

**A longitudinal study exploring  
the educational experiences and  
perceptions of students who  
have been identified as able in  
the context of a challenging  
school**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study was to explore perceptions of educational experiences held by a group of students identified as able in the context of a challenging school. The study was conducted over a four year period, with a focus on the end of KS3, during KS4, and the end of KS4. The study has explored the notion of 'ability', in particular the term gifted. I believe that 'ability' is a construct as opposed to the traditional essentialist view -and I have critiqued the mainstream perspective of giftedness and 'disability/ability', before considering an alternative, more inclusive approach.

The study involved ten students from "Greengate"; a small urban school, located in a relatively deprived area of a northern English city. I interviewed each student four times over a period of four years, having set out to rectify an imbalance I had noted in traditional educational research whereby the students were theorized about or represented, rather than asked directly. I chose to give prominence to student voice, and my post-modern method of working with the data, and presenting my findings is partly as a consequence of my wish to avoid the pitfalls of representation.

I believe that the method I have used here to present the fragmentary and shifting nature of the truth as it appears to a person over time, complements the philosophy expressed throughout my study, namely that meaning shifts, and there is not one essential truth.

Whilst not having a conventional 'findings' section, a key strand running through the study is the issue of how and why, able students from lower working-class backgrounds do not tend to take up Higher Education pathways, as was shown with the ten able students in this study, who despite their substantial enrichment provision, and subsequent high attainment have not, yet, (with two exceptions) attended university.

To the Ten Students who participated in my research

You were all convinced that one day, I would actually complete this study, and that you would be immortalised in print. I don't claim to have quite managed this. You are all so much bigger in life than I could ever have hoped to show on a written page. Instead I have transcribed moments from the interviews we had over those four years that give a flavour of how you perceived education and life at an interesting time in your lives. If you do read this study, and I hope that one day you will, you may recognise something of yourself, and/or something of myself in these pages. I hope it acts as a reminder to you that this was a good time. I also hope that you will accept the comments I have made about the extracts from your interviews, in the spirit I intended it, which is to communicate with you (and the readers of this study). I do not claim to have the last word, just some ideas.

The relationships I had with the ten of you had a distinctness and clarity that has not dimmed over the years, so if nothing else, the research has fixed this period in my head indelibly and I will never forget you.

With love and thanks

'Miss'

*"Sudden in a shaft of sunlight*

*Even while the dust moves*

*There rises the hidden laughter*

*Of children in the foliage..."*

From "Burnt Norton" by T. S. Eliot

<b>Contents</b>	<b>page number</b>
1. Introduction	6
2. Literature review	15
3. Methodology	63
4. 'My Voice'	119
5. Explanation of layout and colour in the ten student chapters	130
6. 'Anthony'	132
7. 'Beth'	144
8. 'Brenda'	156
9. 'Carol'	164
10. 'Cathy'	181
11. 'David'	190
12. 'Daryl'	203
13. 'Ellie'	216
14. 'John'	229
15. 'Lavinia'	239
16. 'My Voice' - 2.	247
17. Conclusion	262
Appendices	276
References	290

## Chapter 1:

### Introduction

In this study, I have been concerned with how best to convey the views of ten students identified as able at a mainstream 11-16 comprehensive school, "Greengate" (pseudonym). Through using extracts from four different interviews given by ten students (again, pseudonyms have been used) over a period of four years, I have attempted to give a flavour of how the students in the study perceived education at the end of KS3, during KS4, and at the end of KS4. I have set out to rectify an imbalance I have noted in traditional educational research whereby the students have been theorized about or represented, rather than asked directly, and it is partly as a consequence of my wishing to avoid the pitfalls of 'representation' that my study has a rather unconventional method of presentation.

Greengate is an urban school serving, arguably, a relatively deprived area in a relatively prosperous LEA. Alternatively, one could argue that it is not so much a 'deprived' area, but more exactly, a locality where there seems to be several aspects of social disadvantage.

Greengate's 'deprivation index score' is the second to highest out of ten secondary schools in the LEA, whilst 4 out of its 5 main feeder primaries are in the 25% schools with the highest deprivation index scores. (Source - Index for deprivation 2007). A needs assessment report prepared by the Primary Care Trust (2007) stated that the ward, in which the school is located, is within the 10% most deprived areas in England in terms of education, skills and training. The ward consists of: 20% residents categorised as social class E (state benefits/unemployed/low grade workers) which compares to 15% for the LEA and 16% nationally; 27% of residents categorised as social class D (semi-skilled and unskilled) compared with 15% for the LEA, and 16% England; 42% residents social class C compared to 49% for the LEA, and 47% nationally; and

11% of residents categorised as social class AB , (professional classes) compared to 21% LEA and nationally. Given that 47% of the residents in the ward, are categorised as social class D or E, compared to 30% for the LEA, and 32% nationally, it can be seen that there is a significantly higher proportion of residents living in lower-working class homes than is usual.

“The school’s OFSTED report in 2009 noted:

*“The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is higher than average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is much higher than average and includes a group of students with behavioural, emotional and social needs. A higher than average proportion of students have a statement of special needs.”*

An analysis of PLASC returns for a period of 5 years reveals an average of 36% students on the SEN register per year. In the academic year for 2008/9 for example, this was broken down as 4.3% who were Statemented, 12.2% who were at Action Plus, and 20% at Action. In terms of literacy, 19% of the 2007 year 7 cohort had failed to reach level 3, compared to 6% nationally. The DfES (2007) view the national figure of 6% as indicative of how:

*“ ... significant numbers of children experience literacy difficulties and are likely to have difficulty in coping with the steadily increasing demands of the curriculum in Key Stage 3 (and beyond).”* (p.16)

The ‘Greengate’ figure of 19% (in 2007, but with a similar figure for 2006 and 2008) is over three times higher than the national average. This represents a significant challenge to a school, given that nearly one in five of its KS3 cohort has been identified as having literacy difficulties.

The above data evidences that the locality surrounding the school has many more children from lower working class families and far fewer from professional families than the national average; more children are from relatively deprived backgrounds than the LEA and national average; there are more children who have FSM in the school than the LEA and national average; there are very much higher numbers of children with literacy difficulties than nationally;

and many more pupils with SEN including behavioural needs than in the average school nationally.

Further background context can be derived from the following: the school was categorised as a 'National Challenge' school in September 2008 due to low attainment; Greengate has, for many years and until 2008/9 (when the school opened up its own behavioural unit) had the highest exclusion rate for secondary schools in the LEA; and there are a disproportionately high amount of children placed on the city-held child protection register from Greengate. For example, over a 10 year period, with approximately 100 pupils on the register from the LEA at any one time, there have been on average 4-5 Greengate pupils. Given that Greengate pupils constitute less than 0.3% of the total children in the LEA, Greengate pupils are 8-9 times more likely to be on the child protection register.

Taking a closer look at the school, it would appear that there is a tendency for former pupils, (boys in particular) to get involved in crime on leaving Greengate. For example, there are 3 out of 21 pupils who were in my mixed ability tutor group from 1994-2000, who have spent a period of at least a year in prison. There are already 3 out of 22 pupils in my 2000-2006 tutor group, who have been sentenced by the Crown Court.

Qualitative data gathered from the ten students participating in the study at the outset of the research, would also suggest that Greengate pupils encounter more social and personal problems than is usual. One of the participants had an uncle who was murdered in the second year of the research, and whose aunt was sentenced for this crime in the third year of research. A second participant spent 2 days in a refuge in the first year of the research due to domestic violence, her brother-in-law was killed the previous year- and she had a baby in the third year of the research. Another student was the subject of a child protection investigation in the first year of the research resulting in the imprisonment of an uncle for sexual abuse. A fourth's father had been a street drinker; he was murdered a year before the research started. A fifth participant hadn't seen his mother for a year at the beginning of the research; she was living



in a refuge for alcoholics in Scotland, and later died towards the end of the study.

The above data may or may not be seen by the reader as convincing evidence of social deprivation, after all I have not attempted any systematic analysis of household incomes, and even I admit that a glance around the locality would give the impression that the housing stock for example, is really not that bad. However, there are certain areas where it seems fair to say that the school experiences more than its share of social problems and in this sense alone, can be regarded as 'challenging'.

During the seventeen years I have taught at Greengate, the school appears to have undergone an 'identity' change. Historically, having originally been a secondary modern, it was seen as a school that catered more for pupils with SEN and behavioural problems. More recently, it has begun to promote itself as a specialist college. Although the school could be described as containing a significant amount of students who are likely to experience a wide range of poverty related barriers to learning, and the examples given above are in no way unusual for the school, there has been a general steady incremental increase in headline GCSE and SATs results over a period of ten years, a sharp increase in the contextual 'value added', and, more recently a significant improvement in numbers of pupils with 5 x GCSEs at grade C or above . Given that one of my roles in the school for the past 9 years has been 'Able, Gifted and Talented' ('A, G&T') co-ordinator, I would like to think that one of the contributory factors to the school's improvements has been the 'A,G&T' programme. This was launched in 2001; one of the key features of the initial programme being an extension scheme, entailing early entry for Religious Studies and Sociology GCSE (stage one) in year 9, with a possibility of then progressing to Philosophy 'A' level in KS4 (stage two). All of the participants in the study took the A level philosophy course.

The ten students involved in the study had been identified as able, and my study has explored the notion of ability, in particular the term gifted. I believe now, writing in hindsight in 2009 that 'ability' is a construct

although at the beginning of my study I believed differently. Initially my research was prompted by my desire to explore ways I could contribute to the strengthening of the academic part of my students' identities. My research design, at the outset was very much informed by my day-by-day work as 'A,G&T' co-ordinator, and it reflects, what I came to identify later as the traditional essentialist view. However, half way through my study, I began to grapple with the philosophical and political implications of the positivistic view of intelligence, and by the end I had come to believe that one of the consequences of this concept was the obscuring and concealing of inequity.

My own perspective on giftedness is thus a changing one. Initially I was attracted by the idea of giftedness being a quality with psychological manifestations, and I consumed large amounts of literature, applying my increasing awareness to my own practice. I applied a 'rights' or 'justice' perspective, and regarded the gifted as a minority group who were not catered for or understood. In addition to creating and delivering the extension scheme referred to in this study, I taught on three NAGTY (National Academy of Gifted and Talented Youth) summer schools. Back in 2001, I regarded some children as gifted, including some who became a focus in my study, and derived job satisfaction out of my mentoring and advocacy. I also regarded some children as 'not' gifted. I remember delivering training to staff at my school on how to identify gifted children, in a confident but non-self-critical manner, probably typical of 'A, G&T' coordinators across the county at the time, and was amused, if a little ashamed to recognise, some years later, what could have been (even down to the name) myself in Benjamin's (2002) description below of the 'A, G&T' coordinator in her place of work:

*"Sue (the newly appointed G&T coordinator) talks about the huge amount of government money. The G&T strand will be national in 15 months, and will be inspected by Ofsted. For us, it will improve standards for all students as the discussion about differentiation will percolate down and benefit everyone. It is, in her account, a question of equal opportunities - the G&T students have a right to be stretched, and after all, research shows that there is a high suicide rate*

*among Oxbridge students who haven't learned how to fail. So G&T students have the right (by implication, like all other students) to be stretched until they fail..."*  
(p. 37)

Whilst my school was not an EiC school and therefore did not receive the money Benjamin's G&T coordinator refers to, the remainder of the above extract echoes my own reasoning at the time; the gifted were an unrepresented and identifiable minority who needed advocacy in order to achieve their potential, and that the ceiling of attainment throughout the school would rise, thus benefiting all children, as a result of this focus.

I believe differently now, and would situate my own position at the time of writing this introduction, similarly to Hymer (2009):

*"At the heart of my own research journey has been a growing dissatisfaction with elements of my practice as a consultant and trainer in gifted and talented education within the United Kingdom ... My sense of being a 'living contradiction' has been nurtured by this dominant discourse at ... three levels ... the level of content, a perceived emphasis on traditional test-and-place mantras and an implied belief in the existence of the 'naturally gifted' student, in the face of overwhelming evidence of the fluidity of such abstract and socially-constructed concepts as 'intelligence' or 'ability' ...b) at the level of process , my adoption of a declarative, superficially authoritative 'expert delivery' ... c) ... an implied faith in ... 'objective' knowledge, understandings and practice, despite a recognition of the salience of contextual factors in knowledge creation and a rejection of the 'banking' concept of education ... "(p. 299)*

My position is not exactly like Hymer's; I am not a trainer, nor an educationalist, nor have I an impressive publishing record (this study is my first publication!) - but I have taken heart from hearing someone who I have regarded for some time as one of the more inclusive writers on giftedness, speak of his 'living contradiction' and his disillusionment with the "implied belief in the existence of the 'naturally gifted'". I too have changed my mind, and my own research based upon my place of work, has shaken my belief in psychological constructs and reflects my disillusionment with the medical model of ability. I am

now much less certain of my right (or anyone's right for that matter) to identify giftedness than I was six years ago, and as I have become more aware of social theories of ability and the role played by cultural context, I have focussed increasingly on Inclusion in my research.

It is now my belief; writing after I have carried out my research, that children who have been identified as able have a right, to be extended and excited by their education, but that this is the same right that all children *should* have. It is the right of an individual to be recognised as an individual, with a changing 'bundle' of talents and weaknesses that strengthen or disappear according to provision and context. Whilst traditional gifted research offers many good ideas and approaches to provision, I believe that these ideas could and should be translated into curriculum changes for all. And I have a second conviction, that the greatest of caution should be exercised when using the discourse of giftedness as otherwise one can end up justifying the existence of an elite group, whilst simultaneously obscuring and concealing privilege through the *seemingly* neutral notions of 'meritocracy', 'intelligence', and giftedness.

My literature review is split into the following sections: a general introduction; a consideration of historical (predominantly North-American) developments; the British view of giftedness; a comparison between disability theory and ability theory; the 'dark-side' of intelligence theory; and how possible it is for giftedness to be reconciled with inclusion. I argue that whilst on the one hand, 'ability' is a construct and that neither giftedness, nor disability have an absolute character - on the other hand, it is widespread practice within the mainstream body of gifted research to use these terms precisely in this way! I suspect, reading through my literature review, that some of my textual analysis was produced just as I had begun to doubt the entire gifted paradigm, and perhaps I am a little harsh at condemning, what was, after-all, my own position just a few years before, indeed the following criticism, although intended by Dyson (2004) for those researching inclusion, could be applied to the approach I suspect I have sometimes taken in my literature review:

*" There is a tendency for work within this field to set about disposing of other kinds of research and scholarship as fatally flawed, to seize the moral high ground by foregrounding its values, and in some cases to argue that it is more capable than other work of challenging the marginalisation, exclusion or oppression of disadvantaged learners .... Work which presents itself as being based on highly inclusive values and assumptions or explicitly aligns itself with oppressed people nonetheless has implicit assumptions which need to be explored, is nonetheless produced by particular individuals and groups, and nonetheless promotes certain interests at the expense of others. In this respect, it is as well to remember that much of the work which is now consigned to the 'psycho-medical legacy ' and seen as serving the vested interest of professional groups and an exclusive educational system was itself at one time offered as the best hope for marginalized learners." - (pp. 158-9)*

The next section of my study outlines and also critiques my methodology; as here, as with the previous review of substantive literature, I have also undergone a change in my approach. Again, I was to begin confidently but not overly critically, and the opening section outlines my initial theoretical inspirations: the praxis-based Freirean framework, and Jacques Derrida's post-modernist concept of existence, before giving a step-by-step account of how I conducted my research at the beginning. Later, I realised that there were considerable flaws in my data gathering, traceable to the contradictions inherent in the approach I had taken. The subsequent critique of my work up until that point, enabled new ideas to emerge, and a new direction for my research, inspired by the work of Levinas, Buber and others. After outlining this process, I then consider how to work with my data, how to analyse and how to write. At this point, I incorporate the metaphor of 'graffiti', which has some resonance throughout my study, linking as it does a moment from my own autobiography, with some of my thoughts on the relationship between language, identity and truth. I explain through this metaphor how I perceive the connection between the words uttered by the students in their interviews with me, and what has ended up on the page.

The bulk of my study consists of eleven chapters, one for each of my ten participants, but flanked by a small section called 'My Voice' that signposts my presence in my own research, (i.e. it is not 'objective' or 'neutral' but shaped necessarily by my views and background). In keeping with the philosophical views outlined in the methodology section I have used an unconventional presentational style that interrupts the reader in any tendency to read the study as a continuous narrative.

The penultimate chapter, 'My Voice-2', tries to reconcile my desire to desist from any analysis of the voices of Others with my equally pressing need to speak about how my beliefs and theoretical leanings had changed as a result of the research process. I believe that my findings can be seen as making something of a contribution to our understanding of the nature of giftedness, and I offer some evidence to strengthen our understanding of how the relationship between identity and labelling affect academic progress.

In the final chapter I discuss what I regard as my most significant contribution to knowledge; my research into the area of 'voice'. I finish with a selection of student comments that signpost directions for future research; these have something to say about the relationship between the transcripts and identity, and the relationship between the transcripts and truth.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Literature review**

#### **Introduction**

Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, it appears that much of the research into intelligence, high ability, and giftedness, has focused on issues surrounding the definition and identification. As Freeman (1998) states:

*"... arguments about precise definitions and the identification of (ability) ... have been active for nearly a century, and will doubtless continue... there are perhaps 100 definitions of giftedness around, almost all of which refer to children's 'precocity' either in psychological constructs, such as intelligence and creativity, but more usually in terms of high marks in school subjects."* (pp. 1-2)

It is interesting that such controversy should reign, and for so long, about the definition of a quality/trait, when perhaps it would be more usual for terms to have been agreed upon nearer the outset of a new research domain. For example, there seems to be far less disagreement about the meaning of the concepts disability or 'learning disability', which could be regarded as the opposite of 'high ability', and research into *this* area, has (as I shall be arguing later in my review), progressed much further, and encompasses a far wider range of theoretical frameworks. Why is it that in Britain for example, the concept of disability is defined and dealt with in the first few paragraphs of the 'Disability Amendment Act' (2005), yet when it comes to high ability, as Freeman notes in the above extract (taken from a report intended to inform the decisions of the government's select committee), its definition and nature is so highly contested?

I shall be contrasting research into the area of high ability, or Gifted and Talented (G&T)/Able, Gifted and Talented (A, G&T), with research into

the area of low ability, disability and Special Educational Needs (SEN). It is my contention that despite both areas sharing a common history there are now large differences in methodology as well as philosophical and political assumptions. Whereas there now seems widespread recognition by researchers into disability that disability is a construct dependent on context, and that furthermore there are serious limitations with the traditional medical/psychological model - research into giftedness appears far less evolved; it still retains the hundred-year old medical/psychological discourse, and is still preoccupied with identification.

The pervasiveness of the mainstream psychological perspective on giftedness can be seen in the writings of Ziegler and Heller (2000). They consider the assumptions of and conditions for giftedness research, and state that their specific intention is to:

*"... delineate meta-theoretical criteria which provide a sound basis for giftedness research and to examine the most important conditions which could influence the validity of conceptions of giftedness..."* (p. 3)

The authors conclude that gifted research should base itself within an empirical psychological framework, and that this should then be conducted with appropriate rigour. However, despite their avowed intent to explore meta-theory, the authors do not consider any non-psychological or non-positivistic frameworks. The Other which they compare empirical psychology with, is a kind of folklore/religious view of giftedness, and Ziegler and Heller argue against this peculiar folklore view as if it were a credible alternative and also, the *only* possible alternative. The 'men of straw' are easily demolished, leaving the mainstream psychological empirical perspective, seemingly, as the only sensible framework.

I shall be arguing that Ziegler and Heller's assumptions are very widespread, and typify the majority of the research into high ability. The notion of the 'objectively existing intelligence' that can be measured, and is more or less fixed, is a common feature amongst gifted research, as is the belief in the infallibility of psychology and scientific research methods.



The first section of my review is a consideration of the historical development of the research into giftedness from the viewpoint of the dominant psychological framework (often regarded as the North American perspective due to the plethora of material which has emanated from this part of the world). I spend some time also looking at a 'developing countries' perspective; this tends to look at the needs of an under-educated population when considering the desirability of training an indigenous able minority (e.g. Raina, 1993; Wallace, 2000; Gwany, 1993), but is similar to the North-American perspective in its basic assumption of a reified intelligence.

I then proceed to explore the British perspective in more depth. I argue that despite claims from some writers that British policies are inclusive, this should be taken with caution, as the vast majority of British research as well as government policy seems to be dominated by the 'grand narrative' of giftedness, which is mainly psychological and positivistic in nature. These mainstream, (essentially North American) views underpin the majority of government initiatives such as the work of NAGTY (National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth) whose brief in the late 1990s and into the early 2000s was to recruit the top 5% of 'absolutely gifted pupils' in the country, and later, YG & T (Young Gifted and Talented); its successor (managed by CfBT on behalf of the DCSF) - which has retained the same definitions of giftedness, and views on identification.

The next section of my review looks at the similarities and differences between researches into the areas of high and low ability, paying particular attention here to changes in recent thinking, as reflected in the British legislature about disability. There has been a significant move away from the dominant positivist model and towards a more social or inclusive model of disability.

I move from this, to a consideration of the darker side of Intelligence Theory - probing the positivistic assumptions and eugenicist implications further. In this section I ask the question, 'why are researchers into

giftedness so reluctant to let go of their assumptions?' and I touch upon some possible answers.

My final consideration is based upon a selection of texts that suggest a more inclusive approach. I am interested here in the philosophical dilemmas and practical challenges that educators face when aiming to include children who have been categorized as having differences such as: SEN, high ability, talents & gifts, low ability, disabilities - whilst *at the same time* ensuring that all children receive appropriate challenge and support, and have their differences recognized and celebrated.

### **Section one: Review of historical developments - mainstream North-American paradigm**

From Hollingworth (1929) onwards, the focus for gifted researchers has not varied significantly and many researchers today are still occupied with the same set of issues that Hollingworth categorized as: how to identify the gifted using tests and/or check-lists; personality traits; how to teach gifted students; whether or not to accelerate/segregate and how to enrich provision.

Hollingworth saw giftedness as an inherited thing:

*"If superior environment were the cause of high scores in tests, no child living from birth in squalor could score high"* (p. 58)

Similarly her contemporary Terman (1924), in his longitudinal study of twins concentrated on the superiority of physique, health etc of gifted children, and argued that intelligence equated high morality.

A third contemporary, Goddard (1911), argued that:

*"Stated in its boldest form, our thesis is that the chief determiner of human conduct is a unitary mental process which we call intelligence: that this process is conditioned by a nervous mechanism which is inborn: that the degree of efficiency to be attained by that nervous mechanism and the consequent grade of intelligence or mental level for each individual is determined by the kind of chromosomes that come together with the union of*

*the germ cells: that is but little affected by any later influences except such serious accidents as may destroy part of the mechanism.” (p. 1)*

The prevailing view was that intelligence was genetically determined and that it could be defined, measured and provided for. This same belief was echoed in the much later work of Herrnstein and Murray (1994), where it was argued that the intelligence spread was along a curve with relatively fewer people at either end, that intelligence was largely inherited, and that many of society’s ills were perpetuated by people with low intelligence.

Gallagher (2000), similarly concluded:

*“The field of behavioural genetics has made it overwhelmingly clear that there are such things as ‘golden chromosomes’. If we would pay attention to something as monumental as the Human Genome Project we should conclude that there are some youngsters who are born with the capacity to learn faster than others those ideas or concepts that modern societies value in children and adults.” (p. xx1v)*

Klein and Tannenbaum’s (1992) edited collection of research, which aimed to summarize the gifted research of the previous six decades echoed Hollingworth’s concerns with: early identification and development; standardized tests; enriching the gifted environment, and the educational and emotional needs of children with a high IQ and moral development.

And interestingly, 15 years later, at the biennial conference of the World Conference on Giftedness in 2007, the domain is strikingly similar; the four day conference being divided into four sections: assessment and identification; classroom practice and pedagogy; underachievement; creativity and talent. The opening of the conference placed particular emphasis placed on ‘characteristics of gifted children’, the ‘lived experience of giftedness’, and the ‘social and emotional aspects of giftedness, with the two lead speakers, Joan Freeman and John Geake, being a chartered psychologist and a neuropsychologist respectively.

Whilst one of the chief concerns of gifted research today is still identification and provision, this process has become more sophisticated. For example, McCluskey, Treffinger and Baker’s (2007) amphitheater model:

*"The Amphitheatre model of talent identification borrows from and is build upon many earlier frameworks including Treffinger's level of service approach, Feldhusen's talent identification and development in education model and McCluskey and Walkers tri-layered representation of effective enrichment programming."* (p.11)

Here we can see, but updated for the 2007 reader, the traditional focus on psychological traits and testing. It is still a concern, even more so in some ways, as the 'tools' emerge to refine the process.

A second focus for giftedness today, is the impetus to reach as many gifted pupils as possible including pupils from disadvantaged groups. One such (among many) studies to research giftedness in minority groups, is Sternberg et al (2006) who researched methods of providing appropriately culturally sensitive teaching and materials, as well as instruction and assessment in the Yup'ik Eskimo students in rural southwest Alaska.

However, I would suggest that these are minor additions to the traditional terrain, easily accommodated by the mainstream psychological paradigm. When Heller and Schofield (2000) analysed a vast body of research from the previous decade's 'World Conference on Giftedness' proceedings, and major gifted journals over six years looking at the scope of gifted research, they found that some 70% (North America) - 80% (Europe) publications revolved around the personality or psychology of giftedness. This suggests that not only have the central concerns of gifted education remained constant, but also, there have not been any significant moves away from the psychological perspective. Heller and Schofield do point however, to how psychologists are now favouring multidimensional models of intelligence, for example Gardner (1999) rather than a one dimensional, single-test view. Gardner's view is that there are 8 ½ intelligences and that:

*"...humans possess a range of capacities and potentials- multi-intelligences – that, both individually and in consort, can be put to many productive uses."* (p. 4)

Gardner's view retains the focus on inherited or genetic intelligence, but has developed the idea of the different kinds of intelligence that a person might favour. Similarly, in the triad identification model of Renzulli & Reis, (1993), there seems little inclination to move away from the notion of genetics/inherited intelligence:

*"Gifted behaviour reflects in interaction among three basic clusters of human traits – these clusters being above-average general and/or specific abilities, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity"*

(p. 219)

Thus Renzulli and Reis, whilst developing their view of giftedness to include 'task commitment', and therefore by implication some consideration of the role played by nurture, have retained the usual emphasis on inherited abilities and (presumably) inherited creativity. And it would seem that whilst the mainstream view is capable of incorporating perspectives as diverse as Gardner's multi-intelligence theory, Goleman's emphasis on emotional intelligence (1996), or Renzulli's triad identification method, it is less flexible with any approach that deviates from the basic assumption that giftedness or intelligence/s exists objectively, is inherited and can be measured. Indeed Gallagher (2000) regards inherited intelligence as a 'fact':

*"Until we can accept the fact that inherited differences between students are a natural part of life and, indeed, can be seen as creating persons who through their superior intellect can creatively play a role in solving many of mankind's continuing problems (war, plague, poverty, injustice etc.) we may continue to apologize for putting effort and resources into providing special education for gifted students and gifted programs."*

(p. xxv)

Such arguments could be used to justify why, even in developing countries, there is still special provision for gifted children. If it is a 'fact' that the gifted exist, and that this group are vital for solving the problems of tomorrow, then it could be argued that it makes financial sense to provide appropriately for such children. But when a developing country has many children within it who

have no access to education, and who may be suffering as the result of an impairment that could have been readily treated if resources had been made available, (but which may instead have been spent in educating the gifted), the 'no apology' may strike as insensitive. Kochhar and Gopal (1997) suggested:

*"The total number of impaired people in the world was approximately 400 million in 1980 – expecting to rise to over 600 million by 2000. United Nations estimates suggest that of the world's 500 million with impairments, there are at least 70 million in developing countries whose sight, movement or hearing could be restored at a unit cost of between \$15 and /\$40."*  
(p. 124)

The issue of gifted education therefore becomes a political one when funding priorities are at stake, and the issue is whether to direct funds towards disability or high ability - whether to restore the faculty of sight for instance, or to train a future leader! Yet the pervasiveness of the North American view, means that the majority of countries have adopted this way of thinking, as for example can be seen in Gwany's (1993) research into giftedness in Nigeria:

*"Since historic times to-date, gifted and talented people have been minority groups who receive attention and concern mostly during emergencies and crises. They are a group who are clearly superior to the majority in performance and in which the majority seek for solace of different kinds ..."* (p. 442)

To sum up, the North-American view, which is the dominant perspective on giftedness, regards identification of the gifted as a priority, assuming that the gifted play a part in resolving the world's problems. A current focus is to ensure that maximum numbers of the gifted are identified, particularly amongst children from disadvantaged groups. More and more sophisticated definitions of giftedness and processes of identifying it are used to ensure the widest possible net, and ideas of multiple intelligences have affected the kinds of talents that are now looked for and provided for.

## **Section two: British scene**

According to Campbell, et al. (2004) English policy is very inclusive:

*"... gifted education is an integral part of general education policy, and the approach used integrates pupils with their peers as much as is possible. This approach builds on general education rather than placing gifted education outside the general education structure"* (p. 5)

A similar view is expressed by Montgomery (2003) writing in the NACE journal:

*"The main UK approach to gifted education has for three decades been inclusive. It has sought to improve the education of all children so that the gifted can remain in mainstream and achieve at the highest levels. It resulted from the experiences of a system of selection and streaming which consigned 80% of the population to be seen as failures at the age of 11 years following the 11 plus examination. This approach contrasts with what may be seen in most other countries where giftedness is seen to be problematic and needs 'special provision'." (pp. 4-5)*

The above writers are using the term 'inclusion' in the sense of children of all abilities being educated at the same site. As suggested by Hartas, Lindsay, and Muijs (2008):

*"An increasing emphasis is placed on "access" and "inclusion" in the revised national curriculum referring to the "provision for all" according to their abilities, making support for able students a statutory responsibility" (p.6)*

Further on in my review, I will consider alternative ways of conceptualizing 'inclusion', for example, the embracing and celebrating of 'difference', the 'inclusion' of marginal groups, and the desire to improve social cohesion - and as might be expected, the philosophical and political assumptions vary depending on the definition that is adopted, but at this point I merely wish to suggest that the use of 'inclusion' here, seems to be closer to 'integration', i.e. the notion of including *some* of the able disadvantaged' at the same educational site, than it is to the concept of inclusion as used by, Ainscow (2009) below which is more to do with "naming barriers". Hartas et al have evoked a 'rights' perspective to

signpost how able children too are entitled to provision appropriate to their abilities.

Yet as Black-Hawkins, Florian, and Rouse (2007), suggest, the British system as it now stands can be seen as highly selective.

*"In England the options are many: between state and private schools, mainstream or special, one local school or another, one type of special school or another, selective entry or comprehensive, single sex or mixed, faith or not, specialist status (which specialism?) or not, 'leading edge' or 'in special measures', and so forth ..."* (p. 2)

How can the British system be seen as inclusive, when it has evolved from the tripartite model? And whilst it could be pointed out that this eventually evolved into the more egalitarian comprehensive system of schooling, even then, the tripartite strategy of 'stream and cream' has been continued, not just within schools through their setting arrangements, but also, via the mechanism of parental choice. Parents of able pupils (or perhaps articulate parents who know how to play the system) are able to determine that their offspring will be educated at the 'better', i.e. higher up the league tables, comprehensives. And there has always been the option, for those wealthier parents, of paying for their child to attend a selective school, thus to claim that the British system is inclusive is at best, a little disingenuous, ignoring as it does the two-tier system that is flourishing as strongly today as ever. So how inclusive really, is the British educational system when, it could be suggested that social class is a more accurate predictor of attainment than ability? As Hatcher cites (2006), according to the DfES in its Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners, children who are disadvantaged yet able, are not catered for appropriately within the system:

*"Those from higher socio-economic groups do significantly better at each stage of our system than those from lower ones - indeed (...) socio-economic group is a stronger predictor of attainment than early ability. (p. 203)*

Persson et al. (2000) suggest that giftedness in Britain, whilst rooted to an extent in a more European tradition, still reflects the American



psychological approach, and has, furthermore been adversely affected by its history of education, whereby privately run schools have often dominated the development of gifted writings:

*"...class consciousness exists alongside a tradition of very prestigious schools for the social elite, the political and egalitarian ideals of the working class, influential charities, and parent organizations of the middle class. In addition there is a strong academic tradition of research on various aspects of ability.."* (p. 723)

White and Fletcher (2003) in their round-up of existing British and American research for the NFER, (and in a manner that echoes the round-up of Heller and Monks) conclude that progress will only be made by a multidisciplinary approach which draws on conceptual analysis, psychological theory, practitioner experience, and expert description of ability. And as if to prove the views of Persson and al, they argue that:

*"A potentially useful source of evidence has been ignored, that of selective and specialist schools..."* (p. 4)

British policy on giftedness has thus been influenced by the selective school-system. Its historical foundations were laid by Galton (1864) as well as by pioneers such as Hollingworth and Terman, mentioned above. Galton's views will be looked at in more detail in a later section of this review, but for now, a small extract will suffice to show that his view of giftedness was elitist and exclusive rather than inclusive:

*"...if talented men were mated with talented women, of the same mental and physical characters as themselves, generation after generation, we might produce a highly-bred human race, with no more tendency to revert to meaner ancestral types than is shown by our long-established breeds of race-horses and fox-hounds."* (p. 320)

As Huxtable (2009) suggests, this tradition places pressure on teachers, who, despite the will to improve their practice, have to attempt the categorising of children and definition of a gifted group:

*"To progress, 'gifted education' has to look to a different logic and value base than has dominated our education system in England since Galton and the beginning of mandatory schooling in the nineteenth century. Teachers are still torn between having to respond to the traditional demands of the establishment to define and categorise children, and their desires as educators to improve educational practice, which has a democratising and emancipating intent."*  
(P. 298)

So if British gifted research, policy and practice is not inclusive, then what is it? And how does it compare with the North American perspective? The following consideration of government policy over the last two decades (there was little reference to the terms 'gifted and talented' at government level prior to that), may help to pinpoint the salient features:

- 1992 - A review by Her Majesty's Inspectors on the education of the very able in maintained schools concluded that pupils were insufficiently challenged.
- 1998 - OFSTED commissioned a study by Joan Freeman - to analyse research and practice on the identification and education of very able pupils.
- 1999 - Report published by House of Commons Select Committee on Highly Able children. This began with the view:

*"In recent years, education policy has concentrated on ensuring that all children reach at least a minimum level of competence. However, the Government and those involved in education are now taking a greater interest in the education of highly able children. Why should we be concerned about provision for highly able children? Because the commonly-held view that they can "get by on their own" is not borne out by the facts: they are entitled to have their needs addressed as much as any other children..."* (p. 1)

- 1999 - DfEE launched four grant-funded programmes - master-classes, summer schools, independent/maintained school partnerships and the Excellence in Cities strategy.

- 2002 - The *National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth* was established, to spearhead the government's drive towards supporting gifted pupils. Over the five years that it ran, the chief provision on offer to members consisted of a selection of intensive residential summer schools, as well as short courses and workshops, held at universities across the country. Members would belong to NAGTY, whilst remaining at their usual schools.
- 2007 - NAGTY was superseded by *Young, Gifted & Talented*, who seem to have concentrated more on their Internet services, and one-workshops - rather than the summer schools.
- 2009 - Current Government policy, which can be viewed on the 'Department of Children Schools and Families' (DCSF) website (The Standards Site), defines the gifted cohort as those pupils who:

*"...were previously members of the former National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY) and who were transferred across as members of YG&T in autumn 2007 during the first phase of the YG&T programme launch; and/or were not previously members of the former NAGTY but nevertheless are judged by the school/college to meet the former NAGTY eligibility criteria; and/or while they may not meet the former NAGTY eligibility criteria, have been identified by the school/college as gifted and/or talented because their ability is developed to a level significantly ahead of their year group within that school/college, or because they have the potential to develop such ability."* (p. 2)

Most of these criteria for giftedness are based on the guidelines that were issued by NAGTY, who stipulated a range of entrance requirements that prospective applicants needed to demonstrate, such as exceptional attainment in CATs (cognitive ability tests), SATs, or GCSEs, and although they made some provision for pupils to be judged on the basis of their performance of tasks/challenges (annotated coursework), this was just one qualitative indicator amongst a range of quantitative indicators. NAGTY were willing to accept

recommendations by MENSA, a school's 'gifted and talented coordinator' or an educational psychologist when accepting pupils; i.e. the essentially North-American emphasis on gifted individuals and their psychology, with its assumption that the professionals who define students as such, do so scientifically and therefore are beyond reproach.

As suggested by Hartas et al (2008), there has been a major shift from considering IQ scores *alone*, to:

*"...acknowledging environmental influences on ability and performance in identifying gifted students ... definitions of giftedness based on IQ scores are expanding to include notions of artistic/sporting talents, social giftedness, and diverse cognitive talents..."* (p. 6)

The use of the term 'expanded' in the above extract signposts how the IQ test is no longer the sole method of identifying gifted pupils, and how there are now other components enhancing the process, nevertheless, there has been no major shift in paradigm, as the IQ test is seen still as the bedrock of identification, to which other methods can be added. This is still the dominant perspective, reflected in the vast majority of British research into giftedness. Freeman (2001) for example, in her longitudinal study: "Gifted Children Grown Up", inserts a sub-heading next to each participant's name, indicating whether they are "highly gifted" (top 1%), "gifted" (top 5%), or "above average" (top 20-25%). Whereas Freeman's definition of giftedness is a rich one that draws upon notions of identity, encompasses the impact of social context, and shows concern for the ramifications of parents defining their own children - it would appear that her use of the categories: 'highly gifted', gifted, and 'above average' in her own research is based upon the two types of intelligence test that she administered, in particular the Ravens Matrices non-verbal test of general intelligence. When discussing her research retrospectively (Freeman 2006), she refers to this test as "an objective measurement" of giftedness, and identifies those who fall into the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile as gifted. Freeman qualifies her use of these terms in the preface to her book (2001), explaining they are a form of "short-hand", and used for convenience, and she comments on the limitations of intelligence tests. Never-

the-less, the fact that she uses such labels and thinks them useful, and furthermore that these categories depend on the results of intelligence tests - reflects the dominant psychological paradigm that categories of giftedness exist and are measurable, and that intelligence tests are useful, and have a significant role to play in determining these.

A slight addition to the official definition of giftedness can be found on the Y,G&T website; they have differed from NAGTY in allowing for the admittance of children who are 'significantly ahead of their year group', i.e. *relatively* gifted. But even here, the view of 'intelligence' that is assumed is one that can be measured and tested by the usual school tests, and even if a pupil is yet to develop their full potential, it is never-the-less the kind of ability that would at some point manifest itself in exams.

And one only need look to the National Strategy (2008) guidance on how to prevent underachievement by exceptionally able pupils, to see how the definition suggested is an absolute one, rather than a relative one, and to see, once again, the prevalence of uncontested attainment levels and the assumption that intelligence is an absolute, rather than something contextual :

*"(Exceptionally able pupils are) ... learners who demonstrate or have the potential to demonstrate extremely high levels of ability compared to their peers across the entire population... A quantitative measure which can be used as an indicator is the top 2% nationally for one or more academic and talent areas... Her Majesty's Inspectors have referred to the exceptionally able as those who are capable of working several years ahead of their contemporaries (HMI report 1993). Again this description is more difficult to apply to the talent areas, but the level descriptors for exceptional performance (beyond level 8) in one or more attainment targets within a National Curriculum subject can provide some guidance on what the achievements of an exceptionally able pupil may look like in, for example, art and design or music. .. The top 2% is a useful guide, but should not be the only criterion applied, as it excludes those of potentially exceptional ability whose performance is depressed by lack of opportunity or inhibiting personal circumstances."* (p. 7)

Thus in 2009, the mainstream British view of giftedness retains the assumption that there is such a thing as 'absolute giftedness', and that furthermore this can be measured and provided for, but with some recognition that pupils can also be 'relatively gifted' within their own schools. There is a view that giftedness is something that is inherited rather than created through a suitably conducive environment, although there is some focus on the role played by circumstances in making it harder for a gifted child to encounter opportunities that enable high attainment. This is similar to the North-American view of inherited intelligence outlined above; neither the North-American or British position questions the nature of intelligence, the validity of mechanisms for testing it, or the fallibility (let alone 'right') of those who define it.

The government has located its policy for 'Able, Gifted and Talented' on its 'Standards Site', which is suggestive in itself, of how it is conceptualized, and the discourse it is perceived to have evolved from and be a part of. Yet it is conceivable how an 'A, G&T policy' *might* have been sited on the 'Every Child Matters' (ECM) website, perhaps as part of the 'to achieve' strand. Despite having considerable educational content, including several white papers about education, the ECM website has no link to the 'A, G&T' part of the Standards Site; there are at the time of writing (June 2008) no references on the site to any aspect of A, G&T - equally, the 'Able, Gifted and Talented' policy, situated on the Standards site, does not refer to ECM.

The separation of these two educational discourses by the government, i.e. 'ECM' and 'Standards' - could be seen as symbolizing some of the tension that teachers face today. As Wilson (2009) suggests:

*" There is significant tension in the English education system (as elsewhere) that requires urgent attention. On the one hand, we have an increasingly data-driven system in which pupils' external test results are published; the position of the school in the league tables is considered crucial and there is great pressure to raise achievement scores. On the other hand, there is a simultaneous drive for creativity, and criticism levelled at teachers if schools are not flexible in their provision"* (p 235)

The data-driven approach referred to above, is very much the child of the Standards agenda ; the purpose of the policies on the Standards Site seem to be geared towards the rise in standards of attainment, and the 'closing of the gap' between the highest attainers and the lowest. The notion of 'flexibility of provision' belongs, rightfully to an 'Inclusion-based' discourse. This is of course a concept that features at the heart of 'ECM', with its focus on the well-being of the whole child and every child. If one were searching for further evidence that 'A,G&T' does not sit easily within a discourse of inclusion, then here it is!

Yet the government allegedly aims to help 'disadvantaged gifted' pupils and claims to have done so since 1999. In 2004, for example, Tony Blair was cited by Eyre on the NAGTY website as saying:

*"We believe that people should be able to rise by their talents, not by their birth or advantages of privilege. We understand that people are not all born into equal circumstances, so one role of state education is to open up opportunities for all, regardless of their background. This means we need to provide high standards of basics for all, but also recognise the different abilities of different children, and tailor education to meet their needs and develop their potential" (p. 1)*

According to Dracup (2003) - the government's strategy, since 1999, had been designed to:

*"Improve pupil attainment, aspirations, motivation and self esteem ... help to attract parents back to inner city schools ... support underachieving g&t pupils especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds ... raise teacher expectations about g&t pupils ... and help schools improve their identification, teaching, learning and support" (p. 7)*

'Excellence in Cities' (EiC), which was launched in 1999 to deliver this strategy, was aimed at improving the outcomes for disadvantaged gifted pupils. This initiative involved, to begin with, 24 LEAs in six major conurbations. Its structure was based on partnerships between LEAs and schools. The scheme was then extended to a further 31 LEAs and began to cover primary and the post-16 sector.

The 'Excellence in Cities' strategy avowedly concentrated on selected inner-city areas and provided resources for clusters of schools within the area, with the aim being to target the more deprived parts of the country. EiC schools were required to identify around 5-10% of their cohort as relatively gifted. The aim was to provide resources and encouragement, particularly for disaffected, disadvantaged and underachieving able students. However, only parts of the country were targeted with the EiC initiative. Schools were allocated Excellence in Cities status based on the LEA in which they were located, rather than in relation to their individual socio-economic contexts - thus having EiC status was not a sufficiently accurate indicator of whether a school had a student cohort from a disadvantaged area. The majority of able students did not live in these areas, and were therefore not eligible for the above provision. They had to rely instead on the other Government strategy: the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY). Dracup mentioned the Academy in the same document, conceptualizing it as existing to serve:

*"An 'absolute' population comprising 5-10% who are gifted and talented in national terms. The Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth is catering for the needs of this group... on those 11-16 students who demonstrate 'academic ability' and are within the most able 5% of the population. There is a separate strand of provision for those who are among the most able 1% nationally."* (p. 7)

Whilst it could be argued that the EiC scheme did not go nearly far enough, a more recent government strategy, 'GOAL' - which was lauded by NAGTY representative Lyn Bull (2006) as a "targeted intervention for disadvantaged pupils", in reality catered for even fewer pupils; just a few hundred pupils out of the 100,000+ identified as potential Y,G&T members.

My view is that the best that can be said of the Government's strategy towards 'disadvantaged gifted' is that it means well, but is tokenistic. At worst, however, its policy can be regarded as bolstering an iniquitous society, as the fact that it *seems* to be doing its bit for the disadvantaged, potentially silences critics who could otherwise argue that the policy is elitist. Similarly, if



one subscribes to the view that giftedness is inherited and evenly distributed across the population, then one *sounds* as if one is *not* prejudging about the kinds of children who show high ability, it *sounds* enlightened, and *appears* to be predicated on egalitarian values, but it allows one to side-step potentially damaging criticisms about giftedness being something that is created through a combination of privilege and wealth (e.g. the best public schools, private tutors, expensive computer, highly resourced hobbies etc). Adonis (2006), in his keynote speech at the 2006 National Gifted and Talented conference, argued just that, using a metaphor of a stork distributing gifted babies evenly across the population. Thus, the argument goes, giftedness isn't created, it is 'natural' - and it occurs evenly across the country.

This lack of awareness of the role played by systems, as well as the power structure in British society in the creation of giftedness, leads to policies that are paternalistic in flavour, with psychological or micro-sociological assumptions and methodologies. They tend to take a 'deficit' view of the 'disadvantaged but gifted', and locate causes for concern and recommendations for how to improve matters, in either the (working class) family, the student peer group, or in the teaching or pupil/teacher relationships of individual schools.

An example of the current manifestation of the Government's strategy is the *City Challenge*. This focuses on three areas of the country, and the London strand for example, called *London Challenge*, focuses on those schools that have lower GCSE rates (or who have been identified as failing by OfSTED), and offers a raft of measures reminiscent of the *National Challenge*, which is a strategy targeted at those schools failing to achieve the government's targets for maths and English GCSE pass-rates at C or above. Both the *London Challenge* and the *National Challenge* offer access to specialist advice from 'successful' schools and the identification of an advisor, an approach which I would argue is strongly paternalistic flavour - i.e. the 'successful' or the 'experts' telling the 'less successful' what to do!

And a similar paternalistic approach can be detected in the research of many mainstream writers/thinkers in the British gifted movement.

Freeman (2001) cites two reasons for being concerned about *helping* children reach their gifted potential: individually, so that each human may reach personal fulfilment, and also to serve the wider needs of the community. Freeman touches upon social disadvantage, but only to describe, how two respondents were affected by poverty; there is no coverage of systems, and no comments about inequity.

Wallace (2000) also considers how working class and deprived family backgrounds can be a barrier to recognising and providing for children with ability:

*"Often in Socio-economically disadvantaged homes both parents are consumed by the necessary task of earning a living doing low status work and there is little time, energy and motivation for reading stories, intensive and sustained discussion and mediated play."* (p. 102)

Although Wallace does not criticise the family, indeed shows sympathy for the demands made on parents who have to earn a difficult living; the implication is that the children are never-the-less at a disadvantage as they do not receive educational input from the parents.

Pomerantz and Pomerantz (2002), focus on the role of the teacher/student relationship or the peer group rather than the family, when looking at the under-achievement of gifted students. They researched the views of 26 year 9 pupils, who were identified as pupils with CAT scores of 115, but who nevertheless failed to perform at level 6 or above. There was also a subjective element in the identification of the sample where teachers were asked to identify appropriate pupils.

*"Able Underachievers value good relations with friendly, attentive, available, respectful, socially skilful teachers with a sense of humour, with whom they can communicate in a more adult fashion thus avoiding the 'Cat and mouse' roles that prevent real dialogue. Unfortunately they feel this is rare at school."* (p. 12)

*"Able Underachievers perceive some conflict between meeting competing needs from teachers' and friends' expectations but tend to try to*

*strike a compromise. They do not seem to grasp fully the nature of the conflict but tend to address it as a simple problem that requires a simple compromise solution.”* (p. 33)

*“They really value friendships but seem to have little contact with or understanding of Able Achievers and reject the social costs of being called a ‘square’, ‘swot’, ‘nerd’, ‘spoff’, or ‘geek’. The peer group culture exerts considerable pressure on Able Underachievers. Able Underachievers fear that hard work and self discipline might disadvantage their social life and make them boring.”* (p. 33)

The suggestion is that teachers are to blame for the underachievement of gifted pupils as they do not communicate in the way that able underachievers like and need, and secondly, that the pupil peer group culture pressurizes the able underachiever, leading them to conform to the norm. Again, there is no reference to the role played by gender, social class or ethnicity; the research operates very much at a micro-sociological level.

Interesting parallels can be drawn, between the above views of disadvantaged or working class underachieving gifted students, with a perspective identified by Mac an ghail (1988) in his study of black students:

*“... focusing upon the black student’s distinctive cultural attributes and suggests that social behaviour is primarily to be understood in terms of culture. The dominant social images constructed by this approach sees the black community as a problem. Ethnicity is assumed to act as a handicap of their assimilation or integration into British society, resulting in their relative subordination. So for example, the differences in the educational attainments of ... Afro-Caribbean students is frequently explained in terms of the pathological structure of the Afro-Caribbean family and kinship organization...”* (p. 2)

In the same way that culturalism (as outlined by Mac an ghail above) leads to defeatism and an inward looking analysis incapable of changing power relations, the mainstream gifted perspective on working class/disadvantaged, as conceptualized for example by Freeman (2001), Wallace (2000), and Pomerantz and Pomerantz (2002) lacks awareness of how economic

relations and structures have a determining effect on social formation. Indeed, their work tends to be anthropological in tone when describing the working class gifted! If one were to apply Mac an ghail's arguments, the main problem for working class students who are gifted, is not their culture, but class prejudice, and an institutional framework discriminating against all working class youth.

Whilst mainstream British research into giftedness, and also government policy on giftedness, are not inclusive, there is a focus, to an extent, on disadvantage. However the practical applications of this, I have argued, are at best tokenistic (e.g. the GOAL provision), and at worse reflect a deficit view of the impact of a working class upbringing that blames the family, and lacks any reference to systems or social inequity. And like the North American perspective as outlined in the first section, the underlying paradigm is a positivist one, whereby intelligence is regarded as a 'something' that exists in an objective and measurable form, and where testing is heavily relied upon to differentiate the able from the not so able. As Hughes (2009) says:

*"Education is obsessed with the (easily) measurable; we have reduced the complexities of abilities and intelligence to numbers. We have created artificial intelligence. Students must answer set questions of isolated knowledge in a limited amount of time, and at given times in the calendar. The frequency of right answers can be converted into comparative numbers. These will then decide who is able (and who is not). Thus has been devised an absolute measure, with no room for deviation, making it easy to classify, box, and label students. Those who refuse to enter the box become the designated deviants, to be differently labelled (behaviour problem? Low achiever? Able underachiever?), and /or be brought back into line." - p165*

### **Section three: some links with research into disability**

Although the traditional psychological approach represents the 'majority' perspective on giftedness, alternative theoretical frameworks exist, and have potential for some interesting applications. Towards the end of my review, I look at some of the more recent theoretical advances as well as research and projects

that have been carried out, but at this stage, I have decided to focus on some of the perspectives on inclusion and diversity.

In 1994 the European Council issued the recommendation that all member states should legislate for the special educational needs (SEN) of gifted children and should make special provision within the ordinary school system. An expression of this can be seen in the third section of the Salamanca statement (UNESCO 1994):

*"The guiding principle that informs this Framework is that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups."* (p. 6)

The right to be treated the same, is firmly expressed here, whether a child is gifted or disabled (and it is interesting to see these two concepts grouped together, as if in recognition that they are opposites) but it is left unclear as to what might be meant by 'accommodated'. Does it simply mean that all these groups of children have a right to an education in the same physical space as their peers, or, if the housing metaphor is pursued, are we to provide an educational home, where the child feels they belong and are appropriately provided for? Is 'accommodate' a term that implies 'integration' or 'inclusion'? Whilst the former has connotations of the drive towards the closure of special schools and subsequent placing of former special school pupils in mainstream schools - 'inclusion', as suggested by more recent thinkers now incorporates a range of perspectives. Hick and Thomas (2009) for example suggest:

*"... there has been a progressively broadening compass to that original idea of inclusive education and nearly twenty years hence the focus of inclusive thinking is diversity and social justice just as much as it is mainstreaming and disability."* - (p. xxv)

And as Ainscow argues in the foreword to Hick et al (2009):

*"In some countries, inclusive education is still thought of as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general educational settings. Internationally however, it is increasingly seen more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners. It presumes that the aim of inclusive education is to eliminate social exclusion that is a consequence of attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability. As such it starts from the belief that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just society."*

Hick and Thomas point to how there were changes in the thinking of the 1990s, and a move away from regarding inclusion as 'integration' and the valuing of people with disabilities, to a:

*"...three dimensional terrain that now incorporates a more extensive spectrum of concerns and discourse - about the benefits that come from valuing diversity..."* (p. xiii)

The Salamanca statement could be regarded as one of the early landmarks on this journey with its focus on the valuing of *all* children as can be seen in the Salamanca statement 7:

*"The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use, and partnerships with their communities. There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school."* (pp. 11-12)

This suggests that inclusion does not mean that everyone has to have the same: the emphasis here is on the celebration of individual differences and of ensuring quality education for all children that accommodates their 'diverse needs'. There is an assumption that schools will 'organize' themselves, and use 'strategies' and 'resources' in order to enable difficulties to be overcome.

The above extracts are very different to the medical model of special educational needs, with its emphasis on the problems and needs of the individual child, a view that is still influential, and which seems to affect every level of practice in England for example, with the Code of Practice, and across the world in the role still given to educational psychologists. Farrell and Venables suggest, after citing Jimerson et al', study of 10 countries:(2004):, that educational psychologists have a key role in the assessment of children with special educational needs (2009)

*"Recent research has shown that educational psychologists can have a huge impact on the development of policy and practice towards the maintenance of segregated special educational systems."*(117)

But there has been a shift in paradigm, with its accompanying change in practice in, for example disability thinking, which involves, according to Barton (2003):

*"... the recognition that disability is a social construction and has meant different things in different historical periods and cultural contexts. This is reflected in the shift of official categories and their meaning including, 'moron, 'imbecile', 'idiot', 'insane', 'feeble-minded', 'mentally deficient', 'subnormal', 'mentally handicapped', and 'learning difficulties'. These categories are themselves a reflection of particular socio-economic and cultural developments and the differential ways in which policy and service provision are associated with particular conceptions. Historically therefore, disabled people have experienced a range of responses in both official and commonsense discourses, including fear, hatred, pity, over-protection and patronisation."*(p. 5)

The medical model, or the 'in-person' or 'psychological' model uses the same categories created by Goddard (one of the 'pioneers' of gifted education mention earlier) and regards disability and/or low ability as an objectively existing quality that is open to observation/testing and is measurable and diagnosable by an Educational psychologists. They depend on psychometric instruments such as IQ tests, - and as Farrell and Venables suggest:

*"In relation to the identification and placement of children who might have special needs, the use of IQ tests to categorize children has had a profound impact on the development of segregated provision. The World Health organization has perpetuated this ways of thinking y publishing a table equating IQ scores with different degress of 'mental retardation'" - 119*

Britain, Australia and the USA, as Farrell and Venables point out, "enshrine" the function of IQ tests and role of the Educational Psychologist in law. The British SEN Code of Practice for example relies on Educational Psychologists at the assessment stage, and when recommendations are made about appropriate and educational site for a child, which includes special schools and whilst Farrell and Venables argue that it is possible for an educational psychologist to be inclusive, pinpoint some reasons why in practice EPs are reluctant to move away from this traditional practice:

*"On the one hand most recent literature on the developing role of the EPs is extremely critical of IQ testing, the medical model of working and of their gate-keeping roles in special education assessments. Yet EPs seem reluctant to change their practice. Are we as a profession partly to blame for this? For, in order to establish our credentials as a new profession, we stressed the fact that were the only people who had the expertise and training to administer IQ tests and to use the findings to make recommendations for segregated education. Are EPs, who have been brought up in this tradition, reluctant to move forward and abandon some of their traditional practices for fear that they will be losing their professional identity and distinctive role? And, furthermore, by losing their distinctive role, schools and local authorities might no longer feel the need to employ them?" (p.122)*

Barton (2003), in his analysis of the SEN Code of Practice argues that it embodied certain assumptions redolent of the in-person model:

- *"That special educational policy, provision and practice were unquestionably good for both the pupils involved and the actual system as a whole*



- *That the predominant perspectives about within-the-child factors were a sufficient explanation for understanding the significant issues involved in terms of disabled pupils and children's experiences and opportunities*
- *That professional decision-making was overwhelmingly in the best interests of those for whom the decisions were claimed to be made" (p. 3)*

The above assumptions can be as easily applied to the gifted movement in Britain, and the unquestioning acceptance of categories such as gifted, 'exceptionally gifted', 'talented' etc as well as the faith in intelligence testing, and the evaluations of educational psychologists in determining giftedness have distinct parallels. Yet despite these two fields being, arguably, merely different sides of the same coin, (and listed as 'opposites' in the Salamanca statement) there seems to be little recognition within the gifted movement of inclusive thinking, which is beginning to take on such momentum in the field of Disability.

Barton (2003) argues that inclusion is regarded as:

*"...transformation of those deep structural barriers to change including the social base of dominant definitions of 'success', 'failure', and 'ability' ....it is a distinctly political "in your face" activity .... it is a public process of naming and celebrating differences and engaging with the identification of what it is we value about one another...Inclusive education is about why, how, when, where, and consequences of educating all learners. It involves the politics of recognition and is concerned with the serious issue of who is included and who is excluded within education and society generally." (p. 12)*

The history of inclusion represents a move away from the positivist paradigm of most of the research reviewed up until this point. It involves a thorough 'unpicking' of the discourse we use when thinking, talking and writing about ability, and highlights how political this discourse is. As demonstrated earlier, the notion of who is and who is not gifted is something that seems to preoccupy gifted researchers - but, as I shall argue in the next section of my review, this is far from being benign.

Clark et al (1998), who also comment on the positivistic nature of the traditional 'SEN' movement, could just as easily be referring to the gifted movement:

- *"An essentially positivist view of the world, in which differences between learners were taken to be objectively 'real' and susceptible to investigation using the methods of the natural sciences;*
- *A concern with those differences which were held to take the form of deficits and difficulties and which were understood largely through the disciplines of medicine and increasingly educational psychology*
- *An essentially functionalist view of special education as a rational response to these difficulties and deficits, developed on the basis of scientific inquiry and offering scientifically proven interventions leading to cure or amelioration"* (p. 158)

One interesting indication of how entrenched the gifted movement is with regards to this model, and how uneasily if at all it includes the discourse of inclusion within its wider paradigm, can be seen in the recent proliferation of research by writers interested in 'dual exceptionality' i.e. co-existing giftedness and SEN. Diane Montgomery for example, whilst avowedly advocating provision that is inclusive, retains the positivist notion of ability:

*"The best form of provision is inclusive, challenging, and interesting to all the learners... There are more than a million potentially gifted and talented pupils in the country but the National Curriculum was only designed to meet the needs of the average learner so it does not reach the hard to teach, the gifted, or the able underachiever. Providing summer schools and master classes is not going to reach them either... The term high ability is frequently used in UK literature before the new initiatives as it is a term that does not imply something perfectly formed and immutable such as a 'gift', rather it encompasses a wider range of capabilities"* (p. 4)

Montgomery then defines giftedness via performance in IQ tests and talks about 'standard deviation from mean'. But her main concern is those students with 'double exceptionality':

*"... gifted pupils with special needs exist and are more widely found than perhaps had been expected. Silverman (1989) for example found that one third of the gifted in her large sample had learning disabilities ...."* (p. 5)

Montgomery uses terms such as: 'deficit', disability, 'needs' ... i.e. a medical/remediation discourse, and when considering 'learning disabilities', refers to the, appropriate education or therapy, with which '*normal* achievements will be attained" - (p. 7)

A similar paternalistic emphasis on 'needs', counselling, compensation etc is used by Wendy Stewart (2003) in her account of 'gifted, learning disabled' pupils:

*"GLD students are intensely aware of their difficulties and shortcomings and need someone who will advocate and support them especially if counselling is not available. In order to cope in their areas of difficulty they need time and someone to teach them strategies for overcoming and compensating for them."* (p. 28)

Shirley Kokot in her neurodevelopmental approach uses an obviously medical discourse:

*"...many gifted children are recognised as having neurobiological problems that interface with academic and social/emotional functioning. It is common practise to label these according to the symptoms they manifest... These conditions may be accompanied by learning disabilities that persist in spite of diverse therapies being tried often by desperate parents"* (p. 11)

and,

*"By applying neuroscience in order to understand the problems experienced by many individuals with a variety of neurodevelopmental concerns, it is possible for them to gain or restore more efficient functioning...."* (p. 23)

The functionalist assumptions mentioned by Barton are easily discerned here, as is the language of deficit. As Hick and Thomas (2009) suggest:

*"The re-construction and medicalisation of difference, difficulty and dissent within a range of 'new' variables of disability or special educational need - such as Attention Defecit Hyperactivity Disorder, or Oppositional Defiance Disorder - can be seen as further examples of how exclusionary pressures continue to reassert themselves in new forms and new discourses in changing circumstances."* (p. Xxv)

There are, I shall next be arguing, political implications embedded within the positivistic, psychological discourse of gifted or 'disability/SEN' research.

#### **Section four: the dark-side of Intelligence theory**

It is my contention that the psychological approach towards giftedness and disability rests on tainted foundations, and that an exploration of the history provides an insight into some of the assumptions carried forward today. Specifically, I shall be arguing that the Eugenics/Euphenics movement underpins the dark-side of intelligence theory. In this section I ask the question, 'why are researchers into giftedness so reluctant to let go of their assumptions?' and touch upon some possible answers, such as that perhaps it is because it is something they (and the public) see as a 'good', and subsequently desire and want to believe in, and want to maintain and secure for those they feel an affinity with.

Czeizel (1996) talks about two distinct types of geneticists. The first, beginning with Galton, believed that genes determined everything including talent. They wished to improve the lot of human beings, thus improve the gene type by selective breeding. Within this school there were positive and negative

geneticists - the former wished to enrich desirable traits by increasing the number of children of talented people. However, Czeizel suggests:

*"this idea was later used for dirty purposes (e.g. to enrich desirable social classes or ethnicracial groups) by criminal persons..."* (p. 106)

Negative geneticists aimed to reduce undesirable qualities of mankind, and reduce 'unfit' persons. Contraception, sterilisation, and abortion were some of the methods used, and the writer says this method works well with genetic diseases as they are relatively rare.

According to Czeizel, the second school of genetics, ('mental orthopaedics'), founded by Binet, thought that most variation between people was the result of environmental factors. They also wished to improve the human condition.

Czeizel refers to eugenics, which accepts that we are:

*"..not able to modify genes within the polygenic system of multifactorial diseases, and we cannot direct the segregation of parental genes to the offspring because it is incompatible with human rights and humanity. However we are able to control the expression of genes."* (p. 108)

Thus it is possible to modify the phenotype by for example, protecting informed people from a given disorder by the limitation of specific hazards and by the use of protective factors such as organizing health promotion campaigns. One example of eugenic prevention is the prevention of early onset of heart disease with people with a certain genetic predisposition by identifying (family history, cholesterol tests, DNA probing), education about risk factors such as smoking and fatty food, and use of things to enhance health (e.g. physical exercise and certain foods).

Gardner (1999), in his study of multiple intelligences had applied this perspective to the field of gifted research:

*" Even those who are repelled by the idea of cloning or more aggressive forms of eugenics understand the appeal of testing for the lethal gene of , say, Huntingdon's chorea and, if possible, turning it off. But the decisions first exercised in the realm of bodily disease will sooner or later reverberate in*

*the corridors of personality and intellect. We have to ask whether we want to eliminate the genes that give rise to dyslexia, and we may ask whether we will tolerate genetic engineering aimed at producing individuals who excel at mathematics, chess, music-making, or the less appealing ability, to manipulate others.”* (p. 216)

It is my contention that these ideas were already present in the origin of the gifted movement and also in the disability movement and that two of the classic thinkers about ability, Hollingworth (1929) and Galton (1864) conceptualized intelligence in ways that could be regarded as elitist:

Hollingworth’s preface included the following extract:

*“The literature of experiment dealing with unfortunate deviates – the stupid, the delinquent, the dependent – has long been voluminous; but the literature dealing with fortunate deviants was until recent years chiefly legendary.”* (pvii preface)

Hollingworth advocates the view that giftedness is a biological matter, and goes on to consider the commonality of head shape (long-headed) , physique (bigger), greater strength and speed, superior motor ability, better health, longer period of being able to reproduce (early menstruation and late menopause) of the gifted, using Terman’s studies (1924) as support for her statement below:

*“.As regards race, we have few facts. In the United States it has been found that negro children furnish relatively few of the gifted, and that children of Italian parentage furnish nearly as few. American children of English, Scotch, and Jewish descent seem especially frequent among the gifted. To find most easily and quickly a group of gifted children, one should go to a private school, or to a public school in an excellent residential section of a city, and ask for children who are young for their classes, and whose fathers are professional men.”* (p.75)

Hollingworth’s view here is that certain races and social classes of people do not as a rule produce gifted offspring. The above quotation, whilst saying there are ‘few facts’ about race seems to sum up the flavour of her work,

which appears to regard eugenics benignly. The influence of the views of Galton and Hollingworth can be evidenced in early twentieth century American law, as stated by Hick and Thomas (2009):

*"The consensus about the good sense imagined to be embodied in eugenics is evidenced by the fact that at the end of the 1920s twenty-four American states had passed laws enabling compulsory sterilisation". (p. xxv)*

Galton's views about eugenics are stated very explicitly below:

*"If a twentieth part of the cost and pains were spent in measures for the improvement of the human race that is spent on the improvement of the breed of horses and cattle, what a galaxy of genius might we not create! We might introduce prophets and high priests of civilization into the world, as surely as we can propagate idiots by mating cretins. ... The feeble nations of the world are necessarily giving way before the nobler varieties of mankind; and even the best of these, so far as we know them, seem unequal to their work... We want abler commanders, statesmen, thinkers, inventors, and artists... No one, I think, can doubt, from the facts and analogies I have brought forward, that, if talented men were mated with talented women, of the same mental and physical characters as themselves, generation after generation, we might produce a highly-bred human race, with no more tendency to revert to meaner ancestral types than is shown by our long-established breeds of race-horses and fox-hounds." (p. 158)*

Galton (1864), who is often credited with being one of the earliest serious thinkers on the subject of intelligence spent considerable time pondering the notion and significance of eugenics. Not only does Galton appear to be justifying the domination and conquest of 'feeble' countries, he also proposes selective breeding, and by implication, negative eugenics also. This sinister note, which was sounded also by Hollingworth, is present in the works of Adolf Hitler (1939) as can be seen below:

*"From the very hour of his birth the spark of genius is living within the man who has been endowed with the real creative faculty. True genius is an innate quality. It can never be the result of education or training. As I have*

*stated already, this holds good not merely of the individual but also of the race. Those peoples who manifest creative abilities in certain periods of their history have always been fundamentally creative. It belongs to their very nature, even though this fact may escape the eyes of the superficial observer.” (p. 86)*

Neither Galton or Hollingworth were alive during the rise of Nazi Germany, and perhaps did not anticipate how their comments on superiority of certain races, types etc could be interpreted by a post fascist reader– but both writers eulogized about giftedness, as if it were a golden, God-given blessing, something noble and precious, to be nurtured and valued, something that helped explain the eminence of certain families throughout history, i.e. they had a good gene pool! They considered that the poor were not gifted, which was why they were the poor; the rich were rich because they were superior, more intelligent, more morally aware, more physically healthy and attractive. Intelligence tests could identify early on (and should aim to do so) whether a child was gifted, in which case, provision was necessary to secure maximum development. Without eugenics, Hitler’s particular fascist vision, as expressed above, could not have been articulated, and his particular justification for the murder of hundreds of thousands of disabled people could not have been presented.

As the century progressed, eugenics began to lose face, as Hick and Thomas (2009) suggest:

*“After the war the, the respectability of eugenics vanished and no one any longer dared to advocate that segregation was in anyone’s best interests. People began to realise that separation in any sphere of life is for the convenience of the majority, marginalizing, disenfranchising, and often oppressing the separated minority.”*

(p. xxv)

But despite a growing awareness of the political and ethical implications of eugenics, I do not think it is too fanciful to suggest that this shameful moment, the embracing of eugenics, still shadows giftedness today. For example Herrnstein and Murray, (1994) suggested that the intelligence spread was along a curve with relatively fewer people at either end, that intelligence was



largely inherited, and that many of society's ills were perpetuated by people with low intelligence. According to Gardner (1999), the writers left the impression, that white people had a higher IQ than black people. Gardner comments that although the book was widely criticized in some circles, it was never-the-less accepted by conservatives and many psychologists.

And there has been little evidence to suggest there has been a paradigm shift away from the basic assumptions about the role played by genetics, and subsequently inherited intelligence that has typified so much research, from Hollingworth and Termann in the 1920s, through to the end of the century, up to the respected researchers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century such as Joan Freeman, who was the British government's 'academic of choice' to present the round-up of literature on giftedness. As discussed earlier in this review, Freeman, like Hollingworth and Termann before her, assigns importance to the role played by intelligence tests when defining giftedness, and without any apparent difficulty or self-doubt, she is able to categorize her participants as gifted, and highly gifted on the basis of test results.

In a similar vein, Deborah Eyre, who was the director of NAGTY, stated at the 2004 'x-city' conference on giftedness:

*"Ability is a mix of inherited predispositions colliding with environmental, personality and contextual features" (p. 1)*

This same desire to retain the idea that intelligence is inherited was prevalent in the 2006 National conference, where, as quoted earlier, the keynote speech by Lord Adonis referred frequently to: the 'seed' of giftedness, and the necessity to 'mine' all the 'silver'. When I questioned the DFES representative (Dracup) about how the government intended to 'mine the silver' with regard to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, (as after-all, it hadn't been referred to in the 2005 white paper, the EiC funding was coming to an end, and although Dracup's presentation had identified 'improved customer support' as one of the things 'we' needed to do, I was still unclear, exactly, how this would happen with regard to disadvantaged students) - he spoke about GOAL. However, as

mentioned earlier, this scheme was unlikely to be anything other than tokenistic, when it was for just 200 students from the then total NAGTY cohort (100,000)

It is my contention that NAGTY, and its successor Y,G&T retain the assumption that psychology is neutral, that intelligence can be accurately measured, and that despite the 'talk' of serving gifted children from all backgrounds, their perspective sits uneasily with those who favour the Inclusion agenda. The government bodies who have taken responsibility for giftedness have regarded themselves as having a 'compensating' function, both in the resources offered, but also through the gesture of money to help disadvantaged gifted children. They are paternalistic - and, as suggested earlier there seems a strange absence of any kind of awareness of the class system, and the role played by social class with regard to pupil attainment, yet, as Hatcher (2006) suggested:

*"If you want to know how well a child will do at school, ask how much its parents earn. The fact remains that after more than 50 years of the welfare state and several decades of comprehensive education, that family wealth is the single biggest predictor of success in the school system. Of course some children from well-off homes don't do well at school and some children from poor backgrounds succeed, the overall pattern is clear: social class, defined in terms of socio-economic status, correlates closely with attainment at school."* - (p. 202)

I would argue that there are political motivations behind the mainstream view on giftedness, which is that intelligence is largely inherited/genetically based. The "instinct to exclude", as Hick and Thomas (2009) argue, leads to a segregative system where some are included some are excluded:

*"The impulse to exclude (and the panic that sometimes accompanies attempts to dilute separative systems) has been at the root of segregative systems of education ... the exclusive instinct existed in the establishment of special schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and before, but it was given a boost in the early part of the twentieth century by the systemization of public education and by the contemporaneous growth of the eugenic and psychometric*

*movements ... and the new science of psychology. Eugenics and psychometrics, until the second world war, had been essential for the advance of segregative systems, acting in symbiosis to feed a notion that separation was best for all: both best for those separated and best for those remaining in mainstream.” (p. xxv)*

The scientific-sounding positivistic discourse masks the contested nature of the entire paradigm, and makes it appear objective when it is not. The term ‘differentiation’ for example, which is used to refer to the way that teachers individualize teaching materials/approaches in response to pupil needs, resonates with and in a sense derives some status from its other more mathematical but still similar meaning; the implication being that there is nothing value-laden about this process. However as Hatcher (2006) points out:

*“The function of differentiation as a mechanism of social class selection is also exemplified by another key government policy, personalised learning... (which is a) crude categorisation of pupils’ abilities as the basis for social selection into different job-related pathways... Government policy conceptualizes children’s learning in terms of scores, levels and targets, and this has had a profound effect on how teachers conceptualize the abilities of children ... it is a way of thinking exemplified by the government’s promotion of the spurious concept of ‘gifted and talented’. Assessment has become central to the teacher’s role, and its primary purpose is selection, not the diagnosis of learning needs...” (p. 208)*

‘Assessment’ and ‘personalized learning’ similarly conceal their subjective and value-laden nature - posing as tools for the teacher ... as aspects of a non-contested ‘teacher craft’ in a professional yet (allegedly) inclusive environment. However, like ‘differentiation’ they serve to preserve the illusion of a meritocracy whilst simultaneously justifying social inequity; i.e. if a child is ‘assessed’ as ‘intelligent’, then ‘differentiation’ results in a ‘personalized’ learning experience - and who can argue with one child receiving a diet of high culture and another a vocationally based course, if ‘assessment’ has indicated the ‘fittingness’ of this? As Hatcher (2006) comments:

*"From age 14 differentiation becomes overt social segregation, within and between schools, when any pretence of a common curriculum ends and foreign languages, the arts and humanities become optional. It is mainly schools in working class areas which will abandon these subjects ... for the majority of working class students the diet is a basic core - exemplified by Tomlinson's proposed school-leaving tests in functional English, maths and information technology - and vocational training. First came the decision to allow FE colleges to take students from 14 part-time, again mainly working class. The latest government plan, to be published in a white paper in 2005, is that 14-year old students can go to FE college full time, or take up a trade such as plumbing under a 'young apprenticeship' scheme on a split week basis between college, school and work - all justified in the name of personalized learning..."*  
(p. 210)

Margolin (1996) also looked at the political function of mainstream educational pedagogy. He analysed how the concept of 'potential' serves the affluent classes who can use it to circumnavigate (their) assessment rules, to categorize a child as gifted even when assessment has failed to discover this! Margolin suggests that gifted potential rather than attainment becomes the crucial defining feature; thus those who perform well and work hard are not necessarily permitted entry; conversely poor performance from a certain kind of pupil can be seen as underachievement/poor motivation of a gifted pupil.

An interesting comparison can be made between Margolin's analysis and the ethos of the NAGC (National Association of Gifted Children), which is a parental pressure group in Britain. The NAGC (2001) take great care to make a distinction between able and gifted, and use the concept of 'over achiever', which one could argue, can serve to keep certain people out (ones who don't fit their view of gifted). Those students who quietly do well (but not brilliantly) on tests, but without an accompanying gifted personality, can be excluded from the gifted label, and categorized as over-achievers. A similar distinction has been used by Y,G&T to warn against focussing on achievement rather than ability when identifying giftedness.

The gifted label is open to being hi-jacked by parent power. NAGC advises families to obtain assessments from educational psychologists if their offspring display a certain set of psychological characteristics, even if their child hasn't shown any signs of exceptional attainment – and as stated earlier, NAGTY and then later Y,G&T accept the recommendation of an educational psychologist, A,G&T coordinator etc. Thus it is possible for children of families who are able to afford the services of an educational psychologist, or have the ability to influence the A,G&T coordinator at their child's school to gain access to the label of giftedness in a way that children of disadvantaged families are probably less likely to.

As Margolin (1996) suggests, the gifted label itself secures privileges:

*"The critical element of a pedagogy of privilege is not what is actually learned or acquired through this pedagogy but how what is acquired or achieved is perceived... what gifted children are actually taught... makes no difference... what matters is that these things are taught through gifted education. The prestige, power and privilege thus derive not from the content of what is taught but from where it is taught and who is taught..." (p.177)*

Yet the prevailing British (and North American) view on giftedness is that it has an objective reality, and that gifts and high intelligence (as well as weaknesses or low intelligence) are usually the consequence of inherited surplusses(or defecits) rather than the success (or failure) of the class system, and are best treated by benevolent expert adults who can define, diagnose and design treatment for the children to receive . My view is that although there are some aspects of gifted education that are salvagable and useful, some of which I consider in the concluding section of my review, that the bulk of research into giftedness should be treated with caution, given its ideological function. As Sapon-Shevin (2006) argues:

*"Gifted education constitutes an example of formalized meritocracy training; students are taught two things: 1) who is smart and worthy of exciting opportunities and who is not, and 2) when apparent unfairness or*

*inconsistencies are noted, it is better not to ask. Not asking is "good", making teachers uncomfortable with such questions is not good. Because gifted education is "fair" - anyone who tests high enough can get in - the differential treatment must also be fair. It would be ungenerous and petty to find fault with one's exclusion from a game from which one was eliminated "fairly". The damage of meritocratic thinking - people who are worthy deserve what they get and get what they deserve - has the weight of power of educational objectivity and fairness to silence any protest or objection." (p. 135)*

### **Section five: towards a more inclusive definition**

Within the last couple of years, researchers have begun to emerge on the gifted scene with a more critical view of the mainstream. Smith (2006) for example talks about how the literature of gifted education parallels that of SEN. Both have origins in narrow definitions and identification techniques which sought to label pupils different from the norm - provision was segregated and 'special'.

She points out how the notion of 'extra support' carries within it the idea that a norm exists - and that although the emphasis of deficit is reduced by opening the range of pupils who may be considered to need additional support (to include EAL, and 'A,G&T') - in some ways, all that is done is to recognize deficit at both ends of the bell curve - the notion of this needs to be challenged to achieve inclusion.

In the UK, schools have had to cope with the tension created by the, on the one hand traditional emphasis on identification of ability, with the objective of ever increasing attainment, with, on the other a desire to be inclusive. As Hick, Kershner and Farrell suggest (2009):

*"In the UK schools are under more pressure than ever to raise academic standards for all pupils. In this climate some teachers are expressing increasing reluctance to admit more pupils identified with special needs, feeling*

*their presence may have a negative effect of the attainment of other pupils. In addition the recent emphasis on beacon and specialist schools and the 'threat' of returning to forms of selection in some areas (e.g. in the new Academies) suggests that there is a growing movement in education that values 'elitism' - hardly values that are compatible with inclusive philosophy."* - p2

Hughes (2009) talks about how all children should be taught to be able:

*"We must temper control with humility and provide the conditions for all children to have confidence in themselves as learners. Teachers must stand alongside their pupils and equip them to go beyond accepted wisdom. We must teach all children to become able."* - p168

Similarly Hymer (2002) talks about society's preoccupation with genetic heritability of intelligence, and points to how:

*"...beliefs about the genetic heritability of intelligence - as defined by IQ remain powerful influences on social policy in our society - and they would be even more powerful if the implications of arguments in books such as "The Bell Curve" (1994) were pursued to their dismal ends."* (p. 10)

Hymer quotes Howe, in anticipation of reservations from the mainstream perspective:

*"Of course we're not all born equal. Michael Howe, long-time rebutter of arguments for genetic determinism in the field of giftedness, qualifies his assertion about the lack of research evidence for genetic explanations for natural talent by going on to make the point that '... it would be totally wrong to conclude that all infants are born identical, so far as the possible precursors of ability difference are concerned. There do exist early differences between infants, some of which are probably inborn and possibly inherited, that can have effects of various kinds on later development' (Howe 1990:112). It's just that the outcomes of these differences are neither fixed, nor direct, nor predictable. I would argue that it's only through proclaiming the universality of individual difference and extraordinariness (realised or latent) that it's possible to deny the*

*equivalence of children's diverse range of aptitudes and gifts and talents without being charged with elitism."* (p. 7)

Taking heart from these shifts in paradigm, I explore here in my last section the views of some more of the writers/researchers whose ideas and approaches can be interpreted as contributing to the body of work informing a more inclusive view of intelligence.

Piirto (1999) takes on board the criticisms of Margolin, plus writers who use a SEN framework, to advocate a post-modernist framework as a way forward for gifted education. Initially Piirto examines the 'grand narratives' of gifted education, for example: being gifted is 'good'; the aim of gifted education is to go to college and change social class; the gifted are a national resource etc – as a way of 'opening up' the discourse. She asks questions such as: 'what have we unconsciously rejected/accepted?', and 'how are we compliant, complicit and blind?' –as well as also looking at terminology, e.g. who are the 'non-gifted' and what does this mean? Piirto suggests we focus on power relations, for example:

*"Much of the rhetoric justifying the existence of an effort for special education for intellectually talented students is that they can "save the world" as "natural resources." Essentially we are educating the students to assume roles of power and privilege. If someone has power, someone else does not; and when the subordinates accept their status as natural, inherent, destined or random, oppression and power are securely entrenched."*(p. 343)

Assumptions about the 'goodness' of dominant western governments including ideas that the capitalist free-enterprise system is good for the world, and that bright students should be educated to carry out it's intrusion into other cultures, result in a "...one-sided, hegemonic view of power..."(343) which may influence bright students who have not been encouraged to be critical. Elsewhere, when writing about creativity, Piirto (2004) refers to how:

*"... many fields have proprietary interest in creativity"-* (p. 38)

Which is also applicable to gifted education and how there may be different reasons for the emphasis on creativity. Piirto's suggestion



that schools investigate the research and understanding behind creativity tests can again be applied to the preponderance of tests used in schools to evaluate intelligence.

Armenta (1999) also wishes to continue to work within the field of giftedness whilst simultaneously deconstructing it. She draws examples from the school of lesbian and gay studies which has had a long history in looking at identity issues and uses this to suggest that we should look at the construct of giftedness amongst other things.

Armenta suggests that identifying and educating the gifted have been of roughly equal importance for educators, researchers and historians of the gifted and that these are rooted in opposite principles: identification, which is essentialist, and focuses on decrypting the effects of biology and environment; and education, which is about transforming and helping students to write the stories of their lives. Whereas ideally identification should serve education, it has actually played the leading role, a fact which has driven contradictions to the surface. Essentialism is at the very root of gifted education, and the consensus is that giftedness can be explained in genetic and/or environmental terms. In other words, according to Essentialists, some people just are or are not gifted.

Armenta says it is not surprising that the essentialist/deterministic/identification focussed works with their scientific status (biology/psychology/physiology) have found favour over the humanist sociological educational aspects. The essentialist school gains status from its association with science, and the more 'medical' its discourse, the more value free it seems. The central difficulty for Armenta is as follows:

*"..eliminating all essentialist-like research and strategies to embrace a radical talent-development approach leaves almost no room for gifted education. Should we disregard our centennial legacy of research and experience? Should we admit that all students at all ages have relative talent and therefore, focus on the identification and development of talent in all youth?"* (p. 385)

Her answer to this question is 'no', but that we should replace the central focus of gifted education, so rather than looking at identification, we look at the gifted person's construct. Armenta suggests we approach giftedness as an issue of identity, and devote time to the study of identity before trying to 'marry' the two disciplines ('gifted education' and identity studies).

Armenta's view is that we have to admit giftedness as a construct and that it is not something we have discovered and that is out there, like a "tree in a forest", but something that is perceived in the eye of the definer. It exists only within a framework, and not beyond time or culture. As 'definers', teachers/educationalists have a moral obligation to make clear the connection between their views, and what serves their social interests. This implies thinking about thinking; looking at the history and content before assessing the worth and merit of the construct of 'gifted education'. A consequence of shifting the focus away from identification and instruction to identity would be a shift in the balance of power, the power would be with the student who engages in self-knowledge and self acceptance.

Armenta argues that we would need to look at identity in two ways – as contributing to a person's sense of difference as well as a person's sense of belonging. The ethical dimensions of both should be addressed as they have been in Lesbian/Gay literature. There needs to be an awareness of potential conflict with giftedness and other identities such as ethnic/peer group/class/gender.

Armenta recommends shifting the balance of power; in her case it is away from the idea of the gifted being the passive recipients of gifts to active constructors of identity. But as Armenta retains the notion of the role of the 'definer' and hence something of psychology - it could be suggested that she doesn't go far enough towards a more inclusive definition: perhaps it would have been more consistent (and also interesting) if she had answered her own question: Should we admit that all students at all ages have relative talent and therefore, focus on the identification and development of talent in all youth?" with a 'yes'?

Hymer seems to have done just this! Below is an extract from the Barrow Community Learning Partnership gifted and talented policy January 2002:

*"... a gifted or talented student is regarded as one who has*  
*i) experienced a degree of facilitated self-reflection on his or her pattern of learning strengths and preferences; and ii) identified his or her area(s) of greatest strength(s) within the framework of an enriched learning environment. Strengths would include gifts and talents as identified by the DfES Excellence in Cities initiative (Gifted and Talented strand) and also less measurable 'soft' skills and qualities such as interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and other elements crucial to thinking for learning (e.g. resilience, analysis, wise judgement and discernment, intuition and imagination)."* (p. 14)

And in some of Hymer's later work (2009), he moves from talking about talent identification, to 'gift creation' which he says happens at moments of coincidence between "opportunity and need", and where we move away from looking at 'objective' data, to "creating opportunities for present and future learning":

*"Implications for the field of giftedness arise implicitly from all of these shifts: we need to embrace the dynamic processes of learning rather than its crystallised products and seen an obsession with identification and labelling strategies for the few (visible performance), give way to serious consideration of the factors underpinning gift-creation (leading to long-term learning) for all."* P307

Hymer's rejection of the creation of strategies for the few, in favour of a consideration of how to 'create gifts' for all, represents a large shift in paradigm, and shows how it is possible to situate giftedness within an ECM agenda. If this emphasis on the achievements of all is combined with Piirto and Armenta's focus on the way an individual constructs their identity to include notions of ability, then some interesting areas for future research emerge.

The following three studies embody something of this approach. The first, Oppelt (1996) is based on gypsy children, and I think, highly unusual for its spirit of embracing difference. It does not, for example, apply a cultural assimilation or deficit approach, and try to impose a compensatory curriculum.

Oppelt explains how Hungary has a history of being a multi-ethnic state, together with state entrenched practices to ensure protection of minorities. All nationalities have the right to:

*"...use their mother tongue, the right to publish newspapers and have radio and television broadcasts of their own, to operate nationality associations, to preserve and promote their own future."* (p. 206)

Oppelt notes (p. 206) that a 'law on Minority' provided the gypsy population of approx 500-700 thousand people with all the rights of the other ethnic minorities. Apparently about 45% of these people are socially disadvantaged, and there is a disproportionate amount of gypsy children going into schools for the handicapped and schools for young offenders. Oppelt mentions resistance amongst gypsy families to education, and identifies language barriers as a particular disadvantage.

Oppelt's focused on the idea that :

*"many gifted children do not develop their full potential because their social and educational environment is unable to provide for their special developmental needs..."* (p207)

Rather than pointing to a deficit in the home environment and using this as an excuse to not make any provision, Oppelt prepared nursery school teachers by introducing them to gypsy culture, life-style and education, and taught them some gypsy language. The teachers also went into the gypsy homes in order to get information about individual children's special needs and talents.

Oppelt reported that:

*"the fact that teachers studied or spoke Gypsy language had a huge effect among the Gypsies, and respect for the teachers increased... the Hungarians started to respect the Gypsies more ...the children became bilingual even in nursery school..."* (p.208)

It was found that most of the gypsies could then pass the usual tests. When looking for talent, they used tests in the gypsy vernacular, made sure the children understood the tests and their purpose, and used non-verbal

tests where possible. Oppelt's study can thus be seen as practical ideas about how to apply a multi-cultural pluralist perspective.

This same perspective can be glimpsed in Hebert's (1996) study of three Latino men. He used an ethnographic approach, to look at the lives, and successes of the young men concerned. Hebert used participant and non-participant observation as well as open-ended interviews with the young men, their families, mentors and friends. Particular emphasis is placed on the men's resilience, which, the writer postulates, is a key part of their coping mechanism. Like Oppelt, Hebert's respect for a way of life different to the mainstream is easily apparent, for example in his desire to establish dialogue with his respondents.

The third study which caught my attention was the Eureka experiment, by Zorman (1997), developed in Israel, as a way of identifying and then teaching pupils with high potential. Using two schools from low-socio economic backgrounds in Tel-Aviv, and concentrating on infants, all children were exposed to two years of stimulating artistic and scientific learning environments/methods. Children were not chosen beforehand, and after two years, when some form of identification was attempted, teachers and other professionals, didn't use tests, but evaluated portfolios of work. Around a third of all pupils were then given opportunities for immersion via either enrichment days (one a week), or extra courses at the end of the school day. Students not identified as talented continued to be exposed to the curriculum content in the same 'exposure' manner as the first two years, and could join the immersion group if they 'bloomed'.

## **Conclusion**

My view of giftedness is a constantly evolving one. I began at the outset of my research, with a set of assumptions that were very typical of traditional ways of thinking. Yet I changed my views during the course of my study, and now, in 2009, believe, passionately that all children matter, that all children have a right to be noticed and challenged. I think the gifted label is

divisive, and there are other ways of organizing how to provide extension/enrichment work (e.g. Hymer) and that it is misguided to divide children up, matching provision to those with perceived deficits or surpluses. This said, I am aware of the 'purchasing power' of the gifted discourse and how it functions in the iniquitous world and whilst I am reluctant to deprive any disadvantaged children from securing a leg-up' through being identified as such, am aware of the implications of not identifying others.

Like Armenta and Piirto, I intend in my own research to look carefully at the constructs and grand narratives of giftedness; in particular the construct of giftedness itself, and how it functions within the ideology of an iniquitous world. I shall try and reject the 'mantle of the expert' approach which has typified so much research within the positivist mainstream in the past (and present!) and try and find a way of presenting the perceptions of students that is not dependant on essentialist assumptions and methodology.

## Chapter 3:

### Methodology

#### Aim

The aim of this study is to explore perceptions of educational experiences held by a group of students identified as able in the context of a challenging school. The study will consider the notion of ability, in particular the term gifted, and an alternative, more inclusive approach.

#### Research Questions

- How do the students in the study perceive education at the end of KS3, during KS4, and the end of KS4?
- How do they perceive any experiences of being supported or challenged educationally?
- How do they perceive and conceptualize themselves? How might a notion of ability feature within their self concept?
- How do they perceive/categorize/identify themselves in relation to others - such as the school, the family, the peer group and wider society? Do they feel that they are 'included'?

#### Theoretical inspiration

I had three major theoretical inspirations for my methodology: the praxis-based Freirean framework (1972), Jacques Derrida's post-modernist concept of existence (1976), and, later on in my study, the Other-focussed philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (1969).

I had been, and still am, inspired and motivated by Freire's indictment of society's oppression and inequality, and his liberating praxis. Freire anticipated that teachers would establish a dialogical relationship between

themselves and their students which would enable the students to see their world afresh, as a problem to be solved, thus precipitating action. Following on from my reading of Freire, my initial aim was to engage students, to invite them to use their critical faculties, and analyse their own experiences. 'Education' would be presented to them as a *problem*, over a period of time that would cover the transition from KS3 to KS4, and also the departure from secondary school.

However, whilst approving of how Freire conceptualized students as "critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher", I did not share his assumption that the enlightened teacher, or researcher in my case, would have a better understanding than the 'oppressed' student, or research participant. I wished to hear and subsequently present to the reader of my study, the perceptions of students, and genuinely wanted to learn from these, rather than believing that these were reflective of false consciousness. Thus although I believed that the process of dialogue *could* enable students (and teacher also) to become more critical, after-all, like many English teachers I was well versed in Vygotsky's theories (1978) regarding the role of talk in the learning process, I did not agree that it could be classed as a genuine dialogue, if one person, i.e. the teacher/researcher, *led* another, i.e. the students/researched.

Freire's writings could simultaneously be seen as both radical and traditional, as suggested by Humphries, et al (2000):

*"Although a Freirean model sees traditional research methodologies as problematic, it accepts fundamental Enlightenment assumptions about the rational individual, and essence of Being and a reality external to the person."* - (p. 7)

Thus, whilst the Freirean critique of conventional pedagogy (and research methodology by extension) offers valuable pointers to educationalists as well as researchers, and can be regarded as radical in respect of its focus on deep seated change, it retains essentialist notions that are incompatible with phenomenological philosophy/methodology. So although we can have a *perception* of something, and in the case of my own title, 'students' perceptions of their educational experiences' - we cannot *know* anything directly, and one



person (a teacher for example) cannot claim to have access to the truth, any more than the perceptions of others can be regarded as in some way false. We cannot know the essence of things, and it is not possible to say that something is. Derrida's philosophy develops this idea further, and his deconstruction of western philosophy, in particular our truth-laden language, can be applied to educational research to lead to the unpicking of some of the value laden hierarchical oppositions commonly employed in research in general as well as research that has been carried out into similar substantive areas as my own study. Concepts such as knowledge/ ignorance, object/subject (& objective/ subjective), outer/inner, neutral/opinion-laden, rational/irrational, presence/absence, researcher/ researched, gifted/non-gifted, able/disabled etc- imply a certainty, distinctness, definiteness and fixity that bears little relation to the shifting nature of the things that they are meant to represent. Derrida thought that the truth-orientated Western languages were based on an oppositional conceptual framework, whereas the ideas/things conjured up by these words, were so often indecipherable from one another. The words denoting the things/ideas were thus inflated or deflated to the point of meaninglessness, or to use Derrida's term, 'erasure'.

Clearly this has implications for my research: for example, the use of the word 'able' in the title of my study needs to be regarded with some degree of caution, as does my use of the word 'exploring' which has connotations of discovery and may suggest to the reader that I intended to find-out *the* truth or *some* truths. I am aware that I am using such words approximately, for example, the word 'exploring' is intended to convey something like 'looking at', 'considering', 'focussing on' - whilst not being any of these exactly.

I hoped there might be a way of combining Derrida's philosophy with the praxis-based elements of Freire, creating a methodology that would reflect my belief in the possibility of change, as well as my epistemological views. At the outset of my study I believed that in deciding to focus on the *perceptions* of the individual students as experienced at different times in their lives, and by using a dialogical framework, the participants could construct meaning for

themselves over a longish period of time which would enable the possibility of change. However, later in my study I came to see how I had still retained something of the essentialist notions of truth, which was to lead to problems when it came to reading the data I went on to collect. This precipitated the inclusion of elements of a third philosophy, derived from the writings of Emmanuel Levinas, as a means of resolving, what had become in my case, irreconcilable differences between my readings of the philosophies of Freire and Derrida.

### **First stage: Nov 2003-July 2004**

By July 2004, I had designed my first interview schedule, had carried out pilot interviews, completed interviews with my participants, and also gathered information that I intended to use as the basis of some life-history work later in the survey. In this section I will give the background to these stages, which I have split up as follows:

- How the participants were selected, and their consent elicited
- The factors taken into account when rejecting various methods
- The factors taken into account when choosing interviewing as the method most compatible with a focus on student voice
- Comments about the teacher/student role and the researcher/researched role
- Comments about the type of interviewing I would do
- Consent
- Explanations of what I hoped to achieve with each of the questions I asked
- How I envisaged I would analyse my data
- Logistics
- After the data had been gathered: first impressions

### **How were the participants selected, and their consent elicited?**

I created my sample group of ten participants from a larger group of students who had been initially identified by me (in my capacity as 'Gifted and Talented Coordinator') as relatively able at the outset of their secondary schooling (two years earlier) after a consideration of CAT and SAT scores. The entire year group of 110 students had been ranked according to these scores, and, following on from Renzulli and Reis's (1993) ideas of talent identification whereby a 20% sweep is made of a particular cohort, the top 22 students had been invited to join the school's 'critical thinking extension scheme'. In reality this had meant that most of these students had a CAT score of 108 or above (i.e. in the high average area), and a KS2 SAT score of 4b or above in English (i.e. in the average area), although some had prior attainment of 4c, and in two cases, 3a. It is worth bearing in mind that if I had attempted to identify the top 20% in a school with a higher level of base-line attainment, these scores would have likely been much higher.

These 22 students were then taught GCSE courses in Religious Studies and Sociology during KS3, and took exams in them at the end of year 9. The 'A' level philosophy course was only available, as a KS4 *option*, to students who had completed the initial extension scheme. There were 10 students who chose Philosophy, 6 girls and 4 boys, and who were thus going to be part of my sample. (see Appendix A.) Each of these had therefore been on the original extension scheme, which meant they had a CAT score of at least 108 and a KS2 English SAT score of 4b. In addition, the 10 students who had opted for Philosophy also had at least one GCSE by the time they completed year 9, and in most cases 2 GCSEs. It could be argued that the attainment of a C grade or above, taken at the age of 13 or 14 yrs, was also an indication of ability - and 8 of the 10 participants had attained at least one C grade already. I was interested in the relationship between the kind of special provision that was intended to challenge able students, self-concept, and subsequent attainment. To my knowledge it was the first time a full 'A' level course in Philosophy had been offered to students of this age at a mainstream comprehensive, and I was

intrigued at how this might affect the thinking of the students and their future achievements.

In summary my 10 participants had all been identified as relatively able at some point, and had all received provision in the past on the basis of this. The 'A' level was intended to supplement this special provision and enable further extension. Thus using quantitative indicators my participants were likely to be *amongst* the 20% most able students in the whole year group, whilst not necessarily being *the most able*. Of course there are many other approaches to identifying ability that I could have taken. SATs had an element of prior teaching ability/influence as they owed much to the assimilation of the year 6 curriculum, CATs, like all similar tests that assess intelligence/potential, can be criticised as they only provide a snap-shot of ability - so there may have been more accurate ways of identifying ability if I wanted to use quantitative indicators. Perhaps more damningly, it seems strange that with some avowedly post-modern views, I was not employing a more qualitative approach, perhaps looking at students' portfolios or offering the 'critical thinking extension scheme' to the entire cohort (and later offering the chance of taking 'A' level Philosophy to those who flourished). A further criticism would be that in including 20% of the initial student cohort on the extension scheme, I had excluded 80% which was hardly what could have been expected from someone with the expressed philosophy at beginning of this section.

The simple explanation of why my methods reflected the body of *traditional* thought, *including NAGTY guidelines* on indications of ability - despite how my own views now, on ability do not accord with this same tradition - was that at the outset of the 'critical thinking extension scheme', which began in 2000, *over two years prior to start of this study*, I had yet to acquire the more inclusive view of giftedness that I arrived at later, indeed it wasn't until I had begun to deliver the 'critical thinking scheme' that I revised my opinions about the nature of giftedness. If I were to attempt such research again I would endeavour to create my sample group differently, perhaps along the lines of the Eureka experiment Zorman (1997) or the kind of approach advocated by Barry

Hymer (2002); and instead of what I actually did, i.e. identifying 20% of relatively able students based on quantitative indicators - half of which would later form my sample. I would have selected participants by how they responded to challenges/opportunities.

But despite these reservations, I do not believe that any of this really affects the integrity of my research. My study was not setting out to measure progress, nor was it an experimental study logging the development of the 'A' level Philosophy course. I was not evaluating the success of the 'critical thinking scheme' - and would not be systematically comparing the attainment of my participants with any other students from the same year. Instead, I was focussing only on student perceptions, and I have a sneaking suspicion that any group of ten students would have served the same purpose in so far as I intended to explore their perceptions of education. But I was also interested in the link between perceptions of ability and identity and how these perceptions remain/develop/change over time, and as these ten students had been formally identified/labelled as able at least once (at the outset of the 'critical thinking extension scheme') and then offered provision, in particular the 'A' level Philosophy course based on this identification, the participants would at least be used to thinking of themselves as able which would, in turn, facilitate further thinking around this area.

The other very practical reason for creating the sample in the way that I did was ease of access to the participants. As the teacher of the Philosophy course, (and the 'critical thinking extension scheme' previously) I would have ample opportunity to communicate with the students involved, which meant that arranging full consent and access was a straightforward matter.

**The factors taken into account when rejecting other methods - and then selecting interviewing as the method most compatible with a focus on student voice**

My initial thoughts were that as I wished to focus on how the participants *perceived* education, I would probably need to use a qualitative method such as ethnography or interviewing. This said, Rudduck and McIntyre (2007) for example, had regarded questionnaires with written answers as a method that could be useful in gathering student voice, yet even here, they had situated it on a continuum of methods ranging from least to most open-ended, beginning with teacher-constructed questionnaires at one end, to having the pupils as researchers at the other. Written questionnaires were thus categorised as 'least' open ended. And I could not see how a questionnaire could be used to effectively gather student voice as these 'student answers' or perhaps 'student writings' were not conducive to hearing whole speeches where the students would express their thoughts and opinions freely.

The next method I considered was ethnography, and given my sympathies with Derrida, began by looking at the writings of a post-modern ethnographic researcher, Tyler (1986):

*"Because post-modern ethnography privileges "discourse" over "text", it foregrounds dialogue as opposed to monologue, and emphasizes the cooperative and collaborative nature of the ethnographic situation in contrast to the ideology of the transcendental observer. In fact, it rejects the ideology of "observer-observed", there being nothing observed and no one who is an observer. There is instead the mutual, dialogical production of a discourse, a story of sorts. We better understand the ethnographic context as one of cooperative story making that, in one of its ideal forms, would result in a polyphonic text, none of whose participants would have the final word in the form of framing the story or encompassing synthesis – a discourse on the discourse" (p. 127)*

Whilst agreeing with Tyler that research *should* be collaboration, I was unsure as to how this collaboration could be achieved. I found Tyler's notions of a "cooperative story" and a "polyphonic text" interesting, but wondered how this might work in practice; and whilst I could envisage how a dynamic and balanced discussion could be regarded as a genuine collaboration at

the data gathering stage, found it harder to understand how the tasks of editing and writing-up were to be accomplished in the same spirit. But more fundamentally, I was a little surprised that an overtly post-modern position would claim that discourse was more privileged than text, being in closer proximity to presence, and thought that this ran counter to the tenets of post-modernism where such oppositions (presence/absence) are treated with suspicion.

Wanting to explore the notion of 'collaboration' further, I looked to McFadyen's ethnographic study of street-children in India (2004) for some pointers about how this could be achieved:

*"By engaging the children as protagonists of the data collection, and allowing them to guide and teach me about their world, this study offers a better perspective of what it is like to be a street child in New Delhi, and the importance of recognizing how different cultures, environments and experiences can distinguish one group from another" - (p. 8)*

And,

*"By inviting the children to participate in the research, and allowing them to take the lead in choosing topics for discussion and activities to engage in, this study has provided the children with a platform to tell their stories, share their life strategies and to express their opinions and concerns about important issues in their lives." (p. 183)*

McFadyen describes how she enabled the children to engage in her research, but I would be cautious about calling this 'collaboration'. Whilst the children chose the topics for discussion and expressed their opinions, it is McFadyen who allows them to lead, it is she who decides which stories/which bits of the stories to use, and it is she who provides the "platform". McFadyen seems to be playing down her own role here as editor, research designer etc, and claiming a kind of neutrality. Rather than coming clean about her role in creating a framework for the children's stories, she uses a passive pronoun to suggest it is "the study" rather than 'her' who has provided "the" platform.

I was mindful of Beckett (2004) who had warned about the importance of the researcher coming clean about their personal biography and

the impact this had on the research. In Beckett's case she considered how her gender had impacted on her own research. McFadyen however does not really consider her effect on the study, and how her identity as a researcher /woman /outsider / friend/adult etc might have affected the children and their responses.

Despite these reservations I could see how I might still begin with a concept of participation like McFadyen's - but perhaps incorporate Beckett's warning about the impact of the self/selves. For example, I could be overt with the participants about my own biography and interests, which in turn would be a means of interrupting any tendencies the participants (or I) may have had to disregard my various roles (woman, researcher, teacher etc). This would then make it clearer that I as researcher was not a coherent or fixed identity, and therefore had no superior claims of representation. But there was a more fundamental problem. Ball's (1990) mention of how vital it was for an ethnographer to be 'truth-orientated' crystallized this for me:

*"Ethnography not only implies engagement of the researcher in the world under study; it also implies a commitment to a search for meaning, a suspension of preconceptions and an orientation towards discovery. In other words, ethnography involves risk, uncertainty, and discomfort."* (p. 157)

The phrases 'search for meaning' and 'orientation towards discovery' are the key ones here, revealing the positivist assumptions of ethnography, i.e. the view that there is a truth to be captured. Even post-modern ethnography relies on the skill of the researcher to present thick descriptions of other people's reality - i.e. the ethnographer decides what is happening and selects the words to capture it.

If I am to be consistent in rejecting the positivist notion that there is a truth waiting out there to be discovered by a rigorous researcher and found in careful investigation of settings or documents, I must also be sceptical about the existence of a pure, or original, or more truthful, story - even if this a polyphonic account - i.e. one which many people who were party to an event would agree on. There is still one *main* author, one researcher, who chooses which bits of the dialogue to present, and provides commentary on what they



mean. It seems to me that all ethnography, by its nature, has to assume that the researcher is able to see differently, or clearer, or more objectively, or more comprehensively, or globally - and by implication better, which is why it is them and not one of the participants who is turning experience into writing. I think it is a little disingenuous to ignore this, and do not see how Tyler's claim that post-modern ethnography:

*".. rejects the ideology of "observer-observed", there being nothing observed and no one who is an observer ..."* - can be substantiated. It is my contention that polyphonic accounts present an *illusion* of equality.

One response to this might be that there is still one valid form of post-modern ethnography; a kind of life history whereby the writer selects their own experiences for study, thus circumnavigating the problem outlined above. Trausradottir (2001), in his consideration of participants with learning disabilities makes the following claims for this method:

*"Of all the forms of research in which people with learning disabilities have been major participants, the autobiography probably holds the greatest potential for full and equal partnership since the person who tells is unambiguously the 'expert', the ultimate insider. The telling and recording of one's story as autobiography is an important way in which a person may choose how he or she is portrayed, how the identity is presented, claimed by the person rather than constructed by powerful others as case notes or biographical fragments..." (p. 149)*

I could envisage how my participants might be encouraged to write their own diaries, or speak their narratives if this was easier (to be transcribed later) - however, as indicated with the use of the word 'insider'; this approach is hardly post-modern as it employs oppositional pairs that are predicated on notions of hierarchy such as: presence/absence, autobiography/biography, the self/the other, and interior/exterior. The assumption here is that as the researched/researcher is the same, and that as they are present in the research, there is no distance or gap between the experience and the writing. The avowed aim for the kind of autobiographical ethnography as described above

is for identity to be presented, as if the self were a coherent rational entity, capable of self analysis and insight. Yet I would suggest that when writing autobiographically, the writer is still constructing; there is an illusion of presence and immediacy, due to the use of the first-person pronoun. But this I is as much a construct as any biographical fragment. Whereas the notion of identity contained in the above quotation is of a knowable coherent self; the post-modern I is fluid, contradictory, and open to various constructions.

In summary, although I found ethnography attractive (the study of the Indian street children was particularly engaging and I had played with the idea of doing a similar kind of thing with 'urban voices'), I regarded these attempts to capture the otherness of the participants as a form of colonisation.

## **Interviews**

Initially I also had reservations about using interviews as a method; they seemed (or at least the conventional model seemed) to fall within the essentialist tradition, i.e. with a researcher gaining data from a researched, and I could see how many of the reservations I had cited above about ethnography could also be applied to this type of interviewing. This is apparent in Rudduck and McIntyre (2007) whose promising title, *"Improve Learning through Consulting Pupils"* includes extracts taken from five studies that have been identified by the authors as featuring 'consultation' with students. The authors talk about "pupil voice" at the beginning of their work, and give a history of this kind of research over the last 40 years, suggesting that such an approach is gaining more favour. However, as the book develops, it becomes apparent that the definition of pupil voice that is being used is not synonymous with my own. In the first instance, it transpires that the 'consultation' mentioned in the title does not include the possibility of any collaboration or dialogue, because, whilst various students have been *asked* in interviews, their responses are not sustained, and they do not ask the researcher anything back. The traditional hierarchy of researcher and a researched is maintained. Furthermore, the

*brevity* as well as the chosen method of *presenting* the student responses, gives a sound-bite or vox-pop effect: the framing of these voice-snippets, between the explanations, summaries and analysis of the (adult) researchers and authors, implies that the words of the children *need* this kind of framing or explaining. This detracts further from a student voice effect; it is like reported speech rather than speech heard for oneself. As Stratton (2003) suggests:

*"Children and youths form subordinate groups in society because they are not considered fully competent to govern their affairs or act in their own best interests .... much of (this attitude) derives from stereotypical and unchallenged assumptions that crumble on close examination... Thus our knowledge about children and adolescents tends to be formed by what 'expert' adults believe about them rather than by their actual social experience and perceptions."* - (p. 124)

It seemed to me that traditional research reflected this view, and that even when children and adolescents were consulted, their views could/did not stand-alone, without the mediation of an adult's perspective and an adult's perceptions (of what was worth reporting and what not, and what was worth commenting on, and what not). If I were to rectify the imbalance referred to by Stratton, I would need to create an interview method where the students could and would speak freely, and later, have their views reflected, without the framing of my interpretations in the written version of my research.

At the outset of my research I was confident that I could do just this. I envisaged that the interview method could be adapted, and become more of a dialogue, with a key focus being a critical discussion of the educational experiences of the students. And whilst I had a niggling doubt that the dynamically-seeming face-to-face encounter could be deemed as privileging speech over thought/observation/writing due to its apparent but illusory proximity to the presence of the participant, I decided to suspend my cynicism for a while, after-all, there was at least an honesty/a necessary coming clean involved in the interview process, (I couldn't pretend I wasn't there!). So, at this stage, on the basis that it seemed on balance a better method for my purposes

than ethnography (but no means being ideal), and also for the simple reason that I enjoy talking to people and am interested and curious about their perceptions - I decided to continue with the current research design, and would use interviewing as my main method.

My decision to interview the participants more than once was based on my belief that a longitudinal study would give more prominence to the voices of the participants. I planned to carry out the interviews at various stages in the students' education - at the end of KS3, the end of yr 10, the end of Yr 11, and a few months after having left year 11 - as the times selected marked the key transitions during statutory secondary schooling and might therefore lead to some interesting retrospective comments.

### **Comments about the teacher/student role and the researcher/researched role**

It was becoming apparent that even at the outset I was occupying at least two roles towards the students, depending on whether I was teaching them or researching. In some cases, I was the form tutor also. I was concerned about this, and wondered how this could affect the interview process. According to Altrichter et al. (1993) the teacher/student relationship can be a source of problems for the teacher/researcher:

*"If a teacher interviews a pupil, the interdependence of the two levels can cause problems: teacher and pupils do not just build up a relationship during the interview, but have already developed various attitudes towards each other (on a continuum of trust and mistrust, affection and animosity). This framework of relationships provides the context in which the interview starts. It influences the way in which the pupil understands what the teacher says...If relationships between the teacher and pupil are strained or difficult, a third person acting as interviewer can be indispensable in getting access to the perceptions and views of pupils. But ultimately the teacher-researcher should interview the pupils him or her self. Although action research usually starts from the teacher's research interests, in the course of time it should become a*

*common concern of the teacher and pupils. We suggest this, not only for ethical reasons, but also because it is our experience that the quality of understanding and potential for development are greatly enhanced if teachers and pupils become research partners..." (p. 102)*

The views above were intended to apply to teachers carrying out Action Research, and whilst I was not sure that this was an accurate description of what I intended to do, I was comforted nevertheless by the assumption that the combination of teacher/researcher role could actually work for me. I had heeded the warnings about how poor teacher/student relationships could make things difficult, but I felt assured by the comment that teachers ought to conduct their own interviews. I regarded the relationships I had with the students as good ones based on how they related to me and how they worked and behaved in my lessons, and whilst I know this view was solely from my perspective, and that it was possible that secretly a student might harbour a grudge, it seemed unlikely that they would have agreed to participate in the study if there was anything amiss. Certainly, I was not aware of anything that might suggest that a third party should become involved. I wondered though whether the difference in levels of intimacy between the different participants and myself should give me any cause for concern, i.e. although the relationships between the individual students and me were all positive ones, the relationships were not all the same in terms of intimacy. I had a lot of contact with some of the students as it was possible for them to be in my teaching classes for English, on the 'extension scheme', and also in my tutor group. Some students were in just one of those three groups. This said I took heart at the point that Altrichter et al., had made earlier in the same chapter, that it was good practice to interview a range of students - some of whom would be better known than others.

I was interested in how Benjamin (2002) had approached this potential problem in her research, of how the different roles occupied by the researcher and the different kinds of relationships that had been established with students might impact on the study. She had been in a similar position to myself, and after a consideration of various roles taken up during her research, her

teaching role and research role, the loyalty to colleagues and contractual obligations stated:.

*" Throughout the period of the research, my concern was not to seek to disembed myself from the intricacies of relationship work with students and colleagues, but to participate in it and to use all the resources it made available to me in what I hope (but cannot guarantee) was a non-exploitative and reciprocal way. Any misuse of these resources had serious implications for me as a teacher, and these were stronger than any guidelines could have been. In the end it was my dual institutional location - as a critical teacher, with an ongoing responsibility towards the students and the school, and with a commitment to sustainable long-term change, and as a research student with a researcher's curiosity and a comparative freedom from institutional demands - that produced the data I was able to gather."* P30

Benjamin suggests that having pre-existing relationships can aid the process of data gathering, and is not something that the researcher should be extricating herself from; rather, it is her view that the dual role of teacher/researcher allows access to resources, and ensures a greater sense of loyalty towards the institution (and people in it) than may otherwise be shown if the researcher was not employed by the school. So far from the dual roles being a problem, they could actually aid better research.

On seeking further advice on the issue of how various roles overlap and can also impact on the research, I looked at a very interesting article by Ellis, Kiesinger and Tillman-Healy (1997) which was written by two women with an eating disorder, and one who did not have a disorder. They had described their lunch together from three different points of view (a kind of layered ethnography) and then produced accounts of interviews that took place between them, which include the interviewer's thoughts and feelings as well as the interviewee's narratives. Each of the three took it in turns to do this. The women are clearly friends, and shift between being researcher and researched.

*"...our work focuses on the interview process, the stories and feelings that both respondents and researchers share in the interview, and the understandings that emerge during the interaction." (p. 119)*

*"Interactive interviewing reflects the way relationships develop in real life: as conversations where one person's disclosures and self-probing invite another's disclosures and self-probing; where an increasingly intimate and trusting context makes it possible to reveal more of ourselves and to probe deeper into another's feelings and thoughts; where listening to and asking questions about another's plight lead to a greater understanding of one's own; and where the examination and comparison of experiences offer new insight into both lives. This intersubjective process provides a contextual basis for a level of understanding and interpretation that is not present in traditional hierarchical interview situations; where interviewers reveal little about themselves, aloofly ask questions in one or two brief sessions, and have little or no relationship with respondents" (p. 122)*

The boundaries between researcher/researched and interviewer/interviewed were blurred in this study, and although the women were not involved like I was with my participants in a student/teacher relationship with each other, they did occupy the role of friend towards one another - which was clearly of help in establishing the 'trusting context' referred to above. I took from this study the thought that the relationships I had established over time with my students, would allow for a more interactive kind of interviewing with probing and revealing being done by both participants and myself. I hoped this would in turn lead to responses that were more open and thoughtful.

### **Comments about the type of interviewing I would do**

Whilst having already decided I would aim to replicate something of the quality of the 'interactive interviewing' described above, my first priority, given the vulnerability of the age-group concerned, was to ensure that the interviews would not cause any adverse effects for the young people involved. As a teacher of 11-16 year olds, I had become used to the way that students

sought out conversations with teachers for their own ends, and would slip in and out of confidential mode. So when contemplating how to organize my first batch of interviews, I realised I would need to make it clear to the students that we were in a research situation. I decided to deliver a formal introduction at the beginning of the interview, in which I reminded the students that the interview would be for the purposes of my research, and where I would then speak about a possible follow-up interview if students decided they wished to talk more informally and privately later (i.e. not being recorded, and not being written up as research) about any issues raised during the interviews. The little speech I gave can be seen as 'appendix B.'

I then gave some consideration to how I would conduct the interviews. Given the age of my participants, and the fact that the usual power differential between them as students in relation to myself as teacher could shape the kinds of things that the students felt free to say, I thought I would endeavour to make sensitive use of active listening techniques, to demonstrate my awareness of the students *as people*, and hopefully, indicate how this was a different kind of encounter to the usual ones we had. I was mindful of the views Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1996) who had given advice along these lines about:

*"a) Checking out with Others the validity of one's representations of them, b) Listening to Others' accounts of us ..... and d) finally (perhaps more in hope than with any sense of current possibility) developing opportunities for dialogue between 'us' and Others."* (p. 16)

I hoped that by listening to others and checking out what they were saying, I would indicate respect, and that this in turn would go some way to eradicating the hierarchical aspect of the teacher/student relationship and establishing two-way conversations. Whilst I was mindful of how there was a possible negative side to the fact that my participants were known already to me in a manner other than participant, I believed that I could also make use of the fact that we already had relationships with one another: I envisaged that the familiar friendly and caring aspect of the usual teacher/student relationships could facilitate the interactive process described by Ellis et al. above.



When I came to decide whether I would have unstructured or structured interviews, I considered how on the one hand, a structured interview with a planned schedule would help keep me to the point, whilst on the other hand, a totally unstructured interview seemed more in keeping with the post-modern spirit. Whilst I *wanted* to be able to interview in a free-flowing and unstructured way, I doubted I had sufficient skills or confidence to improvise and I suspected I would get distracted from my research questions without something concrete and precise in front of me. I regretted this, but attempted to console myself (despite a niggling worry that I should have tackled these doubts thoroughly before circumnavigating them) with the thought that as all questions were 'written' at least in thought before they are expressed in speech, there could be no such thing as a totally free interview anyway. Looking back at this moment in the research with hindsight, I wish I had listened more to that 'niggling worry' and not contented myself with sophistries as it would have saved me a great deal of time and soul-searching later on. But I ploughed on, with confidence and enthusiasm, eager to get 'stuck into' the *real* task (as I saw it) of research, the data collection.

My final idea, for the first round of interviews, was to include life-material along the lines suggested by Goodson and Sikes (2001). They had proposed using a life-history approach, whereby participants are invited to make some sense of their various identities and the various shifts their life have taken. At the end of this book, the writers talked about "ghost histories", where people reflected on what could have happened and what they would have liked to have happened - I saw in this potential for empowerment, that would not be dependent on my questioning, and that might allow students to work through, during their talk, what they felt about things and where they next wanted to end up in life. I also wondered whether such an approach, could even be a vehicle for a critical dialogue.

My chief worry about using this idea however, was the age of my respondents; at the time of the research they were only 14, and in some cases 13, and arguably, the fact that their life experiences were not those of an adult,

might make it a difficult approach to employ, but I thought that perhaps such an approach could be used towards the end of my study, when the students would be 16 and 17, when they could be invited to make sense of their lives to-date, with an educational focus. This way, the life-histories could be presented alongside other data, generated through interviews.

With this possibility in mind, I decided I would gather some data from the students, prior to the first interviews, concerning their personal lives, their families, their health, their key influences etc - with a view to holding on to the moment of leaving KS3 and also providing some historical context. I would then keep this information securely, with the aim to using it as a scaffold for a life-history response to be elicited later in the study.

## **Consent**

At the outset of the original extension scheme I had interviewed each of the (then) twenty two students, written to parents, and also held an evening event to launch the scheme. All students had attended with at least one parent. The Head-teacher was in full agreement, and I had also explained the nature and purpose of the scheme to the entire staff. The possibility of taking 'A' level Philosophy was anticipated from the outset, and all parties were fully aware that I would be researching throughout, and that this might be done occasionally in lesson time. Written and verbal consent was obtained for this. It was made explicit that I would design and deliver the entire 'extension scheme'; consisting of GCSE sociology and GCSE religious studies, and later an A level in philosophy - for no extra pay or status, but with the understanding that I would be grateful for access to the pupils who participated on the scheme. Thus in return for being prepared to consider giving me 30 minutes of their time, perhaps 4 or 5 times in total over a 3 year period, (and at no stage did I *insist* on this), the students would receive something few other schools were offering at the time, early GCSEs which could enhance their curriculum vitae, but also, due to the nature of the subjects studied, add some interest and enrichment to the normal working week. The course entailed optional workshops which were held over the school

holidays - typically for 5 days during the summer holiday and 1-2 days during every other holiday, and the time I spent delivering these, I believed, more than compensated the students for the time they would be giving up for the research. All of the participants took advantage of these extra sessions.

Thus it could be argued that this was a situation where everyone would benefit. The school would receive the accolade of providing extra GCSE courses for a younger age-group, the parents would probably feel pleased that their child had been chosen for the scheme, and would feel positive about the anticipated extra challenge, and the opportunity to do something other pupils in other schools weren't being offered. The pupils would have enriched lessons and early access to additional GCSEs, and I would obtain access for research purposes.

However, given that my study involved young people, I was mindful of how the notion of consent was not straightforward. Goodenough et al. (2004) shared a similar concern with how participants perceive and understand their involvement in the research. Children are seen as a vulnerable group (like people with learning difficulties, mental difficulties, prisoners etc)

*"Consent to participate does not always represent consent for the whole process ... In order for the consent given to be valid throughout the process, it is imperative that children understand, and, act upon, their right to withdraw from the research at any point. There is a danger that, when the negotiated consent is given by proxy, this right to withdraw might not be fully understood by the child participant. This right should be reinforced with the children at all times."* (p. 69)

So in addition to taking the precaution of asking students and parents for consent to participate in my research at the beginning of the study, I decided to also seek consent at the beginning of each interview, and again at the start of the 'A' level course too rather than assuming that the consent was still given.

## **Explanations of what I hoped to achieve with each of the questions I asked**

I was then ready to begin compiling my interview schedules, bearing in mind my desire to enable 'critical dialogues'. The first few questions established the focus on education - e.g. 'What is the purpose of education?' and: 'How significant is education to you?', so I could ascertain how students at this point in their lives defined education. I then intended to probe further into perceptions of the balance of challenge and support, relationships with teachers and what students thought of the teaching and their learning.

The next group of questions were based on the idea of 'difference' - i.e. difference between the expectations held by groups of people such as pupils and teachers, or perhaps parents and pupils, as I wished to explore the post-modern emphasis on deconstructing oppositional frameworks - and as a precursor to this I wished to see, at the beginning, whether the students had noticed any tensions or contradictions.

The third group of questions were to do with notions of identity, for example whether gender as a construct had affected the students, whether they were shaped by the peer group, whether they had perceived themselves as being labelled, and whether they regarded the self as fluid or constant. I needed to see how students felt about themselves, as I was going to follow the ways in which they were changed by education over the years of the study.

The last question of all was more about the research process - I wished the students to be made aware of my double role as teacher and researcher. The completed interview schedule can be seen as appendix c.

## **How I envisaged I would analyse my data**

At this stage in my research I had the intention of writing up my first section of data as a series of voices - something like the style used by Murray and Penman (2000) who simply place their accounts side by side in the body of the book. Some of the accounts are by children with disabilities, some are by siblings of children with disabilities, some are adults talking about

themselves as children, and some are by parents of children with disabilities. The accounts are interspersed with drawings by the children, and occasional photographs. There is a small introduction where the authors establish their credentials for creating such a book, but not a final chapter, nothing to represent, analyse, or retract from the immediacy of the voices themselves. I had been deeply moved by this book, and full of admiration for the commitment that the writers had to their participants. I thought that the methods of presenting the voices could be emulated in my own study, and that I would also stand back from the telling of the stories and refrain from analysing/re-presenting. The students' accounts would speak for themselves.

Also at this stage in my study I envisaged that I would invite participants to comment on the interview process *after* the first batch of interviews, and assume that the subsequent analysis which we would create together in a dialogue based on the transcripts of the interviews would be sufficient to ensure reflexivity, participant ownership of the research, and an innovative post-modern method.

### **Logistics**

The when and where was fairly easy to arrange. I conducted the interviews with the 10 students in June/July 2004, during my periods of non-contact at school; all of them were carried out in the classroom I usually teach in. I recorded the interviews on tape, once permission was given, and I then transcribed them the same night. I also gathered the data that I would use, at a later date, in some life-history work. Again, I recorded students' answers and transcribed them that same night.

### **After the data had been gathered ... First impressions**

My first impressions after having conducted the interviews was that I had gained far more than a set of data; the interviews had in many cases helped cement my relationship with the student, and in asking the students to talk about personal things that I suspect many of the students had not

articulated before, it was as if an expectation was established: that I would continue to be interested in issues of identity and conflict. The quality of the communication I had with these students seemed enhanced from the interview onwards; an unexpected bonus for me!

The material I was intending for life-histories, was also striking, mainly for the wide-ranging and severe problems the students had mentioned. One of the students had cried during these sessions; this posed an ethical dilemma - i.e. should I be asking questions if a student showed distress when answering? Given that I had framed these interviews with a little speech about how counselling could be provided if needed, and that they did not have to answer anything they did not want to, I hoped this was sufficient - the student who had cried, was given a de-briefing session afterwards.

## **Stage 2 - August 2004-October 2005**

My optimism was not of long duration. By October 2005 and as a result of my sinking realisation that the data was not what I had wanted it to be, I had to think long and hard about my theoretical stance, and re-think how my philosophical understanding could affect my methodology. In this section I have split my account up as follows:

- The reasons for my later disappointment with my first batch of data
- A focus on a feature of the interviews that signposted an alternative way forward
- Applying the theory of Emmanuel Levinas
- A consideration of other researchers who had similar concerns to me
- How I went about compiling the next batch of interview questions

### **The reasons for my disappointment with my first batch of data**

When I came to study the transcripts more carefully, I realised that my structuring of the interviews and what I had initially mistakenly regarded

as probing had shaped the nature and extent of participant response to such an extent that it would not be possible to treat the transcripts as reflective of a genuine dialogue. In framing the questions as fully as I had, I had ensured that my voice was heard louder and more insistently than any of the students. In some of the interviews I speak as often as the student! Rather than the pure and unadorned student voices I had envisaged myself presenting, I was left with masses of data, much of it interesting, but all of it very much a response to my perception of key issues. I had certainly cut out the possibility of my presenting the voices as if they were direct representations of a person. The example below is typical:

Sometimes I can be really nice and nice to everyone and sometimes I can be horrible and nasty to certain people.

**SW: is this depending on who you're with, or again, is it something within you that causes the differences**

Its like both really, cos sometimes when I'm like with certain people I'm nice, like they put me in a happy mood so I'm nice, but sometimes when I'm with other people who I don't really want to be with, it annoys me so I'm in a bad mood – but other times its just me being in a bad mood and not liking people

**SW: so it's not to do with how familiar you are with people?**

No not really, I don't be off with people just cos I don't know em, or I do know them and I don't like them, well I am if I don't like them, but I'm never nasty to people just cos I don't know them cos I think everyone should have a chance

One of the effects of my tendency to ask unscripted questions was to direct students' responses, into an 'either/or' format. As can be seen in the above example, in response to the student's comment about how she can be nice or horrible, rather than seeking clarification I ask her whether it is a 'this' or a 'that' - and then my second interjection has the effect of loading the question, i.e. in saying 'so it is not ...' - so of course the likely response would have been a

'no' which is what she replied with. I have not used active listening here, as I have not reflected or summarized, and although the comments the student has made are interesting, there is a randomness to the interview which gives it the quality of a piece of gossip/conversation - i.e. my comment about 'familiarity' had little relevance. Although this kind of thing is fine in the conversations that are carried on between people, where one person can ask another one whatever they want in a casual kind of way, just because something attracts their interest, and then the other can ask things back, this was not what I had had in mind when I had anticipated dialogues. More damnably, as can be seen in the above example, there is clearly one questioner and one who answers, thus the power differential is clear; which shows this cannot be considered a dialogue. The above example was, unfortunately, not a blip - indeed, it represents how something can *seem* on the surface to be a genuine collaboration, with a small amount of researcher talk, and a larger amount of participant talk, and a tone that is friendly and chatty. But rather than managing to effect an erosion of power structures, I had replicated the power relationship of the traditional teacher/student and researcher/researched oppositions.

I suspected that part of the problem was due to my relative inexperience as an interviewer, for example in managing my dual roles of researcher/teacher, and also formulating my responses in order to enable the participants to speak more fully. Another weakness was my poor attempt at a questionnaire. Whilst I had *attempted* to use the Socratic method of asking question after (open) question, thinking this would be sufficient to enable critical thought, looking back at it now, some years later, I see there are obvious and rather embarrassing weaknesses, which I suspect are very far from the gentle 'bringing out' that characterises the Platonic dialogues. Firstly, my use of terms is imprecise, for example I offer no definitions of terms like 'education' or 'labelling'. I ask loaded questions throughout, and make assumptions about the experiences the students will have had, i.e. that they will have experienced both success and failure at school - and whilst *intending* to trigger philosophical discussion about identify, I have offered up a rather crude dichotomy between



the self 'alone' and the self 'with others'. Nor have I considered my own identity and its boundaries and impact. The I has emerged, uncontested, as if it is the voice of reason, rather than myself, Susan, with the whole baggage of experiences and prejudices that constitutes my persona. I ask question after question, both scripted and unscripted as if the questions I ask are the 'right' ones, and I show no awareness of how the meanings I assign to the comments of the students may be different from theirs. This is not a good set of questions. It is certainly nothing like a Socratic dialogue. Moreover, perhaps more fundamentally, even if I had been more successful, and I had managed to capture something of the character of the Greek dialogues, I had begun to recognize how incompatible Freirean and Post-Modernist ideas were, in particular the Freirean idea of 'reposing the world' as a problem. Whilst I had not *believed* at the time that I saw myself as superior by virtue of my teacher/ researcher roles, I think now that I must have *thought* something of this. I had somehow managed to forget that the Greek assumptions, and the whole post-enlightenment tradition, whilst including a vast spectrum of political shades, (everything from the revolutionary writings of Freire on the one hand, to the 'objectivity as an ideal' view of Phillips (1993) - was not compatible with my alleged post-modern philosophy. Now that I have had the chance to scrutinize the student responses, which this space within my study has allowed, I can see that whereas I might have *thought* this technique generates critical thinking; it does not (at least in my hands). It triggers a response, but not necessarily a critical one, and the response is very much shaped by what was said first by me. I shudder now, with embarrassment, at how I had appropriated Freire to think that I would be able to show the students a mirror that would help them to regard their worlds dispassionately, and repose them as a problem. Who was I to define what was or was not a problem? How could I say so surely, that the life experiences of the students were something that needed to be defined as a problem? To take this a stage further, it would appear that I had assumed my students were suffering from false consciousness; no wonder my allegedly post-

modernist methods hadn't worked - they were predicated on essentialist assumptions!

I would need to do some serious rethinking. Not only would I need to decide how I could use the data I had already gathered, but there was the problem of my own persona and its emergence in the study, and finally I would need to rethink how I would structure and conduct future interviews.

### **A focus on a feature of the interviews that signposted an alternative way forward**

My interviews, although full of some rich and complex student responses reflected the conventional power structure; yet, interestingly, there did seem to be moments in some of the interviews, where the balance of power changed, and which I thought I might be able to use as a signpost to a more genuinely innovative method.

The extracts, below, were taken from these interviews. The comments of the participants are in italics, my questions and my comments to the students are in bold, my commentaries are in standard text.

#### **Did it cause any difficulties the interviewer being me?**

*Yeah – it needed to be a blank person – who never told anybody and I never saw again*

**I'm really concerned about getting the best data I can, so perhaps you can help me sort out how I could still conduct the interviews as it is my research but become more 'blank'?**

*You could wear a mask and a white suit – put some glasses on – use a voice distorter – wear a mask of Osama Bin Laden, then I'll answer all your questions*

In the above exchange, the student has used, unusually for a conventional research interview, humour to express his view that there is a problem with the interviewer having a personal history. He has shown more awareness than I did of the role played by my persona in the interview.

*I don't have one label, cos you've labelled me the best in the school (laughs) obviously*

Another use of humour, reinforced with a laugh, which triggered a reciprocal response in me, and that altered the tone of the interview.

*Yes – but I’m not – and that’s only younger people, older people don’t like me .*

**SW: is it them that have labelled you as a ‘slag’?**

*And year 11s, yeah.*

**SW: so how does that affect you?**

*I don’t know, not really as I don’t think I am.*

**SW: No! It’s an unfair label, one that’s just been given to you without any real knowledge of you whatsoever!**

Here, I found myself going out of interviewer mode and into counsellor mode, in order to affirm the student even though she hadn’t asked for this ... however, there were several instances of the student’s discourse using engaging techniques such as mimicry (13 times), laughing (6 times) – which changed the nature/feel, gave it a more animated quality. Perhaps my special knowledge of the student having been sexually abused had crept in here, as I leapt in during comments about her being labelled sexually.

*Em, well the teacher has all the authority and pupils have none so, or very little, so em, its unfair but– wait! – they’re really superior, and people just think they’ll break the rules, things like that .*

The word ‘wait’ was uttered as a command to me. The student took control at this point. At the end of the following student’s interview, there was a postscript, which he instigated as follows:

*But one of them I didn’t understand fully*

**SW: which one was that?**

*The second to last one which was on about myself and my friends*

**SW: ...I suppose what I’m trying to get at is that if you have a constant self that’s always the same no matter who you are with or whether you have an idea of there being layers to yourself that change..**

*Layers*

**SW: that change what you feel, and how you feel about the changes, whether you feel good and happy because you've changed or whether that causes you annoyance as you're not being true to yourself**

*People make me who I am, other people – if someone said something I'd probably believe it and everyone says I'm gullible, and like I change, I don't change, I'm always myself but some things what I say but not everything is changed when I'm with other people*

**SW: so its like there's a core that's always the same, that can't be touched**

*Yeah there is, but there are other layers as well*

**SW: and the layers can be ...**

*Like I think always the same but I don't always say the same things when I'm with other people*

*... Well if someone says something I believe it, If someone said, 'oh you're really fat' or something I'd probably think: 'Ah I'm really fat', or if someone said, 'you're really clever' I'd think 'oh I'm really clever' and , and what people say ...*

**SW: so you're swayed by other people's..**

*Yeah that's it but I'm always myself but what other people say can make me think differently. I always think the same when I'm with other people - my parents I don't swear or with my friends they aren't bothered if I swear – I say things differently but I always think the same*

**SW: but its kind of making yourself sound like a blank canvas in a way, certainly in some ways, it sounds like, correct me if I'm wrong, you respect other people's judgement more than your own?**

*I always think the same Miss, I've got a core but I just think things to myself, oh I don't like him, but I won't say that, its nasty or something – that's what I mean, I'm myself that's all I mean*

This exchange was different in feel to the more formal interview – whereas the main body of this student's interview was very tentative with at least one false start or 'em' per comment, (sometimes many more than this), the postscript had no 'ems', only one false start, and was far more assertive in character (i.e. emphasizing points by using repetition and addressing me directly) also the student decided when the interview was over, not me! Even then he

started the conversation up again – and asked me several questions, about the research, what others had said, as well as probing more about some of the issues covered in the research. This wasn't taped, but was very interesting, he waited until the tape was off, then carried the discussion on, treating it very much like a normal conversation, even changing it into the kind of exchange more usual for us as form-tutor and pupil (or friend) where he could ask the questions and take risks. And this interview showed me in active-listening mode rather than inquirer, with the tentative suggestions I did make being easily rejected or taken up by the student as I had avoided being so dogmatic.

The above moments suggested to me that I needed to think harder about how I could go about erasing the teacher/student, researcher/researched, and adult/child distinctions, in the way that had happened above. The times when the students had resisted labels, conventions, language - show them as 'unpin-a-down-able', thus saying something about the nature of research as well as about the multi-faceted-ness of the children.

### **Applying the theory of Emmanuel Levinas**

I needed a way of conceptualizing that would allow me to avoid the essentialist pitfalls - whilst incorporating some of the thoughts I had had above. It was at this stage in my research that I began to draw heavily on the notions of Levinas (1969), Buber (1958) and other philosophers concerned with notions of identity. Like Freire, Buber and Levinas are concerned with ethics; yet whereas Freire *supposes* something about the Other, e.g. that his/her life situation/consciousness needs changing, Buber and Freire do not wish to change the life-situation/ consciousness of the Other, but instead regard the primary aim as one of establishing a dialogue, of *communicating* with the Other. The encounter with the Other, gives the I a sense of self and finds meaning. In the words of Buber:

*"I become through my relation to the Thou; as I become I, I say Thou. All real living is meeting."* (p. 11)

There is a reversal of power here. Whereas the I of the Socratic dialogue is a confident one, who leads the Other and educates them; and the Other of Freire's writings is an oppressed Other, who is needy, and who is dependent on the I, the teacher, to rescue them from their ignorance/false consciousness - the I of Buber's writings, is founded in the meeting with the Other, and is dependent on the Other for existence (becoming).

Thus, rather than regarding my interviews as 'Socratic' dialogues, where there was a questioner and answerer, who would by the means of this questioning arrive at the truth that lived within (after-all, education in the Greek sense, meant 'a bringing out' of the truth ...) - they would no longer be a vehicle - but would be re-conceptualized, as 'the end', as, (following on from Levinas), the 'face to face relation' is the primary goal:

*"The relation between the Other and me, which draws forth in his expression, issues neither in number nor in concept. The Other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign; his face in which his epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us, whose virtualities are inscribed in our nature and developed by our existence. Speech proceeds from absolute difference. .." (p. 194)*

According to Levinas, speech exists because of the Other; because of the difference that exists between the I and the Other and the desire of the I to bridge the gap between the I and the Other. However this gap can never be fully bridged: the Other is infinitely foreign. Thus, (similarly to Derrida), speech is founded on a difference, and not certainties. In designating the world, I designate it to the Other; as there is a need for language, due to the gap between the I and the Other. So it is not the rationalist I who is the Master of the world; it is the Other who is the one and only teacher. A being just like me (i.e. the same and not the Other) would not be able to tell me anything new, there would be no need for words, they could show me no mysteries, tell me no jokes, plan no surprises, they could only bore me.

Prior to the Other, the I lives in a kind of egoist enjoyment where the world is seen as an extension of the I. Yet the I begins to have a need to

justify him/herself at the point where the I recognizes the existence of Others. Ethics springs into being at the moment of language; the relationship between I and the Other is not only the possibility of dialogue, it is also the founding of love and respect.

My reading of Levinas, is that he sees the naming of the world, and also the desire to explain the I, as gestures of reaching out towards the Other. Levinas regards the chief function of language as expression, and the process of naming is a tentative one, rather than an act of possession or control. It is the Other who is the master, not the I. Yet the rationalist tradition, which typifies the Western academic approach toward research, names and thematizes - it presupposes there is a truth to uncover, one that is often hidden or concealed, and that can be discovered by the I who interrogates and analyses. And when this kind of language and this way of thinking is employed, and words are used *as if* they contain Others, as in the discourse of psychology, and words are used *as if* Others are not even present, as in the discourse of science, then such an attempt is not only tantamount to a gesture of colonisation whereby the speaker assumes a mastery and knowledge of the objects and ideas, as well as the Others he/she conceptualizes, but it is also futile.

*"The word that bears on the Other as a theme seems to contain the Other. But already it is said to the Other who, as interlocutor, has quit the theme that encompassed him, and upsurges inevitably behind the said..."*

*(p. 195)*

Thus, whilst thematizing *appears* to explain the Other and representation *appears* to speak with the voice of the Other - it is an illusion as it does not keep up with the infinite mysteriousness of the Other. This last point had some resonance within my own study. The moments of laughter in my first batch of interviews provided glimpses of the Otherness of the students, and at these times it had seemed that the students were teaching me or surprising me; I had ceased for the moment to (pretend?!) mastery, and had allowed the students to speak. My students had resisted my attempts to 'pin-them-down' through language.

I was curious to see if I would be able to build on these moments in my research, in order to develop a less truth-laden and representational method of working with the data I had already gathered as well as the data I was to gather in the future. It would necessitate a move away from traditional academic writing, which tends to be dismissive of the Other in the sense that Levinas means, through firstly the process of critical analysis, and secondly its concealment that an I is present via the use of the passive voice. It could be argued that some academic writing appears lifeless with its jargon and illusion of neutrality; it is not primarily concerned with expression, or the task of communicating with the Other, whether he/she be the reader of the written text, or the elusive Other who is commented about in that very text. The Other who we attempt to represent, and turn into the subject of our writing is absent when we try to discuss him/her or try to transcribe his/her thoughts into writing.

*"But in its expressive function language precisely maintains the other - to whom it is addressed, whom it calls upon or invokes. To be sure, language does not consist in invoking him as being represented and thought...the other called upon is not something represented, is not a given, is not a particular, through one side already open to generalization ..."* p. 73

I began to wonder what kind of study I would produce if I set out to express rather than represent. After digesting the above ideas for example, I no longer believed that placing transcripts in consecutive chapters could be tantamount to showcasing the voices unadorned. Whilst the format of the interview, proceeding as it does along its linear path gives the *illusion* of a coherent narrative which reflects a personality; the end results are nothing more than fragments or traces of a presence that has since vanished. So whilst I had already identified weaknesses in my own data gathering that made it impossible to regard the words that I had recorded in the interviews and carefully transcribed, as direct representations of a person - even if I had managed to conduct the interviews more effectively enabling a more genuine dialogue, and even if I had used a well constructed questionnaire that led to moments where the students controlled the narrative, this would not have affected my recognition



that representation wasn't just difficult, it was impossible, and not the legitimate aim of transcription.

And I had the additional dilemma that even if I could find a way of commenting on/about the transcripts of the interviews, to express and communicate rather than represent or analyse - my very lack of analysis could possibly result in my failing to meet the usual requirement of a PHD.

### **A consideration of other researchers who had similar concerns to me**

I was interested to see how other researchers had approached the issue of how to research Others, how to work with the data gathered through the contact with Others, how the researcher should conceptualize their presence in the research and finally, how to approach the task of writing about the self and Others. As Lather (1995) expresses it:

*"How do we explain the lives of others without violating their reality?" (p. 297)*

And in the words of Trausradottir (2001):

*"In doing our research and writing our findings we always make decisions about whose story should be told, and whose left out. In doing this we are constructing and reconstructing reality. Our production of knowledge serves to legitimate some views and experiences while challenging others. I have become increasingly aware of the power of the researcher in creating knowledge about our social worlds, and the peoples who inhabit these worlds. If we are self reflective in our research we will be less likely to run the risk of uncritically reproducing Othering or oppressions." (p. 26)*

Trausradottir shows how the decisions that are made, even at the point where a sample is created, can be regarded as an exercise in power and knowledge construction. And in "writing our findings" the implication is, that we have already 'edited' i.e. decided which bits of the data to use and which to leave out - which would seem to presuppose knowledge of what is or is not significant about and to the Other. The suggestion here is that self reflection reduces the risk, of what Trausradottir refers to as 'Othering'. Furthermore, I could envisage

that if I were to involve the participants in the process of “constructing and reconstructing”, for example by deciding which bits from the previous batch of data were included and which left out, and then invited them to explain their views and experiences, then this might not be so much of a violation and the “knowledge creation” would be in their control.

I planned to engage the participants in all aspects of the composition of the *second* interview, and from how the transcript of the *first interview* was treated from this point onwards. I would invite students, to create the questions asked, and afterwards, they would have the power to say what it all meant. With regard to the first interviews, flaws and all would still be admitted into my study, but the students would have been cast in the role as editor and analyser, and would direct how the narratives were cut- up and interrupted. I hoped that my approach towards the second interview, would achieve something more than this as the participants would have shaped the very questions.

This desire to involve the students as researchers has some precedent, as is discussed in Rudduck and McIntyre (2007). The differences between student’s perspectives and adults, is seen as a potential source of creativity. They cite Fielding and Bragg (2003) by way of demonstrating how this can give the students a positive sense of self.

It could be argued however, that in involving the students so extensively, they would become more than participants, and would be nearer to becoming co-researchers. They would be doing some of the work for me. Was this then, exploitative? After-all, it was my name that was on the front of the study, not theirs; was this ethical?

Whilst it is undoubtedly true that the students helped me and that without their help there would be no study, this is also true of most research; without the participation and goodwill of Others there can be no data. In my own study however, it could be argued that the participants were going to work harder than was usual, and so by degrees, were nearer to being co-researchers than was usual. Over the course of four years each had contributed

approximately four hours of their time, and had engaged in dialogue with regard to the data pertaining to them as individuals. But whilst I do not wish to minimize the work that the students did with me, this *does* only constitute a very tiny fraction of the time I invested myself. I am deeply appreciative of the contributions of the students, who, as active and willing participants, gave themselves generously through speech; and following on from Levinas, it was as if the Other was making a gift of the world back to the I (me) through language.

I then looked to Grbich for ideas about how to approach the problem of identity and for suggestions about how to conceptualize the self and the Other given that I was not a neutral researcher, but someone who was both similar and different to the participants. Grbich (2004) suggests:

*"...the discourses of race, sex, class and gender are no longer simple categories which can be imposed and have universal meaning. These are contested categories which have meaning only in context, where they are regarded as fluid, changing, complex, resisted or even meaningless. How are participants using such categories? Are they being used as masks...to block the gaze of the observer... are these categories imposed by others for particular ends ... or are they useful signposts in an ancient map, which may lead to selves partially demolished but still sufficiently intact to identification to be made."*

*(p. 81)*

In my case, I had, rather arrogantly I now began to feel, assumed I shared common ground with my participants, without establishing any common identity first. In the first batch of data I had simply posed as a collaborator with my students whilst assuming my voice was a neutral one. I had not been self-reflective enough about the power I had, by virtue of being teacher and researcher. There were other, more complex categories I should also have explored, and in posing as neutral, I had ignored even what I regarded (for me) as fairly straightforward categories - i.e. middle-aged, heterosexual, white woman -but I had also passed-over what was for me a far more contested area, my social class. Whilst I have a middle-class occupation, my parents were working class, and I grew up in a working class locality. I have retained more

than a trace of the bundle of values and opinions that could be termed 'working class', yet I also have a passionate belief in education that sits more easily within the provinces of middle-class culture. Of course social class definitions are still sometimes based upon the occupation of the adult male in the household, and this complicates matters more as I have a husband who is a craftsman (clock-maker), which is traditionally working class, but he has an upper middle class family heritage. So I am never really sure what social class I am, and perhaps as a result of this, I am more aware/sensitive to this aspect of my life and how my social class impacts on my relations with others. But not only had I ignored my own contested categories, I had failed to consider how the students defined themselves, and what might be their contested categories. I had also neglected the question of how they might feel they related (or not) to me? I now believed that far too many of the questions I had asked the students had rested on my assumption that they and I, interpreted key concepts like gender and social class in the same way; I had paid insufficient attention to the notion of identity.

Grbich went on to suggest:

*"First, an initial critical reflexive process of who the researcher is, via the identification and exposure of his/her historical social construction, cultural location and views is essential. Who is the researcher? What are his/her nodal locations (such categories as sex, race, age, class - being mindful of the fluidity of these labels - culture, profession, stage of life, political affiliations, theoretical preferences, interconnections with others, life experiences, etc, may be of use here or may be meaningless and confining) and how is the impact of these on the research topic to be managed. In addition, the overt and more hidden assumptions which pattern the researcher's undertaking need exposure..." (p. 109)*

The ideas set out in the above extract struck a chord. I would no longer pose as neutral, but I would 'come clean' about who (I thought) I was, and my beliefs/assumptions. I was inspired by the work of Huxtable (2009) who had used a 'living theory approach' in her own research:

*"In living educational theory, research questions and answers do not stand apart but are recognised to be in dynamic, organic, receptive-responsive relationships, and it is the individual's values, theories, and practice, as well as their activities, which are researched. .. (it is) a methodology in which researchers' descriptions and explanations of their values, theories, learning and educational development are recognised as shaping the meaning and significance of their practice..." (pp 222-227)*

So emboldened with this idea, I would insert a segment about myself into the study, called 'My Voice', which would include comments on my social and cultural construction and how I self-categorized. I thought it would also help the integrity of my research if I were to introduce the issue of those contested categories as a topic for discussion in the next stage of my research with my participants before the interview questions were formulated. Additionally Huxtable's view on the legitimacy and significance of the researcher reflecting back on their own values and practice strengthened my resolve regarding the kind of chapter it might be possible for me to write at that later stage in my study, when usually a conventional analysis would be produced. As well as being expressive and communicative, I would come clean about how I felt at this stage in my study about the data I would have by then presented, and would provide a commentary regarding how this might have changed my practice and subsequent philosophy. Thus although I would not presume to analyse or represent the Other, I could turn a critical gaze upon my self, and could give my opinions (clearly marked as my own) and analyse my own research activities, and methodology.

### **How I went about compiling the next batch of interview questions**

I held two group discussions in May 2005 on the topic of the students' categories or identities before considering the ways in which I was similar and different to them, and how this was manifested. I then asked students to analyse how our differences and similarities might affect the research process. These were structured by first having the group split into two smaller

groups of 5 each, to discuss the topics, before combining in one group. The students identified the following as their categories: gender, age, teenage sub-culture, social class, race, peer groups, musical tastes and who was popular. I next asked how important it was for them to share a category with someone in order to relate to them. Five of the group thought it wasn't important at all; the other five all identified the teenage sub-culture, whether this was musical tastes, or who was popular as a key definer. Two of these, both girls, also identified the gender category as significant.

The next stage was to ask for comments about how far they shared categories with me. All students saw 'age' as the essential defining category regarding myself and them; not the teacher/pupil or researcher/researched ones which they regarded as not important. Interestingly the age thing wasn't seen as a barrier to my understanding of them, but something that made me superior. (I was surprised at the veneration they had for age, I had assumed that they would regard their youth far more positively). John mentioned gender as a difference but said it wasn't an important one as I wasn't sexist. Anthony said the difference in gender was not significant at all as that was not how they defined me, the makeup and stuff wasn't worn because I was vain. Carol said I shared a category of gender, but her particular version of gender, which was kind of 'girly' in the way that it encompassed things like wearing makeup, care about hair, going to the gym etc, whilst not being a 'girly girl' ie not being bothered what people thought. She thought I shared social class category, but not in terms of bank balance as she said that mine would be higher. Both Daryl and Anthony thought that we shared a category of liking fun, and also, I was "a mate".

They then discussed whether the fact that I was both a teacher and researcher would pose any problems for them in an interview situation. All students thought that it was an important aspect that we had familiarity, they knew me and could trust me. The teacher bit wasn't a problem, although if I had been a different kind of teacher they said it would be a problem. When I asked about how comfortable they had felt during the interviews at the end of KS3,

Ellie said she had been 100% totally open and honest in the last interview. Lavinia and Cathy had been honest, but hadn't really said all they could have said - both thought it would help to see the questions in advance. John said he'd been truthful last time, but sometimes hadn't given answers that were as full as they could have been. He did not think he would speak more openly with a different teacher, he said he would only speak to me, and would just try himself to make himself bothered enough to say as much as he could. (My summary of this discussion is appendix d.)

Now that the students had been alerted to the different roles and categories that might be operating during the interview, and also made more conscious of the artificiality of the proceedings (i.e. not simply the gathering of truth) I felt happier about introducing the next stage of data collection, which was to involve the students in the creation of the interview schedules, thus hopefully erasing some of the tentacles of teacher/researcher power that had structured the previous batch of data. I devoted two hours to this process, and structured this in the way that I would structure a discussion activity in an English class. (See appendix e.)

The lessons were held on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> June and Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2005. All of the group were present. The aim was to enable the students to devise questions for the next stage of data collection. My method was to start by showing students the aims of my research. I had split these into the five sections below. I began by asking them to work individually for 10 minutes, brainstorming their responses. I explained they could either write the questions they thought might allow them to respond on each section, or simply write their thoughts. I explained that all written work would be collected by me at the end of the lesson and could form part of my data. (These written responses can be seen as appendix f.). After 10 minutes, students worked in pairs, trying to agree on two questions for each section.

A group discussion was then held. Students were invited to suggest questions, and then commented on each question, giving their opinion about whether each question was the best question that could be asked in order

to gain full and honest responses for each section. I typed students' responses as they were given, and the students could see this on the overhead projector.

In the second lesson, I then explained that I would go through each question in turn, and they were to think about whether they personally would find the phrasing of the question clear and specific enough. The students were invited to alter phrasing, amend and delete questions as I went through. Each student had to agree (show of hands) on whether the question was an appropriate one, before moving on to the next one. These were the sections students were given at the beginning:

- 1) Your perceptions of education.
- 2) Your views of yourself as a learner.
- 3) How you view yourself /what you think of yourself generally.
- 4) Studying 'A' level philosophy, including your thoughts on studying it two years earlier than usual.

The students had created a cluster of questions for each of the above categories, with no prompting from me (appendix g). In addition, they added an introduction where they would each have to swear an oath on the tape-recorder in imitation of the swearing in process at court, and they then added an extra category at the end about how truthful the interview had been. I liked the bit of humour that was creeping in already, and also, saw the fact that they had felt able to add a category of their own as a sign that already, they felt more ownership of the interview process. I was also interested in how their questions seemed more directly personal than the ones I had framed in the first interview (I wouldn't have dared to ask: 'what do you like/dislike about yourself?') - their questions were shorter, clearer, less focussed on comparisons, and more interested in opinions and feelings rather than ideas.

As a final exercise I asked students to write as a little piece of optional homework, about how they thought that the interviews might be shaped by the fact that they, the students had written the questions. Two students accepted this invitation. Ellie wrote:



*I think the way that we helped decide the questions was a good idea. It gave us a chance to decide questions that we could understand and answer, to the fullest. It also gave us a chance to think about the question and what we would say as an answer. I think that they will bring out what we really feel, as people will openly answer the questions they helped in creating.*

Lavinia wrote:

*I think that the process yesterday went well and I thought that people did take it seriously. I also thought that people were setting the questions that they wanted to answer, and had lots of feedback on. I think that we will feel more comfortable answering questions that we have set, and understand, and have had time to think of suitable answers.*

I was then ready to carry out the interviews during June/July 2005. Like last time, I used my teaching room, although on two occasions when it was being used I borrowed an office. I scheduled the interviews for lunch-time or after school. I spent some time considering whether or not to make a small payment, £5, as a direct and tangible reward to the students for their time, to mark the difference between our usual encounters as teacher/student and also to indicate respect for the contributions. On the one hand, it could be argued that the exchange of money would commercialize the encounter, and even, that as the amount was so low, there was an element of exploitation in the Marxist sense as I was benefiting from the labour of the students. I wasn't sure of the going rate for a half-hour interview in a research project, but imagined it would be higher than I could afford, possibly double the amount. Yet if I didn't give the students anything at all, would I be exploiting them even more? How ethical was it to treat my participants differently on the basis that they were still at school to how adults would probably have been treated in a research project of this type? Would this imply that what they had to offer was of no commercial value? It could also be argued that in offering *some* payment, I was enabling the students to refuse to participate more easily if they had wanted to, as rather than thinking, 'I'll do this for Miss as I don't want to let her down/she has power over me as she is a teacher', they could simply think/say: 'I can't be bothered to do this and

will just turn the money down'. It was hard to decide either way on the issue; I wanted to treat the students with respect and indicate I valued them and their contributions, and the dilemma was that whichever course of action I now took, it was possible to argue I had not been ethical. At the time, I decided that it was on balance better to proceed with these payments, but that I should also endeavour to convey that in offering the money, I was not intending to imply I had 'bought' the students!

In the event, the students all took the money easily, and with some glee, and didn't seem very bothered at all about what the giving and receiving of the money symbolized. As the study progressed, I increased this payment, ending with a final £10 given for the exit interview.

Looking back, some years later, I can still see that this is one of the more contentious areas of my research, but I don't regret it; the students gave generously of their time, and their interviews were done to help me, and the payments in no way ameliorated the debt I owed to them. This was, simply, a small way I had of showing that I was grateful and appreciated their contributions.

Immediately I noticed that these interviews felt different. They felt more equal, in a sense more discomfiting for me. In particular, Anthony's interview was unnerving when he chose to reject some questions; he joked around and was also quite combative at times. Carol and Ellie also laughed a lot; Beth and David both whizzed through showing an instrumental attitude, certainly with no soul searching; John seemed to be playing with the interviewing process, trying to drag it out. But with all the students I seemed to have avoided overly directing the interview process, and when speaking off the script I had mainly asked questions that sought clarification, or I had used the summarizing/reflecting technique of active listening in order to move the conversation on. The example below, taken from John's interview is typical for how this time I had restricted my comments to the script, seeking clarification, prompts, and little summaries of what the student had said:

**What do you like/dislike about yourself? What do you like first?**

Em - I can speak to strange people anywhere, I have confidence.

**(SW: Anything else?)**

Not really.

**(SW: dislike?)**

I can be shy and that, if I'm with new people, the first time I started hanging around my dad's house with new people I was all shy as I was on my own and that, then my mate slept ... Daryl! Daryl slept the week after and I started hanging around with them, I was all mouthy and that, if I'm with new people I'm shy the first time.

**(SW: anything else?)**

My looks - spots - and my little toe nails on each little toe are dodgy I don't like them either, my freckles, I can be annoying - and er, I've got about God knows how many different personalities - I've got four people telling me different things .. my dad, his girlfriend, my mum and her boyfriend - they're all telling me completely different things, and I get confused; this is what's been happening lately Miss, its just all gone mad. My mum's boyfriend is telling me one thing, my dad's saying the other one - my mum's like in-between them both, and my dad's girlfriend is against everything! And - yeah!

**(SW: so on-top of some little physical things you do not like, one of the bigger things you don't like about yourself is that you've got four people telling you what to do and telling you different things.)**

Five! School counts as one person. And - em... I'm not having as much fun as I should be out of school, its boring! I think what I'd rather do, you know Codie and that, they just mess around all the time like out of school - but it looks miles more fun than what we do, we sit in Ashley park and be bored ....

**(SW: you think Codie and that are having more fun than your group?)**

It sounds it! Beating each other up and that, jumping out ...

The interviews were more snappy and purposeful, with the pupils sounding more like the experts and with me sounding like I was listening! They had the virtue of being composed by the students, who felt more of a sense of ownership, and who had had some time to think about the kinds of things they wanted to say.

### **Stage 3 - November 2005-Jan 2006**

The next stage was to give each participant copies of *both* of the interviews they had done with me. I decided to give them a week to read them, before we would have a time talking about them. The students were now in year 11, and I envisaged it would be interesting for them to read what they had said at the end of year 9 and in year 10. Although I had shown the students the transcript of their interview the day after I had typed it (simply to check that I had heard correctly), they had never previously, been asked to think about the comments they had made (and at the time of the interviews I had not given the students a copy to keep!) So this would be the beginnings of any commentary/analysis. I asked the students to select and comment on what they saw as significant, or anything that struck them, anything that resonated in particular. I then asked them to regard the transcripts as documents, and comment on what the documents suggested about the person doing the speaking. I asked them if the document coincided with their memory of who they were at that time.

I was pleased, mainly, with these student responses, and liked the way that the students were the ones commenting on their interviews rather than me.

### **Stage 4- February 2006-August 2006**

At this point in my study the participants were nearing the end of their statutory schooling. I envisaged giving exit interviews that would be based on a retrospective of KS3 and KS4. Whilst I needed to avoid the pitfalls of the first round of interviews where I had asked too many questions, and not listened actively, I wanted to direct the research a little more than in the second batch of interviews. This was as I had a definite purpose of wanting to enable some kind of closure for the students to their statutory schooling, *and* the research process, whilst ensuring that I had addressed my initial research questions. Furthermore I had an ethical reason for wishing the students to look critically at some data I

had previously compiled at the outset of the study which had been pertinent to their personal biography (appendix h.). My idea was to ask a question about an alternative or 'ghost' history; I had mentioned this at the beginning of the methodology section and my intention had always been to offer the students a little something back - i.e. an increased awareness of the function of choice, and perhaps a sense of achievement over some of the choices they had already made up until this point in time.

I ended up with just five questions, but they were ones that I thought would generate lots of student talk (appendix i). I proceeded to conduct these interviews during July and August 2006; they went smoothly and I found them enjoyable to do. I think the students also found them useful as in addition to enabling a formal closure with the secondary schooling phase in their lives and the research process, they also acted as means of closing their relationships with myself.

Around this time, and to strengthen the reflexivity of my research I also arranged for a reverse interview to take place, where one of the students interviewed me as a means of showing me what it felt like being on the receiving end. I was interested in finding out whether the interviews were as evenly balanced as I hoped or if there was still a power differential, and a student volunteered to represent the group, who would use the approach he felt I had used on them all.

As Trausradottir (2001) says:

*"We argue strongly that researchers have a duty to have a clearly articulated voice in inclusive research. The right to a distinctive voice is based on their expertise as social researchers and this needs to be acknowledged clearly ... Not only is the researcher's claim to be voiceless disingenuous because it hides what is really going on and masks the reality with rhetoric, but it also does a disservice to people with learning disabilities who will remain for ever in the dark, their real participation devalued."* (p. 203)

Whilst Trausradottir was talking specifically about people with learning difficulties, I felt there was some applicability to my own study as

children/teenagers as a group are also very under-represented in educational research. In making clear the exact extent to which my voice was present, I would also be making it clear that the remainder, and by far the largest part, could be attributed to the students.

### **Stage 5 September 2006-June 2009**

I was now at the stage where I had to make some decisions about how to shape or edit the vast amount of data I had produced: I had in total, three interviews, and also an analytical/dialogical piece transcribed for each student. I could not present the interviews as uninterrupted narratives in the usual linear sense, for the reasons explored earlier, but also as there was simply far too much data to include. I wanted a method of conceptualising my data that would allow me to decide how to work with it, and then present it.

The route I eventually chose began with an idea of Annette Laureau's (2007), who applied a metaphor, taken from her personal experience, to signpost her theory/methodology/philosophy at the beginning of the work. I thought I too could use metaphor to help explain to the reader of my study how I conceptualised the relationship between the students, the interviews, the transcripts, and the selections (and method of presentation) made in the final written version. I would choose something that resonated for me, and that would allow me to drill-down into my own thinking.

My metaphor is as follows: when I was at school, as a student I used to graffiti into the maths desk: "*castles made of sand fall in the sea eventually*". I intended this lyric of Hendrix to mean, that there was something fake, insubstantial and rotten about society, and that eventually everything as we know it, would come tumbling down.

The chance of anyone reading into this the same as me is remote. There is a 'bottle thrown into the sea' element to this ... the words are there, forever echoing for anyone who looks, but they will be read variously (or even not read if someone sees them but dismisses them).

The feeling I felt (disaffection) when I etched this graffiti disappeared long ago, possibly even before the graffiti was finished (it took me a few weeks to finish it) so if it is not the original feeling that has been 'fixed' forever by the etching what is it? Does it bear any relation to the original sentiment? Does it matter if it has no connection?

Interestingly, the inscription has transformed the product (table): the act of writing/etching into the desk has given my initial feeling/thought some permanency. Now it is a table *plus* something (some words, a feeling, a thought ...) or *minus* something (it lacks purity and completeness now it has been defiled by my act of sabotage). On the one hand, I regard the something as a trace, or an echo of the original sentiment, and by implication less real or vivid than the original feeling, and certainly only a very veiled way of catching even a tiny glimpse of me and my personality (let alone Hendrix who wrote the original words). Yet on the other, I also regard the graffiti as a communication or an artistic expression. It now has some permanency. And whilst it has no intrinsic meaning, it can be viewed and understood in a myriad of ways.

And if one looks again at the table, it is possible to see that there are other pieces of graffiti, etched at different times, by different people. The layers of graffiti on the table can be read and viewed as a whole, i.e. as a selection or cross-section or snap-shot of views of people who have sat at the table, or the individual pieces can be seen as fragments of thoughts that were once felt by individuals, or the table itself can be seen as an object or piece of art, communicating *something* to whoever sits there. If one looks really closely it is possible to have some idea about the different times the individual pieces of graffiti were etched into the desk as some are faded and some are very bold: one also has a sense of different voices given the different handwritings and names that are inscribed into the desk.

Similarly in my research: the transcripts of the students' interviews, which I have gathered and stored, and which amount to over 100,000 words, are analogous to the body of Hendrix's lyrics, and the written transcripts are the equivalent of my having covered a table in graffiti of the entirety of Hendrix's

songs. The table and blank page are as one. Neither they, nor the unedited graffiti/transcripts that feature a jumble and mass of words, communicate effectively, they do not yet convey or express. They have no meaning, and there is no universal truth to be gleamed.

So I will reflect upon the transcripts, and then make selections - rather like I once made a selection from Hendrix's words, appropriating the fragment which conveyed something of my own feelings of disaffection. And so with the transcripts, I will select the bits that convey something about each one of my research questions. Rather than approaching the transcripts with an overwhelming feeling of disaffection, like I did when I was a pupil in my maths class, I will look at them with curiosity, to find comments that resonate for me, whilst still being suitable for my research task. And I will layer the extracts from the transcripts onto the page, rather like the myriads of pieces of graffiti on the table; taking care to show the different voices involved, as well as the date for each piece.

When I selected the words I would etch onto the desk all those years ago, sitting in the back of the room in my maths class, there was an infinitesimally small chance that someone gazing at the table, and reading the graffiti, would interpret those words just like I had done when I began to write them. Indeed, what I meant by those words changed over time, and whilst to begin with I wished to express something of my disaffection with being a teenager in a world of adults, later, over the years that I still sat in the same seat in the maths room, they came to represent something of the political situation at the time, and also our metaphysical condition; after all we all die in the end, and no one's footsteps in the sand remain for long. So whilst there was no intrinsic meaning to be unravelled, the gazer may have had an idea, or recovered a memory, or imagined something, or in some other kind of personal way, interacted with and interpreted the words. They were also free to imagine what they would about the author of the graffiti, and the original author (Hendrix). So whilst meaning cannot be detected or discovered, it can be *created* due to the interaction of the observer with the words. And so it is with the reader of my



research text. There is no absolute meaning to be gleaned and the reader is free to think whatever they wish, but whilst I wish to invite the reader to construct meaning for themselves and interact with the text, I would also endeavour to interrupt them in any tendency to view the comments I select as representations of an Other, or reflections of a person. So whilst I will divide the research text into chapters with pseudonyms as headings to remind the reader that I interviewed ten students, and to show which of the ten student voices is commenting at which time, I do not think I have *captured* ten voices. And although I will show the different times the comments were made through my use of colour - I am not implying that there is a progression over time. Indeed, I have included contradictions and repetitions as well as some randomness, to remind the reader that identity is not fixed, persons are not glimpsed in linear narratives, and that it is only through fragments that something of the Other (the students and myself) can be glimpsed.

My relationship to the words I reproduce on the page of my research study, is similar to the relationship I had with the words I graffiti-ed all those years ago. I am a writer. I have selected and appropriated, and now I write. I did not originate the words initially, but have chosen to copy them out, changing their context, and have now juxtaposed these with other words, in order to communicate something, not **of** the Other, but **to** the Other (both to the students I interviewed as well as the reader). I bear the responsibility for the words on the page. But as well as being a writer, I am a reader, and as a reader, when I engage with the words in the transcripts, I find they are charged emotionally and are saturated with my memories of the Other, which is why I feel this burden of responsibility in how I present/use/abuse these words; I cannot see these dialogues as 'shells that have been shed', they still have the power, for me, of conjuring up memory and feeling. Not only are the transcripts heavy with my memories and feelings towards the people I interviewed, they are also invested with how I feel now I no longer see these students - in some cases there is a feeling of sadness or loss, and an awareness that I no longer have the proximity to the presence of these students; all that remains is the transcripts.

I choose to see the transcripts as the 'faint copy' of the connection that was created by myself and my students in encountering each other through dialogue in the face-to-face interview. The chasms that exist and that separate the I from the Other were momentarily bridged through language or if not language (because the chances are the students and I did not understand each other fully ... i.e. Anthony: 'there are always barriers') - then through good will.

I cannot presume to know the Other, to possess him/her through language, indeed am proudest of my research when the students have resisted my attempts to be contained through language (e.g. by laughing, turning the interview round and asking me questions, refusing to be contained through formal interviewer/interviewee mode ...). And whilst the process of analysis is something I regard as invasive, unethical and tantamount to colonisation when applied (especially) to voices, it is also something I would regard as impossible, and thus the venture of analysis is in vain. This has implications for the tasks of editing and writing; I believe that my study will be making no truth claims, yet has *something* to do with communication, and I will also be inviting the reader to interact with the text in their own way.

From this point on I endeavoured to regard the transcripts as my attempts to communicate with the Other and possibly at times, when I seemed to be in tune with the responses the Other made to me, as a means of glimpsing a tiny facet of the Other. I would not assume anything about the identity or status of the participants, and their relation to me; I would not be the arbitrator of truth and meaning. Instead, I would set out to express my own thoughts, as a gesture towards the Other, my way of delineating the world for the enjoyment of the Other, but content with the realisation that the Other could accept or reject as they chose. So when I selected extracts from the transcripts to copy into my written research, it would be me, Susan, who was doing this, choosing some bits and rejecting others .... I was not invoking some kind of neutral and impersonal method that could be applied like a formula. The editing is an aspect of my voice, saying 'wait, this bit is worthwhile to me' - and reflects my own

opinions about relevancy, expediency, and audience. It is my responsibility. And the comments I make afterwards, in the space of my study that a reader would perhaps expect to find an analysis, are tantamount to my responding to the points raised by the Other. They are a continuation of a dialogue that was started in the original interviews, and will express to the Other, (the students as well as any reader of my study), how I am changed as a result of my encounter with the Other.

For further pointers about writing and presentation, I was inclined towards an approach I had seen used by Lather and Smitties (1995), which was quoted at length in Grbich (2004) who calls their style a 'hypertextual pastiche'. Lather and Smitties researched women with HIV, and introduced a very interesting format, which I thought I might be able to adapt, to point out how to unravel my own text. They used a variety of styles of text: transcripts of support group discussion, snatches of phone conversations, bits of poetry, commentary by the researchers, autobiographical details, theory, pictures, stories about angels and different versions of the angel as metaphor, information, commentary by members of the support groups about earlier transcripts etc. The text is positioned in an interesting way: in the body of the work, a page is divided horizontally, and marked with a line of angel wings (thus echoing the central metaphor which is explored in its own chapter). The upper text is transcript taken from the support group meetings - the lower half is mainly the commentaries of the two researchers. There are bits of text between chapters where theoretical bits are introduced, and on the pages of the chapters, there are text boxes where snippets of information are given. Sometimes poetry is encased within the text on a page. There is therefore no hierarchy of text, nothing is reduced to the margins or as a footnote, and the reader is at the centre of the process of working out the meaning and can make connections as they choose; even choosing for example to just read the top half of each page, and listen solely to the voices of the women from the support groups. The women have been given the opportunity to introduce themselves, and have made the decision whether to create a persona, or project an aspect of their

lived identity. According to Lather and Smitties, (1995) the text has been structured in this manner to provide:

*"Layers of various kinds of information, shifts of register, turns of different faces towards the reader, in order to provide a glimpse of the vast and intricate network of the complexities of cultural information about AIDS in which we are all caught" (p.543)*

Lather and Smitties present their material extremely movingly, and not just for the nature of its topic and the content of the women's discussion. The writers have achieved many things: on one level, they have succeeded in giving their participants a platform which is not framed by their own agenda. On another level the book is about the act of research and the act of writing. There is a playfulness and lightness to be found in the way that the reader is consistently interrupted in any tendency to submerge in the text and forget the distance between the author and the creative process, and writing and presence - this is achieved by the authors' technique of drawing attention to the act of writing via the proliferation of texts. It is impossible to read the words of the participants as if they were a straightforward interview as the editing hand of the researcher is clearly seen.

Following on from Lather and Smitties, rather than reproducing whole transcripts, I would replicate Lather and Smitties' technique of layering. Using the minimum of structure, in my case, simply the four research questions - I would reproduce those responses from the students that could be read as relevant to a particular research question. Lather had used presentational devices such as boxes, different formats etc to signpost different voices or styles, but I would use colour as my main presentational device, to indicate to the reader which of the four pieces of text (interviews) I was quoting from. I anticipated that the juxtaposition of extracts might well offer contradictions rather than continuity, but this would serve to interrupt the reader in any tendency to absorb the chapters as if they were reflective of a person. They were not; the person had long since vanished, and was never contained there anyway. Rather, the writing I had produced on the page would signpost the very

shifting-ness of identity. Like Lather and Smitties, I intended that in my study there would be no illusion of presenting truth or a pure voice, just fragments placed on the page. And to return to my 'graffiti' metaphor, each chapter could be regarded as a table, with its own layers of graffiti.

With regard to the chapter entitled 'My Voice', I would need to continue with this mode of presentation, rather than creating a narrative. After all my own voice was no more the truth or a *pure* voice than that of the students. I decided to combine the interview that had taken place between Anthony and myself, and combine this with a diary entry about my feelings about education, and another, a retrospective piece I had written, which was based on my own school days. The three texts in combination, whilst enabling my voice to be heard, as well as signposting the role played by my voice in the student chapters, conformed to the method I would take-up in the student chapters.

I hoped that my methodology would offer: glimpses of the Other and some perceptions of identity; some fragmented commentaries on education; words on the theme of schooling, the nature of challenge etc - but certainly not life stories, *not* narratives. The comments would have the quality of graffiti because whilst they are *written*, they are temporal.

The penultimate section of my study, 'My Voice- 2', as already outlined, would express my thoughts and feelings about how I had been changed by my study. I anticipated that at this stage I might also make some connections with ideas that had been introduced in the literature review. I envisaged that in signposting this section clearly as 'My Voice -2' the reader would be reminded of how I was not a neutral observer, or even an expert, but simply myself, giving my views.

The thesis ends with an evaluation of the study by applying some of the criteria cited by Bryman (2008), for evaluating qualitative research. He cited Guba and Lincoln who had focussed on 'trustworthiness' and 'authenticity', and Yardley who had proposed four criteria of: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, impact and importance. I will also make

some suggestions as to how I thought my study may have contributed to knowledge, and finally, make some recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 4:

### My Voice

#### Explanation of layout and use of colour in this section

I have used a similar style of presentation to the student chapters that follow. I have also endeavoured to select relevant extracts using the same (or slightly adapted) research questions I have asked the students and which are used in the following student chapters. These questions are:

- How do the ten students in the study perceive education at the end of KS3, during KS4, and the end of KS4?
- How do they perceive any experiences of being supported or challenged educationally?
- How do they perceive and conceptualize themselves? How might a notion of ability feature within their self concept?
- How do they perceive/categorize/identify themselves in relation to others - such as the school, the family, the peer group and wider society? Do they feel that they are 'included'?

This is the key to the colours I have used in this section.

**The text written in black is from a retrospective piece I wrote about my own experiences as a child, in particular my experiences as a student, written in July 2005.**

The text written in red and blue is from an interview that took place with one of the pupils, Anthony, interviewing me. This took place July 2006. The red is me and blue is the student.

The text written in lilac was taken from a piece I wrote for this research about myself and my views on education - written July 2007.

## **How do I perceive education?**

When I was at school myself I was bored most of the time. I felt rebellious, but only showed this in a quiet kind of way. I didn't participate in lessons and didn't do much if any homework. I always sat at the back, regardless of where any friends were sitting; in fact usually none of my friends were in my classes as I had been placed in top-sets, and they tended to be in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> set (we had an 8 form entry in my school). Sometimes I truanted but I was rarely found out. In maths I sat on my own at the back, and would graffiti Jim Hendrix (or sometimes John Otway) quotations with my compass. My favourite, which to my 14 yr old self had a profundity which I thought demanded to be heard was: "Castles made of sand fall in the sea eventually" - I took this to be a comment about the set-up in society, how it was all rather rotten and fake. In English we could choose our teachers as the English department had written its own CSE course grouped around themes: regardless of the topic I always selected the lesson with my favourite teacher, this meant again that none of my friends would be with me as Mr McCormack taught lessons on 'boyish' topics such as war. This was of little matter to me as I couldn't care less what it was that Sir taught, and also didn't care that the room was full of boys. I was not going to sacrifice the one chance I had of being even mildly interested in class so that I could sit with the girls and learn about 'romance'... Sir would sometimes write the occasional positive comment on my work, (this doesn't sound much but is a lot more than any other teacher did) and I also suspected that he understood me. My experiences must have had something to do with the kind of teacher I am now. I do try and know my pupils as people. I am hurt that none of my teachers made that kind of effort with me. I am aware of how much of the school experience is dull and how difficult it is to resist uniformity.

[What do you find the most successful way of teaching for most students?](#)



Personally, getting to know them one-to-one, then having the curriculum all planned out, knowing exactly what my syllabus is and what materials I need to use, then matching it to whoever's in class and then trying to get some kind of relationship going with every kid, and I would do all that, spend a few weeks doing that, before believing I was doing any proper teaching

Do you do the same for every kid? Even if they are a really naughty kid do you try and get to know them?

Yes, every single kid, although to be honest I probably don't do it as much for pupils who seem to be getting on OK and don't seem to have a need for urgent individualisation, I would probably get round to them, but not as quickly as with those people who aren't interested or where there are obvious barriers to learning, but yes, that is always what I do, I don't like teaching to an anonymous class.

Because everyone is different ... Do you think students should be put into groups by their test scores?

Partly yes but partly no, I think different things at different times, when I'm thinking in the best way, the most moral way, I think they all should be in mixed ability groups, but the problem is that some teachers are not skilled or committed enough to ensure that everyone in a mixed ability group is being taught well, so therefore, because you've got to deal with teachers who perhaps don't put in masses of effort, having them in sets is better - but only as it's easier, it isn't very sound.

So you don't think pupils should be put in sets, or do you?

It's not clear is it from what I said?

No!

Well I think its *easier* to have them in sets, it is *easier* for me, but I don't know if you can ever really know someone's ability in advance of that decision who to put where, the thing is that everyone who is given decent work is going to do well, whether they are in the third set or the first set, its immaterial, but in the fourth set they probably feel labelled anyway as not as 'achieving' so are less likely to stretch up to reach a challenge, I'm not sure they get decent work set in

bottom sets. Really if you want to know what I really think, I say setting is wrong and shouldn't happen but it makes life *easier* for teachers, but for the children it is not the best way of doing it. (See my conclusion, chapter 17, for some comments on the difference between my expressed view and research evidence)

Sad to say but I am bored with teaching. I see the wheel being re-invented time and time again by successive governments, and each new time the change is billed as a progression when I am not so sure it is. It's more like a circle. I am not so sure that GCSES are that important (other than being the ticket to the next stage) - and to an extent believe we pull a confidence trick on the pupils with our emphasis on these exams; we certainly do with SATs, what a nonsense these are. But self belief and achievement are important, and is so far as exam success feeds into these, then I can see how there is some justification for teaching in this way.

### **How do I perceive educational support or challenge?**

I was badly under-challenged as a pupil. The work set for us was dull and not worth striving for; I was lucky to get away with my 6 x O levels as I never made any effort and didn't do homework. I can remember may be four or five times I was interested in a topic - usually English. I loved music but not music lessons: the teacher (who was always encouraging and complementary to me) actually taught us the wrong syllabus so we all failed the O level. Our French teacher committed suicide when we were in the fifth year, so me and four others always had free lessons during French, and basically taught ourselves. The science teachers of the top set did not know how to accommodate girls and the four of us sat in a little cluster at the back of the room, hating our invisibility but showing our contempt by talking amongst ourselves throughout the lessons. We didn't really have a pastoral system, or if we did, it wasn't for pupils like myself; part of the anonymous mass. I cannot remember any time in the whole of my schooling when I was 'supported'; for a start, there wasn't anyone on the staff

who had made the effort to get to know me as an individual and thus any attempts at kindness would have come over as mismatched or patronizing to me.

**I believe that each child is entitled to an appropriate balance of challenge and support. If a child is able, it is sometimes assumed that they do not need emotional support, similarly, if a child is perceived as having behavioural difficulties there might not be as much of an emphasis on ensuring they are stretched. I am aware of how all individuals have barriers and talents, and that over a period of time these might change.**

What would you say about your English class?

The one you were in?

Yes

They did really really well, probably my best ever class in fourteen years, probably because I was able to use materials that I had designed, used at the NAGTY summer school, and I used them here in this school, with the whole of the top set. When you think, I used Henry James which is normally 'A' level or university standard - and I hardly ever had to shout! They were a good class and I would expect them to do well and get good grades.

Do you think that in order to teach a class, its better for the teacher to have taught that class for a while and have got to know the class and know what they are good at?

Yes, you can match your materials to the class well

Do you think every pupil should go on the extension scheme?

I think it should be available for everyone but there is a problem here, on the one hand I believe it should be open to anyone who wants it although the problem with that is that you might not know you want it, in year 7 or 8, your friendships and background might suggest to a person that they are not interested in that kind of thing, so perhaps they should be made to, but then on the other hand, one of the reasons some people find extension scheme powerful is because they were *identified* as clever and chosen, and it's the thought of

being privileged or special that makes them want to do it. It's a really difficult question as I would like to offer it to everyone.

You could make loads of different extension schemes for everyone and pick people for different schemes depending on their talents, so they will do well at that subject, and go off in later life and study it more - a proper extension scheme, but find what's best for all people

I kind of do something like that already, I have an inclusive scheme called 'golden time' which is open to everyone in year 7 and 8 - I had over 60 of them do this earlier in the year, they chose themselves for this. They all have a talent they want to develop, and chose themselves, and they get an interview with me to negotiate a project and a staff mentor, and there were some big prizes - but this was something where they chose themselves so they wouldn't possibly feel the 'lift' of being chosen? And also there's expressive arts GCSE which anyone can do as extension work but this also is self-chosen, but the extension scheme which does still run in all year groups, is sociology and religious studies GCSEs and then philosophy hopefully, there is always an element of staff choosing, well me choosing. I find it hard to get away from believing that one of the motivations for doing these really hard subjects is the realisation that they have been identified as clever.

Do you think it's just like luck that some people with a rubbish background get into university, is it just them? Just once in a blue moon someone has the right attitude and goes?

I think that could happen, but I think its more likely that once in a blue moon they get the right kind of support and encouragement, whether that's from their family or a teacher - I think its nearly impossible to do it by yourself, as one, you don't know the ropes, two, you haven't got the model for you to see in front of you how to do it, the hard thing for me is, that when someone is in school I can support them loads, and think to myself, 'that's it, they're sorted' but then in those two years anything can happen, and all the things they've learned in school, whether from me or someone else, just get diluted or forgotten and they end up with other voices in their lives being more insistent, the university idea

just becomes forgotten, so that is what I think happens time and time again, and I was just hoping that the extension scheme would push someone a bit further into that two years before they begin to forget.

### **How do I perceive and conceptualize myself?**

In my family there is me, and my husband of 22 yrs. We have never had any children, although we have fostered in the past, and I now have a ward; a former pupil whom I have acquired legal guardianship of.

I have always identified as working class. It shows in little things like my attitude towards make-up ('putting on make-up is akin to putting on your brave-face to show the world, if you don't wear make-up you aren't doing your best'). It shows in bigger things like my attitude towards personal ambition (doesn't seem quite right to push myself forward ... it's more important to focus on relationships and inner happiness).

**I am a happy adult, who had a happy childhood.**

As a young child I lived with my family, consisting of my dad (a council worker for the parks department) my mum (a housewife) and my younger sister and brother. When I was a bit older, about 11, my dad opened up a record shop and my mum went to teacher training college. I went to the local comprehensive school. When I was a pupil myself, like everyone else I was aware of who was accorded 'popular' status and who was not. All the rest of us occupied the shifting grey sands - sometimes nearer the popular end, sometimes not. I think I must have known it was all rubbish though: I was bothered about it on one level and would have liked to have been 'in', but not sufficiently to ever do anything about it or lose any sleep over it. The popular people were usually good looking (but usually not *the* best looking), had style, confidence and boy/girl friends. Often but not always they were careless of teacher approval and would 'play up' in class. They were not the worst behaved, they always knew when to stop and

could conduct staff relationships easily. They were often clever, but rarely hard workers - tended to be top of the middle sets. I kind of went my own way, had a group of 'middle status' friends, who I might have called 'friends' but who bored me to distraction with their soap-opera conversations: I don't think I ever told any of them any important detail about myself. I got on with everyone, occasionally took an independent line (not enough to get me bullied but enough for me to be able to live with myself), and on occasions would stand alone against the group or attempt to lead it. I learned to get along with loads of people, all scarily similar. No one was different. Not even me, even though I sometimes felt crushingly different inside. I had my moments of 'speaking out' for something I actually believed in (normally when someone was being hurt/bullied and the subject of intolerable childhood cruelty) but there were not too many of these: the episode with one of the school bullies after my friend had offered to lend her a swimsuit and was ridiculed, resulted in me haranguing the bully; once in our house-block, this boy with 'special needs' (as it was called then) had been made to stand on a table and hit himself with a rolled up newspaper repeatedly and sing "hit me with your rhythm stick" and I yelled at everyone and broke it up; the time I attacked the girls bullying my sister, and in English where I gave a speech on racism but the whole class turned nasty and made racist banners. I also stood up for our religious studies teacher who the class bullied for months: she was Asian (which was motive enough in my school where racist views were common), not very attractive, and too soft - but I hated how the class would make her cry as she made an effort to make our lessons interesting, and she was unfailingly kind - so I did for her what I did for no other teacher, answered questions, did some work, and tried to shut my class-mates up. It was all stiflingly conforming. Perhaps this is why I remember these times just mentioned as they represent the very few occasions I broke out of it; this said I was not unhappy - I did a lot of 'looking and learning'.

**I think that my adult self has retained the sense of fair-play I had as a child, but has grown more tenacious when it comes to achieving what I think I know to be right. I am still someone who watches and listens**

more that she speaks, but my non-conformist streak has strengthened and I am never reluctant or wary about speaking my mind even if I am in a minority of one. I really want things to be fair, and if I perceive that something is not, and it concerns someone or something I care about, I will never give up.

### **How do I categorize my students? Do I feel that they are included?**

Inclusion is an overwhelming priority of mine. I wish to include everyone, and I don't like the idea of things being unfair, of some people not being chosen, of people be ignored, bullied, not understood or appreciated and accepted for being who they are (or who they might yet be). I have chosen, deliberately, to work in a school I perceive as being inclusive. I am driven by trying to 'make things fair' yet I perceive that they are not and this makes me restless; I feel that whilst there is inequality of access, and whilst I can see ways of making things less unequal, I have a duty to keep on battling. Philosophically too, I have always been motivated by the idea of embracing difference which, for me, is what education is all about.

How many people do you think will go on to university?

Out of that class of 31?

Yes

Oh ...based on past experience or hope?

Based on just what you think will happen, a prediction

I'm afraid this will sound cynical or bleak, but in the fourteen years I've been teaching, its only usually 2 or 3 in a year group, even when people are really clever it doesn't seem to happen often

The people that go to university from here, are they from a higher social class?

Yes

Did they get good grades or is it mainly their social class?

They get good grades but not necessarily the best grades - it's a combination of good grades and a middle class or extremely supportive working class background - I can only remember one person in all that time that went on to university from a lower working class background.

One!

One - he had an alcoholic mother and a schizophrenic father, but he did go ... I had to lend him the money to pay his deposit and the fare there. But may be this year will be different - what I'm hoping is that things like the extension scheme will help, like the philosophy, might help people who wouldn't otherwise have thought of it, it will be in their head as something they can do, like Cathy ...

Do you think pupils are more affected by their background, their social class, or their peer group? Or is it all equal?

I think their social class affects them massively, I think there is a culture of poverty in this locality where people have self destructive, self defeating and damaging ideas - and there are limiting gender stereotypes that restrict what people aim for and achieve. It comes from the family and friends, it is all linked in as the friends and family are all working class, and a particular version of working class that flourishes here. I think it has a massive impact on pupils, so if a teacher wants the pupils to really believe that personal achievement matters, and can matter more than peer-group or family expectations, then they have to challenge all of it! Sometimes the family can be really supportive, but often not! They might not even realise they are being unsupportive; when they do things like don't encourage homework - but friendship groups too are massively restricting and damaging.

And gender?

Particularly for boys!

Is it harder for boys?

Yes, I do think that, they are restricted even more as there are very few accepted models that a boy can take up, and be accepted by his peers, it's not impossible but it's hard.



The biggest barrier to the achievement of the pupils I teach is poverty. When I first began teaching I was surprised by seeing some children without socks, without coats in the winter, finding out that many didn't breakfast, that they saw a can of soup or a portion of noodles as a meal. I have seen my school diminishing in pupil numbers and although the demographic has changed which has resulted in fewer family homes and more students from the university living in 'buy-to-lets', I believe that the biggest factor is the ingrained snobbery against lower working class children that is manifested in the aspiring middle-class families that *could* send their children here rather than across the city to another school but choose not to. I hate seeing massive vehicles (driven by massive adults) rush past me in the morning as I walk to school, transporting their offspring to a school of their choice. This is a good school with the highest value added in the city, yet our numbers are shrinking so fast that closure is not beyond the realms of possibility.

## Chapter 5:

### Explanation of layout and use of colour in the ten student chapters

At the beginning of each student's chapter, there is a small piece taken from the transcripts of their interviews that gives an indication of the student's view of the research process. The second extract contains some autobiographical detail taken from the exit interview.

This is the key to the colours used.

**The text written in black is from the round of interviews taken when the students were at the end of year 9 in July 2004.**

**The text written in turquoise is from the round of interviews when the students were at the end of year in July 2005.**

The text written in red and blue is from the round of dialogues *about* the first two interviews. These took place towards the end of year 11 in May 2006. The red is the student and the blue is me.

The text written in black italics is autobiographical information gathered at the beginning of the study and shown to the students at the end of year 11 (May 2007) for checking and commenting on.

**The text written in lilac is from the exit interviews that took place just after the students had finished year 11 in June and July 2007.**

**The research questions (below) have been used in each student chapter as a method of shaping the responses:**

- How do the ten students in the study perceive education at the end of KS3, during KS4, and the end of KS4?
- How do they perceive any experiences of being supported or challenged educationally?
- How do they perceive and conceptualize themselves? How might a notion of ability feature within their self concept?
- How do they perceive/categorize/identify themselves in relation to others - such as the school, the family, the peer group and wider society? Do they feel that they are 'included'?

## Chapter 6:

### Anthony

I think I'm saying loads of stuff that I don't really think! You are making me say loads of stuff I don't think!

#### How am I doing that?

Because I don't know the answer ... All of that stuff I said before I didn't mean it - if I don't know a question I will just say anything so I think a lot of people do that.

#### To what extent do you find out what you are thinking through speaking?

Sometimes I'm just blabbing on - sometimes I'm working it out during saying it. When you are unsure you should just not answer it

*In my family there is mum, dad, sister, brother. My dad's a roofer, my brother's an apprentice roofer, my mum's an occupational therapist and my sister, well she always changes her job.*

#### **Anything else you want to say about your family?**

*My dad's just got a new tattoo!*

#### **I really wasn't expecting you to say that! And your friends?**

*Sometimes I think they're a bit boring, like sad ... computer games! There's other friends that are totally different and just want to party all the time, and I'd rather be in the middle. They are complete wannabe punk rockers, if they were punk rockers it would be alright, but wannabe!? I like to party, but they really care about what you wear, and your music and your hair ... They think it makes you what you are and shows individuality but ... your personality is what matters most ... they really care about what people think about them whereas I just don't.*

## **How do the students in the study perceive education at the end of KS3, during KS4, and the end of KS4?**

### **What do you think the purpose of education should be?**

The purpose of education, ... to teach children how to cope with later life in the proper world – not just the hidden curriculum, ... but it is teaching in the way what the government wants you taught – it should ... try and make you be creative and imaginative.... I'd say it's quite important, but there are more important things, like family and friends, but I do think education's important, but people are more important than that.

### **What do you like/dislike about school?**

I like nothing really ... I like the fact that you learn new things - I dislike all the stupid rules. Ok?

### **Anything else you like or dislike?**

Having to come in so early and homework, and deadlines and stupid petty rules

### **What do you think about the education you receive in lessons?**

Em ... the actual education itself ... most of it, quite a lot of it is pointless sometimes but it's the teachers that really matter like if it's a strict teacher that makes you work and tells you how to work and helps you and everything then you learn more so it isn't actually the stuff what's important, because some of it, most of it you need for your GCSEs, it's the teachers, if they actually teach you it or not... Schooling as a whole I think is right but you shouldn't have to go to school and it shouldn't be like a prison, like it is. It should be like university, no ... not like university, because most kids aren't mature enough and they would never come -.... it shouldn't be like prison, like you have to do it everyday so why make it like a prison? Why make it uniform, why make all these rules like this?

### **What is your opinion about the teaching you have received during KS3?**

Its been good for most lessons but I think some teachers ... bring their personal opinions and if one doesn't like you, you don't learn as much as the others because them not liking you restricts it and I don't think they should do that in lessons, I think they should teach everyone the same if they like them or not.

**How do your relationships with your teachers affect your learning?**

Massively ... cos most of them think I'm just there to disrupt but I aren't at all, if I break a little rule, they stereotype you, and they don't help you either.

**How do other pupils affect your education?**

I bet most people have said they do ... I don't know ... because they do a lot ... because people do mess about but the main thing is the teacher, if the teacher can shout at them and tell them to stop it - if the pupil is messing about, yeah that disrupts you, but the teacher should tell them to stop so it's mainly the teacher I'd say, but everyone thinks it's peer pressure and all that. If the teacher said, right everybody do this or this, nobody would be pressured because nobody would want to be naughty and so, so, everybody would be good and you wouldn't get the micky taken out of you because the teacher's really strict. Do you know what I mean?

**If you had to make just one recommendation about how to change teaching and learning at key stage 3 for the better, what would it be?**

Abolish the National Curriculum, but still teach all kids the same things so they all have an equal chance of learning, even in private schools, but make it more imaginative and creative, like in maths we keep repeating the same work like answering ten questions on the same thing, when ... the teacher could just explain it to you, you do one question and then go ahead without doing it over and over.

Do you still agree with the things you said in the first two interviews? In other words - are these answers still 'the truth' or has your truth changed?

There's one bit I said in the first interview when asked 'what do you think the purpose of schooling is,' and I said about brainwashing, and I still think that. You are not going to use anything outside of school that you've learned here really, unless you are going to be a CDT man. Also - what they could do is make up

some completely false information, and you have to do that for five years and they test you on that - you still would get GCSEs - that's what it's like - it's like teaching us a language what they have made up, then if you do it right you get GCSEs.

**What role would you say that education plays in your life, and also has played, over the last 5 years?**

School is your education so every time I went to school I was being educated - so it's a pretty big part! I think that they should be strict on people who mess around in lessons and I know you don't like this ... but the people that mess around, they should have the same classes. They should have the strict teachers, but if they were all together it would probably make them worse.

**So would you arrange the sets around behaviour rather than ability?**

Yes - well in the lessons where people messed about it just made you feel, there's no point, I hated the teacher so I'm just going to mess about too. That's what I thought in maths.

**Anything else you want to say?**

I think either teach you stuff that actually is going to help you in your life or teach you stuff that's going to be in the exams. Not teach you stuff you don't need. In year 7 and 8 they teach you stuff but I can't remember any of it, so it was two years of life wasted, and so they should teach you five years of exam preparation plus more about getting a job and life after school and how to be a better person and stuff.

**How do they perceive any experiences of being supported or challenged educationally?**

The extension scheme and philosophy have been good as you actually feel like you are learning in them as there is no one who messes about and you sort of feel, it's much better, it's people who have been chosen so they think, oh I must be clever, and they think, the people in this group must be clever, so they don't

feel the need to show off to their stupid mates who just like to mess about, so if you've been chosen to do a smart thing, it makes you feel privileged and you don't feel the need to mess about so you learn better and feel better. You don't feel pressure to be badly behaved. If I did school again I wouldn't feel pressure to be badly behaved, I don't really care what people think about me.

**Any more comments?**

Screw them!!

**Thank you!**

Screw them not anyone in this room.

**Not happy then?**

It's a rubbish school

**Why do you say that?**

At the time I thought it was rubbish ... like coursework, you were the only teacher who got us to do it in year 10 and got it done. Everyone else did it in year 11 and we didn't get any help. English and philosophy as that was also taught by you were the only subjects we got helped in. I didn't get enough help at all!

**I'm interested in knowing to what extent if at all the extra GCSEs you have studied and already got, expressive arts, religious studies, sociology - together with what you studied with me this year, English and philosophy have affected how you view it - after all these things constituted a third of your time-table!**

You helped me a lot, that's the only third that I learned in.

**But do the other two thirds outweigh it then and make it all seem bad?**

If I get good results I will love the school, otherwise it is rubbish.

**What do you think about studying philosophy?**

It has its ups and downs!

**How interesting a subject do you think it is?**

I think it is pretty 'up there' with the interesting subjects.

**How do you imagine studying philosophy might affect you in the future?**



I think it will get me down.

**Can you explain?**

Up and down.

**Does it help you now?**

Yes it does, it sorts my head out.

**Will it help you in the future?**

Yeah it will, I don't know! If I stop doing it then no it won't, as I'll forget it, no actually, philosophy, you learn it, and the exact things don't stay in your head but it shapes the way you think so, its forever, in your head. Know what I mean?

I had thought to myself that you wouldn't have done that, kept saying 'up and down', such short answers, in an official interview with an official person

Oh yes that's true what you say

What that you wouldn't do that?

But you told me to answer them honestly and like, as me, I answered them as me - I didn't answer them as you wanted to hear

So are you telling me that all that 'up and down' stuff was true?

Yes

So the fact that you just happened to express yourself in that way doesn't mean it's not true - perhaps I should quit fussing ...

Yes, stop your fussing

**How do they perceive and conceptualize themselves? How might a notion of ability feature within their self concept?**

**Do you regard yourself as 'labelled'?**

Yes ... whenever I mess about every time they go: 'I thought you were meant to be a clever pupil' and I just say: 'I am!', I think I've been labelled like that, and I can work but they think I mess around sometimes

**Who has labelled you?**

Well, most teachers I think, yeah most, nearly all teachers

**How has the label affected you?**

It just annoys me when they say that, I don't think, I don't think it really affects me that much but ... it has probably made me mess around a little bit more.... if I hadn't been labelled as that I don't think I would be as clever as I am neither, so I wouldn't get, extra stuff – we're doing A level philosophy, but I think that, ... I would've been less clever ... I'm clever with a label but if I had never got labelled as that then I wouldn't be clever and I wouldn't mess around as much.

**To what extent were you aware of being regarded as clever?**

Expectations! Like 'he doesn't need help he is clever, he is going to get As, even when you are stupid and you don't know what's going on. Like in maths, I was crap in maths but he just assumed I was good, I'm not joking but I was one of the worst, well not one of the worst because I studied but if I hadn't I would have been one of the worst. I'm just like in the middle but he thought, 'oh he is clever, he can do maths easily.'

**This tells me that there was a negative consequence of being regarded as clever. Anything else?**

You don't get much help! Also the really clever ones, at the end the teachers just helped them, like Harriet! She got all the help in CDT and maths because it was like, I've given up on all you lot, you are all going to fail. They should have tried to help the people who were failing rather than trying to improve the person that was already good at maths. Every single person said that, they were mad at Harriet as she got all the help and they didn't, and Harriet started crying when she is easily going to pass stuff. The CDT teacher kept referring to my CAT scores and telling me I've got the best CAT scores in the school and I've never had any help since then because of the CAT scores. He kept saying 'if you were my son ...' you know in 'Catcher in the Rye' there's this teacher that says to Holden at the beginning about life being a game, well it was exactly like that.

**Are you aware of how I've always regarded you as clever?**

Yes

**Well has that had any impact on you?**

Well I can just talk to you like a normal person.

**Like a normal 'clever' person?**

Yes like there aren't any barriers.

**Because I take it for granted that you are clever?**

Because you don't make me feel stupid so that way I'm not going to be like, 'oh I'm not going to talk to her as her conversation is too underdeveloped for me.'

**How does your learning affect your identity?**

I don't have an identity! What's an identity? I bet loads of people have said that.

**Identity is your concept of yourself, what you think of yourself, who you are..**

Well I don't have an identity ... well it's a multiple identity.

**Could things have gone differently for you? Do you for instance, have any sense of an alternative history that could have been yours?**

No, it's a vicious trap!

**What's a vicious trap?**

Life! ... I suppose I might have had really long hair not that that matters, and I would be a skater and I would be really good on guitar and I would be a loner, but I would be good at guitar and I would be clever because I wouldn't have to talk to anyone in lessons because I'm a loner and then when I leave school and college I would just make friends at work in a really high paid job and it would be really good, I just imagine me laughing with my business friends in a suit.

**So that's the ghost Anthony, what you could have been**

I would rather be what I am

**Which is not someone with long hair, not someone who skates but you do play the guitar?**

And I went skating yesterday and the day before so basically I'm just the same apart from the long hair

**And the loner part?**

People are my friends but I think I'm a loner

**What do you mean by that?**

I don't know, just that there's nobody just like me... there's people that are like different parts of my personality but there's nobody that's like all of it, do you know what I mean? .. I suppose I just realised I need to find a purpose in life and you are not going to do that by sitting around all day. ... I've just thought of that now! I had never really thought of why - it feels like you are just doing stuff each day that doesn't really matter, but I don't know why I feel that, why I'm not just happy doing that, going home, parties, stuff like that, all the stuff you do at parties, then going in town in the day, going swimming, it's just like pastimes, leisure, it's not something you should be doing all the time...

**So how long have you felt like that?**

I only just realised I feel it, since I've been doing this interview

**So this is the first time you've thought you are not happy doing that day-to-day stuff**

It's only because I've been looking forward to stuff that I haven't been thinking about it, everyone's thinking about their life, but I'm off on holiday soon, I'm off to New Zealand to live, and America so it's different for me. Everyone else is like, 'Oh I need to get my life on track in 'x-city'', but I'm off to college so it's just like going by the system, doing the easy thing to do.

**Going to college?**

Yes, it's the unsure person's thing to do or the person who really wants to be educated.

**Are you doing it as you are unsure, or for a positive reason?**

Em ... I don't know what to do otherwise and I don't know what to study at college anyway! I want to do, it sounds stupid but I want to be a stuntman although it's nothing to do with education is it? Its like 'Catcher in the Rye' - there's not a job that you can live off, where you can do stuff like that, saving kids from falling off a cliff it's a really good thing to do, but there's nothing like that, like if there was a job like that I'd go for it!

**Some people see that as a metaphor and get jobs doing social work or teaching which is another way of saving people!**

Yes ... something like working for poverty would be good but I wouldn't know where to start, so ... college.

**How do they perceive/categorize/identify themselves in relation to others - such as the school, the family, the peer group and wider society? Do they feel that they are 'included'?**

**Are you ever aware of being caught between the expectations of teachers and the expectations of your friends?**

Yeah, because when a teacher is telling you off, but then everyone's like egging you on to like throw something if you don't do it, then everyone's like "oh puff", if you do do it, then you'll get really told off by a teacher

**Which do you usually do?**

Somewhere in between, like I don't know, I didn't mean that particular situation – er, I do work but I also mess about with my friends as well.

**To the best of your knowledge, what do your parent/s think about education and its purpose?**

Well they think that it's quite important, but I think, when they were kids they probably messed around, well my dad, but if I get a bad report he tells me off. But ... they are interested in education but they think, like me, there's more important things than that.

**To what extent do you feel limited or restricted by your gender, particularly in a school setting?**

I think most girls work and most boys spend a lot of time messing about and if you never mess about and just get on with your work, then you're one of the geeks, so yeah.

**What do you think other people in the philosophy group think about you?**

What?! I don't know, I can't read minds!

**What do you *think* they think about you?**

I don't know, people are unpredictable. Sometimes they are nice, really nice to you, sometimes not nice to you - I don't know!

**How do you regard your social status, in and out of school?**

In school, I don't really care, out of school I just do what I want, so I'm off the scale.

**Are you always able to be the same person, with all people and at all times, or are you aware of changing between many selves and roles?**

No – there are hundreds – it depends who I'm with like if I'm with sitting with someone who I don't really know then I won't be myself as much, but, like if I'm with someone who just sit down and works, well I think I have a big sense of humour and I laugh at a lot of things so, something what makes one person think it's funny, I'll probably think it's funny as well no matter who it is, so, I think it's .. I do change depending who I'm with but it's like, I can be lots of people? I don't know! People make me who I am, other people – if someone said something I'd probably believe it and everyone says I'm gullible, and like I change, I don't change, I'm always myself but some things what I say but not everything is changed when I'm with other people

**So it's like there's a core that's always the same**

Yeah there is, but there are other layers as well... Like I think always the same but I don't always say the same things when I'm with other people

**I think I get that – the gullible thing I not sure I get that...cos you've been called gullible, so you believe what people tell you?**

Well if someone says something I believe it, If someone said, 'oh you're really fat' or something I'd probably think: 'Ah I'm really fat', or if someone said, 'you're really clever' I'd think 'oh I'm really clever' and , and what people say...

**So you're swayed by other people's..**

Yeah that's it but I'm always myself but what other people say can make me think differently. I always think the same when I'm with other people - my parents I don't swear or with my friends they aren't bothered if I swear – I say things differently but I always think the same

**But its kind of making yourself sound like a blank canvas in a way, certainly in some ways, it sounds like, correct me if I'm wrong, you respect other people's judgement more than your own**

I always think the same Miss, I've got a core but I just think things to myself , oh I don't like him, but I won't say that, it's nasty or something – that's what I mean, I'm myself that's all I mean

**Do you prefer the way you feel when you are on your own, or with different groups of people?**

Em ... that's quite hard - I don't know - probably... I don't like big gangs and lots of people, I like by myself or with a few friends like six friends or two friends, something like that, but wait, I wouldn't mind being with a thousand of my good, good friends, it's just people who I don't like, loads of people.

**Which do you prefer yourself as, being with your really good friends or on your own?**

Probably really good friends because when you are by yourself then sometimes, no, different on different times - sometimes I want to be on my own, sometimes I want to be around friends.

**Your attitude now is quite a serious one isn't it? You said you wanted to go on to further education?**

Yes

**That sounds like you value education?**

Yes, because lately I've not been learning anything.

**Is it a typically working class thing to want to go on to further education?**

No

**So how do you account for your attitude? Neither your family nor the friends you are now with seem to think quite like you...**

It's myself! Just ... well ...don't quite a lot of working class want to do that?

Aren't most people in our school off to college? They are mostly working class...

**To do what?**

Hairdressing, beauty ... yeah I suppose that is typically working class!

## Chapter 7:

### Beth

#### Are you happy and enjoying life?

No its rubbish - its shit.

No I like my life actually - when was this?

July 2005.

Oh my God! I can't believe how much this has changed in just a couple of months! I think I was just depressed as I was grounded.

Is what you say at the time then, although true at the time, not the *main* thing that you think?

I think that's true ... I was just talking about something that had happened the previous night but it makes it sound as if it's true for all of the time.

*I live with my mum and my dad and my 3 sisters and I share a bedroom with one of them who has ME and she really hates me!*

#### **How would you describe your social class?**

*Working class!*

#### **Are you a typical working class girl?**

*No! Because I'm not common, what I think is common - I don't know that's me just being mean, stereotypical.*

#### **Well what do you mean by common?**

*They all just do the same as each other, smoke, drink at weekends, if someone does something, even if someone says, 'what are they doing that for?', they will still do it and want to be in there with the crowd. Even grown-ups do it, one of my friends at work, they all seem to be having babies as everyone is having babies, and I'm not one of those... I think that the bad things that have happened to me have made me feel I am not important - so I have made myself feel important, tried to make myself feel proud of myself.*



## **How do the ten students in the study perceive education at the end of KS3, during KS4, and the end of KS4?**

### **What do you think the purpose of education should be?**

So you know what to do, you know when you get your job, you know how to work on the computer, you can spell everything properly ...

That's just weird - I don't know what I was saying and that's not the purpose of education at all!

What is the purpose of education?

It is learning and getting experiences so you can go on and get a job, a good job if you want, if you get good exam results you can go to college and university - and get yourself higher and higher.

### **How significant is your education to you compared to other aspects of your life?**

I don't know – I spend more time at school than I do anything else apart from sleeping, but, well I don't know .... Well I like my friends, but I like school as well cos you're here for learning, I don't know, I like learning but it annoys me sometimes

I think I remember why it annoys me cos I used to get loads of grief off teachers when I was in year 9 as I used to be a bit gobby -em, I think my education now is more significant than anything else in life I think, apart from my little job cos I love that.

I used to think - why should I learn? What is the point? It was when I was doing my GCSEs in year 9 and my GCSEs and the A level in philosophy - it has made me feel I can do it, and why not do more. I never used to think education was good in the lower school I used to hate it, but when you do achieve your GCSEs it makes you feel better about yourself, education makes you feel better about yourself and it kind of makes you the person that you are I think. If you like

education and want to carry on - well ... and if you don't, and you laze around and do nothing then just get a rubbish job you are going to be someone different.

**That sounds like you are saying that education creates your future life...**

Yes! Yes it does!

## **How do they perceive any experiences of being supported or challenged educationally?**

### **What do you think about studying philosophy?**

I like it because it gets you to think more about situations than you would normally think about them, put them into a different perspective.

### **Does it help you now?**

It does actually, sometimes I sit at home and I think of things we talk about in philosophy like philosopher's views, I sometimes think about it in my everyday life.

I don't like thinking I'm better than other people as I have done that (extension scheme) but it has made me feel more confident in myself and what I can do, and then I think I can do more and can do what I want to do when I'm older. I might not even get my A level yet, but it makes me think that I might.

## **How do they perceive and conceptualize themselves? How might a notion of ability feature within their self concept?**

### **How does your learning affect your identity?**

I don't know - yes.

### **Can you explain?**

Er ... just 'yes'.

What should you have said then?

I should have said, 'yes because I ... if people see you as very keen to learn and kind of label you a boffin like poor little Harriet - I'd love to be Harriet - but then

even if teachers ... if you can't be bothered to learn then their estimation goes down - but they'll still put the time and effort in but they'll think 'why should I?'

**Are you always able to be the same person, with all people and at all times, or are you aware of changing between many selves and roles?**

Yes – when I'm with my friends I can just be myself but it depends who is there, like 'Anna', I can say anything to her or I can be like silly and I won't even feel embarrassed or anything, but if everyone's there like, all of them, all the girls we hang around with, and I won't, I'll just stay quiet – sometimes I'm noisy but it embarrasses me sometimes cos they can be noisy as well.

In year 9 I said 'yes' but I really should have said 'no' - I was acting naughty in front of my friends to look good

Were you ever yourself in year 9?

Well I think I was, but it was really important in year 9 for me to be liked and to have friends and stuff, and try and act like my friends would want me to act

**How big a gap is there between the person you are when you are left alone with your own thoughts and feelings, for example in your bedroom on a night, and the person (or 'people') the world usually sees? Which is the more 'real'?**

Not very much – I don't know – I don't, I just think about things, not – I don't know –

Again, I acted a bit different around my friends to make them like me - but I don't think I would have said that in year 9 - it's like 'this must be the real me as I'm liked so it has to be the real me' - I think that's what I thought!

**How do they perceive/categorize/identify themselves in relation to others - such as the school, the family, the peer group and wider society? Do they feel that they are 'included'?**

### **Are you aware of there being a peer group culture?**

I think adults think more like they're in charge and cos they're teaching us they're better, and that children should do what they say as they're not grown up yet and that they don't know what they're on about, but they do!

I don't think I answered that properly did I?

Well firstly how would you have answered that in yr 9 if you had understood it fully?

I think I should have said something like, 'there is peer group culture because some people are in big gangs of people and some other people have other friends - some peer groups are bullies and some are really quiet' -

So for you then in yr 9, the peer group culture was a significant thing - with the gangs...

Yeah!

What about now? What if you were answering that question for now?

I still think there is, big gangs and stuff, but I'm just in my own gang with Brenda sometimes -

So you are aware of it, but it doesn't have such a big effect on you...

No

### **How do you regard your social status, in and out of school?**

Well at school, I don't know - I'm just me, some people like me some people don't know me, and at home I'm just bored and grounded ... so I have none.

I can remember how I felt at that time - lonely and depressed and bored and grounded! I didn't have any friends - but now! All of 'the group' talk to me now don't they?! They're not best friends - but I prefer to be myself, and individual, I like time to myself.

So you really have developed then, since year 9, when you think about all the group stuff

Yeah!

### **And what do pupils think about the adults?**

Well some pupils think they can respect adults because they are teaching us, some of us think, we're people and they're people so there's no difference and we

can do what we want and if they can tell us what to do why can't we tell them what to do? Just cos we're a couple of year younger

**Where do you lie on this?**

Probably more the second

**The equality thing**

But I don't , I don't tell teachers what to do, I tell my mum sometimes, I TRY and tell my mum and dad, that's what some teachers act like, like they're your mum

I sound like such a chav! 'Just cos we're a couple of year younger' - oh my God - I can't believe it, its just so embarrassing

What does that tell you about what you were like in year 9?

Well I was in a gang wasn't I? I had got used to saying things and doing things like that - and then I became my own self, and individual - and now I think about adults, that they know more than I do and I should respect them, because I just should, and I'll be one one-day and I'll want children to respect me. I don't tell my mum what to do anymore! I used to say such horrible things about my mum and now I would never do that -

Was that due to the peer-group thing as well? Had it affected how you were at home?

Yeah - and with my friends I would be slagging my mum and dad off, especially my mum, and now I think - that was so horrible - how could I ever feel that about my mum! But now I always get on with my mum now; always. Me and my mum haven't had an argument since ages.

**Are you ever aware of being caught between the expectations of teachers and the expectations of your friends?**

Sometimes when I'm with Carol she'll be chatting away to me , and if I'm in a lesson I like and I like the teacher and I'm being naughty with Carol, I feel awful towards the teacher because I'm not being as I should be and I like the teacher and I get on alright.

**So what do you usually do? How do you cope with the situation?**

I'll talk to Carol but I won't like it...

**You're not going to let Carol down?**

Yes – I'll talk as well cos I like talking (*laughs*) – no I like talking, I like gossiping about things that have happened and stuff

**So you've got kind of a guilty feeling but the enjoyment you get out of the gossiping is the thing that's more important?**

Yes

I think that when I was in year 9 I would think that if my friends were talking to me I would have to talk to them or they won't like me anymore because I was being a boffin and listening to the teacher - but now I just think, if I choose to talk to them I do, if I don't I don't. I think I actually meant that I didn't want to be seen as not one of them.

**Do you regard yourself as 'labelled'? If so, what as and by whom? How does this label affect you?**

Yes loads of people think I'm a slag, or just 'Beth'.

**Is the word 'Beth' a label?**

Yes

**What does it mean when you say it like that?**

Well there are people I don't even know really in this school, but they know me, do you know what I mean! 'Anna's cousin, who goes to a totally different schools but she's friends with one of the year 8 girls here that I don't even know, well I know her name and that but I've never ever spoke to her , ever, 'Anna's cousin knows everything about me cos of this girl, she sees me walking down the street once and said to Beth's cousin: 'that's Beth eh eh eh ', and 'Anna's cousin went back to 'Anna' and looked on her phone and she seen a picture of me: 'How come you've got picture of Beth?', like that! As if I'm some sort of, I don't know ..

**Famous?**

Yeah! She's saying, cos there's a picture on 'Anna's phone called: 'Beth's just woke up' from when we'd just woke up from when I'd slept at 'Anna's, she said: 'how comes you've got a picture of Beth just waking up! Does she sleep at yours?!' (*mimics incredulous voice*) – All from this one girl that I don't even know

**As if you are some kind of famous person that people look up to?**

Yes – but I'm not – and that's only younger people, older people don't like me .

**Why don't they?**

Year 10 don't

**Is it them that have labelled you as a 'slag'?**

And year 11s, yeah.

**So how does that affect you?**

I don't know, not really as I don't think I am.

Is this connected to the peer-group?

Yes

How?

I don't know but I think when I was in my peer-group, that I'm not in anymore, cos we were like the little popular gang in school weren't we! Well people may have been jealous and - I don't know...but most people in that gang were liked by older people and I wasn't - I was the one that everyone picked on! Well I didn't exactly get picked on, I got called names by loads of older people - like 'slag' - but I don't care .... no one really calls me that anymore. And that bit about 'Anna's cousin! Where she knew me -

So you had a kind of fame then!

Yeah but I don't anymore - and I don't care!

So you are making it sound like it wasn't a good thing being part of that peer group?

No because I just used to do what I thought was best for my friends and not me.

**How would you describe your social class?**

Working class!

**Are you a typical working class girl?**

No! Because I'm not common, what I think is common - I don't know that's me just being mean, stereotypical.

**Well what do you mean by common?**

They all just do the same as each other, smoke, drink at weekends, if someone does something, even if someone says, 'what are they doing that for?', they will still do it and want to be in there with the crowd. Even like grown-ups do it, one of my friends at work, they all seem to be having babies as everyone is having babies, and I'm not one of those.

**Given the stereotype of a working class girl, how would you say that you are different from them in terms of your attitude towards education?**

I think they just think that you go to school, leave school and that's it, may be go to college but drop out of college, but they don't really go any further than that, then they have a baby, and move into a council house - that's what I think. What I want to do is go to college, may be go to university or something that is like it, and then I want to have a good job, and want my own house - not rented off the council or anyone else.

**You have ambitions - to what extent would you say that your life circumstances have affected you and your attitude towards education?**

I think that the bad things that have happened to me have made me feel I am not important - so I have made myself feel important, tried to make myself feel proud of myself - I don't know.

**Before you talk about how you are different tell me a bit more about your life?**

I can't say - I don't want to put it into words.

**You know that I know about the court case - how would you feel about me referring to that in the research at this point? Is it OK for me to write it or would you rather I didn't?**

Yes, you say it I don't want to.

**"Beth is a survivor of child-abuse. She had to make a statement and be present in court when she was in year 9. The perpetrator who was an uncle of Beth's, was sent to prison for two years".**

**You've ended up not at all typical for your class, with some very determined views, and here you are today having taken your GCSEs,**



**pretty confident you've done well, in fact already with 2 GCSEs under your belt, and you have also taken an A level, and are expecting to do 4 A levels - it is such an achievement. Anything else you can think of to account for it?**

I'm really selfish and I want the best for myself! No one else in my family has been to university they are all working class, I want to be different and make everyone like me! I am really selfish and I don't want to end up living off benefits or working in a shop as I wouldn't really like that.

**Is that really 'selfishness' that you have just described?**

I think I am ...I do think about other people but I always want the best for myself  
**I am not sure I would call that quality selfishness - perhaps single-mindedness? You've not mentioned your family yet and the things you do, but isn't it quite a lot?**

Yes! And they don't appreciate it! Now I've left school it's got worse and I'm stuck in the house most days, I vacuum clean, dust, clean the pots, and my mum and dad will come in from work, and I know they've got other things on their mind as they've just come in from work and they are going back tomorrow but they won't say anything unless I say, have you noticed I've done this? Then they say 'oh yeah thanks' but they won't say it otherwise, and my sisters have to be told to load the dishwasher, and I just do everything and then I said that to my mum the other day, that it feels like no one appreciates anything I do and she said 'now you know how I feel' - but I'm not in charge of the house, I didn't decide to have us kids, it's my mum! So she shouldn't have decided to have us if she didn't want to do housework after us.

**So you do a lot at home, and it's not a selfish person that does that is it?**

No - because I could just leave it there and live in a stinking old house but I don't want to so I am selfish!

**It sounds to me like you have looked at something that is a massive positive in your life, which is your educational progress and your attitude, and you've tried to change it round and given it a negative interpretation!**

I always do that, everything good I make into a bad thing!

**Even something as good as this, where if it were me, I would think: 'wow! I've moved out of that stereotyped and I'm on my way now' - you sound like you are finding something bad to say about it.**

Yes I always do it and don't even realise I do it until people point it out.

**Could things have gone differently for you? Do you for instance, have any sense of an alternative history that could have been yours?**

Yes I always think about that! If I hadn't got with Rob I think that I would have most probably been one of the common girls, like I've been describing, one of them. I drifted away from them all when I got with him; its not him it's the drifting away from them that made the difference, me being on my own made me what I am I think.

**So you were one of the 'lasses'!**

Yes! I was! If I hadn't started being with Rob I would still be just like that, although not as much as some of them

**What would ghost Beth be doing?**

She'd be like Carol, with a baby! Well that's what everyone thought, Zara bet me £5.00 I'd have a baby by year 11. Carol said when she got pregnant, 'what did everyone say? It would be Beth!'

**So not only were you were of 'the girls' but you were the one most likely to end up pregnant in year 11!**

That also made me think about things as well! My mum still thinks I am going to get pregnant but I'm not! God! I don't want a 'baby' - see .... I'm so selfish!

**I could argue you've done it again, taken a positive, which is your attitude towards education and a career and turned it into a negative, and you don't seem to take any credit for yourself, its either you being selfish or it's down to Rob!**

I don't think that if I carried on being like that I would be wanting to do what I'm wanting to do now!

**So therefore you are suggesting that it is a really big deal, being one of the girls, and that if you are one of the girls you don't have ambition.**

It's not what they think about you, it's what you think about yourself when you are with them and when you are in that situation.

**So ghost Beth could have had a baby, and ghost baby would have been one of the girls..**

Ghost Beth would be nasty still to my mum and dad ... then again even then - I said I would move out at 16, and I didn't, but if I had I'd be living in a council flat, and I could have stopped coming to school

**You could have stopped coming to school in year 9! Other people in your situation might have found it too hard to face school.**

I didn't have any reasons, well not good enough ones.

**Well again Beth, all credit to you as from my perspective you have struggled and survived rather than been blown from here to there by chance.**

## Chapter 8:

### Brenda

Everything I said I still kind of think, most things have stayed the same - when was this? A year ago? And the other one two years ago?

Have the interviews captured what was actually in your head at the time?

Yeah - they are honest and truthful

*In my family there is my dad who is a civil engineer, my mum and my brother. Well a lot of people have difficult lives and that, and I've got everything in my life, I'm privileged, some people say I'm spoilt, I'd say its more like being privileged. My mum and dad have got the money if I want it, although its not like I just get it, I have to work for it - so I've had things handed to me although not necessarily handed to me, but I do have to wait for it*

***Do you see a link between that, your family as you've described it and your attitude towards education?***

*Yes because you are not going to get anywhere without education and that's where it's come from, my dad explaining it all to me - I've always had the 'better' kind of life, and been shown that, and how not to be ignorant about those who don't have as much or are not as lucky.*

## **How do the ten students in the study perceive education at the end of KS3, during KS4, and the end of KS4?**

### **What do you think the purpose of education should be?**

Well to get people far, to get people to do what they want to do and that , cos you're not gonna get nowhere are you if you don't try?

### **How significant is your education to you compared to other aspects of your life?**

I think it's important to me because I do want to do a big job when I'm older so it's like I've got to work hard. My mum and dad want me to work hard as well...

### **What do you like/dislike about school?**

I like the fact that at this school particularly, they're quite good, the system, with bullying and the learning and things like that but there are times when they lack a bit sometimes, cos there are some instances of bullying where they have been picked up really quickly but then others that haven't.

### **What subjects are most worth studying?**

Philosophy for one! I enjoy English, I like English, probably Maths and Science but I don't seem to like them as much, that's about it really, I don't see much point in other things, like PE.

### **What do you think about the education you receive in lessons?**

Some of its alright, then there are bits of it that, when teachers just talk and get you to copy down, then you don't seem to learn as much, but if they talk it through with you and that and they help you and they ask you questions and that, it helps you more, it goes in more, and certain ways of teaching help more.

### **How do your relationships with your teachers affect your learning?**

If I like the teacher then there's more chance of me learning and that. If I don't get on with them there's more chance of me being stubborn.

My education has had a big role in my life, it's the main thing you do isn't it? You go to school through the week, it takes up the majority of the week and you've

got five or six hours a day of it, being at school, and when you go home you've got your homework, and it's on your mind anyway even on Sundays as you've got to go back to school tomorrow so it is a big part. Now we've gone and we've done it all, and you think in year 7 that there's ages until we finish - when you're in year 7 and all the year 11s are leaving, you think, that's going to be us in so many years to come and it seems ages away, but when it gets to year 11, you look back and you think, it's gone really, really quickly. I wish I wasn't leaving! I don't like moving on to different things, I don't want to grow up, I'd like to be little for ever - but then I suppose you make new friends and go through it, you just have to do it.

## **How do they perceive any experiences of being supported or challenged educationally?**

### **What do you think about studying philosophy?**

I like the fact especially that I've done it early, and it will probably help me as well and I find it ... it can be hard but I seem to think a lot about a lot of things like that, I kind of like that, that's why I chose it, because I do seem to think daft things - so yeah, I like it! It's probably the most interesting subject really, that and English, cos I find English interesting and they're kind of linked together so ..

### **How do you imagine studying philosophy might affect you in the future?**

It will probably look good on my CV, it will look good to say that I've done it, the A level, if I get it!

### **Does it help you now?**

Yeah! Especially with arguments with my brother , it comes in handy cos you can catch people out and it seems to add to when you're talking cos you've got a lot to talk about, it's like good for conversation, cos you can flip things round and you can look at it from both angles, both opinions or more than two, whatever.

And it makes me feel special taking philosophy two years early, it will help make me not so narrow minded or whatever, I don't think I am, but if I ever was, it would help.

Philosophy and extension scheme, anything where you've been chosen to do something extra, be higher ... it makes you feel special. For extension scheme you got chosen which made it special, but philosophy you chose yourself, but it was a good choice I think.

### **How do they perceive and conceptualize themselves? How might a notion of ability feature within their self concept?**

#### **Is your learning part of your personality?**

Yeah, probably, not the biggest part - but it's there!

#### **SW: is it one of the good parts?**

Yeah!

I'm quite opinionated, I am quite .. when I don't agree with something – cos I argue with my mum a lot about things, I've got... I have to contradict her on everything and with some people at school I don't bother as I know there's no point, whether I'm right or not, they're going to stand their ground and always argue

#### **Does that ever bother you that you can't say exactly as you think?**

Yes because some things you really can't disagree with but you think if I say something it might turn out the wrong way like before when I was saying you can't be yourself its like if you say something, if you decide that's your opinion they might think its wrong and judge you on that

#### **What do you think other people in the philosophy group think about you?**

*(Laughs ..)* I don't know, I'm just me, quiet! I don't know.

#### **How do you regard your social status, in and out of school?**

It's quite normal cos I'm not popular but I get along with a lot of people , I seem to talk to a lot of people but I am kind of distant as well, but it's not like they cast us out completely and don't talk to us, cos they do.

**Do they cast you out a bit?**

No cos last night I wanted to go with them and they let me and I went round to someone's house and they were fine with me and that so it's not like they said 'no' to me, and I don't think they will.

**What about out of school?**

The same, I don't really go around I don't go out that much out of school as I'm with the horses and people there I get along with really well so ...

**Do you prefer the way you feel when you are on your own, or with different groups of people?**

Em - with different people I seem to come out a bit more, when I'm on my own and that there's no one to talk to or to bring my self out to, but I like being on my own as well as you get time to think.

**What do you like/dislike about yourself?**

I like how I'm nice but I can be bitchy, I can be too shy I think, I don't like talking in front of people, yeah I don't like that about myself, if I could be more confident I'd be happy.

**Are you happy and enjoying life?**

Yeah, yeah! In my life so many people think I've got it easy and I probably have. I'd rather be like I am now than what I was in year 7 and that, I was quite nasty, well not nasty but I got dragged into a lot of things, but now I'm quite happy with my family and that, and just being with my horse, so ...

If anyone was using these interviews to look for evidence about what were the real, key issues for year 9, how could they use what you have said?

People around me!

Aah right!

The way you act in lessons and that and the way people influence you, the way you act - I think that's it.



When you look back now and remember the kind of person you were in year 9, could you have added more detail to this?

I'm still kind of shy and I hold myself back a bit, maybe more than what I should have done. There were times I should have spoken out or told someone something, said something different to what I actually said, acted differently to what I did -

Why do you think you couldn't speak out?

Because you're more conscious of what people think of you, how they're going to perceive it, and if they are not gonna like it, now you start to grow up and you think, I don't care what people say, I'm not bothered about being in this group or that group, got more confidence - you can be your own

So when you were a year 9 pupil it was a real big deal...

More or less yeah - I think its from year 7 to year 9, when you get into doing like, GCSES, a lot of your groups change especially with me personally, I've changed the people I hang around with and that's kind of changed the way I've acted - so

So when you look at the year 9 interview can see any bits that tell you that you were a different person then in some ways?

Yeah - I think I've got worse now! I was more quiet then - most of the time anyway

So do you see yourself at this stage as quite a shy person who couldn't speak out if things were not right?

Yeah or if they would think someone would agree with you and back you up, because there are certain times when you argue with someone and you think, 'I'm gonna stop now'- because there's no point in arguing with them because they think they are right

**How do they perceive/categorize/identify themselves in relation to others - such as the school, the family, the peer**

**group and wider society? Do they feel that they are 'included'?**

**To what extent is there an 'us and them' situation with pupils and staff? Can you describe any differences between the ways these two groups of people behave/think?**

*(Laughs)* – yes there is actually cos it is normal, like there's two sides

**How do these two sides behave?**

Each side thinks they're right, their way ..teachers think their way of teaching is a better way, and pupils will think what they think is best and if they don't want to do something then they're not gonna do it and they think that's right not to do it

**Are you ever aware of being caught between the expectations of teachers and the expectations of your friends?**

Yes because I don't want to actually join in if you think about it but cos they're your mates, so what will they think if I don't, so .. I move! My mum has always said if you're sat next to someone who disrupts you then move.

*When you're alone, and when you're with people and how you've got to act - that's kind of changed yet its kind of stayed the same because you have to be careful but when you've grown up you realise that you don't , there's not as many restrictions... they are the same apart from that...*

**To the best of your knowledge, what do your parent/s think about education and its purpose?**

My mum thinks it's good here - and she says to come here because she knows what it's like because my brother came here so it's better for me ...

**Are you always able to be the same person, with all people and at all times, or are you aware of changing between many selves and roles?**

No – not really – loads of different – but it depends who I'm with – I don't know how to put this, you've got to watch what you say with some people you've got to be careful and you've got to change a bit and you've got to be a bit nasty with certain people a bit nicer with other people

**So you adapt a bit, depending ..\_**

On who you're with

**So which for you is the most real?**

I don't know really – a certain person I'm more normal with and can act normal around them, I don't have to pretend

**So you've got one person**

Yeah

**You can be your real self with**

Yeah

## Chapter 9:

### Carol

So if someone didn't know you and was finding out about you from the documents where your interviews are transcribed, do you think they would get an accurate idea of the kind of person you were?

Yes, but I'm not that person anymore.

Does it give an accurate view of what the real issues had been for you educationally?

Sort of, but on these it sounds like I had nothing to do but whinge on about teachers, thinking I was clever, but that wasn't the key thing! The key thing about why I was badly behaved was that I just didn't appreciate authority, anyone having actual official power over me, I just didn't like it. It didn't really come out there!

Is the reason you didn't talk about this because I didn't ask the right questions?

No, because at the time I didn't really realise this. That's why I didn't enjoy school, but I think what I did in the interviews was just bundle up a lot of little things and decide that that was why I didn't like school.

*There's salvageable stuff there, GCSEs that I have got or which I'm hoping to get, could get me into college to do something decent but I could have done a lot better, I could have done a lot better with my formal education if it weren't for my social life and having a baby, which I don't regret, it just happened. I was completely reckless, we were just a group of teenage yobs, I was like the most popular one out of them so I thought I had something to prove, but I didn't, and I didn't realise it at the time. I just didn't need to be like that and I've trashed my education because I was like that.*

## **How do the ten students in the study perceive education at the end of KS3, during KS4, and the end of KS4?**

### **What do you think the purpose of education should be?**

To educate people so they've got like a knowledge and understanding of everyday life and stuff and then general intelligence as well so they know about things, like science and how things work.

### **What is your opinion about the teaching you have received during KS3?**

I think some of it's good I think other parts of it, it's not even worth learning because some teachers just like, they have crap ways of teaching, like you just copy stuff off the board, others like explain it to you and talk to you about other things as well apart from just lessons. Some teachers just think the lessons are the only thing you can think about in lessons when others understand that there are more things as well.

### **What do you like/dislike about school?**

I like the fact that you don't have to pay to get an education and it gives you something to do when you could be sat at home. I dislike the authority above me, I don't like authority - and I dislike the fact that there's a hidden curriculum and they pretend that there isn't.

### **What do you think about the education you receive in lessons?**

I have a mixed opinion because some of it is really, really good, I have a good relationship with some teachers, I get on with it, and can communicate with them properly (you have to have a good relationship with teachers to know what you are actually doing with the work) and then sometimes I have a bad relationship, and I can't do the work and don't understand it and I can't really concentrate as it's something that doesn't interest me so I have difficulties.

Some of my thoughts about education have changed but that is only because I have gone the whole way through it.

Did it accurately convey what you felt at that point in time?

Oh yes, I can remember how I felt in year 9. Year 9 was the 'kick-off point' when it started to get really bad...

## **How do they perceive any experiences of being supported or challenged educationally?**

### **What do you think about studying philosophy?**

I think it's good. It opens your mind and lets you think outside the box so you're not just boring and dull - and it's interesting and it's challenging for people who would usually just be restrained by the curriculum, where it's boring and it's easy - so yeah it's a challenge and it's a distraction from the rubbishness of everything else they teach you.

### **How interesting a subject do you think it is?**

I think it's interesting cos you learn about, like, you get to make your own opinion on stuff after looking at everyone else's, and it sounds good, I'm 15 and I'm doing an A level. It's interesting, a good topic of conversation.

### **How do you imagine studying philosophy might affect you in the future?**

I don't know. It makes me think a lot more about stuff now it will make me think load more when I know more when I'm older - it will make me challenge ideas and theories - and it will look good on my reference.

I think if I hadn't have gone to this school my education wouldn't have gone as well as I wouldn't have been given the opportunity to do two GCSEs early and an A level in philosophy and they are quite important to me now, they are significant in what I am going to be able to do from now concerning jobs and stuff so its been important in that aspect of my life ... it looks on my resume that I've done quite well in school, aside from not doing maths and science and ICT, if I hadn't been given the opportunity to do the two early GCSEs I would have been at a lower level, in the bottom pool of people for marks and how many GCSEs you've

got so I think I'm just about average now. I'm not one of the highest which annoys me a bit.

**But the two extra have allowed you to have 5 GCSEs at C or above...?**

Yes, so that's quite important it's helped me a lot really as otherwise I wouldn't have been able to do anything at all, apart from being a hairdresser which isn't too good.

**How do they perceive and conceptualize themselves? How might a notion of ability feature within their self concept?**

I think right, if something bad happens to me later in life, if I lose someone I love, then this whole massive person is just going to take over the full me and I won't be anything nice or anything, and then it will be good, cos I just want to be a nasty miserable person, scary! ... like when bad things happen to me I get more and more nasty, like shit happens all the time and I get nasty for a bit then I go back to normal so I think if something really bad happens to me, like in future or something, then I'm not going to be able to go back to how I was.

**Would it come out in words... I mean, does it ever spill out**

Yes.

**What form does it take?**

It spills out in nasty words and through my eyes – I give the most evil looks I know, I've made people cry. It spilled out today, it spilled out with Beth today. It's why she didn't talk to me, why she walked on by.

**How do you regard your social status, in and out of school?**

I'm mint!

*(laughter with both SW and Carol)*

I'll be a little bit more specific. It's quite high in the school as I'm one of the older ones, and gobby - then people tend to ... I don't know if it's fear or respect for the ones a little bit above them, but I get pushed higher and higher every year! Outside of school with certain people it's quite high, but with other people

it's quite low because with my friends and the people I hang around with it's high but with older people and people I don't get along with it's low. It's difficult with the sort of area that I live in to have status with every peer group, you can't have status with every group that there is.

**Do you prefer the way you feel when you are on your own, or with different groups of people?**

I prefer it when I'm with people - I think I'm mentally ill. When I'm on my own I think mad things, and when I'm with people, it's a bit of escapism really, and I don't have to think about what's going on when I'm ... I don't know! I think I'm mad, I'm completely random and it's confusing, yeah - I think about pigeons and stuff, when I'm on my own. Like, do pigeons think, and do they aim when they're gonna poo on your shoulder? Just stuff like that - it's not good.

**What do you like/dislike about yourself?**

I dislike the randomness - some people think its amusing just how random I am but it's completely baffling when you're me and you look back and you realise that you spend most of your life thinking about the most random things in the whole entire world, just things completely unimportant, just random and confusing and unnecessary - there's absolutely no point in thinking about half of the stuff that I do. Anything that comes into contact with my eyes, or a certain smell, I find myself thinking about what that could be for a whole day, so it's confusing. So yeah - the randomness is a bad thing but everyone else thinks it's good - and - my temper, I have a very, very, very short bad temper - it's horrible and I don't like it. My attitude towards authority cos it gets me in trouble a lot. If I had a better attitude towards authority then I'd probably get along a lot better with most people. And that's about it as otherwise I'm perfect!

I like ..... my ability to overcome obstacles in life because I'm a positive person even though I have lots of negative things thrown at me, like shoes.

**Literally?**

No!

*(both laugh)*

**Is that an example of your randomness?**



*(both laugh)*

Em ...I like my sense of humour, I think it's good because a sense of humour is like the ability to make people smile when they are unhappy, I like that cos it makes me feel good - that you can make someone smile when they would otherwise be unhappy about something, makes you feel great, makes you feel wanted - and I like my new trainers - they are very white ...

**And very illegal!**

*(both laugh)*

What about the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, is there anything you want to say about that one?

That interview was when I was going through a lot of smoking cannabis. That interview just brought it out massively. You can't tell by anything I've said, but you can tell I was not of normal mental health - the randomness for example, I was constantly on about how random my thoughts were but they were only random because they were drug induced.

So the hidden subtext is 'cannabis'!

I was not of a sound mental health at that time!

So would you dismiss it?

No I wouldn't dismiss it as I was telling the truth - it was just a drug induced truth - I didn't lie about anything, if I had been of a normal state of mind at that time I would have probably said the same things just a little bit less stupid.

What do you think is stupid in it?

I just talk about crap! I talk about the randomness, there's a whole page with me talking about just how random my thoughts are, and they were, so I was telling the truth, so it was significant, it wasn't lies so I can't dismiss it - that was what I was thinking at that time.

Is it a better snapshot of who you were and what you thought at that moment in time than the other one?

It was probably a clearer one as whilst the first one is all about my views on education the second one is just that little bit more personal. If you read the second one and not the first one you would think I was just an idiot, just some crazy person.

Anyone who read this for the first time wouldn't know about the cannabis, so how do you think they might categorize or analyse this interview? On the basis of what you said, what would they say are the issues for you?

They would probably say I don't appreciate education. I didn't enjoy it because of teachers. I commented on methods of teachers.

Are there any hints in the text, any moments where someone who was 'clued-up' about drugs might be able to say 'ah, I know what's going on here?'

Yes, when I'm talking about pigeons. Pigeons and sheep were on my mind for no apparent reason; pigeons because I thought they were out to get me as they 'pooed' on me constantly, there was a week in the summer when I got pooed on four times so I decided in my crazy little brain they were out to get me, and sheep because when I was in Northumberland, I was smoking, and I kept pondering, do sheep get bored, whether they have the capacity for being bored, whether they know they have just nothingness, they are not achieving anything.

Can you be even more explicit? Why are these examples of drug-induced thinking, and not, for example, bits of philosophical thought?

They have no meaning do they? It doesn't matter how long I ponder on them, it will make no difference to my life, it doesn't matter at all. It is of no significance. If someone looked at that, as someone who learned philosophy, they would think of me as someone who was 'on something, a bit messed up, they aren't normal answers - more like what people say when they are on cannabis.

### **How does your learning affect your identity?**

I think that I would be a completely negative person if it wasn't for my education and my learning because it's a positive thing as you know you're going to get something out of it in the end, and it keeps me upbeat and happy so it keeps my identity positive.

### **What do you think other people in the philosophy group think about you?**

I don't know! I think they probably think I'm quite gobby, and a distraction, but I'm clever, and I'm really, really, really spawny because I come in late and I can

do the work that they've been concentrating on for a while and then they lose - its quite bad that - yeah I'm spawny.

**What does spawny mean?**

I don't know a word for it! Do you know when you get something you don't really deserve, but others do? Undeserving ...

I would have been excluded from this school in the first two years if I wasn't regarded as someone who was clever, someone who could be an asset, if I didn't have the cleverness I would have been kicked out which I nearly was on a couple of occasions, so it's been important or I would have just been a total bum, a (pupil referral) 'centre' person, one of those people who go on special buses and go to the centre.

**So the 'identification' of being clever stopped you from being kicked out - do you have anything you want to say about anything that happened as a result of this identification?**

I was expected to do too much, too much was expected from me, I wasn't allowed to do certain things, teachers didn't expect to have to help me, and they didn't expect that I wouldn't do homework and stuff which I didn't, I just couldn't be bothered, they expected too much and it just annoyed me. I would have preferred it if they knew I was clever but they just treated me normally, like any other pupil but I wasn't.

**So on the one hand it stopped you getting kicked out, but on the other...**

It brought me down mentally as it just made me feel like that because I was allowed to do things that other pupils weren't, it made me feel they would be jealous of me, and it made me feel other pupils would feel worse because of me, that they weren't as important.

**So if we are talking about the extension scheme, you could say although the benefits were the two GCSEs, there was a down side which...**

I wouldn't feel as if I'd done anything without that! I'd have just felt I had come into year 11 and done crap in my GCSEs. But some of my friends were just as

clever and sectioned out and labelled as I was for being clever, but some weren't and they were in the lower groups, and they didn't understand why I got to go to Italy and why we went on trips and stuff, and why I was allowed to get away with swearing at teachers without that bad a consequence whereas other pupils would have got excluded for it. I think that was my allowance for being clever, being allowed to swear, and I honestly think that's the truth to this day, I honestly don't think I would have been in this school behaving the way I did if I was just average, I know there were people in my friends who were not as clever as me who got excluded for doing things that I'd done before - particular things, there was a girl when I was in year 10 who I was apparently bullying although I wasn't aware of it, although she said I was, and she told the head of year, and nothing came of it, I don't know whether that was because the teacher didn't believe her - the next year some of my other friends were accused of bullying another lass over the computer and they were excluded for it.

**So you have concluded it must have been down to your cleverness that this happened, there was nothing else, no other explanation?**

I don't know, perhaps teachers might have liked my personality as I got on with them really well sometimes, then there were some teachers who I just didn't get on with. If I weren't friendly quite a bit, maybe ... If anyone asks me, due to my current circumstances how I did in school, I say about the two GCSEs in year 9, so I'm clever!

**What do you see as your next step in life? Do you have any long-term plans?**

Definitely I'm going to college but not this year, it's just everything I'd planned to do, go to college and get a decent salaried job and stuff is definitely going to happen still but it's delayed. I'd find it morally wrong to leave my daughter in the early stages, where she's crawling and talking and getting her first teeth - and going to college, if I went at that time, I'd feel really guilty. I'd rather, well I wouldn't rather, it's just what I've got to do, live off tax payers money just why she gets a bit older and I can put her in a crèche and then do what I wanted to

do to start off with. It's not that it's my whole life that has gone down-hill and ruined because I've had a baby, it's just that the things that I wanted to do are delayed, which doesn't bother me that much as I get to enjoy what I've got in the meantime

**So your first step is to enjoy your daughter, and then go to college.**

**Long term plans?**

I would like to have a nice house and a happy marriage, but happy marriages just don't happen when you're the sort of person I am.

**What do you mean? What stops you from being that kind of person?**

I don't have the capacity to trust people fully, to trust anyone to know that I could spend the rest of my life happily with them, I can't do it! I don't have the guts to decide, one day, that one person is going to be the person I spend the rest of my life with until I die.

**Could things have gone differently for you? Do you for instance, have any sense of an alternative history that could have been yours?**

Yes, I could have been pissed in the museum gardens right now, right this second as it's a hot sunny day, and it should have been the gap between leaving school and going to college, and I should just be enjoying life, and not paying rent and not having a job - just getting money off my mum - getting pissed until college starts again when I'd get my head down again, doing something with my life earning money - and probably having a little part-time job - and then after, having a decent job, probably something to do with computers, and getting paid quite a lot.

**So there's a ghost Carol out there ...**

Yes. She'll be drinking Malibou in the museum gardens which is where I should be!

**And she'd manage to go to college and then ...**

It's still going to happen but it will be harder and take longer, but I'm not angry or resentful that it's going to take longer and be harder, it's got to be done! I'm not going to be on the dole for the rest of my life so I know I've got to do it!

**Are there any other ghost Carols out there?**

I could have gone downhill, I could be in the museum gardens drinking cider! I could have let my social life take over everything completely and ruin everything and carried on drinking every single day, and smoking cannabis every single day and dabbling in 'hallucinogenic' shall we call them, and done what other people have done and run off to Leeds to get married to someone in a gypsy camp, or I could have ended up with people I used to hang around with, with two babies at seventeen, married to a traveller who beats me and doesn't respect me, living in a council flat - I could have not had the will power I had and said 'yes' every time I said 'no'.

**So you are quite strong willed**

When I wanted to be, I just decided sometimes that I wanted to do it, and sometimes I didn't.

**So is that strong will there for the future?**

Even stronger, it has to be now as I have more responsibilities so I don't really do anything I used to do. I appreciated too late in the day what I had and now don't have.

**How do they perceive/categorize/identify themselves in relation to others - such as the school, the family, the peer group and wider society? Do they feel that they are 'included'?**

**Are you ever aware of being caught between the expectations of teachers and the expectations of your friends? Explain.... Do you have any ways of dealing with this?**

Yes, cos all pupils my age used to think I was quite thick but teachers expected me to do well in lessons because of exams and levels and stuff I've got, people had two different expectations; there's pupils who think I'm stupid cos I act stupid, and teachers thought different.

**So in terms of your ability there is definitely a difference. What about it terms of your behaviour?**

I think teachers expected a higher standard of behaviour because I was supposed to be intelligent, but I've got quite a poor standard of behaviour, so – yeah

**Is that, in any part, due to being a member of a peer group?**

No it's just within me because I've got a bad temper and a big mouth so I think it must be something to do with being intelligent – the big mouth more, but the bad temper's like, I don't know ...that just grew, but the mouth right, the intelligence don't work for the mouth because I know what clever things to say what annoy people so ..it's never all good.

Where does that come from, that dislike of authority?

I think it was because I was the youngest in a group of four children, probably being spoilt and getting what I wanted, and never really hearing, 'you can't have that or you can't do that', that was probably it.

So there was a clash with the values of the school and your own upbringing.

Yes, I was quite spoilt and quite arrogant, I think it was because I was the youngest and never ever expected to come to school and everyone would be telling me what to do, I thought I would just be learning , but it isn't just that at all, there are people telling you what clothes to wear, that really irritated me, and stuff like that, what words you say, swearing, even how you look at the teachers, some teachers would have a go at you if you looked at them in a supposedly disrespectful way, or your tone of voice , things like that had never been said to me before. I hadn't been to a very strict primary school either, just a bog-standard working class primary school, they weren't really too bothered about what I wore or anything!

Would you call this school a working class school?

I think it's a working class school but with middle class teachers. Some of them are, but the majority of kids in this school aren't middle class, and don't have the upbringing they have and don't have the boundaries of respect and behaviour that they have been brought up with either, it's like a clash of classes really, with teachers being older and of a higher class than students, thinking they must be better somehow.

That's an interesting analysis -

I didn't realise it then, it's only when you get into work and that and start doing stuff with your own life, that you realise that the teachers who you were taught by had obviously had a better chance than you had of doing stuff. They must have gone to a better school than this one for them to be teachers and head teachers -

Nothing that I've got from school, any ideas of values have stayed with me - I never had enough respect for any of the teachers to have kept any of their values or ideas, I didn't have that much of a like for them. Out of school, my social life ... has ruined my life.

**What do you mean?**

If I'd been good, and I'd stayed at home, and I'd done homework when other people did when me and other people had been going out and getting drunk and doing whatever, if I'd have been doing homework and revised, or been at after school clubs, it wouldn't have happened.

**What wouldn't have happened ?**

I wouldn't have been home every day feeding a baby! And I don't trust anyone now, because of the two weeks before we left school, there was a lot of viciousness, a lot of lies, and some of my closest friends that have been friends for four or five years I refuse to even speak to now, and that was all from meeting them in the school, and they have impacted on me massively because I don't trust any girl now and when a girl talks to you in a bitchy way, I refuse to listen - they've just ruined what I think about girls - my whole peer group just ruined everything about what I think about friends about who you can trust.

**So they've changed your life path! You went out with the crowd...**

Well I was the crowd, I was the front of the crowd, I did everything before anyone else did it, it was just the fact that I had people behind me that made me carry on and do it, if I'd been on my own going out drinking every night I wouldn't have carried on - it's just thrown me off from where I thought my life was going and it's just burned all my trust, ruined it all, they just really have! People who have been friends for five years and they are just lying about the



most pathetic stuff - it irritates me, I can't do it anymore, I don't like talking to girls anymore!

**So have you been left with anything - anything salvaged from the formal education, that can help you now to get back on that path you mentioned?**

No, because of the life I led with my peer group, I ruined what parts of education I had left.

**Are you saying you couldn't move on and..**

Well I could go on to college, I've got the grades, but I just don't have the mental energy. This is an example ... an ICT course, full of my peers, full of most of my friends, who I hang around with on a night, and because I was doing less work, and trying to impress them and stay with the crowd I didn't get an ICT GCSE, and it was the same as maths, my friends were in my group and I refused to work I talked constantly, even when it got serious and I had to do coursework, we would go onto chat websites and talk to each other, I was the only one who didn't do their work at the same time. Science I didn't do because I just couldn't do it anyway, it bored me to death, it just fried my brains, I didn't understand it. There's salvageable stuff there, GCSEs that I have got or which I'm hoping to get, could get me into college to do something decent but I could have done a lot better, I could have done a lot better with my formal education if it weren't for my social life and having a baby, which I don't regret, it just happened. I was completely reckless, we were just a group of teenage yobs, I was like the most popular one out of them so I thought I had something to prove, but I didn't, and I didn't realise it at the time. I just didn't need to be like that and I've trashed my education because I was like that! I did OK in the lessons that I enjoyed or where I had a liking for the teacher but if I didn't respect or like them I didn't bother with it and I shouldn't have done that, I should have just gone on with it regardless like everyone else did - whether you like or dislike a teacher shouldn't have an impact on how well you do in that subject, but it did for me. I just don't appreciate people who are middle class, who think they are better - well I'm not 'classist' - well my partner's whole family are middle class and I've

no problem with it, it's just that certain people are of a higher class than you and know that they are and they treat you in a different way and that was what some of the teachers are like and that affected my lessons.

**How would you describe your living conditions now?**

I have a baby now! I live in a council owned terraced house and I'm working class. I live with my daughter Ella, my mum, my dad and my drug-abusing bum of a brother, my other brother Michael used to live with me as well but doesn't anymore because of my drug-abusing bum of a brother, and my dog is on it's way out now, my sister doesn't live with us she lives with her two sons and partner in a housing association house, which is still working class, they still don't own their own property. My area used to be quite nice but now it's full of single parents, and miserable old people and people with families with twelve kids, well that is an exaggeration but there is a family down the street with 8 children, there are big ugly flats at the end of the street that house single and old people and that's it... It's not been particularly easy but not too bad, I haven't had anything particularly massive that has happened to me apart from having a baby - that's like affected me really, really a lot. There've been deaths and things, but they've happened to millions of people every day worldwide, but I've had nothing unique that has happened to me.

**Do you have a typically working class life-style?**

Yes

**Are you a typical working class girl?**

Yes

**Do you have a typical working class girl's ideas about education?**

No - a typical working class girl does not appreciate education at all and I appreciate it - I didn't when I was going though it but now I do, but it's a bit late really. Typical working class girls, chavs, think it doesn't matter anyway and you can go on the dole and live in a council flat and be a hairdresser, whether you've got an education or not, they just don't care but I do. I think it's important for your life, I should have appreciated it at the time and got on with it better, because basically a good education means a good career path which means more

money and a better quality of life, not necessarily a better life as money doesn't bring happiness but a better quality of life is to do with having holidays and stuff that works in your house, less stress!

**How do you explain that you have ended up with this attitude?**

I think it's mainly my dad - he is also typically working class but like me he was intelligent and he realised the same as I did that its not as unimportant as some people think it is and he drilled it into me that it needs to be done and everybody's got to do it, just get on with it.

**Did your sister also have this upbringing?**

She also got pregnant at fifteen, and had the baby in year 11, but she had a totally different experience, it sounds the same but it's not. She got abuse when she came to school, and her partner didn't support her. I was supported at school and my partner stayed by me. I was in a better frame of mind, Lindsey was taking class A drugs but I stopped taking cannabis at the end of year 10. It sounds the same, we both got pregnant and decided to have the baby - but she's a different person.

**So don't you see yourself as having any particular merit in carrying on with your GCSEs? Your sister didn't ...**

Other people do it

**Who?**

I don't know ... well I know one, Vicky, who did her GCSEs but she was a lot earlier in her pregnancy

**Whereas you actually had your baby a couple of weeks before the first exam!**

Yes - and I was sleepless and tired and stressed, and not eating very well at the time of my GCSEs, but I did them. My sister chose not to!

**Was it hard?**

The hardest thing was not sleeping

**So what carried you through it? How did you manage to carry on?**

I thought, I can catch the sleep up but if I decide I'm too tired to do them, it doesn't take two hours in bed to get them back whereas it does to take the sleep

that you've lost, it was important to do them whether I was tired or not as I would have regretted it. If I was dying, or had no hands, or was in hospital, then I wouldn't have done them, but I was just tired, I had nothing massively wrong with me.

## Chapter 10:

### Cathy

To what extent do these transcripts reflect the truth about you?

I don't think I was open, if I compare the interviews to what I am like in my normal conversation they are nothing like me - me doing an interview is far more held back than what I normally think and say.

Do you feel confident that a reader would have that in mind, that there is a difference to you and what the words on the page imply?

I think they would make a mistake of thinking that it represents the whole person

*My parents split up twice, my uncle died a couple of years ago - it was a murder and it went on for about six months before it even came to court. In my house there is mum, me, three sisters, two brothers and a step-sister on a weekend. I'm the oldest. Money has not been easy ... mum's not got a job anymore, she's a parent again. Before she had her baby she was working in the chip shop I used to work in and she used to clean, but she doesn't do that anymore as she's just had a baby. ... Family circumstances haven't affected my education as much as most people might have thought they would.*

***In fact didn't you get a 100% attendance for that year when things were at their worse?***

*Things were really bad, but I suppose I just wanted to get on with it, not let things faze me and get in the way.*

***How strong do you feel as a result of coming through that?***

*I feel really strong, I feel like I've got through a lot whereas back in year 7,8 and 9 I don't think I would have got through that! I think I've grown up a lot, too much! I feel like an adult and I don't want to be an adult yet ...*

***Do you feel ready for whatever happens next?***

*I do, everything I've been through has just prepared me - nothing is going to get in my way in the future.*

## **How do the ten students in the study perceive education at the end of KS3, during KS4, and the end of KS4?**

### **What do you think the purpose of education should be?**

To give you a sense of what it's going to be like when you grow up so you learn about politics and how to behave, and give you an understanding.

### **What is your opinion about the teaching you have received during KS3?**

It's been good but there's been the swapping of teachers and all the supply teachers, which none of the pupils get on with so not all of the education is good as it could be.

### **What do you like/dislike about school?**

I like how we learn new things and all the stuff in lessons like all the teamwork where you get to know more people and we go to other schools, I don't like the fact that some teachers are like, you've got to respect us but they don't show respect for you, and they tell you to think of your own opinions but then they try and put all their ideas and opinions into your head.

### **What subjects are most worth studying?**

English - I know it's our own language but it helps us - science, sometimes, to help you understand the things that go off - philosophy, that one helps you think and understand things and put them into perspective - and probably something creative as well, just to show your creative side, help you express yourself.

### **What do you think about the education you receive in lessons?**

I think some of it's ok, like the - not the copying down cos that doesn't help, I like it when we have discussions and talking, cos it goes in more and you receive more information and when you're writing stuff down you're not learning anything you're just copying it, not taking it in - I think talking about stuff and watching videos as well, that helps.

### **How positive/negative is the view that you have of education?**

Positive! I don't like it that much but I do think it has its uses, without school you wouldn't know anything you wouldn't know what was morally right and

morally wrong cos all the rules that you have at school, are sort of similar to those that you have outside, without any of that you wouldn't know anything - you'd just be one dumb person.

### **How do your relationships with your teachers affect your learning?**

I think that if you have a good relationship with a teacher then you probably learn more because if you hate the teacher then you don't want to learn and you don't want to be in the lesson with them - if you have a good relationship with them, then it helps.

### **What role has education had in your life in the last five years?**

It's had the main role in the last five years. It's where you spend your time. It's where you learn stuff and socialize and meet new people and become who you are, for without school, you would just be boring, when you come from primary school you meet new people from different areas of 'x-city'. I miss it now! Some of the education is just not necessary, like citizenship, you know most of it anyway, it's just common sense, it was just a time to talk and let your emotions out, some teachers delivered it different though and made you write it down ... talking, I think that went in more with me. The exam process ... that's a load of rubbish - it puts you under too much pressure and you don't do as well as you do through the two years in year 10 and level - you get put under that much pressure that it all goes out of your head, I am under so much stress, everything goes out of my head and I'm sat there thinking, I don't know this, or do I? I'm sure I've done this in lessons but I don't remember it now, but if it was all coursework, you can understand it, there's not a set amount of time and you're not worried about what you can do, like the English, that was the hardest, it was the writing, I'm not that fast and I end up putting too much into the writing. It's the only thing I don't miss about school - exams! We have them every single year, probably the worst were in year 11 and year 9 when we got made to feel that if we didn't do well in those exams we wouldn't do well in our GCSEs or get into the higher groups or whatever. When I was here I didn't particularly enjoy it, it's just lessons and learning which most people don't enjoy - just being sat down and told what to do.

**But now you are looking back you are saying ...?**

I wish I was still here - you'll find me hiding in the school walls or something .  
Education was good! I had always thought it was a bad thing and I didn't like it as much as I should have done and now I look back I think, I wish I was still here, I wish I was still learning, I even miss the teachers I didn't like as they are not there to annoy you! I'm just sat at home doing nothing.

**How do they perceive any experiences of being supported or challenged educationally?**

**What do you consider to be your most significant successes over the past three years at school?**

Probably extension scheme as it's more advanced than any other thing we've done.

**Have you received enough challenge over key stage 3?**

Yes, the extension scheme, its more advanced than anything else and there's been more challenge, and then I've been in all the top groups and you get all the advanced work.

**What do you think about studying philosophy?**

It's good, it helps you think and even though it's hard sometimes, it's good cos you think, other people aren't doing this around the country and at least it does help you think, and it helps you in other lessons as well.

**How do you imagine studying philosophy might affect you in the future?**

I think it will help in a way because when you go to college they're not going to expect you to already have done an A level - I think it will be good as it helps you think.

**Does it help you now?**

Yeah, not just in lessons but in life outside - if this is so bad, look for another situation.



**What do you think about taking philosophy two years early?**

It's good, I didn't expect to do something like that when I first came to this school - I thought the fact that we did GCSEs early was good enough, but we got a chance of doing A level philosophy!

**How do you think it will affect you, taking it two years early?**

I think it's going to help us prepare for the future if we want to carry on - a future education like A levels cos then you are prepared for the amount of work you've got to do.

**How do they perceive and conceptualize themselves? How might a notion of ability feature within their self concept?**

**How does your learning affect your identity?**

I don't think it affects it that much, I think it used to in the younger years, it used to be, if you're learning this you're a boffin, but now it's more like, doing it, and it's our last year so you have to put more effort into it. I think everyone at the end of the day tries their hardest for most of the lessons.

**To what extent are you aware of being categorized as being clever?**

Quite aware, because as some point it gets made by other students when you get taken out for days where you do workshops and stuff and other people that don't do it make quite a fuss of it so it makes you aware of it, but I don't see it as a bad thing, I think it's really good how we get to do things and have extra chances.

**Has that had an impact on you?**

Yes it has! It's prepared me for college I know that! And the NAGTY summer school was really good I really enjoyed that, it helped me decide what I want to do at college and that I do want to do law, it was Hell at first, but then I really did enjoy it, and then you get all that stuff through the post and it really does annoy me as I can't go, tempted as I may be! And I really did enjoy the A level philosophy course; it was hard, it made you think a lot more, it was a really hard

course! Harder than I thought it would be! The exams were hard but the lessons were enjoyable, I would do it again! No regrets! Although there might be a regret when I get the exam results!

**How do they perceive/categorize/identify themselves in relation to others - such as the school, the family, the peer group and wider society? Do they feel that they are 'included'?**

**Are you ever aware of being caught between the expectations of teachers and the expectations of your friends?**

Sometimes yes, because your friends are a big influence on what you do so if you're doing something the teachers want you to do, your friends might not think its good enough

**How do you usually deal with that situation?**

Just get on with it, it's what you think that's right that's important.

**Are you always able to be the same person, with all people and at all times, or are you aware of changing between many selves and roles?**

No – with your friends you feel you've got to be how they want you to be, when you're with yourself you will personally feel comfortable and your friends you don't always feel comfortable with cos you think you're going to be labelled by them

**How big a gap is there between the person you are when you are left alone with your own thoughts and feelings, for example in your bedroom on a night, and the person (or 'people') the world usually sees?**

Not much of a gap as I speak my mind to my friends I try and act as I am – but I think there is one cos you always feel you've got to be someone different, someone that they'd approve of

**Is there anything hidden inside that doesn't come out?**

Sometimes yes when your friends annoy you, you just want to tell them, but then you probably feel awful and you don't want to fall out with them so you hide what you think of them – They tell you what they think but you still feel awkward and you think, is that really necessary?

When you look back at the first interview you did, the one in year 9, is there anything that strikes you as being surprising?

Yes I think in some of it I was more bothered about how my friends would think about me than I am now. At the time I was part of a big group and I used to think, 'oh I have to act like this otherwise I won't be with them and that's all that matters,' whereas now I just think 'if that's what they think, I can't exactly change it, and you can't pretend to be someone else.'

So you've actually changed since then ... Do you think that anyone reading this transcript would get a clear picture of how things were?

I think in some ways yes, but other things were hidden - I have shown though that friends were a big part of what was going on and that education wasn't as big as the friendships and that I was having to prove something to my friends

**Could things have gone differently for you? Do you for instance, have any sense of an alternative history that could have been yours?**

Yes I could have stayed with the peer group I had and not done as well. I know they did affect me a lot in year 9 and 8, and I know that if I had stayed with that particular peer group I wouldn't have done well, I would have been drinking.

When I look back at it, at that person I could have been, I probably wouldn't have been bothered about all the extra educational things.

**What do you think you would have ended up as?**

Hairdressing or make-up! I can just imagine the kind of person I might have been doing hair! The hair was such a thing back then!

**You must feel so proud of what you've become!**

Yes, I can get through anything now, all the things that get in my way I will just deal with. Focussing on what I want and then getting it is a lot easier now, you've got to take what life throws at you and then deal with it as you can. I'll put it in the past and get on with it again. My parents split up twice, and my

uncle died a couple of years ago - it was a murder that went on for about six months before it even came to court. In my house there is mum, me, three sisters, two brothers and a step-sister on a weekend. I'm the oldest. Money has not been easy ... I don't think my social class has affected me, I know I've had a lot of arguments about it, especially when it came to sociology and stuff like that when it came to all the facts.

**What do you see your social class as?**

Working class ... before I looked at the sociology course I thought it didn't matter - but after I'd seen it I thought it made such a big difference, going to a private school or going to a state school - before that, to me, it's never been a big issue, I've never been bothered about it as you can't exactly change it overnight.

**What does your mum do?**

She's not got a job anymore, she's a parent again. Before she had her baby she was working in the chip shop I used to work in and she used to clean, but she doesn't do that anymore as she's just had a baby she has to look after that all the time.

**I suppose some people might look at your life circumstances, and they wouldn't predict how you have turned out!**

I think I've done as well as I've could! Most people wouldn't predict I've done an A level in year 10 or 11! I think I've broke out of the frame or image of my social class

**Why do you think you've been able to do that?**

I've always thought that the best thing to do is try your hardest, and doing those things early was a way of doing harder stuff, learning new stuff, I like learning new stuff. I especially liked sociology, and philosophy - it's different things! I don't like doing the same old things again and again, I like doing something new. The gender thing - well there's Carol, like me people might look and think that because of her life she's not done very well, but she has, she's done really well.

**So your personal history hasn't really had an impact on your educational attitude?**

Well there was my health which did have an impact to begin with, during the earlier years I didn't have a very good attendance. Family circumstances haven't affected my education as much as most people might have thought they would.

**In fact didn't you get a 100% attendance for that year when things were at their worse?**

Things were really bad, but I suppose I just wanted to get on with it, not let things faze me and get in the way.

**How strong do you feel as a result of coming through that?**

I feel really strong, I feel like I've got through a lot whereas back in year 7,8 and 9 I don't think I would have got through that! I think I've grown up a lot, too much! I feel like an adult and I don't want to be an adult yet, I want to stay here and not leave.

**Do you feel ready for whatever happens next?**

I do, everything I've been through has just prepared me - nothing is going to get in my way in the future.

## Chapter 11:

### David

Do you think that it would occur to a reader of this interview that you had deliberately avoided answering?

Perhaps - some might say I was just a kid, but others would say I was avoiding the question.

So in normal relationships, what's going on when you speak to people? How important is your speech in the context of the relationship?

It's just a slight glimpse of what I would like to say. When I talk to people it's not anything that I would actually want to say, it's just conversation really- boring conversation which no one really wants to hear.

***How would you describe your family background/social class?***

*Probably lower working class. There's my mum, my sister and my brother - and Pete, he's my step-father... My dad's dead. ...I found a newspaper clip and it said ... someone had hit him with a pole a couple of times and then he died in his sleep, choking or something like that.*

***To what extent are you a typical working class lad?***

*I'm probably not! Most working class lads don't like education, and if they get excluded they don't care, they just mess around.*

***And that's not you is it?***

*No I enjoy school!*

**How do the ten students in the study perceive education at the end of KS3, during KS4, and the end of KS4?**

**What is your opinion about the teaching you have received during KS3?**

I thought it was rubbish at first but its got better now, I like some of the teachers more – some of them are annoying, but most of them are quite good now – I don't like CG, he makes me run around the field, and EL, she's annoying, she just keeps everyone behind for nothing, and MM, he doesn't teach me but he's a bit of an idiot.

**The two you mentioned first, you said you don't like them, but are you also saying the quality of their teaching is poor?**

EL is quite a good teacher, yeah, and CG is a good teacher but it takes about half an hour just to get out of the changing room, he rings your parents if you've forgot a sock or something

**What do you like/dislike about school?**

I like seeing my friends, and if you do well, and get good grades, you get an advantage in life, to help your job and going to university - I don't like teachers - some of them I like, some of them are ..... can I say?

**Say what you want**

Knobheads! I don't like some of the lessons you have to do - and that's about it.

**What do you think about the education you receive in lessons?**

In some lessons it's better than others. In English and philosophy it's better, but in some science lessons you don't get very well educated you just get told to do the work and if you don't do it, it doesn't matter - so it depends who's teaching you and if they actually care.

I think I've matured a bit since then!

Which bit or bits are you basing that comment on?

It's just a bit childish: 'I don't like the teachers they are knob-heads' -

Wouldn't you say that kind of thing now?

Well I could say it now, but I wouldn't, not in an interview -

So at that time, the fact that you did say it, was this *because* of being in an interview?

**No it's what I thought!**

Well I've got used to tests and things, before I was a bit nervous but I'm not really stressed out when I do them. I think they should start GCSEs at an earlier age, 12 or 13 - because year 7,8 and 9 are just preparing you for GCSEs and these are just wasted years, you could be doing something better, so you could get GCSEs out of the way and get a job earlier.

**Did you find the earlier years boring then?**

Yes, they were fun because of friends and things but you didn't have to really work at all because there was no point, you weren't getting anything out of it. The SATs aren't really important, they are just showing you where you will be for your GCSEs, they don't matter, they prepare you for every test by saying they are important but they're not. They try and stress you out by telling you that you should be nervous, if you just concentrate on doing it rather than worrying, it's better, it's best to do that.

**Who are 'they'?**

All the people like deputy heads and the Head, they are stressed all the time, it's a very stressful period, but you are not stressed until they start telling you that you are. I don't think that's very good. I don't think they should teach you as much as they do, I think they should focus on certain bits of subjects more - there should be some changes to what they teach you. In ICT, they shouldn't just teach you how to use word documents and spread sheets, they should teach you about how to repair it, and download stuff properly and installing programmes onto a system, because there is only so much you can do with Microsoft word and we've done three years of it, it's just pointless after a bit. You need to know the basics like if there was a virus how to get rid of it, stuff like that. How lessons are delivered .... in PE we had CG, and he doesn't teach you, he just gives you a book and tells you to look in the book, and you don't learn like that, you need someone to go through it with you. The same with CB, she doesn't actually teach you, she just drones on for ages, and you are not



learning because I learn in small parts and revise in small parts so it's in my head, she just talks for an hour so you don't learn you just lose concentration.

## **How do they perceive any experiences of being supported or challenged educationally?**

### **Have you received enough challenge over key stage 3?**

In some subjects I have yeah, in English and science – but other subjects ... you know I dropped geography? Well that wasn't challenging she just got it out of a book, drama is not challenging at all, you don't have to do anything

### **Have you received sufficient support?**

Yes, cos when everything goes wrong really you'll always talk about it and sort it out, but with like some teachers, they're against you, SM – and you feel that they've grouped because SM is always talking about 'I'm the teacher, you are the kid, you have to listen' – and you know AH? Well the other day I seen her going down the stairs and then she wouldn't let me go down the stairs cos she says 'I'm a teacher, I'm older, I've got a degree, so I deserve to go down the stairs, when you can do this, you can go down the stairs' so I thought that was a bit 'grouped' as well, she thought she was a lot better than us, she's not.

### **What do you think about studying philosophy?**

I think it's good cos it makes you think deeper about things, and look at situations differently.

### **How do you imagine studying philosophy might affect you in the future?**

I won't look at material items as much - I'll look more at having good relationships with people - and doing the best thing, utilitarianism - helping the most people I can. That's in the future not now.

### **Does it help you now?**

Yes. I don't really get angry anymore, I just think, 'what's the point?', it's just bad, getting angry so I don't do anything out of angriness - I think about stuff differently.

### **What do you think about taking philosophy two years early?**

I think it's good cos its like saying you're brighter than people in your year so it makes you feel good like that, and at university, if I pass, they'll say, 'he's done well, he's already got an A level 2 years early so he must be able to do a degree now, the same as anyone else.'

### **How do you think it will affect you, taking it two years early?**

It will make me feel more confident in my actual A levels, if I pass, and it will give me an idea of what they're gonna be like and their difficulty.

I think philosophy has helped as it has sort of allowed me to grow up a bit, asking me deeper questions - like maths doesn't help you with who you are. We are all laid back in philosophy

### **To what extent are you aware of being regarded as clever?**

The NAGTY thing was good, I thought it would help get me a job but it hasn't. The A level philosophy was good, I enjoyed that, I'm going to do it next year if I don't pass. The extension scheme was good; I have got 3 GCSEs before I took all of them. I think it's just you that has ever offered anything else for intelligent people, there is nothing else.

### **Has this been significant?**

It's helped me! It prepared me for my normal GCSEs as I had an idea of what they were like and the A level, even if I do fail, it has got me prepared for doing my other A levels. It makes you feel better about yourself knowing you can do them earlier, it gives you a bit more confidence.

## **How do they perceive and conceptualize themselves? How might a notion of ability feature within their self concept?**

### **Do you regard yourself as 'labelled'?**

Kind of yeah, I don't really know, I think different people label me differently so – I don't have one label, cos you've labelled me the best in the school (*laughs*) obviously

**So how does that make you feel? Having been labelled like that?**

I can live up to that one! Do you know EL? She has labelled me as a trouble maker just cos I, she keeps me behind every lesson cos she thinks I'm a trouble maker, like Ellie and Sam, they're talking and laughing all the way through the lesson, but if it's me or Jack or Anthony, and we turn around or something, she'll put our name on the board for a 10 minute detention, but they can laugh and they don't shut-up and EL just laughs along with them

**So how does the label you've received in maths affect you?**

I tried being good but it wasn't worth it cos she still reckons I'm a trouble maker

**How does your learning affect your identity?**

Well philosophy has changed my thoughts on life cos it's a bit deeper than ... maths! So you start thinking differently after a philosophy lesson . But really when I learn in a lesson, and work hard, it doesn't mean anything after the lesson - so not much.

**How do you regard your social status, in and out of school?**

Quite good I suppose - not amazing, but not like a geek, kind of average.

**Do you prefer the way you feel when you are on your own, or with different groups of people? Explain.**

I prefer being with my friends across the road to being with people around school, friends from school, going out with them on a night, I prefer these two lads across the road, you know, where you can just be yourself, so I prefer that.

**Do you prefer the person you are, when you're on your own or when you're with this group of lads?**

When I'm on my own cos I'm kind and things - like when I'm with my family, but when I'm on my own I'm not really much of a person cos you don't speak or do anything.

**What do you think of the person you are when you're with people from school?**

I'm OK but not my full self.

Right - well can you elaborate what was going on in year 9?

Well there was popular people, and other people who had a few friends but they weren't really popular - like there was a group of about 20 people and they were all good friends - all popular people, and it's all split up now.

Was that a big deal then in year 9? Did that group have an effect on everyone else?

Yeah - people who were popular could just bully anyone - because they were popular they could get away with it really.

Why would them being popular meant they would get away with it?

Well people that didn't have many friends couldn't really say anything back, because if there was only 2 or 3 people - who were quiet usually -

Who was in the popular group then? You haven't actually stated it in your interview

Probably the same people who are in it now - but it's split up into Anthony with Matthew and those lot, and Jonjo and those lot, and the people who do drama, and us.

Who is us?

Jack, Josh, Ian, Frazer, Blake, Anna, Ellie -

Back then - where were you in relation to this popular group?

I was still friends but like a 'tag-on' -

So they ruled things, back in year 9?

Yeah - they were like, the big fish and everyone else was just little fish

So are there lots of big fish now, in all kinds of friendship groups?

Yeah - they are sort of split up so you can be popular within different groups .

Everyone's matured a bit now -it's like, you're my friend and you are not so...I'm not going to talk to you

You didn't name them, in year 9.

No! I named the people who were not popular

Yes! That's interesting; why do you think you were able to do that? You've named the ones without many friends but not the popular ones? In fact you don't even really mention this notion of there being a popular group, yet from what you are saying now it seems like it was really important at the time

Hints - but not really... I think as I was not very comfortable with my social status

So is there something more 'comfortable' about naming people with less social status than yourself...

Yes than those with more

It's like they were 'those who cannot be named'- when you think about it now...

It's stupid

Do you think the same situation is going on with the year 9 pupils in the school now?

Yeah, like they bully one person - then just move on to a different person- that happens now.

If you were asked to read this document and comment on what it suggested about the person in it, what would you say?

He whines and has a mind of a six year old! He moans quite a lot, he is just a moaner - he says that the worst thing going on is teachers thinking they are good - but I know that that wasn't it at all, that was just nothing.

So why did that person say that it was a big deal? Why could that person talk about teachers really easily, and call them knobheads, but can't talk about and can't name the pupils that were popular?

Cause I've named practically every teacher !

Can you come up with any analysis of that?

I was uncomfortable within myself - I remember saying some of the things, and feeling angry at teachers for stupid things like CG making me run round the field - not really end of the world stuff. I didn't think very deeply, at all, and just thought about teachers and friends and not the whole thing, your social status with everyone, because not everyone is going to like you.

What would you say to that year 9 person now if you were advising them?

Grow up!

**What do you like/dislike about yourself?**

I've never really thought about it. I like my socks, and that thing there.

**Well apart from your socks and that little thing on your wrist, what do you like?**

I like bits of my personality but I'm sometimes a bit sarcastic and I annoy people quite a lot which I don't like, but I do it anyway.

**Which bits do you like?**

I don't know.

**You said you liked 'bits'...**

I just said it .....

**What do you think about yourself at this moment in time?**

They're a bit deep these questions! I don't really go home and think, how do I feel at this moment in time...

**(laughing) - the questions were all written by you lot!**

I didn't write that one! Someone did ....what was it again?

**What do you think about yourself at this moment in time? Explain**

OK!

What about the year 10 interview?

This one actually asks about social status ... I've grown up since then too.

What do you think about the length of your answers in year 10?

I wasn't at all secure in my social status - because the questions are all about me, and I don't think I've been very open, the answers are really short.

Is there more you could have said?

Probably yes. These are rubbish answers, sometimes one word!

So it's not that you couldn't answer - but you felt...uncomfortable?

Yeah - uncomfortable. Like this one: 'what do you like and dislike about yourself'

Can you see what you did?

Yeah I avoided it, I made a shitty joke - a pathetic joke ... terrible

Do you think that it would occur to a reader of this interview that you had deliberately avoided answering?

Perhaps - some might say I was just a kid, but others would say I was avoiding the question.

Are there any other instances of avoiding the questions?

'What do you think about yourself at this moment in time' - 'They are a bit deep these questions' -

So what technique have you used there?

Just putting the question off - and then you said something, explained it, and I just said 'ok' - that's not a full answer

**Are you quite determined to do A levels?**

I wasn't that fussed to begin with, I wanted to go straight into the army, but they say you can get a better place with A levels so I think I'll get them and then join the army for 5 or 10 years, then do physiotherapy or psychiatry - I want to do a job that is interesting but I haven't worked out yet what it is, something to help people, I wouldn't mind being the prime-minister to be honest! I would have a lot of impact, my name would be remembered and I could help lots of people.

**How do they perceive/categorize/identify themselves in relation to others - such as the school, the family, the peer group and wider society? Do they feel that they are 'included'?**

**Are you ever aware of being caught between the expectations of teachers and the expectations of your friends?**

Yes cos teachers expect me to work and things but my mates expect me to mess around with them, so I'm trying to work but I have to mess around as well as everyone messes around.

**What would the consequences be if you just met the teachers' expectations and not the pupils'?**

Well you'd have no friends and you'd be miserable, cos Harriet works really hard and she has about three friends in school, and she never has a laugh and tells us to 'fuck off' and she's always depressed and things or in a mood, the other day she dropped her jumper on the floor and I tried telling her and she said 'go away!' like that and all I was trying to do was help, she wouldn't even listen to me

**To what extent do you feel limited or restricted by your gender, particularly in a school setting?**

I suppose if I was a girl I would be able to work and no one would have a, would call me a swot as much, they call Harriet – she works too hard, I would never, I can't be bothered, she concentrates too much ... cos like Steven he gets called, or he used to, get called a swot and things cos he works, all the time, but you can't really can you?

**You can't really what?**

Work

**So what do boys do to each other to make it difficult to work?**

Throw stuff at each other and just like talk all the time, and like if you did work you'd get called a 'swot' and 'boffin' so you wouldn't be able to, so you just mess around for the whole lesson, every lesson.

**Does that concern you, or do you feel that's a fair price to pay for the friendship?**

I'm not really bothered as I don't really get detentions, and always get my work done in the end.

The peer group thing: was that like a 'big deal' in year 9?

Yeah

The biggest deal? For example when it came to getting in the way of work...

Yeah well I wouldn't work cos no one else was - I could do the work, I just wouldn't do it

In the same way that 'peer group' then seems to be one of the main themes for the time, is there anything else that you could say was a major theme?

Gender

Can you tell me a bit about that?

I've put something about Harriet - that she can work because she's a girl and that she has no friends - well she has got friends! Everyone is a bit more relaxed and things now.

But gender was a big deal at the time?



Yeah it was easier for girls because they can work, but I still find it hard to concentrate! ... Girls are always able to be more open, they are more comfortable with themselves - I mean a few aren't but most are ... if you had done this interview with Jack or Josh you would probably have got silly little comments. It's probably more to do with mental maturity... because not everything's important! I used to think I was getting bullied by Jack and people didn't I?

Yes that's right!

And everything that happened I'd be offended or whatever, but now I can give it back so... I'm more relaxed - before I would worry about what everyone would think, what does he think, she think, - and now, they can think what they like, I don't really care.

That sounds like a strong position to be in, if people's opinions can't hurt you

Yes because when we were younger - you had to prove yourself to be tough and macho, one of the lads - now it's like, 'well I like you, there's just 4 months left of school, I'll see you after that' - or 'I don't really like you at all, so fuck off really! - you don't really play any part at all that helps me being here'.

But you don't feel the need to express this?

No - I'm laid back - I was really stressed out in year 10, everything annoyed me, but at the end of the day, what's the worse that can happen!?

**To what extent would you say that your life-circumstances have affected you, your attitude towards education, and the educational progress you have made?**

There's my mum, my sister and my brother - and Pete, he's my step-father. My dad's dead. He got beaten up with a pole, I found a newspaper clip and it said he had got beaten up with a pole, someone had hit him with a pole a couple of times and then he died in his sleep, choking or something like that. I am not really sure I haven't looked into to it too much, I am not really fussed what happened to him ... I didn't know him well, he left when I was about 5 or 6, he was creep, an alcoholic. He was a tosser, and I'm glad he is dead really, if I saw him in the street now and he was still alive I'd probably beat him up with a pole

myself - he's a tosser, he left my mum and he left us, he didn't care about us so why should we care about him?

**Has that early fact had an impact on your life do you think?**

Not really, we were short of money when we were younger as my mum couldn't really work for us as she had three kids and we were all at different schools, so she couldn't get a proper job, a full-time job, so we didn't have loads of money, so we missed out on little bits like treats and things, but she'd always do us good presents like Christmas and birthday presents.

**How would you describe your social class?**

Probably lower working class. Pete was a builder but he is a bodyguard now. Mum - I don't know what she does, some kind of book-keeping.

**To what extent are you a typical working class lad?**

I'm probably not! Most working class lads don't like education, and if they get excluded they don't care, they just mess around.

**And that's not you is it?**

No I enjoy school!

**So how do you explain the difference? Not only have you had a typical working class background but it could be argued you have had more struggles to face than most people, so why is it that your attitude is a positive one?**

You've helped me enjoy school because all these extra things have made me feel better about myself. And my mum always taught me that an education is important so there is pressure on me to do well in school and try.

**Do you feel prepared in a way to cope with other kinds of struggle that might crop up?**

I'm not scared of death or anything! I'm not sure if it's got anything to do with my dad, but I would rather die in a noble way than die with a disease. I want to live a good life, not a wasted sort of life, I want to do some good things, I want my name to be remembered when I'm dead for good things.

## Chapter 12:

### Daryl

The interview does capture the person I was at the time but I have changed now - that was who I was then but I am different now.

Do the interviews give the correct and full picture?

Yes - I think so but a glimpse of it, not the whole thing.

So what bits did you think were most significant when you read these back?

I cannot remember any of it! ... I can't think when I have done that at all.

How can you be so sure that what you said to me then was the truth that was inside your head?

It was! I didn't feel the need to lie as there really isn't any point ...

Was that down to the fact that you always answer openly and fully to questions or is it more to do with the nature of that particular interview?

I wouldn't have answered as much with any other teachers but I do tend to answer questions openly and truthfully

*My nanna came from France a little time ago and she wasn't going to tell me but she did, she said my mum's in Glasgow in a hostel thing with carers, it's a good thing though as she used to drink and that so at least there are carers there...*

***You say you can't remember when you last saw her?***

*Not for years...*

***Well it's interesting because someone who just knew a few facts about your history, like the bit about your mum and what that was like - and also how it was just you, Nick and dad for several years, and now there's a step-mother and step-brother who you don't like, well they might not have predicted that you would have turned out as you have! What do you think they might assume?***

*I would be not as I am now, more messed up. They'd think I would be messed up and like a bum on the street, getting pissed every night and wasted.*

## **How do the ten students in the study perceive education at the end of KS3, during KS4, and the end of KS4?**

### **What is your opinion about the teaching you have received during KS3?**

Some of it's good and some of it's bad, ... If the teachers don't get along with you, cos, I don't know, if you do something bad once then they'll always look at you in that way, so they don't tend to teach you as well as they would have been, and you may not like that lesson so you don't tend to do as well as you'd liked to as you don't want to do it.

### **Is there any particular subject that you would say this happens in?**

In my old English group with that other teacher and history – well VC she basically didn't like me, she even said to my face that she doesn't like me, and er, in history, I had a word with CM about how she was treating me different and she actually knew that she was treating me different and she says to me, that she was talking about me the other day and saying that what I said to her was right, so she's stopped doing that now. And HS, cos when other people were bad in her cover lesson the other day – I had her for music after, and she put all crosses on my report, but I did everything that my report said, worked to my potential – and in the other cover lesson she said I was messing around and being rude and swinging round on my chair like a two year old, and she was pointing over there, over the other side, and I said, what did I do that was so atrocious? I put my hand up and she said come and see me at the end, so I come and see her at the end and she says I was acting like a two year old and pointing to the back over there, and I said, 'I wasn't even sat there', so she was like, she stared at me and asked me to leave, and in music she just put all crosses cos David was messing about

This stuff about CM - and VC in history, things like that I can't remember any of it, saying any of it!

You can't remember the details - but can you remember having the feelings that you have expressed in these interviews?

No - I can't remember any of it - I can't think when I have done that at all.

Is there anything there at all that you would say is expressing more than just the fleeting truth of the moment and that contains a more lasting truth?

Em - somewhere - it's just weird cause this is when I was in year 9, and when you are in year 9 ... you are still young - these were seen as knock about years I would say, not mature, these were immature days - now that I am in year 11 and I am doing GCSEs and so on, you have to be a lot more mature and focus on the work more and not get distracted with silly things and squabble with the teachers - you just have to get along with them.

You say that the year 9 stuff is immature - would you also say that you were talking about concerns that you would no longer have?

Well no because now you are in year 11 you have more respect and I don't think any of those teachers would dare talk to you like that anymore, especially in year 11 because they think you are better than that - plus, like when I said I was in year 9 and you can't answer back to the teachers - well these days you do a bit more because you feel like you have a bit more power and you are not like a, I am trying to think of a metaphor, you just haven't respect -

Do the year 9 things seem trivial?

Yeah - silly.

Was there anything that's an exception to that looking back with year 11 eyes?

I still think that what I said was true, because teachers like the ones I have named are kind of twats, and they were valid arguments that I did give, so as you've got older, things are still the same, but you don't care about them, what they say, and you don't take offence - you just have more power in year 11, so they don't do any of that anymore.

So it's not that you are saying that any of it is untrue ...

It was all true

But you have a different way of looking at it?

Yeah it's all changed

Thinking back - do you think that when you were a year 9 pupil, you expressed the 'real' issues?

Yeah - I did, but it's not the same anymore as you wouldn't have issues like that anymore.

### **What do you like/dislike about school?**

I like meeting up with my friends and stuff, having a bit of a laugh and a joke - I like quite a few of the teachers, like 'Miss Williamson', and a few teachers that are alright ... I like playing some sports when I get the chance, and the canteen food's not too bad. I dislike some of the teachers, I don't like HD, SG is alright sometimes but he's a strict teacher - and SC a bit docile and forgetful which sometimes is not helpful, but he's alright. That's about it - but I don't like PN either, I don't have her for nowt but she's never nice.

### **What subjects are most worth studying?**

Probably ICT because the new generation is turning to computers and stuff so it will be helpful, maths is helpful - I don't like science, I don't think that's helpful, English is good to keep your grammar and stuff fine.

### **What do you think about the education you receive in lessons?**

It kind of depends which teacher you've got really. If you've got a good teacher, in lessons, you'd like want to listen to them and try and work hard (like I was this morning) - but if you have a crappy teacher that lets you get away with loads of stuff, which isn't that helpful, like NL, he lets people get away too easy and not do a lot.

Well what do you think these documents are saying?

That he is improving basically - me personally - not the school, it's gone from crap to ok, well not ok, less shit than it was.

Do we get this 'flavour' from your interviews? Is there the 'crapness of school' embedded in there somewhere?

Yes - its all down to me, the way I look at it is down to me. I agree with people that say they should make education more fun with better ways of teaching -

So it's not fun at the moment?

No! I know it's always not fun but you have to learn in year 11 so I do. I read this as Daryl the wise guru, the guru of education.

So the message coming from these is that school is pretty crap, but pupils get wise to it and get along better, not because school has got any better -

But because they have adapted; yeah I found the right word - I have adapted to school.

I miss school actually, it's weird - it does have a big impact on your life, and you do need it or you end up on the street. It's been very good because you learn a lot and it expands your mind, like that philosophy - and you get good friends with your education; it's not boring it's useful.

**It sounds like you have a positive view?**

Yes, now that I've left school, before I didn't used to like it - I don't know it was one of those things that you just didn't like as you was in school everyday and you couldn't do anything else, but now that I've left school I miss it.

**How do they perceive any experiences of being supported or challenged educationally?**

**Have you received enough challenge over key stage 3?**

No not in some lessons like I don't know, like geography I suppose, but science that's getting easy cos AB has put me in A3 cos of behaviour cos KE didn't like me or John, but they said there was six of us or something and they just happened to pull me and John out of the hat, the ones that she didn't like the most, so.

**Had you been in the top set originally? Were you moved from A1 to A3?**

Yes, so me and John, we're in A3 cos KE said we was messing about and that.

**Have you received sufficient support?**

Not really, just from you as you're the only teacher that cares about their students enough.

### **What do you think about studying philosophy?**

I think it's a good thing cos it expands your mind and makes you think about different perspectives on life and it kind of like makes you think a lot more and in some ways it screws up your mind cos you keep thinking about it, like the meaning of life, I have to keep thinking about it, I've got like thousands of different ideas about it, they could all practically be true, it annoys me cos it's always there, and it's like, 'go away!' - not philosophy, but the questions and stuff, the endless questions that no one knows - like 'if a tree falls in a forest does it make a sound?'

### **So you think about this?**

I don't think about it a lot, but I think about it sometimes, I think about it and think 'does it?' - God, it's so annoying.

### **What do you think about taking philosophy two years early?**

I think it's very good cos it's like something no one else has got, which makes me feel good about myself sometimes.

The philosophy thing that we were in, well it's made me go a bit crazy, but in a good way. It's like I think about things differently these days, I've expanded my mind, I have a different perspective on life. It's a good thing that extension scheme, it gives people a chance to do something extra, something a bit different.

### **You used the word 'crazy' ?**

Yes, you know the *whole* of philosophy - I was thinking, what is the meaning of life? I went crazy thinking about it for a few nights. I'm just sticking to three views of it now. One was that we were like termites, say we were like a weed killer and we were put on this earth to destroy it, which we are slowly doing I reckon, and we will be destroyed soonish. Another one is that there isn't a point to life, not in a suicidal way, but life is just there to live, I think it's like a phenomena, we are not meant to be there but somehow we got here and now we are just 'there'. Thirdly it's just weird - you know what Cowie's mum said, we



were all a bit drunk and so was she, and I asked her what the point of life was, and she said in her view, we were here to provide for the children and make their lives get better, so her mum and dad made her life better, and now she will make her children's lives better. I thought that for a night and then I stopped thinking it.

## **How do they perceive and conceptualize themselves? How might a notion of ability feature within their self concept?**

### **How does your learning affect your identity?**

I don't know because I've never really tried, well I've tried but I've never really been that good in lessons - if I was really good in lessons I don't think I'd be that much different, my personality would still be the same, I think people would probably still think the same but a few people would have a little more respect for me, teachers and stuff.

### **Do you prefer the way you feel when you are on your own, or with different groups of people? Explain.**

On my own, I don't have to do anything for anybody, I don't have to express myself to someone, I can just do nothing - but when I'm with people I feel I have to... I suppose I feel more comfortable with people cos there's someone to talk to and stuff. Can you say the question again?

### **Do you prefer the way you feel when you are on your own, or with different groups of people?**

I feel better with different groups of people cos it makes you feel like you're wanted and stuff. Is that right? Is that answering the question?

### **Yeah it's answering it, although I'm interested as you started off saying that you felt that when you were on your own you didn't have to...**

Oh yeah, when I'm with people I feel I've got to try and impress them, so that you're noticed and, noticed and ... people think more of you

### **So it sounds like each has good and bad things**

Yeah when you're on your own you don't have to impress them or nowt but you're a loner, and you won't know what you're like anywhere on your own as you've got no one to see, but if you're with people then people can see what you're like and how you feel and stuff.

**What do you like/dislike about yourself?**

I dislike how I'm easily distracted and ... I don't know, I'd have to ask someone else!

**Why?**

I don't know what I dislike about me as I'll just be putting myself down... do you mean like physical things?

**Anything, whatever comes into your head!**

Well, I would prefer to be taller and that's about it! I like myself but I dislike how I used to be, I didn't feel in place, and it just didn't seem to be me and I've stopped as it was bad.

**So what do you like?**

My personality, I can make friends kind of easily.

**What do you think about yourself at this moment in time?**

This very moment?

**Yeah!**

It's just gone!

*(both laugh)*

Probably a bit nervousish, getting recorded, but I'm not too nervous, as I don't get too nervous. And ... I think I'm lucky to have a great teacher like you!

**Thank you!**

**Are you happy and enjoying life? Explain**

Yeah and no. I'm doing well in my social life at the moment but at home I'm getting good and bad. I still don't have a television, and I'm still getting shouted at for silly things. It's getting betterish - I like being at my grandma's

**Is that the thing that's making it better, that you're spending time at grandma's?**

Yeah, it gives it all a chance to break down a bit, loosens up the tension a bit, till it all comes back again. She always spoils me, I get a telly! She don't really know about the home thing but it's nice to spend time with her and break the tension. At home I don't get to do my work - I tried doing it at home but he don't let me use my lap-top as he thinks I'll just watch DVDs. I want to get it done as well, I need to get it done, I'll get on top of it, then I'll stay on top of it but it's going to take a while.

**So that's your ambition for next year is it, to stay on top of it?**

For the rest of my life!

*(both laugh)*

Do you think the yr 10 interview captured anything of who you were at the time?

That was me then but I've changed - I haven't got all the same worries and problems I had in year 10 - it's different ones now - some are the same

Would that be the entire truth? Do the interviews give the correct and full picture?

Yes - I think so but a glimpse of it, not the whole thing.

What else would you like to comment on about this interview?

I think I have changed since year 10 quite a bit as year 10 also felt like a mess about year, and the way I feel about myself has slightly changed also - I don't get as easily distracted as I used to, and I'm not as 'frigid' to put my hand up and ask for help etc. The interview does capture the person I was at the time but I have changed now - that was who I was then but I am different now.

So like in the first interview it's kind of a snapshot of your life - and the interview provides just a glimpse of a temporary person who is changing always and becoming something else?

Yeah, changed and matured and got better

Which bits tell you that you were immature?

Where I'm talking about messing around - that's not who I am now; past tense!

So how have you changed?

I am a better and improved person.

So the year 10 interview gives the impression that you don't feel good about yourself?

Yes - I've seen it somewhere - I put myself down a bit -I noticed I couldn't really say anything about what I liked about myself it was mostly dislikes which shows that I was kind of 'down'

Was it quite a depressing time for you in year 10?

Yes, yes it was but some bits were fun

Were you honest and open in that interview too?

Yes - I said I was at the bottom.

Would you go further and suggest that the things you said reflected the important issues at the time?

Yes - totally

**How do they perceive/categorize/identify themselves in relation to others - such as the school, the family, the peer group and wider society? Do they feel that they are 'included'?**

**Are you ever aware of being caught between the expectations of teachers and the expectations of your friends? Explain.... Do you have any ways of dealing with this?**

Like the pupils expect me to be funny, my friends would just expect me to mess about and do no work but the teacher expects me to do as well as I can, up to my potential and I always think teachers expect a lot, too much off me cos they think my potential's really higher than anyone else's so they expect more off me, so my friends expect me to do no work but I have to the teacher expects loads off me.

**Are you always able to be the same person, with all people and at all times, or are you aware of changing between many selves and roles?**

No, if you're in front of your friends, like you'd probably act more macho and do stuff that you wouldn't normally do, em, things like that, like the way you're talking to them, things like that. With your friends you just act the harder side of you, but if you're like with your parents or something, you act innocent, like you're not going to do anything or you're just a good boy. If you're in class, if your friends are like near you, you want to act macho but if you really have to then you just act like the good boy and get on with your work and do what the teacher says cos the teachers usually blackmail like 'I'll ring your dad up' or give you a negative referral. Or send you to isolation, things like that,

**How big a gap is there between the person you are when you are left alone with your own thoughts and feelings, for example in your bedroom on a night, and the person (or 'people') the world usually sees?**

I'd say a very big gap, cos I'm not being a knob-head when I'm on my own and thinking about things like what I've done, but if I'm with someone else like friends or something I'll just be a knob-head and blurt everything out and say things which I shouldn't and stuff like that. I think I'm more safe when I'm on my own, thinking, and probably with my friends I'm doing things which I shouldn't.

**Which is more real?**

Being on my own and thinking cos it's just you know what you're doing and there's nothing pressuring you and you're not being pushed to do something, you can just be your own person and think what you're doing.

**So when you're with your friends, is that also an act? You'd said it was an act with staff but is it also an act when you're with friends?**

It come natural – I'd say if you put the act on for so long, if it is an act, cos well it would have to be an act to start off wouldn't it, to get in with the crew that then you'd show your real self and kind of blend it in, so you'd be yourself and wouldn't feel out of place, you'd feel part of it. It's not an act in the end.

**How do you regard your social status, in and out of school?**

*It used to be bad, it's good now as I'm not getting into mischief.*

### **Are you saying that you don't have social status if you are bad?**

Well some people think that the worst bad person would have the highest I suppose cos people are scared so they've like a type of respect for them but not good respect, scared of them, or there's the other way - if you're really nice to everyone your social status can be high as well, but if you're really quiet and don't do anything, it will be low as people won't know you...I've moved from the bad type, a bad boy, to a good boy - just under high social status.

What would you say the main strands are going through your interviews? What could someone tell about you from reading them?

That he is a slightly badish boy and he likes to have a laugh and a joke in the classroom and do a lot of work - That I have quite a lot of friends and are kind of popular so have to do stuff to maintain that maybe - so they would think I was kind of popular-ish which is why I was kind of bad-ish

Paula is my dad's girlfriend and little David is her son. Paula is alright, I didn't used to get along but it's sorted now.

### **And your mum?**

I haven't seen her! My nanna came from France a little time ago and she wasn't going to tell me but she did, she said my mum's in Glasgow in a hostel thing with carers, it's a good thing though as she used to drink and that so at least there are carers there.

### **You say you can't remember when you last saw her?**

Not for years.

### **So your background, someone could say it sounds like you've had to go through some kind of struggle, with not seeing your mum**

Its alright now, I feel I'm the heart of the family. If I was a big tosser like my brother, then I'm sure by now Paula would have gone by now, but I'm not that kind of person. Nick's a twat and he argues with her all the time, proper mouthing and that, I don't do that though. I don't like little David though. I won't stick up for him, I won't grass on him either though. I think he's ugly, it's his face up against mine and I'm trying to eat, its just so annoying and he stares when I eat, I had to shout to him the other day.

**What about the years before Paula but after your mum left?**

Well my dad always had a girlfriend, different ones. My dad has always been alright really, he used to always look after us, the girlfriends weren't too bad, they were often nice, it wasn't too bad.

**Well it's interesting because someone who just knew a few facts about your history, like the bit about your mum and what that was like - and also how it was just you, Nick and dad for several years, and now there's a step-mother and step-brother who you don't like, well they might not have predicted that you would have turned out as you have!**

**What do you think they might assume?**

I would be not as I am now, more messed up. They'd think I would be messed up and like a bum on the street, getting pissed every night and wasted.

**Well the question is then, what is it that has made you like you are when your circumstances would seem to have indicated a different direction?**

I am magic! I don't know, friends have been a good help - Josh helps me out, he's like a punch-bag for stress relief, although I don't hit him or anything he's a metaphorical punch-bag which gets a lot off my mind, but I do the same for him.

**Now that you've mentioned your friends ... have they always been as positive an influence?**

No that was shit as well. Well I used to hang around with the three Joes on a night, getting pissed and doing shite - but I stopped that now, I'm just a local boy now, I'm good.

**Do you know what it might be then, that enabled you to stop doing that kind of thing and become like you are now?**

You've been a good help as well Miss, you know with them talks and stuff.

Otherwise I'm just a happy person.

**That's credit to you then Daryl!**

Well I think a little bit of credit to me.

## Chapter 13:

### Ellie

I was quite shocked really that I said that!

Which bits?

Well all of it! It's ideas that I have in my head, and I realise, I actually *said* this!

But I can't remember saying it so it's quite strange to see all my ideas written down.

Are they still true for you then, these ideas?

Most of them, yes! Some of them have evolved a bit but it's just amazing to know that this is what I think and to see it written on a piece of paper.

So these words on this paper represent what was and is actually going on in your head?

Yes ... it's strange, it's like looking in my own head!

So in the year 9 interview for instance, was that the whole truth?

Yes, and lots of it is the truth for now too.

So that document is quite a permanent record ...

It's like a diary - the things I really believe about things

*My dad's an Anglo-Indian, he came from Calcutta, although it's got a new name now. His only memory of India though is of his grandpa waving from a roof, but he has a lot more memories from England, like all the crazy houses and things. The family had a hard time back in India because it was quite harsh, from the war and things, being of mixed race in India was hard as the Indian's didn't accept you and nor did the English because they weren't English enough so they were kind of in-between, caught between two cultures... He moves boxes (for a living), it sounds really uninteresting! He works for (X factory), he is always busy, but they've got some hard times coming up as it's all moving abroad.*





## **How do the ten students in the study perceive education at the end of KS3, during KS4, and the end of KS4?**

### **If you had to make just one recommendation about how to change teaching and learning at key stage 3 for the better, what would it be?**

Pay less attention to the people who don't behave and more attention to the people who do. They seem to ignore the people who behave, they're like, forgotten.

### **What subjects are most worth studying?**

I think English, English and maths are the most important things cos everyone likes to be able to do English and maths - I don't see the point of science though because when I leave school I'm never gonna use most science again - it is really a bit useless.

### **What do you think about the education you receive in lessons?**

I think it's quite good, it depends on the teacher cos you can automatically point out which lessons you do better in like with the science I know that I do much better in SB's lessons than TW's and CB's lessons, I think it depends on the teacher how well you do. I think it may be to do with the status of the teacher, because the higher the status, the better you learn, it affects learning more as they tend to listen to the teacher.

### **So the higher status teachers deliver better education?**

May be not better education cos I think all teachers give good education it's just that I think people listen more and are a bit more scared cos they know the teacher can do more.

I think the whole situation of how students are taught, with certain teachers, you know you are not in control, always having to have someone over you and without power or control... the powerlessness, and what the teachers say goes! I think it is very unfair! You need some authority but I think that when you get to our age, teachers should take a more relaxed role rather than treating you like a small child - you are actually a human being with opinions, so they should treat

you for who you are. This would happen quite a lot! Probably most lessons, there were only a few where it wouldn't happen.

Education has shaped who I am, the kind of person I am.

### **What kind of person are you?**

I think I'm a very open kind of person, it's kind of boosted my confidence and stuff, made me aware of different religions and cultures and stuff, made me more open to new ideas. I like to think I am less judgemental towards people than when I was younger, more open to different people's opinions and ideas, trying to see things from their point of view... I'm going to go to college and train to be a teacher, which is quite funny for someone who didn't used to do well at school to go on to be a teacher!

### **It's all credit to you!**

Well I want to go back and to change for other people what I found hard and to make other people come out saying, 'I did well, I got what I wanted out of school', I want to stop other people from having the bad experiences I had to begin with, I want to make a difference, make them happy and things.

What do you think someone would say, if they didn't know you, but they read the transcript of your interview - what would they say were the key themes emerging through the interview?

It's all revolving around school and I just sit there and behave, it's changed a bit now - I don't behave as well as I used to do.

Would they regard you as a happy pupil?

Yes I think so - I have tried to put a positive side to things - but most of it is about confidence and not mucking up and stuff

Do you think that that interview gives a fair glimpse of what are generally the key issues for year 9 pupils?

I think they should read it as just personal to me as everyone else seemed to have a different agenda to me in year 9, more about going out and getting drunk, whereas for me it was all about passing exams.

Did you notice any changes between the year 9 and year 10 transcripts?

Not really although in the first I come across as really happy and sparky, in the year 10 one I am a bit different, a bit more stressed as things are getting harder.

How does that compare to how you are now?

I'm happy but not as happy as I was in year 9, things were a lot easier then and I would just get on with it - now I struggle.

## **How do they perceive any experiences of being supported or challenged educationally?**

### **What do you consider to be your most significant successes over the past three years at school?**

Extension scheme (*smiling voice raising...*) it's the biggest thing I've ever done

### **Anything in particular you wish to comment on?**

The extension scheme, as I have always just drifted through school and it was just school, it didn't really teach me anything but when extension scheme came in it kind of shaped the way I thought, changed my views of things and it gave me something to focus on, to focus my opinions on...

I think yes, in some lessons you do, it can be really challenging, really complicated and the teacher really is teaching you something, in other lessons it's just recapping, stuff you already know, stuff that there's no point, going over and over again – it is hard just sometimes we do boring stuff ... Well in maths when we start something we go all over work we've already done, that we've already done and we already know – we're still going over it and we don't need to go over it more

### **What do you think about studying philosophy?**

It's quite interesting actually, it has lots of different sides, you think that it's one way but it's not, it's kind of complicated but that's ok, it's for life, I end up saying to people, 'how do you *know* that?' it's kind of fun.

### **Does it help you now?**

I think it does, in arguments it helps me, and to not have such a plain view of things, it's not just like, 'that's the answer to the question', I think about it more.

**What do you think about taking philosophy two years early?**

I think it's brill!! It kind of gives me a little buzz when I think I'm doing it, it gives me a right little thrill - and I think it gives my mum a buzz cos she tells everyone I'm doing it, and I go bright pink and she's there buzzing, it really does give me a buzz though, its good.

**How do you think it will affect you, taking it two years early?**

I think it will help me for further studying, like the extension scheme prepared me for all my GCSEs.

**Could things have gone differently for you? Do you for instance, have any sense of an alternative history that could have been yours?**

Yes, if I hadn't have got on the extension scheme I would probably have failed - failed my exams, it was a big confidence boost, it made me realise I can do this - I already have two Cs, and I am going on to do the highest level of the course I want to do at college, if you had told me at primary school about this, I wouldn't have believed it, going to college - I expected to fall out of school and trip into a dead-end job, extension scheme has picked me up a lot, I think I can do this, I can get what I want. The ghost Ellie is sitting at home, failing, being miserable.

**How do they perceive and conceptualize themselves? How might a notion of ability feature within their self concept?**

**Do you regard yourself as 'labelled'?**

Yes - I think I'm labelled as a Nerd sometimes cos the teachers always expect you to do well and if you don't do well or you're talking with your friends they automatically assume that it's different, you know, that it's not like in your character, and like if you suddenly don't do so well in a certain subject then they think that it's odd because you usually do well and things

**So the label 'Nerd'; does it mean that you are good at work or are hard working or what?**

I think it's more like hard working as I'm not all that good at some lessons as it's not like my strong point, they expect you to do really well and work really hard all the time, even if you know you might need a break for five minutes

**Are you always able to be the same person, with all people and at all times, or are you aware of changing between many selves and roles?**

I change a lot (*laughs*) I have my opinions but my opinions change depending on what I'm doing, I'll behave at home, and I'll behave at school, but secretly inside I'm rebelling (*laughs*)(*SW laughs*) I'm not doing my homework – it can wait

**So this is like a secret quiet rebellion**

That doesn't affect people apart from myself

**So how does it affect you, what..**

Well I like to watch tele and so I think, I want to watch this so my homework WILL wait and I'll do it tomorrow if I can do what I want to before I do my homework sometimes

Out of the two interviews, which did you prefer reading?

The second one - it made me laugh a lot because it's more evolved -

Which bits in particular?

I like the bit where you've put 'laughed' - when I was reading this I was in creases and people must have wondered why I was laughing.

**How does your learning affect your identity?**

I think it does affect it a lot actually, as I'm sat in school and doing different lessons - it's changed me a lot, I tend to change with the different work I do I suppose - my dad says it's changed me, I completely criticise everything they say - it probably has changed me a lot

**Made you more critical ...**

And argumentative and everything!

**What do you think other people in the philosophy group think about you?**

I don't really know what they think about me, I'd like to know what they think about me. I think they think I'm just Ellie, and there's not really much of me!

**How do you regard your social status, in and out of school?**

I don't have much of a status out of school, I tend to have my grown-up friends who know my parents but in school I just have a small group of close friends, I'd rather have that than loads of friends who don't really know me.

**What do you like/dislike about yourself?**

I dislike a lot of things about myself actually! It would take all day to mention them! I really hate the way I look, the way I am ...

**Ok, I'll ask you it a bit differently, if you could change bits of yourself, which parts would you say, 'oh I'll keep that, I'm happy with that!'**

I suppose it would be my body I suppose as everyone has to be different .

**And what would you change?**

I'd try and be more confident, I tend to freak out when I'm with different people.

**What do you think about yourself at this moment in time? Explain**

It's just me, I'm floating, I have my moments ... but I'm floating

**It sounds like you're happy then which leads us nicely into the next question: ... Are you happy and enjoying life?**

Yeah, you only live once so you might as well. I have my good moments, when I've finished all my coursework , spending time with my family, and everything's just perfect, and other times I can't be bothered when everything's collapsing, and its just not working, I tend to go into moments like that a lot, but they come to an end eventually.

Was there anything else you liked about this one?

Yes the bit where I say I'm floating

Yes I liked that bit - it's a powerful image

I think I drew that somewhere and have kept it in one of my drawers - that's really creative for me - and the bit about me freaking out - it's actually true, I do freak out around different people, it's actually got worse! But I'm trying - I'm floating!

**To what extent were you for instance aware of being regarded as clever?**

In primary school I was always labelled as a stupid person - I was! I was never quite brilliant at things and I had a hard experience of school when I was

younger, they all thought, 'she's shy, she's stupid!' - so I was always stuck on the green table - but when I came here and I was on the extension scheme I thought, 'wow, I am clever and I can do this!' and it kind of opened it out more, and I had more of an opportunity to expand, and now I'm coming out with coursework at an A grade which was something that if you've said it to me at eight or nine, you wouldn't have believed it, I would have probably cried in a corner as it wasn't something I was likely to achieve, I wasn't expected to pass the SATs as I wasn't that good at English.

**Was it the labelling process itself that was most significant here then?**

Well it did boost me a lot at first and then it got to the part where teachers expected a lot more from me which over time, well the buzz you got at first 'oh, I'm clever' became more of a burden, and teachers thought 'she's got to behave, she's clever, she can do everything, she doesn't need help, she should be an example' - so you weren't given the room to be who you wanted to be, you had to be like this perfect person, to set examples to everyone else.

**It sounds from what you're saying that the labelling process is actually very powerful, on the one hand it creates the belief in you that you are clever, and you go on to become this thing, but also, it's a burden, a trap, a responsibility ..**

Yes, when you start to believe the label less, but others believe it more ...

**What do you think now?**

I have completely abolished the label because as we've not been in school for a while there are no rankings anymore, until college, its just 'nothing', there's no one to turn round and say 'I'm cleverer' or 'you're stupider' - you are just free to be yourself, so you don't have the labels anymore

**So do the labels come from others rather than you?**

I think you start to believe the labels when people tell you for a while, you do start to believe it and it does give you a boost, but eventually with it becoming a burden you just throw it away when you've got the chance and its gone!

Try and go below the surface and analyse it - what does it reveal about that pupil?



That I'm someone who really needs to succeed, it's not just a want, it's a need, that's been drilled into them.

Is that also true in the second interview?

Yes, more so.

To what extent is the person you were in year 9 and 10 - related to the person you are now?

I've evolved and all my ideas are developed more - the different bits I've tried to fit together and I think I've made more of a meaning - also I'm over the kind of problems I had with friends clashing with school.

**How do they perceive/categorize/identify themselves in relation to others - such as the school, the family, the peer group and wider society? Do they feel that they are 'included'?**

It's like the world kind of moulds you ... I do have my friends that I am myself with but there's many other people that I'm not, and I don't really know what myself is anymore, because sometimes it just kind of confuses you so you're not quite sure ...its like I used to know who I was now I'm changing so I'm not quite positive who I am, you'll know something but you're not quite sure if you really do know it properly and stuff

**Why do you think that there is this kind of gap between what the world sees and what you have inside?**

I think the world and people have expectations and they want people to be like this or they need people to be like that, or they expect me to be like this, and you're not really like that, and it's kind of like the world expects you to go out and spend loads of money all the time and you don't want to do that inside - it's like it kind of controls you sometimes and you don't want to do that

**Do you actually end up doing what the world wants you to do...?**

You tend to do what the world wants you to do because you can't avoid it, it's like something that is compulsory even if you don't want to do it and its hard to

try and not do it, as the way you've been brought up and stuff is the way, that you will do it, because you will do it to fit in more, and you can't not do it anymore, even though you don't want to do it

**But inside, there's getting a bigger distance between the self, the real you, and what goes on outside, the bit you show?**

Yeah it gets a lot bigger everyday ... It does my head in a lot because you just want to do what you want to do, not what needs to be done kind of thing.

**Does the hidden part inside ever spill out on the odd occasion?**

It does, but I tend to be on my own so I know its going to spill out so I go and hide as I don't want people to know ... people get on your nerves and you suddenly think, you're going to express what you think about them, and you know, you're going to scream and shout and tell them what you believe they're like, and you know you can't do that, but you really want to!

**So you go away and scream it to yourself?**

Yeah, I kind of go and cry though, I cry more than I scream so I kind of go and cry it all out, make it all disappear into a hanky

**So all your words vanish in tears?**

Yeah, they kind of dribble away

**Do you prefer the way you feel when you are on your own, or with different groups of people?**

I think when I'm on my own cos I can just be what I want to be cos you have to act a certain way around certain people - and I've noticed that recently, the way I'm different with different people.

I live in x, and although everyone sees x as posh, it has become one of the roughest, most drug-infested places in 'x-city'. In my family there's my mum, dad, and brother. We see Grandpa a lot, he's round a lot as he is having a divorce, and he stays over, sleeping in one of our rooms, so he can have something to drink and he doesn't have to go back - we see a lot of my dad's aunties too, but some of my dad's family we don't see a lot as they are either in London or in India.

**So is your dad also from India?**

Yes, my dad's an Anglo-Indian, he came from Calcutta, although it's got a new name now. His only memory of India though is of his grandpa waving from a roof, but he has a lot more memories from England, like all the crazy houses and things. The family had a hard time back in India because it was quite harsh, from the war and things, being of mixed race in India was hard as the Indian's didn't accept you and nor did the English because they weren't English enough so they were kind of in-between, caught between two cultures. I think they thought they would be more accepted in England as the English get on with it more, there are loads of different cultures, in India it was a bit hard, they weren't as accepted as they weren't dark enough, I think my grandpa knew part of the language, but they were English dominated.

**So lets go back to you dad for a bit, he sounds like he is from an interesting cultural background ... what does he do for a living?**

He moves boxes, it sounds really uninteresting! He works for 'x factory', he is always busy, but they've got some hard times coming up as it's all moving abroad, it's cheaper.

**Is there the threat of redundancy?**

Yes, but I think my dad will be one of the last to go. Every year they have a party for all the workers without any days off, called the blue ribbon day, and my dad is always one of these - he never takes time off and he is a really good worker, he really does try hard. It is all touch and go, but practically all of 'x factory' will have gone before they start getting rid of his section so I hope he'll be OK.

**Does your mum work there also?**

She used to but now she works in a furniture shop - she puts things out on shelves and works in the warehouse.

**How would you categorize your family's social class?**

Working class -

**To what extent are you a typical working class girl?**

I'm from a typical working class family but I'm not a typical working class girl. My family have typical working class attitudes though - my grandparents on my

mum's side are very, very racist, and my mum was sort of brought up on racist ideas and it wasn't until she met my dad that she changed her opinions and things. My family have tried to bring us up to not be racist, but there are little things that they do that I try not to do, which I won't mention as it sounds mean - like my dad has harsh words for gay people, and I correct him all the time, so now I think he says it just to get on my nerves, but there are kind of things like that, little digs and things - like when one comes on the tele, he'll say: 'It's one of them' and I'll say, 'No dad, it's a gay person, get over it' but I don't think they're that bad, its just the way they've been brought up so its hard to change it.

**Yes, it is a typically working-class attitude to have these views about gay people**

But I'm trying to change them, but it has got to the point whether I'm not clear whether they think these things or they just say it to annoy me

**What about your attitude towards education? Is that typically working class?**

I think my family are different as the typical view says that education doesn't matter so much, you will get a job - but my mum and dad have always pushed us and really want us to do well, not forcing us but making us really understand that they found it hard after school, my dad said that when he came out of school you could walk into a job, but now you cant' do that, but I know that if he had to go for an interview now he would find it hard as he knows he won't be one of the well educated ones so he wants us to get the best out of our education, so we can say, 'we are just as good as you, we have everything you have with your fancy schools and private education, we have it all!' My family encourage us a lot.

**It sounds that your family are of a major significance to you**

Probably the biggest influence of all, we are all very close and we all talk about everything, and we all know each other's feelings.

## Chapter 14:

### John

I can't write what's in my head, it would be too much - it's like one of those big ball things in the middle, with lots of bits coming off it. Take one thing like going out, I could never write about how I feel going out as I would have to write about one of the little things coming off it, and I'll never be able to manage to write about anything really! If I could have something attached to my brain that could track my thoughts onto paper ...

Can I ask you about speech? How similar is it to what you've just said about the writing? ... Is everything you say in an interview situation, although truthful, just one of many things you could have said?

Yes - because anything you asked me in that interview I could have gone on for hours and hours and hours because it could just have connected to everything - things can just go on in my head for hours, it does my head in ...

So I'm never going to catch up, even if I interviewed you every day!

For the same reason I could never keep a diary, I could never catch up ... that's why I say that I can't write autobiography, all I can do is a question mark

Well what could I do then? How should I proceed if I am interested in getting as much of these thoughts as I can?

Put something into my head! Just have one question, and ask me it every day

*I'm with my dad all week apart from when he can't have me then I'm at my mum's or grandma's. As for my mum - She's not family anymore - just people... I don't speak to her for any reason... I can get to sleep earlier now when I'm pissed. When I'm not pissed it still takes hours. ... Well I drink when I can, whenever I've got the chance but there's no point in drinking unless I can get smashed. I get stoned more often than I did, only when I'm out though. I would take any drugs, only if I'm offered them, I wouldn't buy them...*

**How do the ten students in the study perceive education at the end of KS3, during KS4, and the end of KS4?**

**What do you think the purpose of education should be?**

To learn stuff ... get qualifications and that, you need to get a job and stuff

**How significant is your education to you compared to other aspects of your life?**

Probably the least important thing ... I can't think of anything that means less than that.

**How positive/negative is the view that you have of education?**

Out of ten?

**You could give it out of ten.**

Minus seven.

**That's very negative?**

Yeah, because ... I think you should have a choice to come and without getting anyone fined or owt like that - and it's being forced to do it, like being put in prison or something like that - being forced to learn, it's worse, it's boring - and ... and - you've got to choose all your options and that early and all the teachers say SATS and that are really important and decide your future and all that stuff - they don't mean nowt - and it's pointless, if you want to get qualifications you should have a choice, if you don't ... yeah!

You should have a choice really about whether or not to come. It's not a big deal, just boring.

**What kind of a deal is it? How big a part for instance has it played?**

**Can you give it a %?**

About 40% but that's my fault as I made such a big deal of it

**It sounds like you haven't had a good experience ... what kinds of things have you disliked?**

Having to come, getting up in the morning, the lessons - boring!

**What is your opinion about the teaching you have received during KS3?**

None of it's been good, apart from practical stuff

**What do you think about the education you receive in lessons?**

Depends on what teacher - in some lessons I learn a lot, and in some lessons where the teacher does my head in I can't do nowt, I learn nowt... I think most lessons though I think there's no point learning half the stuff they teach you as you're never gonna use it in the future.

**What do you like/dislike about school?**

I like friends, dinner, and when you don't have to work. I dislike everything else - teachers, apart from you, lessons, yeah - some teachers are worse than others... SB, he needs a slap...

**When you say you don't like teachers, and even think they need a slap, what is it you don't like?**

Cos they think they're better than you, boss you around and that - they try and be all nice with you, then when you're getting on all good and that, they think it's gonna change how you are in lessons ...I think the pupils should be able to choose teachers - because we just mess about all the time. Cos some of the teachers like, SB, no one hardly works in his lesson because he's a muppet and no one likes him, but no one really messes about in his lessons - but some teachers, like Mr Oliver whose left, you can just mess about in his lessons more - it will be alright!

**Do you prefer it when you can mess about?**

Yeah - but you don't do nowt when you mess about - and teachers like TG, you have to work as they're an important person - if it's a teachers that you like, you try and work.

**How do your relationships with your teachers affect your learning?**

Quite a bit - if it's a teacher I don't like I don't work for them - if it's a teacher I do like I try to work - and if it's just someone really strict I have to work, I get forced to.

Which bits struck you as being particularly significant?

The bit about the teachers, some of the things where I said they were alright, now I've got to work all the time, but I've got to work now as I'm with all the strict teachers so I'm not alright with any of them

Are you saying that being made to work is a bad thing?

Yes ...

Going back to your first interview, what do you think someone would think if they read that, and they didn't know you, what would they think the most important issues for you were regarding education?

Someone my age might have thought I was a normal moody teenager type person, on about teachers and not thinking school's good...

What about in the second interview?

I really don't know, I don't know what a normal moody teenager is anymore because I might just be one of them, because everyone else will say 'I hate school' and everything so I don't know. Everything I say might just be the same as everyone saying everyone else feels...

### **How do they perceive any experiences of being supported or challenged educationally?**

Well after the CATs tests I had to do the extension scheme - they weren't as bad as the rest of subjects as we'd been doing them for eleven years of something and it just gets boring; with philosophy, it was better but it got boring after about 3 weeks ... I think it was better though, as it was in a smaller group and it's more relaxed, in the other lessons you're not an individual - just part of a class; you only become an individual when the teacher is telling you off ... or when you doing really good work they notice you.

### **What do you think about studying philosophy?**

Messes you up! Makes you think miles more than you should have to, it's depressing as well sometimes ... there's too much to think about, all the time - cos you've got to think of philosopher's views on stuff, and then you can't help



but get your views into it, then you forget about the philosopher's views and go off on one!

**How do you imagine studying philosophy might affect you in the future?**

I think it will make me crazy - I think it will either - em - make me think about stuff more, like if I die, I'll start thinking about - like if I'm going to jump off a cliff or something like that, risking my life, it will make me think of people I'm leaving and that, and that will be crap, I'll be more scared of doing stuff, you've got to think about what happens

**Does it help you now?**

I don't really know - I always used to think about stuff like why we were here and all that stuff, I eventually came to a point where I think - it's an accident - I don't know, I haven't really figured it out - I've been thinking about it for years and I don't think we're meant to figure it out - if we did, there would be no point us being here anymore! Meaning of life!! I think I'm here for a reason, to do something good. I don't just want to be a builder, it's good and that but I want to do something I actually really want to do, like motor-cross or snowboarding - I can't just have a normal job .. I wouldn't care if I was doing something I really liked, and I got paid 2pence an hour, it would be alright as long as I'm doing something I like, and surviving.

**Will it help you in the future?**

Probably. Thinking about stuff, it will make me think more, and then I really will be crazy - I can see myself in 20 years in the corner of a room, rocking, thinking about the meaning of life and all that stuff -

**Does that worry you that possibility or is it just a sketch?**

I don't know but I don't think I'm going to live very long either...I don't see the point of living ... as you just live to die, you're going to die one day so I don't really care. The only thing I think about when I think of dying is my mum ... I think that's why I like doing snowboarding and all that stuff, as it's fun and I don't really care about killing myself ... I wouldn't commit suicide, I'd do stuff where there was a big chance of me dying, I wouldn't commit suicide - there's no

point committing suicide - I'd do risky stuff, if there was something where there was 90% of dying I'd do it - maybe not now, maybe after I've done more - but I'd do it, it would be fun, and why not? The whole point I think of being here is to have some fun, cos you'll get bored all your life doing the same thing - that's another thing I don't want to do - every day doing the same thing, if I do become a motor cross person and I get really good, and win loads of championships, I don't want to do that for the rest of my life, it's like snowboarding, when that gets the same I'll do something different - yeah - that's why school's crap, it's the same thing everyday. That's why when I used to go kickboxing and that started getting the same and all so I stopped that. It's no fun anymore.

**How do they perceive and conceptualize themselves? How might a notion of ability feature within their self concept?**

**Do you regard yourself as 'labelled'?**

Some teachers think different things, AB thinks I'm really really good and that, and SM thinks I'm really good so when I'm sent there by LB she still thinks I'm really good cos I was good in her lessons ... as for the rest of them, more of them are bad than they are good. RM, LB, JP. OS, JB, just all other teachers, I don't know about SB – what does he think of me Miss?

**I don't know – these other teachers, what have they labelled you as?**

Disruptive ...

**How does this label affect you then?**

It don't – people can think what they think

**Has the good label affected you?**

A bit, as it makes me want to be better cos they still think I'm good, so if anyone tries to get me excluded they can stick up for me and say 'he's usually good in my lesson'.

**How big a gap is there between the person you are when you are left alone with your own thoughts and feelings, and the person (or 'people') the world usually sees?**

When I'm with my parents and my family I have to be different, with my friends, I can just be myself usually – with teachers, I have to be good ... Usually I think different things to what I say, but usually I end up saying it anyway ... When I'm thinking on my own, that's more real – but I like it better when I'm with others ..

**Is it a problem to you balancing different parts of yourself?**

It's annoying – having to live up to people's expectations – I can't be bothered.

My mental health is how I show it on the outside, I think its alright on the inside but you can never really know if you are mental or not - I do think when people are doing stuff like smashing windows I think too much about why they are doing it, like the other day this lad got smashed over the head with this big massive rock, and I knew how he felt as I saw his face, he was going crazy. That's how I used to be with mum. After this lad had smashed him with a rock we saw him later on and he was all sad and that, just thinking it was a waste of time and why did he smash someone over the head. I went a bit crazy myself earlier on, started smashing stuff up - I've done it a few times. And I tried to kill John and Adie at Primrose valley I got bored and started throwing big boulders.

What kind of a feeling does that thought give you?

A confusing one as it makes you feel like you can never be an individual because everyone else is just the same, you just think in your head you are, but when you think about you thinking about it ...

**How do they perceive/categorize/identify themselves in relation to others - such as the school, the family, the peer group and wider society? Do they feel that they are 'included'?**

I dislike people more, not individually but the actual human race, their nature. Every now and again you get someone who is all nice and that but they still have

an evil side. There's no way you can change it, because there are people who are always mean, then there are some like that Flanders person off the Simpsons, he is always nice and that, although it's not good to be nice all the time - there are flaws in everyone and I think it's all a waste a time.

School changes people, character building.

**Is this something the school means to do?**

No it's just where you have people together - like when you mix two colours together they mix in the middle.

I'm with my dad all week apart from when he can't have me then I'm at my mum's or grandmas. As for my mum - She's not family anymore - just people. I don't see her - I did see her the other day but we only spoke about business stuff. I don't speak to her for any reason. In year 11 I've jiggled - that's got worse. I had to stay off a couple of times as my dad couldn't get me here. They nearly chucked me out a few months ago, that's just because BS doesn't like me, because when someone soaked him with that ped and I didn't see it, and then TG was asking me about it, and said 'I am the headmaster, and I regret not excluding you three months earlier.' It's good now because I can get away with anything.

At school now I save the money to buy booze and go to Bread and Things and buy a sandwich, sleeping is better though now. I can get to sleep earlier now when I'm pissed. When I'm not pissed it still takes hours. Well, I'm stressed because I think too much and if I didn't I wouldn't be - and depression, I don't feel that depressed most of the time anymore now as I know there's always something better, I can always cheer myself up. Well I drink when I can, whenever I've got the chance but there's no point in drinking unless I can get smashed. I get stoned more often than I did, only when I'm out though. I would take any drugs, only if I'm offered them, I wouldn't buy them. But I can't get them, I just have a bit of weed and that.

**Who are the most significant people in your life?**

Everyone - it's everyone you meet, everyone you walk by changes you a bit - I'm on buses all the time, I have a thing about buses, if you get a bus ticket like a

day rover you can go anywhere, you feel free. Like this morning I got on a bus and went to the designer outlet, then I go on another bus and went to the station, then I went to the railway museum.

**That whole thing you've just told me about - let's go back to the question -is there any connection between what your life has been like and your attitude towards education?**

When I was living with my mum she would tell me off for no reason and I couldn't be bothered anymore and thought why should I come to school because they can't really do anything?

**So that sense of pointlessness about school ...**

And everything ...

**And everything began then, in year 9 when it was bad for you living with mum?**

She caused my life to be like it is... I talk random shit ---

**Has this got anything to do with your own personal history?**

I think it's got to do with being ignored

**By whom?**

I don't know - it's just not being noticed? I think that that's where the random shit comes from because if you say something that's wrong and that, people don't agree with it and .... you are just putting yourself down a bit to make yourself not feel put down. It's all a bit crazy.

I know stuff, but I don't want to be seen to, even if I know something and the teacher asks, I don't put my hand up, I'll look like a geek - even if I know it. It all comes down to the social status thing!

**Yeah - it sounds like it's an important thing**

Yeah - when I leave school, and work and that, and start new, do what I want, - but if I start doing that now, my life would be crap, cos if I stop hanging around with all the decent people, and then you start getting all the shit and that, like some of the geeks do, they get bullied and that...

What I want to do is a building apprenticeship, work for a few years, move to New Zealand, and just get a little house somewhere there and just work there,

so I can go across whenever I want, be whoever I want, see people from England and that who live in New Zealand so I'll have connections and that and then, it gets snowy as well in winter in New Zealand so I'll go snowboarding, and that will be sorted! I'll never have to move and speak to people really, for years - but you can't really get away with not speaking ...

**No and really you can't move away from yourself either as you go too!**

I'll leave all my personality and that behind and I'll be me! I'm me sometimes - it depends how I'm feeling but I come out with crap all the time - I think I'm quite funny - if I weren't me, and I was someone else, I'd just laugh at me all the time, I come out with some shit.

**What kind of laughter would it be? Would it be a kind laugh or a mocking laugh?**

It would be mocking laughter!

**Could things have gone differently for you? Do you for instance, have any sense of an alternative history that could have been yours?**

Yes, I could have - it depends who you hang around with. I might have just ended up never going to school then ending up working with my mum's boyfriend, getting an apprenticeship with him and have an alright life, and get pissed all the time and it would be alright just like any normal life every now and again. ... and If I had never gone out in year 7, but I did, I wanted to go out

**So what might have been different if you hadn't had this kind of social life?**

It would have been better, I'd have ended up being friends with someone at school. I'd have been a different person... I feel optimistic, I don't know what's going to happen, but it will be good. Instead of thinking it's all a waste of time because I don't like people, school, where I'm living, my mum - and I argue with everyone and I make it worse, but I always look on the bright side!

## Chapter 15:

### Lavinia

Looking at the first interview from year 9, is there anything that you feel is significant about that interview?

I can't really remember doing it

OK - you can't remember -but did it *seem* to you when you were reading through that the things you were saying at the time were the full truth?

Yes probably - it's the same kind of stuff I would say now, nothing's changed really

Did you find anything interesting?

That I didn't really answer your questions

Why do you think that happened?

Because I didn't know what questions you were going to ask - I couldn't think of what to say then, so I just said anything

*I think because my mum and dad are still together I'm quite lucky, and with my brother, I always look up to him and that although he doesn't realise that - yeah so I think I have a good life.*

***How would you describe the social class of your family?***

*Well my dad works at 'x-factory', he is a fork lift man - so working class.*

***Do you think you are typical for working class?***

*Yeah because although we don't have loads of money we are still happy and that, it doesn't really matter that we don't have any money.*

## **How do the ten students in the study perceive education at the end of KS3, during KS4, and the end of KS4?**

### **How significant is your education to you compared to other aspects of your life?**

I think it's important cos you can make a good life for yourself after, but everything else, like sport and everything they don't really make you anything

### **What do you like/dislike about school?**

You get to like, meet all your friends and you can learn stuff, I don't like that you have to do some lessons, like they're not going to make any difference to what you do when you're older and you're just wasting your time when you could be doing more of the stuff that you need for when you're older - like ICT and science and everything.

### **What subjects are most worth studying?**

Textiles, and English cos you have to write don't you, and maths just in case you work in an office or something and you have to do calculations and PE cos it keeps you fit.

### **What is your opinion about the teaching you have received during KS3?**

In yr 7 and 9 that's been good, but in yr 8, in English we didn't really do owt because we didn't really have a, is PN a proper English teacher?

### **SEN really**

She didn't teach us right we just read books – the other subjects are ok

### **What do you think about the education you receive in lessons?**

Depends on the teacher cos some teachers help you and everything and treat you as individuals but others just treat you as a group so if one misbehaves we all have to suffer the consequences really of that person's action.

### **How positive/negative is the view that you have of education?**

I think it's quite positive cos I know that I need it.

### **How do your relationships with your teachers affect your learning?**



If I don't have a good relationship with a teacher then you don't learn as well as you don't really wanna, and they don't help you or anything but if you have a good relationship with them then you respect them and you're good for them and everything.

Everyone that I've seen says they wish they were still in school and that as it's so boring, you don't get to see as many people, and I think everyone wishes they were back, and you get to learn more stuff and it makes you more, a better person I think.

**What parts do people miss? In particular, which parts do you miss?**

The structure of it all and how you've got certain things to do, because now you can do anything you want and you are in control but it's boring!

**How do they perceive any experiences of being supported or challenged educationally?**

**What do you consider to be your most significant successes over the past three years at school?**

Probably doing my GCSEs

**Have you received enough challenge over key stage 3?**

When I was in yr 7 I don't think I did because I was in a lower group I just worked really hard to get up,. But in yr 6, what do we do?

**SATs**

Yes, I didn't do well so I was just put into groups, and then I tried to work really hard

**So you're in top sets now?**

Yes

**And you have enough challenge now?**

Yes

**Have you received sufficient support?**

Yes I have

**What do you think about studying philosophy?**

It's good, cos you get to learn things that you wouldn't have done and it's more like practical and real life cos you can use it.

**How interesting a subject do you think it is?**

I think it's very interesting cos you have to have all your own opinions and you can't really be wrong when you do your own opinions and its good to learn about all the other philosophers and what they think and everything.

**How do you imagine studying philosophy might affect you in the future?**

I think it will like give you more opportunities and stuff cos we've done it early and you can use it as well to do stuff.

**Does it help you now?**

Yeah cos I always do it to my mum and dad to get out of stuff!

**Does it work**

Yeah.

**What do you think about taking philosophy two years early?**

I feel like proud that I'm doing it early and it will bring more opportunities.

**How do you think it will affect you, taking it two years early?**

I think that when I go to university or college, I'll know what its like to do an A level so I can choose how many to do. It's like preparation.

**What are your feelings about any provision made available to you on the basis of being clever, actually, to what extent are you aware of being regarded as clever?**

Well when we did sociology I thought most people were doing it so I didn't think I had been chosen but with that NAGTY I must have been chosen for that as people didn't do it. It made me feel special as there only a few of us. I look at all the courses and there are some unique things, but I haven't done any as I wouldn't know anyone and I think everyone looks really brainy and I don't think I could do it. With the early GCSEs I took that was good as I did it at the same time as my brother in year 11 and I got higher than him.

**How do they perceive and conceptualize themselves? How might a notion of ability feature within their self concept?**

**Do you regard yourself as 'labelled'?**

Yes they think that you just get on with your work and are never in trouble

**Does this annoy you?**

Yes – I'm not sure, I try and make it so I am what they're labelled me but sometimes I can't so .....

**Would you want to be labelled like this?**

No –

**Have you been labelled by pupils?**

Yes – some pupils think that you're really brainy and know everything and they ask you and if you don't know the answer then they just think you don't want to tell them. People see me as like quiet and stuff like that, but they don't know what I'm really like doing and stuff

**There's quite a big gap?**

Yes – it only spills out when I'm with my cousin – she's the same age and I get on with her really well.

**Apart from with your cousin, the gap between the part that people don't see and do see, is that getting bigger or smaller over time?**

It's getting smaller as I didn't used to tell anyone anything but now I do in school.

**What's making the gap shrink?**

Having more friends that are the same as you like – I don't know

**Do you prefer the way you feel when you are on your own, or with different groups of people?**

When I'm with different groups of people like my friends cos I'm like more of me, cos when I'm on my own I'm just like bored, and I don't really think anyway.

**What do you like/dislike about yourself?**

I like friends that I've got cos they're all nice and they don't try and make you bad at school or whatever and I don't like em, the way that other people think about me, do you know like people in the main group, people who ... do you know who I mean?

**Yeah, you mean the 'crowd'?**

Yeah

**What if you're talking more personally, about your personality - what do you like/ dislike?**

I think I'm like, I'm not nasty well I don't mean to be nasty, I wouldn't be nasty to anyone who hadn't done anything to me really, and I respect other people and their stuff. I dislike how I'm too quiet and don't have enough confidence or anything around certain people.

Have you noticed any changes from the person you are now and the person as is represented in these documents?

Well I think I don't really care what people think anymore - I think I've changed

Do you think that's the same for everyone? Do people tend to care less as they get older?

Probably

In your own case - what do you think would have been the bigger issue, the 'learning' that you spoke of earlier, or the bit about caring what others thought?

Probably thinking of what people thought of you as you're more conscious of it aren't you?

Its funny though in a way as the 'thinking of what people thought of you' isn't really mentioned in the interviews - why do you think this is?

Probably because it's harder to talk about

**How do they perceive/categorize/identify themselves in relation to others - such as the school, the family, the peer**

**group and wider society? Do they feel that they are 'included'?**

**What do you think other people in the philosophy group think about you?**

That I'm like a geek or something cos like most of the people in that group I don't hang around with out of school so they don't really know what I'm like so they'll just think I'm like what I'm like in lessons, quiet and everything.

**How do you regard your social status, in and out of school?**

I think out of school, I have, kind of social status cos they're my best friends and everything but in school I don't think that I have high status cos like - well with some people I have but with other people they don't even know who I am so ... I think because my mum and dad are still together I'm quite lucky, and with my brother, I always look up to him and that although he doesn't realise that - yeah so I think I have a good life.

**How would you describe the social class of your family?**

Well my dad works at 'X-factory', he is a fork lift man - so working class.

**Do you think you are typical for working class?**

Yeah because although we don't have loads of money we are still happy and that, it doesn't really matter that we don't have any money.

**What about your attitude towards education? Is that typical for a working class girl?**

I didn't used to see the point in coming to school and I didn't use to like it, but now it's over I do!

**So are you saying that the not wanting to come is typical working class?**

Yes, I would rather have been in a job.

**Do you still feel like that?**

No, in a job you only get to do one thing but in a school you get to do lots of different things, subjects and that so you get to explore it. I'm doing A levels next term.

**Have you got any explanation of why your attitude has changed from typical working class to what it is now?**

I have realised you get more out of jobs once you have more qualifications and you can get a better job and you won't have to do the same thing every day. You will have loads of other options. I think my mum and dad used to always say you should do it so you can get a good job. They would say that they were stuck in their jobs as they didn't have any qualifications and have been in their jobs for 20 years and they wish they could change but they can't - so they have made me do all I could so I won't be the same.

**It sounds like your family have been the major influence on your decisions.**

Yes because if they hadn't have pushed me I wouldn't have really bothered about it and if they hadn't shown me what could happen I wouldn't have had the situation they had

**Could things have gone differently for you? Do you for instance, have any sense of an alternative history that could have been yours?**

Yes because in year 7, if everyone had pictured you as a certain kind of person then all the way through your school life you would have to keep up to that image wouldn't you? So then you wouldn't want to do as well as you would have to be seen as that picture.

**What kind of person do you think you could have been pictured as right at the beginning?**

Just as someone who didn't want to do it. I probably wouldn't have done the GCSEs or not as well, and then there wouldn't have been the choice of going to college and I would have just have had to do what I could get.

## Chapter 16:

### 'My Voice - 2'

This space, that I am taking up now, is traditionally the proper location of analysis. The convention is that having presented the data, the researcher then interrogates the data, discovers patterns and suggests explanations. But as I have stated in my methodology section, I have decided that I will not presume to explain, or interpret the voice of the Other. I have instead, restricted myself to: some comments on how I (as opposed to a neutral 'passive third' persona) feel and think about the data; some analysis directed at my own role in the study, and, having adapted Huxtable's concept of *Living Educational Theory* (2009), where the "research questions and answers do not stand apart" and the "researchers' descriptions and explanations" of the learning achieved through the course of the research are "recognised as shaping the meaning and significance of their practice" - I have also included some comments regarding how my practice and subsequent philosophy changed during the course of the study.

Originally, at the very dawn of my research, I had the intention of exploring the concepts of 'able' and 'gifted', first via my literature review but then also through student voices, and their comments about education, identity, and any extra educational provision made due to an identification of their being able. My study was to have a particular focus on an extension scheme to which all of the participants belonged, and the subsequent effects on their self concept and attainment. I had hoped my findings would show that an identification of ability followed by appropriate provision, would lead to a rise in attainment, and self confidence which would subsequently open up pathways to higher education for students of mainly lower working class backgrounds who came from families that had not previously had access.

Thinking about this intention now, some several years later, I am abashed at how naïve, even arrogant this seems. There is the paternalistic, even

egotistical belief that 'I' could trigger a process that began with *me* identifying students with ability (the implication being that it was therefore 'I' who was to be the begetter of access to higher education); there is my lack of sophistication in defining the students without hesitation as 'working class' - and the rather simplistic (even romantic belief) in the uncontested goodness of 'higher education pathways'. I believed to begin with, that the students would all do well, and that this would allow me the opportunity of delivering, if not a kick, at least a nudge at the prevailing mainstream perspective on giftedness. I reasoned that if the students in the school where I worked, who had predicted grades that fell within the average category, could attain grades that were indicative of giftedness using the NAGTY criteria (who still existed at the outset of my study, and who I regarded as the government mouthpiece on giftedness) I would have demonstrated how giftedness was not an absolute, but something that varied depending on provision. This would have been at odds with the mainstream view of giftedness that retained the notion of absolute intelligence.

Again, looking back in hindsight, I regard this as very naïve. I had assumed much about my own powers, and the potential of the 'critical thinking scheme' and had totally underestimated (and not fully understood, as I shall be suggesting further on in this section) just how very corrosive the tentacles of an unequal class system could be. Perhaps this is partly due to the way I had appropriated the more radical elements of Freire; it certainly strikes me, looking back through 'My Voice-1', that there appears to be a self-conscious strand of rebellion in the pieces I have selected to say about myself. I comment on how I was keen to be different. The graffiti-ing, occasional truancy, and disaffection were all part of that. I was on the cusp of the punk generation, and identified with rebellious perspectives, and I note that I have positioned myself within the narratives of this section, as a kind of Robin Hood figure, launching one-woman attacks against the system. I also seem to dwell in 'My Voice-1', on my role in righting the wrongs of others, whether this is due to bullying, racism, or just children's thoughtlessness. Something of this tendency, in combination with bits and pieces of Freire, can be glimpsed in the opening stages of my data



gathering, where I appear to conceptualize myself as fighting on behalf of the working classes, to create a level playing field. When the various strands of the early stages of this study are looked at together (parts of the introduction, a large proportion of the literature review, the first bit of the methodology section and some of the documents that make up 'My Voice-1') - it is possible to see how I have been fashioning for myself a certain persona, one that gets involved in issues of justice.

Yet an obvious criticism of gifted education is that it can be very elitist, even unjust, to those who are excluded from the gifted definition. So one of the questions I would ask the person I was at the beginning of the research process would be, 'What reason did you have for positioning yourself as you did? How, in short, did you manage to conceptualize yourself as being on the side of the angels?'

At the time, I had would have reasoned that able students in challenging schools were not included fully, in the sense that these students did not receive appropriate provision, and that they could not therefore achieve the self actualisation, which I believe (still) is an important component of inclusion. With hindsight, I suspect that the concept of giftedness was only palatable to me as I applied a human rights perspective, whereby the gifted were seen as a minority group who needed support, and advocacy. I like things to be fair, indeed I have mentioned this as mattering to me in 'My Voice-1', and I suspect I would find it difficult to sleep at night if I thought I had become part of the mainstream; bolstering up an elite. But it could be argued, and I am of this opinion myself now, that in trying to acquire for a small group of working class students some access to the privileges more commonly enjoyed by students from middle class backgrounds, I had neglected to consider the rights of the many. Ultimately it is possible to argue that the extension scheme could be regarded as having an unintentional ideological function and that rather than opposing the mainstream view, my work could be conceptualized as sustaining it. Later on in this chapter, I will explore this idea in more depth.

To begin with though, and especially given my grand claims to be inspired by writers such as Freire, I will consider two things - firstly, how the space for reflection that I provided for my participants affected them individually. Were they aware of changing in any way, in particular, with regard to how they *considered* their identity and their access to higher education pathways? Secondly I shall reflect upon whether, to date, the life chances/educational pathways of the students have shown any sign of actual change following on from any alterations in perception.

This section has been organized to show the views of the participants on these issues, to demonstrate how they reflected on the wider context and have considered for example, the role of social class. But I have also given some of my own thoughts, together with biographical information (gathered in preparation for the exit interviews), and comments about current career destinations (at the time of writing: June 2009).

Looking back at the student chapters, I found several comments that could be read as demonstrating how there was a keen awareness of how the identification of 'able' functioned as a label, and how this in turn affected identity and also future plans. The finding that labelling affects identity and subsequent progress confirms the findings of classic micro-sociological studies from Keddie (1971) onwards, although I have perhaps provided a slightly different angle through my focus on the impact of labelling as perceived by so-called gifted pupils.

Ellie for example stated:

*"In primary school I was always labelled as a stupid person - I was! I was never quite brilliant at things and I had a hard experience of school when I was younger, they all thought, 'she's shy, she's stupid!' - so I was always stuck on the green table - but when I came here and I was on the extension scheme I thought, 'wow, I am clever and I can do this!' and it kind of opened it out more, and I had more of an opportunity to expand, and now I'm coming out with coursework at an A grade which was something that if you've said it to me at eight or nine, you wouldn't have believed it, I would have*

*probably cried in a corner as it wasn't something I was likely to achieve, I wasn't expected to pass the SATs as I wasn't that good at English... Yes, if I hadn't have got on the extension scheme I would probably have failed - failed my exams, it was a big confidence boost, it made me realise I can do this - I already have two Cs, and I am going on to do the highest level of the course I want to do at college."*

This comment of Ellie's makes me shiver when I read it. It highlights the power of the labeller, and credits the extension scheme at Greengate in transforming her life. Ellie pinpoints succinctly why this worked - it boosted her confidence and made her believe she could achieve.

Anthony commented:

*"The extension scheme and philosophy have been good as you actually feel like you are learning in them as there is no one who messes about and you sort of feel, it's much better, its people who have been chosen so they think, oh I must be clever, and they think, the people in this group must be clever, so they don't feel the need to show off to their stupid mates who just like to mess about, so if you've been chosen to do a smart thing, it makes you feel privileged and you don't feel the need to mess about so you learn better and feel better. You don't feel pressure to be badly behaved."*

Again, Anthony seems aware, just like Ellie, of what a powerful thing it is, to be 'chosen' for being 'clever', and he talks about how the behaviour in the group changes as a direct result of the identification, and creates an atmosphere far more conducive to learning. He talks about feeling better, which I guess could be seen as a sense of belonging with like minded peers, as in a class like this one, there is no longer any pressure for him to behave badly and be one of the lads.

David's view was that...:

*"The A level philosophy was good, I enjoyed that, I'm going to do it next year if I don't pass. The extension scheme was good; I have got 3 GCSEs before I took all of them... this has prepared me for my normal GCSEs in year 11 as I had an idea of what they were like and the A level, even if*

*I do fail, it has got me prepared for doing my other A levels. It makes you feel better about yourself knowing you can do them earlier, it gives you a bit more confidence."*

Like Ellie, David commented on the increased level of confidence, and suggests this will be instrumental in helping him to tackle A levels. Like Andrew he talks about how the extension scheme made him feel better, although whereas Andrew thought this was to do with being able to learn in class without the pressure to behave badly, David is referring to a heightened self belief. It is interesting that both boys mention 'feeling better', as if in conventional educational settings they do not feel good.

The comments above, regarding the role played by labelling a person as able, point to the link between identification, provision, and subsequent rise in self confidence and attainment. The perception that there has been a rise in attainment is to an extent borne out by the GCSE and AS/A level grades gained. (see appendix a.) I am aware that this is not an original pattern to have discovered, although focusing on gifted students and labelling is possibly slightly unusual, and I have looked at the positive function of labelling as opposed to the more usual studies that have explored the negative functions; never-the-less, I have found some evidence that strengthens the findings of the many studies in this area.

However, whilst I have found that perceptions and even identity can change, and there is the implication (see Ellie's comment above for example) that consequently a life *might* be shaped by the decision to identify as able (or not), I have not found much evidence to suggest that lives *have* been changed in any significant way. Looking at Cathy for example, it is interesting to consider her highly defined and extremely positive comments about the power of education as copied below, in the light of her family background whereby she faced eviction in year 8, lived in an overcrowded council house with six siblings and her single mother, and was traumatised by the murder of her uncle in year 9. Her statement that: "*nothing is going to get in my way in the future*" could be considered brave and uplifting.

*"I think I've done as well as I could! Most people wouldn't predict I've done an A level in year 10 or 11! I think I've broke out of the frame or image of my social class ...I've always thought that the best thing to do is try your hardest, and doing those things early was a way of doing harder stuff, learning new stuff, I like learning new stuff. I especially liked sociology, and philosophy - its different things! I don't like doing the same old things again and again, I like doing something new. .. Family circumstances haven't affected my education as much as most people might have thought they would... things were really bad, but I suppose I just wanted to get on with it, not let things faze me and get in the way... I feel really strong, ... everything I've been through has just prepared me - nothing is going to get in my way in the future. I'm going to go to college, then university. I'm doing law, psychology, English combined and sociology. Then after that I'll take it step by step. I never thought that all the things that have happened to me would happen to me so you've just got to be ready for anything."*

Cathy did well at secondary school, far better than her average/high-average base-line entrance data would have predicted. She attained 11 x GCSEs at grade C or above and a full 'A' level in Philosophy. At 14yrs old, her GCSE grades on the extension scheme secured her entrance to NAGTY. She participated on a 3 week summer school in law at the end of year 10 for NAGTY pupils. She seemed to be doing well at sixth form too, and attained 'B' and 'A' grades in her 'AS' levels. However, Cathy failed to attend her final exams at the end of the upper sixth, her reason being that her boyfriend had just finished with her, and she subsequently dropped out of college a few months later. She is now pregnant and looking forward to being a mother.

Similarly Carol, who expressed the view that she, was determined to pursue a higher education pathway, which sounded all the more convincing for her realistic-sounding assessment of some of the barriers she would encounter. Carol, who as the youngest of four children, looked set to be the first in her family to complete statutory schooling with grades of 'C' or above. Her family life had been chaotic, her elder sister left school at 15yrs to have a baby, and one of

her brothers had failed to complete yr 11. Her brother-in-law died when she was in year 10, and she spent some time in a refuge due to domestic violence in year 9. In year 10 Carol's attendance plummeted (coinciding as she says in one of her interviews with heavy cannabis consumption), and then deteriorated further in year 11 where she had an attendance of 10%. Carol gave birth to her daughter 2 weeks before the final GCSE exams. This said, Carol had a firmly held belief that education was her 'way out' and a perception of herself as distinct from and different to the stereotypical 'working class' girl:

*"...a typical working class girl does not appreciate education at all and I appreciate it - I didn't when I was going through it but now I do, but it's a bit late really. Typical working class girls, Chavs, think it doesn't matter anyway and you can go on the dole and live in a council flat and be a hairdresser, whether you've got an education or not, they just don't care but I do. I think it's important for your life, I should have appreciated it at the time and got on with it better, because basically a good education means a good career path which means more money and a better quality of life ... Definitely I'm going to college but not this year, it's just everything I'd planned to do, go to college and get a decent salaried job and stuff is definitely going to happen still but it's delayed. I'd find it morally wrong to leave my daughter in the early stages, where she's crawling and talking and getting her first teeth - and going to college, if I went at that time, I'd feel really guilty. I'd rather, well I wouldn't rather, it's just what I've got to do, live off tax payers money just why she gets a bit older and I can put her in a crèche and then do what I wanted to do to start off with. It's not that my whole life has gone down-hill and ruined because I've had a baby, it's just that the things that I wanted to do are delayed, which doesn't bother me that much as I get to enjoy what I've got in the meantime"*

Carol attained 5 GCSE grades of 'C' or above, including 2 x 'A' grades, and 2 x 'B' grades. She also gained an 'AS' level in Philosophy. By the end of year 9, when she had gained 2x GCSEs at grade 'B', and the year after, she applied to sixth form. Carol's baseline entrance data in year 7 indicated that she was of high average ability. Despite the grades achieved on the extension

scheme, the 'AS' level in philosophy (one of the three units was scored as a 'B' grade) and apart from in English where she gained 'A' grades, this potential was not realised elsewhere. Carol did apply to Sixth-form College, but lasted only a few weeks due to her inability to afford the child-care. She applied again the year after, and the same happened. Carol's mum has since died, and now she and her partner are currently unemployed and living at his parents. Carol has no plans to try 'A' level courses again.

David's case shows a similar pattern. Like Cathy and Carol his personal background had presented him with situations and experiences the average child would not have to encounter. His father, a street drinker, was murdered when David was 13 yrs old, and his early memories of family life included images of violence and domestic abuse. Also like Cathy and Carol, David expressed determination that he would be 'breaking the mould':

"(To what extent are you a typical working class lad?)

*I'm probably not! Most working class lads don't like education, and if they get excluded they don't care, they just mess around... I enjoy school!*

(So how do you explain the difference? Not only have you had a typical working class background but it could be argued you have had more struggles to face than most people, so why is it that your attitude is a positive one?)

*You've helped me enjoy school because all these extra things have made me feel better about myself. And my mum always taught me that an education is important so there is pressure on me to do well in school and try... I want to live a good life, not a wasted sort of life, I want to do some good things, I want my name to be remembered when I'm dead for good things... First step is to get some 'A' levels ... and then join the army for 5 or 10 years, then do physiotherapy or psychiatry - I want to do a job that is interesting but I haven't worked out yet what it is, something to help people, I wouldn't mind being the prime-minister to be honest! I would have a lot of impact, my name would be remembered and I could help lots of people."*

David gained 9 x GCSES at grade 'C' or above including 2 he had gained in year 9. He also gained a full 'A' level in philosophy. When he arrived

at Greengate in year 7 his baseline data was indicative of high average ability. David completed sixth form but didn't do very well in his finals. At present he has a part-time bar job. He is not looking for any other employment or a place on a university course. David's mother believes he is depressed, and recently in conversation with me cited an example of how David had intended to have a 'gap year' in Europe before going on to university, but got as far as Leeds festival and came home.

Daryl had also had a childhood that presented some difficulties. His mother had been an alcoholic, who left Daryl's father when Daryl and his brother were young. He had seen her rarely since, and towards the end of the research, heard that she had died, after having lived the last few years of her life in a hostel. Whilst Daryl had not expressed any desire to go to university, he had wanted to go to college.

*"Now that I've left, I've been working with my dad practically every day, earning a bit of money to put in the bank, then college hopefully, if I get in. You would be like Site manager when you've finished, and with the construction you do business, and maths and CAD, so I've decided to do the certificate in that"*

Daryl started in year 7 with average baseline data, and he left school with 7 x GCSEs at C grade or above. The intention he had of going to college to study construction at a high level had seemed realistic however he dropped out of college very early on. Since then has had a variety of casual jobs, and has something of an alternative life-style, with a focus on drugs and drug-culture.

John also has drifted into an acceptance of low-level criminality. He was sentenced by the Crown Court a couple of months ago for an assault. John is estranged from both parents, and does not work. The lower-working class macho stereotype with its acceptance of deviant life-styles seems to have emerged and subsumed ideas that both Daryl and John had earlier in their lives and expressed in my study, about educational pathways.



Brenda and Ellie both work in nurseries, which, it could be argued, reflects the typical gender-stereotype for working class females, with its emphasis on the nurturing female role, a view which can also be seen in the case of Cathy and Carol who became young mothers. For working-class females, there is a large emphasis placed on relationships and families. Lavinia who deferred her university entrance in order to work in a shop and be with her boyfriend, could also be seen to reflect something of this perspective. But interestingly, in the case of Beth, who like Carol was a young mother (at 17yrs), there have been some changes.

Beth's personal circumstances as a younger teenager were not easy. Beth was a victim of sexual abuse during her yr 8 and 9, and towards the end of year 9, testified against the perpetrator (who received a jail sentence). This took place on the actual day of her sociology GCSE exam. Beth sat the exam at 7.00am in the morning in the head-teacher's office so that she could go to court later to testify as a witness.

(Are you a typical working class girl?)

*No! Because I'm not common, what I think is common - I don't know that's me just being mean, stereotypical.*

(Well what do you mean by common?)

*They all just do the same as each other, smoke, drink at weekends, if someone does something, even if someone says, 'what are they doing that for?', they will still do it and want to be in there with the crowd. Even like grown-ups do it, one of my friends at work, they all seem to be having babies as everyone is having babies, and I'm not one of those... I think they just think that you go to school, leave school and that's it, may be go to college but drop out of college, but they don't really go any further than that, then they have a baby, and move into a council house - that's what I think. What I want to do is go to college, may be go to university or something that is like it, and then I want to have a good job, and want my own house - not rented off the council or anyone else.*

(What would ghost Beth be doing?)

*She'd be like Carol, with a baby!"*

Beth attained 9 x GCSEs at C or above, including 5 at grade A and the 2 GCSEs she had gained in year 9. She also achieved the full 'A' level in Philosophy. Beth had baseline entrance data indicative of above average ability. On completing Greengate, Beth went to sixth form college and continued to do well gaining 3 good A level grades. She gained a university place at 'x-city', but somewhat ironically, given Beth's view as stated above, gave birth to a daughter 2 months after completing her exams. Beth spent a year out, living on her own in a flat, (with a great deal of support from her mother), but enrolled at university in September 2009, on a midwifery course.

Anthony is the other participant to have definitely taken up a higher education pathway (Lavinia may do in the future - at present she is intending to, but has not actually enrolled). Perhaps the fact that Anthony and his family moved to New Zealand immediately after he had taken his GCSEs had some bearing on this. He is now on his second year at university, studying international business.

One question that haunts me at the end of my study is why did only two of the ten participants gain access to higher education pathways, despite most of them wanting this for themselves? They made phenomenal progress in some cases, and attained grades that would have placed them on a par with students from any school anywhere. Whilst it is not within the remit of my study to answer this question (after all, I intended to 'explore' rather than 'explain') my suspicion now is that Hatcher (2006) was along the right lines when he commented on how the class system impacted negatively on the ultimate educational achievements, and by implication, range of choices for career destinations of students like the ones at my school. As cited earlier in my research:

*"If you want to know how well a child will do at school, ask how much its parents earn. The fact remains that after more than 50 years of the welfare state and several decades of comprehensive education, that family wealth is the single biggest predictor of success in the school system. Of course some children from well-off homes don't do well at school and some children*

*from poor backgrounds succeed, the overall pattern is clear: social class, defined in terms of socio-economic status, correlates closely with attainment at school.” - (p. 202)*

Whilst it had not been my intention to focus on the meanings and definitions of ‘social class’, ‘poverty’ and ‘inequality’, I think I have shown something, in the student chapters, of how these external, system-wide factors do contribute to restrict expectations and future pathways. However, in hindsight I wish I had devoted more space to unpicking these terms. If I had, I suspect my study would have had more political power, and I would have perhaps avoided falling into the very same trap I had warned about in my literature review, namely, being lulled into the use of the gifted discourse, with the subsequent (unintentional) concealment of the pernicious effects of class, inequality or poverty. For example, it could be reasoned, that if my (or any) gifted programme worked then it couldn’t be the class system at fault but something else. But although there were some examples of success, it didn’t work in any kind of convincing way. The end results were just as Hatcher had suggested, “*some children from poor backgrounds succeed*” - whilst social class “*correlates closely with attainment at school*”.

I wish I had shouted louder, ‘look at this, it is unfair’ when commenting on the lifestyles of the students in the introduction, underlining the sheer scale of the task of ‘levelling the playing field’, when a child has been sexually abused, or evicted, or has had a close relative murdered. Out of the ten students participating in my study, two had had close relatives murdered (David and Cathy), and three had a dead parent by the end of the study (Daryl, David, Carol). Surely something is very wrong in society when there can be such a high concentration of death, and of social and personal problems in such a small group of students. And something IS wrong - the evidence is there in the figures I so carefully cited to sketch a picture of Greengate as being relatively poor. In my introduction however, I skim over the implications of this, and even express a view that the gifted programme has helped to change things round.

It could be argued that teachers such as myself, who quietly beaver away, implementing extension schemes and the like, whilst intending to empower disaffected, under-achieving gifted students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, may end up doing more to maintain the status-quo than teachers who have opted to teach the straightforward curriculum. In demonstrating how the 'right' kind of provision enables (some) students like the ones who participated in my study do as well as students anywhere, one could argue that the solution to inequalities of educational access lies in the hands of individual students, teachers and schools - rather than assigning the responsibility of rectifying any imbalance to the government, or wider society. If, the argument goes, one person can do it, then so can they all. This is the very last thing I intended. I am aghast to think that my own research could be used to show how the effects of social disadvantage are combatable at a micro level, as students like Beth can do well, regardless of personal difficulties.

This thought triggers another, to do with my workplace now. We, the teachers, are expected to work hard to enable a child to attain their FFT score (Fischer Family Trust prediction), regardless of the child's personal circumstances - and it is somehow seen as if those who do mention life circumstances are 'missing the point' of potential. The FFT target is, according to common sense knowledge, the *real* figure, and we are somehow doing the students a disservice if we are so misguided as to mention our suspicion that sometimes they don't have things as easy as children in other schools or even ourselves, the mainly middle class teachers. Whilst the FFT database works by averaging data received from pupils in similar circumstances, and that there is for instance some consideration of whether or not a child has free school meals, there is nothing factored in for a murdered uncle, overcrowded house, 7 days per week worth of super-noodles for tea, a lack of winter coat, a fifteen year old sister with a baby who shares your bedroom, a parent in prison, nobody in the family with a wage, an abusive boy/girlfriend. The FFT predictions presuppose an *average* child in certain circumstances, who probably doesn't have to face many of these obstacles in their life, and probably has a home computer and at

least one supportive parent, and probably eats a good nice meal each evening, and probably doesn't have an elder sibling with a drug habit, or a family member who has been to prison for a violent crime.

At this point in my working life, I have stepped aside from the title of 'Gifted and Talented Coordinator', to re-emerge as 'Inclusion Leader', where the 'proper' task of my job is to do with Social Inclusion and leading Others, from the top, to methods of work that are as inclusive as possible. I can of course act-out my desire to be Robin Hood more readily now, but in my less cynical moments I feel comfortable at having created a policy for the school that regards 'all individuals as having a combination of talents and weaknesses'.

## Chapter 17:

### Conclusion

Above all, this study has been concerned with 'voice', and whilst I have had *something* to contribute to the sum of knowledge in the area of ability, as explored in the previous chapter, my major contribution to knowledge, is my work on 'voice'. But what is my contribution to the study of 'voice'? And perhaps more fundamentally, given the plethora of voices that there always appear to be on any subject, in any place - what makes this an important area for study?

It often seems to me that modern life is white noise, words bandied about, blaring out in the media, in the playground, in the streets, people shouting down their phones, littering 'Face-book' and social networking sites with cheap words that devalue the price of speech, and over-inflate their meaning. Words torn apart in text messaging, blaring in i-pod ears, accessible in their millions at a push of the button on the Internet, pinning the word-surfer to the interminable dribbling of the blog and the twitter ... And then there are the words without speakers, copied and pasted and forwarded to hundreds of 'my friends' - so the sense of ownership and authorship when you say 'I think ...' is vanishing fast, and the identity of the audience is never known or cared about. How tiring it is to attempt to unravel the layers of sound, intertwined like dirty grey threads, to try to uncover a person, becoming themselves through the medium of talk. As for the external world - it too has a voice, like a long deadly sneer, a voice that absorbs fire and spirit, and difference, and assimilates it all into homogeneity. In this day of enhanced communication where words are cheap and silence rare, and we can launch our words in a split second to a destination across the world, how ironical it is that the face to face encounter with an Other seems to be something that is becoming rarer, and that the breadth of modern communication seems to have been achieved at expense to its depth.

In my study, I was concerned from beginning to end with the voice of the Other, using a concept of the Other than owed much to Levinas and to Buber. My concept of voice thus has ethical and metaphysical implications. The relation between the Other and I, expressed through language, is a gesture of 'reaching out', or of bridge-building. There can be no I without the Other, no living ("real living") without meeting Others, within the face to face relation. My use of the concept 'voice' has thus been very different to how it is often conceived in modern life; I have strived to remember that all speech has been uttered by a person, whilst remembering that the relationship between the words as they are eventually recorded on the page bears an extremely complex relationship to this same person. Much of my study has been devoted to exploring the nature of this relationship.

My initial focus had been the voices of the ten students identified as able. What would these students say about their educational experiences? What kinds of questions would be most useful when eliciting student voice? How should the voices be conceptualized and presented?

There was, in the second instance my own voice as teacher/research interviewer. Was I using different voices, expressing different aspects of my role in relation to the students, at different times? If so, did this matter? What was the relationship between the voice of the teacher and that of the researcher? What were the implications of this for the quality of the data that can be gathered in a longitudinal study?

There were also those fragments and/or traces of speech once spoken by indeterminate others, glimpsed either second hand through the eyes of the students, and referred to as the family, the peer group, authority, society etc, or gleaned through the quotations I have cited, and written into my study. In a study that purported to be concerned with the ethics of representation, how should I conceptualize and respond to these voices? Were they exempt from the careful consideration I gave when considering my primary data? If so - how could this be justified?

There was, in the final instance my voice as a writer. What was the relationship between the writing I had produced and the comments that were originally made by the students? Did it matter that I had sometimes slipped into using a rather dogmatic passive voice when analysing literary texts, whilst at other times I took up a more passionate stance when commenting on the ethics of representing the voices of others? And what relationship did the sections where I am self consciously writing from my own perspective, and taking pains to signpost this, even to the extent of naming chapters in the study: 'My Voice -1', and 'My Voice 2' - have with those parts of the study where I have seemingly erased the personal, to take up the mantle of the expert? There was for example a comment I made in 'My Voice-1' (p.120) where I have transcribed a comment I said to Anthony, when my role was that of interviewee. I am aware that this appears as a rather naive opinion to express on the effects of setting on students. As a writer of research I would have wanted to insert a reference to some of the studies that have been produced on this subject, Hallam and Ireson (2005) for example, and given a more measured reflection. However, I have allowed my expressive voice, the voice of the person I was when in an interview situation with Anthony, emerge.

When evaluating my study, in addition to all of the above, the reader would need to be mindful of the criteria I had outlined earlier, (Bryman 2008). In this respect, I would suggest firstly, that my research *could* be regarded as having some authenticity, and I like to think there is an expressive quality to these sections of my work, which allows something of the characters of the students to emerge. There are also occasions when my study achieves "ontological authenticity" in so far as participants perceive that they have arrived at a "better understanding of their social milieu" -(Bryman, 2008, p379). For example, Ellie suggests that seeing her words written on the paper, strengthens her view of herself and her life:

"So these words on this paper represent what was and is actually going on in your head?"

Yes ... it's strange, it's like looking in my own head!



So in the year 9 interview for instance, was that the whole truth?

Yes, and lots of it is the truth for now too.

So that document is quite a permanent record ...

It's like a diary - the things I really believe about things ... it's nice for me to know that someone knows what I think, without judging me or anything, it's like having a diary"

Similarly Anthony stated at one point that it was the interview itself which enabled him to realise things:

**"So how long have you felt like that?**

*I only just realised I feel it, since I've been doing this interview"*

I considered I had been at pains to be scrupulously honest with myself, even painfully so in places, particularly where I record my self criticisms and how I changed as a result of these. I had achieved a measure of triangulation by giving the students copies of their interviews to analyse, and furthermore, I had included whole sections (My Voice-1 and 2) specifically for the purpose of underlining who I was and what I believed, which would have helped with the transparency and also the credibility. My introduction had established the context of my work place and my role as teacher and G&T coordinator; thus showing my credentials as someone who was experienced in the practical matters of schooling, and thus a credible contributor to this debate.

I am fairly confident my study is authentic and trustworthy - so there is some degree of 'fit' with the criteria suggested by Guba and Lincoln, and also this would mean it goes some of the way to satisfying the criteria of Yardley; as his notion of 'coherence' is similar to (and arguably contained within) that of Guba and Lincoln's 'authenticity'. The high importance I have placed on ethics throughout my research, for example in the way I am so careful to show respect to the Other, in combination with my desire to show loyalty to my workplace and providing anonymity for my surroundings, suggests 'sensitivity to context'.

As for whether my study shows 'commitment and rigour' I certainly *feel* I was committed and rigorous - but ultimately I suspect this is more for the reader to judge than myself. Similarly when it comes to evaluating how 'important' my work is and whether it has 'impact'.

My thesis has underlined just how multifaceted the concept of 'voice' is, and provides some evidence to show that it is a concept that is highly contested, philosophically rich, and one worthy of further exploration. With regards to education for example, a focus on 'voice' in the 'student/teacher' relationship, leads to research that shows the importance of listening to students, according them the respect and status of Others, whilst also pointing to the significance of the teacher's voice. The comments I have copied on the next page from the interview-transcripts suggest that if the teacher's voice is loud and clear and positive, then this may remain in the student's memories as an echo, even after they have moved on.

On reflection, when I had been a student myself, this had been the case for me. Even though I had spoken, in 'My-Voice 1', about being invisible and anonymous at school, I realise it wasn't entirely true. The 'Sir' who was mentioned in 'My Voice-1' was a strong influence on me, and I corresponded with him for several years after leaving school. He was my imagined audience for my song writing, essays at university, and for any comments I wished to make about any books I had read. I am in my 40s now but I can still hear that voice. And I also had a second teacher, who taught me sociology, and whose politics certainly shaped my own, and whose views were the measure by which I gauged other political perspectives for many years to come.

When I had been interviewed by Anthony, I had commented fully on how I conceptualised the teacher voice.

*"I think it's nearly impossible to do it by yourself, as one, you don't know the ropes, two, you haven't got the model for you to see in front of you how to do it, the hard thing for me is, that when someone is in school I can support them loads, and think to myself, 'that's it, they're sorted' but then in those two years anything can happen, and all the things they've learned in school, whether from me or someone else, just get diluted or forgotten and they end up with other voices in their lives being more insistent, the university idea just becomes forgotten, so that is what I think happens time and time again, and I was*

*just hoping that the extension scheme would push someone a bit further into that two years before they begin to forget."*

I was interested to find this reference to 'other voices' and how I had characterised the extension scheme as a springboard, but also by implication a voice. I thought about this, and wondered, if it did have a voice, what kinds of things would it have been saying ... and amused myself by imagining how it might have been something along the lines of 'you are clever', 'education is important', 'you have a strong and rewarding academic part of your identity'. And in a way, I was the mouthpiece of this extension scheme, these are the things I had intended the students to hear from me. I wonder whether I might have expected too much from my sole teacher voice, and had rated my own importance too highly here - I express a belief that the voice of the adult can echo through the years, even when a child has left. But this is precisely what had happened in my own case.

So could the students in my study still hear my voice at the end of their statutory education? Was this voice swamped by the cacophony of other voices, less meaningful to them, or had it silenced itself, possibly to remerge at some time in the future. This question is one for perhaps a future piece of follow-up research, but I have made a small selection of comments from the students' exit interviews that have some bearing on this issue of voice. Anthony for example had this to say on the importance of the teacher:

***"How do other pupils affect your education?"***

*I bet most people have said they do ... I don't know ... because they do a lot ... because people do mess about but the main thing is the teacher, if the teacher can shout at them and tell them to stop it - if the pupil is messing about, yeah that disrupts you, but the teacher should tell them to stop so it's mainly the teacher I'd say, but everyone thinks it's peer pressure and all that. If the teacher said, right everybody do this or this, nobody would be pressured because nobody would want to be naughty and so, so, everybody would be good and you wouldn't get the micky taken out of you because the teacher's really strict. Do you know what I mean?"*

Anthony has attributed much to the role of the teacher's voice, including the ability to counter all of the negative effects of the combined 'pupil voice' in the classroom arena. He then commented on how he was influenced by the voices of Others:

*"People make me who I am, other people – if someone said something I'd probably believe it and everyone says I'm gullible, and like I change, I don't change, I'm always myself but some things what I say but not everything is changed when I'm with other people "*

Anthony seems to be suggesting here that the voices of Others create who he is.

Daryl seems to support Anthony's first comment, that the teacher voice has the power to make a real impact:

***"Do you know what it might be then, that enabled you to stop doing that kind of thing and become like you are now?"***

*You've been a good help as well Miss, you know with them talks and stuff."*

The teacher voice, specifically, *my* teacher's voice, has had the power to enable Daryl to break away from the negative behaviour he had been involved in earlier down the school.

Of course, it does not have to be a teacher who takes up this role; it could be any other adult at school, a friend or member of the family. Lavinia comments here on how her family had the positive voice, with the similar positive impact:

***"Have you got any explanation of why your attitude has changed from typical working class to what it is now?"***

*I have realised you get more out of jobs once you have more qualifications and you can get a better job and you wont have to do the same thing every day. You will have loads of other options. I think my mum and dad used to always say you should do it so you can get a good job. They would say that they were stuck in their jobs as they didn't have any qualifications and have been in their jobs for 20 years and they wish they could change but they cant - so they have made me do all I could so I wont be the same."*

The implication for teachers arising from this thesis is that they should pay careful attention to the voices of their students, whilst also being aware of the responsibility they have to use their own voice wisely. My study has shown that the concept of giftedness is highly contested, perhaps more so than we have as of yet appreciated, and as with all labels that can be assigned to students, great care should be taken by teachers in using their voice to express opinions about whether or not a student is gifted or not. The voice of the teacher as well as the practices the teacher adopts, have an impact on student identity, which can change what students think about their future life chances, and in some cases change lives. Whilst there are external factors that affect students' lives, there is still the possibility that the teacher's voice can be heard above other voices, and thus some cause for optimism.

Finally, what are the implications for future research into the perceptions of students, particularly when one is concerned with issues of voice like I have been? In keeping with the spirit of my study, the final pages are comments made by the students about: the research process, and the relationship between interview transcriptions, the person who spoke initially, and truth. I think these comments in juxtaposition with each other, speak quite eloquently about the fragmentary nature of truth and the impossibility of knowing that truth about an Other.

David and SW:

Would it have been possible to structure the interview and ask the questions in such a way that the answers would have been more full and honest?

No! Because I wasn't comfortable with myself then really. I wasn't very confident -

Could a different person have managed to...

No I just needed to grow up a bit, build up my confidence

So in normal relationships, what's going on when you speak to people? How important is your speech in the context of the relationship?

It's just a slight glimpse of what I would like to say. When I talk to people its not anything that I would actually want to say, its just conversation really- boring conversation which no one really wants to hear

Lavinia and SW

Looking at the first interview from year 9, is there anything that you feel is significant about that interview?

I can't really remember doing it

OK - you can't remember -but did it *seem* to you when you were reading through that the things you were saying at the time were the full truth?

Yes probably - it's the same kind of stuff I would say now, nothing's changed really, but I didn't really answer your questions

Why do you think that happened?

Because I didn't know what questions you were going to ask - I couldn't think of what to say then, so I just said anything.

Cathy and SW:

Would a reader be right in thinking that the interviews showed the full person?

Not really. Education is important to me but then so are my family and friends which aren't really shown in the interviews. Also the way I have changed isn't shown in the interviews; I have changed a lot since the year 9 interview and these are important changes but this isn't shown.

To what extent do these transcripts reflect the truth about you?

I don't think I was open, if I compare the interviews to what I am like in my normal conversation they are nothing like me - me doing an interview is far more held back than what I normally think and say

Do you feel confident that a reader would have that in mind, that there is a difference to you and what the words on the page imply?

I think they would make a mistake of thinking that it represents the whole person

David and SW:

Why do you prefer writing to speech?

Cause I can think about what I am writing. With conversation you have to say it straight away. With writing I can structure my answers a bit more. In speech though ...

It's like I am talking directly to you, but in writing when it's something personal, it's different because you are not there to see what they say

So if there is another person with you .... it can be...

Off-putting

How far would each of these spoken versions be 'the truth'?

They would be partly true - not fully.

Would the writing be the full truth?

Nearer anyway. You don't feel like you are talking to a person - just writing to yourself so you can write your thoughts down, all structured, in the way you would like to say them.

But is it possible to regard something that is more 'constructed' or 'created' like writing is - as more true than something that is spontaneous?

Yes because I write better than I speak and I am a more honest writer. You don't want to say anything too deep or meaningful as you are stood right there!

Ellie and SW:

I was quite shocked really that I said that! It's ideas that I have in my head, and I realise, I actually *said* this! But I can't remember saying it so it's quite strange to see all my ideas written down.

Are they still true for you then, these ideas?

Most of them, yes! Some of them have evolved a bit but it's just amazing to know that this is what I think and to see it written on a piece of paper.

So these words on this paper represent what was and is actually going on in your head?

Yes ... it's strange, it's like looking in my own head!

So in the year 9 interview for instance, was that the whole truth?

Yes, and lots of it is the truth for now too.

So that document is quite a permanent record ...

It's like a diary - the things I really believe about things ... it's nice for me to know that someone knows what I think, without judging me or anything, it's like having a diary.

Its nice to hear you say this - the impression I got also is that the interview process for you is similar to the function of a diary - in a sense my listening and recording has mirrored what happens when thoughts are written down in a diary. So the things you have said are personal and true for you - and the interview has shown more than a tiny glimpse of you, it has reflected quite expressively who you are.

Yes, it's was such a big deal in my head, and here I've reduced it to just a sentence! My pain for a year - and now just a sentence! I think it might have helped then to have seen it as a sentence, it would have helped me to overcome it faster, to realise it was just a small thing!

So I suppose that the transcripts don't really show the depth of the feeling, the full pain of the experience; in reducing it to a sentence its not the whole of it is it?

Not the full-blown load, just the idea of it!

In your opinion then Ellie, what's the best way of my getting a good quality response in the last batch of interviews?

Probably just the same! You always seem to manage to capture it when things are getting on top of me, you seem to get everything!

John and SW:

I can't write what's in my head, it would be too much - it's like one of those big ball things in the middle, with lots of bits coming off it - take one thing like going out, I could never write about how I feel going out as I would have to write about one of the little things coming off it, and I'll never be able to manage to write about anything really - if I could have something attached to my brain that could track my thoughts onto paper - sometimes I can feel it behind my eyes in my brain, like lots of pictures flashing up. ...If you spend every waking hour getting every answer I've got, it still wouldn't be enough as it would depend on what mood I'm in

So I'm never going to catch up, even if I interviewed you every day

For the same reason I could never keep a diary, I could never catch up...

Can I ask you about speech? How does this fit in? You've talked about you writing and how impossible it is to capture it, what about speech, like our interviews?



I just get confused when speaking about things, as I forget what I said previously and change my mind

So is the writing a bit like this, like when you cross it out and go off in another direction? Is the speech a bit like the ball thing you described?

Most of the time what I say is just random and that's why I come out with shite

So - is everything you say in an interview situation, although truthful, just one of many things you could have said?

Yes - because anything you asked me in that interview I could have gone on for hours and hours and hours because it could just have connected to everything - things can just go on in my head for hours, it does my head in

But it's interesting as you would never get any sense of this process going on when reading this interview

That's because I was being asked questions - that's why I couldn't write it down as I do what I do in my head out loud but usually in my head its more bollocks than what I say, I say some right shit so I think that's why my head's funny

Do you ever think when you see something written down - that it fixes an opinion a bit, it carves it out, stops it from flying off and becoming another opinion

That's what the questions do, they anchor you - or else when I'm going on someone will tell me to shut up and that does the same thing. That's why I say that when I can't write autobiography, all I can do is a question mark.

But I change even while I am talking - look it's like a pyramid with an answer at the top of it, the top part is usually the same no matter what different mood I'm in, its just the rest of the pyramid that's different - so we would just have to find the top bit for each of your questions - ... Life is just like the education thing - not enough time to say what I think, just little squiggly lines!!!

What do they mean John? Little squiggly lines? Confusion? Like white noise?

No - they are drawn with three billion pens all different colours, not as definite as a question mark

Are they all the possibilities?

I don't have a clue - I'm trying to think of life, but I can't think about life - all I'm thinking of now are those colours on the back of my eyes -

John, when you are leaving in a couple of months and I try and do an exit interview, what advice can you give me about how I should conduct my interview with you?  
Should we just have one word and get you to talk about it?  
Let me be random, but I'll just come out with loads of shit - meaningless stuff

Anthony and SW:

Is that possible, saying the truth in an interview situation with me?  
There are always barriers to what people say  
When are they most and the least?  
Less barriers with you -  
What barriers are there between me and you?  
Mental barriers - barriers that stop you from saying stuff honestly  
So are the ideas and thoughts in your head, but not able to come out in words as there are barriers?  
Yes - I don't know ... I'm saying the truth now!  
How could we get rid of barriers during interview time?  
You make it a robot  
But this implies that in order for there to be no barriers I can't be a person  
If there was a survey that wouldn't work as you wouldn't be bothered writing loads of stuff - but if there was a robot, and it had no emotions and it couldn't tell anyone anything  
So the emotions get in the way  
Yes - but you've got to know the person to interview them  
But you would still have barriers?  
There are no barriers here now at all  
So do the barriers crop up when it gets more personal and you have to make decision about whether or not to say it?  
Well think of it this way - we are human - so ... do you have secrets Miss?  
Well I suppose so  
Do you have things that you don't tell SG?  
Yes, I just don't think he would want to know!

Exactly! A barrier can be that you think that he doesn't want to know - that's an example of a barrier- you can't stop it because he can't read your mind - you'd have to invent a mind-reading machine if you really want the truth out of anybody.

## Appendices:

### ***Appendix A.***

	<b>CAT Mean</b>	<b>KS2 Mean</b>	<b>GCSSESociology</b>	<b>GCSERE</b>	<b>NAGTY</b>	<b>GCSSEs (total at C or above)</b>	<b>LevelIAS</b>	<b>LevelA</b>	<b>PotentialYr 11 performance in relation to</b>
John	102	3a		E		1xC			On target (mainly D grades)
Cathy	103	4a	D	B	✓	2 x A, 5 x B, 4 x C (11)	✓	E	On target
Ellie	106	4b	C	C		1 x A, 3 x B, 5 x C (9)	✓	E	Above target
Brenda	108	5c		D		2 x B, 2 x C (4)	✓ E		Below target
Carol	109	5b	B	B	✓	2 x A, 2 x B, 1 x C (5)	✓ E		Below target
Daryl	110	5c	E	G		6 x B, 1 x C (7)			On target
Daniel	113	5c	C	B	✓	3 x B, 7 x C (10)	✓	E	On target
Lavinia	116	4a	B	A	✓	1 x A*, 5 x A, 3 x B, 2 x C (11)	✓	D	Above target
Anthony	122	5b	B	B	✓	2 x A, 5 x B, 3 x C (10)	✓	E	On target
Beth	123	5b	C	C	✓	5 x A, 1 x B, 3 x C (9)	✓	E	On target



## **Appendix B.**

### **This is the speech I read out before the interviews:**

The objectives of my research are as follows:

- To help me in my practice as a teacher so that I can understand better how students, particularly those identified as able, think about education. This understanding will be used to improve what I do now and in the future.
- To find out about concerns that the students I teach may have, and to respond to these as appropriate.
- To inform other teachers in how they go about their jobs, particularly with regard to able students. In the short term – this will be based on teachers in this school and in other 'x-city' schools. Eventually when the research is published, I aim to inform teachers, and student teachers throughout the country.
- To add something new, to the existing amount of research on 'Gifted and Talented' students.

### **Confidentiality**

The interview/s you give will be taped, and then transcribed. The tape will then be wiped. No one will hear the tape apart from me. The transcript will not be shown to anyone at "Greengate" apart from you if you wish to read it and check it.

In September, a short summary of my early findings will be made available to TG, (Head Teacher) but no student names will be used, and the transcripts will not be shown. If your transcript is referred to, it will be by a pseudonym.

I intend to write several articles based on my research for publication, as well as a book. Neither the articles or book will be written for at least six years. "Greengate" will not be mentioned by name. If I wish to use a part of your transcript, either in the final research or in any other articles related to it, I will continue to use a pseudonym, and will endeavour to gain your permission again at the time. You will have the opportunity to amend your transcript, comment on it, and edit the part of the publication involving you.

### **Other matters**

I am aware that as this interview will explore personal feelings, there is a possibility that you may wish to talk further and more informally after the interview. If you feel there is still 'unfinished business' and wish to talk about your concerns without being recorded, I would be happy to offer a follow-up session.

Thank you for your assistance with my research; it is greatly appreciated!

## **Appendix C.**

### **The first interview:**

1. What do you think the purpose of education should be?
2. How significant is your education to you compared to other aspects of your life?
3. What do you consider to be your most significant successes over the past three years at school?
4. What do you consider to be the things you have been least successful at?
5. What is your opinion about the teaching you have received during KS3?
6. Describe your methods of dealing with classroom situations when they are not going well. How successful are these?
7. Have you received enough challenge over key stage 3?
8. Have you received sufficient support?
9. If you had to make just one recommendation about how to change teaching and learning at key stage 3 for the better, what would it be?
10. To what extent is there an 'us and them' situation with pupils and staff? Can you describe any differences between the ways these two groups of people behave/think?
11. Are you ever aware of being caught between the expectations of teachers and the expectations of your friends? Explain.... Do you have any ways of dealing with this?
12. To the best of your knowledge, what do your parent/s think about education and its purpose? Is this exactly the same as the school's view? If there is any difference, how and to what extent has this affected you? (If appropriate – what strategies do you use for dealing with this? How successful are these?)
13. Do you regard yourself as 'labelled'? If so, what as and by whom? How does this label affect you? (In particular – are you aware of having been labelled as something to do with ability?)
14. To what extent do you feel limited or restricted by your gender, particularly in a school setting?
15. Are you always able to be the same person, with all people and at all times, or are you aware of changing between many selves and roles?
16. How big a gap is there between the person you are when you are left alone with your own thoughts and feelings, for example in your bedroom on a night, and the person (or 'people') the world usually sees? Which is the more 'real'? If you are aware of a gap, why do you think it exists? Is the gap getting bigger or smaller over time? What do you feel about this? If there's a hidden part, does it ever 'spill out'? (If appropriate – to what extent does this *concern* you?)
17. Along a continuum, how authentic is this experience now? What might make it more authentic?

## ***Appendix D.***

### **From my Research diary**

On 12.5.05, I had an informal discussion with five of the group about categories and 'frames', with a view to finding out how far they regarded me as sharing their 'frames'.

I first asked them what they regarded as their own 'frames'. They said: gender, age, teenage sub-culture, social class, race, peer groups etc as the main ones. Then I asked them how important it was for them to share a category with someone in order to relate to them. Carol, Beth and Anthony thought it wasn't important at all. Daryl thought it was quite important, and spoke about he had been 'framed' by the teenage sub-culture he associated with, spoilt in a way. Beth thought social class a bit, as everyone knew who lived in the poorest homes, with loads of children and parents that let them do what they wanted.

Then I asked them to comment on how far they shared categories with me. Carol said I shared a category of gender, but her particular version of gender, which was kind of 'girly' in the way that it encompassed things like wearing makeup, care about hair, going to the gym etc, whilst not being a 'girly girl' i.e. not being bothered what people thought, and not being defined by other people. She thought I shared the same social class category (working class), but not in terms of bank balance as she said that mine would be higher.

Both Daryl and Anthony thought that we shared a category of liking fun, and also, I was "a mate". Anthony said the difference in gender was not significant at all as that was not how they defined me, and that I wasn't vain; the makeup and stuff wasn't worn because I was vain.

Daryl said there was a category of 'wisdom' that they were stupid and I wasn't (Beth objected strongly to this) - he refined his comment, and said the experience thing meant I had sussed out the 'meaning of life' (!) whilst they still made stupid mistakes.

All pupils identified 'age' as a category we did not have in common - but none of them thought the teacher/pupil category was in any sense defining or important for either the research relationship or the pupil/teacher relationship we had.

I asked them what they thought about the dual role I was occupying towards them, i.e. both researcher and teacher, and how far they thought this might affect the data. All said that the familiarity gained from the teaching/pupil relationship was an important positive - they knew me and could trust me. They didn't worry about telling me things as this was what they always did anyway. I explained that I also tried to keep the two roles separate, by for instance only including in my research data information that they had known in advance was going to be used for that purpose- but all five of them thought it would be fine for me to take data whenever I wanted. (I thanked them but told them that I still would not do this as I couldn't regard it as ethical).



We discussed the research for a while, and I told them about why I had been dissatisfied with last year's. I told them about what I was pleased with and what still needed working on, and also explained about the methods I wanted to try. They were interested in this, and pleased with the idea that research would be published about them. All five requested that their own names be used, Carol asking if she could write the prologue at the beginning! Daryl wanted his picture included somewhere. Anthony and Beth asked if they could see their transcripts from last year. Anthony then asked, what if I got it wrong? Meaning what if I misheard something they'd said (I did this during this session; I'd thought that Anthony and Daryl had said I *wasn't* a mate for instance - and it was only due to my habit of summing up what people had said at various points which allowed them to point out my mistake). I replied that I would be showing them the transcripts straight after. This flags up a problem I'd not even thought of about last year's data - I didn't get round to verifying it and simply assumed I'd heard everything on the tapes correctly!!!

Five days later, I saw: Cathy, Lavinia, Ellie, John and Brenda  
 In addition to the categories already mentioned by the other pupils, these pupils mentioned musical tastes as being an essential defining and dividing category, also the category of who was popular and who was not. Whereas John and Cathy thought this was not important, and that being part of the 'in crowd' did not restrict you or define your choices, the others argued it did, that the popular ones (they included John and Cathy in this category) did have the freedom to talk to other pupils but usually chose not to, whereas those *not* in the 'in group' didn't even have this choice. None of the group thought that class or race were important - but Lavinia and Ellie thought that gender was a bit. They both spoke to some boys but not many. Ellie spoke about how one of the boys in the year group was totally ostracised by other boys for having 'so called' feminine traits.

All pupils present again saw 'age' as the essential defining category regarding myself and them; not the teacher/pupil or researcher/researched ones which (again) they regarded as not important. The age thing wasn't seen as a barrier to understanding, but something that made me 'superior'!!! (I was surprised again at the veneration they had for age, I had assumed that they would regard youth more positively). John mentioned gender as a difference but said it wasn't an important one as I wasn't sexist.

As far as the research went, no one thought that the dual role posed any problems - Ellie said she had been 100% totally open and honest in the last interview. Lavinia and Cathy had been honest, but hadn't really said all they could have said - both thought it would help to see the questions in advance. John said he'd been truthful last time, but sometimes hadn't given answers that were as full as they could have been. He did not think he would speak more openly with a different teacher, he said he would only speak to me, and would just try himself to make himself bothered enough to say as much as he could.

The group liked the idea of creating the questions themselves and thought this would help. Like the other pupils, they enjoyed the idea of being part of the research. Cathy asked if she could have a copy when it was finished.

## ***Appendix E.***

**Lesson held on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> June at 2.30.** (All the group were present.)

**Aim:** to enable the students to devise questions for the next stage of data collection.

**Method:** the students were shown the title of the research. I then broke the title down into the five sections below, and asked them to work individually for 10 minutes, brainstorming their responses. I explained they could either write the questions they thought might allow them to respond on each section, or simply write their thoughts. I explained that all written work would be collected by me at the end of the lesson and could form part of my data.

After 10 minutes, students worked in pairs, trying to agree on two questions for each section.

A group discussion was then held. Students were invited to suggest questions. They then commented on each question, and gave their opinion about whether each question was the best question that could be asked in order to gain full and honest responses for each section. I typed students' responses as they were given, and the students could see this on the overhead projector.

I then explained that I would go through each question in turn, and they were to think about whether they personally would find the phrasing of the question clear and specific enough. The students were invited to alter phrasing, amend and delete questions as I went through. Each student had to agree (show of hands) on whether the question was an appropriate one, before moving on to the next one.

These were the sections students were given at the beginning:

1. Your perceptions of education.
2. Your views of yourself as a learner.
3. How you view yourself /what you think of yourself generally.
4. Studying 'A' level philosophy.
5. Your thoughts on studying it two years earlier than usual.

## **Appendix F.**

Written comments, ideas and suggestions from the lesson

### **Lavinia**

Comments:

A few people in the class don't want to learn, so they mess about and the teacher wastes their time on them and people who want to learn don't get the chance. They teach irrelevant things, so the things you need for exams don't get as much time.

Ideas for questions:

Do you think things you are taught are relevant? - What learning methods work best for you? Do your teachers let you choose to learn like this? IS philosophy complicated? Which part? Do you enjoy it? Does it challenge you? Are you happy at school? Are you happy at home? Are you enjoying life? Do you feel proud, special because nobody had really done this before? (A level)

### **Brenda**

Ideas for questions:

Which is your favourite subject?, Do you agree with the educational system?, Do you see yourself as a good learner?, What learning methods/tactics do you use and which works best for you?

### **Carol**

Perceptions of education:

Learning is helpful but the discipline is shit.

I think I am a good learner.

I am amazing.

Philosophy is great - given me a different outlook on things.

### **Daniel**

Ideas for questions:

Can you write descriptively about education?, How do you learn best? What techniques suit you best? How would you describe yourself? How do you feel about studying A level philosophy? How do you feel about doing A level philosophy 2 years early, describe fully.

Comments:

I think education is helpful but it takes ¼ of your life, this is a waste of time. I am an average learner. I sometimes learn but I mostly get distracted.

**John**

Ideas for questions:

How do you feel about what you do in lessons? Do you learn?  
What do you think of yourself? What do you think of A level philosophy? What do you think of doing it early?

**Daryl**

Ideas for questions:

What do you think about education? How do you learn best? Do you perceive yourself as popular?

Comments:

Education is good as it makes you clever and not end up as a 'BUM'.

It is good being a learner. I think of myself as cheeky, funny and 'with-it'.  
Philosophy is different and good.

**Cathy**

Ideas for questions:

Which lessons have a particular importance? How do you feel about yourself at the moment? What do you like about yourself? How do you feel about studying an A level at your age? Which philosophical perspective do you agree with? Do you think philosophy will help you in the future and why?

**Beth**

Ideas for questions:

Do you agree with the subjects that have to be studied within the curriculum? What is your favourite lesson? Do you think the education system is fair - eg. Should we spend as much time at school? Should we be made to study subjects we don't want to? Do you agree with homework?

Comments:

I think that having the chance to take A-level philosophy two years early is a great opportunity. It makes me feel very proud of myself! - Thanks miss! Xxx

**Anthony**

Ideas for questions:

Do you like school, which aspects of school do you like and dislike? What learning method works best for you, eg taking notes? What do you like about yourself, dislike? Are you the next Plato? Do you think its right to study two years earlier?

**Ellie**

**Comments:**

They teach you things that no one knows or wants to know, things that don't make sense, and we won't use them again. EVER. They teach you hard things like how to fraction, crude oil and how to work out the size of an angle in a triangle in a circle on a tangent. (They make no sense) They give you loads of hard complicated things to remember then say use these triangles to help you remember them. What are we supposed to do in order to remember all the triangles? I can never remember anything we get told. Ever. I think of myself as a hopeless fool who can't remember anything important. I think my brain is just full. Philosophy is interesting but sends your mind bogging. But it sounds good when you say "I'm studying 'A' level". It's hard but its worth it.

About the process of question forming by the students

**Ellie**

I think the way that we helped decide the questions was a good idea. It gave us a chance to decide questions that we could understand and answer, to the fullest. It also gave us a chance to think about the question and what we would say as an answer. I think that they will bring out what we really feel, as people will openly answer the questions they helped in creating.

**Lavinia**

I think that the process yesterday went well and I thought that people did take it seriously. I also thought that people were setting the questions that they wanted to answer, and had lots of feedback on. I think that we will feel more comfortable answering questions that we have set, and understand, and have had time to think of suitable answers.

## **Appendix G**

***Oath of truth*** – “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? So help me Miss.”

“I do.” (Hand on the tape recorder)

### **1. Your perceptions of education**

What do you like/dislike about school?

What subjects are most worth studying?

What do you think about the education you receive in lessons?

How positive/negative is the view that you have of education?

How do your relationships with your teachers affect your learning?

How do other pupils affect your education?

### **2. Your views of yourself as a learner**

What factors affect how hard you work?

What factors affect how well you learn?

What is the best learning environment for you?

How does your learning affect your identity?

Do teachers teach in a way that you learn?

Which learning methods work best for you?

### **3. How you view yourself/what you think of yourself generally**

What do you think other people in the philosophy group think about you?

How do you regard your social status, in and out of school?

Do you prefer the way you feel when you are on your own, or with different groups of people? Explain.

What do you like/dislike about yourself?

What do you think about yourself at this moment in time? Explain

Are you happy and enjoying life? Explain

### **4. Studying A level philosophy**

What do you think about studying philosophy?

How interesting a subject do you think it is?

How do you imagine studying philosophy might affect you in the future?

Does it help you now?

Will it help you in the future?

### **5. Thoughts on studying it two years earlier than usual**

What do you think about taking philosophy two years early?

How do you think it will affect you, taking it two years early?

### **6. Oath of truth**

Do you think that you have answered all of these questions truthfully and fully on a scale of 1-10? (1 is not truthfully and 10 is truthfully)

**Appendix H.**

1. Name
2. Date of birth –
a) 3. Address and type of housing: (Type, number of bedrooms, owner occupied/private rented/council etc, description of area – )
4. The family: Who lives in your home with you? Family members, plus others who may live with you?
5. Occupation of chief wage-earner/s in family (or families)
6. Anyone university educated in immediate family?
7. a) Things that are important to the family – b) Chief sources of stress /friction-
8. Favourite and worst subjects at school. Why?
9. Report – list negative/positive subjects (and comments if appropriate)
10. Attendance record – personal comment and actual figure
11. Behaviour record – last few months (exclusions, isolation, SLT detentions)
12. Significant school achievements over last few months
13. Health - comment on the following: Illnesses – Eating – Sleeping - Stress/depression – Smoking/drinking/drugs - Fitness –
14. Friendship group – who? plus statement about quality/type
15. List those people who you regard as significant/influential in your life – these could be: family members, friends, teachers, social workers, famous people ...
16. Support strategies – Who do they talk to, in order of the most likely when they have something on their mind re. the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Things going wrong at school - Things going wrong at home -</li> <li>• Friendship problems – Health – The Future - career etc –</li> <li>• Concerns about life/point of life etc. –</li> </ul> Do they receive any professional support? -
17. Any involvement with outside agencies e.g. police, social services – if so describe/explain –
18. Extra curricular at school –
19. G&T provision –
20. SEN provision –
21. Hobbies/interests out of school – plus significant achievements –
22. Personal ambition/s –
23. Anything else they wish to let me know about/they feel might be relevant?



## ***Appendix I.***

### **Exit interview - year 11**

1. What role would you say that education plays in your life, and also has played, over the last 5 years? (*Education - can be looked at in at least three ways: please look at the prompts a, b and c) below when thinking about how to answer this question)*

a) *Formal or Statutory education* - e.g. schooling - national curriculum, content of lessons, exam process, how lessons are delivered and by who (teachers) etc.

b) *Special provision* that may have been made on the basis of you being regarded as 'clever'. For example, what role do you think that 'additional provision', for example the original extension scheme, the 'A' level philosophy course, NAGTY membership etc - has played in your life?

c) *Informal education* - e.g. values and ideas that you have come across at school - the people (pupils and teachers ) and how they may have impacted on you - hidden curriculum - socializing by agencies other than school (e.g. family, mass-media, friends out of school) - reflective or independent learning etc.

2. To what extent would you say that your life-circumstances have affected you, your attitude towards education, and the educational progress you have made? This question invites you to consider your personal history and the extent to which your social class, peer group relationships, gender, health, family circumstances etc has affected your education.

*(Please look at the attached document before answering this question. This was completed when you were in year 9 and it contains some information you gave at this time about your home-life and general background. You may refer to some or all of this, as well as additional information about your life when answering this question.)*

3. What do you see as your next step in life? Do you have any long-term plans?

4. Could things have gone differently for you? Do you for instance, have any sense of an alternative history that could have been yours?

5. Any other comments about either the topic or the research process itself?

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