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Young peoples' reflections on what teachers think about family obligations that conflict with school: A focus on the non-normative roles of young caring and language brokering

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Abstract

In "Western" contexts school attendance is central for an 'ideal' childhood. However, many young people engage with home roles that conflict with school expectations. This paper explores perceptions of that process in relation two home activities - language brokering and young caring. We interviewed 46 young people and asked them to reflect on what the teacher would think when a child had to miss school to help a family member. This paper discusses the young people's overall need to keep their out-of-school lives private from their teachers.

Key Words: Young caring, Language brokering, Teachers, School, Family obligations

Managing school, family obligations and societal expectations

The assumption that children attend school has helped shape the way society constructs children's development, and discussions of age are often tightly linked with school demands, particularly in "Western" contexts (Rogoff, Correa-Chávez & Navichoc Cotuc, 2005). One 'normative' expectation is that school attendance, learning and education is of uppermost importance to the experience of an 'ideal' childhood (Rogoff, 2003). However, the obligations and activities that children and young people undertake at home sometimes create tension and conflict with the roles and obligations demanded of them by the school institution. In this paper we explore how problems with school attendance challenges the 'ideal' childhood through the lens of two activities that can interfere with this: language brokering and young caring. Whilst there has been a strong body of work that has looked at how these kinds of activities conflict with school obligations (see Aldridge & Becker, 1993; Sempik & Becker, 2013), there has been considerably less research that has explored young people's interpretations of their teachers' perspectives on 'non-normative' family obligations. This leads to a key question in this paper: What are young people's interpretations of what teachers think about pupils' family roles and obligations that can interfere with school attendance?

The two activities of language brokering and young caring were chosen because they are a useful lens through which we can examine and challenge the assumption that children's moves towards adult responsibilities are always gradual and carefully supported by adults. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from cultural- and- critical psychology, we contest a dominant assumption that children's

lives in contexts like the UK universally revolve around school, play and socialisation (James & Prout, 2015; Jans, 2004). Both language brokering and young caring are activities that contest these 'normative' childhood assumptions. Moreover, we argue there is value in looking at the views of young people on the role that school plays when children's home circumstances conflict with societal and school expectations.

As a point of clarification, when we talk about language brokering we refer to a child who mediates between two or more different languages for family members with limited English (Cline et al., 2011). Language brokering differs from professional interpreting in that it is often informally arranged within families, frequently involves the use of children communicating with officialdom and may cover cultural mediation as well as direct language translation (Hall & Sham, 2007). Young carers are defined as children and young people under the age of 18 who "provide or intend to provide a substantial amount of care on a regular basis" (Carers Act, 2004). Both of these activities are an ideal focus of study because they are frequently the cause of missing school to fulfil family obligations, thereby creating a site for tension for young people (O'Dell et al., 2010).

Conceptualising school as a cultural institution

A number of commentaries within cultural and critical psychological theorising have argued that school is a cultural institution that has strongly influenced how we conceptualise childhood in western contexts (Burman, 2008; James & Prout, 2015). In particular, the setting up of compulsory education around the late 19th century in England is cited as a catalyst for creating the 'ideal' childhood. Whilst compulsory education functioned to remove working-class children out of harsh working conditions, it was also seen as a solution to combat a 'working-class problem'; namely poverty and crime (Walkerdine, 2009). Traces of these white, middle-class, often male-orientated values can still be found in the institutional practices of school today. Institutional values and norms can be powerfully reproduced over time (Crozier & Davies, 2007), and may put demands on young peoples' lives in school and at home (Hedegaard, 2009).

Cultural and critical psychological theorizing asks us to focus, not just on the study of the individual, but on how development and meaning unfold and are constructed through participation in communities (O'Dell, Brownlow & Bertilsdotter, in print; Hatano & Wertsch, 2001). An individualistic model of human development neglects how changes in society and communities impact on children's development. School institutions, by virtue of the way they are set up, seek to keep children away from adult activities by giving children specialised child-focused activities to prepare them for the future (Rogoff, 2003). These specialised child-focused activities are common in middle-class families, and the institutions that reflect those values, such as schools, tend to neglect the diversity of home practices. In a socially and culturally diverse society like the UK, childhood experiences are heterogeneous and the values and obligations of home can conflict with the educational expectations of school (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010). It is these 'at-odds' aspects of home and school participation that are of interest to us in this paper.

It has been argued that the norms about how young people 'should be' in school impact on the child's social situation at home (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010). For example, in some urban working-class neighbourhoods in England, the school occupies a contradictory space in relation to the streets and the estates where many young people live (Archer, Hollingworth & Mendick, 2010). Teachers may recognise this incongruity but still struggle to find ways to reconcile these competing contexts. Teachers face potentially competing demands between their pastoral role in emotionally supporting their pupils and institutional demands for compliance with achievement outcomes. Children may also be aware that their own family values, practices and life circumstances are not shared by the teachers (Passy, 1999). It is on this basis that we wished to examine how a diverse group of young people would answer the question, 'what would the teacher think?' when a child had to miss school to help a family member.

If school contributes to the notion that childhood is a constant state of 'becoming', so that it is only in adulthood that one reaches a state of competence and knowing (O'Dell, 2008), then children whose lives do not reflect these powerful ideals may feel out of touch in an institution that is an exemplar of how their lives should be. Thus, they may not readily turn to teachers to help with an out-of-school home life that contradicts this taken-for-granted childhood. Yet previous studies have shown that children have a strong sense of what a 'normal' or 'proper' childhood should be in their given context (see O'Dell. 2010). In turn, children may participate in school but they may not feel that they are members of it (Rogoff & Angelillo, 2002). For their part, teachers may struggle to reconcile these deeply embedded ways of thinking about childhood with counter-examples from a contradictory reality.

Both young carers and language brokers face the challenges of balancing their caring/brokering and school obligations (Eley, 2004; O'Dell. 2010). Very often it seems that schools are unaware of the home obligations of children with, say, caring duties (Crabtree & Warner, 1999). In any case, there appears to be a tension around what young people want the school to know when it comes to private family matters, especially if there is no formal procedure in place for sharing this information among the staff group (Eley, 2004). Young people are keen to support and protect their families from the authorities (Kwon, 2014).

From the young person's perspective, it seems that children who are 'out of place' or feel devalued within school are more likely to find social and cultural capital in their out-of-school lives through friends and family (Holt, Bowlby & Lea, 2013). They are likely too, to recognise when they are 'looked down on' by authority figures in society such as teachers (Archer, Hollingworth & Mendick, 2010) or viewed negatively by the outside world (Howarth, 2000). It seems that strategies for dealing with conflicts between home and school can often be self-withdrawal, rather than help-seeking. This does not necessarily take the form of not attending school but rather a self-imposed silence (see Hirst, 2007) or withdrawal of participation or an other-imposed withdrawal associated with discrimination (see Abreu & Hale, 2009; Hedegaard, 2005).

Given these complexities and the often-contradictory expectations between the obligations of school and home we used data from a project about constructions of childhood to examine young peoples' views. Specifically, we took two activities that would be considered 'non-normative' in a UK context (young caring and language brokering) and investigated participants' response to the question, 'what would the teacher think?' about students missing school to fulfil these family obligations.

The Research Study

The project was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council and consisted of two phases, a large-scale survey from which in the second phase participants were selected for an interview. The initial survey involved young people aged 15 to 18 years old who were students at six schools and colleges in the South East and South Coast of England. The schools and colleges were chosen because they were situated in places where there was known to be a high level of new migration and this was particularly important for finding young people who undertake language brokering for family members. In the survey the young people were given a list of both paid and unpaid forms of work (i.e Saturday job, vacuuming, washing clothes). Listed in these items was 'taking care of an adult with a disability' and 'translating for an adult' and those who had ticked these boxes were invited to interview (see Table. 1 below for a breakdown). Since we wanted to contrast this with young people who had engaged in a very 'typical' form of children's work, we also invited respondents who ticked that they had worked a Saturday job for interview. From the survey 46 young people agreed to take part in the interview in total.

Table 1. Composition of interview sample

	Typical activities		Non-normative activities				Total
			Language brokers		Young carers		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
White-British students	6	3	0	0	4	3	16
Ethnic/ linguistic minority students	4	12	5	7	0	2	30
Total	10	15	5	7	4	5	46

The wider aim of the project was to examine young people's constructions of childhood through the lens of 'children's work'. The individual interviews were built around four story vignettes, two depicting young people engaging in 'normative' work-roles within the UK, such as babysitting and having a Saturday job, and two depicting the 'non-normative' work roles under discussion in this paper - language

brokering and young caring. We selected vignettes as the stimulus material because stories that place an imaginary character in a concrete context allow researchers to explore what participants think about sensitive topics while disclosing as much or as little personal information as they feel fit (Barter & Reynold, 2000; O'Dell et al., 2012).

The characters in the vignettes were 14 years old, slightly younger than our respondents, to allow them to identify with the characters and feel that they were familiar. The vignettes implied a variety of cultural backgrounds (indicated by culturally specific or ambiguous names such as Samuel and Mira). The two vignettes pertinent to the analysis in this paper are Eduardo and Mary. Eduardo is a language broker and Mary is a young carer (see Table 2).

Table 2. The two story vignettes

Eduardo: language broker	Mary: young carer
Eduardo is 14 years old. He speaks English and Portuguese. Eduardo mum can't speak English, so she often asks him to help her. Eduardo is proud and pleased to help his mum but is embarrassed when he translates for her at the doctors. Eduardo misses school some days because his mum needs him to help translate for her.	Mary is 14 years old and lives with her dad and her brother who is 15 years old. Mary's dad is disabled and needs help during the day with activities such as getting out of bed, getting dressed and making lunch. Mary loves her dad and is happy to be there for him. However she also misses school some days if her dad has a bad day and needs extra help. Sometimes Mary wishes that she could see her friends after school like her brother does.

There were standard questions about each vignette (such as "What advice would you give Eduardo if he was your friend?" and questions that involved the participant comparing the four stories (such as "Which child has the hardest job and why?"). The data analysed for this paper looks specifically at the young people's answer to the question "What would the teacher think?" when a young person had to miss school to either translate for a parent or undertake caring duties.

Beyond the usual processes of gaining consent, offering anonymity and ensuring participants understood the topic of the study and their right to withdraw from it, there were some ethical sensitivities that required further discussion. The research team were very conscious that the activities of language brokering and young caring could be sensitive topics for the young people. We knew that many young people choose not to tell their school they have these home obligations and that if they do tell the school, it can be a site of tension. We took extra care to assure our respondents that we would not be disclosing this information to the school. Additionally, we chose to use vignette methodology, in part, because it is

considered an ethically sensitive approach (Barter & Reynolds, 2000). The young people could freely discuss the character but choose whether or not to relate that to their own personal experience.

The analytical steps included taking all of the young peoples' answers to the 'what would the teacher think?' question for the Eduardo and Mary vignettes, and then coding across those for patterns in what they said. Two themes that were identified in the data are discussed in this paper: 'typing' the teacher and their view on family obligations and practices and 'keeping it hidden' reflecting the young people's overall need to keep their out-of-school lives 'hidden' from the school community. One interesting facet of the vignette approach is that interviewees often move between talk about the character and references to themselves and their own lives. Consequently, it is possible to see throughout the analysis multiple dialogical positions taken up by the young people regarding the character and the self (O'Dell et al., 2012; Crafter et al., 2014).

Results

Overall the young people presented a fairly complex picture concerning teacher's interpretations of the family obligations presented in the vignettes. The young people's discussions did not show distinct contrasting differences between those who had caring and brokering responsibilities and those who did not. Rather, across the sample there were varying views on how sympathetic the teacher would be relative to whether the activity was caring or language brokering. Some of the young people interviewed began by describing the tension that might be felt by the teacher between their obligations to impart academic knowledge, achieve measurable academic standards and enforce school attendance as a critical feature of childhood, and their recognition that students sometimes had conflicting obligations towards their families.

Typing the teacher: a good cause or a 'good' teacher?

It was clear in a number of the interviews with these young people that their view of the school and the 'teacher', was that they place their duty to educate and teach above everything else. Even teachers who might be described as being 'respectful' or 'sympathetic' to family obligations were still described as having a school agenda; that is, school attendance would still be their main priority. Students also felt that the teachers would assess whether the family obligation was perceived to be a 'good cause' to warrant missing school. Young caring was often seen as an activity that was outside of the child's control, and for that reason it was expected that the teacher would be more understanding. Perspectives on language brokers were mixed, even among those who undertook the practice. Although some thought the teacher might respect the characters dual language proficiency, some thought the teacher would see this activity as something parents could more easily overcome, so many anticipated that a teacher would be 'torn' or in conflict. The following quotes from the same monolingual participant (Jake) are indicative of this general perspective and give some illustration of the kinds of tensions that they thought that teachers face whilst differentiating between types of family obligation:

> *Jake says about Eduardo:* I guess they'd probably be proud of him 'cause he can speak two languages, like I said um, dunno [don't know], he might be a bit annoyed he has to miss school, they won't be too impressed with that

> *Jake says about Mary:* I think they would be quite lax on Mary because of the stress, if they know then the stress that she's under is quite large, to put it simply.

When talking about Eduardo (the language broker) Jake suggests the teacher would have polarised feelings about his language brokering activities. On the one hand, being able to speak more than one language is a source of pride on behalf of that pupil. Equally, though, Jake assumes that school attendance is a primary priority for the teacher, though one of the key debates around young caring in the British literature has been about the lack of recognition or visibility in official contexts like school (Thomas *and others,*., 2003).

A few of the young people spoke about teachers 'respecting' the characters because they took their family obligations seriously but felt that the conflict of interest with the main goals of being a teacher would override the teacher's feelings for the character at a personal level. John, who engaged only in 'typical' work activities said:

> *John says about Eduardo:* I think the teacher would respect him for what he's doing but the teacher would still want him in school because that's what the teacher gets paid for, to teach, and if he's not there then the teacher might think he's not going to school for other reasons…

For the small number of pupils who did not think that the teacher would experience a tension these young people focused on the family activities as the key signifier for how the teacher would respond, i.e. making a judgment as to whether what they were doing was "important enough, like good enough reason to miss school" (*Greg [typical work] discussing Eduardo*), was for a 'good cause' (*Cian [typical work] discussing Eduardo*) or that helping a disabled parent "would be a normal thing to do" (*Cian discussing Mary*).

The concept of 'normality' here is an interesting one and links to our theoretical discussions above about how the image of school as an institution is inextricably linked with how we conceptualise 'childhood' and that education is an absolute priority. Cian reconstructed the 'atypical' into something that it is 'normal' to do. In other words, it would be 'normal' that Mary should help her father. Cian was not, himself, a young carer or language broker but it is clear he empathised with the vignette characters. Other interviewees suggested that getting professional help (a paid carer for Mary's father and a professional interpreter for Eduardo's mother) would be the 'normal' and appropriate thing to do, so that the childhoods of these characters were not compromised.

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There were some participants who made fairly clear distinctions between the two types of activities and suggested that either language brokering or young caring would receive a different level of understanding from teachers. Lucy, for example, who was neither a language broker or young carer, argued that teachers would not be happy that Eduardo missed school to broker because "it's not really, it's not medical or anything like that, so." Most of the participants who made a distinction between the activities said the teacher would be more sympathetic towards Mary on the basis that Mary's father "can't do anything" to help his situation but that "Eduardo's Mum can do something about the fact that she doesn't speak English" (Daniel; typical work only). It is worth noting that in the last decade that has been a concerted effort to raise in the profile of young carers through charity work and young carers projects across the UK. Young interpreters' schemes are sparser, and debates about language brokering and school attendance are less visible. This may provide some explanation for why, in this next quote, when Luke talked about Eduardo's brokering activities he ascribed more tension to the teacher between obligations to learn and obligations to undertake family activities. In the end, priority is with the school:

> *Luke said about Eduardo:* I don't know, the teacher might be like a bit of fifty/fifty 'cause he is missing the lessons, he's always doing one subject, English, and he's only translating, he's not building his mind over a few other subjects so I don't think the teacher might be a little bit cautious with what he's doing. Of course all the teachers want to you to be at school.

His stance towards Mary is slightly different. There may be two issues at play here. One, is that Luke perceives that young caring is a necessity (which suggests he sees this activity as more important and believes the teacher should share this opinion). Secondly, Luke himself is a day-to-day young carer for a grandparent:

> *Luke said about Mary:* What I'm doing, the teachers were actually fine with what I was doing 'cause at least I was helping out other people which *[sic]* needs more help than I do myself, so they should feel quite comfortable about that, especially if it's her own dad 'cause he needs to be there for her as well as he needs her. So, missing school, again it's quite hard, 'cause if her dad is ill she needs to be there, really, 'cause he can't cope on his own.

He slips between talking about himself and talking about the vignette character moving between the 'I' and the 'her'. He explains that his own teachers have been sympathetic and so expands this personal experience by suggesting other teachers should feel the same.

The uncertainty on behalf of our respondents about teachers' reactions to disclosure of non-normative family obligations led to discussions about the personal philosophy or 'type' of teacher in question. They suggested that if the teacher saw their role as solely to do with imparting knowledge and developing academic skills, then they would not be sympathetic. But another teacher might also have a fuller appreciation of the reasons why a young person might give priority to their family obligations, so a student might confide in them about their family life. Petar, [himself a language broker] when he was

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talking about Eduardo, made a clear distinction between the teachers who care about pastoral needs and those that do not. When talking about Eduardo, Petar explained how he thinks that distinction plays out:

> *Petar about Eduardo:* There are some particular teachers that understand and some that don't really look at it, some teachers don't really think that, they don't really look from a pupil's point of view so they don't sort of, they don't know what happens a lot of the time. Like the teacher that helps my friend, he's really easy to talk to because he does know what happens out of school as well so.

Petar went on to explain, when asked whether teachers ask about their pupils' lives outside of school, replied "not really, they don't really know, like most of my teachers, almost all of them don't know what happens after school or on weekends, some of them do but yes as I say most of them don't have a clue."

At the heart of most of these discussions is the young peoples' belief that the teacher's main priority is to always have the child in school. At times these young peoples' narratives touch on a distinction between the teacher as an individual (at the level of the person), whose personal empathy might allow them to be lenient about family obligations. But simultaneously they are often the institutional face of a school culture in which their primary job is to turn out well-achieving pupils. In seeking to keep children apart from adult-based activities and in turn, forging a construction of childhood as a time of dependence, teachers have become, by proxy, enforcers of the achievement-focused ethos of the school system.

Hiding family obligations from school

We asked most of the participants interviewed about whether the character would tell the teacher about their home activities and obligations. As indicated above, some would tell a particular teacher but also suggested there was a risk to disclosure. A number of respondents did not think that the character, or in some cases they themselves personally, would disclose personal information to teachers about their home lives. They felt it would be preferable to use excuses and keep the activities hidden. Adesh [typical activities] was asked whether he thought the teacher would know about Mary's young caring at home:

> *Adesh about Mary:* Probably not 'cause I don't think Mary would tell.

By way of explanation, Adesh explained that she thought Mary would keep her activities hidden to protect her father so that he didn't "look bad" for needing her help. The fear that young carers may have of drawing professional attention to their home circumstances has been highlighted in the literature previously (see Aldridge and Becker, 1993). However, the same can apply to language brokering activities. Estelle [typical activities], for example, when asked if the teacher would be understanding about Eduardo's activities replied "I don't think so, I think he probably might get someone, not Social Services, but someone to come and help his Mum." The mention of social services by Estelle is telling. One of the reasons why some children do not talk to teachers about their home lives may be that they perceive schools as participating in broader surveillance of family lives by the authorities.

Perhaps more telling than their suppositions about an abstract teacher in a story vignette, is a question about what the young people themselves would do, or have to do themselves, in real life. In the end, many of the young people claimed they would not risk disclosing private family information to a teacher:

> *Jake was asked*: Would you feel happy telling your teacher if you missed school for that reason (to translate for a parent)?

> *Jake replied:* I would probably, you know, I would think it was a good reason but I still wouldn't know what their reaction would be to it. They might be like, quite annoyed about it because as far as they can see you know, they're not, not to sound like they're callous but they're not really interested in that side they're more, they just want you to learn and if you're not there then they can't teach you.

The uncertainty about teachers' reactions to disclosure of non-normative family obligations has been described in other research. Aldridge and Becker (1993) argued that school was the site where young carers experienced the most overt hostility to caring and where the responses were punitive rather than supportive. This piece of research is quite dated now but the more recent study by Moore et al. (2009) reported that young carers still felt unsupported by some of their schools. One respondent from this study said about the teachers, 'I'm sick of them saying "We don't get paid enough to care" - they said that all the time to me – well, they do get paid to look after us so they should care' (p.15).

These experiences were not specific to young carers. Aida, who had experience language brokering for her family, drew on her own experiences with school teachers. When she was asked what the teacher would think about a language broker such as Eduardo missing school, she told us:

> *Aida explaining her own language brokering situation:* I don't think the teacher would understand 'cause it happen to me once, I had to bunk off school to go with mum 'cause she had to see the doctor for her eyes. But when I came to the college and I explained they didn't actually believe me...They won't believe me, they just said 'don't do that again, let your dad do it' or... they don't understand unfortunately. But they should understand

When asked if Aida had any teachers who had understood or acknowledged her family obligations she replied that she had, but that they still marked her as having had an unauthorised absence from school on her records. For her, this signalled a lack of understanding about the nature of her absence. In the end, she preferred to say she was sick.

Keeping home lives hidden is not just about having to protect oneself from authority. Bana [a language broker], for example, could see no problem with telling the teacher about her language brokering, but when asked whether Eduardo would tell the truth about why he missed school she replied:

> *Bana on Eduardo:* I don't talk about translating, I mean, it's necessary part of my life, it's quite
> important, it's my choice

The language brokers frequently stressed to the interviewers that this activity is a 'normal' part of the home lives in the communities in which they lived. In fact, a few could not understand why we were asking about their interpreting activities. Schools might perceive that missing lessons to provide language brokering support in a country such as England transgresses normative expectations for young people. For those living that experience in communities where such activities are common, a family obligation to respond to a language brokering request is constructed as being part of everyday life. At the same time, some of the young people did mention having to make difficult choices to support family members at a risk to their school life.

For many of the young people in our study, though, maintaining privacy was one of the reasons cited for keeping family obligations hidden from the school. Family care of different kinds was seen as part of the nexus of obligations within the family that do not need to be released into the public domain. Damilola [typical activities] tried to explain why Mary would not tell the teacher:

> *Damilola about Mary*: Because it's, it's sort of like erm…I don't know how to say it…it's sort that's
> what she has to do, she doesn't really want people to know like erm, I dunno, maybe in a sense
> it'd be sort of like 'oh look what I do for my dad' or something. But it's like, I dunno, she just, it's
> just what she feels is her duty so she doesn't feel the need to let anybody else know what it is she
> does in her own private time

Damilola infers here that by disclosing her caring duties Mary would be perceived as bragging about her home skills or her dutiful behaviour as a daughter. It is sometimes assumed that young people do not disclose about caring because they might be ashamed or see it as a sign of weakness (Kendal, Keeley & Callery. 2014), so Damilola provides a contrasting explanation; protecting one's private life.

For Maiba [typical activities], not discussing home obligations with the teacher was partly because she thought relationships between teachers and pupils are not set up to accommodate exchanges of personal information. She felt the teacher might notice school was being missed but would be unlikely to know any details:

> *Maiba on Eduardo:* No I don't think like, some peoples' relationship is not like 'lets talk about it
> session' sort of thing, so I don't think she would know, she would notice but I don't think she
> would know anything about it.

The preference some participants expressed for keeping home activities hidden from teachers poses a challenge to the view that teachers are a fundamentally important resource for helping children living in challenging circumstances. The young people reported in this section present conflicting evidence about how much they want school to know about their home lives. Clearly, the inspirational teacher can make a

difference to challenges occurring at school but there is also reluctance among some young people for the school to know too much. Even the presence of a sympathetic teacher was not necessarily seen as enough to encourage disclosure.

Conclusions

We have argued in this paper that the school as an institution is bound up with particular ways of looking at childhood that conflict with the reality of some young people's lives. We suggest that in a society such as the UK, activities that do not fit within the boundaries of an 'appropriate' childhood place both teachers and young people in an uncomfortable position. The principal aims of school, such as to impart knowledge and maintain standards of achievement, are often directly measured against children's regular attendance (Department for Education, 2016). Whilst pastoral care is recognised as being important to children's success, the emphasis remains on school attendance being in the best interests of the child. For young people, by necessity, family obligations sometimes have to take precedence and school attendance is sacrificed for that reason.

The young people in this sample recognised that teachers face competing ideas about their role as educators alongside pastoral obligations. For students, at the level of the individual teacher, much appears to rest on evaluating their personal ability or desire to empathise with students who have 'non-normative' family responsibilities and obligations. The young people in this study frequently mentioned particularly kind or inspirational teachers. Like their pupils in 'non-normative' situations, such teachers face a serious dilemma. The institutional constraints of formal education give them only limited scope to develop a full understanding of the diverse complexity of their pupils' home lives and to provide them with effective support.

We suggest that the lack of clear-cut opinions between those who did these activities and those who did not, is that 'typing the teacher' and perceiving the teacher as a 'sympathetic' or 'kind' plays an important part in their discussions. In other words, some of our carers and brokers did have understanding teachers, whilst others had experienced negative reactions, particularly the brokers. We had examples of those who did not do these activities, witnessing how teachers treated their friends who did. However, this aspect might highlight a limitation in this study, in that even those who did not do non-normative activities were in schools and colleges with high levels of diversity. Language brokering in particular, was not an unusual activity in these settings, therefore opinions might be more divided amongst pupils where this practice is unusual. As mentioned above, the UK has seen a concerted effort to raise the profile of young carers lives through charity events and campaigns and local young carer support groups, so pupils are perhaps more generally aware.

However, the pupils are also under constraint about what to reveal regarding their home life and to whom they should reveal the information. On the one hand, they need to disclose personal information about their home obligations but disclosure comes with risks, especially if the reason for not attending

school is not deemed critical, which was often the case for language brokering. So when pressed, most would choose not to disclose and this applied to both those who undertook the activity and those who did not. Both a limitation and a strength to our vignette methodology approach is that whilst it cannot truly tell us what those without non-normative roles might do in these situations, it does provide us with information about how young people represent the perspectives of others, in this case, a teacher and the school institution more widely. For those who did take part in non-normative activities, they were able to relate the vignette to their own personal experience. Overall, we suggest that future research would benefit from a better understanding of how young people manage the diverse complexities of their home obligations within school, when they are at odds with institutional demands.

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