described in more detail in 5.5.6 Figure 4 and 5.

In terms of using creative pedagogy, these were not demonstrated at all at this particular project.

5.5.9 Summary

The main areas of interest in response to the research questions to emerge from the findings of this research have been outlined in this chapter within the various themes as depicted in Figure 6 (p.123). In summary, these findings focused on the effect that becoming disengaged from mainstream school has on a young person’s self-image, both as a learner and as a fully engaged member of society. The impact of being disengaged on future aspirations is apparent, as is the feeling of disconnection and feeling the need to reconnect with the mainstream education system at some point in the future, in order to continue with their education and progression towards a career. However, it became apparent that the young people saw alternative education as a temporary step-aside from education rather than a movement from one education setting to another. They existed as educational liminads in this space, not valuing the alternative educational offer that was displayed before them, seeing these as low-level, ambiguous qualifications that had little or no currency for entry into their future. However, the effects of having a negative experience at school appeared to have little impact on their own self-concept and identity as the young people disconnected from the negative connotations or labels associated with any previous disruptive behaviour or from the disengagement process.

The act or concept of disengagement was not applicable only to the young people, it was seen that some of the educators too, identified with the notion of disengagement in terms of their own experience of education as an adult, several having felt disengaged themselves whilst working in mainstream education settings.

Within each of the settings observed, the educators focused very much on building relationships with the young people they worked with rather than being purely outcome focused, as many of the teachers at mainstream school appeared to have been. Yet, it was the different curriculum and activities available that appeared to be crucial in the level of meaningful engagement in each of the programmes. Innovative engagement methods such as ‘reinvention’ were observed as a means to construct an alternative persona for the young people rather than attempt to repair or to build on the cracked foundations of their previous educational experience. Those settings which were free of the constraints incurred with being bound to the recreation of the mainstream school curriculum and qualification expectations were more able to offer the freedom needed to create the space for reinvention.

The next chapter will present a discussion focusing on some of these findings in order to attempt to provide an understanding of how young people and educators experience disengagement from the mainstream schooling system.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The central questions in this study sought to:

a) Determine how young people who had become disengaged from mainstream education, and their educators, understood and made sense of being disengaged.

b) Ascertain whether there was a relationship between these young people's construction of their identity as learners and their being represented as disengaged.

c) Explore how a selection of alternative education initiatives utilised different methods to engage young people who have been disengaged from mainstream education back into learning.

In this chapter I draw on evidence from the interviews, observations and participatory research activities undertaken in the various settings, as outlined in the previous chapter, to analyse and discuss the findings to the questions above. I also present examples of how the findings relate to existing research and through locating my study in the field, this chapter will begin to stake a claim about making new contributions to this knowledge. The chapter is divided into three sections, each section focusing on discussing the main findings in relation to each of the research areas above.

6.2 RQ1: How do disengaged young people and their educators, construct, understand and make sense of being disengaged from education?

6.2.1 Young People's view of disengagement: Maintaining a positive personal identity

Even when the specific word 'disengaged' is not used, the young people know through the actions and responses that are being applied to them, that they are being treated differently and that their educational opportunities have changed and often narrowed since they have no longer been attending mainstream school (Chapter 5, p.127).

Yet, though they had all been targeted with measures to tackle their propensity to disengage, such as reduced timetables and removal from mainstream school to full-time attendance at an alternative education provider, the participants in this study did not appear to associate themselves with any of the terminology used to describe disengagement from school and displayed that they refrained from internalising any negative stigma to themselves associated with the state of being disengaged. The only time, they did associate with negative language or behaviour was when they described at various times both themselves and others as being *'bad'* (Chapter 5, p.164). However, this denotion of negative behaviour was only ever used to describe that which occurred whilst still attending mainstream school. This suggests that the label of 'being disengaged' in whatever language may be used to describe this state, is not a primary defining identity to them, however, the behaviour associated with those who have become disengaged, before they have been fully excluded from mainstream school, is a recurring defining marker of identity. Examples of where the young people are not associating with a label of being disengaged or identifying with the state of disengagement can be seen in Chapter 5, p.138, where the young people talk about what they want to do in the future. It is clear that they are not accepting their being disengaged as affecting their concept of themselves as learners. So, whilst the status of disengagement does seem to hold importance to some of the adults around the young people, particularly the teachers and instigators of the move from mainstream to alternative education, it is not something that the young people are necessarily affiliating themselves to or using to define themselves and are more likely to afford such distinctions to others (Chapter 5, p.125).

These young people showed consistently throughout the study that they are able to maintain multiple identities at once (Chapter 5, pp. 165; 166; 175; 207), and the stigma of being disengaged from school was avoided through recourse to other positive self-concepts that were present i.e. those awarded through the process of reinvention (Chapter 5, p.204). It is suggested then, that the particular conditions of the concept of being disengaged, the ambiguous definition which changes depending on whom is the definer and who is being defined, the reliance upon the perception of others, the lack of consistency in enforcement and the sweeping extent of behaviour and attitudes covered within the term, mean that the label of ‘disengagement’ is ambiguous, fluid and therefore easy to throw off and/or disguise. This indicates that the label of ‘disengagement’ is ephemeral and easily contested.

This vague definition, to be ‘disengaged’ as to have become temporarily disconnected from school is a diluted version of the full-fat label of being ‘excluded’ which brings with it strict legal requirements and responsibilities on behalf of the excluding school. The multiplicity of institutions involved in the management of young people at risk of disengagement (and presumably in the avoidance of exclusion) and the application of a range of formal responses to it as well as the reliance on teachers own perception in the detection process results in a flexible label which provides young people with the space to redefine and reconstruct when necessary - the space for freedom and reinvention.

It has been suggested that the application of stigma is relational rather than being a primary defining identity (Crocker and Quinn, 2001; Trautner and Collett, 2010). Through reference to their position as individual young people or as a ‘group’ identity as students (Goffman, 1963), some of the young people indicated that they associated the ‘disengaged’ label with their group-association rather than their own ‘self’ (Crocker and Major, 1999). They described how others (i.e. teachers at school and/or other students at the school) would see them as bad (Chapter 5, p.164). The stigma of being identified as someone who had been ‘*kicked out of school*’ (YP: C1/PRA) was rationalised as a reflection on their identity as a disruptive student, rather than on their personal identity. In this way, the young people accept that they do not follow the criteria for being a particular type of student but this does not impact negatively on their feelings about themselves as a person.

6.2.2 Young People’s view of disengagement: Condemnation of the condemners

With the majority of the participants in the research, the reason for becoming disengaged from school was, according to reports from the school and through information relayed by the educators in the setting, due to the young person exhibiting disruptive behaviour in the classroom. The view that their behaviour in school had been the cause of their disengagement was not however generally accepted by the young people (Chapter 5, p.165).

This perception from the respondents that they were labelled as disruptive simply because this was how their behaviour was perceived by a particular teacher or teachers, was a common theme to emerge during the discussions. Most of the young people spoken with felt that they had become disengaged from school because they were wrongly judged as presenting negative behaviour, most probably due to wider discourses which take place beyond their individual characteristics. Reflective of Sykes and Matza's (1957) '*condemnation of the condemners'* (p.668), whereby the young people employed a strategy to deal with being labelled as disruptive for example, through denying ownership of the label (whatever the label may be) through a claim of being 'misjudged' by the labeller.

This strategy allows the young person to avoid the label (of being 'disruptive' in this case) through denying its intended application; despite seeing that others are judging their behaviour as negative, they do not judge it in this way. This may be because they perceive those who are making the judgements as being entirely wrong or misinformed. This was reflected in the opinions voiced by young people about the ways in which teachers viewed them (Chapter 5, p.132), sometimes even before they had experienced any negative behaviour from the young person (Chapter 5, p.133; 146).

Many of the participants stated that although they were aware that teachers were finding their behaviour within the classroom and school environment as extremely disruptive, they maintained that they were simply having fun with their friends as was common in the classroom and therefore did not a) accept responsibility for being disruptive or b) view this behaviour as being disruptive (Chapter 5, p.167). So, whilst accepting that others found their behaviour disruptive, they were able to justify this behaviour because they felt they had been misjudged. This justification begins to explain why they can maintain a positive personal identity, despite the application of a stigmatising label.

One of the common strategies the young people used to deny an identity of being disruptive at school, was to deflect the label onto their friends (Chapter 5, p.174/ 175). Often, young people who had been referred by their school to an alternative education provider had a feeling that they had been misunderstood and their behaviour had been misinterpreted (Chapter 5, p.165), and that they had been singled out unfairly from a group of similarly behaved peers (Chapter 5, p.174). Through identifying others around them who they considered to be more disruptive than they are, the self-image subsequently reflected back to them is one of '*less disruptive'* (Mead, 1934). This was also exhibited through the comparisons and anecdotes about their past behaviour in school that the young people in all of the settings regularly engaged in (Chapter 5, p.131-136; 170). Whilst the participants circulated in social circles containing other young people who were generally considered disruptive, or 'bad' at school, this offered an opportunity to deflect the identity of being disruptive away from themselves by feeling secure that their behaviour was not unusual. As discussed in Chapter 2, Fisher (2011) suggested that disaffection with engagement might be concealed by young people, even those who have become fully disengaged from education as they fail to accept that their disengagement is either permanent or has anything to do with their own behaviours.

This assertion, that they were more victims of circumstance and bad luck rather than accepting and internalising responsibility for the persistent disruptive behaviour that had been the cause for their disengagement was a common view amongst the young people interviewed.

A significant number of young people interviewed presented the belief that disruptive behaviour at school was something that every pupil at school took part in at some point, whether deliberately or inadvertently (Chapter 5, p.165/166). This approach could be seen as an attempt to neutralise their behaviour through normalisation. Trautner and Collett (2010) suggest that individuals can use ‘othering’ as a technique to distance themselves from the stigma of a negative label. In this way, the young people can be seen to view individuals who they felt conformed to the disruptive or ‘problem pupil’ stereotype as ‘others’, invariably those who are different from themselves, and this allows them to distinguish between a justified label and their own unjustified one.

This technique was demonstrated in this study through the strategy the young people used of modifying the category of being ‘disengaged’. It could be seen that the young people did have a view about what disengagement was, in particular, that which had resulted from persistent disruptive behaviour at school, but their own individual actions did not fit in with this view and as such, they consequently deduced that they had been wrongly labelled.

Hence, many of the young people did not see themselves as having become ‘others’, due to being disengaged from mainstream school and rather recognised that some people may see them as ‘others’ at some times and in some places (Blinde and Taub, 1992) but where it mattered, with their peers for instance, they were not seen as being any different. The young people in the study often displayed that strangers’ opinions of them were of little importance to them (Chapter 5, pp.125-127), yet, it has been shown throughout this study that they also indicated that they were aware of the ways in which they may be viewed and appeared to ignore any responses towards them which they perceived as negative (Chapter 5, p.127). This indicated that there seemed to be tensions between the understanding of the young people with regard to disengagement and the views that are held of them by others.

6.2.3 Educators view of disengagement

The findings from this study showed that the educators view of disengagement differed across the settings visited and that the way the educators viewed disengagement correlated on the whole with the experience that the young people were having at the setting.

In terms of the language used to describe those young people for who attendance at mainstream school was no longer an option, the educators at Artworks and City Farm in particular, showed affinity with the young people's view, in that they also preferred not to use terms such as disengaged, disenfranchised, marginalised and similar terminology, instead preferring not to use any defining terms at all (Chapter 5, p.146).

Educators at Skate Park however, were very focused on the knowledge that the young people they were working with were disengaged from mainstream school. The ethos within the organisation was that reintegration back into school was an integral and essential aim, especially for the younger age groups.

The educators across all settings were, on the whole, mindful of the effects of labelling and of the risk of contributing towards a self-fulfilling prophecy (Becker, 1963) whereby the act of being labelled as 'disengaged', 'disenfranchised' or other, may lead the individual to internalise the label and begin to behave according to the label until finally the label becomes part of their identity (Lemert, 1967). Howarth (2004) refers to this particular form of labelling as a 'social identity', one that is constructed from "*external sources, attributed value and ascribed to individuals*" (p.163). When a social identity is internalised by an individual this becomes and ‘extended social identity’, making the individual unable to separate their individual sense of self from what outside sources ascribe to them, and thus the social identity becomes an extension of who they are (Howarth, 2004; Becker, 1963). However, this appeared to not be the case with the young people in this particular study as, on the whole, as discussed previously, they steadfastly sidestepped being assigned with stigmatising labels or surrendering to the absorption of a negative identity.

Evidence was present to suggest that the educators, particularly at one of the settings (City Farm) deliberately negated any labelling that may have impacted on the attitude to learning of the young people attending there through applying the principles of a growth mindset approach (Chapter 5, p.206).

This statement indicates that some young people arrive at the alternative education setting having begun to internalise a more negative personal identity, possibly relating to their experiences whilst still in mainstream school. It is then likely that the avoidance of using stigmatising terminology by the educators and the adoption of the ‘blank slate’ (Chapter 5, p.146) approach has gone some way to enabling the young person to develop a positive personal identity with which to move forward. This correlated with the view as expressed previously that young people, although aware of potential stigmatisation for becoming disengaged from mainstream school, are quick to disinherit this status as it is one for which they do not feel responsible for the allocation of.

The previous section, which outlined how the young people felt that they had been wrongly identified as disengaged, also indicates that the young people know themselves and each other better than the adults who are applying these labels. There is an implicit understanding of an ‘us and them’ situation (Chapter 5, p. 131-

132). The findings of this study indicated that, in comparison with the focus on accredited outcomes at Skate Park, the increased level of personal interaction and relationship building that was allowed and encouraged between the educators and the young people at Artworks and City Farm correlated with the increase in distance between identifying with the negative stigma associated with becoming disengaged from education. Hence, this study showed that the more that the educators entered into and empathised with the world of the young people, the less that the educators used the deficit lens to view disengagement from the mainstream schooling system as being the fault of the young person. This investment in human interaction and focus on relationships with its resulting avoidance of the deficit view of disengagement is concurrent with literature around the transformative powers of positive educator/young person; teacher/student relationships, especially for those young people at risk of disengagement from education (see Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016; Thomson and Russell, 2009; teRiele, 2006, 2007, 2011, Woods and Woods, 2009; Fielding and Moss, 2011; Apple and Beane, 1999; hooks, 2003). McMahon (2004) in her study of educationally marginalised students in an Australian high school found that her respondents’ stories depicted a longing for meaningfully caring relationships with educators who both challenge socio-cultural inequities along with respecting their lived experiences and encouraging and supporting their individual knowledge and abilities.

However, this view presents an overtly positive view of alternative education which depends upon the assumption that educators working within alternative education settings are indeed committed to combating the deficit view of disengagement. To work towards transforming the educational experiences of the young people they work with, it is vital that inherent in the values and ethos of the setting, the trust and respect for the young people they work with and also belief in the abilities of the young people is implicit. However, as illustrated in the previous chapter it is apparent that some alternative education settings, specifically Skate Park in this study, concur that they are *a “last resort”* (Chapter 5, p.152-153). By accepting this position they are by default, colluding with the view of young people that serves to “*pathologise [disengaged] groups as abnormal and aberrant“* (Kakos et al., 2016, p.13).

The way the educators constructed and understood disengagement appeared to be heavily influenced by the ethos of the setting they worked at. Skate Park, for example, operated from the belief that *“when they’re outside the mainstream, they’re outside society”* (Chapter 5, p. 151) an imperious tenet which dictated their whole approach to seeing young people as problems which, if not solved and returned to school as early as possible would be resigned to the ‘dumping ground’ (Kim, 2011, p.78) which is alternative education “*the longer they are with us, the less likely they are to be able to integrate”* (Chapter 5, p. 152). This view contributed to the setting’s tenacious disposition for propelling the young people towards the achievement of accredited outcomes, seemingly to the detriment of relationship building and responding to individual needs.

6.2.4 Educators as disengaged

The findings from this study showed that several of the educators felt also that they had at some point themselves, become disengaged from mainstream education. Several were qualified teachers who had previously taught in mainstream school, one at assistant head teacher level. They had left mainstream school to work in alternative education as they had become disenfranchised with what they saw as increasing bureaucracy, rules and pressure to maintain standards which were leaving many young people by the wayside. (Chapter 5, p. 159-161)

This concurs with the findings of Mills and McGregor (2014) who identified in their research with educators in alternative education settings that the stories of the educators they interviewed:

> *…revealed varying levels of disillusionment, dissatisfaction and disappointment with mainstream schooling systems.* (p.85)

A recent survey of teachers in secondary school in the UK, carried out by the National Education Union (Adams, 2018) found that over 80% of teachers were unhappy in their role and were seriously considering a career change due to the ever mounting pressures and heavy workloads that they had to endure.

Several of the educators interviewed and observed identified with the young people they worked with as they felt that they had themselves experienced similar experiences of being disengaged from education (Chapter 5, p.159-161). They all had in common that they felt that their lived experiences enhanced their ability to empathise with the young people and to understand the issues that they were facing (Chapter 5, p.161-162). There is very little literature with which to correlate this finding other than the aforementioned study by Mills and McGregor (2014) and accompanying paper (McGregor and Mills, 2012), yet both focus more on how working in alternative educations settings had reignited a passion for teaching that had been thwarted by employment in the mainstream education sector. However, in the field of social sciences, Perry (2003) found that in the recruitment of social workers to work specifically with ‘impoverished’ young people, those applicants who themselves had personal experience, as young people, with poverty or negative experiences of education, were more likely to want to train as a social worker in this field. The claim here is that those who are drawn to a career that has relevance to them personally do so for reasons more to do with motivations based on personal growth and religious or political ideology rather than for financial gain and career advancement.

This suggests then, that those educators most suited to working with young people who have become disengaged from education, may have themselves experienced or be committed to the appeasement of disengagement in some form. What is lacking in the literature in this area is research looking at the factors which influence one’s desire to work with young people in an education setting which is outside that of mainstream school. This data, were it to be sought, would be conducive to the effective recruitment and retention of educators in these settings and also assist in the design of professional training programmes akin to current teacher training programmes for those interested in working in this sector.

If it is that the motivation to work with young people who have experienced disengagement from education is based on the quest to either rescind personal experiences, a desire for personal growth and/or to reconciliate or propitiate a commitment to a political or religious ideology, this then suggests that these educators are indeed demonstrating that they oppose the deficit model of disengagement. It may be that it is those educators who have themselves experienced disengagement, who are more likely to be able to understand the ways in which society can be seen to problematise young people who have become disengaged from mainstream education. This empathic understanding when present will aid the educator in determining triggers in the environment which may deepen or enhance the young person’s sense of disengagement or provoke and maintain the young person’s potential for challenging behaviour.

6.2.5 Liminal spaces and fuzzy zones

Liminal spaces are defined by their existence as transitional or transformational *“Liminality is a condition where the usual practice and order are suspended and replaced by new rites and rituals”* (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003, p.267)). They are the waiting areas between one point in time and the next. As a physical manifestation, a liminal space may be a waiting room, an atrium or a stair well, neither here nor there, neither coming nor going.

That disengagement can be viewed as existing in a liminal space was illustrated throughout this study by both the young people and the educators. One young person described feeling that people did not want to know him anymore (Chapter 5, p.164), whilst one educator depicted the young people in the alternative education setting as being in a state of merely waiting until the time came for them to be able to leave “*and then they’ll be off*” (Chapter 5, p. 155) and perhaps most telling of all is the comment (Chapter 5, p.156), intimating that although the young people at the setting were full of potential, this was unlikely to be realised whilst they were there.

This concept, corroborated by both the young people and the educators across all of the settings visited, reinforced the view asserted through this study of alternative education settings as liminal spaces. Kim (2011) offered the image of alternative education as a “*warehouse or dumping ground*” (p.78) whilst Nairn and Higgins (2011) saw them as “*places of “containment*” (p.183). This view however, presents a view of young people as acquiescent automatons who are placed passively in such places. Through the evidence collated during this study, it appears that contrary to this view, that the young people in these settings, although undoubtedly sequestered, are instead quietly tracking their own way into their futures.

That these young people are maintaining the self-confidence and positivity that beyond alternative education lies the possibility of further and higher education (Chapter 5, p.145) counteracts the view that they are being shaped for "*empty and meaningless work lives*" (Lawy et al., 2009, p.741) and that the disengaged are not bound by the expectations of those around them: "*we're not expecting anyone to go into farming or the environment or save the world or anything"* (See Chapter 5, p.155).

Matthews (2003) in his study on how children create their own pathways and journeys through life in the city, describes the streets in the city as:

> *a place which both makes possible and signifies a means of transition through which some young people move away from the restrictions of their childhood roots towards the independence of adulthood.* (p.106)

Perhaps then, this is how young people within alternative education settings see their time there, not as being '*contained*' or as in a '*warehouse or dumping ground'* but as in a liminal space, where the future is still out there waiting, a '*fuzzy zone'* (Matthews, 2003, p.165), where each setting has different rules, outcomes and expectations but within each, young people are expected to be active navigators into the worlds of their future.

6.3 RQ2:Is there a relationship between the representation of young people as disengaged and individual young people's construction of their identity as learners?

As discussed previously, the views of the participants in this study indicate that although no longer attending mainstream education, they do not expect that this period of attending an alternative education provider will affect their future direction. This section, therefore, presents the argument that there is not a relation between the representation of young people as disengaged and individual young people's construction of their own identity as learners. The young people who participated in this study, on the whole, do not accept that they are disengaged, rather, their understanding of disengagement is that they have taken a short hiatus from the mainstream path, a path to which they shall return upon leaving the alternative education provision. This was evident, not only in the participants' attitudes to being disengaged from school, but also in their aspirations for the future. Exceedingly, the young people perceived their future in terms of what could be seen to be the conventional accoutrements associated with success in the western society, including variably having a successful career, having children, getting married and owning their own home, all findings reflected in other studies of young people's aspirations, for example: MacDonald and Marsh, 2005.

The future aspirations of the young people who have become disengaged from education are documented in Chapter 5 (p. 142/143). These ambitions indicate that all the young people in this study, participants, whom wider society (i.e. mainstream school teachers, media, government and policy makers) would define as being disengaged, viewed their position as still existing within and part of this wider society from which they have, by definition, become disengaged. This reflects Matza's

(1964) proposition that young people can ‘drift’ in and out of mainstream society without committing to any form of sub-cultural ideal or values.

However, this aspect of future aspirations for young people who had become disengaged from mainstream education did reinforce the finding in this study that for some young people, their status as being disengaged from school was something that they had not fully accepted and identified with. This was particularly applicable to the younger children that were observed and interviewed. Those young people who, if at school, would have been in Year 7 (aged 11) showed symptoms of disengagement as creating a feeling of disconnection and insecurity. A clear illustration of this feeling was presented in the young people who maintained the wearing of their uniform, despite the alternative education setting not requiring this (Chapter 5, p.172). This may have been an indication that full exclusion or disengagement from school for younger children, into an alternative education setting which caters mainly for age 14 upwards is not appropriate and may be detrimental to the young person’s identity formation as a future learner.

6.4 RQ 3: How are different initiatives and methods used to re-integrate young people who have become disengaged, back into learning?

McGregor et al (2014) called for alternative education settings to offer a ‘meaningful’ education, consisting of:

> *Programmes that resonate with the needs and aspirations of young people who find themselves on the outside of mainstream schooling pathways* (p.611)

The settings visited for the purposes of this study were specifically chosen as they offered something different, they each based their educational offer, their ‘hook’ back into learning, on three very different foundations of activity. The different activities offered at each setting were as follows:

- Music/Arts Activities
- Environmental/Nature based
- Skate Park Activities (skateboarding, scootering, climbing)

The way these activities were incorporated into the structure of each setting was very different. At Artworks, music and arts represented a link into the wider organisation which was being developed as a cultural hub in the city in which it was based. For City Farm, environmental and nature based education was woven into the very fabric of the setting as a working urban farm and involvement in these areas was unavoidable. For Skate Park, the link with associated activities was tenuous and only readily available to that section of the organisation which was actually based within the skate park facility (i.e. Skate Park 1), even here, these activities were offered as a sometime reward for participation in lesson style activities (Chapter 5, p.199)

Across all settings it was the recurring themes of positive relationships, the feeling of belonging, small group sizes and growth mindset approaches to behaviour management which were proliferate in fostering the positive engagement of previously disengaged young people into learning and educational experiences. That all these factors work to positively engage young people in education is thoroughly backed up in sound academic research much of which is referred to elsewhere in this study (teRiele, 2006; Woods and Woods, 2009; Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016; Morgan et al., 2015; Klem and Connell, 2004).

What clearly emerges from this study, is that, as claimed by self-determination theory, the need for belonging is an innate need (Deci and Ryan, 2000), and therefore universal and relevant in the realities of all young people and educators, irrespective of context. This need to belong and not to be seen as the ‘other’ or as ‘ostracised by society’ results in the young person, who has become disengaged from mainstream school, adopting a denial of the associated deficit connotations of that status. Hence, they exist largely, during their tenure at each respective alternative education provision, hanging in a state of suspended education. As one educator professed “*we’re just glorified babysitters really*” (Chapter 5, p.148)

However, there were two emergent areas that really stood out as both areas of practice and conceptual frameworks which wove themselves throughout all of the settings, either notable for their presence, whether more or less so, or equally their absence. These were the themes of freedom and reinvention and what follows is an investigation and discussion of both.

6.4.1 Freedom

The term ‘freedom’ was frequently referenced across all of the three settings, mentioned and alluded to on numerous occasions by both educators and young people. However, the articulation and representation of this concept across the three settings was markedly different as was the way in which both young people and educators understood this concept. Freedom occurred in these settings in its literal sense, for example, in Artworks for example, although being allocated to one particular area in the morning and one in the afternoon, the young people were free to move between the music and art areas as they pleased. They were also free to opt out of the music/art session altogether and some young people spent the whole day or large parts of each session watching music videos on You Tube and talking. This ‘freedom’ to choose what it was that they wanted to spend their time doing during the day was an aspect that they greatly valued and appreciated as one of the key differences between the alternative education setting and mainstream school. Of interest was what the young people and educators were perceiving as freedom was operating between the very tight parameters of freedom and constraint as in fact the young people, once in the building were not then allowed out until the end of the day. With no outside space excepting a small yard space in which the young people were allowed to smoke at break and lunchtimes, they were limited to a relatively small indoor space consisting of just two activity rooms – art and music. What was particularly inspiring about this setting was that despite operating within such a small physical space, the notion of freedom could be created.

In City Farm, the sense of freedom was almost limitless, mainly due to the abundance of physical space in which the setting was based and in the way that learning was not based at all in a classroom setting. However, this physical freedom was tightly bound by strict rules related to health and safety procedures such as the wearing of personal protective clothing and also linked to the need for constant consideration to other users of the setting, particularly those with special needs, mental health issues and learning difficulties along with members of the public who accessed the setting (primarily families with young children). Interestingly, the young people seemed not to be hindered by the parameters of the rules and regulations to which they were expected to adhere and did not exhibit any challenges towards the ways in which they were expected to behave. This was in stark contrast to the extreme behaviour exhibited at Skate Park whereby young people kicked a hole in the wall, pulled a sliding door off its hinges and upturned several tables and chairs in the space of a three hour observation period. Interestingly, the young people at Skate Park felt that they had no freedom within the setting, either in terms of being able to choose what they wanted to do and where they wanted to go or the extent to which they were involved in making decisions or choices about such issues as the curriculum they followed or the timing of the sessions. As it was, they did have freedom in that they could wear their own clothes, they could swear, chat with each other and withdraw from lessons at will, all areas in which freedom could be seen to be demonstrated, at least in comparison to that which they would have had within mainstream education.

An example of where the concept of freedom was illustrated, yet not necessarily received in a positive way, was in Artworks where, as with all of the settings visited, no uniform is required and the young people are free to wear whatever they like. Two of the young people there, both Year 7 (age 11) females, chose to wear the uniform of the school with which they no longer attended due to behavioural issues but had referred them to this setting. When questioned about why they continued to wear their uniform, it became apparent that they both were unsettled by the amount of freedom that they had at the setting and were maintaining a kind of order by wearing their now defunct uniforms.

This particular young person was not following an accredited programme due to being seen as being too young and also low ability in terms of technical art and creative design ability. She moved between the two main activity spaces (arts and music) and did not settle long in either. She did not have anyone her own age with whom to interact and had formed a loose affinity with a young female who was slightly older than her who only attended for two half days each week. This example could be seen to demonstrate that the young person was requesting through her actions, a system of ‘firm-framing’ (Woods, 2005) whereby a definite structure is needed:

> *That provides, on one hand, a sense of position and place in an organisation, concepts, ideas and a context of values to relate to, and a rhythm of social relationships, and, on the other, loose structured creative social areas where hierarchy and assumptions of knowledge, norms and practice are minimised – with movement between these.* (Woods and Woods, 2009, p. 237)

6.4.2 Reinvention

To invent again or anew, to remake or make over, as in a different form (OED, 1999)

City Farm engaged in an innovative practice that they named ‘reinvention’. Educators at the setting already had an unofficial policy in place of purposefully not reading the case notes or school records that accompanied each new intake. The reason for this was to negate the opportunity for forming pre-conceived ideas about how a young person was likely to behave based on their previous conduct. In the interests of health and safety, any information that may have caused a risk of harm to either the young person or others would be disclosed and discussed amongst the small staff team but otherwise information sharing was kept to a minimum.

‘Second-chance education’ (Mills and McGregor, 2014) is not a new concept for the plethora of alternative education settings located around the developed world but this term usually refers to the way that this type of education is literally offering a ‘second-chance’ to young people for whom their ‘first-chance’ has not worked out. Re-invention however, refers to a pedagogical approach which actually operates a literal, blank slate approach to each young person who has become disengaged from mainstream education and is now embarking upon their ‘second-chance’ at education.

The educators at City Farm will literally give the young people that attend their setting a ‘second chance’ when upon meeting a new intake at their setting, they will consciously disregard their given name and ceremoniously allocate them with a new name, a new identity. This new name may be that of a famous historical figure, a revered footballer, an acronym or even an alliterative play on words. The name itself may have a link with an interest, a physical characteristic or an ambition of the young person, for example, a fan of Leeds United who is very small in stature may be reinvented as George Meek (the smallest ever player for Leeds United who proved one of their most successful, with boundless energy and enthusiasm on and off the pitch). Whilst visiting the setting, one of the young people attending there had been reinvented as ‘Lord Byron’ (Chapter 5, p.209).

As outlined in Chapter 5 (p.211), at Artworks, the young people themselves were engaged in their own form of reinvention through the names they had for each other which were in the style of those music artists associated with ‘gang culture’ music of Trap, Drill and Grime. This demonstrated the young people’s leaving behind of the name with which they were associated at school, here was a new start with new opportunities that had been given to them. The curriculum offered at this setting here was almost an irrelevance to the young people, a comforting, non-challenging past time to engage in between the spaces where the real work of redefinition, reinvention through the developing of relationships between each other in a safe place, a place of refuge, a place where the young people could heal their wounds, test out their re emerging sense of efficacy and put together their plans to move forward onto the next stage in their lives.

TeRiele (2007) identifies that the objective of alternative learning provision aimed at re-engaging young people who have been observed as having behavioural deficits, is not so much about achieving qualifications but rather developing the skills and changed behaviours necessary for return to regular education or work. The ability of the educators and staff in these settings to foster positive relationships with young people is essential. Desirable personality traits include empathy, warmth, understanding, caring nature and sense of humour (Cornelius White, 2007; Roffey, 2012; McHugh et al., 2012). Jennings and Greenberg (2009) found that educators required a high level of social and emotional competence, social awareness, self-awareness and self-regulation along with the capability to engage authentically with students. The educators at City Farm felt strongly that through this process of giving each new participant a new name and associating identity, they were effectively re-naming each young person and hence creating a bond that is almost parent like. The young people who participated in the study likened this process to a '*re-birth*' or becoming *'woke'* as in 'awakened' (Chapter 5, p.210/211). The use of this almost pseudo-religious imagery through likening the process to being 're-birthed' and 're-awakened' could be seen as contentious. However, one of the educators at the setting was keen to cite Bowlby's (1982) theory of attachment as a driving influence. Bowlby advocated the importance of children developing a consistent, secure attachment with at least one adult to achieve optimal social and emotional development and the setting aimed, through working closely with very small groups (maximum 6 but most usually consisting of 4 young people) to create plenty of opportunity for the development of one to one relationships. They saw that the re-invention process was just part of the relationship setting. This process is a powerful one and will undoubtedly create a strong impact on the young person and cement the relationship with the educator in the setting with whom the re-invention took place. This relationship can dramatically change a young person's perception of a new environment which can initially seem hostile and unwelcoming. With a positive relationship established at the outset, the setting is then more likely to appear as a safe space to encourage the young person to engage positively with the educational experiences on offer (Tsai and Cheney, 2012; Klem and Connell, 2004). For disengaged young people in particular, relationships with supportive staff can be a 'bridge' into the educational system that would unlikely have been created by other means (Hobbs and Power, 2013). Educator/young person relationships provide a crucial interpersonal, human connection that is vital for many of these students in order for them to engage with a system that is difficult or uncomfortable for them (teRiele, 2006; McHugh et al., 2012; Roorda et al., 2011).

Another aspect which enhanced the educators' ability to develop strong relationships aided by the process of reinvention was that the majority of the young people attending the setting were male and the two main educators were also male. Geddes (2006) reported that for male children and young people of insecure attachment experience, adversity can be particularly meliorated by relationships with other significant male carers. Fathers, siblings, teachers, friends can all offer a more positive experience which will enhance self-esteem and resilience. In this way, the process of reinvention at play at City Farm, may well be conducive to the young person’s developing capacity to engage with the outside world through being offered a new perspective or mask through which to view this world. The exploration of gender differences in terms of the impact of disengagement on the identity of these young people was outside of the confines of this study but did however an important area for consideration in future research.

6.5 Summary

This chapter has described the ways in which the young people disengaged from education and their educators participating in this research made sense of being disengaged from education and how they conceptualised disengagement in their own construction of learner identity. Different methods have been analysed to ascertain their contribution towards the effective engagement of young people in education and learning. The young people constructed disengagement as a liminal transitory period between school and the world of college or work, between childhood and adulthood. Young people are placed ambiguously within this transition and their fluid position is marked by contradiction. They are, according to perception, disengaged from the mainstream, but they are by no means against school, or against society; they are simply drifting, all the while searching for their place within it.

The main areas which show a new contribution to existing knowledge ascertained through the research findings as discussed in this chapter can be summarised thus:

- Disengaged young people maintain a positive personal identity even though a stigmatising label and experience has been applied to them.

- Disengagement is experienced as a liminal, transitory period between mainstream school and their next steps which are often anticipated as being onto mainstream tertiary education.

- Young people are peripheral to the decision making processes around their disengagement from mainstream school and the involvement in the choice of alternative education provider that they subsequently attend.

- Disengagement from mainstream education, specifically that which results in engagement with alternative education provision, has the propensity to create the space for the freedom to grow, adapt and engage in a process of reinvention.

- It is not only the young people but the educators themselves in alternative education who have become disengaged from mainstream schooling.

Chapter 7: Conclusion, reflections and recommendations

This study specifically set out to explore the experiences of disengagement from education for young people and their educators in a small sample of alternative education settings which had been identified by the researcher as purporting to use creative methods of engaging young people back into learning and education. This chapter draws together the themes that have emerged from this empirical study presents the following summaries:

- Contribution and originality of the research study
- Reflections on the research process
- Recommendations for future research
- Implications for education and practice.

7.1 Contribution and originality of the research

The research set out to fill a gap in the literature around disengagement through exploring how the experience that young people have through becoming disengaged from education affects their identity, in particular their identity as a learner either in the present or in the future.

Disengagement has been displayed in various ways throughout this study, seen by academics as a fluid concept, existing on a continuum, and by schools as a problem with no clear solution, to be swept away and out of the school into the sometimes unknown realms of alternative provision. This study has shown that young people find themselves temporarily undefined beyond the normative mainstream school structure. This weakens them, disables their rights, but at the same time it strengthens them as it liberates them from structural obligations. Following this line of reasoning, the study shows that disengagement can offer a sense of freedom, a possibility of creation, of reinvention and a shared sense of both identity and alterity with others existing in the same state. At its best, alternative education, accessed through becoming disengaged from mainstream school, can give young people the space to linger, in a limbic state, a space in which to reconnect with who they are or to reinvent into whom they want to become.

The most distinctive discovery through this study was that being disengaged and subsequently entering alternative education provision, was found not to result in '*containment*' (Nairn and Higgins, 2011, p.183) or as being placed in a '*warehouse or dumping ground'* (Kim, 2011p. 78) but instead as finding oneself in a liminal space, a fluid entity where the future is still out there waiting - a '*fuzzy zone'* (Matthews, 2003, p.165).

Another key discovery through this study was that rather than the deficit view of disengagement as becoming a social identity which is internalised by the young people and this becoming an extension of who they are (Howarth, 2004; Becker, 1963), the young people who participated in this study did the opposite, they instead externalised this viewpoint, assigning it always to the 'other'. In making sense of being disengaged from mainstream school, the participating young people drew on existing understandings of defined, fixed oppositional categories such as: being a pupil and becoming excluded from school; exhibiting disruptive or compliant behaviour; opposing or complying with rules; good and bad and being one person or another. They then used these understandings to describe other people whilst simultaneously situating themselves as between these polarised statuses: defining themselves through what they are not.

Through ascertaining their experience of disengagement, the young people are presenting themselves as educational liminads; residing in a space between their mainstream school and the place in which they are planning to move onto, whether that be further education or employment, but yet, they momentarily have the characteristics of neither. They are status-less, ‘being’ rather than ‘becoming’, existing in a space which, in the right setting, with careful support and attention, can provide the freedom to redefine and reconstruct themselves as necessary, the freedom for reinvention.

7.2 Reflections on and limitations of the research process

The purpose of the study was not to come up with an verifiable list of strategies to understand and engage young people who have become disengaged from education that is applicable to all young people and educators in all cultures and teaching contexts. Instead, the purpose of the study was to ‘*provide better understanding and illuminate the process’* (Hart, 1998, p. 47) of how young people and educators in alternative education provision make sense of what being disengaged from mainstream school means to them and how it affects their identity as future learners. This has been achieved through an in-depth exploration of the experience of a sizeable number of research participants. The case study findings have been aligned with existing theories and knowledge (Riessman, 2007; Yin, 2009) in order that some of the principles identified could be potentially applied across a larger cohort within the alternative education sector. In this way, the findings of this thesis concur with Newberry’s (2008) observation that:

> *information at micro-level contains foundational elements of humanity that can be applied globally.* (p. 164).

One limitation of the research process was the decision made not to take into account in any great detail the impact of external factors which contribute to disengagement, such as family background and wider societal influences. These all obviously played a part, to a lesser or greater degree, in the lives of all of the young people who participated in the study and would inevitably have influenced the effect to which, they felt becoming disengaged had impacted on their construction of their identity as learners. However, to have extended the scope of the study to this level would have taken it outside of the parameters of the requirements for a thesis of this size.

7.3 Recommendations for future research

The limitations as outlined above provide in themselves indicators for gaps in the research which future researchers may want to address. Another area that demands in depth, longitudinal research is that around the exploration of strategies to work with young people who have become disengaged from school which are experimenting with creative pedagogies and approaches. These approaches could perhaps be more akin to therapeutic techniques rather than those which recreate the incessant pursuit of accredited qualifications. This area has been focused on to a lesser extent within the reach of this study but there remains further scope to develop this research on a deeper level with a view to developing a sustainable model of practice which best meets the needs of those for whom school has become untenable.

Another area for future scrutiny could be that focusing solely on the experience of educators working in alternative education settings. Current research in this area is currently sporadic and tends to be limited to a few lines within larger young person and school/alternative setting focused studies (see Mills and McGregor, 2013; Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016; Thomson and Russell, 2009). Further study relating to the reasons why educators choose to work in these settings along with the challenges and specific issues they face would be useful in developing and enhancing elements of teacher education programmes, where there is currently a lack of focus on alternative education, which could best support and indeed promote this rewarding and vital area of education to prospective educators.

7.4 Implications for education and practice

The findings generated from this study have indicated that if the following areas were to be acknowledged and developed then we would be closer to establishing a comprehensive model of good practice for the future of alternative education for young people who have become disengaged from mainstream school.

- Alternative education needs to embrace its capacity to offer young people the freedom to be an educational liminad and to see itself as a space between rather than a space instead of. To do this, it needs to establish itself as a transformational, therapeutic intervention which provides the capacity for freedom and reinvention for the young people, rather than presenting as a carbon copy of the schooling experience from which the young person has already become disengaged from.

- Alternative education needs to move away from a ‘holding pen’ mentality which is currently leaving young people with a sense of fluidity, contradiction, ambiguity and drift and instead embrace its ability to be betwixt mainstream school and tertiary education or the world of work, to see this space as a place of exploration and renewal.

- There needs to be an emphasis on involving young peoplein the choice/decision making processes around disengagement. Young people need to own this process in order to then fully identify and engage with the opportunities available to them.

- Attention needs to be afforded to the educators working within the alternative education sector. Their perception of themselves as being disengaged from the mainstream needs to be transformed, being afforded similar status, training, recognition and professional development opportunities as that proffered to the mainstream teaching profession.

7.5 Summary

To return once again to the imagery introduced at the beginning of this thesis, perhaps it should be that it is the ‘*mothership*’ of mainstream school that should be acting as an incubus, from which those who wish to jump ship or for whom the ship is no longer the best place for them to be, may do so, with tendrils of support to sustain and nourish them on their journey. That alternative education exists as it does, formed of many separate entities, wholly disconnected from the mainstream school, does not necessarily best meet the needs of the young people of whom it serves.

This study certainly does not negate the need for alternative education and as Giroux (2014) points out, the action to engage the disengaged does not need to happen within the confines of the school and that perhaps, as shown in this study, disengagement from school might not mean to be disengaged everywhere. He calls for a critical, transformative education for these young people:

> *Education happens everywhere – it needs to be reclaimed...it's not about methods – it's about educating people to enhance their own sense of critique, their critical imagination...in order to act otherwise they need to think otherwise.*(p.146)

And is it worth being reminded that disengagement means not only "*the action or process of withdrawing from involvement in an activity, situation, or group*' but also refers to '*the process of becoming released*' (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2017).

The implication of the above definition may be that alternative education sector needs to define itself fully as an either/or status. It needs to confirm that it exists either as an appendage to the mainstream or as an alternative to the mainstream. Those settings which are housed between, in a grey, no-man's land, responding to the standardised, test driven demands of mainstream are not always meeting the needs of the most 'in-need' young people. These young people need to be busied in their work of education and not to be merely held in a waiting place. It is vital that these educational liminads are attended to, that the spaces they engage with are healing spaces, therapeutic and transformational. That said, there are settings which, as shown through this study, whilst perhaps not meeting the quota of accredited outcomes so desired by our society, where everything measurable needs to be measured, are filling our young people with different skills and knowledge. Settings where the young people are learning through exploration and experiencing, sometimes for the first time, pockets of freedom within which to reinvent and transform themselves, transformations which transfer into hope for the future, theirs and ours.

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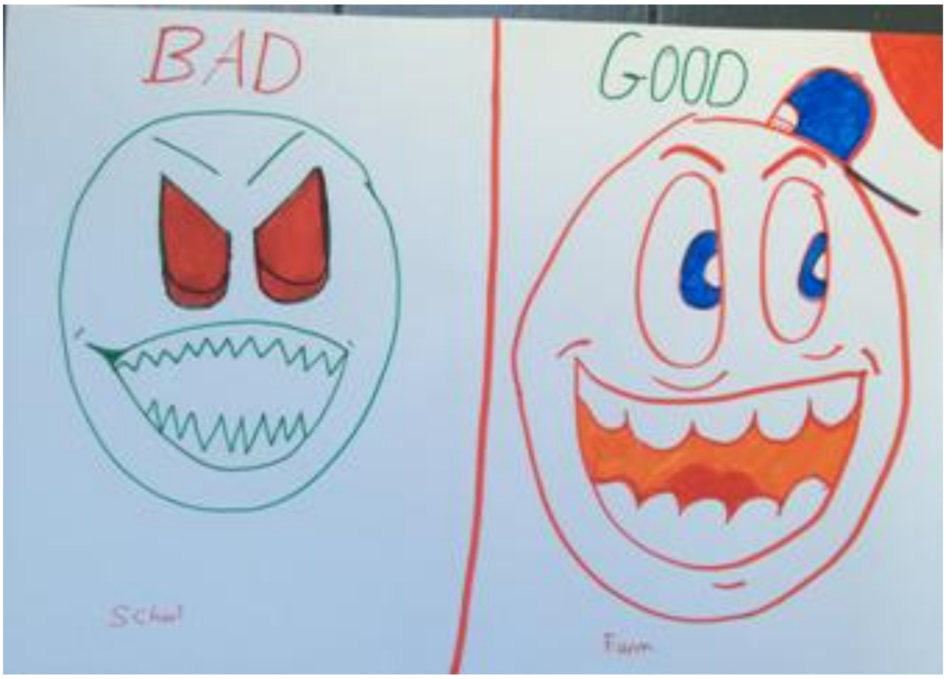
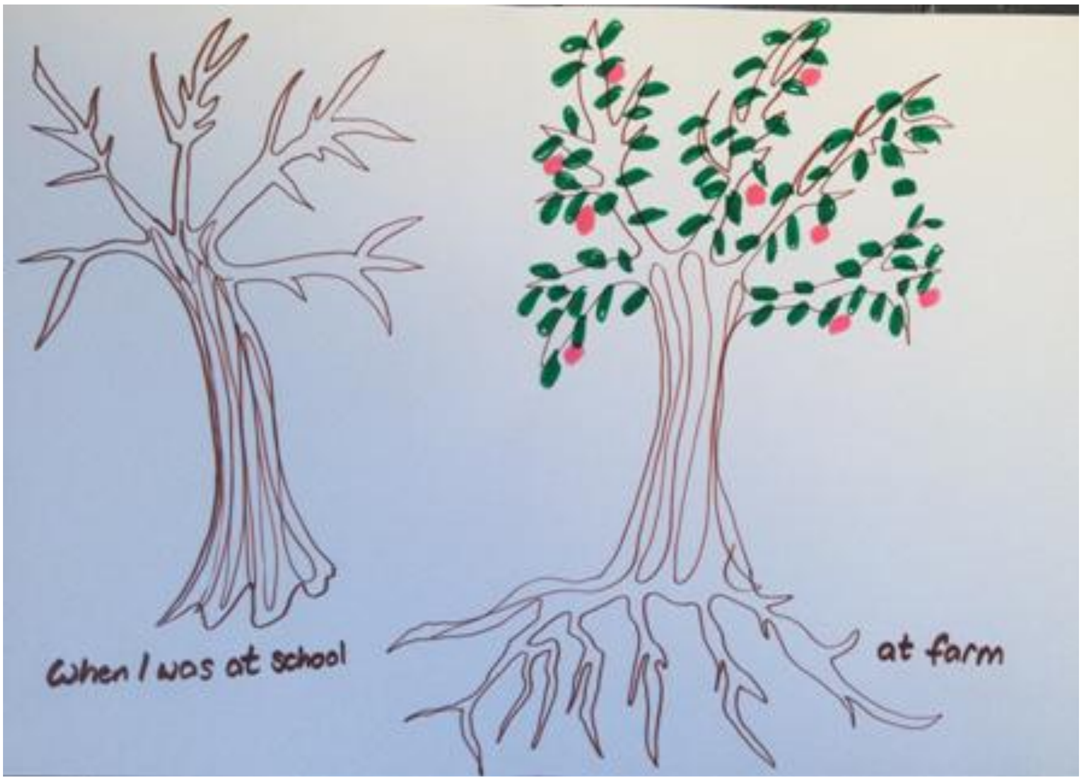
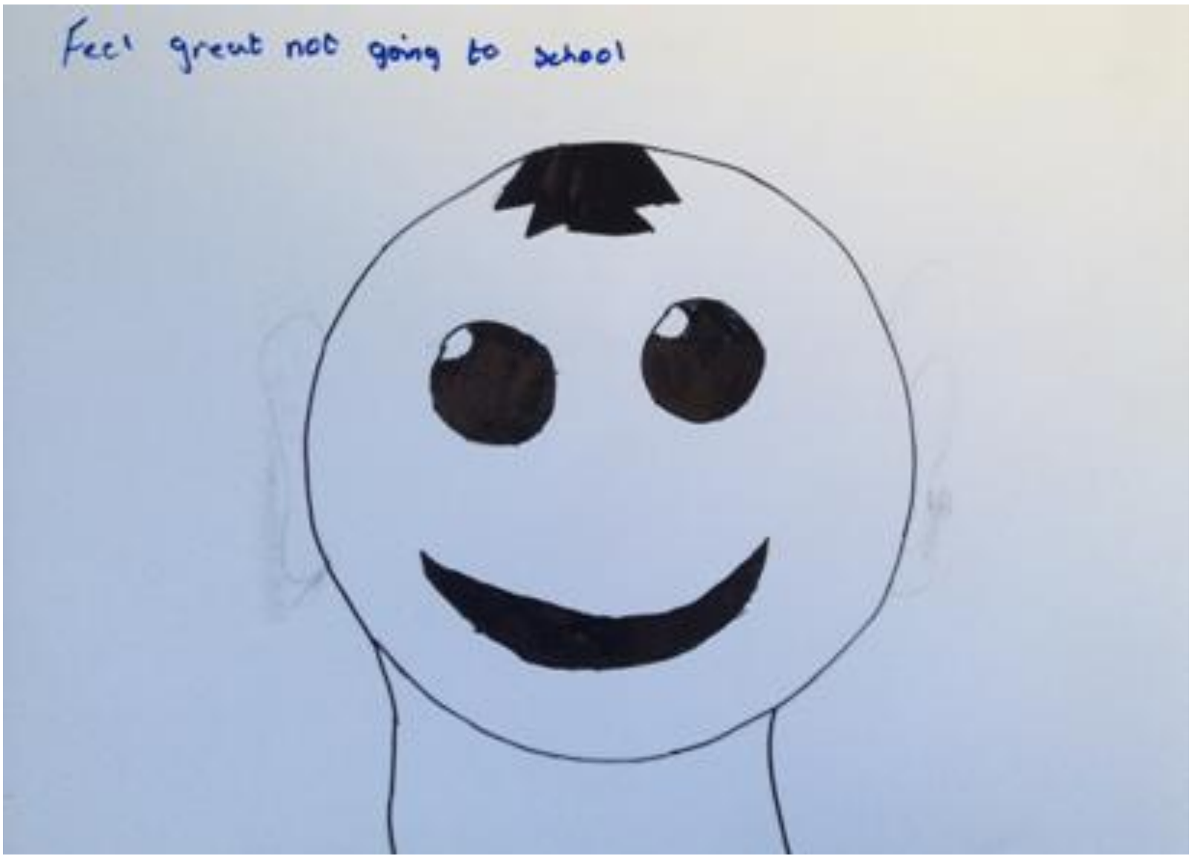
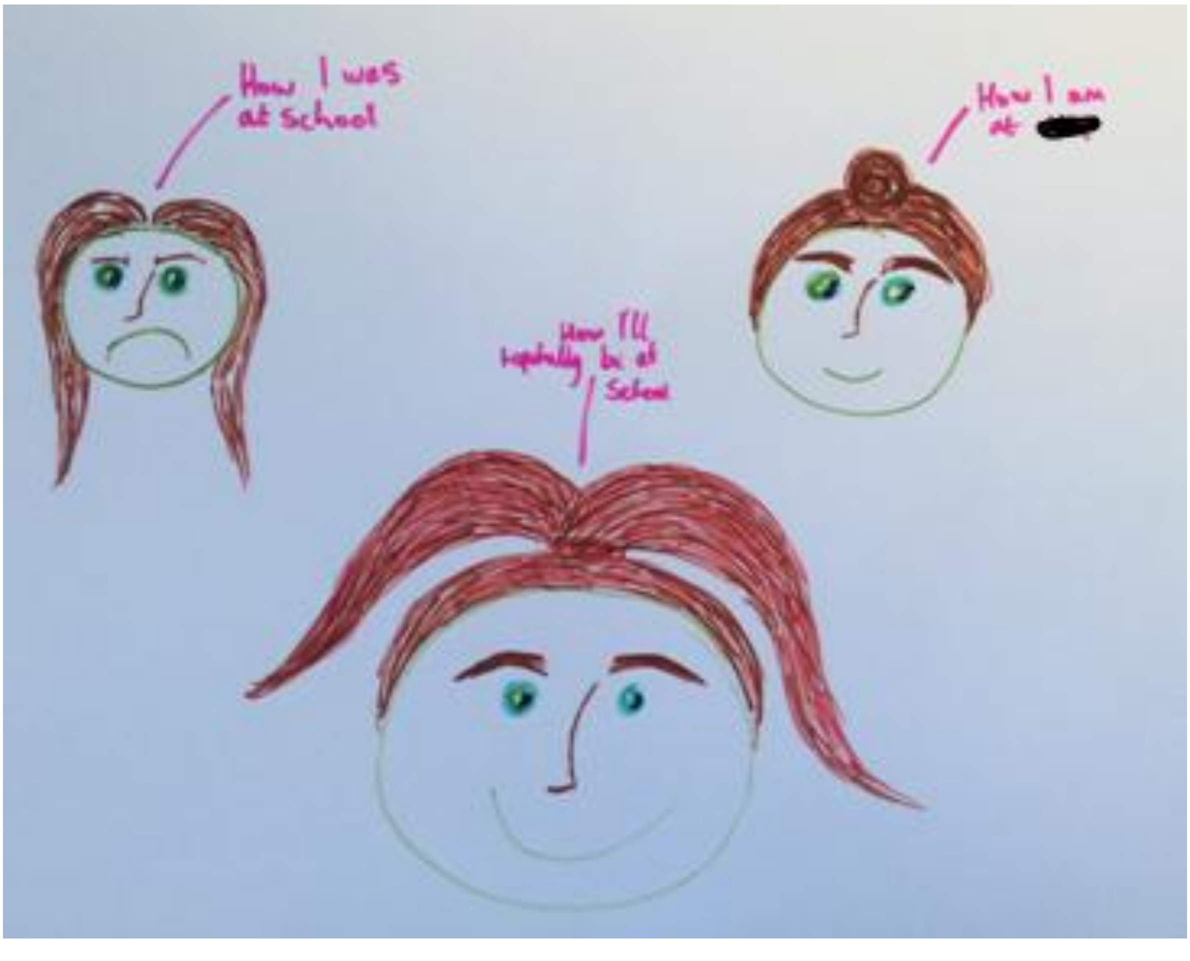
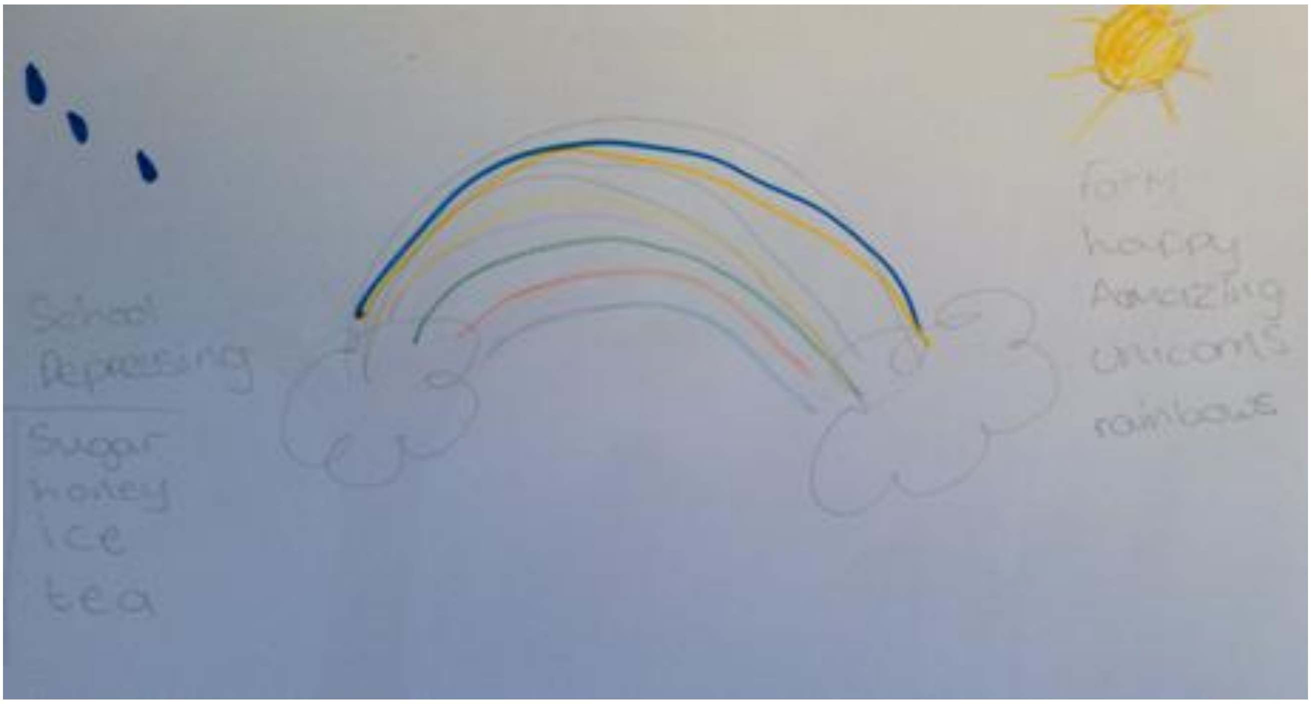
Images from participatory research activities

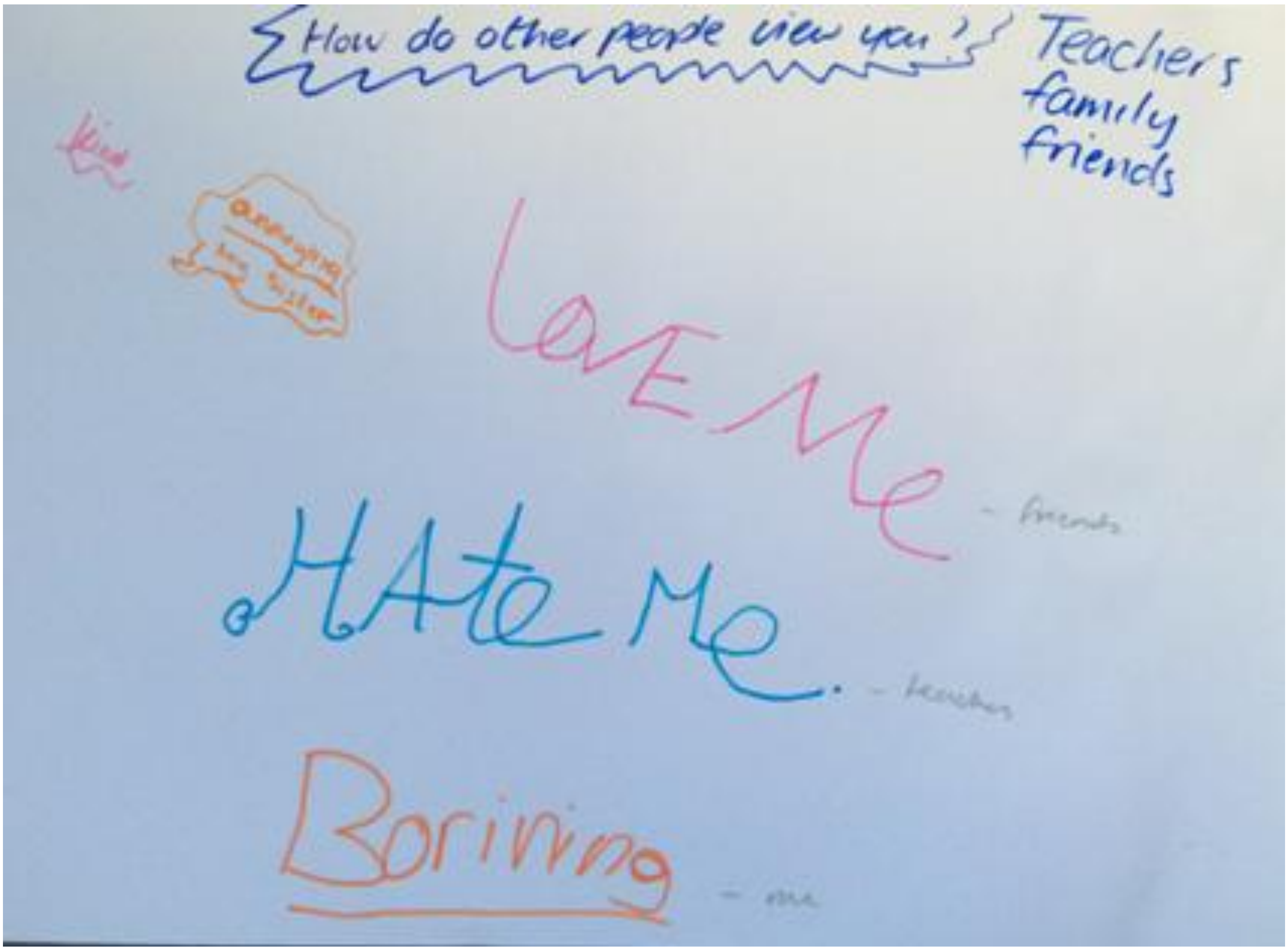

BAD
GOOD
School
Farm

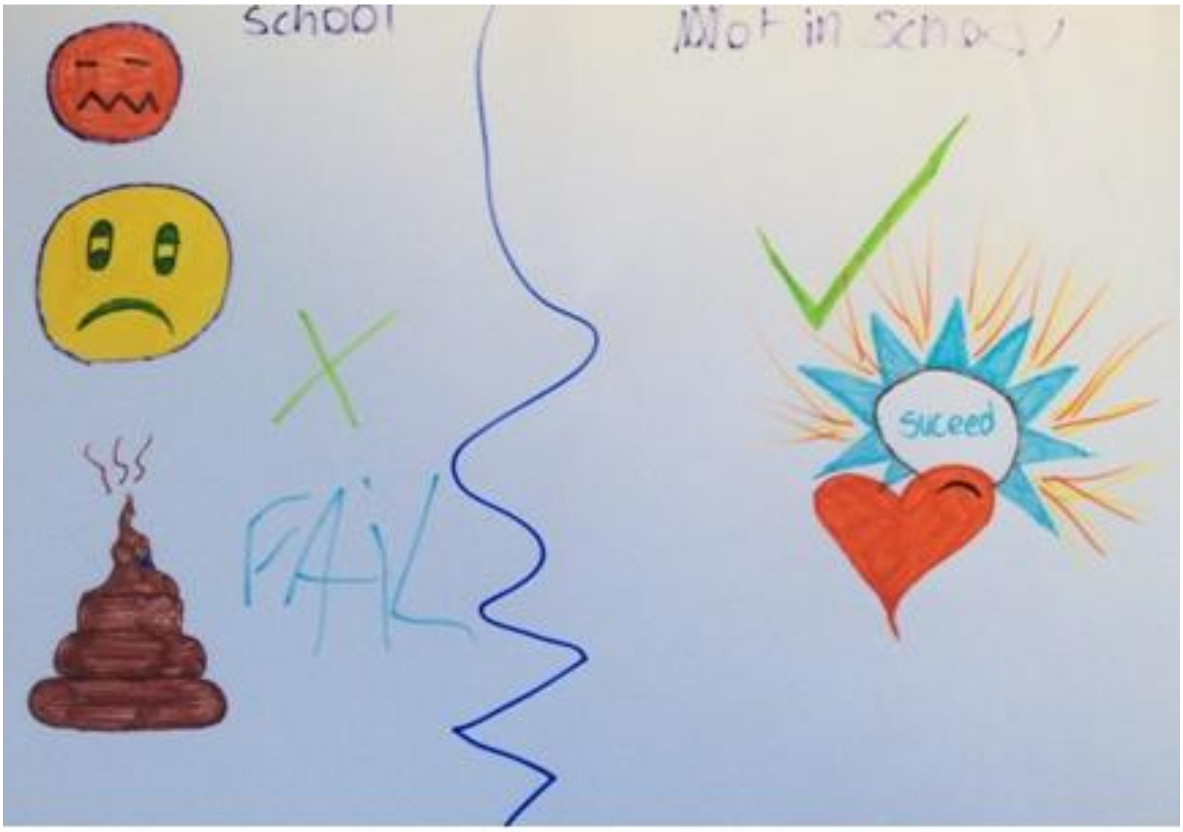

When I was at school
at farm


Feel great not going to school

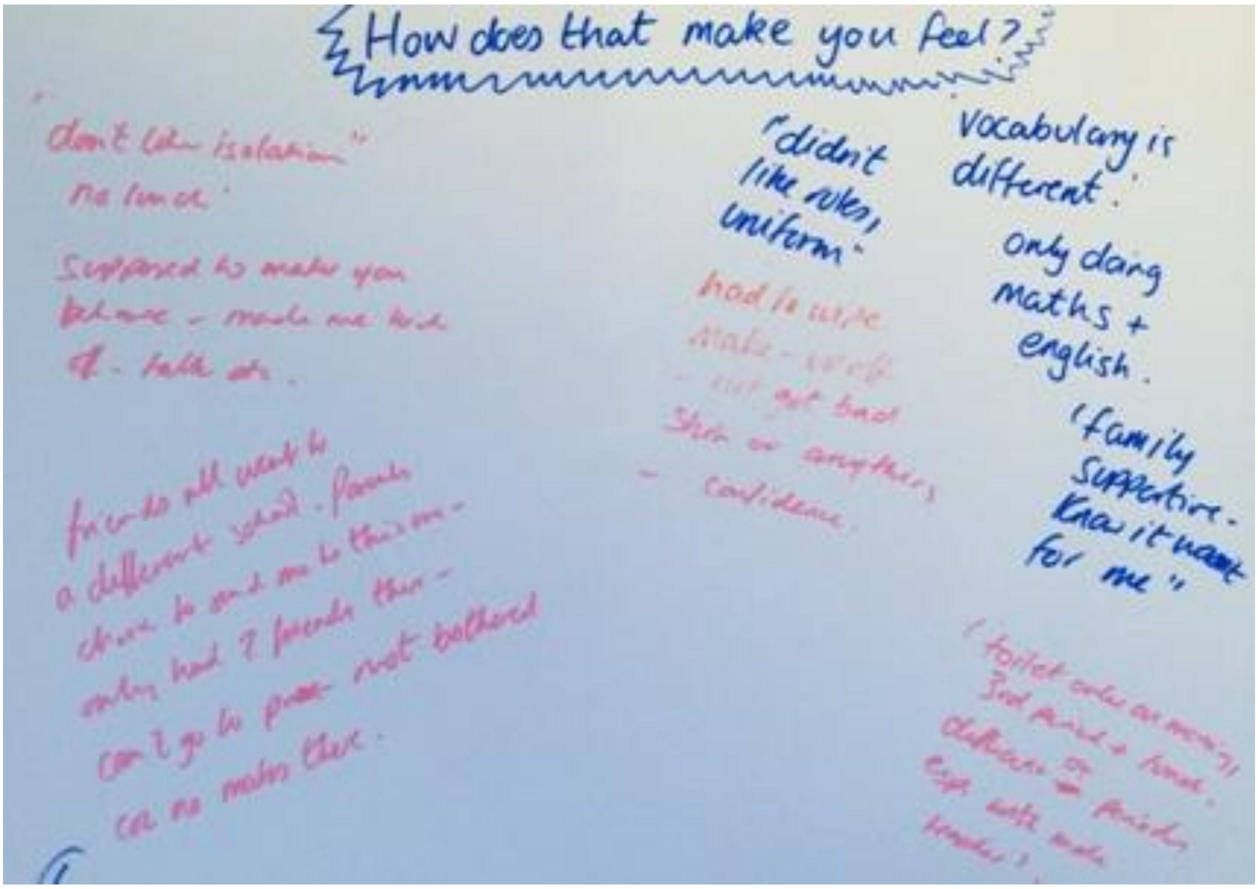

How I was at school
How I am at [redacted]
How I'll hopefully be at school


School
Depressing
Sugar
honey
ice
tea
farm
happy
Amazing
unicorns
rainbows


How do other people view you?
Teachers
family
friends
Kind
annoying
big sister
LovE Me
- friends
HAte Me.
- teachers
Boriring
- me


School
Not in School
FAIL
suceed

SchOOL
.Boring
.Teachers Annoying
.Dont get a chace what you want to do.
FARM
.More Active
.Not forced to do anything
.More [illegible]



How does that make you feel?

"don't like isolation"

"no lunch"

Supposed to make you behave – made me kick off

friends all went to a different school. Parents chose to send me to this one – only had 2 friends then – can't go to prom – not bothered cos no mates there.

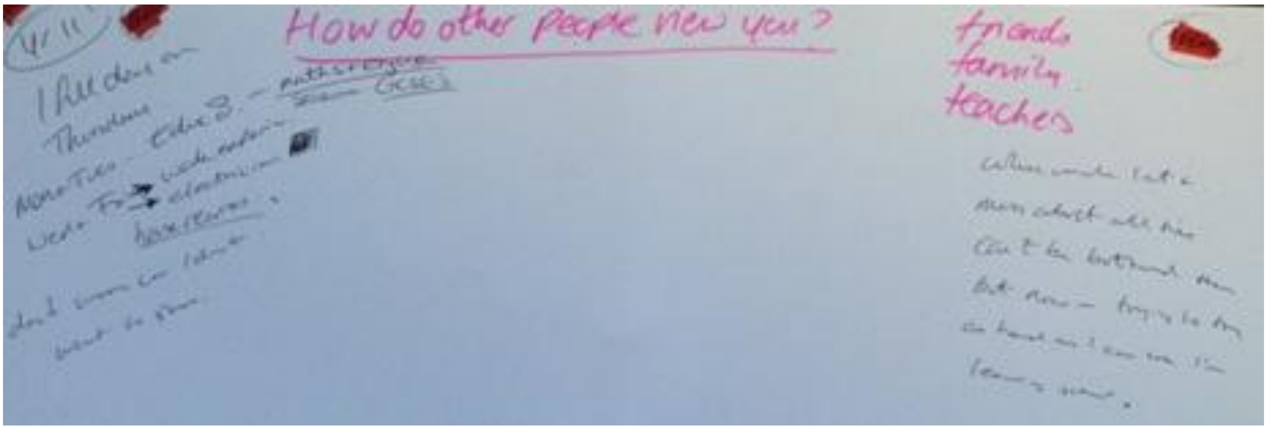
"didn't like rules, uniform"

had to wipe make-up off – not got bad skin or anything – confidence

Vocabulary is different.

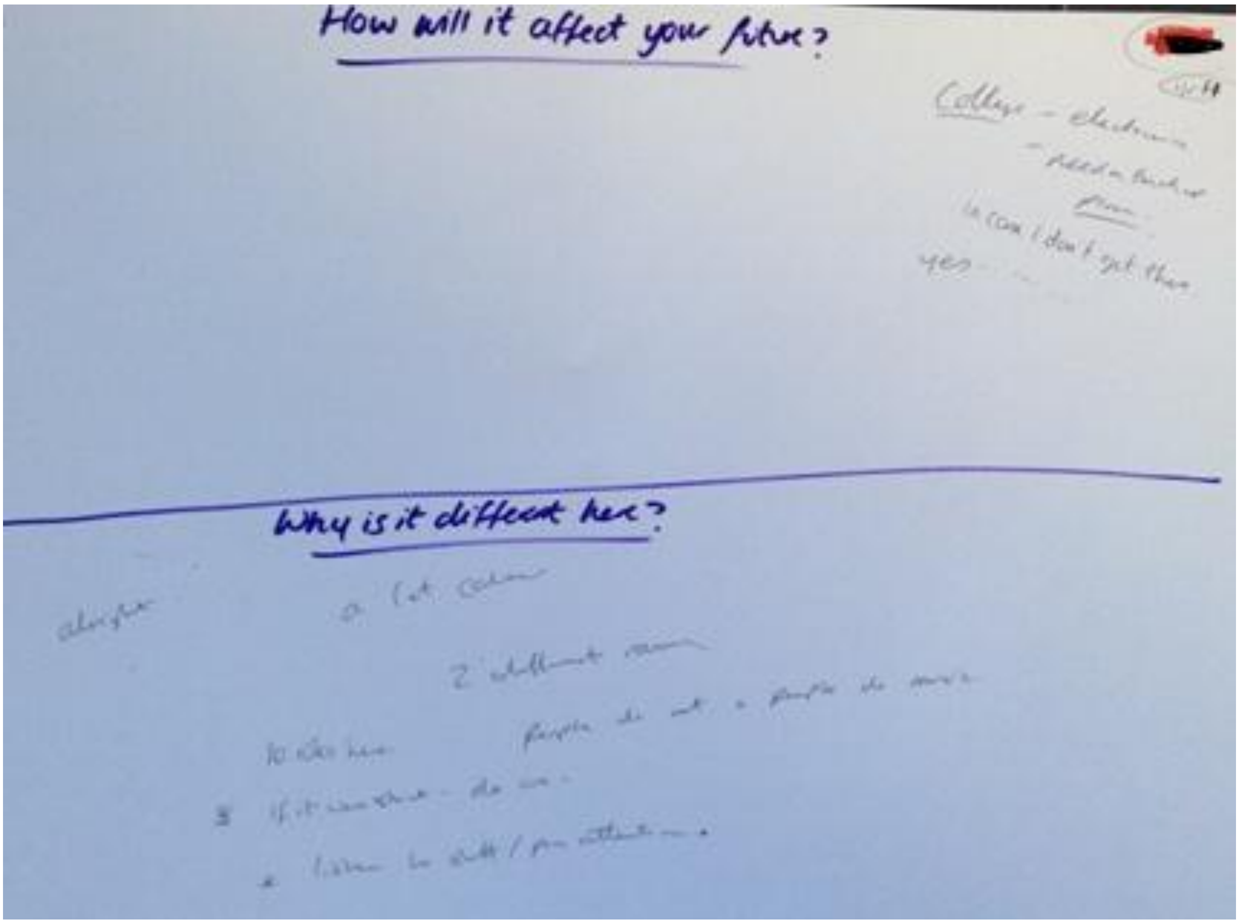
Only doing maths + english.

'family supportive. Know it wasn't for me"



How do other people view you?

friends
family
teachers



How will it affect your future?

[redacted]

College – electronics

– Need a back up plan

In case I don't get there

yes...

Why is it different here?

[illegible]

a lot calmer

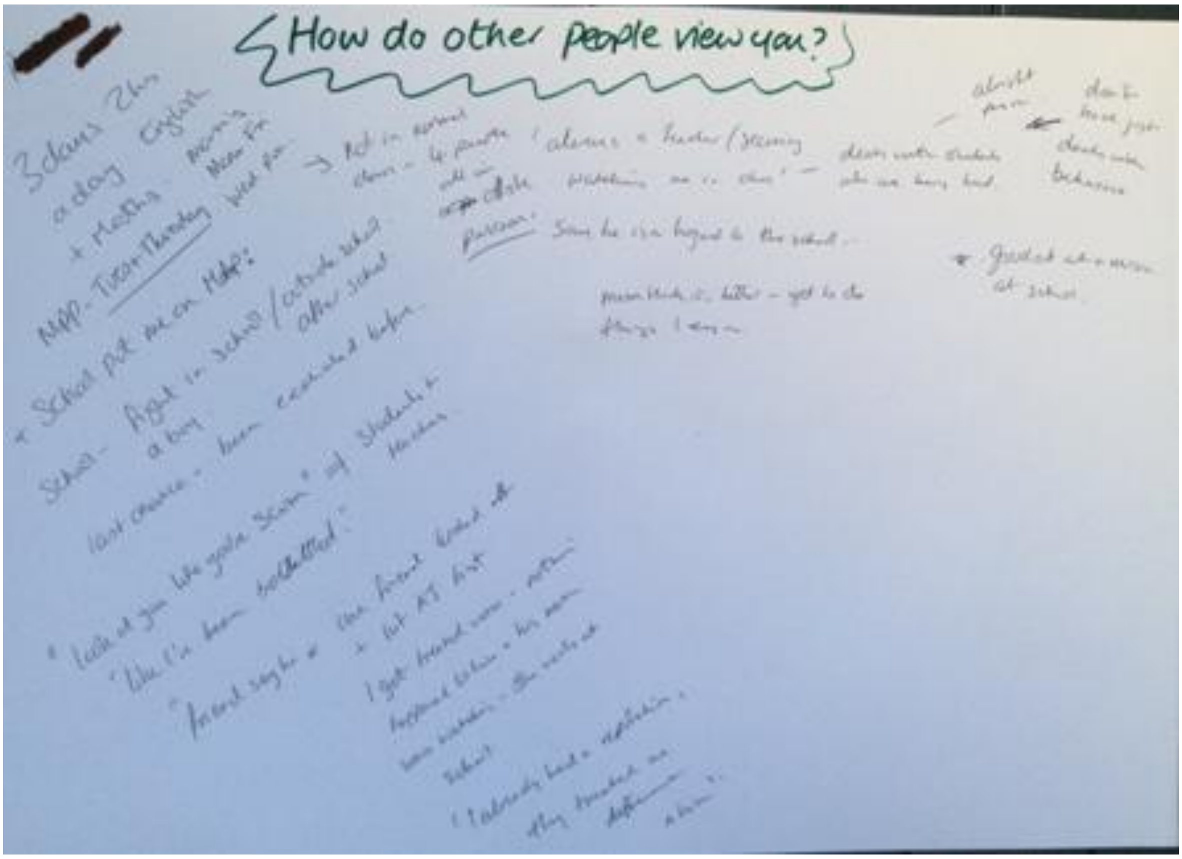
2 different rooms

10 kids here

people do not [illegible] people do more

If it was there – do [illegible]

Listen to staff / pay attention...



[redacted]

How do other people view you?

3 days 2hrs a day English + Maths [illegible] Mon Fri

MAP – Tues Thursday [illegible]

+ School put me on MAP:

School – fight in school / outside school [illegible] a boy other school

last chance – been excluded before

"Look at you like you're scum" of students + teachers

"Like I've been [illegible]"

"friend says [illegible] the front [illegible] + [illegible] AT first

I got [illegible] school

I already had a [illegible] they treated me differently [illegible]

→ Act in normal class – [illegible] 'always a [illegible] / [illegible] watching me in class' – deals with students who are being bad

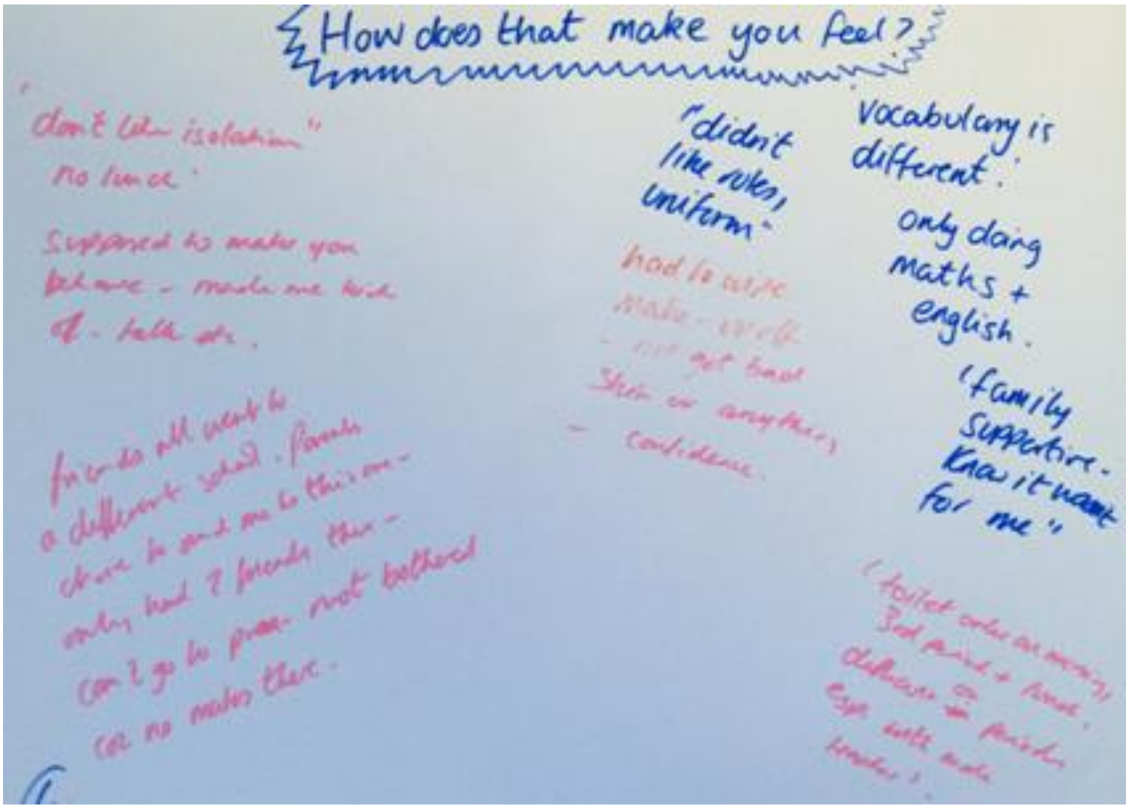
[illegible] person. Since he's been [illegible] to the school...

[illegible] thinks it's better – got to do things I enjoy

[illegible] person

don't have just deals with behaviour

* Quiet [illegible] at school.



How does that make you feel?

"don't like isolation"

no lunch"

Supposed to make you behave - made me kind of - talk etc.

friends all went to a different school. Parents [illegible] only had 2 friends there - [illegible] not bothered [illegible]

"didn't like rules, uniform"

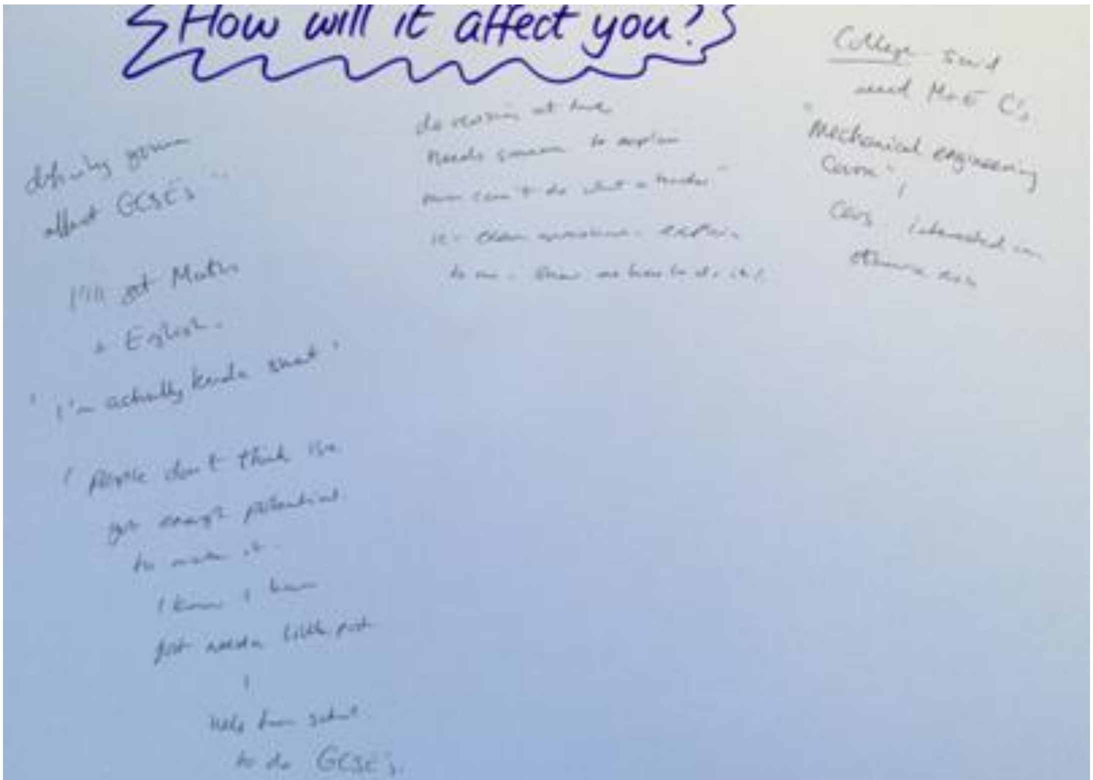
had to [illegible] [illegible] confidence.

Vocabulary is different.

only doing maths + english.

"family supportive. Know it wasn't for me"

[illegible]



How will it affect you?

definitely gonna affect GCSE's..

I'll get Maths + English.

"I'm actually kinda smart"

"people don't think I've got enough potential to make it.

I know I have just need a little push

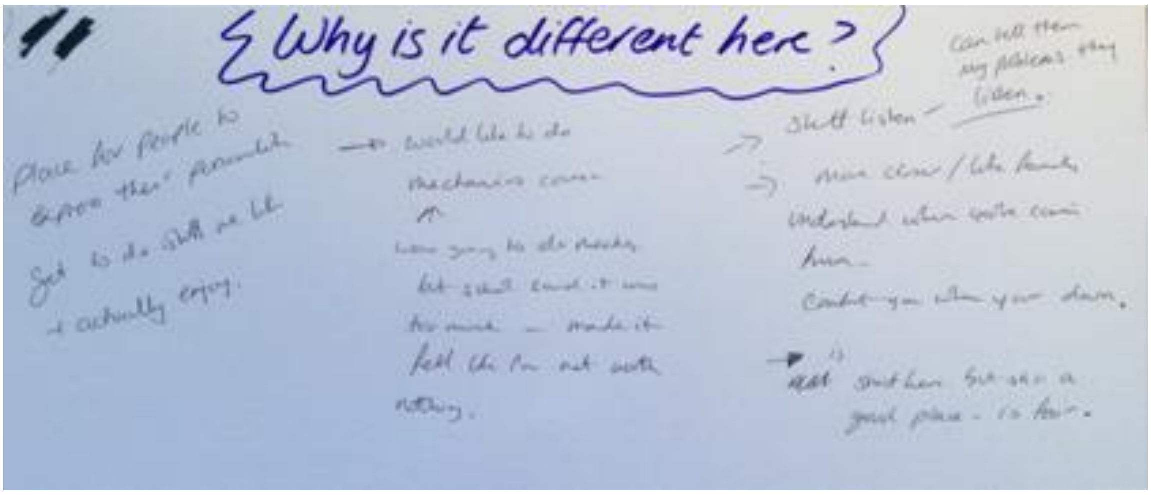
help from school to do GCSE's.

[illegible]

College said need Maths C's

"Mechanical engineering course"

Cars interested in [illegible]



Why is it different here?

Place for people to express their personality

Get to do stuff we like + actually enjoy.

→ would like to do mechanics course

↑

were going to do mechanics but school cancel it [illegible] — made it feel like I'm not worth nothing.

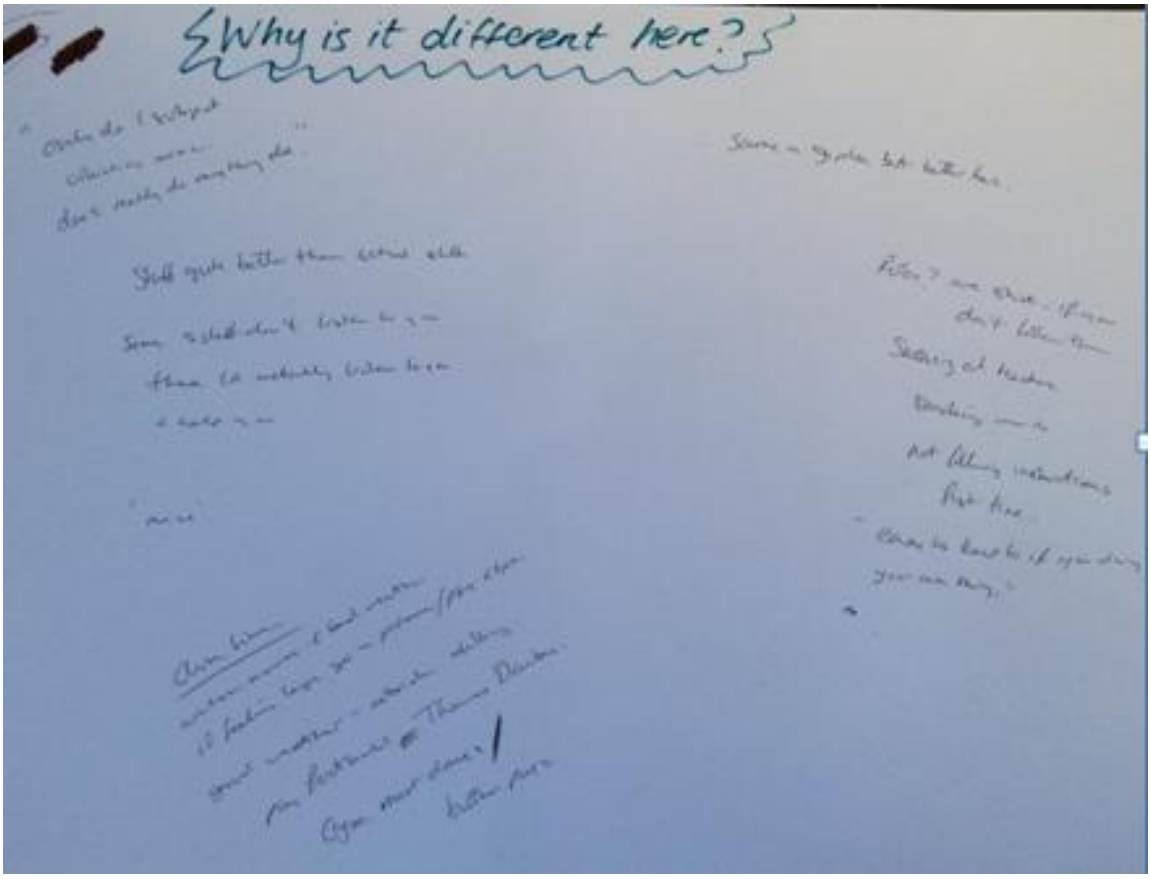
Staff listen – can tell them my problems they listen.

→ more close / like family

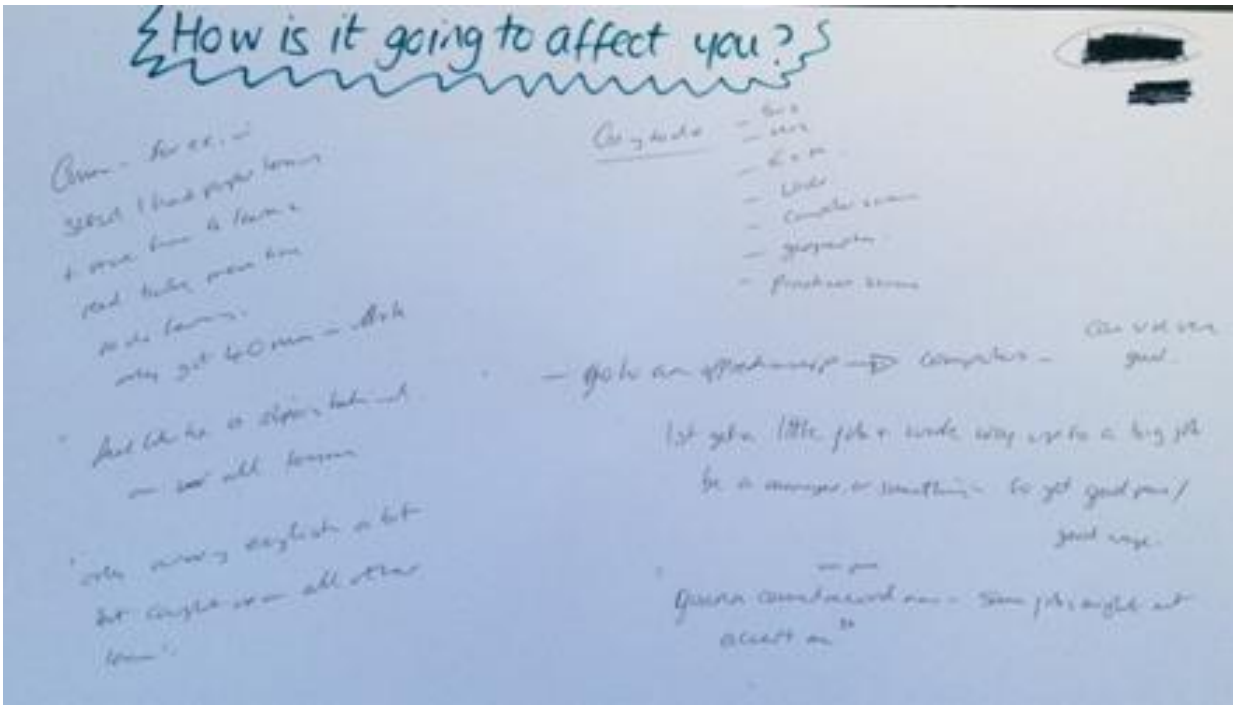
Understand where you're coming from.

Comfort you when you're down.

→ " [illegible] staff here [illegible] a good place – to learn.

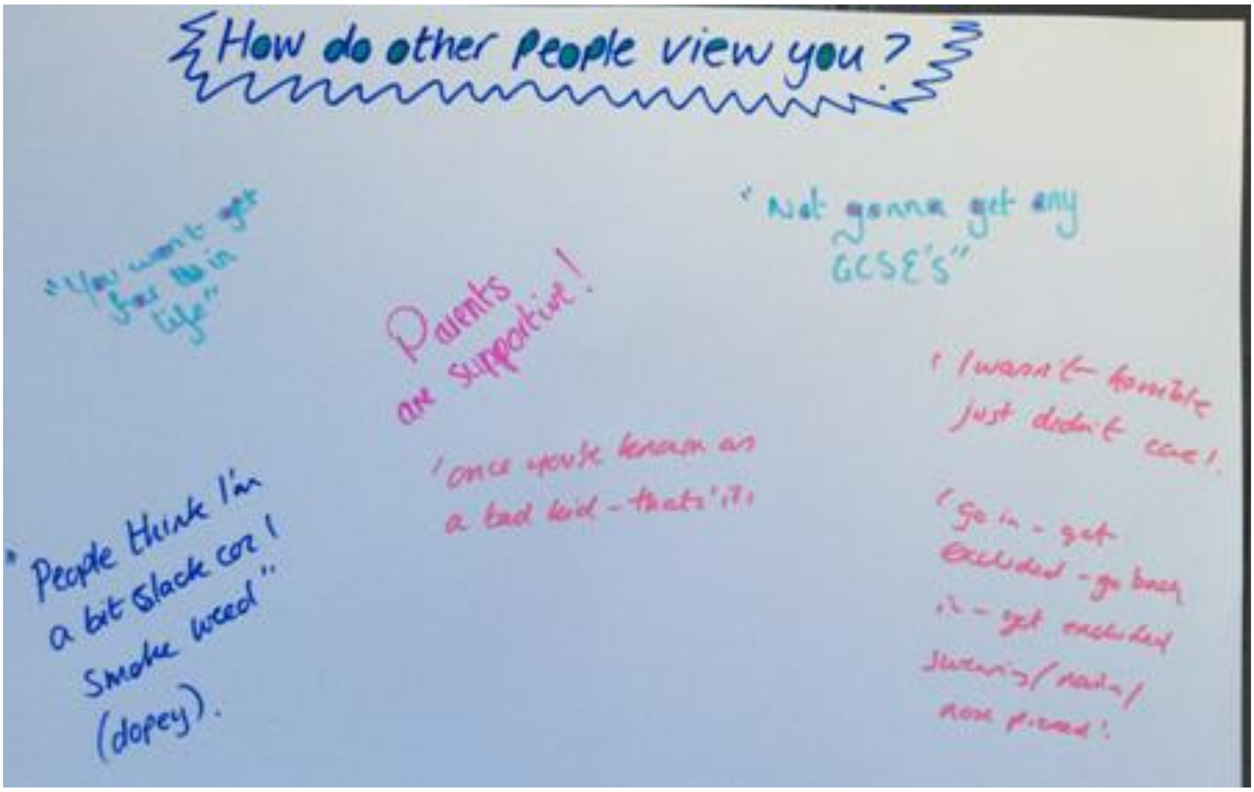


Why is it different here?


How is it going to affect you?

[redacted]

[redacted]


How do other people view you?

"You won't get far in life"

"Not gonna get any GCSE's"

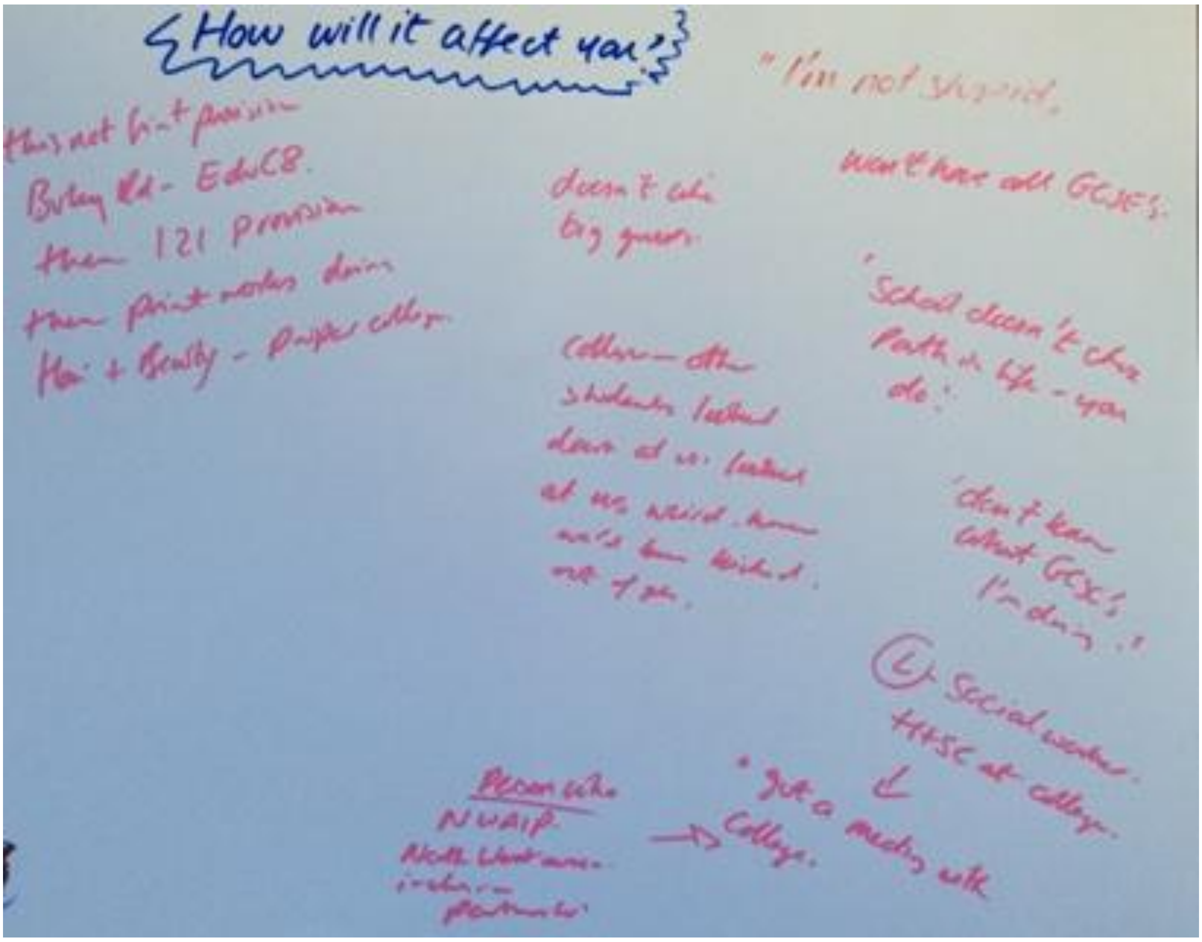
Parents are supportive!

'once you're known as a bad kid – that's it'

'I wasn't horrible just didn't care!

'Go in – get excluded – go back in – get excluded swearing/ [illegible]/ nose pierced'!

"People think I'm a bit slack coz I smoke weed" (dopey).



How will it affect you?

This not first provision
Burley Rd - EduC8.
then 121 provision
then Print works doing
Hair + Beauty - proper college.

doesn't ask
big ques.

College - other
students looked
down at us, looked
at us weird. how
we'd been kicked
out of [illegible].

Person who
NWAIP
North West area
inclusion
partnership
→ College.

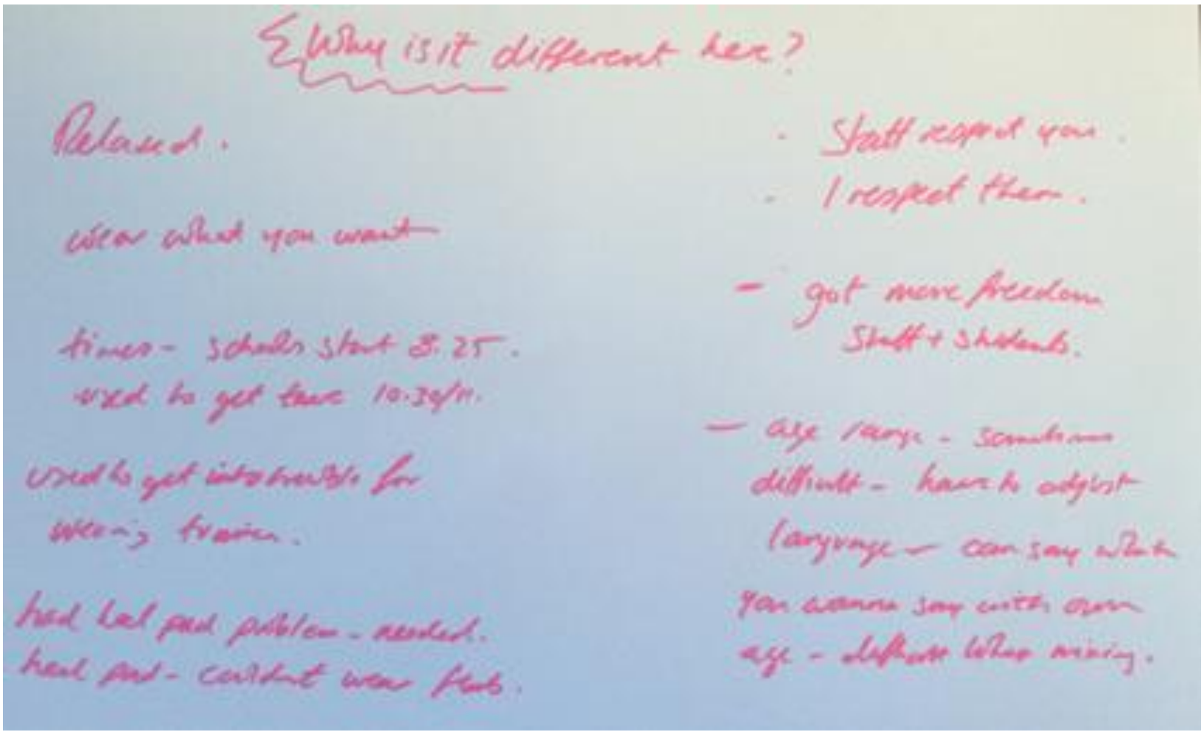
"I'm not stupid."

won't have all GCSEs.

"School doesn't chose
Path in life - you
do".

"don't know
what GCSEs
I'm doing."

(L) Social worker.
H+SC at college.
↓
"got a meeting with
College.



Why is it different here?

Relaxed.

wear what you want

times - schools start 8.25.
used to get here 10.30/11.

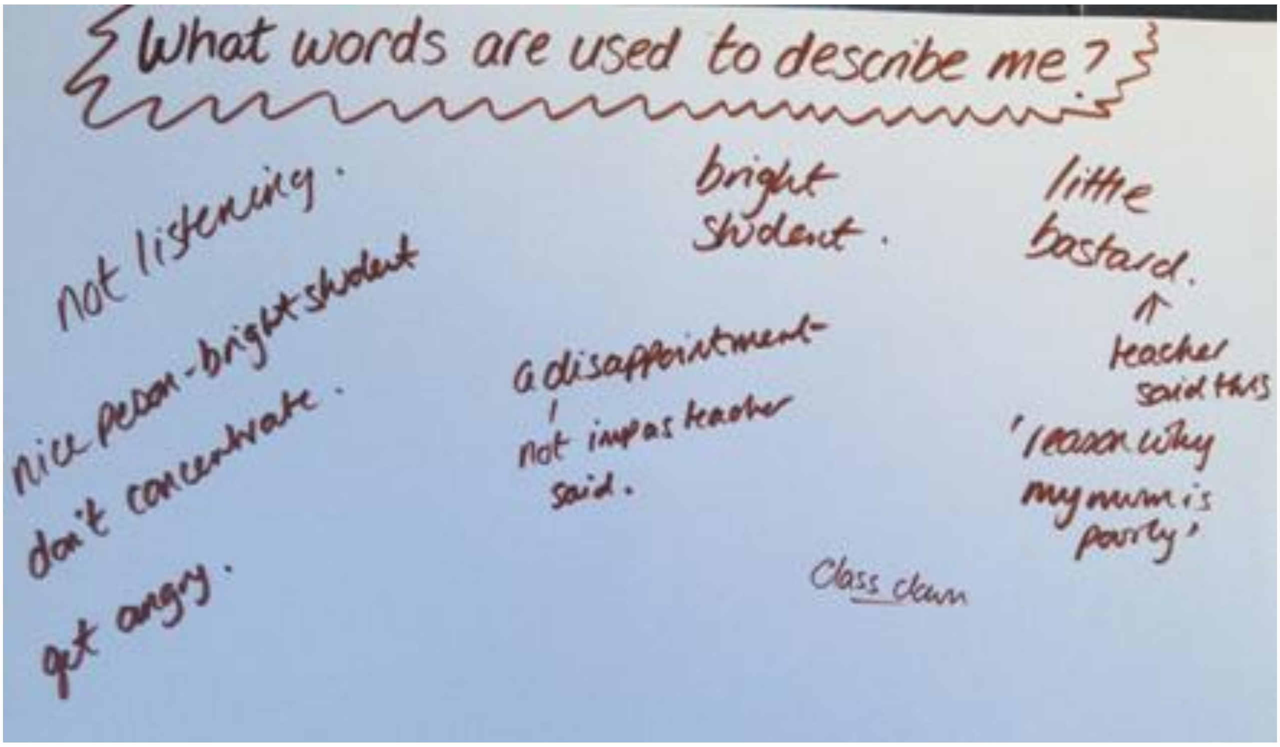
used to get into trouble for
wearing trainers.

had bad pad problem - needed.
heel pad - couldn't wear flats.

- Staff respect you.
- I respect them.

- got more freedom
Staff + students.

- age range - sometimes
difficult - have to adjust
language - can say what
you wanna say with own
age - different when mixing.



What words are used to describe me?

not listening.

nice person - bright student

don't concentrate.

get angry.

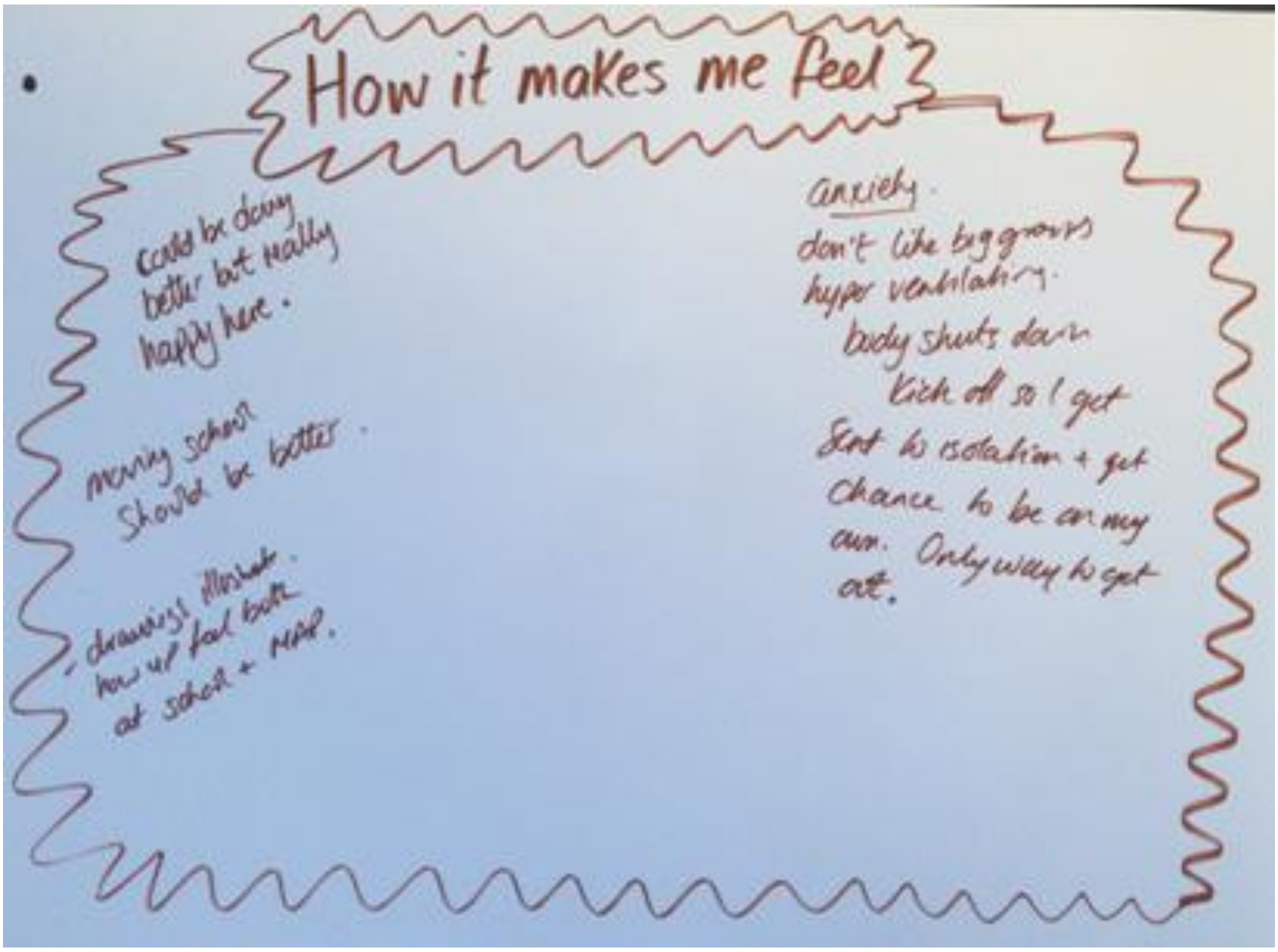
bright student.

a disappointment ! not impas teacher said.

Class clown

little bastard. ↑ teacher said this

'reason why my mum is poorly'



How it makes me feel

Could be doing better but really happy here.

moving school should be better.

- drawings illustrate how we feel both at school + NAP.

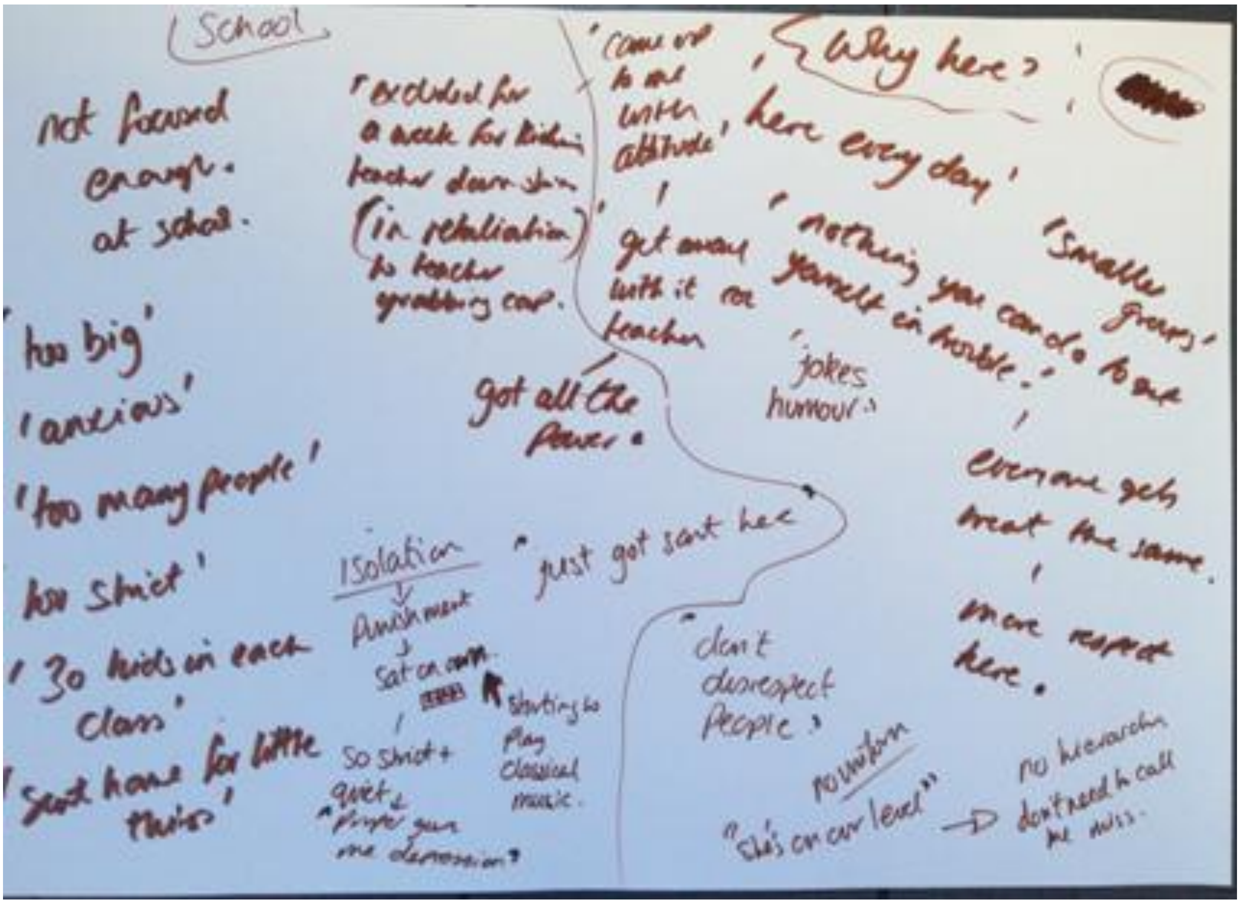
anxiety.

don't like big groups

hyper ventilating.

body shuts down

kick off so I get sent to isolation + get chance to be on my own. Only way to get out.



(School)

not focused enough at school.

'too big'

'anxious'

'too many people'

'too strict'

'30 kids in each class'

'sent home for little things'

'Excluded for a week for kicking teacher down stairs' (in retaliation) to teacher grabbing coat.

'come over to me with attitude'

'get away with it cos teacher got all the power.

Isolation
↓
Punishment
↓
Sat on own [redacted]
So strict + quiet + "Purple gave me depression"

Starting to play classical music.

"just got sent here"

(Why here?)

'[redacted]' here every day'

'nothing you can do to get yourself in trouble.'

'Smaller groups'

'jokes humour'

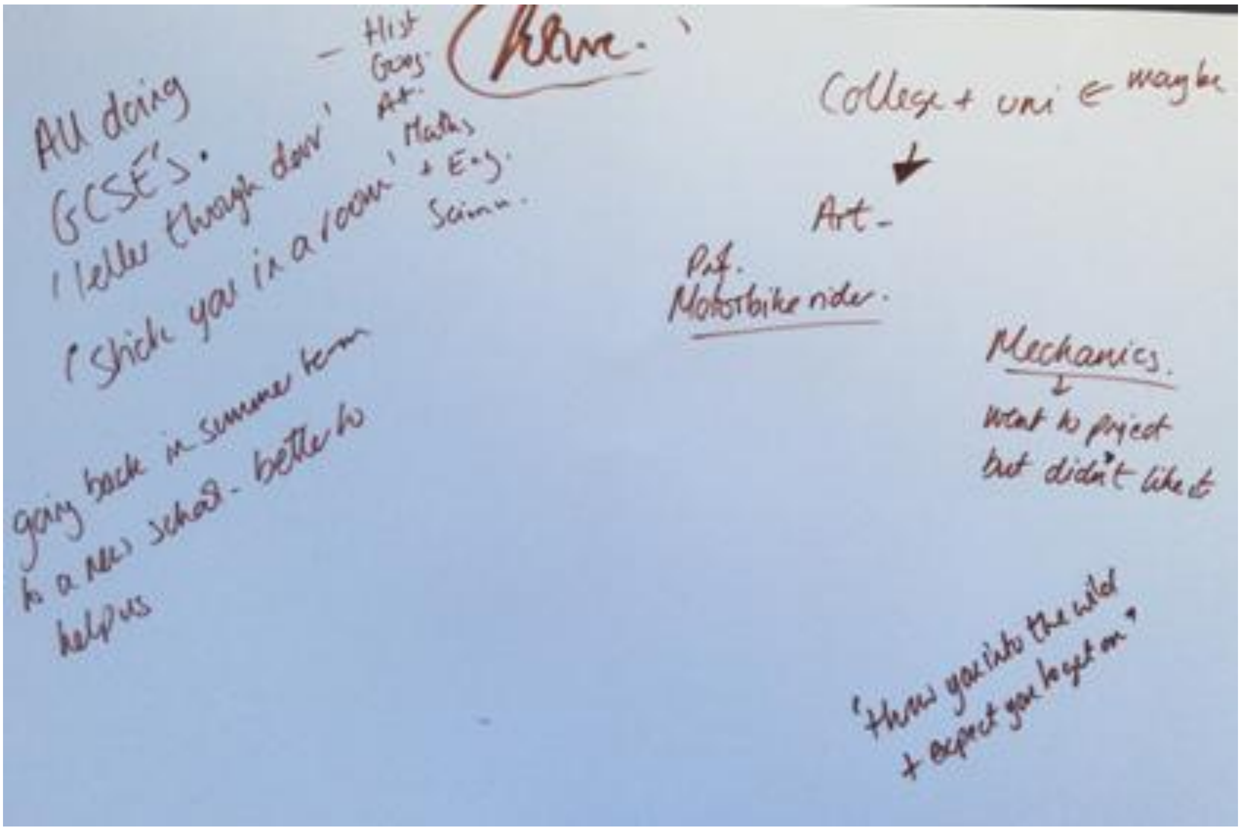
'don't disrespect people'

no uniform

"she's on our level" → no hierarchy don't need to call her miss.

'Everyone gets treat the same.'

more respect here.



(Future.)

All doing GCSE's.

– Hist
Geog
Art
Maths
+ Eng.
Science.

'letter through door'

'stick you in a room'

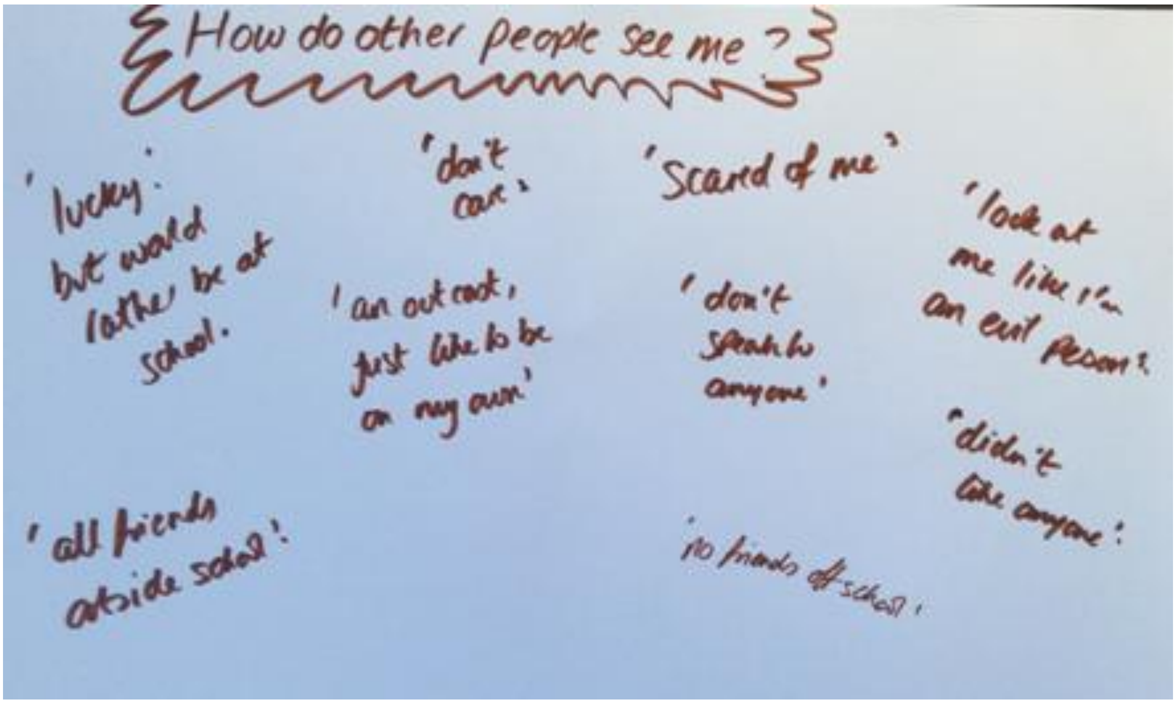
going back in summer term to a new school - better to help us

College + uni ← maybe
↓
Art.

P.T.
Motorbike rider.

Mechanics.
↓
went to project but didn't like it

'throw you into the wild + expect you to get on'



How do other people see me?

'lucky.' but would rather be at school.

'don't care.'

'Scared of me'

'look at me like I'm an evil person'.

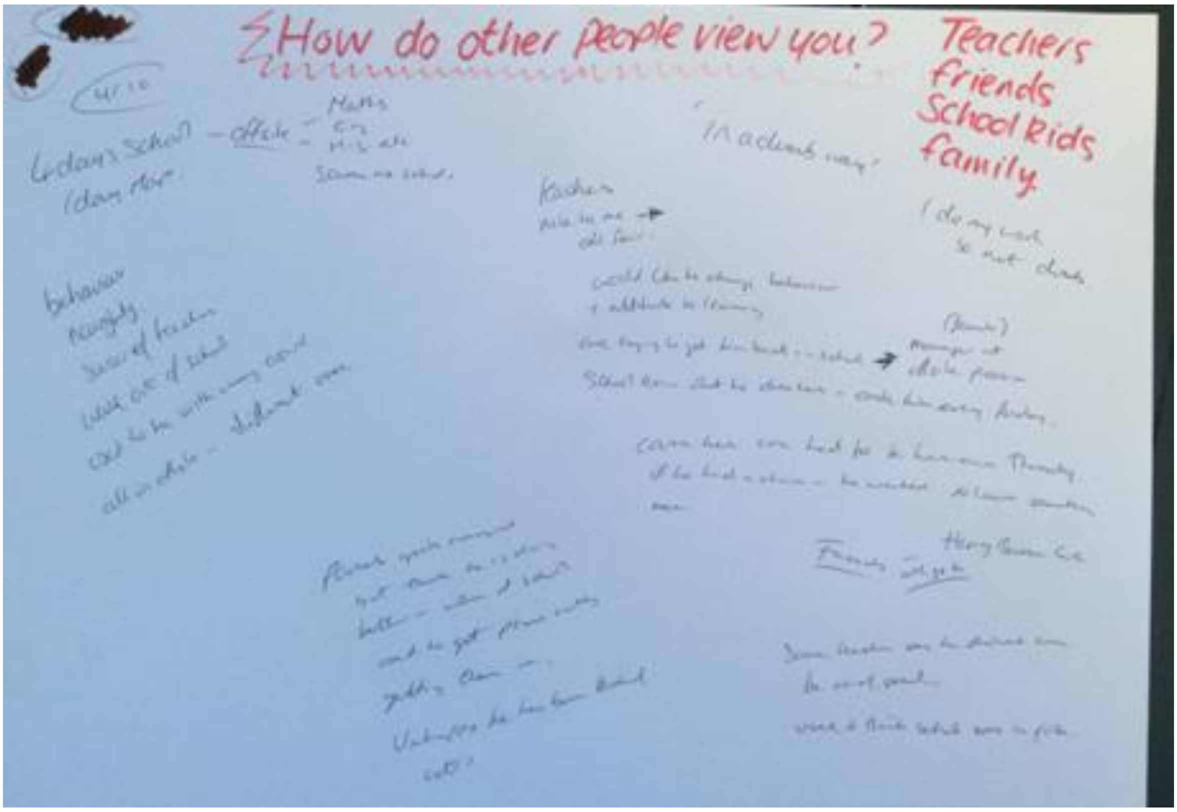
'I am an outcast, just like to be on my own'

'don't speak to anyone'

'didn't like anyone'.

'all friends outside school'.

'no friends at school'.



[redacted]

[redacted]

How do other people view you?

Teachers
friends
School kids
family

Maths

behaviour
naughty

Appendix 2

Young People's Informal Interviews

INTERVIEW GUIDE AND QUESTIONS (Interviews will last roughly 1 hour)

Discussion Guide

1. Interview Guide read/provided to participant. (what the interview will consist of, what I will do with their responses)
2. Information letter provided for participant to read (or me to read to the participant) – limits of confidentiality explained (i.e. child abuse and schedule 1 offences).
3. Participant shown the questions which will be asked if required.
4. Consent form given to the participant to read (or I will read to them) and sign if happy to go ahead.
5. Brief explanation of the recording equipment which is to be used
7. Explain to participant that they can stop recording at any time, show them how to stop the recorder if they feel the need
8. Discuss and agree what participant's code name is to be
9. Ask if there are any questions before we start
10. Recorder switched on: I confirm the date, location and the participant's code name and age

Main Subject Areas

- What is "disengagement from education"
- Why young people become disengaged?
- Personal experiences
- What other people think about young people who are disengaged from education – adults, media, government etc
- Your experience here compared with that at school.
- Personal future – how does/has being disengaged affect this?

Example Questions:

1. How long have you been coming here? Where did you go before or what else do you do as well as coming here?
2. How would you describe yourself as a student as you don't go to mainstream school as much as some people do – what words are used to describe people like you? Is there a term used?
3. Can you explain how you think other people see you?
4. What does not going to mainstream school mean to you? What does it feel like? Can you give examples?
5. What do you think is the difference between coming somewhere like this and being excluded from education altogether?
6. In your opinion, what kind of people become disengaged from education?
7. Do you think you are disengaged? Why, or why not? And when you think about yourself generally do you think that you are disengaged from other areas of life or is it just school?

8. Is being disengaged from school different for different people? Is there a difference between disengagement of girls and boys? Or people with money and no money?
9. Do you think that anyone is to blame for young people becoming disengaged from school?
10. What do you think should happen to people who become disengaged from school?
11. Have you ever been warned or punished for not being engaged in school? What was the experience like?
12. Did you have any friends at school who have also become disengaged? (if yes - What makes you say that they are disengaged? Why do you think they were disengaged too?)
13. Have you ever acted in a way that would make yourself intentionally disengage from school/education?
14. When you were doing it at the time did you think you were trying to get out of school?
15. Is this place (the setting) different to school? How is it different? How is it not different? (explore activities/curriculum/ attitude/ approach of educators)
16. Do you think that young people are more likely to become disengaged from education than adults? If so why?
17. How do you think that young people who are disengaged are portrayed in the media?
18. What do you think the government thinks about young people disengaged from education?
19. Do you think there are any good things about becoming disengaged from education?
20. Why do you think people worry about young people becoming disengaged from school?
21. Do you think that you will be a ‘disengaged’ adult?
22. Are some things that can make you more disengaged than others? Like what?
23. Is education important? Why? Is it important TO YOU?
24. What is it that you plan to do in the future? Where do you see yourself in say – 2 or 3 years?
25. Do you think that coming here instead of going to mainstream school will have an effect on your future? Will your future be different?

Appendix 3

Educators Informal Interviews

INTERVIEW GUIDE AND QUESTIONS (Interviews will last roughly 1 hour)

Discussion Guide

1. Interview Guide read/provided to participant. (what the interview will consist of, what I will do with their responses)
2. Information letter provided for participant to read (or me to read to the participant) – limits of confidentiality explained (i.e. child abuse and schedule 1 offences).
3. Participant shown the questions which will be asked if required.
4. Consent form given to the participant to read (or I will read to them) and sign if happy to go ahead.
5. Brief explanation of the recording equipment which is to be used.
7. Explain to participant that they can stop recording at any time (show them how to stop the recorder if this makes them feel more comfortable)
8. Discuss and agree what participant's code name is to be
9. Ask if there are any questions before we start
10. Recorder switched on: I confirm the date, location and the participant's code name and job role within the setting.

Main Subject Areas

- What is their understanding of "disengagement from education"
- Why young people become disengaged
- How does their setting view young people who are disengaged from education
- How does their setting approach and work with these young people – ethos/practices
- How young people who are disengaged from education are viewed – educators, media, government etc
- Future of the young people – how does/has being disengaged affect this?

Example Questions:

26. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your role here? How did you get to be doing this job/role?
27. What do you think disengagement from education is? Can you give examples?
28. What terms do you use to describe young people who are disengaged from education? Are there any terms you particularly like/don't like?
29. Why do you think that young people become disengaged from school?
30. What do you think is the difference between disengagement and exclusion?
31. In your opinion, what type of people become disengaged from education?
32. When you think about the young people you work with, do you think that they are disengaged from other areas of life or is it just school?
33. Is being disengaged from school different for different people? Is there a difference between disengagement of girls and boys for example? Or people from a different class background?
34. Who do you think is to blame for young people becoming disengaged from school?
35. What do you think should happen to people who are becoming disengaged from school?

36. Do you think that becoming disengaged could be prevented?
37. How do you/ your setting work with young people? What approach/particular pedagogies?
38. Is your/your settings approach different to what they have experienced in mainstream school?
39. Would you say that your success in engaging young people depends on WHAT you do (curriculum/activities) or HOW you do it (pedagogy/relationship)?
40. Do you think that young people are more likely to become disengaged from education than adults? If so why?
41. How you think other people view young people who are disengaged? (both young people and adults)
42. Where do you think that people get their ideas about young people who are disengaged from?
43. How do you think that young people who are disengaged are portrayed in the media?
44. What do you think the government thinks about young people disengaged from education?
45. Do you think there are any good things about becoming disengaged from education?
46. Why do you think people worry about young people becoming disengaged from school?
47. Do you think that the young people you work with will be disengaged adults? How could this manifest itself?
48. Are some things that can make young people more disengaged than others? Like what?
49. What effect do you think being disengaged from mainstream school will have/has had on the future of the young people you work with? Why?

Appendix 4

UNIVERSITY OF Hull
Faculty of Arts, Cultures and Education

ETHICAL PROCEDURES FOR RESEARCH AND TEACHING

PERMISSION TO PROCEED WITH RESEARCH: ETHICAL APPROVAL

Name:	**Charlotte Dean**
Programme of Study:	**PhD**
Research Area/Title:	*Angels with Dirty Faces: Exploring and analysing the concept of disengagement in terms of how young people and educators in alternative education environments construct, understand and make sense of being disengaged from education.*
Image Permission Form	NA
Name of Supervisor:	**Max Hope**
Chair of Ethics Committee	**Dr Fiona James**
Date Approved by Ethics Committee:	**16th October 2017**

Appendix 5

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

(for Parent/Guardian/Appropriate Adult where participant is under 16)

Name of young person:_ _

Full title of Project: Exploring and analysing the concept of disengagement in terms of how young people and educators in alternative education environments construct, understand and make sense of being disengaged from education.

Aims of project:

1. *To investigate the concept of disengagement with a focus on how society can be seen to problematise young people who are disengaged from education.*
2. *To identify the effects of this problematisation on young people? (i.e. how young people view themselves and are viewed by society)*
3. *To examine some of the initiatives and methods used to re-engage these young people back into learning. (focusing specifically on their approach to/concept of disengagement)*

1 Please Initial Box

1. I confirm that I have been informed and understand the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐
2. I understand that (insert name)___________'s participation is voluntary and that s/he will be free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. ☐
3. I agree that (insert name) _____________ can take part in the above study. ☐
4. I agree to the research sessions or interviews being audio recorded if required. ☐
5. Any information which might potentially identify (insert name) ______________ will not be used in published material. ☐

Name of Parent/Guardian ______________________ Signature ______________________ Date ______________

Appendix 6

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Full title of Project: Exploring and analysing the concept of disengagement in terms of how young people and educators in alternative education environments construct, understand and make sense of being disengaged from education.

Aims of project:

Name, position and contact address of researcher: Charlotte Dean: EdD Student, The University Of Hull, deancharlotte@hotmail.com

2 Please Initial Box

1. I confirm that I have been informed and understand the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. ☐
3. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐
4. I agree to the research session or interview being audio recorded if required. ☐
5. Any information which might potentially identify me will not be used in published material. ☐

__________________	__________	_______________
Name of Participant	Date	Signature
__________________	__________	_______________
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix 7

Information sheet for research project

2.1.1 Study title

Exploring and analysing the concept of disengagement in terms of how young people and educators in alternative education environments construct, understand and make sense of being disengaged from education.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

2.1.2 What is the purpose of the study?

As part of my study towards an EdD qualification in Education at the University of Hull, I am carrying out a research study looking at the experiences of young people who have become disengaged from mainstream schooling.

The main areas that I am interested in researching are:

4. *Investigating the concept of disengagement with a focus on how society can be seen to problematise young people who are disengaged from education.*

5. *Identifying the effects of this problematisation on young people? (i.e. how young people view themselves and are viewed by society)*

6. *Examining some of the initiatives and methods used to re-engage these young people back into learning. (focusing specifically on their approach to/concept of disengagement)*

The project will use a range of different methods (called a mixed method approach) such as group and individual interviews with teachers, support workers and other people who work with young people who have become disengaged from mainstream education.

I would also like to involve young people in the research by using fun and creative ways to find out what their views are about the reasons that they have become disengaged from school and what are some of the things they have noticed about how being disengaged from school may affect them as learners and how they are viewed by other people i.e. teachers, friends, families etc.

2.1.3 Why have I been invited to participate?

It's really important that we get the views of lots of different people who may be involved in the education of young people who have become disengaged to make sure that the information I collect is fair and includes everybody's views.

I would like to work with children, young people, support workers, teachers and any others who would like to be involved.

I am looking at working with around 20-30 people altogether and it would be great if you could be one of those people.

2.1.4 Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you are under 16 then your parent/guardian or an appropriate adult will also be asked to sign a consent form as well.

I believe in the LAW OF TWO FEET – this means that if you decide to take part and then change your mind later, you are still free to leave at any time and without giving a reason.

2.1.5 What will happen to me if I take part?

You may be asked your views and experiences about what it' has been like for you to be disengaged from school or about your experiences of education in the setting you attend or work in now.

You might also take part in a creative workshop where we will create an image of what your education feels like to you.

Depending on how much you would want to be involved I would probably only see you once or twice and then would make sure that your setting got a copy of my completed research for you to read if you wanted to.

2.1.6 What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Being involved in a research project is a great way to look at something in a more detailed way than you would normally and to learn about things that you might not have really thought about before.

2.1.7 Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

All information collected about you and anything that you say to me will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations which I will explain to you).

Any information that I have, either about you, or about what you have said to me will be collected and stored safely. Paper copies of notes, written answers, group activities etc will be transferred into a digital format where they will be stored safely until the study has been completed.

Any computers, ipads, etc. that I may use are password protected. Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of all research material.

2.1.8 What should I do if I want to take part?

I will give you a consent form to sign which you (and a parent/guardian or appropriate adult if under 16) will need to sign and return to me. I will then get in touch with you to arrange a meeting or to invite you to a group research session. If you are a young person attending an alternative education provider then I will be coming in to a couple of your sessions and will speak to you then.

2.1.9 What will happen to the results of the research study?

I will write up all my findings into a report on my study which you will be able to receive a copy of if you wanted one. If I want to use anything that you have said then I will make sure that you can't be identified in any way.

Some, of the research study might be published in a journal or online as this will be a subject that may be interesting to other people working in this area – if so, I would let you know.

2.1.10 Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being carried out as part of my own study towards an EdD at The University of Hull.
I am not being paid or receiving any funding to carry out this research.

2.1.11 Who has reviewed the study?

The research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee, University of Hull. If you'd like to see proof of this then just let me know and I can let you see confirmation.

2.1.12 Contact for Further Information

For further information about the research project please contact Charlotte Dean – EdD Research Student at the University of Hull, deancharlotte@hotmail.com

2.1.13 If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted and feel you need to speak to the University of Hull about either me or my study, you should contact:

Clare McKinlay, Secretary to the Ethics Committee, Research Office, Faculty of Arts, Culture and Education, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull, HU6 7RX. Email: C.M.McKinlay@hull.ac.uk Tel. 01482-465031

2.1.14 Thank you for taking time to read the information sheet and please let me know if you have any further queries.

Date prepared: 03/08/17

Appendix 8

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM - ORGANISATION

Full title of Project: Exploring and analysing the concept of disengagement in terms of how young people and educators in alternative education environments construct, understand and make sense of being disengaged from education.

Aims of project:

Name, position and contact address of researcher: Charlotte Dean: EdD Student, The University Of Hull, deancharlotte@hotmail.com

Please Initial Box

1. We____________(name of organisation) confirm that we have been informed and understand the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

2. We understand that our participation as an organisation is voluntary and that we are free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. ☐

3. We agree to take part in the above study. ☐

4. We agree to the research sessions or interviews being audio recorded if required. ☐

5. Any information which might potentially identify our organisation will not be used in published material. ☐

Name and role within organisation	Date	Signature
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature