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**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES

School of Education

**Pupil Misbehaviour and Classroom Management: the impact of  
Congruence**

by

**Maria Rosaria Carotenuto**

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2011



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy

PUPIL MISBEHAVIOUR AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT: THE  
IMPACT OF CONGRUENCE

By Maria Rosaria Carotenuto

Pupils' misbehaviour has been attracting the attention of media, educators and policy makers in many countries over the past several decades. The literature on the subject is extensive and ranges across different disciplines, foci and methodologies. However, the call for new understanding is still strong, as the interest in the topic seems not to abate.

The present study adds to the literature by exploring how Secondary school teachers manage incidents of minor misbehaviour in class. A case study methodology has been used, including classroom observations and interviews of six subject teachers, teaching the same year 8 bottom-set class, within one comprehensive secondary school. A third source of data is constituted by relevant school documents.

Analysis of the six cases suggests a theory (the Congruence Hypothesis), which might explain why some teachers are more effective than others in tackling minor misbehaviour in school. Relying on evidence from the data, the hypothesis suggests that, among the many factors influencing pupils' behaviour, a significant element is the degree of congruence between the teachers' belief system, their classroom conduct and the school culture. The theory builds upon a social ecological perspective - which considers the individual, organization, community, and culture as spheres nested into one another like Russian dolls (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) - and takes into consideration two of those spheres: the individual (called the personal congruence level) and the organization (the institutional congruence level). It is hypothesized that the more the teachers are congruent at both personal and institutional level, the less likely it is that pupils will engage in minor misbehaviour. The concept of congruence finds sparse application within the educational field and makes almost no appearance in the area of pupils' misbehaviour. Consequently, the thesis can be considered as pioneer work. However, the aim of the study is not to present a definitive statement, but to put forward a model that could serve as a framework for further reflection and understanding.

The findings are a useful addition to the knowledge-base relating to effective teaching on matter of classroom behaviour management. Potentially they have implications for a range of stakeholders in both the informal and formal educational sectors, ranging from teachers and school leaders to governors, teachers' trainers and policy makers.

# List of Content

Declaration of authorship .....	v
Acknowledgements .....	vi
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
1.1 Background to the study .....	1
1.2 Aims and research question .....	2
1.3 The researcher's background .....	2
1.4 Thesis overview .....	3
Chapter 2 Literature review .....	7
2.1 Introduction .....	7
2.2 Setting the field .....	7
2.3 Definition .....	8
2.4 What is considered to be misbehaviour .....	9
2.5 Two other reasons why misbehaviour is an issue .....	12
2.6 Why does misbehaviour occur? .....	14
2.7 Theories explaining misbehaviour at the level of social deviance .....	17
2.8 The role teachers and school play in pupils' misbehaviour .....	23
2.9 Psycho-social factors .....	29
2.10 Summary .....	31
Chapter 3 Methodology .....	33
3.1 Introduction .....	33
3.2 A qualitative approach .....	33
3.3 Case study .....	35
3.4 Trustworthiness of the case study .....	36
3.5 Ethnographic observation .....	38
3.6 Interviews .....	45
3.7 Focus groups .....	49
3.8 Documents .....	51
3.9 Methodology into practice .....	52
3.10 Data analysis .....	57
3.11 Ethical considerations .....	59
Chapter 4 The Official Voice of Portside School .....	61
4.1 Introduction .....	61
4.2 The School .....	62

4.3	The idea of discipline.....	64
4.4	The ideal teacher.....	75
4.5	Themes from the interviews only .....	79
4.6	Summary .....	80
Chapter 5 The Teachers .....		83
5.1	Introduction .....	83
5.2	French: Ms FL .....	83
5.3	Science: Mr AM .....	88
5.4	Geography: Mr EW .....	93
5.5	English: Mr SV .....	99
5.6	History: Ms GV .....	106
5.7	Maths: Ms TN.....	111
5.8	Summary .....	115
Chapter 6 The Voice of the Pupils.....		117
6.1	Introduction .....	117
6.2	Section one: interviews .....	117
6.3	Section two: focus groups .....	122
6.4	Summary .....	127
Chapter 7 Congruence.....		129
7.1	Introduction .....	129
7.2	Definition and uses .....	129
7.3	Congruence and misbehaviour .....	133
7.4	Personal congruence .....	134
7.5	Institutional congruence.....	139
7.6	Summary table.....	145
Chapter 8 Discussion .....		147
8.1	Introduction .....	147
8.2	Background .....	147
8.3	The Congruence hypothesis .....	150
8.4	Reflections.....	151
8.5	Recommendations for future research .....	154
8.6	Summary .....	157

Appendix 1 .....	159
Appendix 2 .....	205
Appendix 3 .....	207
Bibliography .....	211

## Declaration of authorship

I, Maria Rosaria Carotenuto, declare that the thesis entitled “Pupil Misbehaviour and Classroom Management: the impact of Congruence” and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- none of this work has been published before submission.

Signed:

Date:



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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background to the study

Pupils' misbehaviour has been attracting the interest of educators and policy makers in many countries over the past several decades and still draws great – and sometimes misleading – attention from the media. The problem is probably less grave than as it keeps being described (Beaman et al., 2007), yet a large number of studies disclose students' misbehaviour to be the primary reason for teachers' dissatisfaction (Klassen and Anderson, 2009), stress, burnout (Geving, 2007) and withdrawal from the profession (Tsouloupas et al., 2010), at significant costs for the social community (Kyriacou and Kunc, 2007). Further, there is agreement over the fact that although the most often displayed pupils' misbehaviour is trivial in its nature, it occurs so frequently as to be a recurrent cause for concern in school (DfES, 1989; DfES, 2005, 2009; Little, 2005; Woods 2008)

The literature on the subject is extensive and ranges across different disciplines, foci and methodologies (Miller et al., 2002). “There are few topics within education that receive as much attention... as children's behaviour that is seen as problematic” (Lyons and O'Connor, 2006, p. 217). Quantitative-approach research has produced definitions and lists of what is considered to be misbehaviour (e.g. Merrett and Wheldall, 1986), has investigated the effectiveness of different disciplinary methods (Infantino and Little, 2005), and has examined the causal attribution of pupils, parents and teachers (Miller et al., 2002). Assuming that behaviour is socially determined, qualitative studies have focused mostly on circumstances where misbehaviour is displayed. A basic distinction can be drawn between studies that allocate misbehaviour at social deviance levels or/and within the school (e.g. Woods, 2008), and studies that set misbehaviour as a within-the-child problem. The latter is usually the preferred explanation of practitioners and official documents (e.g. DfEE, 2001a), which treat misbehaviour as something pupils carry into the school from the outside, namely families and socio-economic circumstances. The position has specific political implications (Araujo, 2005).

The cluster of research exploring the effect on pupils' behaviour of factors like teaching styles, school culture and classroom climate (e.g. Lewis, 2001; Zounia et al., 2003) leans on the assumption that school features have a more direct impact on students' academic progress and behaviour than do their families and social characteristics (Reynolds, 1989; Porter, 2007). The present work collocates within this area of research.

## **1.2 Aims and research question**

The aim of the thesis is to acquire a better understanding of the phenomenon of pupils' misbehaviour in schools and to gain new insights into ways of dealing with it. The study adds to the literature on pupils' misbehaviour by building up a theory to explain why some teachers are more effective than others in tackling the problem. The theory considers the teachers' beliefs system, their classroom conduct and the school culture as linked factors that may have significant effects on pupils' behaviour. More specifically, it is hypothesized that the link between those three factors lies on the degree of congruence the teachers manifest at personal and institutional level. Therefore the more the teacher is congruent at both levels, the less likely it is that pupils will engage in minor misbehaviour.

The concept of congruence finds sparse application within the educational field and makes almost no appearance in the area of pupils' misbehaviour. Consequently, this thesis can be considered as pioneer work. The study was conducted in one comprehensive school (named Portside) and concerns six different subject teachers, teaching the same bottom set year 8 class. Data were gained through classroom observations, interviews and analysis of documents.

There is only one research question, which originated in the field, through a progressive focusing process. It reads as follows:

*Why do teachers obtain different behaviour outcomes from the same group of pupils, although applying similar behaviour management techniques?*

## **1.3 The researcher's background**

My interest in minor misbehaviour originates from my experience as an Italian secondary teacher of 16 years and as an Assistant Head of two. Both roles led me to question whether misbehaviour had increased since I first entered the teaching profession and what one could do to alleviate the problem. Especially my experience as an Assistant Head had given me a broader perspective about school life by pushing me out the ivory tower of my Latin classroom. It appeared that, around my comprehensive

secondary school, teachers were struggling more and more to keep the level of minor misconduct down. In the capacity of Assistant Head (and also by virtue of my Master's degree in counselling) I was frequently asked to intervene, solving behaviour problems and improving teachers' and pupils' relationships. Sometimes I could not escape the feeling that a sort of guerrilla warfare occurring around the school. In July 2006 my husband's company sent him to the Southampton area and I decided to take a sabbatical leave from my job and study misbehaviour at a PhD full-time level. I admit I embarked on this course of study for no other reason but my intellectual curiosity, pleasure and personal more than professional development. In Italy, secondary teachers do not have a developed career progression; there is no such thing as "senior staff" and Heads personally appoint their teams on a voluntary basis. So I did not need a PhD degree to progress professionally. Nevertheless, I wanted to study the subject of misbehaviour in school because I found it profoundly interesting, the principle of inquiring into a subject on the basis of its intrinsic interest having been recognised (Hammersley, 2004). I was also aiming to make a difference and contribute to the development of knowledge.

The majority of the thesis is written in the third person narrative voice, but when talking about my personal experiences and choices as a researcher I have used the first person.

## **1.4 Thesis overview**

The following is an overview of the nine chapters constituting the thesis. For each chapter a summary is given of the main content issues.

### *1.4.1 The literature (Chapter two)*

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a contextual background for the research by reviewing the relevant literature on pupils' misbehaviour in schools. After having dealt with issues of definition, the review pays particular attention to causes of and reasons for misbehaviour, as this constituted my initial focus of interest. The writings concerning causes of misbehaviour have been described by grouping them into three main categories: studies at a general system level, sociological and educational research, and neuro biological/psychological explanations. Before expanding on causes of misbehaviour, the chapter also discusses why misbehaviour is considered to be a source of major concern, due to practical reasons, associated with providing teachers with the opportunity for instructing pupils, and other less practical reasons, related to the issue of inculcating a sense of responsibility in students. However, how schools can

promote responsibility by pursuing discipline in the form of pure obedience to rules is questioned.

#### *1.4.2 The methodology (Chapter three)*

The chapter is concerned with providing justification for a research methodology and methods. It is divided into two sections. The first section considers the theoretical underpinnings of the preferred methodology, outlines competing strategies, describes the research stance and discusses relevant theoretical issues. Specifically, it explains how this work is set within the conceptual framework of qualitative research. It employs a single-site, multiple case study approach, seeking to develop a new theoretical framework for understanding teachers' management of pupils' misbehaviour. Issues related to trustworthiness of the case study methodology are addressed in the chapter. The data were gathered through three main research methods, which are also discussed in detail, namely ethnographic observation, semi-structured interviews and analysis of official documents. The second section, titled Methodology into practice, explores aspects of the researcher's access in the field, comprising the difficulties of progressive focusing and data collection, describes the data analysis process, and concludes with relevant ethical issues.

#### *1.4.3 The official voice of Portside school (Chapter four)*

The aim of the chapter is to construct the official voice of Portside Comprehensive on matters of behaviour and discipline. Such an "official" voice played an important role later in the thesis, in the construction of the school culture. The chapter opens with a brief description of the school and its area.

Data from two different sources were used, namely school documents and senior staff interviews. The documents taken into consideration consisted mostly of the Staff Handbook and the School Prospectus. On the assumption that "position defines groups of people with similar vested interests and climate perceptions of the organisation" (Vancouver et al., 1994, p. 667) semi-structured, tape-recorded, in-depth interviews with the senior staff were conducted. The themes gathered from both sources of data are organised around two macro themes: "the idea of school discipline" and "the ideal teacher". A cluster of themes was extracted from the interviews only, and is treated separately in the last section. From a theoretical viewpoint, Portside school's approach to discipline draws on behaviourist principles, underpinning an imbalance of power between adults and children. Such a stance can be considered authoritarian – as it firmly

relies on external control – and conservative, as its aim is to conform pupils to a set of cultural norms, where “the powerful have the right to control the vulnerable” (Porter, 2007, p.182).

#### *1.4.4 The teachers (Chapter five)*

A detailed portrait is drawn of each of the six teachers who agreed to take part in the study, namely the teacher of French, Geography, Science, English, History and Maths. Each portrait constitutes a paragraph in the chapter and encompasses an overview of the most significant themes emerging from the data analysis. The themes are grouped into three conceptual areas: Teaching, Children and Behaviour Management. The first area (teaching) includes biographical information, an overview of the teacher’s classroom environment, and their thoughts about the profession, the subject they teach and themselves as a teacher. The second area (children) comprises the teachers’ beliefs about pupils, both in general and specifically about the class under study. Finally, a third wider area (behaviour management) includes details regarding the standard lesson and encompasses several issues of behaviour management and discipline. Within this section there is also an account of pupils’ behaviour as it was observed on the field. The chapter includes several passages from the interviews and field notes.

#### *1.4.5 The voice of the pupils (Chapter six)*

The importance of recognizing children’s right to be heard as social actors capable of commenting on their own experience has been recently acknowledged within the research community. This chapter addresses such instances by considering pupils’ opinions in relation to issues of misbehaviour in school. Pupils’ opinions were gained via interviews and focus groups and therefore the chapter is divided into two sections respectively. For each section the themes are organized in three conceptual areas, namely: types of misbehaviour, school rules and the ideal teacher. Pupils shared the culture of Portside school, characterized by control, authority and a taken for granted imbalance of power between adults and children. For a teacher to have control over the class is considered essential to win pupils’ approval. Teachers unable to wield power (and/or who resorted to other teachers for help) were disapproved of, while respect was given to strong teachers who “don’t let you get away with much”. Unfairness was the most discussed topic by pupils. This is consistent with literature on pupils’ perspectives

where the unfairness of teachers is actually considered one major cause of misbehaviour.

#### *1.4.6 Congruence (Chapter seven)*

In order to make sense of the six cases outlined in chapter 5, this chapter introduces the notion of “congruence”. How the notion has been used in the literature of different fields, including Psychology, Management and Education is described. Further, by clarifying the ways the notion collocates within the area of pupils’ misbehaviour, the chapter sets out the congruence hypothesis, which constitutes the main finding of the present study. The hypothesis argues that the more congruent the teacher is at both personal and institutional level, the less likely it is that pupils will engage in minor misbehaviour. By personal congruence is meant the match between teachers’ (professed) belief systems and their (observed) classroom behaviour; by institutional congruence is meant the match across the teachers’ belief system/classroom behaviour and the school culture. The literature related to the two levels of congruence is reported. Finally, to enhance the practical understanding of the institutional level congruence, an overview of Portside school culture has been included.

#### *1.4.7 Discussion (Chapter eight)*

The aim of the chapter is to recapitulate the main finding of the study that is the Congruence hypothesis. The evidence supporting such hypothesis, displayed in chapter 8, is here summarized within a tabular display. The table illustrates that among the six teachers who took part in the research, the one who achieved a very high level of both personal and institutional congruence, experienced a very low level of pupil misbehaviour. The three teachers who achieved high levels of personal congruence but medium levels of institutional congruence experienced medium to low amounts of pupils’ misbehaviour. The two teachers who achieved a low level of both personal and institutional congruence experienced high amounts of pupils’ misbehaviour. The chapter also looks at whether the hypothesis supports, contradicts or extends previous research, particularly in regard to the area of effective teaching. Factors different from congruence, affecting pupils’ classroom behaviour, are also discussed. An outline of the study's limitations and strengths, as well as implications for future research, is included in the final section.

# Chapter 2

## Literature review

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a contextual background for my research by reviewing the relevant literature on pupils' misbehaviour in schools. After having dealt with issues of definition, it pays particular attention to causes and reasons for misbehaviour, as this constituted my initial focus of interest. The writings concerning causes of misbehaviour have been described by grouping them into three main categories (Logan and Rickinson, 2005): studies at a general system level, sociological and educational research, and neuro biological/psychological explanations. However, before that, the chapter also discusses why misbehaviour is considered to be a matter of concern for teachers, parents and policy makers.

### 2.2 Setting the field

Misbehaviour in school is a cause of great concern within the international teaching community and seems to have experienced a dramatic increase over the past 30 years in most Western countries (e.g. Bru, 2009; Oplatka and Atias, 2007). Yet whether such a growth is true or is just a perception is difficult to establish given the lack of statistics. "The question of incidence is beset with problems mainly because our identification of indiscipline as a major concern for research is recent so we lack hard data that will present a baseline for comparative purposes" (Tattum, 1989, p.64). For example in England the first systematic national survey was carried out by Sheffield University for the Elton Report (DES, 1989) and concluded that despite the fact that the majority of teachers' professional association members believed, at the time, that indiscipline was on the increase, "in the absence of national statistics the problem itself could not be directly measured. Any estimate would have to be based mainly on teachers' perceptions" (DES, 1989, Chapter 2). Twenty years later, this is still the case. Although the general feeling is that misbehaviour in school is getting worse, it cannot really be proved. Hence, the role of the media in building and shaping public perception should also be taken into account:



*Well publicised violent events in recent years have exaggerated the public's perception of the level of disruptive behaviour in schools, and created the impression that misbehaviour is more pervasive than is the case (Beaman et al., 2007, p. 46).*

Research on teachers' perceptions reveals that teachers believe they did not receive enough training in the area of behaviour management (Martin et al., 1999). Such lack of training could partly explain their perception of misbehaviour as increasing. The recent inclusion of students with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD) in mainstream schools might well be considered another reason for such a perception (Bru et al., 2002; Avramidis et al., 2000). In fact, a significant amount of research and public documents insist that it is minor misbehaviour that actually causes the most concern among teachers while acts of violence in school are relatively rare (DES, 1988; DfES, 2005; Little, 2005; Beaman et al., 2007). That said, many studies still show students' misbehaviour to be the primary reason for teachers' dissatisfaction (Klasser and Anderson, 2009), stress and burnout (e.g. Lewis, 1999; Stoughton, 2007; Geving, 2007) and the main cause of concern among training teachers (McNally et al., 2005; Kyriacou and Kunc, 2007). Pupils' misbehaviour appears to be one of the reasons why 40% of training teachers and 30% of qualified teachers withdraw from the profession (Tsouloupas et al., 2010; Wilhelm et al., 2000). Recent studies have found that up to 76% of secondary school teachers' time is engaged with controlling the disruptive behaviour of students (Infantino and Little, 2005; Bru, 2009). Finally, pupils' misbehaviour is costly in terms of time and money. Research on teachers' perception of students' problem behaviours, conducted by Little (2005), found that "55% of secondary teachers reported that they spend too much time dealing with maintaining order and control in the classroom" (p. 370). This is consistent with the findings of other studies (e.g. Wheldall and Merrett, 1988a; Houghton et al., 1988; Giallo and Little, 2003; Bru, 2009). The cost of misbehaviour in terms of teachers' time and recruitment and in terms of the negative effect it has on other pupils' learning is also the main focus of several public documents (e.g. DfES, 2002a). In fact, as Arahujo (2005) points out in her study on the construction of indiscipline: [in official documents] "concerns with the economic costs of social exclusion and with the impact of indiscipline in the recruitment and retention of teachers seem of particular significance" (p. 250).

### **2.3 Definition**

Although the problem of pupils' behaviour in school has received a great amount of attention, within the educational research field different terms are used while

little or no explanation is given for the reasons why one term has been preferred over another. Among the articles that constitute the present literature review, the most frequently used terms are “misbehaviour” (e. g. Martin et al., 1999; Atici, 2007; Stephens et al., 2005), “challenging behaviour” (e. g. Lyons and O’Connor, 2006; Swinson and Knight, 2007) and “antisocial behaviour” (e. g. Reinke and Herman 2002, Lake 2004). Alternative expressions, such as “discipline problems” (e.g. Zouhnia et al., 2003; Luiselli et al, 2005) “low level disruption” (Woods, 2008), “difficult classroom behaviour” (e. g. Miller et al., 2000; Little et al., 2002), “undesirable behaviour” (Kokkinos et al., 2005), “troublesome classroom behaviour” (Corrie, 1997; Beaman et al., 2007), “school conflict”(Ingersol, 1996), “classroom aggression” (Lawrence and Green, 2005) are also frequently employed. “Disruptive classroom behaviour” is another expression still used in educational research with reference to misbehaviour (e.g. Infantino and Little, 2005; Arahujo, 2005; Bru, 2009). Recently though the term has been employed to define pupils having special emotional and behavioural disorders (see Visser, 2003), such as EBD pupils, and therefore appears to be better suited for studies in the psychological setting. Official British documents rather use the terms “indiscipline” or “discipline problems”(DES, 1989; DfES, 2005, 2009) as well as “challenging behaviour” (Ofsted, 2003; 2005a). Other expressions such as “low level disruption” and “misbehaviour” (DfES, 2005), “oppositional behaviour” (DES, 1989), “egocentric”, “erratic”, “poor” or “inappropriate” behaviour (Ofsted, 2001) are also employed although less often.

Having considered the various terminologies I decided to use the term “misbehaviour”. In my opinion it accounts better for the minor character of the phenomenon under study and it is generic enough to encompass all the meanings outlined above. As Docking (1980) has observed: “labelling behaviour is bedevilled not only by technical problems of assessment but also by problems of value judgements” (p.42). Therefore, although the term “misbehaviour” still implies disapprobation, I think it does not suggest the writer is implicitly taking the side of the teachers as much as definitions like “challenging” “troublesome”, “undesirable” and “difficult “ behaviour do. Nevertheless, when quoting other people’s words, I will obviously employ the terminology they have used.

## **2.4 What is considered to be misbehaviour**

Not only is there a problem of terminology, within the literature there are basically two different approaches to misbehaviour in school. It is defined either

objectively by listing actions that are considered undesirable *per se* or it “can be seen as ... relative ... with reference to a particular context” (Lyons and O’Connor, 2006, p 218). The two approaches are related to the quantitative versus qualitative paradigm and in turn lead to different researchers’ foci and stances. Specifically, the first approach “locates the cause of behaviour in the individual or their upbringing” (ibidem) while the second “emphasises the challenge of the behaviour to the system...and recognises that the definition of behaviour is socially determined” (ibidem, p 223). Qualitative studies focus on reasons and circumstances (such as pupils’ gender, ethnic and class differences, teachers’ styles and beliefs, classroom culture) in which misbehaviour is displayed rather than defining it and will be treated later in this chapter. The following section deals with the issue of definition in respect to the quantitative approach.

There are basically three recent theoretical definitions of misbehaviour. The first was given by Merrett and Wheldall (1986, p. 88) who defined misbehaviour as “any activity that interferes significantly with a pupil’s own learning, other pupils’ learning and teacher’s ability to operate effectively” The second (and most used) is the one given by Doyle (1990, p 115): “any action by students that threatens to disrupt the activity flow or pull the class toward an alternative program of action”. A third definition, although only occasionally applied within the literature, is used by Lawrence et al. (1983, p. 83): “behaviour that seriously interferes with the teaching process, and/or seriously upsets the normal running of the classroom”. One can notice how misbehaviour is described mostly from the teacher’s viewpoint. In fact only Merrett and Wheldall’s definition mentions pupils.

A first cluster of studies are concerned with producing a list of what teachers (and training teachers) find to be misbehaviour. Although pupils’ behaviour might be broadly distinguished between “on task” and “off task” (Swinson and Knight, 2007), Merrett and Wheldall (1986) attempted to classify what exactly are the classroom behaviours that primary teachers find most troublesome. They discovered that these behaviours were quite trivial in nature, namely “talking”, “disturbing others” and “not attending and disobeying”. Continuing in the same vein, ensuing research conducted by Houghton et al. (1988) on secondary schools confirmed “talking out of turn” and “hindering other children” to be the most frequent and disruptive behaviours for teachers. The results are congruent with subsequent studies focused both on teachers’ (Little et al., 2002) and training teachers’ views (Kyriacou and Kunc, 2007). Beaman et al. (2007), in a literature review also asserted classroom behaviours that teachers found most difficult to be “talking out of turn” and “disturbing others”. Both behaviours are

“relatively innocuous but occurred so frequently as to be a recurrent cause for concern” (p.46). The same study acknowledged – and this point is quite in line with Doyle’s definition of misbehaviour – that teachers are more concerned with those behaviours that affect them in the course of their teaching, than with behaviours that might cause difficulties for their students. It has also been noted that the types of behaviour that teachers find more difficult are those that “tend to involve challenges to the teacher’s authority” (Lyons and O’Connor, 2006, p 222).

A smaller cluster of research has been carried with the intent to investigate pupils’ perception of what misbehaviour is. Leach and Tan (1996) in studying the effects of sending behaviour letters to parents of secondary school pupils, found that “talking without permission to classmates” was rated by pupils as the second most frequently occurring behaviour after “making noises”. Infantino and Little (2005) while examining students’ perceptions of troublesome behaviour and the effectiveness of different disciplinary methods, discovered that the three behaviours students considered to be the most troublesome and frequent were “talking out of turn”, “being out of seat” and “eating”. In her research on children’s rights, responsibilities and understandings of school discipline, Osler (2000) found that pupils identified “fighting ...which occurs as a result of silly things” (p.53) as the most common discipline problem. What emerges from all these studies is that pupils’ and teachers’ perceptions of misbehaviour do not match completely (Verkuyten, 2002) and actually, apart from talking, appear to be quite different. Still, pupils and teachers do agree on the fact that the classroom misbehaviour most frequently displayed is trivial in its nature.

Official British papers – DES, 1989; DfES, 2005, 2009; Ofsted 2001; Ofsted, 2005b – constitute a third cluster of documents where a definition of misbehaviour is provided.

*“Evidence from inspections confirms that the most common form of poor behaviour in schools continues to be that identified by the Elton report: low-level disruption of lessons. The Elton report detailed what are in themselves minor discipline problems that involve pupils talking out of turn, avoiding work themselves and hindering the work of others, being rowdy and making inappropriate remarks” (Ofsted, 2005b p. 6).*

The Steer Report (DfES, 2005, 2009) – considered to be the most important British public document on behaviour in school to date – confirms the trivial nature of the problem in question and states: “The most common forms of misbehaviour are incessant chatter, calling out, inattention and other forms of nuisance that irritate staff and interrupt learning” (DfES, 2005, p. 6).

## **2.5 Two other reasons why misbehaviour is an issue**

Although within the literature pupils' misbehaviour is considered to be quite a trivial problem in its essence, it is of continuing interest and concern for teachers and policy makers as well for the community. The rationales for such an interest have been mentioned already: pupils' misbehaviour is one of the main causes of teachers' stress, burnout and premature retirement; it can be an obstacle for other pupils' learning and it takes up a great amount of teachers' classroom time. In short, misbehaviour is economically counterproductive. However, there are at least two other reasons why misbehaviour is considered to be a matter of relevance from an educational viewpoint. The first argument rests on the assumption that there are "practical reasons associated with providing teachers the opportunity for instructing pupils" (Lewis, 1999, p. 155), order being considered a pivotal factor "to promote a condition which is conducive to serious learning" (Docking, 1989). "Quite simply, students who are orderly learn more than students who are not" (Rosenholtz, 1985, p. 374). This view is congruent with some recent British literature on classroom management, where the problem of maintaining order in the classroom is considered to be a key issue in teaching and learning (Mc Culloch, 1998). Such an assumption underpins a large cluster of research that has explored which deterrents and incentives work better in school (e.g. Lawrence et al., 1983; Whelldall and Merrett, 1985; Little et al., 2002; Infantino and Little, 2005).

However, the connection between learning and order (or good behaviour) has also been questioned. "Many will disagree that silence, posture...are mandatory for learning. There is nothing to prevent good education in a noisy nudist colony." (Goodman, 2006, p. 215). Probably, as Desconmbe (1984) notes, the reason why the noise emanating from a class is regarded by staff in such an adverse light is not only because it hinders the learning process but mostly because "it can be treated as evidence of lack of control in the classroom" (p. 136) and consequently it can be seen as a sign of the teacher's incompetence.

The second argument is based on the assumption that "the area of classroom discipline is integrally related to the issue of inculcating a sense of responsibility in students" (Lewis, 1999, p. 155) and it is also controversial. In a later study on classroom discipline Lewis insists, "[discipline] serves as a means of preparing students to take their place in society as responsible citizens, an aim of primary importance to schooling" (Lewis et al., 2005, p. 729). The socializing function of the school has been strongly supported by classic sociologists like Durkheim (1858-1917) who viewed the major function of education as the transmission of society's norms and values.

Particularly, in his book “Moral Education” (1925), Durkheim advocated that the school's purpose was to transmit a sense of morality to pupils through the application of school discipline. Students’ duties equate the civic obligations of adults; by respecting school rules pupils learn to respect rules in general and develop the habit of self-control (ibidem, p. 149). The social role of school is recently expanding, as Ingersol (1996) notes: “schools are being increasingly called on to perform tasks that were once reserved solely for parents, churches, and communities” (p. 163). If it is reasonable “to expect teachers to make their pupils aware of socially acceptable behaviour” (Stephen et al., 2005, p.214) whether teachers can train pupils as democratic citizens by forcing them to “imitate or get used to established behavioural patterns” (Psunder, 2004, p.275) is a matter of doubt. Democratic citizens, it has been observed, need to develop autonomy and critical thinking in order to participate actively in a democratic society (Lewis, 1999; Lewis 2001). Typically though, schools intend “a social acceptable behaviour” – in traditional Durkheimian terms – as “pupils’ ability to obey, or follow the rules and desired behaviours accordingly” (Oplatka and Atias, 2007, p. 48). While it is widely acknowledged that schools and teachers “provide one of the first opportunities to introduce children to democratic principles and practices” (Dobozy, 2007, p. 116). Some have raised doubts whether children can really be introduced to democratic principles and practices in a school system where obedience is the main prerequisite for pupils’ behaviour. “If those adults who young people are expected...to admire respect and imitate are consistently authoritarian to them, they will come to accept this as the normal way of relating to others, giving orders or taking orders” (Harber, 2004, p. 42). Lewis (1999) claims that children “being raised in a democratic state, have the right to be exposed to the style of discipline which will adequately prepare them to be the citizens of tomorrow” (p.168). There is in fact a widespread agreement within the educational community congruently with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1996, articles 12, 13 and 15) that pupils have the right to cooperation, as Psunder points out:

*“Participation and involvement in decision-making play important roles not only in the development of student autonomy and responsibility but also in providing students with practical experience for living in a democratic society. Through cooperation and decision-making, we motivate students in independent thinking and critical evaluation” (Psunder, 2005, p. 284).*

Schools therefore need to recognise students’ current status as citizens, “rather than simply prepare them for future citizenship” (Carter and Osler, 2000, p. 338). A wide range of studies (e.g. Dobozy, 2007; Stoughton, 2007; Thornberg, 2008) lean on the

idea that by requiring obedience in terms of observing rules and conducting congruently with the norms, schools cannot really promote autonomy and responsibility among pupils. Pupils in fact are expected to passively obey rules that have been set without their involvement. Conversely,

*Experiencing democracy and human rights in their schools on a sustainable basis, in a variety of situations and on a number of levels (whole school and classroom), may enable students more effectively to learn to value the meaning and advantages of the rule of law and open and fair decision-making processes within and outside school contexts (Dobozy, 2007, p.117).*

Kohn (1998b) has long argued that for schools to help pupils become ethical people, as opposed to people who merely do what they are told, need to help students figure out for themselves what to do:

*“That’s why dropping the tools of traditional discipline, like rewards and consequences, is only the beginning It’s even more crucial that we overcome a preoccupation with getting compliance and instead involve students in devising and justifying ethical principles” (Kohn, 1998b, p. 15).*

However, I believe the way a country deals with school discipline and students’ behaviour is strictly related to its culture and its value system. While schools may have some success in establishing their own individual ethos and culture, the influences of centrally directed curriculum emphases and governmental priorities have also to be taken into account (Pettigrew, 2007). The culture of a national context is not an easy concept to explore but comparative research has been particularly helpful in revealing national and international educational values (Planel, 1997; Alexander, 2000). For instance, a cluster of research comparing Britain to Norway in regard to pupils’ misbehaviour and teachers’ classroom management strategies (Stephen et al., 2005; Bru et al., 2001; Bru et al., 2002; Hultgren and Stephens, 1999) agrees that “English society is more openly authoritarian than in Norway ... and a punitive habitus infiltrates English classrooms” while pupils in England “are arguably more used to custodial control in punitive settings” (Hultgren and Stephen, 1999, p. 29).

## **2.6 Why does misbehaviour occur?**

Research on pupils’ misbehaviour is vast and has developed from different fields with different foci. In respect to the issue of what causes misbehaviour, which is the main focus of the present literature review, it is impossible to find a unique answer. According to Logan and Rickinson (2005) the writings concerning causes of misbehaviour can be grouped into three main categories (which have been applied in the

present chapter): studies at a general system level, theorising about the nature of society and the role of deviance, where misbehaviour is explained by looking at the meaning of school for children; sociological and educational research exploring the role of school in promoting or inhibiting behaviour in terms of environmental influences ; neuro biological/psychological explanations which see misbehaviour as a within-child or within-child-in-family problem.

My reading suggest that pupils (and parents, to a lesser degree) usually think teachers and school factors play a great role in enhancing or even causing misbehaviour; while teachers, staff and several official school documents would consider misbehaviour as something pupils carry into the school from outside and would blame parents and home circumstances for it (e.g. Atici, 2007). As Gregg (1995) points out: [teachers think] “Parents have failed to instil in their children... a sort of work ethic or the willingness to do what an authority tells them to do” (p.588). In her study on the construction of indiscipline, Araujo (2005) noticed:

*Teachers used various arguments to explain indiscipline, which can be grouped into five non-exhaustive and non-mutually excluding categories: the individual, the home, the community/culture, the school's leadership, and pupils' subcultures. Despite this variety of explanations, those based on the individual, or on a deficit model of certain families and communities were prominent. The school, its organization, the quality of teaching, the curriculum, or the social interactions taking place daily, were much more rarely, if ever, addressed (p.252).*

The Elton Report (DES, 1989) similarly concluded that teachers and staff judged parents and home factors to be the major causes of difficult behaviour in schools (see also Ho (2004) for a list of studies supporting this assumption), in spite of the fact that “evidence from a number of studies suggests that is a gross over simplification to attribute the cause of in school behaviour only to factors outside the school (Docking, 1989, p.16).

Miller et al. (2002) studying pupils' causal attribution for difficult classroom behaviour found pupils' attributions for misbehaviour in school were best represented by four factors: fairness of teacher's actions, pupil vulnerability, adverse family circumstances and strictness of classroom regime. Other studies on pupils' viewpoint (e.g. Woods, 2008; Pomeroy, 1999; Zounia et al., 2003; Gibbs and Gardiner, 2008) support those findings. Pomeroy (1999) investigating “Excluded Students' View of Teacher-Students Relationship” described how teachers sometimes would show behaviour patterns that were found to be antagonistic and humiliating by pupils. Those included shouting, telling students to ‘shut up’, putting them down, responding



sarcastically and name-calling (p. 469). The latter is supported by findings of a study conducted by Wanzer et al. (2006) on use of humour by teachers. In distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate use of humour, they found that there were a number of different types or subcategories of offensive humour that teachers would use, namely sexual comments and jokes, vulgar verbal and nonverbal expressions, jokes associated with drinking, related to drugs or illegal activities, personal in nature, morbid or sarcastic (p. 187). From the pupils' viewpoint other causes of misbehaviour are teachers shouting (Pomeroy, 1999), peer pressure (Araujo, 2005), pupils' emotional turmoil and difficulties with schoolwork (Miller et al., 2002). Araujo (2005, p.256) congruently with Pomeroy (1999) and Osler (2000) found also that "teachers' efforts to listen to all parties involved in an incident and the application of appropriate sanctions had an enormous impact on pupils' attitudes to discipline". An Ofsted Report (2005b) summarises the issue as:

*A significant number of pupils in the secondary schools dislike the inconsistent expectations shown by different teachers. They feel that some teachers do not explain things well, they shout too much, are too strict and seldom give any praise. In some lessons they feel they have been branded as a result of past behaviour and a punishment after each lesson is likely" (p.27).*

The relationship with pupils is generally perceived by teachers to be only a minor cause of misbehaviour while in contrast pupils felt that poor pupil-teacher relationships including fairness, consistency, positive attitude and methods of control were very important (Lyons and O' Connor, 2006). A study by Reinke and Herman (2002) on school environment and antisocial behaviour suggested that students have sometimes quite vague ideas about the reasons why they have been punished, the lack of clarity about school rules being another factor that can increase the incidence of misbehaviour. However there is evidence that clarity about rules is not sufficient a condition, as students actively judge the value and fairness of school rules (Thomson and Holland, 2002). The perception of reasonable meaning behind a rule adds significantly to students' acceptance of the rules themselves (Thornberg, 2008). According to the Domain Theory (Turiel, 1983; Nucci, 2001) students tend to judge arbitrary or even unnecessary – and thereby tend to break them more easily – rules that are based on personal domain. Personal domain rules in fact are placed "outside the area of justifiable social regulation (conventional domain), subject not to considerations of right and wrong (moral domain) but to preferences and choice" (Nucci, 1996, p.8). Main examples of personal domain matters are: choice of friends, recreational activities, and the status of one's body (Arsenio and Lemerise, 2004).

Finally, parents attribute pupils' misbehaviour to three factors: 'fairness of teachers' actions', 'pupil vulnerability to peer influences and adverse family circumstances' (Miller et al., 2002). As opposed to pupils, parents do agree with teachers that certain adverse home circumstances are a major cause of difficult pupils' behaviour. However, in contrast to teachers, parents also agree with pupils that certain features of teachers' attitudes, especially unfairness, are equally major causes of pupils' misbehaviour, while teachers, unsurprisingly, do not mention it as a possible problem.

## **2.7 Theories explaining misbehaviour at the level of social deviance**

A number of theories have been developed within the literature on juvenile delinquency, which can play a significant role as theoretical frameworks to understand causes of misbehaviour in school.

Among them is the reactive subculture theory developed by Cohen (1955). In his book "Delinquent Boy" he claimed that young, working-class males were effectively denied the opportunity to achieve social status because they invariably failed in the education system. Consequently, they found themselves in opposition to the norms and values perpetuated by the education system itself (namely middle class values of respect for authority, unquestioning obedience, punctuality) and developed an alternative social setting (the gangs) where they could positively define status on their own terms. Cohen argued that whilst all pupils tended to be committed to success and school values when first entering the school, the ones allocated to low streams experienced status frustration. To cope with that they inverted the school's values and pursued those inverted values instead. Some pupils, as Lacey (1970) added later, could even adopt an alternative set of values that was specific to, and available within, their sub-cultural groups and communities (e.g. Jewish, Black Caribbean etc.). The theory has been contested (c.f. Hammersley, 1990) but yet the importance of status among pupils (and related status frustration) has been located as one possible reason for deviance and misbehaviour in school by some recent research (e.g. Kaplan et al., 2002; Swain, 2004; Woods, 2008).

A natural extension of those early studies on delinquency was the so-called labelling theory (Becker, 1967), which David Hargreaves (1967), among others, applied to schools. He suggested that deviant sub-cultures (in schools) emerge mostly as a pupil's reaction to negative labelling. After conducting an observational study on working-class boys in a secondary modern school, he found that a delinquent sub-

culture developed as a reaction to, and reinforcement of, a labelling process. Pupils who expressed a deviant / delinquent sub-culture did so as a reaction to being labelled as “multiple failures” as they attended a secondary modern school widely seen to be the type of school that non-academic pupils attended and were invariably streamed in the lowest stream and thereby identified as “louts” and “trouble-makers”. As a consequence of this negative labelling, pupils sought out each other's company as a means of “fighting back”. They accepted this label and tried to transform its negative connotations into positive attributes through deliberate attempts to see who could gain the most prestige within the group by breaking the rules. By doing the things that teachers regarded as deviant – playing truant, disrupting lessons, making teachers appear foolish, cheating and so forth – pupils were able, in each other's eyes, to gain some form of status within the sub-cultural group. Conversely, Hargreaves (1975) found that a non-deviant (conformist) pupil sub-culture was developed for the opposite reasons; pupils who were relatively successful within the school also sought out each other's company as a means of confirming their superior social status within the school.

The labelling theory has been specifically called into question by Bird (1980) who has shown that in a modern comprehensive school, like the one she conducted her research in, consistently deviant labelling actually rarely occurred. This happened either because pupils tended to see deviance in relation to specific teachers in certain contexts and were mostly unaware of how teachers were labelling them (especially pupils who had rejected school as of little significance), either because many teachers applied deviant labels only at times of crisis and insofar it was improbable that they used the same label for the same pupil. Unlike the behavioural labels, however, Bird found academic labels were seen by pupils as consistent over context and time and thereby internalised. Yet, as Hargreaves (1975) had already addressed, in the majority of the cases the “implicit” negative behaviour labels and the more explicit (negative) academic ones, tend to match and overlap. In fact several studies recently demonstrated academic failure and bad behaviour to be connected (McEvoy and Welker, 2000). For instance Bru et al. (2001), exploring the link between negative social events and pupils’ misbehaviour, argue:

*Pupils who perceive themselves as good learners are less inclined to engage in norm-breaking behaviour.... This contention is supported by recent studies, which show that opportunities for pupils to experience success in school are linked to a lower incidence of misbehaviour (p. 717).*

Further within the area of early studies on juvenile deviance, Miller (1958) suggested the existence of two polarised subcultures among students defined as the “Pro and Anti-school cultures”. The idea found some advocates over the years (e.g. Woods, 1983) and it was particularly popular in the 1980’s. As Woods summarised it, pupils belonging to the pro-school culture would take exams and tended toward the top streams while pupils with anti-school orientation did not take exams and tended to the bottom stream; the first group was facing the problems of getting success and the second the problems of failure. The two groups received different treatments: the first had continuous reinforcement by the teachers and the entire school system while the second did not. Pupils within the first group had rewards for individual efforts in competition with others while, for the anti-school culture group, the rewards of status came from their peers (Woods 1983 ). The two sub-cultures would also be identified towards subject choice; where pro school pupils tended to employ criteria of job relatedness, ability and interest, anti-school pupils used as a criterion whether the subject would require hard work or examinations, whether it was boring, if teachers would allow them some freedom and finally (and most important) the presence of their friends (ibidem, p.80). Several studies indicated that the differentiation–polarization theory is also applicable to teachers (see Van Haute, 2005, for an overview).

The polarisation model was challenged by theories of resistance that offered accounts of how working-class pupils failed school via opposition, agency and class struggle (Russell, 2005). Resistance theorists viewed pupils as actively rejecting school by deploying ‘working-class cultural weaponry’ (Davies, 1994, p. 333), a proper counter-school culture derived from wider working-class antagonism to intellectual practices and to “mental labour” (Walker, 1988, p.5). The champion of this “resistance theory” – from an explicit Marxist perspective – is Willis (1977) who in his seminal book titled “*Learning to Labour, Why Working Class Pupils Get Working Class Jobs*” developed the idea of a counter-school culture. After studying a group of 12 boys in their last 18 months at secondary school and their first few months of work, he argued that “the lads” (as they identified themselves) formed a distinctive “counter-school sub-cultural grouping” characterized by its opposition to the values and norms perpetuated by the school. This group felt superior to conformist pupils (labelled disparagingly as “ear ‘oles”), showed little interest in academic work, preferring instead to amuse themselves as best they could through various forms of deviant behaviour (“having a laff”), and tried to identify with the non-school, adult world as they saw it, by such things as smoking, drinking and emphasising a strongly sexist and racist set of attitudes.

Similarly Corrigan (1979) in his “Smash Street Kids” study found the most common and intense activity exhibited by the majority of British working-class pupils was the activity of “passing time” and “doing nothing”, with “doing nothing” specifically including a lot of talking and joking around, smashing things and fighting.

Clearly in Willis’s perspective, pupils and teachers tend to be oppositional by definition (he called it “guerrilla warfare”) as teachers belong to middle class and pupils to working class backgrounds. Hence, in his view, school itself was based on a hierarchical form of social relations that was conflictual in its own way: “ In a system where exchange of knowledge is used as a form of social control, denial of knowledge and refusal of its educational equivalent (respect) can be used as a barrier to control” (Willis, 1977, p.72). Misbehaviour in sum, from Willis’s perspective, might well be considered as a sort of natural resistance on the side of working class pupils towards school’s middle-class values.

The idea of working-class students “against” middle-class teachers and rules has been challenged for being rather simplistic. For instance Hammersley (1990, p.53-72) in his study of Downtown school, found that although deviance was much in evidence there, that was no sign of pupils’ resistance to authority or a product of culture conflict in the forms that Willis had drawn. Actually Hammersley’s observations revealed a very low level of confrontation with teachers and quite rare challenges to teachers’ authority. Instead most pupils’ misbehaviour seemed to be due to boredom – the point is separately treated further in the paper – while their frequent cheating appeared to be attributable to their wish to be successful or at least not to appear stupid. That is congruent with a study on classroom goal structure and student disruptive behaviour conducted by Kaplan et al. (2002) who found that “Being disruptive publicly also may provide students a reason other than low ability for being unsuccessful in school” (p. 193).

Hammersley clearly contested the appropriateness of the culture conflict model: “It is a mistake to assume that each social class and each ethnic culture generates a single distinct adaptation to school” (Hammersley 1990, p. 105). The pro/anti school schema, in his opinion, did not adequately capture the complex patterning of pupils’ behaviour.

However, despite its limitations, the resistance theory can still be traced as a theoretical framework underpinning recent studies on pupils’ misbehaviour. For instance Contran and Ennis’s (1997) research on students’ and teachers’ perception of conflict and power, found teachers and students were clashing over the most valued

aspects of school. While many pupils assigned low values to educational outcomes and came to school to see their friends, girlfriends and boyfriends, to get out of the house and to have fun, many teachers tended “to operate within curricular frameworks that were in place when they were students in public schools and education programs” (Cothran and Ennis, 1997, p. 552). Those frameworks were mostly based on traditional, male, white, middle class knowledge that was not valued by students any more, particularly by ones coming from different social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Therefore the gap existing between components of the adolescent culture, the curriculum offered by the school and the approach adopted by teachers – the issue will be expanded further within the section on the impact of school on pupils’ behaviour – produced in pupils a form of “resistance” that is expressed in terms of non-participation and/or disruption (i.e. misbehaviour) but is not to be considered as conscious opposition to the dominant ideologies and values of society, as in Willis’s perspective.

Traditionally, research on resistance in school has mostly considered male students (see Mills, 2001). In fact even in recent studies (Lewis, 2001; Kokkinos et al., 2005; Myhill and Jones, 2006) and in official documents (e.g. Ofsted, 2005) teachers still hold the perception that boys usually would cause more disturbances than girls (see above in the chapter). However, research conducted on girls (e.g. Anyon, 1983; Ohn, 1998; Osler, et al., 2002) shows the existence of some sort of covert resistance on their part too, particularly in the form of remaining silent in class, immersing into their own private concerns, wearing make up and “expanding” their uniform (McRobbie and Garber, 1991; McRobbie, 2000).

A fourth theory offering some explanation for causes of misbehaviour in school is the Reproduction theory that Woods (1980) divided into the Direct Reproduction Model and the Relative Autonomy Model. The Direct Reproduction model, still very Marxist in its inspiration, was constructed (although separately) by Althusser (1969) and Bowles and Gintis (1976) who pointed out the fact that, in contrast to the claims and premises of liberal ideologies of education, “schools are not about the kinds of individual fulfilment and social mobility promised in official rhetoric” (Beach, 2003, p.22) but actually serve for social reproduction of a basic social division of labour. Their main argument, criticized for being strongly deterministic (Woods, 1980, p. 175), is that there is a correspondence between the teacher–pupil relations in school and those of manager–worker in workplaces as education tends to reproduce the social relations of production. The school acts as a mechanism for selecting those who will be dominant and those who will be subordinate in the future workforce and therefore transmits the

essential inequalities of the capitalist system (the Hidden Curriculum, as defined in Portelli, 1993). In direct opposition to the correspondence principle put forward by Althusser and Bowles and Gintis stands the Relative Autonomy Model also as the “Capital Cultural theory”, especially articulated by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977). In brief, Bourdieu criticized the premises, given by Marx, to economic factors, and stressed the capacity of social actors to actively impose their culture and symbolic system (Cultural Capital), which plays an essential role in the reproduction of social structures of domination. A dominant class is able, in effect, to impose its definition of reality upon all other classes and this is a reflection of its powerful position within capitalist society. Schools do not socialize children into the values of society as a whole (in Durkheim’s terms) but mostly attempt to reproduce a general set of dominant cultural values and ideas which appear to be relatively autonomous from production. By virtue of this apparent autonomy, pedagogic action and pedagogic authority are experienced as neutral and not related to the interest of any particular class (Sullivan, 2001). However, Bourdieu explains, this view is misleading because, far from being neutral, education actually serves the ideological purpose of enabling a dominant social class to reproduce its power, wealth and privilege legitimately, and maintaining the status quo. “Of course, some lower-class individuals will succeed in the educational system, but, rather than challenging the system, this will strengthen it by contributing to the appearance of meritocracy” (Sullivan, 2001, p.294). Bourdieu also points out that, given the premise that everyone has an “equal opportunity” to succeed (and this premise being universally accepted as neutral and true but being actually part of the set of values imposed by the leading class), when failure happens it is seen as a consequence of individual failing.

Noguera (2003), in his study on social implication of punishment, openly leans on the reproduction theory to explain the issue of misbehaviour in school:

*An implicit social contract serves as the basis for maintaining order in schools. In exchange for an education, students are expected to obey the rules ... and to comply with the authority of the adults in charge ... once some of them (the less advantaged minority group who are more excluded from school) understand that that the rewards of education, namely acquisition of knowledge and skills ... are not available to them – as rewards are limited – students have little incentive to comply with school rules (p. 343)... the repeated violations [i.e. misbehaviour] suggest that students understand completely that the social contract underlying their education has been broken (p. 344).*

The Reproduction theory as a frame of reference also underpins the work of Araujo (2005). Analysing current official British documents on discipline she argues

that in those documents indiscipline is pointed out as something carried from home to school (DfEE, 1999a; DfES, 2002), linked to poor parenting, particular social/ethnic backgrounds and as afflicting specifically inner city communities (DfEE, 1999b). In brief, she states, “It is the same people that are supposed to be supported who end up being blamed” (p. 247) for misbehaviour. Teachers are presented as victims being tested or challenged by pupils’ indiscipline and the right of other pupils to learn is seen as threatened by the misbehaving group, as “these pupils are constructed as an obstacle to the success of their peers” (p.250). The approach, she adds:

*Is particularly appealing for policy-makers, schools and teachers, as it implicitly promotes simplistic ‘quick-fix’ solutions, centering intervention on the pupil rather than on the school organization, pedagogy or the curriculum” (p. 247).*

Further, she argues, “having a ‘good attitude’ towards the school and education was what enabled teachers to define well-behaved pupils, and this encoded particular cultural capital.” (p.260). Her study reveals, in fact, that pupils with the ‘right attitude’ to school and education tended to be from more advantaged backgrounds and mainly white. Girls were also more often positioned in this category, being perceived as obedient, hard working and at most ‘chatty’. Pupils defined as disruptive (that is having a bad attitude) were disproportionately boys of Turkish and African-Caribbean family background who also received more detentions. The link between exclusion and ethnicity has been confirmed by several other studies (e.g. Osler et al. 2002; Kaplan et al., 2002; Blair, 2001).

## **2.8 The role teachers and school play in pupils’ misbehaviour**

Leaning on the assumption that school features have a more direct effect on students’ academic progress and behaviour than do their families and social characteristics (Reynolds, 1989; Porter, 2007), a rich cluster of research argues that teachers and the school culture play a significant role in increasing misbehaviour, perhaps even in producing it.

### **2.8.1 Classroom management styles**

Classroom management is considered as the ability “to secure and maintain students’ cooperation and involvement in classroom activities both instructional and non-instructional” (Emmer, 1982, p.17). Within the literature the term is often used interchangeably with “classroom discipline”, although they are not exactly synonymous and the latter “typically refers to the structures and rules for students’ behaviour and



efforts to ensure that students comply with those rules” (Martin et al., 1999, p. 4). Behaviour management styles are usually classified into bi or tri-partite models. Those models have been constructed by considering the continuum of control and power (high, moderate or low) teachers wield (Sokal et al., 2003). An example of tripartite model is given by Lewis (2001) in his study on the role of classroom discipline in promoting student responsibility. Leaning on Gordon (1974) Glasser (1969) and Canter and Canter (1992) respectively, Lewis distinguishes among three styles of classroom management which he names Model of Influence, Group Management and Control:

*[The Model of teacher Influence] consists of the use of techniques such as listening to and clarifying the student's perspective, telling students about the impact their misbehaviour has on others, confronting their irrational justifications, and negotiating for any problem behaviour a one to one solution that satisfies the needs of both the teacher and the individual student. Techniques relevant to the model of Group Management are class meetings at which students and the teacher debate and determine classroom management policy, the use of questions by the teacher... the application of class-determined teacher responses to unacceptable student behaviour, and finally the use of a non-punitive space where children can go to plan for a better future. The model of Control consists of clear rules, a range of rewards and recognitions for appropriate behaviour and a hierarchy of increasingly severe punishments for inappropriate behaviour” (p.308).*

Similarly, Glickman and Tamashiro (1980) conceptualised a framework to explain teacher beliefs toward classroom management in terms of three approaches, namely interventionist, non-interventionist, and interactionalist. Interventionists focus on the environment's effects on the individual, and their proposed management strategies tend to represent behaviourist ideals (Sokal et al., 2003) like the models developed by Canter (1992) and Jones (1987).

*Interventionists believe that students learn appropriate behaviors primarily when their behaviors are reinforced by teacher-generated rewards and punishments. Therefore, teachers should exercise a high degree of control over classroom activities. (Evrin et al., 2009, p. 612).*

Non- interventionist models of classroom management include Ginott's Congruent Communication (1972) and Gordon's Teacher Effectiveness Training (1974). Underlying this approach is the belief that children have an inner drive that requires expression and therefore should be allowed to exert control over their classroom behaviour. Finally, examples of Interactionist models are Glasser's Control Theory (1986), Albert's Co-operative Discipline (1996) and Berne's theory of games (1964) among others. Within this approach, it is believed that students engage in misbehaviour

in an effort to obtain one of four (mistaken) goals: attention, power, revenge or avoidance of failure; teachers are supposed to tailor their interventions to the specific situation and the individual student's goals (Martin et al., 1999) and share responsibility with students for classroom management.

Others postulate a bi-partite model for classroom management and discipline (see Almong and Shechtman, 2007). Lewis himself in a later comparative study on classroom discipline (Lewis et al., 2005) simply distinguishes between a "relationship based discipline" style, comprising discussion, hints, recognition and involvement and a "coercive" discipline style, comprising punishment and aggression (shouting, sarcasm, group punishments, etc.). A similar distinction is proposed by Zounia et al. (2003). Investigating the reasons for pupils behaving appropriately in several subjects of the curriculum and the perceived strategies used by their teachers to maintain discipline, they also describe two main categories of teachers' strategies:

*The first category refers to strategies based on the notion that teachers can maintain order in the class by rewarding appropriate behaviours and preventing or punishing misbehaviours.... These strategies promote external reasons for behaving appropriately in the class. The second category refers to strategies that help children to take responsibility for their own behaviour—in other words to increase their self-determination" (p. 221).*

The two categories seem to fall respectively into the model of influence and the model of control as described by Lewis (2001). Another two-fold model of classroom management has been applied by Oplatka and Atias (2007) in their research on gendered views of managing discipline in school and classroom:

*Two major classroom management perspectives have been presented to teachers over the past four decades... The first, the counselling approach, focuses on discipline and on understanding students' problems. This perspective stresses the need to help students better understand themselves and work cooperatively with adults to develop more productive behaviours...The second, the behavioural perspective, assumes that the focus of classroom management should move in the direction of teacher control. Teachers are viewed as coping with disruptive student behaviours by means of behaviour modification (writing contracts with recalcitrant students, reinforcing appropriate behaviour, stating clear general behavioural expectations, punishing disruptive students consistently, providing group reinforcement for on-task behaviour). Effective classroom teachers are assumed to provide students with clear instruction in desirable classroom behaviour (p. 45).*

There is strong evidence (e. g. Pomeroy, 1999; Zounia et al., 2003; Stephen et al., 2005; Kaplan et al., 2002) that a coercive approach would impact negatively on pupils' behaviour. In fact a punitive and aggressive style of interaction ("coercive", in

Lewis's terms) on the part of the teachers has been associated with a higher incidence of pupils' misconduct (Russell and Russell, 1996), while positive feedback by teachers has been positively correlated with compliant and on-task pupils' behaviour (Swinson and Knight, 2007). A Norwegian study on students' perception of classroom management conducted by Bru et al. (2002) found that emotionally supportive and caring teachers (i.e. teachers to whom students feel attached) would prevent or reduce misbehaviour among pupils, while teachers showing non-immediacy and a non-caring style increase it. Further, from a comparative study on discipline strategies in China, Australia and Israel conducted by Lewis et al. (2005) it emerges that "students more prone to misbehaviour report greater levels of aggressive teacher disciplinary behaviour" (p.739). The reason why teachers respond to pupils' misbehaviour with more aggression-rate behaviour could be because – as Fuller and Bown (1975) explain – teachers have three levels of concerns. Initially they are concerned about their physical and emotional well being (level 1). Once they are sufficiently experienced, teachers focus on skills (level 2). Having acquired sufficiently in the area of skills they move to level 3 where they focus on the needs of students and choose from among the many skills in their repertoire those that are most productive. However, if teachers appraise a particular situation to be a threat, they regress to level 1 and, to protect themselves, resort to a coercive discipline style, which in turn enhances pupils' misbehaviour in a sort of vicious circle. Resorting to a coercive, disciplinarian approach in schools has also been criticized by advocates of democratic principles for not allowing children's participation and citizenship rights (Carter and Osler, 2000). Further, Porter (2007), in her book "*Behaviour in Schools*", draws attention to the specific political implications of coercive behaviour management approaches to school discipline, which depends on an implicit imbalance of power between adults and children .

### 2.8.2 *Bad teaching*

While there is empirical evidence that "consistent experience of good teaching promotes good behaviour" (DfES, 2005, p.14), a connection between bad teaching and misbehaviour has also been drawn (e.g. Reinke and Herman, 2002; Kaplan et al., 2002) particularly because bad teaching produces (or might produce) pupils' boredom, which in turn promotes non-participation and disruption (Hammersley, 1990). As Araujo explains:

*Poor quality of teaching was seen as potentially providing the conditions in which indiscipline would breed. Teachers not setting enough work or not explaining what to do, uninteresting lessons, and having too many different*

*supply teachers were amongst the reasons provided to explain indiscipline. It is interesting to note that this particular understanding of the origins of indiscipline was adopted not only by the pupils considered disruptive, but also by those who were generally seen as behaving appropriately. Generally, they agreed that in such conditions they often engaged in small talk with their friends” ( p. 255).*

In this perspective misbehaviour has been considered by some to be functional, a sort of “tool” students would employ to encourage their teachers to alter the academic focus of certain subjects ( Portelli, 1993; Cothran and Ennis, 1997). Similarly Gregg (1995) observed that “the constitution of mathematics as ‘boring’ rules and procedures ... seemed to exacerbate control problems, given that the students had no positive reason for learning these rules and procedures” (p. 589). In the same study, Gregg also found that when teachers were having difficulty in keeping the class under control, they would sometimes limit the students' opportunities to participate in mathematics, in order to limit their opportunities for breakdowns in control. “However, this limiting of the students' participation further contributed to their boredom and thus actually appeared to contribute to problems with discipline and control” (ibidem). The possibility that student misbehaviour is, at times, “an attempt to alleviate the tedious sameness of the typical school day” has been also advanced by Cothran et al. (2003) in their research on students’ perspective on classroom management. However, students’ boredom might not be entirely teachers’ fault. It can be, as Cothran and Ennis (1997) have suggested, that curricula do not encounter pupils’ expectations and interests any more, or also that school work is increasingly perceived as meaningless (Bru, 2006).

Negative students’ performance, usually associated with bad teaching, also reflects on misbehaviour.

*The causal direction between academic failure and antisocial behaviour has yet to be determined. However, research supports the conclusion that... higher academic performance is associated with refraining from offending (Reinke and Herman, 2002, p. 553).*

### 2.8.3 School culture

Teachers do not work “solo” and their behaviour management style is also determined and influenced by the school culture or school climate (the difference between the two terms is addressed in Chapter 7) in which they operate. There is evidence that behaviour problems are better tackled at the whole school level. Reinke and Herman (2002) summarise the issue as follows:

*In schools with the worst discipline problems, rules are typically unclear, unfair, or inconsistently enforced; responses to student behaviour are ambiguous or indirect (e.g., lowered grades in response to misconduct); teachers and administrators do not know the rules or disagree on the rules; teachers ignore misconduct; and students do not believe in the legitimacy of the rules.... Conversely, school policies associated with lower levels of disorder include systematic school discipline procedures that decrease the arbitrariness of rule enforcement and decrease student frustration; pleasant working conditions and good teacher-child relationships; and a structured reward system for appropriate behaviour. School climates known to foster delinquency tend to have low expectations for achievement, ineffective administration, and lack of commitment to building student efficacy in learning (p. 552).*

The idea that schools should establish a clear and consistent approach to behaviour management is very popular among British official documents (DfES, 2003; 2005) and mainstream manuals (e.g. Cowley, 2006). However, consistency solves only half the problem, as it depends also on which approach is applied. There is evidence in fact that while a coercive authoritarian approach to behaviour management on the part of the teachers may, unintentionally, reinforce student antisocial behaviour, the same can be said at the school level (Solomon et al., 1996). For instance Noguera (2002) in his study on the social implication of punishment in ten US secondary schools demonstrates that where the “fixation” for control (although consistently applied) had overridden all the other educational concerns this resulted in schools operating “like prisons”. Those schools being too preoccupied with discipline and control had “little time to keep students intellectually engaged [n]or to address the conditions that influenced teaching and learning” (p. 347) and that reflected negatively, presumably via boredom, on pupils’ behaviour. In addition Freiberg and Brophy (1999) note that by relying on punishment for reducing undesirable behaviour, teachers and schools tend to see pupils as basically destructive and would value pupils’ compliance rather than initiative, leaving little opportunity for students to “learn the skills necessary to function in a world where they need to work independently, making decision and preventing and solving problems” (p. 8/9).

The debate on the efficacy of different classroom management styles, both at class and school level, is underpinned by an even more major debate of Behaviourist vs. Democratic beliefs as a frame of reference for discipline in school (Porter, 2007). Behaviourism, particularly in the form of behaviour modification, is an accepted and established approach to the issue of students’ behaviour within the majority of English speaking countries (Funnel, 2009). However, some have raised doubts toward the efficacy of such an approach, especially in respect to the use of external stimuli – a

pivotal behaviourist concept – which typically translated into schools in the form of reward and punishment systems (Robinson and Maines, 1994).

A recent qualitative study conducted by Woods (2008) explored specifically the reasons for the failure of the rewards and punishments system in a British primary school. Woods found that “behavioural discipline methods are flawed because they neglect three key dimensions of children’s experience: emotions, a sense of justice, and their relationships with peers” (p.183). About the first dimension Woods adds:

*Behavioural discipline models do not seem to take account of children’s emotions, apparently assuming either that these are not relevant or that emotions conducive to reparation and conformity, such as sadness and shame, will inevitably result from sanctions. This case study demonstrates that children do not always respond to consequences in this way, and that angry responses in particular seem to be more conducive to rebellion and resistance than to conformity” (p.192).*

## **2.9 Psycho-social factors**

Pupils’ misbehaviour can be explained also at a psycho-social level as a “within child or within child in family” problem (Logan and Rickinson, 2005). There are important influences on children’s behaviour to be located outside the immediate control of the school which do not necessarily cause misbehaviour but can predict or facilitate it as “risk factors” (Tolan et al., 2003). For Docking (1989, p.15) the main such factors include:

- Temperamental and other constitutional factors in the child
- Inconsistent or inappropriate standards set by parents and punitive or permissive child-rearing practices
- Stress generated by such factors as poverty, substandard living conditions and homelessness, long term unemployment, family discord
- Elements of violence and other antisocial behaviour in society and its portrayal in the media
- Dietary deficiencies

Hayden (2007) in her book “Children in Trouble” summarises the issue as follows:

*At the level of the individual pupil...[misbehaviour] may relate to a number of issues, including child abuse and poor parenting, disrupted and stressful living circumstances...being in care, relative poverty, special educational needs or learning needs not met...academic pressure and fear of failure, being bullied, being a young carer, and being part of a travelling family (p. 85).*

The within-child approach is the preferred focus of psychological rather than educational research as it seeks “both cause and cure within the sphere of the pupil’s individual psychology and is referred to as a medical model” (Tattum, 1989, p. 67). Although research on teachers’ views suggests that “teachers’ explanations of pupils’ ...conduct problems tend to be dominated by assumptions relating to the child or to factors within the home environment” (Docking, 1989, p. 15), the number of educational studies especially concerned with within-child factors is actually low. One such study was conducted by Bru et al. (2001), who researched social support, negative life events and pupil misbehaviour among young Norwegian adolescents. In line with findings from previous research (e.g. Windle, 1992; Rutter, 1998) the study outlined that negative life events, namely exposure to psychological, physical or sexual abuse, parental divorce, parental death, or relatives’ and friends’ chronic physical illness, were all factors significantly associated with pupil misbehaviour among both male and female adolescents. Conversely it was found that support from parents, friends and teachers was negatively associated with pupil misbehaviour. Another study conducted by Kaplan et al. (2002) on the connection between classroom goal structure and students’ disruptive behaviour adds gender and ethnicity to the within-child factors associated with levels of misbehaviour:

*Boys tend to be more disruptive than girls, and also tend to manifest more aggressive modes of disruption ... Minority students—particularly African Americans—are repeatedly over-represented in receiving discipline referrals and in being suspended” (p.195).*

Boys being more likely to disrupt than girls are acknowledged also by the majority of British official documents (e.g. Ofsted, 2005, p. 11). On masculinity as a risk factor for misbehaviour, Lyons and O’Connor (2006) expand:

*Explanations for the link between gender and challenging behaviour can be interpreted as evidence of internal causal factors, relating to biological and physiological influences or as contextual, relating to gender roles and the interpretation of girls’ and boys’ behaviour (p.226).*

Psychological research generally suggests that disruptive behaviour in school can be considered as part of boys’ definition of themselves in terms of their masculinity (Martino, 2000; Mills, 2001) and peer status (Swain, 2004); while the direct aggression boys may show in school is seen as more problematic by teachers than the indirect aggression shown by girls (Masse and Tremblay, 1999). For instance, in a longitudinal Australian study conducted by Prior et al. (2001) teachers openly admitted they

perceived more negative characteristics in behaviourally problematic boys than in behaviourally problematic girls. In regard to ethnicity, there is no shortage of empirical evidence showing it as a possible risk factor (e.g. Skiba et al., 2002; Ingersol, 2002; Noguera, 2003; Araujo, 2005); while analysis of national figures confirms that Black Caribbean students are more significantly excluded from British school than white students (Pettigrew, 2007).

## **2.10 Summary**

Investigating causes and reasons for misbehaviour in school constitutes the main focus of the present literature review, as it was dictated by my initial interest into acquiring a better understanding of the phenomenon. During the fieldwork phase of the study, however, from such a “general” interest I developed a specific concern with exploring why some teachers are better than others in tackling pupils’ behaviour. The concern, which frames the production of my research question, finds its theoretical support elsewhere in the thesis (see chapter 3). Nevertheless, I believe the review in all its parts constitutes a valid contextual background for the entire research. It offers an outline of the extensive existing literature on misbehaviour and provides a selective survey of the educational concerns informing the contemporary debate.





# Chapter 3

## Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with providing a justification of a research methodology and methods. It is divided into two sections. The first one considers the theoretical underpinnings of qualitative methodology, outlines competing strategies, explains the research stance and discusses relevant theoretical issues. Section two explores aspects of access to the field, data collection, the difficulties of progressive focusing, and ethical issues especially related to the study in hand.

### 3.2 A qualitative approach

For the present study a qualitative approach has been preferred over a quantitative approach. The historical background of qualitative research lies in British anthropology and ethnography. Qualitative research firmly established itself through the Chicago School of Sociology in the 1920's and 1930's. The qualitative approach seeks to describe and analyse the culture of human beings and their groups from the perspective of those being studied (Bryman, 1993); therefore qualitative research is an activity that locates the observer in the “other’s” world (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The focus is on the understanding of the social world through an investigation of subjectivities and their interpretation by participants. This ontological position is often described as “constructionist” in the sense that it implies that social properties are products of the interactions between individuals, rather than phenomena “out there” (i.e. it differs from the natural scientific model used in quantitative research studies). Qualitative methodology enables the researcher to go beyond pure description and provides the basis for analysis of the environments, events and behaviour of participants in their context. Qualitative research is an umbrella term for a range of methodologies all of which adopt similar strategies and are located within the interpretive tradition. Such methodologies are ethnography (Goetz and Le Compte, 1984), symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) and ethno-methodology (Garfinkel, 1968). The main methods associated with qualitative research are observation, qualitative interviewing and focus groups, diaries, stories and narrative (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) advised that before embarking upon a piece of research the researcher has to decide whether to employ a theoretical framework within which information is gathered or to treat the theory as something that emerges out of the collection and analysis of data. Bryman (2001) defined the latter approach as an “inductive” view of the relationship between research and theory. For the present study, the latter approach has been preferred as it allows theory, method and data to develop simultaneously each informing the others (Meyenn, 1979).

Embarking on research into pupils’ misbehaviour in school, my initial concern was to find explanations for it. Like many other “experienced” teachers I had the feeling that the phenomenon had increased in the last 20 years, since the time when I first started in the profession, and wanted to discover why. Naively I hoped finding the reasons to be just one step away from solving the problem. Before looking for reasons, though, I had to prove that misbehaviour in school had increased in the first place. The literature clearly demonstrated that there are no national statistics against which the problem could be directly measured and therefore “any estimate would have to be based mainly on teachers' perceptions” (DfES, 1988, Chapter 2). My first question (has misbehaviour recently increased?) had rapidly to be put aside; but not so the quest for reasons and causes of misbehaviour which remained a key issue for me. However, the more my reading accumulated, the more I realized that looking for causes was also quite a misplaced line of action and could not really constitute a proper basis for informing my research questions, given the complexity of the issue and the vast variety of explanations which one could find within different research fields. The literature supported me opting for a different course of action, in the form of the “progressive focusing process” (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972; Stake, 1981,1995; Foster 1996b). Congruently with that approach, the researcher enters the fieldwork being sensitive to what concepts and concerns might become eligible for study, but postpones the choice until familiarized with the scene (Stake, 1981). Causes and reasons for pupils’ misbehaviour remained the pivotal issue I would particularly be alert to observe and focus on, but I would let variables for special attention, as well as my research questions, emerge gradually during the following stages of investigation. Also, I was interested in exploring teachers’ and pupils’ personal ideas about misbehaviour, taking into account individual histories and experiences, in the hope of discovering something “new” about the way it is produced, faced and managed. In short, given that I wanted to put misbehaviour in context, the choice of a qualitative approach, specifically in the

form of a case study – with its emphasis on subjectivity and meanings attributed by participants – seemed the most suitable for my research aims.

### **3.3 Case study**

Case study is one approach that is used extensively by behavioural and social science researchers who want to investigate and understand complex social phenomena (Merriam, 1988). Although it does not yet have a universal definition (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998), a case study is an approach that tries to represent a case through capturing the singularity of a person, a school, an institution or even a community (Gillian 2004). It is context-bounded (Merriam, 1988), tries to give a whole subtle picture of a studied issue (Merriam, 1988), provides an in-depth description of that phenomenon (Mertens, 1998), and captures the voices of the study's participants through the use of a multiple range of data sources (Winston, 1997). Case study methodology is used by researchers who want to explore daily life situations where complex and multiple human behaviours occur simultaneously (Merriam, 1988) and cannot be explained through statistics and numbers but rather through more holistic and interpretative approaches (Keeves and Lakomsky, 1999). This research on pupils' misbehaviour employs a single-site, multiple case study approach, seeking to develop a new theoretical framework for understanding teachers' management of pupils' misbehaviour. A case study strategy was considered appropriate for several reasons. First, it places action and events in context. The nature of my topic (misbehaviour) is particularly context-bounded and the literature reveals how different contexts, as well as different approaches to school discipline, can produce different definitions of misbehaviour. Second, consideration was given to a research design that would explore the multiple perspectives of participants, namely teachers, senior staff and pupils. Third, a case study approach permits the researcher to collect first-hand data by adopting an observer role – although an “ideal” ethnographic approach in the form of participant as observer in my case was not a plausible option. Fourth, case studies are also known for having a “generative” nature (Gilgun, 2001), and this was revealed as appropriate for my study during the data analysis phase, when the intention to develop a theory became manifest (see chapter seven). Finally, which I have found particularly appealing, case studies are written in an “illuminative” style (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972), which is potentially intelligible to the audience and gives readers access to source data and theory construction.

### 3.4 Trustworthiness of the case study

#### 3.4.1 Generalization

Although case study is extensively used in different disciplines in social sciences, some researchers support the notion that case study provides little basis for scientific, or “nomothetic” generalisations (Neuman, 1997). Indeed, case study is a poor source of statistical generalisations found in the traditional sense in the sciences (Bassey, 1999) because its aim is not to help a researcher find a universal truth for everyone and provide statistical generalisations but instead to understand that particular case in depth (Merriam, 1988) and to generalise either about that case or from that case to a class (Simons, 1980). According to Simons (1980):

*Case study data, paradoxically, is strong in reality but difficult to organise. In contrast, other research data is often weak in reality but susceptible to ready organisation. This strength in reality is because case studies are down to earth and attention holding, in harmony with the readers' own experience... (p. 59).*

How, whether and why it is appropriate to “generalise” from a single case is debatable (Merriam, 1988). The literature suggests a number of different terms like “analytic generalisation” (Yin, 1994), “naturalistic generalisation” (Stake, 1995) “fittingness” (Guba and Lincoln, 1981) and “fuzziness” (Bassey, 1999) in order to re-conceptualise the traditional term of “generalizability” and make it more appropriate to qualitative studies. For instance, fuzzy generalization (Bassey, 1999) is “a qualitative measure arising from studies of singularities that claim that it is possible, likely or unlikely that the same finding could be found in other similar situations” (p. 12). For Bassey (1999), conclusions presented in this way not only recognize the complexity of educational settings but also go some way to answering David Hargreaves' (1996) criticism of educational research as inconclusive and of little practical help. Thick description (a term from anthropology meaning the full, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated) is another medium that qualitative researchers use, in order to describe in great detail the complex social reality of everyday life (Shipman, 1985). It makes the reader able to recognise a personal similar experience and is useful for transferability (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

In regard to generalization, this study has worked from the premise that case studies, where appropriate, may be generalisable - in the sense that their findings are applicable in different contexts - and therefore contribute to theory on the line of the fuzzy generalization as presented by Bassey (1999). I did also my best to provide a rich,

thick description, which would make the reader able to recognize a personal similar experience.

Nevertheless, this approach is not without problems. There are no guarantees that the researcher recognises and understands the personal stance of the reader and the way he/she will interpret the inferences coming from a case study. Furthermore, since the investigator is the primary “tool” of the research, issues of the researcher’s personal integrity might occur while they rely only on his/her abilities to represent a trustworthy piece of the world (Merriam, 1988). As an Italian teacher for 18 years, I admit I had preconceptions and biases stemming from my past experiences (conducted in a different culture setting) and pre-entry reading on the research topic (named “personal reactivity” in Hammersley, 1979). I hope that being aware of that contributed to diminishing bias to a certain extent. A second area of concern is the influence the presence of the researcher has on those being researched (the “observer effect” in Bogdan and Biklen, 1982). This is a problem common both to qualitative and quantitative research. I had the impression that both teachers and pupils were aware of my presence in class for quite a long time, although after I had spent several days in the setting, they definitely became more relaxed.

### *3.4.2 Triangulation*

Researchers are obliged to protect and safeguard the transfer of knowledge (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998), and to minimise possible misunderstandings and distortions of the real world picture through the production of valid and reliable knowledge (Stake, 1995). In qualitative (naturalistic) inquiries this is feasible through the procedure of triangulation which uses multiple methods to gather data and tries in that way to eliminate possible biases inherent in the very nature of a case study (Merriam, 1988). Winston (1997) refers to the use of case study as a “triangulated research strategy” (p. 2) that contributes to the enhancement of the trustworthiness and overall validity of a case study. Among the four different kinds of triangulation the literature suggests, the present study provides “data source” and “theoretical triangulation” (Merriam, 1988 ; Stake , 1995). Data collection methods included observations, semi-structured interviews and analysis of documents. Sources of data included field notes, interviews transcriptions and school documents, Theory and investigator triangulation were not possible, as I was the only researcher in the setting.

### 3.4.3 *Reliability*

Reliability deals with the ability of a researcher to replicate their findings many times and arrive at the same results. This logic is based on the assumption that there exists a single reality and relies on repetition for the establishing the truth. Although this principle is adopted by a wide range of positivistic researchers (Guba and Lincoln, 1981) it cannot be feasible in qualitative case studies (Merriam, 1988) because the complex and multifaceted nature of social phenomena (Bassey, 1999) is in “flux” and never static (Merriam, 1988). Furthermore, the educational researcher is interested more in the discovery of differences rather than similarities that exist in the real world and this contrasts with the notion of the recurrence of a phenomenon in a consistent and similar way (Guba and Lincoln, 1981). Yin (1994) suggested that the general way of approaching the reliability problem to conduct research as if someone were always looking over your shoulder (p. 37). That has been the approach chosen for the present study. However, “what makes the case study work scientific is the observer’s critical presence in the context of occurrence of phenomena, observation, hypothesis testing, triangulation of participants perceptions, interpretations and so on” (Merriam, 1988, p.165). In this study, such criticability has been achieved by a constant reading and re-reading of the data, through a process of comparing the data from one observation, to the data from another observation and by contrasting the data from the observations with the data from the interviews. Those data in turn have been compared and contrasted with the information gained from the analysis of official documents.

### 3.5 **Ethnographic observation**

Observation is one of the oldest research instruments which arose within the context of anthropology but is no longer related to exotic cultures. Observation was considered for a long time an effective and powerful research strategy but apparently in recent years it might have been less employed by qualitative researchers who rely “more on oral accounts, reported behaviour and recall, rather than direct observation.... One consequence of this trend is that researchers become several stages removed from the object of study” (Power, 2001, p. 327). However, the value of the observation method is still considerable since it relies on the fact that it makes it possible to record behaviour as it happens and therefore it is the most direct way to gain “first hand” data, that is data stemming not from what people declare they do but from what they really do. This point seemed particularly relevant in a research on misbehaviour where observing it while happening has been regarded as of great importance. Further, the method allows the

researcher “to report relevant and rare data which is inevitably missed or omitted when it comes to self-report” (Power, 2001, p. 328) and finally it permits the researcher to gain a better understanding of insiders from their own frame of reference because people are observed in “natural real world settings with as little intrusiveness as possible” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). That means also that observers may see what participants cannot see any more, because participants tend to take for granted features and processes of their own environment (Delamont, 1981). In the present study, observation has been selected as the first research tool as I desired to focus on misbehaviour in classrooms (ignoring misbehaviour out of classrooms: in corridors, playgrounds and toilets). I consider mine to be an ethnographic observation because I did not use any form of pre-conceptualised schedule and because, according to an ethnographic approach, I sought to understand, from the participants’ viewpoint, the meanings of interactions, activities and events (Spradley, 1970). I observed one class in six subjects for one lesson a week from October to May. In each classroom I was assigned a place (I would sit normally in the back row) from where I could conduct my observation. I had a limited visual awareness of what was going on, made even worse by my short sight but in the second part of the year, I had permission to employ a tape-recorder and used it at the same time as taking notes. This helped me enormously in writing accurate and detailed field notes.

In schools, observation can provide information which could not be produced by other methods such as a detailed record of language and nonverbal communication in the classroom could not be obtained from interviews or documents (Foster, 1996a). The qualitative approach to observation adopted in the present study is sometimes referred to as ethnographic, reflecting its origin in anthropology (Foster, 1996a, p. 4). This approach does not specify what will be recorded and tries to note the natural language (direct speech, subjective perspectives) of the observed people rather than classifying it. “This does not mean that the observer begins data collection with no aims and no idea of what to observe, but there is a commitment to begin observation with a relatively open mind, to minimize the influence of preconceptions and to avoid imposing measures and existing preconceived categories” (Foster, 1996a, p. 6).

There is a variety of roles adoptable by researchers in fieldwork. Merriam (1988, p. 93) classified them as: complete observer, observer-as-participant, participant-as-observer, and complete participant. The choice depends on the problem to be studied, on the insiders' willingness to be studied and on the researcher's prior knowledge of the insiders' setting. For the present study, the “complete observer” role was chosen, which



involves the use of detached observation. I was not able to choose a more participant role because of my language, my external status and the fact that the staff did not express a desire for me to participate. Therefore my priority was to intrude as little as possible with the lessons observed and to cause the least inconvenience possible to the teachers who had agreed to let me observe their lessons. My observation, although detached, was not systematic and therefore can still be placed within the qualitative paradigm. The major obstacle was that such a non-participant role did not allow me to develop strong relationships with the people in the field. However, even if ethnography does prefer a more participant forms of observation, I still think my approach in observing the classes was “ethnographic” in the sense that I wanted “to capture the slice of life” (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982, p. 84).

The literature suggests it is important that the observer has personal contacts with the events under study for a reasonably long period. According to Malinowski’s (1922) methodology the longer the time one spends on the field, the better for understanding what is going on and grasping the point of view of the natives as a group (O’Reilly, 2005). While a full-fledged ethnography typically demands long-term engagement in the field, ethnographic case studies can be conducted over shorter spans of time to explore narrower fields of interest to help generate hypotheses. Accordingly, others suggest there is no ideal amount of time for observation: it can be long or short depending on situations, on the research problems and on the role assumed by the researcher. Considering the timetable of my research project, the duration of an entire academic year (from September to July) seemed to be the most appropriate. By the end of May, though, the “saturation phase” (Merriam, 1988, p.94) was reached and I stopped observing but I kept visiting the school in June and July to conduct some interviews.

### *3.5.1 Classroom observation*

Classroom observations have been used in education research for more than three decades. On the one hand, quantitative approach studies (e.g. Brophy and Good, 1986) have developed several standardized classroom observational measures strong in reliability and validity, applied mostly in the field of effective teaching. On the other hand, there is agreement that qualitative (ethnographic) approaches to observation would provide richer, descriptive – although less generalizable – information about classrooms. Such information has been revealed to be important particularly for developing theory and generating hypotheses (Pianta and Hamre, 2009).

In line with the ethnographic qualitative stance I went first through an exploratory phase, and familiarized myself with the “general characteristics” of the classroom setting which consist – according to Boehm and Weinberg (1987) – of physical features, objects, people and activities. After that, agreeing with Cazden (2001) that communication is at the very core of schooling, I gradually directed my attention to the classroom discourse. By “classroom discourse” is generally meant all forms of discourse (i.e. communication) that take place in the classroom at both linguistic and non-linguistic levels (Tsui, 2008).

At the linguistic level, traditionally the smallest unit of speech communication is considered to be the “utterance” (Oxford Dictionary 1989, 255585.) which is a dyadic rhetorical structure determined by a change of speaking subjects. However, not all conversational exchanges are limited to two moves. In classroom settings for instance, the IRE (initiation/response/evaluation) or IRF (initiation/response/follow up) triadic sequence has been reported to be a widely used form of interaction (Nassaji and Wells, 2000; Cazden, 2001). Such interaction is usually initiated and concluded by teachers, who have by institution a more powerful position in the classroom and tend to orient pupils’ responses and evaluate their answers (Bellack et al., 1966). However, deviations from this structure have also been found. More recently the literature acknowledged the importance of students’ power in triadic classroom interaction (e.g. Candela, 1999; Thornborrow, 2002). Pavlidou (2003) for instance, studied how such a student’s power shapes the form of “non-compliant verbal initiatives directed toward what the teacher is saying or doing” (p. 124).

During my classroom observation, I was aware of both the triadic and the dyadic sequence, although neither constituted my observational schedule because the patterns of interactions were not the focus of my research. Further, in line with the qualitative stance of my work, the behaviours of both teachers and pupils were not considered as isolated acts of one to one interaction but rather as bi-directionally influencing one another (Cooper and McIntyre 1994) in a system perspective (Watzlawick et al. 1967). This means that although producing my research question allowed the teachers to be the main focus of my observation, I still assumed with Mehan (1979) that it was the “interconnected nature of student-teacher interaction in verbal and non-verbal modalities” (p. 12) that I was perceiving. Teachers’ and pupils’ verbal behaviour was observed and recorded. In terms of the teachers, particular attention was paid to their behaviour management techniques and notes were taken of their keywords, phrases and topical expressions.

At the non-linguistic level, non-verbal aspects of behaviour are also considered important for their interpersonal significance (Wubbels and Brekelmans, 1998), see for instance what Neji (2009) states:

*when people speak, they normally do not confine themselves to the mere emission of words. Furthermore, they also use their hands, (gestures), head movements, eyes (eye contact), lips (smile), bodily postures and symbols to communicate which always accompany oral discourse - intended or not. The impact of these non-linguistic cues in conversation is called non-verbal communication (p.101).*

In line with such assumptions, teachers' and pupils' non-verbal communication or non-verbal behaviour (Miller, 1988), consisting of spatial position, gestures, head movements, eye contact, facial expressions and tone of voice, touch and silence (Aðalsteinsdóttir, 2004) were observed. Specifically, facial expression and eye contact are considered to be the most important non-verbal communications (Nelson-Jones, 1993).

### 3.5.2 *Field notes*

According to Polit and Hungler (2004, p. 381) the most common types of data collection when doing ethnography are logs and field notes. While the former are used to record daily conversations or events, field notes are “much broader, more analytic, and more interpretive”. I used descriptive (ethnographic) field notes, included descriptions of physical settings and maps of the classrooms, activities and accounts. From February onward, especially because of my difficulties with spoken English, my supervisors suggested that I enhance my notes by employing a tape-recorder. The teachers agreed and I found it extremely beneficial as I could concentrate on contextual information and at the same time I could also grasp – and then very accurately take note of – the majority of words being said in the class.

Listening and re-listening to the tape recorder at the same time as expanding the notes and matching the two has been time-consuming. One hour of observation would take around three/four hours of writing. Nevertheless, given that an individual's memory can be regarded as a source of bias, the use of the tape-recorder has been good to reduce that problem as well.

### 3.5.3 *Disadvantages of the observational method*

Concerns about ethical matters are common to all types of research as every researcher has a duty to minimise possible misunderstandings and distortions of the real

world picture (Stake, 1995). While observation is generally seen as the least intrusive data collection method, it still has its own ethical pitfalls. First of all, it could always be seen as an abuse of an individual's privacy (Adler and Adler, 1994, p.378); yet a debate (c.f. Pearson, 2008, p.1) is open on the covert–overt issue: does a researcher have the right to study a group or individual without their knowledge and/or permission? The Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, published by the British Educational Research Association, seem to call for overt observation as preferable, but the complexity of fieldwork “make [s] it difficult, if not impossible, to adopt a single set of standards” (Spradley, 1980, p. 20). There might be “situations where the field would otherwise be closed to research, where overt techniques would unduly distort the field leading to inaccurate results or where the safety of the researcher is at stake” (Pearson, 2008, p.1). It is still controversial whether in such cases covert research may be justifiable, hence the researcher might also happen to face situations that give rise to ethical dilemmas (e.g. witnessing bullying, assaults etc.). In those cases, knowing when and whether to intervene can be very excruciating; a non-interventionist position is generally supported although it might sound immoral in case of participants’ danger and needs to be thought about carefully. For my research I was “overt” in the sense that teachers knew what I was doing in the school; they had voluntarily agreed to let me into their classrooms and presented me to the pupils as a researcher from Southampton University. I am not sure whether the pupils really understood the reason for my being in their school or the topic of my research, though. Some kept asking me for quite some time whether I was a classroom helper or a journalist. Still I had to decide what to do when I saw pupils fighting in the corridor as happened a couple of times. I judged those fights to be not really dangerous for the pupils involved and therefore I resolved not to intervene, invoking my role of a detached observer. I was aware that when research takes place in school it might be imbued with the conventions of the teacher–pupil relationship (Dockrell et al., 2000) and therefore tried not to present myself as a figure of authority.

Observations, by their very nature, are impossible to replicate exactly and that gives them limited reliability, although along with other qualitative methods and methodologies, which tend to focus on “what is unique about a certain group of people, or a certain event” (Johnson, 1997, p. 289), they rarely, if ever, aim to make generalizations on the basis of a relatively small, unrepresentative group (Pole and Morrison, 2003). Further, one has to take into account the complex, fluid and never static nature of social phenomena (Bassey, 1999). Sanjek (1990) in respect of

generalization vehemently declares: “we cannot expect that another investigator will repeat the field work and confirm the results...there is practically zero possibility of even testing the reliability of an ethnographic report, so one ought stop of talking about replication as a technique of verification” (p.394). The reliability of participant observation can be further questioned in terms of the extent to which the presence of the observer actually changes the behaviour of those being studied (observer effect, as defined by Bogdan and Biklen, 1982). On this point Merriam (1988) optimistically states, “The stability of a social setting is rarely disrupted by the presence of an observer” (p. 97). Yet for a while I kept having the feeling that participants (especially the teachers) were quite conscious of my presence in the classroom.

To address bias and enhance reliability, Adler and Adler (1994, p. 381) suggested that researchers should conduct their observations “systematically and repeatedly over varying conditions”, as variations of time and place “ensure the widest range of observational consistency” (ibidem). Therefore, when possible, according to the teachers’ timetables and agreement, I varied the day and the time of some of my observations. The literature recommends also the use of multiple observers in order to enhance reliability, but given that I was the only researcher in the field, that was out of question.

The second issue about observation is in relation to its validity. Traditionally, validity deals with the question of how one’s findings correspond to reality, although in qualitative research, positioned within the non-positivistic paradigm, “what seems true is more important than what is true” (Walker, 1978 p. 45) and reality, rather than existing “per se”, has been considered as “a multiple set of mental constructions” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 295). Judging the validity of an observational study rests upon the investigator showing they have represented not reality itself but the research participants’ constructions of reality (internal validity). Cho and Trent (2006) suggest different techniques which can be used as “a medium to insure an accurate reflection” of “reality”, namely triangulation (using multiple investigators and/or different sources of data), member checking, which according to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 314) is “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility”, repeated observations of the same phenomenon and peer examinations. I understood that going through the observation data was too time consuming for any of the teachers, whose timetable were very full, so I did not dare to ask. After having interviewed the staff I offered to send them the interviews back so they could add or modify something if they wanted to. The majority of the teachers kindly declined the offer on the spot. The few who did not and were sent

the transcripts have never replied. Being a teacher myself I do acknowledge that they were already extremely busy and understandably my research was not top of their priorities.

Finally, another threat to validity lies in researcher bias that may result from selective observation, selective recording of information, or the subjective interpretation of situations, that is the “human perceptual errors and inadequacies” as defined in Polit and Hungler (2004, p. 391). On this matter Wolf (1990) vehemently adds:

*the last decade has brought anthropologists to the realization that their products, both uncooked (the field notes) and cooked (the ethnography) are but personal interpretations of others' equally nebulous realities. Our uncooked facts... are infected with the bacterial subjectivities of our own as well as our informants' particular biases...and our cooked descriptions... are even more likely to contain foreign particles...(p.343)*

Selectivity both in observation and in recording is inevitable. Although the literature asserts that trained and experienced researchers are less vulnerable to this kind of bias, being a novice in that respect, I guess I have not really been able to avoid the risk.

### **3.6 Interviews**

Kvale (1983, p.174) defines the qualitative interview as “an interview, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena”. Interviewing is distinguished from conversation in terms of “[its initiation] by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research relevant information and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic descriptions, predication or explanation” (Powney and Watts, 1987, p.6). Powney and Watts (1987) distinguish between respondent and informant approaches to interviewing. The interviewer retaining control by means of a set of questions characterizes the former, where it is the interviewer's issues that matter. Conversely, the informant perspective depends on the interviewer relinquishing control in order to allow the interviewee's issues to be raised and the discussion to range across the area of interest. Cohen and Manion (2007) suggest that interviewing as a research tool may range from structured interviews, in which questions are asked and the answers are recorded on a schedule (structured interviews), through less structured interviews where there is a certain openness to changes of sequence and forms of questions (semi structured interviews), to entirely informal interviews simply based on key issues raised in a conversational way (p.291).

Finally, a distinction between broadly qualitative and ethnographic interviews has been traced within the literature (Spradley, 1979; Agar, 1986), the latter being specifically focused on exploring the “classroom as cultures in which social interactions patterns are developed over time by students and teachers” (Foster, 1999, p.32). For the current research, the interview method was developed from the informant perspective and can be collocated within the semi-structured interview approach. I did not use ethnographic interviews because my aim was not to explore the “classroom as culture” as much as to collect participants’ points of view in regard to misbehaviour and related issues. In total, six teachers, six pupils, four senior staff and two classroom-helpers were interviewed within the ten-month time-span I spent in the field. The average duration of each interview was about forty-five minutes (fifteen for the pupils).

Face-to-face interviews are the most common form of interview used in qualitative research. Face-to-face interviews are characterized by synchronous communication in time and place and therefore they can take advantage of social cues such as voice, intonation and body language. Given that there is no significant time delay between question and answer, the answer of the interviewee is more spontaneous, without an extended reflection, and this constitutes an advantage of the method. Wengraf (2001) speaks of “double attention”, which means “that you must be both listening to the informant's responses to understand what he or she is trying to get at and, at the same time, you must be bearing in mind your need to ensure that all your questions are liable to get answered within the fixed time at the level of depth and detail that you need” (p.194). Face-to-face interviews can be tape recorded, with the permission of the interviewee. Using technology allows the researcher to obtain very detailed information about an interview. However, Powney and Watts (1987) advise that interviewees unfamiliar with being recorded may become reticent and circumspect in their responses. I do not think this has been the case with any participants in my research.

In addition to that, one has to consider that the transcription of tape-recorded interviews is extremely time-consuming. Bryman (2001) suggests that one hour of tape could take five to six hours to transcribe. As all the interviews of the present study have been tape-recorded, that has been exactly my case, further complicated by English not being my native language. Verbatim transcription of some interviews took me more than six times the interview’s duration, depending on the interviewee’s accent, speaking pace and jargon.

### *3.6.1 Bias*

In interview researcher's bias is a major threat to the reliability of data. Brenner (1981) suggests that rather than attempting to eliminate bias researchers should instead seek to acknowledge and diminish it. Interviewer bias can arise from personal psychological factors such as motives, expectations, attitudes, perceptions (my stance as an Italian teacher has already been mentioned) and from behavioural factors related to personal interviewing skills. To limit bias, according to Brenner's (1981) recommendations, I tried as much as possible to provide the same introductory information to each interviewee, whilst taking into account their different perspectives, to probe only in a non-directive manner, and to ensure a correct understanding of what the interviewee was saying by using paraphrasing and summarizing techniques (Sutton and Stewart, 2003). Diminishing interviewer bias rests ultimately on the development of interviewing skills and on the willingness of the interviewee (Powney and Watts, 1987, p 51). I think the degree of willingness of the people I interviewed was good, as all of them (even the pupils) declared they had enjoyed being interviewed. I could see it also in the enthusiasm the majority of them put into answering my questions. About my skills as an interviewer, I could count on some previous training as a counsellor. Interviewer skills comprise different abilities such as active listening, sensitivity to non-verbal cues, empathy and adaptability (Combrie, 1995). Active listening techniques (Gordon, 1974) are crucial to the interviewer. These may be usefully divided into probes (non-influencing, verbal or non-verbal interjection) and prompts (the questions themselves, paraphrasing and summarizing sentences) although there is no altogether clear dividing line between them. Sensitivity to non-verbal cues involves mostly paying attention to the interviewee's body language and enables the researcher to gain useful cues about the conduct of the interview. For example, at some points in the interview the interviewee's eye movement, voice tone, gesture and/or posture might reveal that they have become uninterested or uncomfortable and that it is time for the interviewer to move on from that specific issue (or even to close the interview). By conveying empathy for the interviewee, along with respect and genuineness, a more straightforward and complete interview can be facilitated. It is especially important that the interviewer demonstrates a non-judgmental attitude (Rogers, 1951). Finally, interview skills need to be adapted from person to person and shifts in the interviewer's behaviour are necessary. For instance probes, prompts and supplementary questions must be adapted to the context brought by each interviewee.



I used a model of communication produced by Gordon (1974), adopting a Rogerian (Rogers 1951) approach. In this model, respect, empathy and genuineness are key factors. By conveying respect the interviewer defuses any threat the interviewee may be feeling and thus leads to less defensive responses. Empathy is allied to respect. Indeed, it would be difficult for an interviewer to convey respect in the absence of some understanding of how the interview may be feeling. Finally, genuineness – “the degree to which we are freely and deeply ourselves” (Sutton and Stuart, 2003, p. 9) – is a precondition for empathy. By conveying genuineness, the interviewer may attract from the interviewee reciprocal genuineness which in turn encourages self-disclosure. There are two other issues that need to be addressed in regard to interview, namely the interviewer’s appearance and the interview’s environment (Combrie , 1995).

Presented with a formally dressed interviewer some may either feel that such an appearance reflects the interviewer's respect for them or might feel intimidated. A more casual appearance may suggest a lack of seriousness on the part of the interviewer, although some interviewees may feel more comfortable with a casual approach. I resolved to adopt for the interviews the same style I used for the observation, adjusting my style to the “smart casual” dress code of the school.

If the interview takes place within the interviewees’ environment, they are more likely to feel comfortable and consequently to speak relatively freely. In addition to that, and perhaps more importantly for qualitative research, by playing host within their own territory, the interviewees are also likely to retain a good degree of social control over the situation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 150). On the other hand, it is reasonable to expect that people are less willing to accept challenges in their own rather than in a novel environment and this can be considered a disadvantage of choosing the interviewee’s environment as an interview’s setting. Further, interviewees may find it difficult to consider less familiar factors beyond the day-to-day boundaries of their own environment. For my research, all the interviews, both with staff and pupils, took place within the school environment. Some teachers chose to be interviewed within their own classroom (Geography, French and Maths), some in the very noisy staff room (History, Science and the Geography helper), one in the department room (English), one in the library (the English helper), some in their office (the deputy head teacher, the assistant head teacher and the teacher responsible for the school ethos), and one in the year office (the head of the year). The pupils were all interviewed in the year office meeting room. I contacted the participants and arranged for the interview either via e-mail (the senior staff) or personally (the teachers). The pupils whose parents had agreed to them being

interviewed (via a letter home) were directly contacted by the year office. Before each interview, interviewees were assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

### **3.7 Focus groups**

Group discussions or focus groups are finding increasing favour within qualitative research (Woods, 1980; Wengraf, 2001; Gillham, 2005). Essentially, the focus group is a form of unstructured interview with more than one subject (Bryman, 1993). During the 1980s the information gathered from group interviews was used mostly as a basis to construct surveys, or focus groups were considered as “pilot” interviews for a larger study. In the late 1980s and early 1990s though, social sciences recognized focus group interviews as important data sources in their own right (Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub, 1996). Focus groups have several advantages. The flexible format allows the facilitator to explore unanticipated issues and encourages interaction among participants. Interactions can generate more discussion and, therefore, more information. The data are in the respondents’ words, are easily understood, and will provide insights into how respondents think about the topic. Participants may be more comfortable talking in a group than in an individual interview. In a group setting, participants provide checks and balances, thus minimizing false or extreme views.

Merton and Kendall (1946) reported different uses for focus groups: focus groups can help to generate hypotheses if researchers are exploring new territory or focus group findings can help to interpret survey responses, particularly if the focus groups are conducted midway through a mixed-method research project. Further, focus groups can offer insight into statistical findings, especially if unexpected outcomes occur (Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub, 1996). In particular, focus group data can explain how stories, ideas, attitudes and experiences function within a certain cultural setting, and they are considered of pivotal importance within ethnographic studies. The purpose is to gather information about a specific topic in a group environment, through discussion and interaction by the participants. For the present study, two focus groups were used in order to expand the pupils’ point of view in regard to misbehaviour and good/bad teaching. The participants had voluntarily agreed to take part in the study.

Participants in focus groups interviews can be randomly selected from a larger group that should be able to give insight into the topic. It is important to consider whether the focus group reflects the target population in terms of gender, ethnicity, religion, political views, socio-economic status, age, education, and whatever other dimensions might be relevant. A further question is whether to target a heterogeneous or

homogeneous sample. Most researchers prefer a homogeneous group, as having too many different voices could detract from the overall purpose (Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub, 1996). A balance between the need to have enough people for a lively discussion and the danger of an overwhelming group size must be achieved. With respect to the present research, the number of participants in the focus groups (six in total divided into two groups of three pupils each) was smaller than suggested in the literature but worked very well. The groups were homogeneous, as all the pupils came from the same top set Maths class, mostly boys (only one girl wanted to take part). In order to prompt the focus group, the pupils were shown a three-minute video on misbehaviour that I had purposely put together. The use of videos as a valid prompt for children's interviews is well supported within the literature (see Murcia and Sheffield, 2010, for an overview).

It is important to emphasize that regardless of sampling method, focus groups do not provide generalizable results (this issue has been treated above with regard to interviews and observation). The most useful measure of validity may well be transferability which denotes whether the results are presented in a way that allows other educators to judge whether the findings apply in their context (Barnett, 2002). In conducting focus groups the degree of familiarity unquestionably impacts on group discussions. Most researchers prefer group members to be unfamiliar with one another in order to try to prevent acquaintances from influencing comments. My focus groups participants, though, knew each other well as they came from the same Maths class. The moderator is vital to the success of the focus group. "Moderating a focus group might seem easy, but it requires mental discipline, careful preparation, and group interaction skills" (Krueger, 1993, p.73). Most of the skills outlined for the interviewer also apply to the moderator in terms of active listening, sensitivity to non-verbal cues, empathy and adaptability. My long-term experience as a secondary school teacher has been undoubtedly of help. Warm-up questions should be asked in order to facilitate discussion: in that respect projecting the video on misbehaviour was very useful. People should be informed that their responses are neither right nor wrong; the moderator's job is to let the group members know that it is okay to agree or disagree with others' responses.

However focus groups also have some limitations. The flexible format makes the method susceptible to facilitator bias which can undermine the validity and reliability of findings. The group setting can influence the responses of individuals, which is problematic when a dominant member affects the outcomes (but this was not

the case in the present study). Focus group interviews generate relevant qualitative information but no quantitative data from which generalizations can be made for a whole population. Moreover, the information can be difficult to analyse, as comments should be interpreted in the context of the group setting. Specifically in my case, given the issues with English not being my first language, the verbatim transcription of the focus groups interviews resulted in particular difficulties, due to instances of people talking over each other.

The focus groups were added in order to enrich the picture of pupils' perception, which in turn contributed to the construction of the school culture. Given that my sample pupils were all lower set, it seemed interesting to add the opinion of some top set pupils in regard to the same topics (types of misbehaviour, school rules and the ideal teacher). During the winter term I had had the opportunity to observe a Maths year eight top set class for three lessons. Among the thirty pupils of that class, 15 pupils were asked, via the year office, whether they wanted to take part in the research. Six out of 15 responded positively to my letter. I did not know them personally and they did not know me, therefore I thought focus groups to be more suitable a form of interview than one-to-one. Each focus group lasted circa 20 minutes, and was tape recorded and prompted by the video on misbehaviour I had manufactured. Before starting, pupils were reminded of the ethical protocol.

### **3.8 Documents**

Documents constitute an important field for research in their own right (Prior, 2003). Atkinson and Coffey (1997) refer to documents as “social facts”, which are produced, shared, and used in socially organised ways (p. 47). The presence and significance of documentary products provide the researcher with a rich amount of analytic topics as well as a valuable source of information (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Generally documents are referred to as secondary sources of data, which might be numeric or non-numeric, although the definition of a secondary source may vary depending upon the discipline or context. Documents that may be used as part of a study take a variety of forms. As a research method, the analysis of documents is particularly applicable to qualitative case studies, as Merriam (1988) suggested: “Documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding and discover insights relevant to the research problem” (p. 118) as they offer data on the context within which the participant operates (Mills et al. 2006). Documents can be analysed as a way to verify findings or corroborate evidence from

other sources (Bowen, 2009). However, when using documents it is important to bear in mind that they are produced for a purpose other than research, independently of a research agenda, and therefore researchers should consider the original purpose of the document and its target audience. Documents analysis has many other advantages. First, the investigator's presence does not alter what is being studied; documents are "unobtrusive" and "non-reactive"; that is, they are unaffected by the research process; second, the analysis of documents is less time-consuming than other research methods. For the present study various documents produced from the school have been taken into consideration (i.e. maps, school bulletins and newsletters, behaviour procedure sheets, etc.) along with Ofsted reports, national statistics and census documents, in order to gain a broad picture of the school, its area and its general organization. In particular a detailed analysis of the staff handbook was carried out and used for data triangulation (see Chapter 4).

All the data were analysed through a process of thematic analysis. However, over the documents, elements of discourse analysis were also applied (see below).

### **3.9 Methodology into practice**

In this final section I will describe some concerns and problems encountered during the data collection phase of the study. Specifically, issues related to access, researcher's disposition, conduct in the field, organisation of data collection and ethics will be considered.

#### **3.9.1 Access**

The literature agrees that gaining access to the set is considered to be a key phase of the research process (Foster, 1996b). Portside School was chosen for various reasons. First it is a "good" school in the sense that it enjoys a good academic reputation in the area, confirmed by the Ofsted inspection results. Its good academic reputation is paralleled by an equally positive reputation for managing pupils' behaviour (Ofsted, 2008). At first glance researching a "good" school where little misbehaviour would happen might appear contradictory. However, to explore misbehaviour I did not need a "difficult" school with serious incidents of pupils' resistance, my focus being on episodes "relatively innocuous but [that] occurred so frequently as to be a recurrent cause for concern" (Beaman et al., 2007, p.46). During the summer term 2008 a brief exchange of e-mails occurred with the Deputy Head, Ms A. Preliminary information was given about the topic of my research and myself as a researcher and permission was

formally accorded. In September 2008 I was invited to the school to meet Ms A. and to give her a short presentation of my research aims and methodology. I kept it very open because knowing a little how schools work; I preferred not to dictate too many boundaries. I guessed it would have been easier for me to adapt to the school than vice versa. One week later Ms A communicated to me via e-mail that she had found six teachers of six different subjects (namely French, Maths, English, History, Geography and Science) who were happy with “being involved” in my research. Further, the school had also set the sample of pupils to be observed: a bottom set class attending those six subjects. The pupils taking part in the six lessons were roughly the same group (around 24 pupils). My request having been quite non-specific in respect to whom I wanted to research, the school had picked for me a group of pupils who were potentially “naughty” so that I could observe them while misbehaving. It seemed a good starting point for the progressive focusing approach I had decided to follow, the literature offering examples of ethnographic researchers who had started their fieldwork with a wide focus, and gradually refined it (Foster, 1996b, p. 79).

The six teachers – three males and three females – were all very kind when a few weeks later, at the beginning of October, I made my entrance into their classrooms. As the majority of them had not attended the introduction meeting, I introduced myself to them and handed them a synopsis of my research along with the ethical protocol to be signed. Some gave me a plan of the class with pupils’ names on it. Teachers presented me to the pupils as Ros and outlined briefly and vaguely that I was there to study behaviour in school. None asked me to present myself or to expand on my topic and I did not think it was appropriate for me to impose it. Pupils, for their part, did not show a reaction of any sort, not even of curiosity.

### *3.9.2 The researcher’s disposition*

Ethnographic research is of a very personal nature, thus the personality and personal disposition of the researcher become an important element (Stapleton, 1984) in the sense that my gender, nationality, language and age influenced how pupils and staff interacted with me; there are documented cases of gender impacting on research (Meyenn, 1979; Oakley, 1981; Troman, 2000). I think being female did influence this research, although subtly. Male staff related to me quite chivalrously and helped me a few times with practical issues like photocopying or finding rooms where I could conduct my interviews. I also think that some of them felt my presence in the classroom not as embarrassing as it might have been, had I been a man. At the same time, though,

they kept me at a discreet safe distance. On the other hand, female staff demonstrated a sort of tacit solidarity and empathy. With some, a special tiny bond was constructed over the clothes issue and sometimes compliments were exchanged in regard to outfits or bags. My sensitivity to external appearance is quite high and I guess the way I dressed soon became part of my identity within the school (I was told this many times by the reception ladies). However, appearance and particularly clothes have been featured as “an important issue in researching both pupils and teachers” (Measor, 1985, p.58). The staff being extremely aware of my accent did not help me in creating relations around the school. I know that I should have talked more to people during lunch and coffee breaks because that would have been beneficial to my research but I could not help feeling embarrassed by my awful accent. I tried to compensate by smiling a lot, though, and acting as courteously as possible.

Troman (2000), exploring the benefits of the researcher entering the field as a “stranger”, suggests that participants sometimes find it difficult to disclose personal information to those they know, finding it easier to talk more openly to someone they are not so close to and may never see again. I think that has been definitely the case in respect of the interviews but I am not sure the benefit of being “a stranger” applies to observation as well. I would have preferred to have bonded more, especially with the pupils, within the field, as that would have allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of some events that occurred in the classroom. Unfortunately, bonding with pupils was not possible. I could not talk to them in class and disturb the lessons. I could not run after them on their way to another class either, as I felt they did not want to talk to me in public. Yet that revealed a positive side when I left the field in July, because no particular emotional links had been created. At the time, though, I had to accept that as an adult I was associated with teachers and that simply gave me limited access to the pupils' world. Being a teacher I did find myself “fighting familiarity” (Delamont, et al., 2010), in the sense of facing situations with a teacher's mind-set. That is acknowledged to be a possible source of bias but at the same time also being Italian and coming from a different culture acted as a beneficial filter in that respect. To me things were well known to a certain extent and completely new to another in what, I believe, happened to be a fortunate balance of “familiarity and strangeness” (Smith et al., 2009).

### *3.9.3 Conduct in the field and the organization of data collection*

The first three months within the field, from September to December 2008, were what I retrospectively have called my “contextualisation period” (Macintyre, 2000). I

had theoretical and substantive questions in mind, mostly concerning the broad area of causes and reasons for misbehaviour in school – the kind of general issues that are often termed after Malinowsky (1922) as “foreshadowed problems” - but basically I had not yet defined specific research questions, and I therefore aimed at obtaining a broad overview of the group under study (the bottom set year eighth class within the six different subjects). In accordance with Ball (1981), “acquiring... culture is the essence of doing a case study” (p. 79), I also wanted to get to know Portside school as an institution with its own culture, rituals, symbols and meanings. To put misbehaviour “in context” (Bassey, 1999), at breaks and lunch times I sat in the staff-room in an attempt to absorb the “climate” or “culture” of the school. In the library I read bulletins and newsletters on a regular basis as well as the notices on departments and staff room boards. Having sometimes a two-hours gap between one observation and another, I also wandered around the labyrinthine disposition of the departments and offices of the school.

In class, an initial month or so was spent just getting familiar with the general characteristics of the classroom setting, their physical features and objects (size of the room, disposition of desks and furniture, windows, etc.) as well as the people (teacher’s and pupils’ personal traits, attitudes and behaviours) and the activities performed in it. Gradually, still without following any pre-structured schedule, I spontaneously moved from such a “broad sweep” (Mills et al., 2006) of the classroom to a more specific observation of the classroom discourse, where teachers and pupils are constantly influencing one another other at both verbal and non-verbal levels.

By the end of December, after three months of regular weekly observation, I felt I had gained quite a broad picture of what was happening within “my” bottom set year eight class within the six subjects. However, while originally I intended to gain additional information through informal chats to pupils and staff, that had not been possible in reality. I had tried stopping a few times at the end of one lesson or two talking to some of the teachers about salient episodes but that was just enough to realize the impracticality of such an idea. It was quite evident teachers had no time to talk to me on a regular basis and they were not particularly looking forward to me impinging on their (precious) break time; that was more than understandable. In the end I could only manage one formal interview from each teacher and just a few occasional informal chats. The plan of keeping in touch via e-mail and comment over some episode had also to be rejected for the same reason of lack of time on the part of the teachers (in fact the few e-mails I did send were not replied to). With pupils I had thought that after a while



the ice would break and some opportunity to chat to them could arise but that was never the case. They very rarely, if ever, returned my smile when meeting in the corridors and tended not to make eye contact with me, giving clear signals that I could not go any closer. Without these informal feedbacks from participants I felt my initial, although broad, design needed adjustment. Despite the fact I knowingly had entered the field with no specific research questions, as a researcher I was now developing a sense that the object of my inquiry was proving too elusive, too indeterminate to be adequately captured. However, the literature supported me in thinking that this constituted a familiar feature within a process where the researcher is the “paramount investigative medium” (Bell and Newby, 1977; Burgess, 1984; Walford, 1991) and that this was also an inevitable part of the “progressive focusing process” (Stake, 1981; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Therefore I resolved to suspend my observation for two months after Christmas, go back to the data I had already accumulated and make provisional sense of it while expanding my literature review accordingly. I felt the time was right for me to narrow my focus and finally produce specific research questions. In order not to lose familiarity with the field, though, I agreed with the teachers to keep attending some lessons (at least one or two per subject) while I met the staff for the interviews we had already planned.

#### *3.9.4 A new focus*

Following a form of thematic analysis, I was able to start making sense of my initial data. Congruently with the “progressive focusing” process, I was expecting a more specific research focus, propositions and hypotheses to emerge (Spradley, 1980) and to identify which issues would be suitable to frame my (future) research questions. From the provisional data I recognized clearly a specific scenario: a cluster of six teachers of different genders and ages, operating within the same school, applying the same discipline rules and facing substantially the same group of pupils and who, nevertheless, were “receiving” different rates of misbehaviour from the pupils. Behaviour ranged from the respectful quiet that pupils exhibited during History lessons to the disruptive behaviours the (same) pupils adopted in English or Science lessons, through other different behaviour in other lessons, depending on the teacher. My attention was drawn to understanding why those teachers had such different responses in terms of behaviour from the same pupils in the same school, some (like the English and History teachers) in the same day of the week, within 5 minutes of each other. Was it because of attitudes, subjects, or differences in the teachers’ behaviour management

styles? Would it be possible to identify what teachers did or said that had an effect on pupils' misbehaviour? Those constituted the premises for eventually producing my research question (see below). In March, I went back to my weekly observation having developed a more precise focus which informed a more "selected observation" (Spradley, 1980) of classroom interaction, and concentrated on teachers' attitudes and behaviours (verbal and non-verbal) as well as on pupils' response behaviours. The themes that emerged from this first set of analysed data were investigated further in the interviews.

### **3.10 Data analysis**

The data were analysed through a process of thematic analysis. The rationale for choosing thematic analysis lies in the qualitative nature of the data. I decided not to use any computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (e.g. CAQDAS), because I was sensitive to "the dark side of the technological advance" (Seidel, 1991), mainly concerning the distance that technology may create between the researcher and the data.

Boyatzis (1998), whose seminal work on thematic analysis has been a source of inspiration, describes a theme as "a pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organizes possible observation and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon" (p.4). To understand the unrefined information and reduce it to manageable proportions, the thematic analysis process prescribes as a first step breaking the data into small segments (units of coding) and then grouping them into themes. Instead of working on the entire corpus of data, though, I found it easier to approach them by looking at specific sections (namely: classroom observation, teachers' interviews, senior staff interviews, pupils' interviews, the staff handbook and other written material). Subsequently a set of themes was identified for each section. At this early stage of analysis, comparing and contrasting these sets of themes was crucial to the process of reaching a more conceptual way of thinking about the data (Hardy and Bryman, 2004). Also, it seemed better to combine together the sections of classroom observation and teachers' interviews into one section under the heading of "Teachers". Similarly the themes that emerged from the analysis of the staff handbook section were melded with the ones from the senior staff interviews in order to construct "the official voice of Portside school".

The themes were traced at a manifest content level and developed inductively from the raw data, so that "various people...will perceive and therefore encode the information similarly. The result is a higher interrater reliability" (Boyatzis, 1998, p.

30). Over the staff handbook data, however, elements of critical discourse analysis were also applied, in order to “understanding the nature of power and dominance” and how “discourse contributes to their production” (van Dijk, 2001, p.301). The identified themes and their analysis were extensively described (see appendix 2 for an example) and led to the production of an expanded cluster of material, although smaller than the original raw material. Some chapters of the present work, namely the Teachers, the Official voice of Portside school and the Pupils’ voice, have been built mostly on those thematic descriptions.

Chronologically, my data analysis process was divided into two stages. The first set of data from classroom observations and, to a smaller degree, from teachers’ interviews, was analysed in January 2009 after I had decided to end the contextualisation period and was in need of a broader research focus. By comparing and contrasting the themes across subsamples (i.e. the six teachers) from that cluster of data my main research question emerged clearly, which guided me during the second phase of the fieldwork:

*Why do teachers obtain different behaviour outcomes from the same group of pupils, although applying similar behaviour management techniques?*

I purposefully decided not to break it into several research questions as I felt its compactness to be fruitful.

At the same time, in order to develop ideas and explanations, I was expanding my theoretical reading beyond the mere perimeter of pupils’ misbehaviour, to include studies on teachers’ effectiveness, teachers’ belief system and school culture. The second stage comprised the analysis of the entire set of data gained by July 2009, which was conducted through the process described in the paragraph above. This time, having my main research question in mind, while comparing and contrasting the themes, I thought about ways in which the data should be interrogated and how valid explanations might be constructed. “A leap of imagination” (Woods, 1985, p. 52) eventually brought about the idea of the congruence hypothesis as a possible way to answer my research question. The hypothesis reads:

*The more the teacher’s belief system, classroom behaviour and the school culture are congruent, the less likely it is that pupils will engage in minor misbehaviour.*

To put in place such hypothesis, a third stage of analysis (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996) appeared to be necessary. Within the Teachers section, the arrays of identified

themes were re-organized into three broader conceptual macro themes: teaching, children and behaviour management. Those themes had been extracted from the relevant literature on teaching practices, which will be discussed in Chapter 7. This third stage of analysis also involved going back to the original data and re-reading them in the light of this new conceptual framework, in order to ensure nothing had been left behind. The three macro themes were identified to organize the teachers' belief system, which constituted part of the congruence hypothesis.

A parallel third stage of the data re-organization and re-reading process occurred in order to trace back the Portside school culture on the matter of behaviour at the three levels of artefacts, values and assumptions (Schein, 1985). An examination of the school culture was also necessary in order to put the congruence hypothesis in place. A synthesis of the results of the third stage of analysis is offered in Chapter 7 within the section titled Portside school culture. However, traces of this analysis surface within Chapters 4, 5 and 6 where several clues regarding the school culture have been provided to guide the reader.

### **3.11 Ethical considerations**

The main ethical principle in research has to do with the behaviour of the researcher who has to act in ways that are ethically acceptable. This involves informed consent, not harming the respondents as a result of their participation in the research, and respecting their right to privacy. Within the widespread and lively debate about the basis for ethical decision-making (see Alderson, 2004; Homan, 1991), Wiles et al. (2006) add "a commitment to knowledge (or the right for others to know, for example, how specific organizations operate); a commitment to the promotion of respect for social science (i.e. to avoid "spoiling the field"); and protecting the researcher (e.g. from litigation)" (p. 284). Elements of all these approaches are mentioned in guidelines such as those produced by the Social Research Association (2003) and the British Sociological Association (2001). However, some argue these guidelines to be "intentionally ambiguous, which has left researchers able to interpret them in ways that fit the needs of the specific research they are undertaking" (Smyth and Williamson, 2004, p.10). The ethical appropriateness of the present study has been checked and approved by the Research Governance Office of Southampton University. Information sheets from a participant perspective were provided to all the participants, namely the deputy head teacher, the subject teachers and the bottom set year eight class pupils. A consent form (including the right to withdraw and information on confidentiality and

anonymity) was handed to the teachers and the deputy head to be signed and returned. I enquired whether permission from the parents of the pupils being observed had to be obtained. The school, however, resolved not to ask permission for the field observations because those were already part of the standard classroom school procedure and did not need to be re-negotiated with the parents. Hence the pupils were sent the consent form only for the interviews and focus groups, via a letter home through the year office.

### *3.11.1 Confidentiality and anonymity*

Confidentiality is commonly understood in terms of privacy (Oliver, 2003). In general, promises of confidentiality in research are concerned with who will have access to the data (just myself and the supervisors) and how the data will be used (for research purposes only). Frankly, participants in the present study did not seem concerned about the confidentiality issue. For the senior staff who were not observed but only interviewed, anonymity and confidentiality were clarified before the interview took place. I offered the adult participants (i.e. the staff) the opportunity to view their own transcripts and to amend them if they were not happy with something they had said but they all declined the offer. Pupils were not presented with the same opportunity to check their transcriptions and I am aware this constitutes a flaw, particularly so given the recent development of an ethic of good research practice in relation to research with “vulnerable populations” (Kellet and Ding, 2004). However I was not expected to have personal contacts with the pupils without the mediation of the year office, which had already organized all the pupils’ interviews and, it being the end of the summer term, was extremely busy, short-staffed and unable to manage the interviews’ transcripts back and forth.

As it is traditional in social and educational research (Corden and Sainsbury, 2004) I ensured the anonymity of my research participants by concealing their identity through pseudonyms and, in some cases, by changing other biographical details in order that individuals could not be recognised.

## Chapter 4

### The Official Voice of Portside School

#### 4.1 Introduction

The aim of the chapter is to construct the official voice of Portside Comprehensive School on matters of behaviour and discipline. Such an “official” voice also played an important role in the construction of the school culture, which will be described in Chapter 7. Data from two different sources have been used, namely school documents and senior staff interviews.

The documents taken into consideration consisted mostly of the Staff Handbook and a few items from the School Prospectus. The Staff Handbook is a document of 63 pages divided into nine sections. Albeit the entire document has been explored, the sections named Behaviour and Discipline (page 49–52), An Aide Memoire (page 4), Consequences for not Meeting School Expectations (page 5), and Portside School Values (page 11) have been considered of particular interest. The documents have been analysed mostly for their factual content although few elements of discourse analysis have also been employed, in order to investigate the presence of power, dominance and inequality issues (van Dijk, 1998).

On the assumption that “position defines groups of people with similar vested interests and climate perceptions of the organisation” (Vancouver et al, 1994, p. 667) open-ended, tape-recorded, in-depth interviews were conducted with the senior staff, namely the Assistant Head Mr Y, the Deputy Head Ms A, the Head of Year Eight Mr K, the teacher responsible for the School Ethos Mr P, and the Behaviour Support Room Team, Ms G and Ms T. The participants were asked almost the same questions about their perception of misbehaviour, whether it has increased over the last 15 years or so, and why, which type of misbehaviour happens more frequently in their experience, for what reasons, what makes a good teacher and whether a Portside School style exists or not. The Head of the Ethos and the Behaviour Support Room team gave extra information about the Back Up System.

For a better description, the themes gathered at the second step of the data analysis process (see Chapter 3) have been re-organised around two macro themes: namely “the idea of school discipline” and “the ideal teacher”. A little cluster of themes

was extracted from the interviews only and has been treated separately in the final section. The chapter opens with a brief description of the school and its area.

## **4.2 The School**

### *4.2.1 The area*

[Clifton] is a town with around 79,000 resident inhabitants, situated on the southern coast of England. According to the Census, the 97.1% of its population is classed as white with 95% being classed as white British (ONS, 2001). [Clifton] is generally considered a “difficult area”, densely populated with a very high rate of teenage pregnancy. [Clifton] residents earn below the county, regional and national averages. The 2007 Annual Business Inquiry (ONS 2007) data shows that 35.3% of the jobs based in [Clifton] are within the public administration sector (including defence, health and education); this compares to 22.8% within the county and 25.5% within the entire South East Region. In 2006 there were only 0.52 jobs per resident of working age population. The low job density levels in [Clifton] contribute to a high level of out-commuting. The political stance of the area is traditionally conservative (ONS, 2003). In regard to the Education sector, the figures for [Clifton] show that the proportion of pupils achieving 5+ A\*–C (and equivalent) in 2008 is below that at county, regional and national levels, with the exception of Portside School. In 2006/07 [Clifton] had one of the highest permanent exclusion figures in the county and the second highest pupil absences within the Local Education Authority at both primary school and secondary school levels and above the national average for secondary school absences (Department for Schools, Children and Families, 2010).

### *4.2.2 Portside School*

Portside School and Sixth Form is a mixed comprehensive. The school occupies buildings based on an historic residence and serves the coastal town of [Clifton] and the surrounding area. The number of pupils on roll in the year (2008-09) is a little over 2000, which includes nearly 400 students in the Sixth Form. 350 pupils are admitted to Year 7 each September. Upon entering the School, pupils are placed in mixed-ability classes for most subjects, the exceptions being English and Mathematics. Other subjects are not setted until the beginning of Year 8. At this stage pupils who have demonstrated sufficient linguistic ability, approximately a third of the overall school population, will have the opportunity to take a second language (currently a choice between German and Spanish).

The Ofsted report (March 2008) described the School as, ‘Good with several outstanding features’. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) indicates Portside comprehensive to have the lowest percentage of absence among the secondary schools in the area and the highest percentage of pupils achieving 5A+ (despite attainment on entry to Year 7 being broadly average) compared to the other secondary schools in the area. Students come from all the diverse socio-economic backgrounds of the [Clifton] area. The majority are from a white British background and speak English as their first language. The number of students with identified educational difficulties or disabilities is below average, as is the number with special educational needs (Ofsted, 2008). The composition of the sixth form is less socially diverse, although an increasing proportion of students (about 30%) are supported by Education Maintenance Awards (EMAs) (Ofsted, 2008). The school has recently established an Enterprise Academy: an offsite provision for Key Stage 4 pupils who are at risk of becoming seriously disengaged. Some teachers believe the Academy to have positively affected the general level of pupils’ behaviour within the school (teachers’ interviews).

The school is located in a tidy suburban area of detached houses with no walking distance shops. House prices within the neighbourhood are higher than in other sectors of the town and estate agencies use the vicinity of the school as a selling point, because the school enjoys a reputation for success and high quality within the area for both its educational and behavioural outcomes. The school is surrounded by an atmosphere of quiet, due probably to its distance from the town centre. Many pupils reach the school either by bike or by bus. The buildings are all in good condition with no graffiti on the walls. Some of them have been built in recent years while others are older and evidently part of the historical assets. A big area, half used as a staff car park, half as a major playground, separates the entrance gate from the main building where the reception is placed. Both the car park and the playground area are clean with no litter on the ground. Before entering the structure, visitors have to report to the reception. The majority of classrooms I saw are traditionally set out with school desks and chairs, arranged in rows facing the teacher's desk and board which is usually an interactive whiteboard. There are several Science and IT laboratories, as well as indoor and outdoor sports facilities.



#### *4.2.3 Staff hierarchy*

The staff are organised in a pyramidal order, primarily regulated by the Head (male), two Deputy Heads (one female and one male), four Assistant Heads (2 male and 2 females), all of whom have authority to suspend and exclude pupils, followed by 3 (male) senior teachers (one of them is the Head of the Ethos), Heads of Years and Heads of Departments (Staff Handbook p. 57–58). The staff consists of classroom teachers who have specialised subject knowledge and support staff, which includes covers, curriculum support, finance, IT and learning support (Prospectus, p. 28–34). There is a matron and a Behaviour Support Team. All staff have a weekly meeting every Monday afternoon at 2.30 pm.

#### *4.2.4 The pastoral system*

Upon entry to the school in year seven, pupils join a mixed-ability mixed gender tutor group of approximately thirty peers. They remain in that tutor group with the same tutor for the whole of their five years in the 11–16 school. The tutor is the main reference point in the system of individual monitoring and pastoral care (Prospectus, p. 14). Once a term, each pupil has a one-to-one tutorial with his/her tutor about particular issues relevant to the pupil's progress at each stage of their school life. In addition, groups have a Year Head, a Deputy Year Head and a Pastoral Assistant who lead and co-ordinate the work of the tutors.

### **4.3 The idea of discipline**

#### *4.3.1 A behaviouristic approach to school discipline*

“Discipline methods can be categorised according to the underlying theories of learning that the methods reflect” (Woods, 2008, p. 181). From a theoretical viewpoint, Portside School’s approach to discipline draws on behaviourist principles; this is never stated either within the Handbook or in the interviews but it can be inferred. To explain why, three main points have been addressed below:

##### **1) Behaviour is learned**

According to behaviourism, behaviour is learned; consequently teachers’ major role in schools is to organise and determine such learning (Bull and Solity, 1987, p. 4). “Behavioural approaches based upon the theory are widely employed and supported in the UK education system” (Woods, 2008, p.182) and constitute the theoretical framework of mainstream teaching manuals (e.g. Dean, 1996; Fleming, 2004; Cowley, 2006). The Steer Report (DfES, 2005), considered to be the most important British

public document on behaviour in school to this date, for example reads: “good behaviour has to be learned – so schools must adopt procedures and practices that help pupils learn how to behave” (p. 14). This is the position adopted by Portside School Staff Handbook, as it shows in the following passages:

*Pupils need to be taught the expectations and routines of the classroom. This is responsibility of the teacher (p. 13).*

*Remind the pupils of the rules relating school dress (p.51).*

*Make sure pupils are aware of the regulations (p.51).*

*Finally impress upon all pupils the need to treat the fabric of the school with respect (p. 51).*

In the interviews the idea that behaviour is learned and school staff have the duty to teach it is not mentioned explicitly but is often alluded to. See for example this passage:

*If the Head of the Year feels that it will be positive, that pupil will go to the Behaviour Support room and they will work with the Behaviour Support team; they will work up there doing some work that we have in Behaviour Support; they wouldn't necessarily be doing work that they would be doing in lessons, they are doing work related to trying to modify their behaviour. We have just signed up to a web site of a company who provides also behaviour modification work and other things (Mr P).*

## **2) Behaviour is modified by its consequences**

Skinner (1904 – 1990) refers to the idea that a person's (or animal's) behaviour is modified by its consequences (external stimuli). He listed four main types of modification, namely punishment, positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement and extinction. According to a behaviourist approach, the events which follow a behaviour (named positive or negative consequences) are essential in determining whether that behaviour will be repeated or not (Bull and Solity, 1987, p. 10). This leads to the necessity for schools that draw upon a behaviouristic approach of putting in place a reward and punishment system that works on an extrinsic incentive base (external stimuli). Punishment occurs when undesirable behaviour is followed by a sanction that is supposed to make that behaviour less likely to happen again (Bull and Solity, 1992, p 10). A system of sanctions is in place in Portside School and is clearly stated on pages 5, 24 and 49–52 of the Staff Handbook. It comprises detentions of different length (from 30 to 120 minutes) confiscation of property and letters to the parents/carers. On

page 37, information is added about exclusion for a fixed number of days (depending on the gravity of the behaviour and on the decision of senior staff) and permanent exclusion (only used as a last resort when all other measures have failed). Page 49 also mentions the Back Up System which works via the Behaviour Support Team, the Year Heads and the Head of Ethos's office. The system provides support for staff to deal with pupils' misbehaviour. Senior members are on call and able to intervene when classroom teachers require their help. The system serves also to monitor pupils' behaviour around the school. Each Monday the year offices and the Head of Ethos produce a list of recurrent offenders. Some offenders are in turn addressed to the Behaviour Support Team Room for behaviour modification interventions.

Positive reinforcement occurs when behaviour is followed by a reward, which is supposed to make that behaviour more likely to happen again (Wheldall and Merrett, 1984, p.20). In Portside Staff Handbook a reward system is announced on page 24 in the form of a Merit System based on merit certificates of different degrees (several pieces of good work, a major project, drama production, charity work, helping with extra curricular activities etc. would bring to a merit certificate; five merit certificates lead to a letter of congratulation to be sent home and to a Certificate of Achievement; three Certificates of Achievement lead to a Gold Certificate, five to a Framed Certificate). The Merit System is used by subject/department staff and monitored through the Year offices. Note that only page 24 is dedicated to the Merit System, while information about punishment and consequences for not meeting behaviour expectations are distributed along the entire Staff Handbook. The Merit System is not mentioned in the Prospectus where the sanctions are explained quite exhaustively on pages 26–27.

The interviews confirmed the centrality of the school's punishment system, which was explained in detail by the Head of the Ethos, Mr P, the Behaviour Management Team and the Head of the Year, Mr K. Conversely the reward system was barely if ever mentioned. This might be because the reward system operates through the departments while sanctions are imposed by the senior staff, namely the interviewees themselves; it can also be seen as an indication of a disciplinarian attitude of the school. However, it is worth noting that while the merit system addresses academic performance, the punishment system is concerned with behavioural matters. Therefore the two systems are not treated as linked in the documents nor were they perceived as such by the staff and pupils (interviews).

Behaviourism as a learning method, based on the principle that behaviour is learned and can be modified by its consequences, has been widely criticized (cf. Chomsky (1959) and Bandura (1973), among others). Under an educational viewpoint, Kohn (1998a) argues that such an approach rests on the assumption that children (whose nature is considered implicitly negative) will not mature or develop spontaneously but must be forced to do so. The assumption has also significant political implications (see Porter, 2007, pp. 180–200, for a synthesis), particularly because behaviourist approaches to school discipline draw upon an imbalance of power between adults and children. Such an imbalance of power is considered “not only inevitable but also right and, in turn, this *right* of adults to control children is often elevated into a duty” (Porter, 2007, p.182). Such a stance can well be considered authoritarian, as it firmly relies on external control, and conservative, as its aim is to conform pupils to a set of cultural norms, where “the powerful have the right to control the vulnerable” (ibidem). This authoritarian stance has been found to be at the very core of Portside School culture (see Chapter 7).

### **3) Pupils choose to misbehave**

Another important tenet of behaviouristic approaches to school discipline is the idea of choice. Glasser (1969), concentrating on reflection as a means to modify misbehaviour, introduced the notion that teachers should teach self-control to students in three steps: giving alternatives, warning, and then removing pupils from the class. At present, “the psychology of choice, as behaviour management, is a specialist area in education where it retains its status in teacher preparation and government policy on school discipline” (Funnel, 2009, p. 483) and has produced a number of academic texts and self-help manuals for teachers (e.g. Canter and Canter, 1992 ;Cowley, 2006).

“Choice” is mentioned in the Staff Handbook on page 11:

*Sanctions should be seen as a tool to support people in their learning. It is an action to bring clarity to what was wrong to their choice of behaviour (not what was wrong with them) so that they can learn from their mistake and improve.*

The same idea of choice is to be found within many interviews, see for example this passage from Mr Y:

*Sometimes you get a combination of children who choose to be disrespectful toward members of staff... and that's irritating and difficult to deal with.*

Such an idea of choice has been contested for being misleading, because it subtly contributes to the allocation of causes of misbehaviour completely to the children

(inferred by the family background), with no responsibilities for teachers and schools (Miller et al., 2000; Araujo, 2005; Porter, 2007; Woods, 2008). It also draws upon a pessimistic concept of pupils' nature – another important assumption of Portside School culture – with pupils being seen as unwilling to behave well unless adults oblige them to do so.

#### *4.3.2 Types of behaviour*

##### Minor misbehaviour

In the Staff Handbook misbehaviour appears to be of two different kinds. One (minor misbehaviour or misdemeanour) is related to not meeting the school expectations in terms of dress code, punctuality and equipment (Staff Handbook, p. 5), noisy behaviour on road and buses (ibidem, p. 49), and incessant talking during lessons (ibidem, p.14). For this first cluster of behaviours the sanctions consist of confiscation of unauthorised items (like jewellery, mobiles, inappropriate clothing), names on the board (specifically in case of persistent talking) isolation and detention of different lengths (from 30 to 120 minutes depending on how many times the behaviour has been repeated).

During the interviews teachers declared that they were concerned mostly with minor misbehaviour. By “minor” misbehaviour though they didn't really mean lack of equipment or dress code issues as indicated in the Staff Handbook, as much as “persistent talking, being off task, not sitting properly, shouting across the class, talking when teacher talks, answering back” (interview data). These behaviours, apart from persistent talking, are not explicitly listed within the Staff Handbook. They also appear to be consistent with the findings of quite a large amount of research on pupils' misbehaviour (e.g. Kyriacou and Kunc, 2007; Beaman, Wheldall and Kemp, 2007; Stephen et al., 2005; Little, 2005) and public documents (DfES, 1988; DfES, 2005; Ofsted 2001).

##### Homework

Not doing homework is to be taken into account as another type of problem behaviour that is not to be comprised within the other clusters, as it is not strictly a behaviour issue but rather “it's an attitude thing that in itself is a problem” (Mr Y). Nevertheless, lacking homework is considered to be misbehaviour (Staff Handbook p. 4 and 15) and therefore is punished (usually with detention). All the interviews pointed to homework as a problem and some suggested it should be addressed differently:

*Homework is a big issue, one of the biggest; so many detentions are given for failing homework, a lot of teachers' time is taken, I think we need to understand why across the school there is such a rate of children not engaged in homework" (Mrs A).*

### Serious misconduct

Within the Staff Handbook, a second type of misbehaviour is defined as "serious misconduct" (p. 4). It consists respectively of "Blatant defiance towards a member of staff; Racial and/or sexual incidents, Violence" (p.49). For this second type of behaviour, consequences are not made clear. It needs to be "brought to the attention of senior staff " (p. 4) who in turn reserve the right to decide upon it. The point is confirmed by Mr Y in his interview:

*If you say to pupils: "this is the way we are gonna do it", then you get very restricted, confined because then you'll have to...put it in black and white [and] you cannot get away with it. Whereas if it comes up to the way we do it, it gives you the flexibility that OCCASIONALLY that's not the way we are gonna do it because there are other circumstances...*

The "legitimate dominance" (Delamont, 1983, p.77) senior staff are supposed to wield when deciding "ultra vires" about the consequences of serious misconduct, confirms that Portside School considers teachers to be situated in a position of high power while children have low power (Tauber, 1999, p.20). It also draws upon a traditional idea of teachers' authority as something that "must be taken for granted and not questioned" (Hammersley, 1990, p. 69). Claims have been made that such a traditional and authoritarian stance is profoundly conservative as it assumes a power dynamic and hierarchical relationships between adults and children in schools to be inevitable and unchallengeable (Kohn, 1998a), while at the same time by coercing children into accepting the status quo and adjusting to established power structures, schooling might reinforce social inequalities (Foucault, 1977). Such a conservative idea that imbalance of power between adults and children is right and unquestionable is another assumption of Portside School culture.

A second issue to be noticed is that "defiance toward a member of staff" –which according to the Domain Theory (Weston and Turiel, 1980) is to be classified as a conventional rule (that is a rule that promote social interaction) – has been equated in seriousness to "racial-sexual incidents" and "violence", which are instead violations of moral rules (see chapter two). The equation subtly conveys the message that defiance toward (teachers') authority is perceived and treated as a moral mistake, while in turn compliance is implicitly suggested to be a virtue and an end in itself (Porter, 2007).

Within the interviews there is no specific mention of the three forms of serious misconduct with defiance toward teachers' authority standing among them, in the way they are listed in the Handbook. However, the majority of the interviewees were actually quite concerned with the issue of the teacher's authority, as in the following passage:

*I think probably attitude is the major problem for us; youngsters' attitude to teachers and authority... so I would say the way that they respond to teacher ... it is the youngsters' attitude toward some member of staff and [the fact that] they think they can speak as they like or something like this...I would say that's the major thing (Mr P).*

The fact that defiance toward teachers' authority is viewed as a moral mistake reinforces the philosophical stance and cultural assumption that teachers have the right to power as much as pupils owe obedience (Hargreaves, 1982, includes this within his description of "the hidden curriculum"). See for instance the following passages from the Staff Handbook:

*You must sit where staff tell you and you must move if asked to do so (p. 52).*

*If a member of staff asks you to work in silence you must do so (ibidem).*

*When a member of staff talks to the whole class you should remain silent and concentrate (ibidem).*

*If the member of staff asks a question you should put up your hand to answer, not shout out (ibidem).*

Teachers' authority and power are taken for granted and expressed quite authoritatively through the use of "must" and "should", terms traditionally employed for orders. Further, the simple present tense contributes to building up a "prescriptive" tone, positioning "the editor as the giver and the reader as the receiver of uncontested information" (Fairclough, 1989). By reading the Staff Handbook, the feeling is very much of a "written-on-stone" document.

A similar idea of teachers having an implicit (moral) right to pupils' obedience was traced in many interviews. One sees for instance this passage from the interview with Mr Y where obedience (*do what you are told*) is clearly the underlying assumption:

*You are talking! How bad is talking in a scale of one to ten, seven? I told you not to talk, how bad is refusing to do what I have told you to do? That's pretty serious actually; refusing to do what staff told you; it's eight, ok?*

On the other hand, passages mentioning pupils' power and rights appear to be very few either in the documents or in the interviews. The School Council (Staff Handbook, p. 39, the Prospectus, p. 17) is the only explicitly allowed way to make pupils' voices listened to (and only over a limited range of issues). Beyond this, pupils are expected to obey rules the school has set without their involvement and above all, to treat the teachers with due respect. Such an unbalanced distribution of power toward the teachers' end is to be considered characteristic of an authoritarian idea of school discipline, as opposed to the egalitarian or democratic (Porter, 2007, pp.18–20). According to Porter, egalitarian teachers earn their power as students recognise their knowledge and skills (expert power) and wish to emulate them (referent power). Therefore students' obedience and teachers' coercion are less emphasised in favour of techniques such as negotiating, discussing, group participation and contracting (Lewis, 2001). Forms of the egalitarian or democratic approach are related to the works of Dewey (1859-1952), Montessori (1870-1952) and Rogers (1902-1987) and are often referred to as Humanism. Conversely, authoritarian teachers exercise control over students mostly by virtue of a status conferred by institutions (role power); this status in turn corroborates their ability to reward and punish (coercive power). Forms of the authoritarian approach are the ones related to Behaviourism (Porter, 2007).

The Portside School approach to discipline can reasonably be collocated within the latter. In fact the role power is openly mentioned in the Staff Handbook in the form of the “in loco parentis principle” – which is the legal basis for teachers' power in Britain (DfES, 2005, chapter 10) – when it states: “When you are at school, staff are acting as your parents/carers” (p.52). Coercive power appears to be at the core of the punishment and reward system.

#### 4.3.3 *First discipline then learning*

Portside School places great importance on tackling misbehaviour. Even more, this is actually assumed to be a mandate provided by the set of school values:

*We value continual improvement of the individual. We wish for everyone to aspire to the highest standards of behaviour and achievement ... We want everyone to enjoy the experience of success and take pleasure in the feeling of making progress ... We also equally value the right of others to succeed ... These values provide a mandate to challenge and prevent low level disruption and anti-social behaviour in the school” (Staff Handbook, p. 11).*

“Mandate” is a strong word suggesting an official or authoritative command (Collins Dictionary, 1998, p. 511) and indeed conveys the idea of how important the



issue is to the school. Interestingly, teaching and learning seem to be treated as means to tackling misbehaviour rather than vice versa, and in fact the paragraph continues:

*In the classroom this requires an emphasis on continually developing the most effective approaches to teaching and learning” (ibidem).*

According to critical content analysis, “the collocation of words and phrases indicates the presence of a classification scheme” (Thomas, 1999, p. 45). Several cues confirm a sort of “hierarchical order” (first control, then learning) to be in place in Portside School. See for instance:

*In School, good order and considerate behaviour are essential for effective teaching and learning” (Prospectus, p. 26).*

*Description of what should be seen in every lesson: An orderly atmosphere in which routines and expectations are clearly understood and adhered to; Pupils engaged in their learning; Teacher explaining things well” (Staff Handbook, p. 13).*

Elsewhere the issue is directly addressed as follows and the reader is left in no doubt that control and order come first:

*Having control of an orderly classroom is therefore a pre-requisite to effective teaching. However it is not sufficient. Teaching is about learning not just keeping control or policing children. The question often discussed is whether you can have one without the other and which comes first? Interestingly a lot can be learnt from a chaotic or dangerous situation, but that is not something we would value at Portside School” (Staff Handbook, p. 45).*

Considering adequate control of a class to be a prerequisite for achieving instructional objectives is a tendency quite widespread in Western schools (Oplaka and Atias, 2007, p.49); however, in this specific case it contributes to appreciating the disciplinarian / authoritarian stance of Portside School culture which has emerged so far. This stance appears not only in the content but is also reflected in the form of the passage, which is prescriptive thanks to a series of declarative sentences. Note that chaos and danger have been linked together and assumed to be both antinomies of order (while danger is not), with persuasive intent. Finally, it is suggested that teachers who do not agree with the passage shouldn’t really consider themselves as part of the Portside community (this point is expanded further below).

In the interviews, the term “mandate” is never expressly used yet it seems to be replaced by the idea of the “responsibility” the school is vested with. See for example the following passage from the Mr P interview:

*I don't think there is a fear factor in society, a lot of kids are not scared of the police, some of them don't bother to go into court and they think they gonna get a number of chances before prison ... but at the same time I feel we have to look to other venues to try and get them to see the errors in their ways and to try and improve their behaviour, their attitude to life... It's our responsibility to try to improve their life chances. What we are all about in my view here is to give the youngsters, when they walk through the gates, the opportunity to do the best they want with their life...*

A link here has been made between the lack of fear-factor in society and the responsibility the school has to fill it. The school is presented as a venue, alternative to police and courts, where pupils will improve their life chances via learning appropriate (social) behaviours.

#### *4.3.4 The way we do things around here*

The previous passage from the Staff Handbook closed with the idea of community. That was infused by the use of the pronoun “we”, which denotes inclusivity and exclusivity at one and the same time (Thomas, 1999, p. 48). Within the Staff Handbook, Portside School is presented as a closed community, which explicitly asks its members to renounce their different values and embrace the way “we do things around here”:

*Whilst it is healthy to recognize diversity, it is helpful to be consistent and achieve a clear identity about what it means to be a member of this school community. This can be known as the school ethos or culture and it is about the way-we-do-things-around-here (p. 11).*

The tone might look informal but the statement is actually very firm: in order to be a member of the Portside community, staff are expected to agree on the values and procedures the school has set. The use of a colloquial expression – *the-way-we-do-things-around-here* – positioned just about the end of the paragraph works to reinforce in the reader a feeling of familiarity with this community, whose authority is therefore suggested to be a “natural fact”. It follows that on the basis of this implicitly natural authority, Portside School Staff Handbook can claim the legitimacy of its own set of values, with challenging misbehaviour standing out among them as a mandate and where defiance of teachers’ authority is treated as a matter of the most serious concern.

In the interviews, this theme of *the way we do things around here* transformed into “Portside School style”. When asked whether a Portside School style existed or not, almost all the participants agreed that it did exist. The following is a passage from Mr Y’s interview where he gives his definition of it:

*I think there is [a Portside style] in term of the difference in culture, the ethos if you like, has to do with the way the staff talk to children on a level that is pleasant, polite, human and accepting that there is a difference ... I suppose that if you'd be talking about our style it would be that mostly.... I can't possibly say that everybody in the school is like that because they are not and there are some teachers who teach differently or behave differently in that respect ... but I think this is the kind of rational approach is very much our style, the ethos.*

For Mr Y then, the very core of Portside School style consists of a rational approach, a way to talk to children that is polite, human and accepting. This point is accurately reflected several times within the Staff Handbook, see for instance: “*When talking to individuals who are misbehaving do so in a quiet voice*” (p. 15).

Not shouting on the part of the teachers was actually a point made by all the participants in the interviews, either when they were talking about themselves (*These days I rarely raise my voice to a pupil* – Mr P) or in general, when talking about what makes a good teacher. In both cases, shouting was always presented as an inappropriate behaviour on the part of the teacher. It also constituted a norm within the school culture (see Chapter 7). On the issue, the Behaviour Support Room Team, for example, said:

*It doesn't work to shout and yell at a child because you just get it back.*

Mr Y added an explanation for this. From his interview it clearly appears that shouting to children, being aggressive and confrontational, is to be considered something from the “old days”, in contrast with the cultural shift the school recently had:

*We don't tend here to have teachers shouting at pupils and that sort of thing which is old school...the way they used be back in the bad old days. We stopped being very aggressive and confrontational with children and what we try to do is try to find other ways of dealing with children [other] than that and trying to find ways to avoid confrontation, to avoid that sort of disruption... So it's giving people sort of strategies to do that and so I suppose that, in that respect, there has been a cultural shift in the school.*

In regard to “the way we do things around here”, Ms A added:

*I think there is a Portside style that means to be open to ideas and changes but with always almost an underlying sense of tradition, tradition of values and not just running with things because they are the latest... and I think we evolved in the last 10 years or so from being a school that didn't really embrace change at all and felt that there was a big strength in that ...I think that probably is the Portside style is this sense of tradition but recognition that the word is changing and recognising we are educating young people to a world that we don't know what it's going to look like.*

For Ms A, Portside School style is more to be found in balancing tradition and innovation. Yet putting the two passages together one would conclude that in the last ten years or so Portside School performed a transformation in its attitude from being very traditional to embracing some changes. Among those changes one would also include the cultural shift in approaching misbehaviour Mr Y referred to. He expanded his explanation in terms of going from being instinctive (i.e. shouting and confrontational) to being reflective (and therefore preventative) as shown in the passage below:

*We are focusing at the way we see things. It's not the child being bad it's what he has done that is bad....It is the preventative approach....It is to do with staff reflecting....So the way they deal with a situation, is not instinctive it's reflective. So when faced with a situation, just take a few seconds to step back and think actually when I use this technique that's gonna happen; if I use this technique something else is gonna happen.*

This shift from being “instinctive” to being “reflective” and “preventative” doesn’t really challenge the theoretical assumptions that Portside School culture draws on, which remains behaviouristic and authoritarian in their conception of power-relations between adults (teachers) and children (pupils). This can be ascribed to the sense of tradition Ms A was alluding to. Nevertheless, even if not a complete transformation of paradigm, a change seems to have happened and has been portrayed as the way we do things around here. That could be summarised as a cultural change from teachers being openly “aggressive” to being “assertive” (Cowley, 2006).

#### **4.4 The ideal teacher**

##### *4.4.1 A confident (not shouting) disciplinarian*

The Staff Handbook gives several pieces of advice that revolve around the idea of control and order as a primary goal for teachers, see for instance:

*Having control of an orderly classroom is a pre-requisite to effective teaching (p. 13).*

*It is essential to know pupils' names; this reinforces the message that you are in charge of the classroom (p. 14).*

Yet, control cannot be delivered by shouting, as that is negatively treated:

*When talking to individuals who are misbehaving do so in a quiet voice (p. 15).*

*Hint – you retain your authority by maintaining a calm controlled exterior (p. 14).*

*Nevertheless this does not exclude a non-emotional short sharp “bark” where a more severe form of misbehaviour has ensued (p.15).*

Consistently with mainstream manuals (e.g. Canter and Canter, 1992; Cowley, 2006) reminders are given that teachers have to clarify their expectations and set their classroom rules:

*Pupils...need to be taught the expectations and routines of the classroom. This is responsibility of the teacher (p. 13).*

Although their authority is being assumed de facto, teachers are all the same invited to take action in case said authority is threatened:

*They need to judge the situation and act accordingly if they feel their authority is being undermined (p.14).*

A good Portside School teacher should also:

*Engineer positive interactions with children (Staff Handbook, p. 14).*

*Reinforce their progress (p. 11).*

While keeping them at a (socially) safe distance:

*Colleagues are encouraged to seek relationships with pupils based on mutual respect. Over-familiarity is likely in the end of benefit neither to pupils nor staff (p.43).*

The term “over-familiarity” has been strategically positioned next to respect, in an attempt to create polarisation between the two concepts as if they were mutually exclusive. The document seems to be suggesting here that every time something different from respect happens in between pupils and teachers, over-familiarity is likely to take place. One would notice that actually many “things” different from respect could happen between teachers and pupils, namely care, kindness, humour, support, listening, just to list a few, and whether they can all be addressed as “over-familiarity” is a matter of doubt. However, the stance seems to be congruent with the traditional idea of teachers’ authority and power, as has been outlined previously, in section two.

The list of teachers’ characteristics (which are addressed as “norms” within the discussion on Portside school culture, in Chapter 7), elicits *confidence* as a key word along with *authority* and *control*. Confidence, confident and a few synonymous

expressions like “in charge” are actually expressly mentioned in significant passages of the Staff Handbook:

*We strive to ensure all have [the] **confidence** and self-esteem... (p. 11).*

*At times this may require “tough love” and the **confidence** to engage in uncomfortable interactions (p.11).*

*Within classrooms we want teachers to feel **confident** to manage the pupils (p. 13).*

*Is essential to know pupils’ names; this reinforces the message that you are **in charge** of the classroom (p.14).*

*The teacher should be alert the whole time, appear to be **confident** and relaxed, monitoring the lesson ... the key is to appear **confident** and effortlessly aware of everything going on (p. 14).*

This view of confidence as a pivotal feature for the teaching profession parallels suggestions from popular teaching manuals (Dean, 1996; Wright, 2005; Cowley, 2006).

The interview participants confirmed by and large the same perspectives: good teachers are “authoritarian” in their stance but tend not to shout and are able to create good relationships with their pupils. The following passage from the Mr P interview seems to be particularly significant as it summarises the issue:

*I have a reputation here and my reputation here among the pupils is I am not nonsense. So, whether they are scared of me or not, I am not sure whether scared is too strong a word, I would say lots of them are apprehensive ... I think they are wary of me but at the same time I think they think that I am bit of a laugh ... but they know the line is there. They say we can have a laugh from Mr P but when he says listen carefully he means LISTEN CAREFULLY.*

Here, the authoritarian stance of the school is expressed in terms of “children being apprehensive of” and “listen carefully to” the teacher, while the underpinning fact that children think he is a bit of a laugh suggests the idea of good relationships.

Yet the interviewees also enlarged remarkably the picture of what makes a good teacher in Portside School. Ms A for instance added new clues about being inspirational and interactive:

*A good teacher is someone who can build a good learning relationship with a range of youngsters... who can connect with the learners and therefore inspire their learners...It’s an interactive thing.... There is no one formula for that; teachers will do it in their individual ways. In order to do that I do think that people have to feel quite secure about themselves and... be aware that they are the adult in that situation, and [that] youngsters are not only learning about the*

*subject but they are learning about behaviour, they are learning about adulthood in all sorts of ways and sometimes they have to learn by mistakes.*

Still one can also trace the themes of confidence (secure about themselves) and being in control (they are the adult in that situation) surfacing within the passage.

Mr Y introduced the theme of positive attitude and expectations:

*It has to do with the teacher's attitude to the class, to do with their high expectations, in terms of their work and enjoyment and treating them as if they were a top set, expecting to work very hard, producing lots and lots of work and praising them all the time for things they have done and having a good time.*

Finally, Mr K added the themes of humour and teacher's personality:

*I firmly believe that whether 50%, 90% it's the teacher personality. It comes naturally to certain people and how they conduct themselves with a bit of humour, not taking everything literally, not hearing everything, the other way you create animosity...that's quite a range of skills that come down quite naturally to certain people but to others it makes it a very difficult job.*

The importance of humour was traced also within the discussion on the school culture, where it shows in the guise of a norm (see Chapter 7).

In sum, the Handbook and the interviews are both conducive to an idea of the good teacher as someone who is in control of the class, calm, confident and at the same time able to build good but not too close relationships with pupils. The interviewees added some other characteristics to the picture, namely the importance of good attitude, personality and humour.

#### *4.4.2 A masculine idea of leadership*

By staying confidently and calmly in control of the classroom and imposing rules and sanctions, teachers are actually exerting a leadership role. Some manuals openly state in fact "the role of leader is an essential complement to that of teacher" (Bull and Solity, 1992, p.64). However, leadership is not a gender-neutral issue and it is a matter of vivid debate within the literature. For the purpose of the present work the issue might be best summarised by using the two ideal, although stereotypical, types of "masculine" and "feminine" leadership styles in education proposed by Gray (1989). Broadly, a "feminine" leadership style is described as caring, nurturing, creative, intuitive, aware of individual differences, non-competitive, tolerant, subjective and informal, while "masculine" leadership style is conceptualised as being conformist, normative, competitive, evaluative, disciplined, objective, formal and rule bound.

*While the women principals focused on listening, human proximity and emotion displays, to diminish disruptive behaviours in school... men principals focused on obedience, hierarchy and sanctions and emphasized considerably their teachers' responsibility for classroom control (Oplaka and Atias, 2007, p. 53-54).*

Given these premises, it seems reasonable to classify the type of leadership role encouraged at Portside School as towards the masculine end. In fact, in the Staff Handbook recurrent terms regarding discipline were: consequences, rules, expectations, control and order, while no mention was made of other more “feminine” characteristics like caring, nurturing and tolerance. Of focal interest is probably the fact that both the Staff Handbook and some interviews, advocated the avoidance of displaying emotions (particularly negative ones like anger and annoyance) in favour of a rational approach. This too can be considered consistent with a social definition of masculinity where rationality plays a pivotal role (Read, 2008, p. 612). This masculine stance was addressed as a norm within the discussion on the school culture.

#### **4.5 Themes from the interviews only**

Four themes emerged from the interviews only, which were not specifically traced within the official documents. However, these themes have been included in the chapter because they (all) expand on the issue of pupils “choosing” to misbehave, discussed above. The issue appears to constitute a salient feature of the official voice of the school and its culture (see chapter 7). In the data, in fact, there is little to suggest that Portside teachers and staff had a view that the school was part of the problem or that the very notion of behaviour management is co-constructed by school and parents. Considering the four themes as one issue, a brief general comment has been included at the end of the section.

1) Pupils bring their misbehaviour from outside, in terms of emotional problems:

*In society youngsters are bringing into school all sorts of emotional problems that they are affected by outside the school. So it's not surprising that some of those emotions spill over in their behaviour in the classroom (Ms A).*

2) Many misbehaving children don't have a strict upbringing and tend to come from a single parent family:

*I think we have more complex problems, breakdown of society, social issues ... The behaviour of children, the fact that they cannot necessarily concentrate for that long and they don't understand the work and so the avoidance strategy comes into place and they decide not to do it or they misbehave...Lots of them*



*come from homes where they don't have a strict upbringing or good guidance, we see more broken homes now and parents struggling, single parents (Mr K).*

- 3) Some parents have a negative attitude toward school, which children tend to imitate:

*Parents who may never come to the school, never come to parents evenings, never take a grain of interest in their child's education and... it is extremely difficult to try to encourage parents particularly the calibre of parents who don't want. Or perhaps there is a barrier, perhaps in terms of their experience of school and therefore the knock down effect is there...it is just that...they bring it to their youngsters and the youngsters' attitude to school (Mr P).*

- 4) Some parents don't teach their children appropriate behaviours:

*There are lots of pupils who don't seem to know what good behaviour is... I mean, when you speak to them and they have been rude and you say: "you can't do this!" They say, "Why?" And they don't quite understand, if you ask them, "Would you do that at home?" They say, "I would! My mum doesn't care what I do". And that's their life. There is no rule (Behaviour Support Room Team).*

The idea of indiscipline as originating in the home and predominantly in certain cultural and social backgrounds is actually reflected by recent discourses on school discipline in Britain (Araujo, 2005). Within this view, teachers tend to be presented as victims being tested or challenged by pupils' indiscipline, while the right of other pupils to learn is seen as threatened by the misbehaving few. However – as discussed in Chapter 2 – the idea that disruptive students come from particular social backgrounds cannot be considered politically neutral, as it does not affect all pupils equally (Howarth, 2004). Also, this view disadvantages these pupils' educational opportunities, thus questioning political commitment to social justice. "Promoting the shifting of the problem of indiscipline onto pupils (and their families) is particularly appealing for policy-makers, schools and teachers, as it implicitly promotes simplistic 'quick-fix' solutions" (Araujo 2005, p.245), while centring intervention on the pupil rather than on the school organization, pedagogy or the curriculum determines that, "It is the same people that are supposed to be supported who end up being blamed" (ibidem, p.247).

#### **4.6 Summary**

Portside School approach to school discipline appears to be mostly behaviouristic in its theoretical framework and very much centred around the concept of "control". Behaviourist approaches have been particularly criticized for drawing upon an idea of power-imbalance in favour of teachers and therefore have been accused of

being authoritarian, with Authoritarian standing against Democratic (Porter 2007). A power-imbalance appears to be very much in place in Portside School. Features of authoritarianism can also be traced in the great emphasis Portside Staff Handbook places over the “mandate” of tackling misbehaviour, with lack of respect for teacher authority standing out among the most serious behaviours. This in turn suggests the stance of the school being traditional and conservative aiming at pupils’ compliance and conformity to (social and cultural) norms. A second focal point of the chapter revolves around the existence of a Portside School Style, which is outlined as being rational and preventative versus confrontational and punitive. Yet this doesn’t challenge the broad behaviouristic theoretical approach and its authoritarian stance. The portrait of an ideal teacher, which comes into light, is therefore that of a confident non-shouting disciplinarian, exerting power and control through a masculine leadership style. The final section of the chapter addresses issues, which emerged from the interviews only. There, the problem of misbehaviour is addressed (mostly) outside the school into pupils and their families



# Chapter 5

## The Teachers

### 5.1 Introduction

The aim of the chapter is to draw a portrait of the six teachers who agreed to take part in my research, namely the teachers of French, Science, Geography, English, History and Maths. The order is the same as the observation timetable. For each teacher there is an overview of the most significant themes which emerged from the data analysis. The themes have been grouped into three loose areas of different length: teaching, children and behaviour management. The latter, given the behavioural focus of the present work, is bigger than the others. The first area includes biographical information about each teacher, a glimpse of their classroom environment and thoughts about the profession, their subject and themselves as teachers. The second area comprises teachers' beliefs about pupils, both in general and specifically about the bottom set year 8 class. Finally, a third wider area includes details about the standard lesson and describes the teacher's approach to issues of discipline, misbehaviour, power and rules. In this section there is also an account of pupils' behavioural outcomes. Note that the order of the items comprised in each area differs from one teacher to another. Also, the distinction among the three areas is not to be considered rigid, as the areas tend to overlap.

The reader will find many details given in the present chapter recurring further in the thesis, within the tabular display. One of the aims of the chapter is in fact to offer a form of conceptual framework for the tabular display.

### 5.2 French: Ms FL

*I like to work with children and help them really to do well in my subject... but also to grow as individuals and give them support, really, so that's why I call myself a vocational teacher.*

The observations were conducted on Monday mornings, period one (9.00 – 10.00 am) and, after winter term, on Tuesdays, period five (2.15 – 3.15 pm). A tape-

recorded interview was arranged at the beginning of December during lunchtime break and took place in the same classroom.

### 5.2.1 Teaching

Ms FL was in her late forties, blondish and cheerful. She reminded me of a Flemish picture. She welcomed me into her class very warmly. Every time I went she kept being very enthusiastic, this enthusiasm being one of her distinctive traits that she exhibited with children too. Her subject was French, which, I had been told by the Head of the Year Mr K, was not very much valued by pupils, particularly from bottom set classes like the one I was observing. In the interview on this matter she declared:

*I love the subject that I teach! I love learning languages and go and travelling in different countries... From a literacy point of view our subject is so important! But they are saying it's not ...because we are supposed to educate our children at thinking and really give voice to what they are doing*

In the interview Ms FL said this was the second time in her life she had taught, the first time she had a break of eight years while having children of her own and then started again. She had been in Portside School for 6 years now. Those eight years off have been very useful in her job because by helping her children throughout the primary school syllabus she received significant clues to the entire educational process from Key Stage One, so that now she could “*understand where the children have come from, their teaching back ground, in a much fuller way*”. Her classroom was quite dark, packed with pupils’ tables. Shelves were everywhere, no place left to move around. Ms FL had a computer table on one side of the room but often stood facing the pupils in front of the class, where there was a big interactive whiteboard. The walls were covered in posters. The room used to get very freezing in the winter and very hot in the summer, Ms FL revealed. She had a seating plan and gave it to me, which I found very helpful. During the year she changed her seating plan a couple of times, accordingly to pupils’ behaviour.

### 5.2.2 Children

Before the lesson started Ms FL used to put on a French apron and went to meet the children outside the class, in the yard. I thought this going out and ushering the pupils to be her peculiarity but it was actually suggested in the Staff Handbook, as a good practice for staff. Wearing the apron made her look more like a mother than a teacher. Also the way she smiled at the pupils, looked at them leniently, greeted them

and saluted them at the end of the lessons, showed a maternal attitude. See for instance these passages from my field notes:

*It's the first lesson after October half term. The classroom looks particularly cold and gloomy to me. As usual when I arrive few minutes before the bell goes, Ms FL is already in class getting ready for the lesson. As usual she seems to be remarkably enthusiastic; she declares to me smiling knowingly while putting her apron on and then proceeding towards the door: "I am so happy to see them again; I have really missed them.... their smiley little faces [...] They seemed to be tired today.... Most of them probably went to bed very late during half term holidays" (3<sup>rd</sup> November).*

[Rainy day. Ms FL says:] *"They will get wet! Their clothes will get wet! Their desk will get wet and everything will be wet, so their behaviour today will be worse... As usual the ones whose parents care of them will have jacket and plastic covering for their books but the others will not...I'll put on a song in order to cheer everybody up" (11 November).*

In the interview such a maternal attitude surfaced from her understanding of pupils' background:

*you don't know what they come into school from...I have said this to you before I am sure that's a huge impact on them.[Talking about Betty] I can nearly imagine her at home, she is probably allowed to do too many adult things...and she probably doesn't see the point of education at the moment because she is quite young, isn't she?*

Ms FL also believed that pupils loved rules:

*I do think the children like a good structure even if they try...to push the boundaries...they feel much more secure... I think so! The routine is what they expect....*

The first time I met Mrs FL she expressed some concern about the class I was going to observe:

*It's hard work, this class, really... I cannot let them move around otherwise they get out of control. They had another French teacher last year and so they probably need to get used to my style....*

Quite soon, though, after a few lessons, this negative impression faded completely from her talk and she always manifested great contentedness and pride in the children's performance. Sometimes I heard her praising them effusively when talking with the classroom helper: *"They are such good children.... Aren't they? I am so proud of them!"*

Talking about this class, in the interview she didn't want to use the term "bottom" while referring to pupils and preferred to say "*the class with the biggest percentage of low ability children*" instead.

### 5.2.3 Behaviour management

The children entering the classroom were usually quite loud; they preceded the teacher into the room and by the time she was back the noise level used to be very high. Ms FL allowed them some time to settle down before getting in control of the situation and did so usually through a countdown in French, raising her right arm. Sometimes she needed more than one countdown and in that case she would add sentences like: "*I am just waiting!*" with firm voice. When she had calmed the class down she would go for the register. That was not just a formality to be dealt with but a very important moment, as she would address every single child by making eye contact and declaring enthusiastically: "*[Tim] (or [Johnny] or [Betty]) bonjour*", and expected a "*bonjour madam*" (which seemed frankly less enthusiastic) back. Sometimes a pupil answered in English but she wouldn't comment.

Ms FL usually had a very well planned lesson with different activities to be done: videos, movies, songs, drawings, games and quizzes alternatively used with silent working bits. She praised pupils frequently and enthusiastically by saying (either in English or in French): "*you did very well in your test; I am very pleased with your memory; well done! you are really getting there; excellent, excellent!*" She would recognize good pupils with merit certificates and stickers and wrote positive comments when giving their homework back (as she declared in the interview, this took her quite a long time but it was "worthwhile"). Pupils usually paid a good level of attention and participated in her lessons smoothly but she had to monitor them constantly and sometimes staying in control would require some extra effort and raising her voice (she never really shouted, though). See for instance this extract from the field notes:

*"Thank you... thanks!"... The teacher raises her right arm and starts the countdown: "Three...two.... [Betty]? Two...I'm waiting [the chatting doesn't stop] Betty... you are still carrying on talking... turn around... put your feet on the floor" (Ms FL is spelling the words very distinctively)... gradually the chatting decreases but not completely. Again the teacher addresses the class: "you are not listening...[pupils chatting] you are being rude now...[the chatting is still there] we are doing the listening now.... Listen carefully to the tape recorder" ... she tries to give other instructions; imposing her voice over the noise as many pupils are still chatting but in the end she gives up the instructions and turns to the reproach. This time she doesn't go collectively but addresses Betty who continues to be the most loud: "[Bett]y ...if I have to speak to you again...it's your last chance now...do you understand it's your last*

*chance so don't turn around, don't call out"...her voice is firm, even lower than uses to be when she gives the instructions, but she seems really meaning this reproach (she looks at [Betty] for a quite long time). Eventually the class gets silent and she finishes with the instructions about the listening activity in perfect silence (16 March).*

As suggested in the Staff Handbook, Ms FL wouldn't allow the children out at the end of the lesson if they didn't maintain a good couple of minutes of perfect silence. The rule was not systematically applied, though. Some days she just let them go in disarray when the bell rang. In regard to other rules, consistently with the Staff Handbook, she required hands up before talking ("*don't call out*"), silence ("*don't talk when I am talking*") especially during the register, respect ("*don't argue with me*") and the students bringing their equipment.

In the interview she explained how she used to clarify her expectations:

*I have the behaviour expectations on my door, I have this book (she goes and collects a book that she shows to me) and I make them copy it out all right. And I try to make them focus on what I expect because some of them, they don't understand that saying "yeah"...and not "yes Miss"...is rude...*

She also declared her dislike for shouting and being confrontational:

*And then I find I shout a lot less now...I don't like shouting, that's my rule if you overstep the mark one more time you just ...that's the rule... they hate it [teacher shouting] it really winds them up more...I mean occasionally you have to raise your voice, that sort of 54321 counting down...it's quite effective ...it's something that they are used to... at the junior school.*

She affirmed that both she and Portside School had improved recently in managing behaviour. She also reckoned that living within the school area was something contributing to good behaviour:

*I think that in a school like Portside... things have tightened up in the last few years and so there is much more guide line for teachers and pupils to know what the expectations are. And I think for myself, I have tightened up from when I first started... Yes I think I have got quite a bit firmer and a bit more confident about disciplining them... because the children know who you are. You might have taught an older brother or sister ...and so...I think all of that does make difference to behaviour and plus ...we live in [Clifton] so I do often see their parents or relatives and they think I might say something to their relatives! (laughs) And also another thing is... phoning home and for them to know that you are interested in and you call if there is a problem I think that's important ... it's worth doing it.*

I happened to see Ms FL giving detention just once, to [Ronan] who brought no equipment for weeks. From time to time she would move a pupil to another table.



Sometimes, in order to reinforce her reproach, she would remind children of the head of the year Mr K – although she never called for the back up system – or would mention Mr Y’s list (where, she declared in the interview, she would write up the “naughty” children). She also would threaten to send someone (e.g. [Betty]) to another room for “solo” work if they wouldn’t stop calling out and actually did once send her to the Year Office. Usually when the noise level rose, she addressed the class collectively by saying: *“I am a bit disappointed ... I am not well impressed with you today or I shouldn’t be waiting for you to be quiet”*...but she never lost her temper. If pupils kept being noisy she would turn to silent working for a while.

When asked about the most annoying behaviour or at least the one she would find more difficult to cope with, Ms FL doesn’t mention talking out of turn, answering back or being off task as most teachers did, she said instead (again, quite maternally):

*I think it is difficult when you have got an indifferent child the one that doesn’t really care that you are making an effort...I think that’s really hard, because you can try all the different types or ways to make the learning interesting and accessible but it can get very frustrating when you have tried everything you know and you are still not getting positive responses, or even any response, sometimes!*

### 5.3 Science: Mr AM

*I would describe myself as a teacher who likes the pupils to try and think for themselves as opposed to telling them everything.*

The observation took place on Mondays period two (10.05 – 11.05 am) and the tape-recorded interview happened in February, after lunch break, in the staff room.

#### 5.3.1 Teaching

Mr AM is difficult to describe. Medium height, slim, brown hair, brown eyes, probably in his thirties... there is little I can really hold on to in order to depict him. He didn’t wear a suit. I always saw him in a shirt, even in the playground during the most freezing winter days. The first time I met Mr AM in his classroom he treated me kindly but he didn’t seem really interested in what I was doing there. After a couple of weeks of observation, however, I realized that the look of non-involvement depicted on his face was just part of his character. He would keep the same neutral (deadpan) facial expression throughout the lesson and modify it very slightly when getting annoyed. His voice too was very monotone; when angry he would just raise it but still he didn’t really give away any specific emotion of rage.

Mr AM was in his fifth year of teaching, four of which he had spent in Portside School. Before starting teaching he worked in industry, but he added in the interview, his real interest was in sport science. So he thought that teaching science in school would be one way of doing it:

*I thought of becoming a teacher before, as a PE teacher, but as I couldn't do that, science seems to be a good alternative,*

He described himself as not a strict teacher “by any means”:

*I tend to forget basically what's happened and so... if someone has got a detention in the lesson, I forget about it. So I am not as good at following up my threats as I should be, but it doesn't seem to affect me too much at the moment, because I feel that the way I teach I don't need to be ultimately strict.*

Mr AM's classroom was a prefabricated spacious one at ground level overlooking the playground. Pupils' tables were disposed in a sort of island shape where they sat in groups of 5/6. He declared this island shape did work for him, as he was not “obsessed with control” and did not need the pupils “face pointing at the teacher”. The seating places were planned but Mr AM didn't give me a map of the class. Along the side walls there were other desks, usually empty, 2 sinks and several shelves with experiment's equipment. The teacher's desk sat on a big platform along the front wall. Mr AM rarely used it, preferring to stand in the centre of the room instead. I would sit on a side desk at the very back of the room from where, frankly, I couldn't see very well. Despite the presence of 3 windows, the impression I had while entering the class was of darkness and cold. I usually kept my coat on, although I knew it was against the school rules.

### 5.3.2 Children

Despite in the interview he declared to be in favour of pupils working independently, in class Mr AM used to repeat his instructions several times, even when it was quite clear (to me, at least) that pupils were “sizing him up” and just pretending not to have understood. Some did not even bother to listen properly in the first place and then they would go to him asking for help and complaining they didn't know what to do. He would reproach them for not having paid attention but always ended up repeating the instructions again and again. A couple of times referring to pupils' homework, he said, “the most frustrating thing is that you didn't even try!” making it clear that he would have been satisfied with just a little effort from them, no matter what

the outcome. In the interview he showed quite modest expectations of the class, although hidden under a surface of mild content:

*When I think about some of their backgrounds, and some of them have a difficult life... they could be far worse in another school, so, I think they actually... do the work, they finish what they do, they are generally quite polite, the worst thing they do is to talk too much...in that case I can't complain. So I am quite happy with the way they are going ...they are not going to become A grade students at the end of year eleven but hopefully they'll do the best they can...they enjoy doing science... they seem to be quite keen to learn and they seem quite keen to try things... they like to do experiments they don't like to write things down because they struggle writing things down so it's better for them to do experiments.*

### 5.3.3 Behaviour management

The average lesson was quite noisy with parts where the teacher managed to overcome the general chatting and explained something or gave instructions, alternating with other noisy parts. Normally pupils entered the class in a noisy fashion and the teacher would wait before starting with his efforts to get listened to (by shouting “*Thank you, thank you! Ladies and gents! Right!*” several times). Frequently a few pupils were late for different reasons and Mr A.M would threaten “*to keep them behind*”, but by the end of the lesson he might forget about it. Here is a typical beginning of the lesson:

*I enter with other pupils and go and sit at my table. The noise level is quite high. Pupils arrive in groups from different buildings. Everybody is chatting and laughing. Mr AM is busy with his computer. Eventually he spots Alan and Johnny through the window and goes and ushers them into the class. He is usually annoyed with latecomers but not today. The noise level is huge and Mr AM starts his usual struggle to overcome it by shouting: “Right, thank you... thank you...thank you....still waiting....STILL WAITING...Alan I am still waiting for you... you don't understand? You were late”...Alan doesn't turn and doesn't make eye contact but unwillingly sits down. Eventually the rest of the class calms down too but it requires Mr AM to shout for a while... then he adds: “there are two pupils at the back who want to stay longer...Lee you'll stay behind (Lee complains). Stay still and listen...it is quite simple.” He switches to an explanation modality but his voice is still very loud as it was when he was taking control of the class. (2nd March)*

When he would manage to calm the class down, Mr AM started his lesson and presented the topic of the day. The degree to which pupils liked the topic affected the noise level: experiments and practical tasks produced fewer noises than writing tasks but either way Mr AM had to stop and restart his talk many times in order to keep them attentive. As soon as he was finished and the practical phase commenced, the noise level would rise again. Pupils normally alternated chatting and socializing with doing

some work (not much, in my opinion; I noticed in fact that many pupils would pretend to work only when Mr AM stood close to them. As soon as he moved to another table, they would slow down their pace again). During this practical phase, the noise level would stay quite high but there was a sort of tolerated level. If pupils overstepped it, and they usually did, Mr AM would intervene to calm them down (partially, at least) by addressing them collectively (*“Right, Year 8, ladies and gents, still waiting, THANK YOU”*) or singly by telling someone off. When he managed to get pupils’ attention back and the noise level down, Mr AM would not miss the chance to also add some more instructions or repeat the previous ones. Eventually he would say: *“and if you need help just let me know”*. I observed this sentence be a sort of signal, it meant pupils could go back to their modality of working and chatting at the same time, while the teacher went around the class and checked. After a while the noise level would rise again and Mr AM intervened in the same way. This modality happened several times, till the end of the lesson. Sometimes he called the pupils around the central table for some extra explanation, demonstration or for watching a video. They normally moved very noisily (*“like a group of animals”*, he said to the class one time they had been particularly noisy) and once there, Mr AM would struggle to get in control of them again.

When the lesson was close to the end, Mr AM would start shouting once more to impose his voice over the pupils and usually tried to draw some conclusions. Normally pupils listened as long as he was talking but got noisy again as soon as he stopped. When the bell rang, Mr AM would wait for perfect silence before letting them go, table by table. He very often stopped someone for a chat.

Mr AM used different behaviour management strategies. Firstly, and despite the recommendations in the Staff Handbook, he shouted to overcome pupils’ voices so that they had to listen to him. Secondly, as he had to struggle to maintain the class focus on what he was telling them, he stopped his talk many times and waited, arms crossed, for their attention. After a while pupils would feel uncomfortable with the teacher being mute and became quieter. Eventually he started talking again, sometimes from the very beginning. If he could address someone specifically, he told them off several times or less frequently wrote their names on the board (as suggested in the Staff Handbook); a couple of times, not being able to identify the culprit, he put the names of an entire table of pupils on the board. If this did not work, he would send the naughty ones far away from the others, sitting on their own along the side walls. Mostly I have seen [Betty] and [Bobby] being sent to the side, and less frequently [Alan]. The practical part of the lesson (it could either be a quite enjoyable experiment or some loathed writing task)

was generally very noisy with the teacher going around the tables shouting instructions and struggling to keep the noise level down. A couple of times at break just after the end of the lesson, Mr AM confessed to me he had been quite happy with the class behaviour, which I found particularly bizarre, as I just thought I had witnessed the contrary! In the interview he said:

*They are not especially badly behaved it's just they call out too much or talk too much when they should be listening so they are not being silly they are not throwing stuff, I haven't seen too much of it, but they call out and talk at inappropriate times.*

Mr AM admitted that pupils' behaviour on Mondays, when my observation took place, could be a bit worse than other days because they came from language lessons, which, he said, they didn't like much.

Very often Mr AM threatened pupils with “*keeping them behind*” after the end of the lesson and eroding their break time. Pupils seemed to be very keen on their free time and really did not want to waste it, so the threat usually worked. Yet there was often some pupil kept back for what I have called in my notes a “5 minute sermon”. Unfortunately because my chair was located at the back of the room, I was not able to listen properly to any of these sermons. Most of them were administered to the same children: [Bobby], [Betty], [Alan], [Mark], and [Johnny]. From the little I could hear, Mr AM always concluded by saying: “*remember...next time...*” but next time I didn't notice any improvement in those pupils' behaviour.

In managing what looked to me a constant battle for keeping control, Mr AM, although shouting, didn't look seriously annoyed. He adopted a sort of standard reproaching expression (his deadpan face) and used a singsong voice that pupils seemed to be very used to and didn't look very worried of. If the telling off didn't work (as frequently it did not) Mr AM threatened the pupils with stopping the experiment and giving them “*something boring to copy down*”. He frequently announced he would do so but he did it only once out of 20 lessons I observed.

Another technique Mr AM used with misbehaving pupils was to write half a detention slip and then give them some more days; if their behaviour improved he said he would bin it, if not he would complete it and send it to the Year Office. Mr AM's classroom rules could be reduced to two: silent register (but he did it just a few times) and silence before exiting. Both those rules were mentioned in the Staff Handbook and were applied by other teachers that I observed in Portside School. Mr AM didn't expect a silent entrance and only wanted pupils to be quiet when he was talking. He was very

tolerant about the noise level; in fact he said: *“I do not expect perfect silence, that wouldn’t be realistic!”* making it clear that chatting was tolerated – as long as pupils did some work as well. He didn’t like pupils arguing back with him and although many actually tended to do so (especially [Alan]), he often picked up on [Betty]. In the interview he mentioned her as the most annoying pupil in the class.

Mr AM acknowledged that pupils would not act rudely or aggressively but talked too much and didn’t listen properly. I found his view to be true on one hand, as I didn’t observe any serious bad behaviour, but to be a rather “minimalist” approach on the other hand, as to me the amount of misbehaviour appeared to be considerable. Pupils tended to answer the teacher back and challenged him, showing very little worry about his sanctions. This was confirmed by the pupils’ interviews. They would also pretend not to have heard him and played the “I didn’t understand it” theatre, working extremely slowly and doing as little work as possible, continually asking for new explanations and guidance, making little voices, laughing, tapping their pens, slamming their chairs, having a talk and a laugh as frequently as possible. Once I happened to hear this conversation between Alfie and some other pupils waiting in the corridor: *“have we got a test in Science today? No? No? Good! So we can keep annoying the teacher all the time!”* However, during an official test, the pupils were extremely silent. Finally, in the interview, Mr AM noted an improvement in pupils’ behaviour:

*At the beginning of the year they weren’t very good, they basically saw it as an opportunity to do nothing and be a bit silly. They seem to be getting better at it.*

Again, I have to say that our opinions diverged considerably as from October to the end of May I didn’t observe improvement of any sort.

#### **5.4 Geography: Mr EW**

I love teaching when the doors close and you have a class in front of you
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The observations occurred on Mondays from 1.15 to 2.15 pm. (period four), after lunch break. The interview took place in Mr EW’s room at 2.15 (period five) at the end of November. It was the first interview of my research. Mr EW answered all my questions but didn’t expand on some of them, in a sort of questionnaire fashion. During the year we had the opportunity to chat informally at the end of lesson a few times.

### 5.4.1 Teaching

Mr EW was a tall, athletic and blondish man, probably in his late twenties. He wore glasses. I always saw him in his shirt, either white or pale blue, usually with a tie. He looked professional and formal but not too formal. His voice was strong and firm and perfectly matched his physical structure. Mr EW started his teaching career in Portside school so he didn't have experience of other schools. He decided to be a Geography teacher very early in his adolescence and he never changed his mind. In the interview he declared he still loves the job:

*I decided I wanted to be a teacher quite young, I was 15, 16? And Geography was the subject I enjoyed the most at school and I was good at...so... I did a Geography degree and then a PGCE afterwards ... This is my first school ...this is my fifth year...I love the teaching when the door closes and you have a class in front of you. That's the good bit of the job...filling forms and targets and so on isn't as interesting...I enjoy teaching a class, being with small groups or large groups of children...*

Although his family moved around quite a lot during his childhood he had the opportunity to attend a grammar school and probably that's the reason why, he suggested, he tends to find it easier (and more interesting) teaching top set pupils:

*I definitely have a preference towards high ability students ... in some way I am probably better at teaching them than lower ability students ... I think because of my experience... I went to a grammar school ...I think I find it difficult to get into the mind or empathize with low attaining students...I find it difficult to understand how they will learn or when they struggle to learn something that I see as very basic ...with teaching very able students I can understand what makes their brains work.*

If he hadn't told me, though, I would never have guessed that he didn't like to teach bottom set pupils. In fact neither his attitude in class nor his talk gave it away. I had the opposite impression, mostly from his body language and his facial expression, that he actually approached this bottom set class with a certain degree of enjoyment (which I cannot define as proper enthusiasm but still seemed very close to it). Also, he often manifested contentedness and gladness about pupils' outcomes and praised them, although not as frequently as other teachers I observed. To me he embodied very well the ideal of the non-emotional but friendly teacher suggested in the Staff Handbook.

Mr EW's classroom was quite bright with windows on both the main walls. Few signs were placed on the short wall in front of the door, but there were not as many maps as I would have expected for a Geography classroom. He had a desk on the side of the room where he managed the PC from, but he did not stay at it for long. More often

he would sit on top of a table or walked around the room. Pupils' tables were disposed in long rows with little space in between; however the class did not look suffocating. Mr EW had a seating plan and gave me a map of the class the very first day. He changed his seating plan once at the end of April. He seemed to put some attention into the seating plan, particularly during group work when he showed that he had carefully thought about who would be sitting near whom.

#### 5.4.2 Children

Despite his declaration of preference for top set classes, Mr EW didn't think lower set pupils are less intelligent than higher sets:

*For some of them, they get put in those bottom sets because of their behaviour, more than their ability.*

In fact, I noticed in my observation that Mr EW valued what children would say, and usually built his lessons on that, while keeping his talk to a minimum. Also, he seemed to be quite critical of the setting system:

*It is a condemnation ... then they are labelled and that is their mentality and it is a self-fulfilling prophecy... that they are bottom set and they are not going to achieve and they don't ... in the top set they should achieve and they usually do.*

Mr EW displayed a perception of top set pupils as being much more supported by their families, compared to bottom set ones who, to him, look underprivileged:

*[Top set pupils] Their homework, you can see when their parents have helped them, not in a negative sense, whether they have supported them, helped them to make a model, doing extra research. It is clear their parents have been involved and that's a positive thing ...they turn up with the right equipment, they turn up with having their homework done [Bottom set pupils] they seem underprivileged. Their attitude towards school, what is important, they are not ambitious towards school, although their parents may be lovely and nice people, they are not perhaps driving that way and not pushing their children that way, certainly. I feel that perhaps in most cases parents are not supportive...they don't know their grades or what they are doing at school and when it comes to parents evening, I have this class are they 23 in here? I see perhaps half of them...there are certain who are supportive ...but many of them they just. ...They don't care about school, they don't think it will be important for their future... It is sad.*

Mr EW didn't seem annoyed with this bottom set class behaviour, as, he said in the interview, they are not really naughty but mostly attention seeking. For such attention-seeking-ness he even accepts some responsibility:



*They are very attention-seeking, this class... Perhaps they are not getting enough positive praise from myself and other teachers around the school... To seek attention they do negative things... but it's not naughtiness.*

The only child Mr EW really found difficult was [Alan]:

*[Alan]...he seems not to want to be seen to do work, he is fairly able, he understands, but he is very lazy and wants it done for him. And he rather wastes time than think about the work and ...there is a sort of malice but the rest of them, they know when you get cross... they start work, as they should, but Alan is still the one who will kick up against that...*

During my observation, I often witnessed [Alan] openly trying to provoke the teacher in a sort of “let’s see who the leader of the pack is” fashion. [Alan] tended not to make eye contact, wouldn’t stop talking unless reproached at least 3 times, commented under his breath about Mr EW’s words, pretended not to have understood the instructions, tried to shout across the class (usually to [Johnny] or [Mark]), frequently arrived late for the lesson, asked questions at the wrong time, possibly with no hand up: more or less the same range of behaviours I saw him displaying with other male teachers. However, Mr EW didn’t lose his nerve, never shouted at him and, most importantly, I guess, never displayed any hesitation when telling him off. Plus, he did so all the times it was needed, no less and no more, firmly demonstrating he was the one in charge. When we talked in November Mr EW agreed with me that [Alan] was probably challenging him more than anyone else in the class, in a sort of what I defined as a “masculine struggle for leadership”. At that stage Mr EW didn’t seem particularly confident he could win. But he did. Under my eyes, he gradually and spontaneously obtained the boy’s respect. I noticed this clearly from March onward as [Alan] engaged in the lessons more frequently, stopped commenting viciously under his breath, and in general displayed a more polite attitude toward Mr EW. Whether the teacher had a plan in mind or did the right things almost unintentionally is another issue I would have loved to talk to him about, but unfortunately no opportunity arose.

#### *5.4.3 Behaviour management*

The standard lesson would start a bit noisily with children bursting into the room. Usually Mr EW was there already and I wondered whether he had had his lunch. He didn’t seem to notice the children’s chatty entering for a good couple of minutes, while being busy with the computer and the board. I guess he wanted the pupils to settle down before getting in control of them and doing the register. The teacher doing the register was the signal for the children to calm down and they did so spontaneously

almost all the time. After the register Mr EW would introduce the topic, capturing the attention of the class by using video, music, clips, pictures and many different devices. He also tried to start the lessons building on something relevant from their daily lives, that pupils could immediately understand (like for instance letting them check the brand of their shoes in order to introduce a lesson on child labour).

Normally pupils would pay a good level of attention to the topic of the day, and the teacher would easily drive them towards the end of the lesson. He would divide the lesson into different sections of ten to twenty minutes, each based on a different activity (question/answer session, writing, drawing, colouring, watching a video, listening to music, games and group work). Dismissing the class would be normally preceded by a couple of minutes of perfect silence, in line with the Staff Handbook suggestions, but sometimes Mr EW would let pupils go away without it. A teaching assistant circulated the classroom helping the teacher and also keeping an eye on pupils. Once the teacher brought the class into the library and instructed pupils how to use computers for some extra research. Apart from that, all the lessons I observed took place in Mr EW's room, on the second floor of the Geography building.

Mr EW declared to be quite at ease with behaviour management:

*...and each year it gets easier. I have a reputation in the school ...so they don't play games and they come in with expectations...yeah... I don't worry about behaviour.*

The rate of general misbehaviour was medium to low and got better and better throughout the year.

In line with the Staff Handbook suggestions, where shouting was to be avoided as much as possible, Mr EW illustrated his behaviour techniques as follows:

*I am not a shouty person, so I never get very angry and really shout at a class unless it is absolutely necessary. That's because it's not my character and I find it very hard work ... and when I do shout I think they realize that they have got too naughty ...hopefully I keep it in reserve for the few occasions when it's absolutely necessary... The best thing to do is always to wait for silence... and put your pens down and make sure that you have got their attention...some of these guys are quite difficult and I prefer to call them individually....*

From time to time, depending on the task and consequently depending on the noise level of the class [writing tasks being less welcome than watching a video, and group working being noisier than a "hands up" session] Mr EW would stop talking and waited arms crossed for pupils to slow down. He also would tell someone off or "shush" the class collectively but very rarely displayed a nervous mood or any anxiety. He

always looked in charge, as if he didn't doubt that he could manage the situation. If needed, he moved troublesome students to another table. Once after the final bell had rung, he sent the entire class back to their seats and ordered them to pack again, more quietly. However, he didn't always insist on perfectly silent exiting. I never witnessed him giving detentions. Further, he never mentioned that he was expecting any intervention from the Head of the Year or the Year Office staff as if managing the class was his own business only. Very rarely, as declared in the interview, Mr EW would stop some student who had created problems at the end of the lesson for a *little chat* (I saw [Alan], once).

From the first day I observed his approach to class management to be very firm. He spoke firmly, in a serious, moderate tone, with no display of negative emotions, in line with the suggestion from the Staff Handbook. Only once in twenty lessons he got very upset and blew up shouting (in my notes I wrote that he looked very scary, on that occasion). He gave me the idea of someone who liked his job and did it competently. That doesn't mean he didn't have to work on the class' noise level and pupils' on-task behaviour, as he did, especially in the first part of the year. However, I could see how gradually his confidence appeared to improve so that in the second part of the year he displayed a more relaxed attitude and looked more and more at ease. Whether he too would agree with this "improvement" I don't know, as I didn't have the chance to talk to him about it. The class response to Mr EW was generally good. They tried many times "to size him up", more often during the first term but also, randomly, throughout the entire year but he always managed to stay in control. That was particularly during group work, a work modality he tried a few times despite its mixed results, from the behaviour viewpoint. Once at the end of such a group work lesson when the children had left, he displayed a sorrowful expression and said to me: "*not a very organized lesson today, I am sorry.*"

Mr EW's rules were the Portside School standard ones: hands up before talking, silent register, silent working, silent listening to instructions, silent packing up, silent exiting after the bell (this one not always applied). As mentioned, he tolerated some chatting, particularly during group work.

About the types of behaviour he would find most difficult to cope with, Mr EW said: "talking at the wrong time" and "wasting time off task". He didn't make a question of personal power out of it; he did expect a certain amount of attention and silence as much as it was functional for the lesson.

## 5.5 English: Mr SV

*Every day I come here I am not properly pumped up with: yeah! This is it! This is what I do...this is my mission yes ...as it's more: well as I'd do in any job I would do, I would do my best... as I have done every day when I was in school actually ...*

The classroom observations took place on Wednesdays, period one (9.00 – 10.00 am). Sometimes I had the opportunity to stop and have a little chat with Mr SV at the end of the lesson although I had to rush to another classroom observation (History). Sometimes we exchanged a few words at the beginning, before the children arrived, if he was not too busy. The interview took place on 2<sup>nd</sup> February at 10.20 am, just immediately after one very difficult lesson, in the English staff room, and was tape-recorded.

### 5.5.1 Teaching

Mr SV was young and slight, with very short hair. He looked very pale in his black suit and tie and gave me the impression of a boy in adult clothes. Despite his fragile look, his voice was quite deep. I noticed that he tended not to make eye contact as if he were shy or embarrassed. After a brilliant student career in private schools Mr SV graduated in 2005 from Oxford and went into teaching straight afterwards, despite not feeling completely sure about it:

*Partly because I'd done a little bit of teaching in Indonesia over a summer and I enjoyed it and so I thought it was something I'd like to try anyway...*

The training period, he said, was challenging. He had a very tough boys school to start with where he saw “*things he had never seen before*”. In 2006 he started in Portside School:

*My first two years were very difficult because I had a very difficult timetable, very mixed classes and lots of bottom sets and middle sets, every single year group, I was teaching, so it was incredibly challenging, getting to know all the curriculum and getting to know all the different types of behaviour... I came very close to not really succeeding, at one stage, and I'd be given a lots of very careful guidance, to tell me how to get through and, eventually, I think I did get to grips at the end of that first year and managed to feel secure enough.*

Further in the interview he confessed he would love to think of some other job better suiting his skills but he had not found anything yet and so he had “*ended up doing the thing that was his second best option at the time*”.

This was his third year of teaching at Portside School and things were gradually getting better:

*I'm consistent in terms of how I apply these things. I might not have a brilliant control over the year 8 class but I will always do the same thing in every lesson and so they know where they stand.*

The fact that he didn't have "brilliant control" over the year 8 pupils was confirmed by my classroom observation. Mr SV had constantly to struggle to impose silence and to make his instructions understood. Some lessons were better than others but my general impression was of great stress on his part.

On the evidence of my field notes he didn't appear to be a consistent teacher as he did not always do what he had threatened to do, nor did he treat all pupils equally. Interviews with some of the pupils confirmed this. So did the teaching assistant, who remarked the point a couple of time during informal chats we had at the end of the lesson.

In line with the suggestions from the Staff Handbook, where emotional display was advised against, in the interview he pointed out he would never lose self-control:

*It doesn't come naturally to my nature to be loud and demanding so I don't do that and I find it very stressful to try and do that anyway.... I never lose my control, I lose it on my inside but I don't lose it on the outside... I mean I don't show any anger or frustration... I am just constantly trying to stop things affecting me emotionally and I think that if I raise my voice I'd start to get emotionally involved.*

When bad days happened, Mr SV actually succeeded in not raising his voice and stayed calm but the impression I had was that he found it very difficult. He managed to stay detached, even when pupils drove him mad, but his body language gave away his tension and anger. He barely smiled and rarely laughed, walking rigidly and sad-faced around the class. He also attempted some sarcastic jokes the children couldn't understand. Even when he praised them, his voice didn't sound really convincing to me. He would speak too quickly as if he feared the good attitude would stop soon and pupils would go back to their normal bad behaviour.

Specifically, Mr SV thought his role as a teacher had to be that of "authority figure" and the fact that this bottom set year 8 class did not accept that made him feel frustrated:

*You are supposed to be their authority figure and to be their guide and ... that's a thing I am trying to get across them..... I'd like to think that they are going into the world knowing who is the authority figure... So when they talk to you*

*like you are their age, it can be very frustrating, because you are supposed to be their authority figure ... but you are nothing to them, nothing!*

### 5.5.2 Children

Mr SV depicted this year 8 bottom set class as his Achilles' heel. The first time we met he told me tensely:

*I apologize for what you'll see today...this class is very hard. My top set are completely different, they are angels...but these... the first two weeks they were fine but after that they have started to be a challenge.*

In my initial observation I had a quite strong feeling that Mr SV was "worried" in approaching this class but after a while the feeling decreased. That could be either because I became used to his style or because during the year, his confidence slightly increased. However, he clearly remarked in the interview his distance (both cultural and social) from the class:

*I still can't get my head around the fact that that's what children do, because that was not what children in my school did, when I was at school, we were very, very well behaved in my school, and so...I have never mixed in these circles before...I have never seen these types of things...I am not actually from a wealthy background at all, I just happened to be privileged academically.*

He didn't appear to expect much from the pupils academically, as the following passage shows quite well. It is from a short conversation I had with Mr SV at the end of May after having observed his top set class once. I asked him a few questions about the lesson. Specifically I wanted to know whether the subject that day had been the same as the lesson I had observed previously in the bottom set class. He replied:

*It's the same principle, it's just slightly higher standards... it's the same principle... obviously level 6 and 7 things that I'll do tomorrow; obviously they [the bottom set class] will never get there! (He gives a short little laugh). So, yeah, something is slightly the same...but...I mean, they are really struggling finding quotations, as you would expect them to, obviously, and...I gave from the book the same model example paragraph...they did it ok yesterday but...they are not great, obviously.*

Despite his negative expectations about their academic results, Mr SV agreed those pupils were not necessarily less intelligent than top sets. On the contrary, he seemed to think it was more a social and cultural issue:

*I don't think it has much to do with abilities, in some ways it's probably your background, the way you are brought up... because you see pupils in the bottom set, pupils like [Charlotte] and [Jane], they have never said to me that it wasn't true what I have said, and then you can have pupils like [Alan] but [Alan] is*

*actually quite clever ...so I don't think it's got much to do with abilities ... these children are already very used to a home life where people shout at each other.*

[Alan] deserves a special place in this paragraph. Although he patently challenged all the 3 male teachers who took part in my research, Mr SV appeared to be his favourite target. When [Alan] was not in class, the lessons were more likely to flow smoothly and the percentage of indiscipline was lower. In the interview Mr SV expressed his tension with him as follows:

*Monday when I was talking to him he just did that sitting at the angle looking across the room and ...I said his name 8 times and he didn't even flinch to turn to look at me...so just totally blank to me, you know...I feel lost in those situations, you don't know what to do, really ... specifically in a classroom situation where you are supposed to be their authority and to be their guide, to be the one teaching and things, you think "how can they stand there and not talk to me?" They just ignore me...this doesn't make sense to me.*

[Alan] would strategically avoid eye contact with the teacher, evidently in a form of lack of respect. However, the teacher on his part avoided eye contact with the pupil too. The latter could be due to many reasons (rage? embarrassment? I myself felt too embarrassed to ask) but I am sure [Alan] understood it as fear. Further, I also noticed that Mr SV didn't confront [Alan] as often as he did other pupils, and tended to let him get away with more than the others. Again, that might have been because Mr SV knew that once he started an argument it would only finish in the Year Office and wanted to avoid it. But [Alan] seemed to believe the teacher was not brave enough to take up the challenge, and therefore would raise the stakes as much as possible. Other pupils tended to imitate [Alan] in showing disrespect and non-compliance towards Mr SV, particularly Mark and sometimes Johnny and [Alfie]. But with them Mr SV didn't step back as much as he did with [Alan] and therefore managed to get some obedience if not proper respect from them, while from [Alan] he had neither.

### 5.5.3 Behaviour management

I usually entered the class first and went and sat at my desk at the back of the room. Mr SV arrived a minute later from his tutor group. He started making himself busy with the computer and barely raised his head from it. I often had the impression he was dreading the beginning of the lesson. Children arrived in groups and took seats while talking and joking. The teacher usually waited for all of them to settle down and then started the lesson. Although he gave many signals that he was going to start (standing up from his desk, moving around the room, picking up the register, addressing

some of the children, “shushing” the class collectively, etc.) it usually took him quite some time to get in control. Characters like [Alan], [Johnny], [Mark] and [Alfie] tried to ignore him as long as possible, keeping shouting at each other across the room. So the lesson normally started in a quite belligerent atmosphere. The standard lesson varied, going from very chaotic to smooth depending on the day. Mr SV himself, talking to the teaching assistant, couldn’t explain why this would happen, why some days were so much better than others (e.g. 18/3). One reason appeared to be the activity, as the children loved watching movies and videos while they were less keen on written tasks. They also appreciated being read to and Mr SV did it often and quite passionately. Sometimes the readings were a peaceful oasis within very noisy lessons. If the children liked the topic (e.g. the story of Theseo and the Minotaur, the Simpson movie, Big Brother video clips) they paid attention and “allowed” the teacher to go on with the lesson. They would participate by raising their hands, giving their opinions and generally showing a discreet understanding of what was expected from them in terms of behaviour. When the pupils did not like the topic, the noise level rose and they would become chatty and off task, especially [Alan], [Mark], [Johnny], [Alfie] and [Lee]. I often observed how this group of children, usually instigated by [Alan], would keep spoiling the lesson by networking across the classroom, shouting, chatting and ignoring the teacher, while the rest of the pupils were actually quite on task.

When the bell rang, Mr SV did not let the pupils go without a good couple of minutes of perfect silence. I felt this to be a sort of revenge on his part, as children hated to be kept late for the following lesson (History). In such a silence, he usually gave a short sermon, commenting in a tense voice on their behaviour and performance. When he let them go, eventually, they would rush out of the class in disarray, visibly relieved, while Mr SV usually stayed in the empty room with the teaching assistant, Ms A, and talked about the lesson. A very few times I was able to stop with them because I also had to rush to the History class.

Mr SV expected pupils to respect the rules mentioned in the Staff Handbook: silent register, hands up before talking, not to talk when the teacher was talking, being on task and following his instructions, silence when the bell announced the end of the lesson. However, children often acted as if those rules were completely new to them. The behaviour management techniques Mr SV used were also the ones mentioned in the Staff Handbook and employed by other teachers around the school, but did not work as well. Mr SV would proceed by steps, starting with stopping his talk in order to recall pupils’ attention, telling off the noisy children (without shouting) and then, if that didn’t



work, writing their names on the board. The following step consisted of adding ticks on the board, in case of further misbehaviour. After 3 ticks the child was sent outside, either in the corridor or to someone else's class (sending pupils outside the class, however, was specifically advised against in the Staff Handbook). In addition to that, Mr SV frequently threatened to put someone in detention (but actually he did so only twice) or to call in Mr K from the Year Office (in fact Mr K happened to pop into the classroom from time to time but whether he had been called or not, I cannot say).

In the second part of the year Mr SV applied a different strategy: he gave the pupils less time to settle down and took control of the class as quickly as possible by going to the door to speed them up and doing the register straight away. He also praised pupils more frequently, distributed stamps and merit cards and wrote on the board the "top five kids" instead of the badly behaved ones (in my notes I have called this "the new positive approach"). He left them less empty time to misbehave, not only at the beginning of the lesson but also during task changes. It seemed to be working for a while; the lesson on the 18th March, for instance, was particularly successful in this respect and the teacher at the end, talking to the teacher assistant, dared to express his relief and even some hope that the class would behave positively in the future. The following lesson (25th March) didn't work as well. I had the impression that the strongest characters ([Mark], [Johnny], [Alfie], [Lee] and particularly [Alan]) in turn tried a sort of "un-planned-mutiny" culminating with Alan turning his back to the teacher and walking out of the class without permission, while Mr SV was still talking to him. Here are the field notes concerning the end of that lesson:

*The teacher interrupts his reading: "[Alfie] I am still not happy with you why?" Very firm voice. [Alfie] doesn't reply. Alan parrots back sotto voce... "Why am I not happy with you? Explain!" the teacher goes on. [Alan] comments something I cannot grasp. The teacher finally addresses him: "[Alan] you are not part of this"...[Alan] challenging: "why not?" The teacher: "I am not talking to you...not interested in what you say...shush!" Alan doesn't stop to comment something back but the teacher lets him go with it and turns to the instructions [The lesson goes on. After a while the teacher understands that [Alan] is still muttering under his breath.] Teacher: "Sorry [Alan]?" (with annoyed voice). [Alan]: "it's not only me talking". Teacher: "you don't need to respond...just sit down... last task p 32! p 32 please stop talking we need to finish on time". [Instructions] The noise level rises and actually Alan promotes most of it. Mr SV has to address him again: "[Alan] you are not working, come on"... The bell rings, in the disorder that follows, I notice that [Alan] is running after [Alfie] around the class, the teacher notes it as well and reproaches [Alfie] in the first place but then he realizes it's [Alan]'s fault and starts telling him off: "[Alan]? [Alan]? Look at me, look at me." [Alan] doesn't. The teacher insists, "LOOK. AT. ME." with a stronger voice. [Alan] doesn't look at him and actually shows his wish to go out without Mr SV's permission. The teacher*

*threatens him: “[Alan] if you wander off you are just getting senior staff on you!... Get back here...”[Alan] doesn’t care and just goes...the teacher asks me looking visibly upset: “Why does he want to get in trouble, I don’t understand?”*

After that lesson on the 25th of March, [Alan] was given a “fresh start” by the Year Office and went to the behaviour management room for two weeks. Therefore two (observed) lessons followed, where the positive approach seemed to be working, fairly well. When school started again, after the Easter Holiday, [Alan] came back in class from his “fresh start” and kept on showing his disrespect to the teacher as usual by talking back, parroting him and muttering vicious comments. He also kept making alliances against the teacher with [Johnny], [Mark] or [Alfie] and quite often his strategy was to “wind them up” and suddenly stand back before reaching the crisis point, while the others, less smartly, often ended up being punished. Despite that, the teacher continued with the “new positive approach”. My observation stopped at the end of May so I cannot say how the second half of the summer term went.

From time to time, particularly in the first part of the year, before attempting the new positive approach, Mr SV used to reproach the class by asking rhetorical questions like “*I am talking to you, am I not allowed?*” or frequently reminded the children “*I am the one you have to listen to!*” which actually made things worse, I felt, as instead of reinforcing his authority, as he would have expected, those sentences just highlighted the lack of it. Mr SV would obtain a similar backfire effect while reminding pupils of the Head of the Year. Children, especially the “tough” ones, went on with their attitude of ignoring him as much as possible, making no eye contact and showing a general “I don’t care” look. Yet it was not all the class doing so; actually many pupils (particularly the girls) used to pay attention and behave well. However, even during “[Alan]-not-in” lessons, it would be always someone like [Mark] or [Johnny] or [Alfie] who:

*Just ignores you because he doesn’t show any respect for authority, happily... talks over and interrupts and talks across the class... nothing seems to get these pupils to learn something, I think.*

What I found amazing was the fact that a few minutes after the bell announced the end of the lesson, those very same children walked into the room of Ms GV (the History teacher) and behaved very well, as if they were different people.

## 5.6 History: Ms GV

*And this just reminds them that I am the one in control and if I decide that they have to do something, then they do it!*

The observations took place on Wednesdays period two (10.05 – 11.05 am) in Ms GV's room on the second floor of the History building. I used to come straight after the English lesson and sometimes got trapped by the crowd of pupils who were moving around the school all at the same time. The interview occurred at the beginning of March in the (very noisy) staff room and was tape-recorded. A few times during the year I stayed with her at the end of a session and we exchanged a few words about the lesson.

### 5.6.1 Teaching

Mrs GV was a blond, Botticelli-esque kind of a woman in her early thirties. The first time we met in the Deputy Head's office I was impressed with her confidence and firmness; I would say she radiated a sort of natural confidence. This was her fourth year at Portside School. She had done History at university but worked in business for five years before deciding to go in for teaching.

She considered teaching "*as a very rewarding job*", particularly when "*you do a really good lesson and they really enjoy it...and you say oh! I really have made a difference!*" In the interview Ms GV made it very clear that she really loved teaching History, as it is the subject she preferred:

*I find that they [pupils] can... understand that people in the past were no different, they were born in different time period, but if we would be moved backwards or forwards, we would react in the same way. And I like them to understand, to learn from history.*

She had the opportunity of teaching Geography once and felt she could be a competent teacher but definitely not as "*enthusiastic*" as she was in History. I found her lessons definitely exuded enthusiasm.

About herself as a teacher, she expressly admitted to have "presence": which I found to be very close to the idea of "confidence" expressed within the Staff Handbook:

*When I was going into teaching I had a couple of friends who were teachers and I said to them "what I would be like?" And one of them said: "you have got presence".... and my Head of Department said that, when he was observing me during my NQT "you have got presence"...I don't know if it is something you*

*can manufacture because from my first lesson... it wasn't practice, I just had it, really!*

### 5.6.2 Children

Consistently with the suggestions from the Staff Handbook, Ms GV thought that as a teacher she has to build good relationships with pupils while at the same time avoiding over-familiarity:

*You do keep your distance but you build up a relationship. You don't have to know what's going on, what clubs they join and everything... but just to be able to have a little joke as well.*

She seemed to be quite happy with this bottom set year 8, as they “are a very good group anyway”. About the top set pupils she said:

*Top sets are REALLY quiet, so quiet that they sit there and just like sponge and absorb...I did have a year ten top set two years ago, they were just ...dull!*

However, she did not make distinctions between the two sets; in fact she didn't think they were different in terms of academic abilities:

*Probably one of my limits is I don't differentiate as much as maybe I should do or maybe as I am expected to do and... I don't design specific worksheets, you know, cards and things and filling the gaps... I find that with the bottom set classes they can pick up and explain things that a top set doesn't. They are very good at recalling facts, the information; they are a lot better at that than top sets are. I have noticed this because I have always had a bottom and a higher set, since I have been here, but they don't explain as much.... top set they don't remember the facts but they do explain ...but I don't think that bottom sets should be taught differently.*

However, when it comes to homework, she conceded the two sets did show some differences:

*A lot of them [bottom set pupils] I know come from the type of home where ...they don't always have a pen, they often don't know where their exercise books are at home so... with the bottom sets I tend to take their books in. I also don't set lots of homework, as you probably noticed, because most of the time it is just for the point of it, and is not gonna get done. And the one who has got issues at home, goes home and sitting down and doing their homework is last thing on their mind...so... I cram a lot into the lessons... Homework at home that's more for top set kids who have got that kind of support they got a peaceful place where they can go and research while the bottom sets are just not always that way.*

Observing Ms GV's lessons I noticed that she actually expected a lot from the pupils, not only in terms of behaviour but also academically, and she passed this

message to them. In fact she always treated them as “capable” and therefore didn’t accept any excuse for their off-task behaviour. In case of inappropriate answers she would even assume a sort of scornful expression as if they did it on purpose to offend her. On the other hand, she praised them sincerely, when they did well, either collectively, especially at the end of the lesson, or singly (*I tell you... you know a lot! Well done! Spot on! Okey dokey!* ) and, by her voice and facial expression, there were no doubts that she really meant it. Regarding this point, in the interview Ms GV says:

*I think if you praise them not excessively so they don’t value it, say that was REALLY GOOD they would remember...I wasn’t expecting you to remember that much.*

Even [Kay], the statemented boy, had to take part in the answering sessions as much as the others.

### 5.6.3 Behaviour management

The start of the lesson was usually very quick and brisk. As most of the time I arrived last when all the children were already in I couldn’t say whether Ms GV greeted the pupils on the door or not. But I don’t think so. She was the only teacher among the six that I observed who didn’t allow pupils any settling down time. She expected them to walk into the class very quietly – as if the lesson was starting outside the door, in the corridor – and if they did not do so she warned she will send them back out again (actually this happened, once). She did the register briskly with an almost annoyed voice and started the lesson promptly without pauses. See the following field notes:

*Ms GV is standing in front of the board facing the class. She is staring at the pupils with darkened face. A few pupils are chatting slowly but stop immediately as the teacher brandishes the register and does it firmly with her slightly nasal voice (she sounds quite posh). The silence is perfect. It looks like pupils are waiting to be told what to do next. And in fact Ms GV immediately after the register starts the lesson with a firm voice: Okey dokey...(16 October)*

The standard lesson was well planned and flew smoothly throughout. Ms GV would explain a topic, read some passages or recapitulate what has been said previously, while pupils answered different questions or wrote in their books, alternately. Ms GV used a large number of technical devices such as the interactive board, video clips, movies and music along with books and photocopies. The explanation / reading parts were quite interactive, with children invited (or even commanded) to take part in it by raising their hands.

While explaining History Ms GV sprinkled her talk with amusing, horrific or funny bits (she mentioned for instance: the rotten teeth of Elisabeth the First, the ghost in the London Tower, the stammer of King George, the decapitation of Mary Queen of Scots, etcetera), which patently encouraged pupils' attention and exploited their enjoyment of the subject. The same happened with the reading parts, where she mimicked different voices and accents in a laudable theatre-like effect. Even during the interview she changed her accent and voice for me a couple of times. She also would pause and recapitulate the content frequently in order to verify pupils' attention and understanding. None was left behind and none could easily get off task.

Sometimes a "resolve-a-mystery" or "answer-a-question" or "find-the-answer" activity shaped part of the lesson in a sort of detective story fashion. At other times, particularly by the end of some lessons, where she thought that pupils had been working hard and deserved a treat, she employed games and quizzes. Ms GV took an active part in these games and showed her engagement and team spirit by shouting, jumping and pulling faces. The first time I spotted her being so involved I was quite impressed as she acted as if she was genuinely into the game. Ms GV seemed to be aware that pupils appreciate this amusing side of her teaching style:

*If there is something amusing about history then I will walk kind of.... you know... do that....(she mimics someone limping funny) and they like that ...a little bit amusing really ...*

The year eight bottom set class responded very well to Ms GV's strategy and showed an impressive degree of engagement and attention along with a low degree of misbehaviour. I believe Ms GV was the most successful teacher among the six I observed in managing pupils' behaviour. Even characters like [Alfie], who found it very difficult to stay focused for more than few minutes and tended to go off task very easily, seemed to enjoy her lessons and participated actively. Ms GV revealed in the interview that she used to make it very clear to the pupils from the very first lesson that she expected their full attention and did not tolerate anything less than a perfect extent of engagement and behaviour:

*The first time you get a class...forget that hour of teaching and just spend it going over what you do expect ...basically saying ... "these are my expectations, this is what I expect you to do!" Doesn't matter if other teachers are saying the same as well, you need to be clear ... I think that some one said once you've got 30 seconds when you meet a class and then they are sizing you up! And I would remember every September I get new classes, I open that door and I know that I have got 30 seconds, and I have got to get across what I like.*

When pupils did not behave as they should have, Ms GV intervened very promptly:

*Maybe it looks like I overreact but I think “if I don’t bring them back now I’m going to have problems with them!” And if it’s necessary I do this sometimes with the bottom sets.... if they came in too loud, you know, yelling across the classroom... I call order for the register and if they don’t do it...I just go: “Right, get out!” And they are out and they stand out and sometimes it can take a couple of times for them to...I insist that they are absolutely silent outside when they walk in, in absolute silence ...and they sit down and it’s ABSOLUTE silence.*

Ms GV told pupils off by watching them severely and spelling the words in a sort of scornful fashion that seemed to be quite effective. In fact, pupils immediately stopped whatever they were doing and showed contrition. Sometimes she engaged the naughty ones in a short verbal exchange that delivered the reproach even more effectively:

*What’s the problem [Mark]? (dismissive tone). [Mark]: I don’t know. Ms GV: Neither do I so why are you talking? (November 12th)*

Even pupils like [Alan] and [Mark] who with other teachers would show challenging behaviour at the time, acted deferentially in Ms GV’s class. If reproached, they would apologize and say: “Sorry madam / miss” (while with other teachers they wouldn’t). Sometimes just the fact that she stares or points at the annoying pupils without saying a word is enough. If not, Ms GV wouldn’t hesitate to make them to stand up.

I never saw Ms GV stopping anyone at lunchtime, although she threatened to do so a few times. Occasionally, she would stop someone for a brief chat at the end of the lesson, instead. Ms GV never used the back up system – even if “*it is nice knowing it is there, just in case there were someone I wouldn’t be able to charm into submission*”, she said in the interview. She never mentioned she would call in the Head of the Year in order to intimidate the pupils, as she simply did not need to.

As one of her students ([Johnny]) summarised during his interview, Ms GV “*has power*”. It is something that she simply draws upon as it is naturally due to her as a teacher:

*I see this with parents and teachers ... who just want to be their [children’s] friends, be popular and go: “I have asked you three times (mocking a silly little voice); no please I don’t want you to do that”...(she shakes her head) I don’t have it and I go: “RIGHT! That’s what you’re doing! (Very firm strong voice). No discussion! I am not gonna ask you again...do it!”... Then they go and do it.*

The best way I can think of to describe her behaviour is “regal”. Sometimes I had the clear impression she was not giving instructions to the class, she was giving orders, as these sentences from the field notes show:

*Stand up, I am talking, you are not (October 8<sup>th</sup>)*

*Register! Turn around and I do not say it again! (November 5<sup>th</sup>)*

*Sit down and get off that not very school uniform jacket...(May 20<sup>th</sup>)*

In her approach I would say Ms GV appears to be very much in line with the Staff Handbook, closely embodying the figure of “friendly disciplinarian” that surfaces in it.

Apart from the standard school rules of silent entering/exiting, silent register and hands up before talking, Ms GV had a few specific rules that worked to enhance her position of power. First she didn’t accept anyone sitting relaxed in their chair while she was talking and promptly and briskly commanded them to “*sit up!*”

Secondly, unlike other teachers, she would not allow pupils any spare time when changing from one task to another and expected them to behave properly non-stop. Only by the end of the lesson while packing, Ms GV would tolerate a little amount of noise and chatting on the part of the pupils but as soon as the bell would ring she didn’t allow them out unless they had turned into a perfect silence once more. Sometimes she would produce a long wooden stick (how emblematic!) and banged it on the floor in order to convey to pupils the signal that the lesson was over and that perfect silence was required.

## **5.7 Maths: Ms TN**

*When you get to year nine you don't like to have the bottom couple of sets... actually no I'd be really happy if I could have the same class again that'd be fantastic!*

The classroom observations took place on Wednesdays period five (2.15 – 3.15 pm). After February half term it was agreed to move it to Fridays, same period. We had a first informal chat in November and a proper tape-recorded interview in June.

### **5.7.1 Teaching**

Ms TN was a very young teacher. She had started her career in Portside School just two years before and this was the only school she had had experience of, apart from the Catholic school where she went as a pupil. She was short and blondish with green eyes. The first thing Ms TN declared in the informal chat we had in November was her



great enthusiasm for the job: “*I love it, absolutely love it!*” In her family, she said, there were many teachers, so she was glad to continue this sort of tradition. She repeated several times that teaching was her perfect life-job and that she would love to stay in Portside as long as possible as she was extremely happy with this school, too, especially with her department.

She thought of herself as a soft kind of a teacher

*I set lots less detentions, I think, than other teachers and they [the children] really have to push a lot to get a detention. They know that I would kind of listen to them and ...probably not to be quite so harsh on them.*

Her room was spacious and bright with three big windows and bookshelves on the short wall. It looked brand new, as did the entire Maths building. I had been in some other classrooms on the same corridor and they looked almost the same.

### 5.7.2 Children

Very early in the interview Ms TN enthusiastically pointed out how much she liked the pupils and how proud she was about their outcomes:

*They actually want to learn, which is brilliant, they are such a nice group...I like all year group anyway but ...I really like them ...the characters in there are.... Yeah! I see them last thing on a Friday. Normally when we have low set last thing on a Friday you think: “Oh it’s got to be horrible” and that’s what I have thought... before I met them I watched the timetable and said “I have got a Z four last thing on a Friday, how horrible!” But I really enjoyed it because you can do so much more with them because they all push themselves to the expectations quite happily and they want to, they want to achieve ...and that’s fantastic!*

The results had been good beyond expectations at the point she “*would be very happy to have the same class again*” the following year, as she was very happy with pupils’ outcomes.

*I am so proud of what they have achieved ...this year as a class they have done brilliantly... I expect a lot from them.*

In her opinion, the fact that those pupils were in a bottom set class was not due to their lack of academic ability but it was more an effect of the setting system of the school:

*The 8 year group, they are a very bright year group... I have taught the same band same set couple of years ago and they are much brighter than that class... but they’re still coming down in the set.... [because] the top set in that year*

*group are massively, massively high, very very bright, miles ahead of everything else we had in the last few years.*

### 5.7.3 Behaviour management

I normally waited in the corridor with the children until Ms TN arrived – carrying lots of books and stuff – and ushered everybody briskly into the class. She was the only teacher among the six I was observing who did not have a teaching assistant. Pupils took their seats (Ms TN had a very definite seating plan and changed it twice during the year) quite noisily while the teacher was busy with the board and the computer. After a few minutes Ms TN would give verbal signals that the proper lesson was about to start:

*“Fine, Year 8 are you ready? Listen carefully, no noises now”...they do not stop chatting; she is standing in front of the class and rises an arm for a countdown: “five, four, three...I still see people not getting ready....Year 8 do you want to go out and start again? [The noise level is still quite high] ENOUGH !!!” she shouts, her face gets red. Gradually pupils are calming down, they are quite still now, Ms TN continues with the instructions... some are not giving attention, particularly Johnny and [Lee]...” It’s not good enough” (she shouts in her sergeant major style) “you know what? I am not doing the practical lesson...just boring stuff next time”.... the threat works and they all quieten down (22<sup>nd</sup> October).*

Such an initial struggle to gain pupils’ attention and silence became shorter during the year, to the point that, especially after the winter half term (February), a simple countdown would be sufficient for Ms TN to receive the right level of attention. Therefore, two phases can be distinguished in her behaviour management, with February being a sort of watershed between the two.

Ms TN’s lessons were planned carefully with written exercises, hands up sessions and practical tasks alternating with explanations and instructions. She used the interactive board accurately and quickly, for a great range of different activities. The transition from one task to another could be a bit noisy but she usually managed not to lose control over the class. Frequently in the last 5 minutes before the end of the lesson Ms TN rewarded pupils by allowing some sort of mathematical games or quizzes, often enthusiastically taking part in them herself (sometimes she looked even more engaged than the pupils!). When the bell rang, Ms TN would wait for a perfect silence and then let the pupils go. Occasionally she would stop troublesome ones for a private chat, which I tried unsuccessfully to eavesdrop a few times.

During the first phase, when she wanted the lesson to begin or when the noise level had risen to a critical point, Ms TN turned to a countdown, spitting out the words

with a very strong voice and angry face (what I called in my field notes her “sergeant major style”) shouting, “*Guys be sensible*” or “*ENOUGH!*” Or short sentences like: “*What’s your problem? Why are you talking? Is it a good reason? Is it related to maths? No? Then it is not appropriate!*” She would interrupt her talk several times while staring at the children and waited for them to calm down. She would send someone out into the corridor (she did so with [Mark] and [Johnny] a couple of times; once she sent the entire class out as they had had a particularly noisy entering). She would threaten pupils with not letting them do the practical activities or games they loved, and writing boring stuff instead (she did so only once). She would announce detentions (I witnessed actually her giving one, to [Johnny]) and that she would call in Mr K, the Head of the Year (but she never did). However, Ms TN alternated such “sergeant major style” with a softer and more enthusiastic persona who would use merit slips, stickers and stamps as preventative techniques. She would smile encouragingly, challenge the class, and create some suspense (“*you won’t be able to do this! Would you believe it? This is a level six!*”), make positive comparisons with her other year 8 class and praise the pupils, showing her happiness with their results (“*excellent, well done, I am very pleased with text results, SUPERB*”). Finally Ms TN would patrol the class, checking and helping pupils around.

The rules Ms TN followed were the standard Portside School ones with pupils required to be silent before leaving the classroom and in general when the teacher was talking or during written exercises. No jumpers were allowed in the class (this is a rule I found written in the Staff Handbook and it sounded particularly strange to my Italian background. Why couldn’t they wear a jumper if it was freezing, as long as it was the uniform one? ). Ms TN expected pupils not to answer back and not to interrupt her. She tolerated some noise, particularly when doing practical exercises (like taking measurements, drawing, or building geometrical shapes with Lego) and gave pupils some settling down time but also expected them to pay attention, put their hands up before talking, and follow her instructions.

Among the six teachers I observed in Portside School, Ms TN was the one who had the most significant change in pupils’ attitude and behaviour during the year.

From the beginning of the school until February (phase one) the noise level in the class was generally quite high (although intermittently) and Ms TN had to struggle, sometimes even quite hard, to impose her authority over the pupils. She did succeed in this almost all the time, and pupils after a while usually started working well, but she had to put in a considerable effort and a lot of “sergeant major style”, consisting of

briskness, shouting, telling pupils off, threatening, interrupting her talking, to reach that level of attention and quietness. Such a “sergeant major style” at the beginning of the year looked to me a bit like pretence, as if she wanted to perform the confident disciplinarian role recommended by the school but managed to be aggressive, instead. However, she slowly became more effective in performing that role, and eventually what had seemed to be a façade became her real style. In fact, during the so-called phase two, the pupils were more diligent, more engaged and were mostly listening to the teacher without her having to struggle to gain their attention. Sometimes they would manifest some excited and loud behaviour but mostly for reasons that were related to work and therefore tolerated. For her part, Ms TN was firmer in managing the class and less patient toward chitchat and off-task behaviour than before. She still had to shout from time to time in her sergeant major style but it looked like she had gained pupils’ compliance. In the interview Ms TN agreed that pupils’ behaviour had improved. She ascribed it to a better mutual understanding:

*I think it starts being very difficult, when you don’t quite know them...at this point [June] I know them so much better and they know me and they know...they can have a joke, can have a bit of a laugh and then they know when they have gone too far...I don’t know if...there are certainly different things... I think they know me better, they know what I expect from them, I mean, I have always made it very clear...when they have done really well I would always tell them: “You did brilliantly, you have done fantastically!” and when things haven’t gone quite as well I would say “Don’t forget” and just remind them of my expectations.*

Ms TN insisted that praising children really worked. In that respect she was also a believer in the school system of rewards and illustrated it to me in great detail during the first informal chat we had in November. In fact I have seen her going around the classroom giving stickers and merit slips quite often, definitely more than other teachers. She also thought that it was worthwhile to stop troublesome pupils for a chat at the end of the lesson so that they could “*think of their behaviour and be reminded of it from time to time*”. Such children (note that Alan did not attend this class) were [Bobby], [Lee], [Mark] and [Alfie] who tended to shout across the class and have a chat instead of concentrating. They all improved their behaviour during the year except for Alfie, who kept being very off task and required more help to stay focused than any other pupil in the class.

## **5.8 Summary**

Having considered the six individual teachers with regard to their particular belief system and classroom conduct, the following conceptual step is to turn to a way

of understanding why the teachers received (or provoked) certain kinds of pupils' behaviour. The congruence hypothesis, expanded in chapter 8, has been developed in order to make sense of these individual cases. The hypothesis considers the teachers belief system, their classroom behaviour and the school culture as linked factors that have effects on pupils' behaviour. More specifically, it is suggested that the link between those three factors lies on the degree of congruence the teachers manifested at both personal and institutional level.

## Chapter 6

### The Voice of the Pupils

#### 6.1 Introduction

The importance of recognizing children's right to be heard as social actors capable of commenting on their own experience has been recently acknowledged within the research community (e.g. Roberts, 2000, Buck et al., 2007). This chapter addresses such feature by considering pupils' opinions in relation to issues of misbehaviour in school. The information gained from the analysis of pupils' opinions has been used to understand the school culture. Pupils' opinions were gained via interviews and focus groups and therefore the chapter is divided into two sections respectively. The themes that emerged from the data analysis have been organized in three macro themes: types of misbehaviour, school rules and the ideal teacher.

#### 6.2 Section one: interviews

Six pupils were interviewed in one-to-one sessions of 20 minutes each. The semi-structured interviews took place during the first week of July 2009 in the Head of the Year's office. Before being interviewed, each pupil was reminded of salient ethical issues and shown a short video on misbehaviour in school which had been especially assembled as a facilitating tool. Each interview was tape-recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

The six pupils were part of the year eight bottom set class who attended the lessons I had been observing throughout the year. Some like [Betty] and [Alan] had been respectively in 2 and 4 out of six subjects, while the others, [Johnny], [Tim], [Mark] and [Lee], had taken part in all six subjects. The pupils I interviewed were the ones whose families had replied positively to my consent letter, sent home via the Year Office in February 2009. The pupils were all boys (apart from [Betty]) and white-British (apart from [Johnny], who was black).

Despite having seen me in their classrooms for almost eight months, the pupils seemed quite shy and did not look particularly at ease with being interviewed (however, when asked, none of them wanted to withdraw from the interview). Consequently the data gained revealed was less extensive and more fragmented than expected.

### 6.2.1 *Types of misbehaviour*

The six children were asked about their idea of what misbehaviour is and which types of misbehaviour they had happened to meet during their school career. They all admitted that misbehaviour had got worse in the passage from primary to secondary school:

*In junior school wasn't that bad but now that I have come up you can see like pupils get into fights a lot more [Alan].*

*In junior school you try not to behave bad where in secondary school you try to look bigger so you, like, behave...badly [Mark].*

Asked to list which types of misbehaviours happened more often in their school experience, they mentioned: *being late for classes* [Tim], *shouting across the class* (Tim, Mark), *moving without permission* [Tim], *fighting* [Tim], [Lee], *acting up* [Tim], *forgetting stuff* [Tim], *distracting lessons* [Mark], [Lee], *swearing at teachers* [Mark], [Alan], *talking when teacher talks* [Mark], *playing up lazy* [Lee], *laughing at teachers* [Lee], *swearing* [Johnny], [Mark], *chewing* [Johnny], [Betty], *using mobile phones* [Betty], *frightening teachers* [Alan], *running out of school* [Alan]. Almost all the pupils agreed that homework was a big issue for them and that detention as punishment for the lack of homework was not an appropriate solution. Alan and Johnny even confessed to having escaped detention for homework several times.

The list of behaviours mentioned by pupils is by and large congruent with my observation data (although I didn't see them swearing at teachers or running out of school) and with the teachers' perceptions as emerged from their interviews. It is also congruent with the literature. Note how the majority of items listed by pupils can be grouped under the heading of lack of respect toward teachers' authority, an issue of considerable importance in Portside School culture.

### 6.2.2 *School rules*

School rules play an important part of school life. In Portside they were well described in the Prospectus, summarized in the students' planner and frequently recalled in Bulletins, Newsletters and lessons. However, the majority of the pupils declared that they were not sure exactly where the school rules could be found, apart from [Betty] who said:

*They are written in our planners, we have read them first day of the year second ...last year in Madam Smiths' class, if we talked out of turn, we had to write*

*them up seventy times for homework...so...that's how...we have got reminded of them!*

If not the rules, pupils knew the punishment system of the school and were able to distinguish between isolation, detention and exclusion with their different degrees of gravity. [Alan] and [Mark] admitted they had learnt some of the rules just by having broken them. On that matter [Lee] added:

*Pupils don't really pick it [rules] in their mind ...and when they do something wrong... then, it's when you think they should not have done that ...but it's too late!*

[Alan] and [Johnny] agreed that if they had known the rules better, they probably would have avoided some detentions. However, when asked, none of the pupils found it unfair not to have been consulted about the school rules and none questioned the fairness of the rules system, apart from [Betty] who showed a slightly more critical attitude. See for instance this passage from her interview:

*Last year in French my teacher said I was chewing, chewing gum and I said I wasn't and then she gave me a detention! ...I don't understand what chewing does for disrupting pupils.*

Among the school rules it is explicitly stated, "chewing of gum is not allowed in school" (Staff Handbook p. 50). However Betty is questioning how it can be seen as a form of disruption.

### 6.2.3 *The ideal teacher*

Despite initial declarations of non-shouting as a favourite teachers' characteristic, in reality almost all the pupils admitted shouting to be quite an inevitable strategy of behaviour management. See for instance:

*You shouldn't shout at them [the pupils]! Just straight away, you should tell them: right calm down, right? Be quiet, do your work and I won't shout; but you gradually build up your voice until they don't carry on, then you shout [Lee].*

*Like... the ones [teachers] who aren't fair, they shout at you straight away, when you haven't done nothing... like... they don't give you an explanation before they shout at you [Johnny].*

In this passage the point seems to be not whether teachers shout or not but if they give an explanation before doing so, that is if they shout with a fair reason (the same position was assumed by [Betty] and [Mark]). [Johnny] continues:



*Mr K ...he knows how to shout.... Some teachers don't know how to shout, do they? Like Mr SV [the English teacher] and Mr AM [the Science teacher] they don't want to shout...they are like...but you get all over them and they go to the year head and tell them about their lesson*

Clearly [Johnny] admires Mr K (the Head of the Year) who “knows how to shout” and disapproves of Mr SV and Mr AM who “don’t want to shout”, let pupils “get all over them” and then have go to the Year Office for help.

In fact, the majority of the pupils agreed that, more than non-shouting (which despite initial declarations seemed to be quite a tolerated attitude by these pupils), good teachers are the ones who would make them obey even if to do so they need to be “frightening”. This position is in line with the very core assumption of Portside School culture (described in Chapter 7) characterized by control, authority and a taken for granted imbalance of power between adults and children.

See for instance this passage from [Betty]’s interview:

*A good teacher is like Mr R. He could be funny but he only could shout when you don't do as you are told and he can be quite scary! So he would tell everybody off. [Me] so you think that being scary is important for a good teacher? [Betty] yeah not scary ...scary just a bit frightening... like you have to do what you are told, otherwise he shouts at you more*

Note that this element of apprehension appears in other pupils’ interviews (see below) and also surfaces in some interviews with the senior staff. The Handbook doesn’t explicitly advise teachers to be “frightening”. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, it draws upon quite an authoritarian, masculine idea of teaching style, which one might well consider as not lacking in apprehension. This idea has been considered among the assumptions of the school culture.

When asked to give examples of good teaching among the six subject teachers I had observed them with, the majority of pupils mentioned Mr K, the head of the year and PE teacher, whom I had not observed but only interviewed. In the interview Mr K explicitly declared about himself: “*they are probably a bit apprehensive with me...probably more than with their teachers*”. Pupils also mentioned Mrs GV the History teacher:

*She is very strict ... when she starts shouting she can be very scary [Alan].*

*She has control over us, she has POWER! All teachers should have that power ... we like to be good at history because we know what she can do [Johnny].*

*I like her...although she shouts and all that [Mark].*

*She is my ideal teacher because she makes it [the subject] exciting but then she gets very strict and angry [Tim].*

Clearly for pupils it is important that Ms GV makes the subject exciting but the fact she can control them is even more important (c.f. Woods, 1986). Again, this is congruent with the disciplinarian attitude characteristic of Portside School's culture. Similar ideas of power and control surfaced in the evaluation of the other teachers. Mr EW the Geography teacher was positively considered by pupils because:

*He does shout but is all right... he does have control [Johnny].*

*Can get the class to be quiet when he wants to [Alan].*

*He is not boring [Mark].*

The English teacher Mr SV on the contrary was described as:

*Not strong enough [Johnny].*

*When he says something to someone they just carry on ... I suppose he isn't very scary ... we get away with much [Alan].*

Similarly about Mr AM the science teacher who is also mentioned for having little power they said:

*He just stands up and tells everyone to stop chatting... but he is not strong enough, he is like Mr SV [Johnny].*

*He doesn't show he is the teacher ...he doesn't tell pupils off, he just goes for shush, shush and only keeps pupils behind for two minutes...like with any other teacher you get detention [Betty].*

Both Mr SV and Mr AM were also blamed for being unfair:

*When the nice pupils talk he [Mr SV] doesn't blame them [Johnny].*

*During his lesson [Alan] had got his name on the board six times ... but [Alan] hadn't detention, which [Mark] did [Lee].*

The unfairness of the teachers is the second major issue for almost all the pupils. This is congruent with results of research exploring children's point of view (e.g. Miller et al., 2002, Woods, 2008).

Basically an unfair teacher *punishes you when it's not your fault* [Betty]. See this passage from [Johnn]'s interview:

*I think sometimes... sometimes the teachers point a finger on you, when they don't know who was...it could be someone else but they blame the person who is always annoying ...and I get blamed for something that he has done and they think he is good and I am bad.*

### **6.3 Section two: focus groups**

Six top set pupils randomly selected from the same Maths class participated in the research as two focus groups. I was impressed with how naturally these pupils opened up to me and at how easy they looked with expressing their opinions, compared to the bottom set counterpart I had interviewed previously. Some of their ideas were also remarkably thorough and echoed adult words. In addition to the topics of misbehaviour, school rules and what makes a good teacher, pupils expanded spontaneously over two other themes – teachers' behaviour management style and the bottom-top set classes issue – which are omitted in section one because the lower set pupils did not mention them. Both focus groups are presented together without indicating the names of the pupils, whom I did not know personally.

#### *6.3.1 Types of misbehaviour*

Both groups thought that by moving up from primary to secondary school the amount of misbehaviour had increased, mostly *because the school is bigger, classes are bigger and pupils want to show off*. The first two reasons (school and class size) were not mentioned by any other or bottom set pupils or staff; however, it is an issue raised in some official documents. The third reason (showing off) was not new as it was mentioned both by staff and bottom set pupils, although in passing.

Despite top set classes being credited with being very calm and quiet, as I myself had been able to observe, the pupils in the focus groups seemed to be very concerned with misbehaviour. They actually talked about it as a problem plaguing their school life, which I would never have guessed, mostly for two reasons: it impeded them from working properly and it was very consuming of teachers' time (both reasons are addressed in the literature):

*If you have good ones in one class and a couple of bad ones in there as well the bad ones always disrupt the good ones and you don't get enough work done.*

*Some of the teachers...spend all their time on the bad ones and sort them out when it is actually the good ones who are actually doing as they are told.*

When they did not refer to misbehaviour as generically as disrupting/ruining the lessons, pupils specified that the most common behaviour they happened to see around the school and in their classes was talking:

*In our science class we are top group but we are one of the worst for talking.*

Persistent talking is mentioned in the Staff Handbook and was indicated as frequently occurring misbehaviour by many teachers. It is also congruent with the literature.

Among other types of misbehaviour frequently occurring, some mentioned homework, which I was expecting to be more of a bottom set pupils' issue:

*Because some pupils they can't do homework because of some reasons at home and some teachers don't respect that, they just don't think that some pupils couldn't do the homework.*

Homework is an admitted problem for Portside School as around half the total number of detentions imposed per year are homework-related. However, from the passage surfaces also how little power pupils have to get their reasons listened to by teachers. Finally, lack of respect toward teachers was mentioned as "proper"(i.e. genuine) misbehaviour, consistent with the official position of the school:

*I mean proper misbehaviour like shouting at the teacher and having a go and like...really bad things not only the silly petty like...forgetting your homework.... yes back-chatting them and all that stuff.... yeah although you feel like shouting at the teachers, half the time you can't.*

### 6.3.2 School rules

Asked about school rules, pupils confirmed – just like the bottom sets – that they didn't know all of them:

*At the beginning of year 7 you write them down but now I can't remember any of the rules .*

*No there are some that I know that are ... like the basic ones and then there are some complicated ones that I don't really know...like the earrings and jewellery I don't know that.*

Many pupils admit (as in the bottom set pupils' interviews) they tend to learn some of the rules by making mistakes and being punished

*They shout at you and you just don't do it again, you do something else and they shout at you again, so you got shouted at all the lessons for doing different things.*

Pupils looked slightly critical about the sense of some of the rules (just as Betty was, in the bottom set group). The literature supports that “the perception of reasonable meaning behind a rule [is]... significant to students’ acceptance of the rule” (Thornberg, 2008, p. 37):

*Also I don’t see why ...like...the music player is not allowed, because it’s not actually doing any harm, just listening at lunch and break.*

*And they changed the rules as well, so now you can’t take your jumper off saying in the summer term ... you sweat in your jumper...some teachers don’t let you [take your jumper off] some teachers don’t mind, but then it gets too hot and I felt quite bad like... it wasn’t in my old school because I just could take it off.*

I asked whether they would have liked to have a say regarding the rules and they mentioned the existence of the school council in response, although it doesn’t seem to be really representing their voice:

*We have the school council...they deal with things like the school buildings something like that and they don’t even have to listen to us, basically.*

### 6.3.3 *The ideal teacher*

Like the bottom set pupils, being able to “control” the class is the most appreciated characteristic in a teacher, as is shown clearly from the episodes reported. That is also congruent with the authoritarian stance of Portside School.

*My French teacher she is like.... a push-over like...she always counts down in French from three she has to do it like...five times to get us to be quiet...she doesn’t raise her voice but she doesn’t have any effect on us because she does...she is like...she doesn’t have any control.*

*Usually [my Science teacher] takes names on the board like if you are talking then you get your name on the board and you have to stay behind and...that doesn’t really work ...and she doesn’t control actually she just puts another name on.*

*Depends on teacher personality. Because if they are like warm and nice then the class likes them and they might behave... But if they are like push-over that might make them worse. They have like...no discipline.*

Apart from taking control, pupils expanded the issue of the ideal teacher and listed how he/she should be and what he/she should do (emphasis is added):

*Being in a happy mood and do some jokes.*

*Respecting the pupils.*

*Being warm and nice, then the class likes them and they might behave but if they are like push-over that might make them worse.*

*Be humorous ...like my English teacher Mr S...he made a pact with the class every lesson he is gonna tell us a joke at the end of the lesson and everyone in the class likes him and even some jokes are rubbish it makes him more funny.*

*They need to talk to the pupils more.*

*I think they might interact with pupils like... showing stuff on the board and watching films and also be quite strict sometimes with pupils who are messing about.*

*Set more outside lessons if it's like sunny.*

*Not set work out of the book every lesson.*

*Also some of the teachers don't give enough praise to laud the good pupils.*

Some issues like “talking and interacting more”, being “warm” “happy” and “nice”, giving “more praise” are quite new as the bottom set pupils did not mention any of them while “being humorous” is constantly pointed out among the main traits for a good teacher by all the pupils. It surfaced also in the staff interviews. The use of (appropriate) humour in teaching has been investigated as an important tool by several studies (c.f. Wanzer et al., 2006, p. 179 for a list).

None of the pupils said explicitly when listing the characteristics of a good teacher that they should be fair but many told of episodes where the unfairness of teachers was an issue, for example:

*In science earlier on, someone shouted out something and a person who didn't say anything had to go and stand in a corner because the teacher thought he was talking ... and you can't really say anything because then you get in more trouble.*

The fairness of teachers is strictly related to their power. In Portside School there is quite an imbalance of power between pupils and teachers. Several episodes about the way teachers wielded their power were narrated in the focus groups, like the one mentioned above, where the teacher was wrong in accusing someone but the children couldn't say anything about it. Here is another one:

*I almost had a row in Maths because I didn't write out the questions but because I didn't need to because I can do it in my head ... she had a go at me ... now she doesn't say anything ... but then if I simplify the questions she still shouts at me because I haven't written the question down, but it is the same question!*

The following comment summarizes the link between teachers' unfairness and power:

*It is because teachers don't like hearing the other side of the story, what they think is right, is right ... it could be someone else but because they saw you or they thought they saw you ... never wanna listen to you.*

#### 6.3.4 Behaviour management techniques:

Questioned in regard to how teachers can keep control over their top set classes, which are normally 30 students in size, pupils listed the following techniques:

*Teachers have to shout a lot to get the class to calm down...like whack a stick on the table... they do a big noise so the class gets shocked.*

Shouting should be considered as a reaction to pupils' bad behaviour more than as a strategy, but in this case it is mentioned as a means of classroom management. The issue of shouting was largely referred to by almost all the bottom set pupils in their interviews:

*My French teacher just sends pupils out ... sometimes it solves the problem but there are always noises in my French class. .... My Spanish teacher ...she usually takes names on the board ... that doesn't really work.... My language teacher she just gets fed up and doesn't answer any questions.*

Taking names on the board is suggested as a technique in the Staff Handbook, unlike sending pupils out which is explicitly discouraged.

Keeping all the class behind is another technique that I myself have seen being used by some of the teachers I observed. It is actually suggested as a strategy in the Staff Handbook, too. Yet pupils protest:

*It is not really fair on other pupils who are quiet ... all the class has to stay behind five minutes when it's like 90% of them haven't done anything wrong.*

*Some teachers control the class by giving out detentions a lot... so pupils just think whatever... I have got detention anyway!*

Detention is a commonly used form of punishment. Pupils say there are teachers who think the more detentions they give the more in control they are and therefore use it as a means of behaviour management. However, this can be unfair:

*I had detention for forgetting my PE case.*

*And I had one because I forgot my French homework ... just forgetting homework, you could actually forget it rather than hiding it, honestly but...and then you get detention.*

*I had half an hour detention for not reading and looking out of the window daydreaming and it was only for 10 seconds!*

As Alan and Johnny among the bottom set pupils had pointed out, detention is something pupils try to escape:

*I have noticed some pupils say they cannot stay as they have to catch the bus or their mum is picking them and stuff like that ... but then they run out and they don't actually go to the bus.*

### 6.3.5 Bottom and top set classes

This theme surfaced in the focus groups and was spontaneously addressed without me having asked any questions. The same issue of bottom vs. top set classes was addressed in many teachers' interviews.

*In the top set classes are pupils who want to do work, in the bottom sets are the ones that do whatever they want.*

*I think they are not actually messing about but they are probably lower set because they don't get any work done because of the pupils who misbehave.*

*I don't think they really care...they muck around and things, they don't care what they grow up to be, and they'd like rather to be alive than... having a good life and things like that, they just think they have to be there [i.e. in school]*

Note how bottom set pupils are seen (i.e. blamed) as the ones who “don't want to do work” and “don't care to have a good life”, which in turn appears to be related to school success.

## 6.4 Summary

Both bottom set and top set pupils shared the culture of Portside school, characterized by control, authority and a taken for granted imbalance of power between adults and children.

Pupils would judge teachers by personality more than by the way they taught and for a teacher to have control over the class is considered essential to win pupils' approval. Teachers unable to wield their power (and/or who resorted to other teachers for help) were disapproved of, while respect was given to strong teachers who don't let you go away with much. Bottom set pupils specifically indicated their preference for



scary, powerful teachers like Mrs GV and Mr K. Shouting, officially advised against within the Staff Handbook, appears to be still quite common a behaviour in Portside school, as pupils reported many episodes of teachers shouting. Interestingly, however, pupils tend to distinguish between teachers who know how to shout and others whose shouting is ineffective and/or unfair. Unfairness was the most discussed topic by both interviews and focus groups. This is consistent with literature on pupils' perspectives where unfairness of the teachers is actually considered one major cause of pupils' misbehaviour (e.g. Miller et al 2002, Woods 2008).

Also in line with Portside school culture, pupils – especially top set - showed appreciation for *funny* and *humorous* teachers who would *do some jokes*. The use of (appropriate) humour in teaching has been investigated as an important tool by several studies (c.f. Wanzer et al 2006, p. 179 for a list). In regards to school rules, none of the children complained for not having been consulted - and that is unsurprising given the authoritarian stance of the school culture. However, some demonstrated a critical attitude towards rules they judged unnecessary (like chewing or wearing the school uniform jumper in hot days), “the perception of reasonable meaning behind a rule [being]... significant to students' acceptance of the rule” (Thornberg 2008, p. 37).

# Chapter 7

## Congruence

### 7.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 explained how, as the best way to answer the research question, a “leap of imagination” led me toward the construction of the Congruence hypothesis. The hypothesis aims to make sense of the six cases outlined in chapter 5 and assumes that among the many factors influencing pupils’ behavioural outcomes, a significant element is the degree of congruence between teacher’s beliefs, behaviours and the school culture. The theory comprises two levels, called “personal” and “institutional”. The present chapter now provides a theoretical background for the hypothesis. It describes how the notion of congruence has been used in the literature of different fields, including Psychology, Management and Education, and explains how it collocates within the area of pupils’ misbehaviour. Subsequently the chapter explains what is meant by personal and institutional congruence levels, and expands on the related literature. Finally, in order to elucidate the nature of the institutional congruence level, an overview of Portside school culture has been included.

### 7.2 Definition and uses

The concept of congruence (or congruency) from Latin *congruere* – to agree, to correspond, to come together – is used in very different fields from Social Psychology to Geometry to express a kind of equivalence (although not a perfect equivalence) and an idea of similarity, “fit” and match between two or more “conceptually distinct constructs” (Edwards, 1994, p.51) as a predictor of outcomes. In such a basic acceptance the term finds wide applications. It has been employed, for instance, to address the degree of compatibility between patient and doctor attitudes (*patient–doctor congruence*, Krupat et al., 2000) as well as the measure of agreement between policy statements and public opinion (*rhetorical congruence*, Rottinghaus, 2006)

A more specific use of the term, applied especially in vocational psychology, is to be found in the concept of *person–environment congruence*, which supposes that alignment between the characteristics of people at work and their environments results in more positive job outcomes (Sekiguchi, 2004) and job satisfaction (Smart et al.,

1986). Similarly, some career intervention models build on the basic assumption that people do better and are more satisfied in occupational environments that match their interests (*interest–occupation congruence*, in Tracey and Robbins, 2006). The concept is also named *job congruence* and appears to be a commonly used construct in management literature where it has been the traditional approach to employees' recruitment and selection research (Wolniak and Pascarella, 2005).

All such types of congruence (*person–environment*, *interest–occupation* and *job congruence*) are broadly based on Holland's (1966) theory, in turn leaning on Lewin (1935), which hypothesizes an interaction between six types of individual personality and six analogous environments and assumes that each personality type is most likely to flourish in the corresponding environment, where there are opportunities, activities, tasks, and roles congruent with the competencies, interests, and self-perceptions of its parallel personality type.

Within the Psychology field Rogers (1902–1987) adopted the term *congruence* to describe the match between an individual's inner feelings and outer display. Rogers developed the notion of congruence as a condition of harmony or agreement between one's real and the actual selves (*self-congruence*, which is a match between one's sense of who one is and who one feels one should be, as well as harmony or agreement between what one is and one's life experience). The congruent person is genuine and transparent while the non-congruent person plays a role and hides behind a facade. Rogers (1961) finds the human infant to actually be a model of congruence. He/she is seen as completely genuine and integrated, unified in experience, awareness and communication. Distorted perceptions from conditions of worth cause our departure from this integration. Although no one tends to experience perfect congruence at all times, some argue the relative degree of congruence to be an indicator of mental health. The opposite notion is *incongruence*, defined by Rogers as a condition of disharmony, which threatens one's unitary sense of self and leads to anxiety. The advertising and marketing literature (Aaker, 1997; Helgeson and Supphellen, 2004; Chang, 2006) employs recurrently the terms *self-congruence* meaning a match between brand and consumer personality as well as *self-image congruence* (Sirgy et al., 1997) as a match between product/brand and user self-image construed.

The organizational and management literature presents a more consistent use of the concept of congruence than other literatures, and also offers some congruence models. Different authors have pinpointed specific dimensions of congruence. Some have focused on “two [organizational] constructs as a prediction of some outcome”

(Edwards, 1994, p. 51) assuming that congruence is a measure of how well pairs of such constructs work together within organizations. Vancouver et al. (1994), for instance, expose the concept of organizational goal congruence as “the agreement among employees [and employers] on the importance of the goals the organization could be pursuing” (p.666). As expanded below, a similar concept of goal congruence has also been positively taken into account by some literature on school effectiveness.

Many studies on organizations have exploited the idea of *value congruence*, defined as “the sharing of similar value systems among different employees” (Knoppen et al., 2006, p. 539). At the organizational level, in fact, “values are viewed as a major component of organizational culture ...and are often described as principles responsible for the successful management of a number of companies” (Meglino and Ravlin, 1998, p. 351) Such value congruence appears lead to increased normative commitment and satisfaction (Okabe, 2002), a lower intent to leave the company and a lower turnover rate among employees (O'Reilly et al., 1991). Different authors have assessed the congruence between leadership style and organization's value system and hypothesized that – different classifications of leadership styles and organizational types being given – the appropriate (congruent) leadership style in each organizational type promotes a condition of minimum conflict and maximum efficiency (Quinn and Kimberley, 1984; Stanley, 2008; Brown and Trevino, 2009).

A significant body of research has documented that people's work-related values tend to match the values of their work environments, and such a value match (by some also called *person–organization congruence*) has been claimed to yield “superior job performance and greater employee satisfaction” (Haley and Sidanius, 2005, p. 187). However, the findings are not uncontroversial (Meglino and Ravlin, 1998; Siegall and McDonald, 2004). Finally some studies –drawing from Lewin and Holland – take into consideration the role of congruence between person and setting (*person–setting congruence*) considered to be important especially in relation to organizational choices (c.f. Bretz et al., 1988, for a list).

Instead of focusing solely on two main organizational factors, there are authors considering the organization as a whole and congruence as the alignment of all its components (*organizational cultural congruence*); in such a conceptual framework, models of congruence have been proposed. The notion of (organizational) cultural congruence was developed by Nadler and Tushman (1980) among others, and is based on the assumption that organizations being composed by a variety of cultural attributes (see Morgan, 1997, for a list) the more all those attributes happen to be aligned (i.e.

congruent) the more an organization would produce effectiveness, compared to organizations with incongruent cultures. Although such an assumption is supported only partially by findings, there is evidence that congruence in organizational culture is positively associated with individuals' affective orientations toward the organization and their jobs (Harris and Mossholder, 1996) as well as with the organization's smooth functioning and an absence of conflict (Cameron and Freeman, 1991). All such studies lean partly on the attraction–selection–attrition (ASA) model developed by Schneider (1987) who explains that individuals are attracted to, selected by, and stay with organizations that match their personality, attitudes and values. Owing to these three factors, the personal characteristics of those who work for an organization are likely to become more similar over time, leading to the consolidation of organizational culture.

Drawing on the idea of organizational culture, a variety of congruence models have been elaborated (c.f. Nadler and Thusman, 1980), their major premise being that “for organizations to be effective, their subparts or components ... must approach a state of congruence” (ibidem, p. 36). Such congruence has been defined as “the agreement or harmony between the organization's culture, its mission and goals, and the people within the organization” (Comer, 2001, p.1) or also as “the alignment of each of the [organizational] components: the work, people, structure” (Wyman, 2003, p. 4).

In Education the concept of congruence makes an appearance in the literature on school effectiveness (e.g. Rosenholtz , 1985; Cheng , 1996) and in research on higher education (e.g. Telford and Masson, 2005; Wright, 2005). The notion has been also used in recent studies on school victimization (c.f. Stone et al., 2009). A study on teachers' quality of work life conducted by Seashore (1998), addresses the congruence between teachers' personal goals and the school's goals (*goal congruence*) as a factor leading to a higher sense of self-efficacy and commitment among teachers. Spera and Wentzel (2003), exploring congruence between students' and teachers' goals and its implications for social and academic motivation, found goal congruence to be positively related to student interest in class and perceived social support from teachers. Another study, carried out by Fung and Chow (2002), was aimed at assessing whether there is congruence between pedagogical images of student teachers and their classroom practices. Benner and Mistry (2007), examining the conjoint influence of both parent and teacher expectations for low-income youth, noticed a high degree of congruence between teachers' and parents' expectations to be positively related to students' educational outcomes (*expectation congruence*). Finally there is a small body of research that uses the concept of *cultural congruence* (i.e. the fit between the culture of

the pupil's home and the culture of the school) to address strategies for enhancing literacy and reading abilities among cultural minority group students (Rickford, 2009) as well as to develop culturally congruent intervention strategies to improve discipline outcomes (Mayes Pane, 2010; Day Vines and Day-Hairston, 2005).

### **7.3 Congruence and misbehaviour**

The previous section has shown how the notion of congruence between two or more constructs (such as values, goals, person–environment etc) as a predictor of outcomes is supported by numerous empirical studies within several research fields, but there is little if anything in the area of pupils' misbehaviour.

The idea of congruence as a theoretical construct in pupils' misbehaviour arose in the form of a "leap of imagination" during the progressive focus phase of this study and was further developed alongside the data analysis process. It offers an alternative perspective in answering the research question:

*Why do teachers obtain different behaviour outcomes from the same group of pupils, although applying similar behaviour management techniques?*

The literature on misbehaviour provides a wide selection of possible answers to such a question. Some of them have been discussed within the literature review in terms of reasons and causes of misbehaviour. There is also a cluster of practitioners' research (described in Chapter 9) where other factors that could have answered (but have not) the research question are unfolded. However, the notion of congruence has the potential to add new insights into the subject of pupils' misbehaviour, not so much to present a definitive statement, which may in any case be impossible, but to suggest a model that could serve as a framework for further reflection and understanding and as a way of capturing something that is missing in terms of differences among teachers (see Chapter 9). The congruence hypothesis reads as follows:

*The more the teacher's belief system, classroom behaviour and the school culture are congruent, the less likely it is that pupils will engage in minor misbehaviour.*

To better make sense of the data, two levels of congruence have been considered and will be discussed below: the personal level and the institutional level. The personal level of congruence consists of a match between the teacher's belief system and teacher's behaviour. The institutional level consists of a match across the school culture and the teacher's belief system/behaviour. The basic assumption of the hypothesis, drawing from

the literature mentioned previously in the chapter, is that at both levels the extent of teachers' congruence influences pupils' behaviour.

#### **7.4 Personal congruence**

By personal congruence in the present paper is meant the match or fit between teachers' (professed) belief systems and their (observed) classroom behaviour. The two items are expanded below.

##### *7.4.1 Belief system*

A significant number of studies have revealed that teachers' personal belief systems guide their choices of classroom management approaches (e. g. Evrim et al., 2009). Although the findings of such studies are still open to debate and although the correspondence between teachers' beliefs and their actual behaviour has been questioned (Wilcox-Herzog, 2002 ; Almog and Shechtman, 2007; Fung and Chow, 2002; Martin 2004), research on teaching and teacher education and research on teacher change clearly emphasize the importance of beliefs, thoughts, knowledge, attitudes and theories of teachers for teaching practice (c.f. Opdenakke and Van Damme, 2006, p.2). A starting premise of such studies is that "each teacher – knowingly or unknowingly – ascribes to a set of principles or priorities that are loosely connected to their classroom practices" (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2006, p.143). The congruence hypothesis developed within the present study leans on this literature, and assumes that a link between teachers' beliefs and teachers' practices not only exists in the first place but may also influence students' behavioural outcomes.

Three main dimensions emerge from the literature as primary constructs to conceptualise teachers' belief system. These include:

- Teachers' thoughts about knowledge, teaching practices and themselves as teachers (summarised as "Teaching")
- Beliefs about children (summarised as "Children")
- Beliefs about discipline and behaviour management (summarised as "Behaviour management")

Each dimension has been the focus of existing research (c.f. Rimm-Kauffman, 2006).

### Teachers' beliefs about knowledge, teaching, and themselves as teachers

Building on pioneer work by Perry (1968) several studies on epistemology assume that:

*The beliefs of adults about knowledge and the process of knowing, lie on a continuum. At one end is the belief that... knowledge is certain and comes from authorities and at the other is the belief that knowledge is uncertain and can be gleaned from the weighing of accumulated evidence. In between is the belief that knowledge is uncertain and that what is known is relative to each knower (White, 2000, p 280).*

Consistently with such a continuum, teachers' beliefs about pedagogy have been distinguished in the literature as teacher-centred, student-centred or individual-centred (Olafson and Schraw, 2006), while the corresponding roles the teacher might assume go from expert, to collaborator to facilitator (Minor et al., 2002). In contrast another cluster of research on teachers' beliefs uses just two-fold distinctions. Woods (1983) for instance, accounts for two contrasting paradigms: the psychometric paradigm, which rests on the assumption that knowledge is objective and the teacher's role is to fit the knowledge into the child, and the phenomenological paradigm, where knowledge is constructed, and the child is believed to have an unlimited capacity. More recently, Hempel-Jorgensen (2009) and Osborne et al. (2000) differentiate between performative mode pedagogy (where children's learning is strongly linked with academic performance) and competence mode pedagogy (where children's academic success is based on their personal characteristics). Similarly, Opdenakker and Van Damme (2006) distinguish between a learner-oriented versus a content-centred approach pedagogy. Porter (2007), in her book on behaviour in schools, also uses a two-fold distinction between teacher-directed and child-centred educational theories. The first approach, she points out, is also known as "top-down" as knowledge is instilled into children from expert adults and is, therefore, adult driven. The second is a constructivist "bottom-up" approach, which "respects and responds reflectively to the skills and interests of children and their parents" (p. 25). Generally speaking, the six teachers I observed in Portside School all had a teacher-centred or teacher-directed idea of pedagogy and, with some subtle differences from one another, they all enacted the role of "experts of given knowledge".

Beliefs about themselves as a teacher encompass the field of professional self-efficacy research literature. Drawing on Bandura (1997) a large cluster of research supports the claim that self-efficacy is an important influence on human achievement in a variety of settings, including education (Klassen and Anderson, 2009). In educational



contexts self-efficacy is defined as the extent to which teachers believe they can influence students' behaviour (Tsouloupas et al., 2010) and academic achievements, especially in respect to students with low learning motivation (Almog and Shechtman, 2007) and negative family and community influences (Friedman, 2003; Caprara et al., 2003). There is also evidence that teachers' self-efficacy influences teachers' persistence, enthusiasm and commitment (Caprara et al., 2006) which are considered as pivotal characteristics of the teaching profession [cf. Professional Standards for Teachers in England (HEA, 2007) and Code of Conduct and Practice for Registered Teachers (GTCE, 2009)]. For the six teachers, features of their self-efficacy beliefs (namely their expectation to influence pupils' behaviour and outcomes, enthusiasm and commitment) have been traced within the interviews and informal chats.

### Beliefs about children

Beliefs about children can be grouped into the main areas of beliefs about children's nature and beliefs about children as learners. In regard to children's nature there are basically two substantially different approaches (Porter, 2007). One, leaning on Hobbes (1588-1679) and his negative view of human nature, assumes that children would not behave spontaneously well unless adults compelled them to do so. Such a view underpins school policies which are based on control and particularly encourages the use of reward and punishment systems. The opposite view, following Rousseau's (1712-1778) philosophy, sees children as inherently good innocents in need of protection. Although more optimistic, this view can still imply a top-down approach where adults are responsible *for* children. Hargreaves (1975) in his distinction between deviance-insulative teachers (who tend to believe pupils that are essentially good and willing to do school work) and deviance-provocative teachers (who tend to believe that most students avoid work and are rebellious) echoes such substantial dichotomy.

Beliefs about children as learners can be placed alongside a continuum from passive recipients to active collaborators to active constructors (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2006). Such a continuum reflects the corresponding abovementioned beliefs held by teachers about pedagogy and teachers' role. Evidence from the data, displayed in chapter 8, suggest that the six teachers investigated in the present work, all fall within the upper end of the spectrum, considering children as fundamentally bad in nature and as passive recipients of adult driven knowledge.

### Beliefs about discipline and behaviour management

Although used interchangeably, the terms classroom management and discipline are not necessarily synonymous. Discipline “typically refers to the structures and rules for students behaviour and efforts to ensure that students comply with those rules” (Martin et al., 1999, p. 4) while classroom management implies the ability “to secure and maintain students’ cooperation and involvement in classroom activities both instructional and non-instructional” (Emmer, 1982, p.17) in a broader and more preventative sense. Previous research, developed particularly within the field of teachers’ and beginning teachers’ education, focused largely on the teacher perspective, while recently new insights have come from the students’ point of view (c.f. Cothran et al., 2003; Den Brok , 2008). The literature offers different models of conceptualising teachers’ beliefs toward behaviour management and discipline, which were expanded in Chapter 2. Here it is probably worth recalling only that the vast majority of those models (either bi- or tri-partite) have been constructed by considering the continuum of teachers’ control and power as high, moderate or low (Sokal et al., 2003). In contrast, another cluster of models revolves around which theoretical approach (usually behaviouristic versus humanistic) informs teachers’ beliefs (Lewis, 2001, Zounia et al., 2003). The six teachers (as well as the entire school culture, see below) generally expressed beliefs of control and power, although with intrinsic differences.

As stated, the overall belief system of the six teachers in Portside School has been inferred mostly through the semi-structured interviews and informal chats conducted over a nine-month period. However, consistently with Olafson and Shraw’s (2006) view that “teachers’ epistemological world view must not be examined in isolation, but rather in conjunction with their teaching practices” (p. 73), I acknowledge that insights were gained also from the field observation.

To facilitate reading in the congruence tables, the belief system of each teacher has been split into two columns; the first is called “Characteristics of the teacher” and the second “Evidence”. The Evidence column contains the correspondent significant passages from the interviews and/or informal chats as described in the first column (see summary table below).

#### *7.4.2 Teacher behaviour*

The other element considered in the Personal Congruence level is called (observed) teacher’s classroom behaviour. At its simplest it consists of behaviours (verbal and non-verbal) that the teachers – in their institutional role of initiator and

terminator of classroom discourse (e.g. the IRE or IRF sequence) – exhibited in class (Bellack et al., 1966). The more those behaviours match the teachers’ professed beliefs and vice versa, the higher the level of congruence. Hence, there are cases in the data where taking into account teachers’ behaviours only was not sufficient to address the level of congruence. Consider the following example: a teacher states in the interview he/she likes to be in control and he/she performs actions to take control of the class. If one stopped the sequence of observed behaviours here, one could say the degree of congruence between what the teacher says (professed beliefs) and what he/she does in class (observed behaviours) was high. However, during the classroom observation of the teacher in question it was also noticed that pupils’ behaviour was averagely out of control. On the basis of this further information, the teacher level of congruence is considered to be low, as the teacher’s (verbal and non-verbal) behaviour in class was not responded to according to the teacher’s intent (Salomon, 1981). As a consequence of that, to appreciate the level of attributed congruence, the reader will find that the item “Teachers’ behaviour” – in certain cases, similar to the one exemplified above – comprises also elements of the corresponding pupils’ behaviour. Within this same cluster of “teachers’ classroom behaviour”, the emotions teachers (and pupils) expressed in class were also considered. Traditionally, there are six basic emotions grouped in three pairs of opposites: joy and sadness, acceptance and disgust, and anger and fear. The topic of emotions has only recently gained importance in teacher education (Hargreaves, 1998; Hargreaves, 2000; Reyna and Weiner, 2001), even if it has seen a blossoming within psychological research since the early 1980s. Although psychologists do not agree on what emotions are, many theorists conceptualise them as a process consisting of a network of changes in various components of the organism. These components, which are partially independent of each other, typically encompass appraisal, subjective experience, physiological change, emotional expression, and action tendencies (Sutton and Wheatley, 2003). Among all those components, for the aims of the present study, I have focused mostly on some observable changes during the emotion process (of both pupils and teachers) namely vocal changes in pitch, loudness, and speed (Johnson and Scherer, 2000) and specific facial expressions (Raffagnino and Occhini, 2000). To gain appropriate information about the subjective experience of emotions, the literature suggests using observations, interviews and physiological measures (Sutton and Wheatley, 2003). I wasn’t able to provide physiological measures but I guess I gained a reasonable picture of teachers’ emotions both via observations and, to a lesser extent, through the interviews and informal chats I had with them. In

regard to the pupils, I mostly gained information about their emotions from the observation. The interviews also provided some additional clues.

#### 7.4.3 Table Summary of personal congruence level

Below it is shown how the data from interviews and observations have been organized in a tabular display (see appendix 1) in order to assess the personal congruence level of each teacher. This level is also summarized in the fourth column at the right end of the table in terms of very low, low, medium, high, or very high.

Characteristics of the teacher	Beliefs	Behaviour	Congruence
Organized within the areas of: Teaching, Children Behaviour Management	Correspondent data from interviews and informal chats	Data from classroom observation	Corresponding degree of congruence between belief system and behaviour (very low, low, medium, high, very high)

### 7.5 Institutional congruence

The second level of the Congruence hypothesis is called institutional congruence. The idea stemmed from the notion of organisational culture whose literature was discussed previously. In this instance, institutional congruence means the match across the school culture and the teachers' belief system/classroom behaviour. The teacher's belief system and classroom behaviour have already been addressed separately in the Personal Congruence tables and will now be considered as one.

#### 7.5.1 School culture

The concept of school culture is widely used within various literatures and disciplines but its exact meaning remains problematic (Schoen and Teddlie, 2008). Prosser (1999) defines school culture as

*“an unseen and unobservable force behind school activities, a unifying theme that provides meanings, direction and mobilization for school members....It has both concrete representation in the form of artefacts and behavioural norms, and sustained implicitly jargon, metaphors and rites (p. 14).*

Deal and Peterson (1999) explain culture as

*“unwritten rules and traditions, norms, and expectations that seem to permeate everything: the way people act, how they dress, what they talk about, whether they seek out colleagues for help or not, how teachers feel about their work and their students” (p. 237).*

A concept similar to school culture is *school climate*, which is often used interchangeably with *culture* to describe the overall character of a school. A major – still open – debate is whether culture has to be considered a component of climate (Van Haute, 2005) or whether “climate is better understood as a level of school culture” (Shoen and Teddlie, 2008, p. 130). Hoy et al. (1991) noted that the term climate is typically viewed from a psychological perspective and used mostly in quantitative research on school effectiveness. Culture, on the other hand, takes its original meaning from an anthropological perspective and as a concept is preferred by school improvement research and qualitative sociologists (Prosser, 1999). Some organizational studies distinguish between climate and culture by defining climate in terms of behaviour, and culture in terms of values and norms (Schoen and Teddlie, 2008). The present study leans to the latter stance and considers climate as a feature of school culture. Van Haute (2005) synthesizes the issue as such:

*Climate researchers measure how organization members perceive the organizational climate, while culture researchers look for what members think and believe themselves. Culture concerns values, meanings, and beliefs, while climate concerns the perception of those values, meanings, and beliefs (p. 75).*

Many scholars in the field of educational administration adopt Schein’s (1985) classification of three levels of culture, which differ regarding their consciousness among teaching staff (Maslowski, 2005). The least tangible layer of culture is called basic or tacit assumptions and consists of taken-for-granted beliefs and attitudes, which operate unconsciously. They constitute the essence of a school culture. The second level consists of values and norms. Values refer to what teachers and staff consider as standards of worthiness and are often translated into behavioural norms. “Norms are unspoken rules of what is regarded as customary or acceptable behaviour and action within the school” (Stoll and Fink, 1996, p.120). All such basic assumptions, values and behavioural norms of a school are visualized at the third level in Schein’s classification scheme: artefacts (myths, and symbols) and practices (customs and rituals), which are observable and which Hargreaves (1995) calls the “routinised solutions that become the way we do things round here” (p. 225). A culture is considered to be homogeneous if nearly all staff members ascribe to the same assumptions, norms and values (Maslowski, 2005). However, in the field literature there is no agreement on whether a

single organization is characterized by one integrated culture, or whether different cultures (e.g. sub-cultures) exist alongside each other in the same organization (Van Houtte, 2006). Within the different typologies of school culture offered by the literature (see Prosser, 1999 for a list) the one created by Hargreaves (1995) found some advocates. The model is based on two dimensions: the instrumental domain representing social control and orientation to task; and the expressive domain reflecting social cohesion. Four types of school culture sit in different places along those two dimensions, called respectively traditional (low social cohesion, high social control), welfarist (low social control, high social cohesion), hothouse (high social control, high social cohesion), and anomic (low social control and low social cohesion). However, although useful for classificatory intent, models like the one mentioned above are not able to capture all the subtleties of a school culture. The concept of school culture in fact is not quite often studied “per se” as much as it is understood in regard to specific features. The literature offers a range of studies where the notion has been used within different frameworks such as school change and effectiveness (Schoen and Teddlie , 2008, Stoll and Fink, 1996), special education (Corbet ,1999), multiculturalism (Horenczyk and Tatar, 2002), informal teacher learning (Jurasaitė-Harbison and Rex, 2010) students’ learning outcomes (Cavanaugh and Dellar, 1997) and human rights (Carter and Osler, 2000). In line with this approach, Portside School culture has not been explored “in toto”, with classificatory intent, but with a very specific focus on pupils’ misbehaviour. This means that other elements traditionally considered parts of school culture (for example curriculum and pedagogy) have only received attention at the point they coincided with behavioural issues.

### *7.5.2 Portside School culture*

Schein’s classification scheme described above has been used as a source of inspiration to capture Portside School’s culture on matters of behaviour and discipline. The first observable layer of culture (e.g. the artefacts) included information about the school organisation, behaviour and discipline policies and procedures (comprising the reward and punishing system), structure and pace of the lessons, teachers’ and pupils’ classroom verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Features of most of those artefacts can be traced back to Chapter 4, 5 and 6 respectively. From the artefacts, I moved further to values / norms and tacit assumptions, which, for Schein, constitute the very core of any culture. Reaching those two layers of culture was an inductive process of re-reading the data and re-understanding them in light of categories such as “the abstract premises

about the nature of human relationships, human nature, truth, reality and environment” (Hoy and Miskel, 2008, p.186). Evidence of many such values/norms as well as cues of the corresponding assumptions, have been provided in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Here, for the aims of the tabular display, a synthesis of the three layers of Portside School culture is offered. In order to facilitate the appraising of the institutional congruence level across the teachers’ belief systems, the content of the synthesis has been further organized around the three abovementioned macro themes of teaching, children and behaviour management (the issue is discussed in Chapter 9).

### Teaching

At level of values and norms in Portside school culture the teacher is responsible for pupils’ learning and is the one who initiates and regulates classroom discourses. The successful flow of the lessons depends on how much teachers engage students and promote / regulate their participation. In order to do so, it is assumed that good teachers are assertive and confident. Having a sense of humour is also of importance. A rational, masculine model is in place around the school where teachers who demonstrate their feelings (especially anger) or are too sympathetic with pupils (e.g. over-familiar) are not seen positively. The assumption underlying this set of values and norms is that knowledge is fixed and adult-driven.

### Children

At a level of values and norms, staff in Portside school share the idea that as learners, [bottom set] children – and their families – do not think learning is worthwhile, nor are interested in marks. Therefore pupils have to be constantly engaged into learning by teachers. Good teachers are the ones who “take up the challenge” and successfully capture pupils’ interest. Showing discontent about bottom set pupils is regarded as an admission of incapacity on the part of the teacher as well as inappropriate. Because children “choose to misbehave”, good teachers have to set boundaries and incessantly teach pupils appropriate behaviour. Again, teachers who complain about pupils’ behaviour are implicitly admitting to not being able to manage it. The implicit assumption based on those values and norms is that children are bad by nature and unwilling to learn and behave, unless driven to do so.

### Behaviour management

Data offer evidence that a sort of “hierarchical order” (first control, then learning) is in place around the school, where tackling misbehaviour is considered as an end in itself (the school’s mandate) rather than a means to teaching and learning. School discipline is conceived in the form of obedience to teachers’ authority and conformity to rules. By virtue of their authority and power, teachers are naturally entitled to respect while pupils’ due is submission. The school has in place a system of punishment to protect teachers’ authority and ensure respect (the Back up system). However, at level of values and norms, good teachers do not rely on external help and are able to gain pupils’ compliance via apprehension, by virtue of their personal authoritativeness (which adds to confidence and assertiveness as a pivotal teacher’s characteristic). Teachers who are not powerful and authoritative (or even authoritarian) and cannot stay in control of their class do not really deserve pupils’ respect. Shouting should be sparingly used and only as a means to show pupils “who is in charge”. From this set of values and norms, teachers and staff in Portside school appear to hold the implicit assumption that the imbalance of power between adults and children is right and unquestionable and therefore the school has the duty to discipline the children.

#### *7.5.3 Table summary of institutional congruence level*

The table below shows how the data from interviews and observations have been organized (see appendix 1) in order to assess the institutional congruence level of each teacher. The table summarizes elements of the school culture (which do not change) and data from classroom observation and interviews (which vary from one teacher to another). The degree of congruence is outlined in the third column at the right end of the table in terms of very low, low, medium, high, or very high.



School culture	Beliefs and/or behaviour	Congruence
<p>(Good) teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Drive pupils into learning via assertiveness and confidence.</li> <li>▪ Do not show emotions and are not sympathetic with pupils (e.g. have a “masculine” style).</li> <li>▪ Possess a sense of humour.</li> </ul>	<p>Data from classroom observation interviews and informal chats.</p>	<p>Corresponding degree of congruence: very low, low, medium, high, very high)</p>
<p>(Good) Teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are able to teach pupils good behaviour and discipline</li> <li>▪ Are able to constantly engage children in learning</li> <li>▪ Are not supposed to complain openly about bottom set pupils (neither as learners nor from the behavioural viewpoint) and should “pick up the challenge” instead</li> </ul>		
<p>(Good) teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Take control of the class (e.g. are powerful),</li> <li>▪ Exact obedience from pupils (e.g. are authoritative),</li> <li>▪ Exert apprehension from children (e.g. are authoritarian)</li> <li>▪ Do not need external help</li> <li>▪ Keep shouting at a minimum</li> </ul>		

#### 7.5.4 Pupils' behaviour

At the end of each teacher's tabular display (see appendix 1) a short paragraph addressing pupils' behaviour, as it was observed in the fieldwork, has been added to help the reader to put in place the congruence hypothesis. Many instances of such pupils' behaviour had been already included in Chapter 5, within the description of the teachers and their classroom conduct. Further, the level of pupils' misbehaviour has been summarized and addressed along a continuum from very low, low, medium, high, to very high. Consistently with the qualitative approach of the present work, the appraisal of such a continuum, although leaning on evidence from classroom observation, cannot be considered "objective" as it does not come from quantitative data. To evaluate the level of pupils' misbehaviour during my classroom observation, I was guided by my reading of the field literature as well as by my personal experience as a secondary school teacher. Leaning on such literature, pupils' behaviour was observed and appreciated considering the basic distinction (Blatchford et al., 2003) between attentiveness ("on task" behaviour) as opposed to inattentiveness (off task behaviour). "Off task" behaviour in turn was understood in terms of instances of indolence, disrespect for the teacher, and noisiness (Geving, 2007).

#### 7.6 Summary table

The data from classroom observation and interviews have been organized in a cluster of tables addressing the personal and the institutional congruence levels for each six teacher. The tables have been included in Annex 1. Here, a summary of the main results is given, drawing together the significant evidence.

Teachers	French	Science	Geography	English	History	Mathematics
P.C. L	High	Low	High	Low	v.h.	High
I.C. L.	Medium	Low	Medium	Low	v.h.	Medium
P. Msb	Low/med.	High/v.h.	Low/med.	High/v.h.	v. low	Medium/low

P.C. L. = Personal congruence level

I.C. L. = Institutional congruence level

P. Msb = (amount of) Pupils misbehaviour

v.h. = Very high

v. low =        Very low  
Low/med =    from low to medium

The table shows that the teachers (Science and English) who achieved a low level of both personal and institutional congruence also received high amounts of pupils' misbehaviour. One teacher (History) attained a very high level of both personal and institutional congruence and had a very low amount of pupils' misbehaviour. The three teachers (French, Geography and Maths) who achieved high levels of personal congruence but medium levels of institutional congruence all received medium to low amounts of pupils' misbehaviour. The table is discussed in the following chapter.

# Chapter 8

## Discussion

### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes and discusses the main finding of the study, which is the Congruence hypothesis. It recapitulates the ways in which the hypothesis addressed the research question, and looks at whether it supports, contradicts or extends previous research. The chapter also includes an outline of the study's limitations and strengths, as well as implications for future research.

### 8.2 Background

The present study into pupils' misbehaviour in secondary school was conceived out of a desire to enhance contemporary understanding of the phenomenon and to gain new insights into ways of dealing with it. Within such a broad area of interest, the process of progressive focusing gradually brought about a specific research concern, aimed at casting light on the issue of differences among individual teachers in tackling pupils' misbehaviour. British research focusing on differences among individual teachers in their effectiveness is still small (Muijs and Reynolds, 2005). In the literature some attention has been paid to issues such as difference between teachers experiencing burnout (Pierce and Molloy, 1990), differences in teachers' perceptions of school climate (Griffith, 2009), indiscipline (Munn et al., 2004) and behavioural problems (Martin et al., 1999; Bibou-Nakou et al., 2000); however, to the best of my knowledge, there is no other research which investigates differences in teachers' effectiveness specifically in respect to managing pupils' behaviour. Therefore the present study can be considered as pioneer work. Further, while the existence of a link between the school culture and academic and behavioural "functioning" of students has been already suggested (e.g. DeWit, 2002), the particular issue of how the teacher's belief system in its relation to the school culture may affect pupils' behavioural outcomes has not been previously researched.

The issue of behaviour in school has received a great amount of attention from researchers in different fields but the call for new understanding is still strong, and the interest in the topic seems not to abate (Lyons and O'Connor, 2006; Woods, 2008).

Within the vast literature on the subject the idea that an authoritarian style at both school and classroom level, has a negative impact on pupils' behaviour (see chapter 3) is widely supported. However, the data I collected during my fieldwork in Portside School unveiled almost the contrary - the most authoritarian teacher having the best behavioural results- leaving me in need of a different explanation.

A further exploration of writings on behaviour management revealed a lack of research in the area of effective classroom practice. Historically, this has been a relatively neglected research field within the British academic community, which tended to prefer a school "effectiveness paradigm" over a "teacher-based focus" (Muijs and Reynolds, 2005, p.5). In respect to effective management of pupils' misbehaviour, more often than not, the area is the domain of practitioners' research -see for instance the cluster of research on pupils' disaffection produced within the NASC programme (Elliot and Zamorski, 2002)- and mainstream teaching manuals (e.g. Kyriacou, 2001; Pollard et al., 2005), which tend to approach the issue mostly from a "problem-solving" viewpoint. To date, this approach has offered a plethora of empirical tips and tricks regarding "what works", aimed to produce a direct impact on teachers and practitioners; although useful, the approach lacks firm theory-based research support. The Congruence hypothesis suggested in the present study, and settled within the conceptual landscape of classroom practice, moves beyond the problem-solving approach and attempts to conceptualise "what works" in terms of explanation and prediction, that is in terms of a theory (Woods, 1985). The theory argues that teachers' congruence at both personal and institutional level is a factor that significantly reflects on pupils' behaviour. Developed and applied within the limited scenario of six teachers in one school, the theory satisfactorily answers the research question, which reads:

*Why do teachers obtain different behaviour outcomes from the same group of pupils, although applying similar behaviour management techniques?*

By putting the emphasis on teachers' congruence, I am not denying that other factors could have addressed the difference in effectiveness among individual teachers. The literature in fact offers many such factors. For instance, Muijs and Reynolds (2005) in their pivotal work on effective teaching, point at a number of general teaching/teacher characteristics associated with positive pupils' outcomes (at both learning and behavioural level); for example: structured teaching, high level of interaction with pupils, challenging work, pupils' involvement, teachers' enthusiasm, positive atmosphere, high level of praise (ibidem, pp. 2-3). However, while these factors had already been the focus of attention within the Educational community research (e.g.

Brophy and Good, 1986; Pollard et al., 1994; Murray, 1997; Harris, 1998; Campbell et al., 2004) the congruence hypothesis applied to the specific area of misbehaviour, is something new that can add some additional insights.

The practitioners' literature also offers a cluster of circumstances, specifically suited to explaining different behaviour outcomes. The factors are summarized below. A brief explanation is given of reasons why none of them could address satisfactorily the research question.

a) The subject. Research supports the idea that subjects are not perceived as equally enjoyable or relevant by pupils (Colley and Comber, 2003; Biddulph and Adey, 2004). The link between lack of enjoyment and misbehaviour has not been extensively explored, but there is evidence that boredom (a consequence of the lack of enjoyment and engagement) may lead to misbehaviour (Hammersley, 1990; Gregg, 1995; Cothran et al., 2003). On the other hand where pupils show a positive attitude toward a subject this has been related to better achievement (Thomas et al., 2000) and in turn to a lower rate of misbehaviour (Reinke and Herman, 2002). However, the difference in terms of subject content did not fully account for the differences within the rates of misbehaviour received by the six teachers under study. English, History and Geography for instance, had all different behavioural outcomes, despite belonging to the same cultural area of humanities. Further, research supports the idea that French, (with RE) is the least preferred subject by pupils aged 11-12 years (Colley and Comber, 2003). In the light of such an assumption, the French teacher should have had a higher number of misbehaviour instances, compared to the other subject teachers, which was not the case.

b) Differences in classroom activities. Some empirical studies support that the teaching and learning activities conducted in class are more influential on pupils' attitude toward a subject than is the content itself (Biddulph and Adey, 2004). Similarly, there is evidence that interactive lessons and the use of videos are rated by pupils as the most enjoyable teaching techniques (Harris and Haydn, 2006). However, in regard to the six teachers under study, data from the observation demonstrated that they all employed similar teaching techniques, based on the involvement of children and on the regular use of videos and other technical devices.

c) The timetable and temporal factors. Empirical evidence shows that Mondays and afternoon periods are particularly prone to disruptive behaviour (Reynolds and Cuttance, 1992). Again, this did not account for an exhaustive reason for "my" scenario, where French and Geography on a Monday had moderate to low amounts of misbehaviour, and so did Maths on the last period of a Friday.

d) The weather. Although findings of various studies on the subject of how the weather affects humans are often contradictory, there is some evidence that the weather has effects on school children (Brown, 1964; Staut 2001). Specifically, a cluster of studies claim that in winter high humidity can predict and elicit aggressive behaviour (see Ciucci et al., 2010 for a list). Despite that, adverse weather conditions did not throw a light on the difference among the six teachers. For example, my field notes indicate that on several rainy Wednesdays pupils behaved quite badly in period one (English) and very well only five minutes later, in period two (History), under the very same weather conditions.

Finally, within the literature 2 other factors have been associated with instances of pupils' misbehaviour by some educational studies: shabby and untidy classrooms (Lawrence and Green, 2005) and large size classes (Blatchford et al., 2003). Neither factors applied to the situation under study. All the six classrooms in fact were in very good cleaning condition and the number of pupils did not exceed 25 units.

### **8.3 The Congruence hypothesis**

The Congruence hypothesis formulated for the study at hand reads as follows:

*The more the teacher's belief system, classroom behaviour and the school culture are congruent, the less likely it is that pupils will engage in minor misbehaviour.*

The hypothesis is based on the generally supported assumption that teacher factors are the most significant determinant of classroom environment (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996) as the teacher is by institution the one in control of classroom discourse (Bellack et al., 1966). I was led to adopt this teacher-centred approach by the nature of my data, because the approach was the one that best fitted the research's unfolding "scenario", not because it reflected my personal ideas or my political stance.

Leaning on a social ecological perspective, which considers the individual, organization, community, and culture as factors, or spheres, nested into one another as Russian dolls (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the Congruence hypothesis takes into account two of those factors, namely the individual (the personal congruence level) and the organization (the institutional congruence level). Due to a lack of time and resources, it has not been possible to address in the present study the other two levels of community and culture; however, their importance is acknowledged and will be discussed further in the chapter.

The notion of congruence, its relevant literature, and how it relates to the area of pupils' misbehaviour via the production of the congruence hypothesis was discussed in Chapter 7. In order to provide the "thick description" (Shipman, 1985) which makes the reader able to recognise a personal similar experience and is useful for transferability (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), all the tables showing how the hypothesis was applied to the six teachers under study have been included in Appendix 1. The use of devices such as tabular displays and graphs to present qualitative data finds some advocates (Miles and Huberman, 1994). I have chosen it to allow the reader to understand the theory "at a glance" and as a tool it achieves its purpose. However, I also acknowledge that at times it did not completely accommodate the fluid, descriptive nature of my data.

The summary table included at the end of chapter 7 has recapitulated the evidence from all the tables, showing that the teachers who achieved a low level of both personal and institutional congruence also received high amounts of pupils' misbehaviour. The teacher who attained a very high level of both personal and institutional congruence had a very low amount of pupils' misbehaviour. The three teachers who achieved high levels of personal congruence but medium levels of institutional congruence received medium to low amounts of pupils' misbehaviour.

The case of someone having a low or medium level of personal congruence and a high level of institutional congruence did not present among the six teachers under study. Although such a case looks quite unlikely, further research on a wider cluster of teachers and schools is warranted. If it existed, the case would add an interesting further twist to the hypothesis, namely whether the level of institutional congruence weighs more than the personal as a factor influencing pupils' behaviour.

#### **8.4 Reflections**

The congruence hypothesis probably has the potential to add new insights into the broad subject area of pupils' misbehaviour and to bolster the somewhat limited empirical literature so far available on the issue. The aim of the study is not to present a definitive statement, but to put forward a model that could serve as a framework for further reflection and understanding. I agree with Yin (2003) who states that the goal of an exploratory case study is "not to conclude a study but to develop ideas for further study" (p. 120). Generating a theory from case study research has quite a long tradition; however, it can still be controversial for several reasons. To summarize the issue, I lean on Eisehardt (1989) who, in her "roadmap" for building theories from case studies research, states:



*The likelihood of valid theory is high because the theory-building process is so intimately tied with evidence that it is very likely that the resultant theory will be consistent with empirical observation.... However, the intensive use of empirical evidence can yield theory which is overly complex.... The result can be theory which is very rich in detail, but lacks the simplicity of overall perspective... The risks are that the theory describes a very idiosyncratic phenomenon or that the theorist is unable to raise the level of generality of the theory (p. 547).*

I believe that the congruence hypothesis constructed within the present study avoids risks of both over-simplicity and over-complexity. However, further research is warranted to test the hypothesis on a wider sample of teachers and on “two or more schools with contrasting structures” (Woods 1985, p. 58).

The two levels of personal and institutional congruence have been described separately for obvious practical reasons but are actually thought to be interconnected, having influence on each other and happening contemporaneously, as the teacher lives at the classroom and the school levels at the same time. This approach finds some support within recent educational research, where the focus has shifted from considering individual teachers’ knowledge, beliefs and instructional practices to exploring the social contexts and institutional cultures in which teachers operate (Windschitl and Sahl, 2002).

#### *8.4.1 Limitations and strengths at the personal congruence level*

I borrowed the idea of personal congruence from Rogers, who also uses the similar concept of genuineness (Rogers, 1961). In Roger’s definition, however, congruence and genuineness (qualities he referred specifically to the therapist) are intended at a more subtle and psychological level as ways of being “the self which one truly is”, whereas I willingly restricted my conceptualisation within the more tangible and relatively more observable perimeter of “the match between beliefs and actions”.

I acknowledge that while the latter was the object of quite an extensive field observation, one interview and a few informal chats with each teacher do not account for a proper exhaustive investigation of their belief system. However, one interview is what had been agreed during the preliminary contacts with the deputy head and was all that the teachers expected and seemed willing to give me. Even arranging that sole interview was complicated at times. I also acknowledge that the majority of the interviews focused mainly on behaviour issues, as that was my leading interest at the time. They were not meant to encompass the entire teacher’s belief system, because this, as a conceptual framework, emerged later, at the third stage of the data analysis (see Chapter 3). Despite these limitations, I am still confident (and the data support me) that

the interviews contained enough elements to appreciate the teachers' belief system in its main facets. Within the match between teachers' belief systems and behaviour, I included also a few features of congruence between "what the teachers say and what they actually do in class" (Cohen and Manion, 2000, p. 231). However, the features could have been treated separately as a different level of congruence, which is probably worth more attention in further research.

The importance of teachers' awareness of their beliefs and how they relate to practice, which constitutes the basic assumption of the personal congruence level, has been recently recognized (Fairbanks et al., 2010), especially within the movement towards inclusive education research (Carrington and Robinson, 2006). It is my opinion that becoming familiar with the notion of congruence and appreciating their congruence levels will contribute to improving teachers' classroom practice, enhancing their "professional development" (Borko, 2004) as much as the students' behavioural outcomes.

#### *8.4.2 Limitations and strengths at the institutional congruence level*

By institutional congruence is meant the match between the teacher's belief system (comprising their classroom behaviour) and the school culture. It has been mentioned already that Portside School culture was investigated within the major conceptual frame of behaviour, and that other elements traditionally considered parts of the school culture (for example curriculum and pedagogy) have only received attention at the points where they coincided with behavioural issues. However, to accommodate the data within the rigid structure of the tabular display, so that the reader could appreciate at a glance the degree of congruence between teachers' belief system and the school culture, I decided to re-organize all the elements of the school culture within the three areas of teaching, children and behaviour management. These three conceptual areas emerged from the literature as primary constructs to conceptualise teachers' belief systems (as described in Chapter 7). I am aware that dividing the data collected with regard to the school's culture in such a way may appear to be forced but I believe that doing it this way was of considerable benefit for the interpretation of the tables.

Beyond the mere perimeter of pupils' misbehaviour, an asset of the congruence hypothesis at the institutional level lies, in my opinion, within the area of school recruitment and retention, where there is evidence that problems have been growing in recent years (e.g. Cockburn, 2000; Hayes, 2004; Guarino et al., 2006). I believe that, having an understanding of the notion of congruence, schools leaders and governing

bodies could select persons whose belief system and classroom practice were already aligned (at least in part) with the existing school culture. If a match of attitudes, behaviours, and values were put in place at the recruiting stage, the adjustment and retention of newcomers would be facilitated.

### **8.5 Recommendations for future research**

The Congruence hypothesis provided in the present study attempts to cast a new light on the issue of pupils' misbehaviour by focusing on the relatively little-researched field of differences among individual teachers. The assumption of the hypothesis is that at both personal and institutional levels some teachers are more congruent than others and their congruence reflects positively on pupils' behavioural outcomes. The hypothesis will benefit from further research, which can support, reject, or, perhaps most likely, correct and refine the model presented here.

A preliminary step to test the hypothesis, should be subjecting it to the scrutiny of a group of teachers of different ages, experience and job status (including head teachers). Gaining the opinion of other practitioners teachers will add precious insights into a possible practical application of the hypothesis and contribute into its theoretical improvement.

A second, more vital, step is to test the hypothesis over a wider number of teachers and at least two schools, with different school cultures. This I expect is the crucial point for future research to take in order to challenge the model. In fact, however intriguing the idea under consideration, there remains the question of empirical evidence. Given the limited database and the modest sample sizes of my investigation, it is clear that more work is needed before strong conclusions are drawn about the impact of teachers' congruence on pupils' classroom behaviour. In regard to future research, I think there are two main issues of matter. The first concerns the exploration of the teachers' belief system. I am aware that to enhance the validity of the congruence hypothesis, a deeper understanding of teachers' belief systems should be provided. I suggest (a) increasing the number of teachers' in-depth interviews; the more the better, given the complexity of the subject and (b) conducting them in parallel with other qualitative investigation tools such as focus groups, written diaries or even blogs. I acknowledge that engaging teachers on such a venture of elaborating their belief system might prove difficult. In the first place there may be issues of time, because teachers are usually extremely busy. Further there are issues of personal vulnerability and accountability, which are not easy to address. However, there is already a strong

tradition of qualitative research (particularly in the field of Action Research) engaging teachers on long-term in deep investigation (for a list, see Fairbanks, 2010, p. 60.)

The second substantive issue for future research concerns the exploration of other levels of congruence. Consistently with the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), there are two other levels of congruence which have not been investigated in the present study but are worth of some attention, namely the congruence between the school culture and the local community culture, and the congruence between both school and local cultures and the national (i.e. British) culture. I have assumed the existence of some “linkage” between the authoritarian stance of Portside School and the political stance of the area where the school is located - which according to the UK Census and to the Annual Business Inquiry (ABI) is traditionally conservative and white British (ONS, 2001), and where 35.3% of the jobs are within the public administration sector (ONS, 2007). I suspect, although I have little evidence, that Portside School was successful in fostering and promoting its authoritarian culture because the approach was broadly shared by the local community, that is, because Portside School culture was congruent with the culture of the [Clifton] area. How it would have been if such an authoritarian school culture had met a very liberal local culture? Or vice-versa? Researchers into school change and school improvement might find the question of some interest. The last possible layer of congruence, the one between school culture/local community culture and national culture, is also worth attention. In the specific case of Portside School I assumed its authoritarian culture matched a (supposed) authoritarian local culture and both in turn were congruent with an authoritarian national culture. This link, if it exists, needs to be investigated appropriately. However, while I had very little information to infer about the local community culture and could only make suppositions about it, there is evidence within the literature (e.g. Stephen et al., 2005; Bru et al., 2001; Bru et al., 2002) that British culture on matters of behaviour in school is authoritarian and that “a punitive habitus infiltrates English classrooms” (Hultgren and Stephen, 1999, p. 29). I have identified such habitus within public documents such as the Steer Report (DfES, 2005; 2009) - where “pupils’ responsibilities to listen and respond properly to adults and accept sanctions” (DfES, 2005, p. 41) is firmly insisted upon - and within recent British legislation. For example the Inspections Act (2006) has reinforced teachers’ power to discipline pupils, even off the school premises, and to search pupils and their possessions without their consent. The Act also states that all schools shall have a nominated police contact. (Inspection Act, 2006, p. 40).

### 8.5.1 *Implications*

It has been said already that congruence is to be considered as one factor, among others pointed out in the literature, influencing pupils' behavioural outcomes (see Visser, 2005, for a list). Congruence, in the specific acceptation of the concept developed by the present paper, adds to the list of many such factors, whose importance is not discounted. However, if further research proved the hypothesis true, new insights into teaching practice would be provided, as the demand for changes in classroom practices, beyond traditional forms of professional knowledge, is widely acknowledged within the educational community (e.g. Borko, 2004; Fairbanks et al., 2010). I also expect the congruence hypothesis to have implications for both the single teacher and the school.

For the single teacher a first asset offered by the hypothesis is related to enhancing self-awareness. The importance of teachers' critical reflection on their own practice has been recognized by several studies (e.g. Burnett and Lingam, 2007; Brandt, 2008; Sockman and Sharma, 2008). The model presented here offers a new frame of reference for teachers not only to uncover their beliefs and assumptions but specifically to evaluate whether those match their classroom practice, as this, has been hypothesized, will reflect on pupils' behaviour outcomes. However, to reach such an awareness and to trace back possible lack of congruence at their personal level (that is, the lack of fit between what they think/say and what they actually do in class) teachers will need external help in the form of feedbacks and guidance, as very rarely can human beings observe their own behaviour whilst they are displaying it (Duval and Wicklund, 1973). Therefore, I suggest the notion of congruence to be introduced in teachers training courses as a useful tool for tutors mentors and supervisor to improve teachers' self-awareness and to promote thoughtful teaching practices.

I believe having knowledge of the second level of congruence, the one considering the teacher's belief system and the school culture, may also contribute to teacher empowerment, understood in terms of a teacher's opportunity for autonomy, choice, responsibility, and participation in decision making in organizations (Lightfoot, 1986). For a single teacher, by taking school culture into account (as much as they can, without embarking on a systematic research) and being aware of whether their belief system matches it, can prove useful. For instance, the process of new teachers fitting into a school is usually an unconscious process of conforming (Woods, 1983), with very little awareness (and power) on the part of the teachers. On the contrary, I think that making this process conscious, even partially, by framing it in terms of presence or lack

of congruence, will equip teachers to deal with the complexities of teaching environments. Further, having knowledge of the congruence hypothesis would help teachers making a pondered decision whether they want to push their ideological boundaries to fit into a specific school.

Considering the issue from a school level point of view, head teachers and senior staff can adopt the notion of congruence in order to promote teachers' engagement and discourage withdrawal as well as to appoint new teachers who are already quite in line with the values and assumptions of the school. Research on school performance in fact, has demonstrated that

*A close alignment of personal values and organizational values is likely to be related to the motivation and commitment of employees...to lead to a better fit between personal and organizational values.... With respect to schools, this concept of cultural fit can be considered as a proxy of whether staff members have a 'constructive attitude' towards school. It may indicate whether staff members are willing to reflect on their actions, and whether they are willing to change their practices (Maslowski 2001, p.133).*

Recruiting new teachers whose belief system is already, at least partially, congruent with the school culture presents obvious advantages. For instance it might contribute establishing policies to overcome the challenges of building consensus, which importance as a basis for social order has been recognized by a long theoretical tradition from Durkheim (1947) onward. Further, assuming with Stolp and Smith (1995) that "perhaps the most important ability of today's school leader is to be a culture builder," (p. vii), I believe headmasters and senior staff might reach a more holistic and effective way to look at the school culture by framing or re-framing it into the notion of congruence as it has been presented in the study. This approach seems to be in line with several leadership studies (see Moos et al. 2008, for a list), which indicate that educational leadership and its successes are highly contextually dependent.

## **8.6 Summary**

In conclusion, the aim of present thesis has been to make a contribution toward the problem of misbehaviour in schools. This has been achieved by providing a better understanding of what makes some teachers more effective than others in tackling pupils' behaviour. The field of differences among individual teachers has received relative little attention within the British academic community (Muijs and Reynolds, 2005) and therefore by adopting such a focus, the thesis can be considered as pioneer work.

Relying on a variety of evidence drawn from interviews and the observation of six teachers within one comprehensive secondary school, the study highlights that, although the six teachers took very similar approaches to behaviour management with the same students, they differed from one another in the extent to which they manifested congruence at both personal and institutional level. In fact congruence, it is the main assumption of the thesis, positively affects pupils' classroom behaviour. If further research were to show a clear link between congruence and pupils' conduct, teachers and school managers would have an additional means of identifying possible reasons for pupil misbehaviour and possible ways of improving such behaviour. This might entail a useful addition to the knowledge-base relating to effective teaching on matter of classroom behaviour management.

# Appendix 1

## Tables

### A.1 French: Ms FL

#### A.1.1 Personal congruence table

Characteristic of Ms FL	Beliefs	Behaviours	Congruence
She loves her subject and thinks it is very important for educating children at thinking. (Teaching)	“I became a teacher.... because I love the subject that I teach, I love learning languages and go travelling in different countries.” “from a literacy point of view our subject is so important... it’s that we should use it for modelling and I am trying to do it more ...because we are supposed to educate our children at thinking and really give voice to what they are doing.”	Ms FL constantly demonstrates enthusiasm (both for the subject and for teaching it) in her body language, particularly by smiling (e.g.23/2). She shows children how to learn in different ways, i.e. once she let them writing on each other back and they had to guess which word it was (20/10); and uses music as a strategy to improve their memory (3/11).	High Her professed enthusiasm and ideas match her classroom behaviour.
She believes supporting pupils to be her main role as a teacher. (Teaching)	“I like to work with children and help them really to do well in my subject but also to grow individuals and give them support, really, so that’s why I call myself as a vocational teacher.”	She praises pupils very often and very enthusiastically (1/12, 11/11) and frequently gives them merit certificates and stickers (1/12).	High. The support she gives is shown by frequent certificates and stickers.



She takes into consideration pupils' backgrounds and home circumstances. (Children)	"Most pupils in this class have hard situations at home and their parents do not take care of them properly, you can see how they arrive on a rainy days, some have no jumper and their stuff is all wet while others have umbrellas and plastic covering for their books." (informal chat 20/11)	On a rainy day she put on a song to cheer pupils up (11/11). She says to the helper things like "they are tired" (28/4) or "they are finding it a bit challenging" to justify the pupils' not perfect behaviour (23/2).	High
She believes in treating each child individually and personally. (Children)	"Also I did realize it is worth making the time to write down merit slips and really take time marking their book writing a personal comment even small thing like "this is a good piece of work" and not just mark the book but use their name....I think they appreciate things like that...and stickers they love stickers (laughing) and they love it if you note they have made an effort."	She gives back pupils' books adding cheering comments (1/12). She takes some time to do the register (in French) using this as an opportunity to greet warmly every single pupil, making eye contact and smiling at them (23/2) She also exchanges with the helper brief praises of the pupils, like: "I am so proud of them!" (31/3), and: "if you think they are a Z group!" (21/4).	High
She believes children need boundaries and expect routine (Behaviour management)	"Well I do think the children like a good structure even if they try...to push the boundaries...they feel much more secure... I think so, the routine is what they expect."	The boundaries the teacher has (quite successfully) set and reminds the pupils of are: school uniform (3/11), hands up before talking (11/11), bringing all the equipment (19/1), not arguing back (16/3) not talking when the teacher is talking (1/12), silence during silent working (6/10); the silence-before-the-bell rule is not always in place (24/11). Her lessons follow a regular schema: entering, silent register, various tasks, silence before the bell rings, exiting. A list of the activities for the day is placed on pupils' desks at the beginning of each lesson (11/1).	High

She thinks she has refined in managing pupils' behaviour (Behaviour management)	"I have tightened up from when I first started...this is my sixth year now...if I look at what it was like when I first started...back and now...I think, yes I think I have got quite a bit firmer and a bit more confident about disciplining them and how to discipline them."	She firmly makes a count down as a signal that pupils have to be silent for the register (3/11); she doesn't look intimidated by pupils and is very firm when she tells them off (11/11) or when she reminds them about some rules like "don't talk when I am talking, [James]" (1/12). Pupils respond accordingly.	High Overall, her behaviour management style did manifest firmness.
She thinks it is important for a teacher not to shout and find other ways of managing pupils' behaviour. (Behaviour management)	<p>"I don't like shouting that's my rule...they hate it, it really winds them up more...I mean occasionally you have to raise your voice that sort of 54321 counting down...it's quite effective ...it's something that they are used to, they know what to expect and also they used it at the junior school."</p> <p>"We live in [Clifton] so I do often see their parents or relatives and they think I might say something to their relatives! (laughs) And also another thing is... phoning home."</p> <p>"I've got a record of them and I tell them that Mr K keeps an eye on pupils whose names keep turning up and so...I've got it for several years ...and then I find I shout a lot less now."</p>	Ms FL usually doesn't shout. When the first count down doesn't work she does another (11/11); if it's still not enough, she adds sentences like "I'm still waiting!" showing some annoyance but always being very measured and polite until pupils eventually calm down. However, there are days (more frequently before Christmas) when she has to raise her voice (6/10); as the children take a while to clam down. A few times she threatens pupils with writing their names down for the year office (19/1). When the noise level rises, she addresses the class collectively by saying, firmly: "I am a bit disappointed" (6/10), "I am not well impressed with you today" (11/11) or "I shouldn't be waiting for you to be quiet" (19/5). Phoning home and talking to parents outside the school were strategies I could not observe.	High Ms FL succeed in finding alternative ways to manage pupils' behaviour without shouting,

A.1.2 Institutional congruence table

School culture	Beliefs and/or behaviour	Congruence
<p>(Good) teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Drive pupils into learning via assertiveness and confidence.</li> <li>▪ Do not show emotions and are not sympathetic with pupils (e.g. have a “masculine” style).</li> <li>▪ Possess a sense of humour.</li> </ul>	<p>Ms FL has a very structured lesson plan and follows it meticulously; a list of the activities for the day is always placed on pupils’ desks at the beginning of each lesson (11/1). She looks quite happy and at ease (e.g. confident) in her role as a teacher (23/2).</p> <p>She does jokes from time to time (e.g. 16/3, 31/3) Her teaching style is warm and “feminine”: She takes into consideration pupils’ backgrounds and home circumstances (see Personal Congruence table); she demonstrates care for the pupils by greeting them at the door wearing the French apron (24/11), doing the register in a very maternal fashion addressing every single child by making eye contact and declaring enthusiastically: “[Tim] <i>bonjour</i>”(e.g. 6/10, 11/11, 23/2), putting on a song to cheer them up in a rainy day (11/11), declaring publicly after an holiday that she had missed them (23/2), smiling and praising them almost unconditionally (1/12), declaring how proud she is of them (31/3).</p>	<p>Low</p> <p>Although other features are in place, Ms FL’s emotional display of affection and care is quite far removed from the masculine stance of the school culture.</p>

<p>(Good) Teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are able to teach pupils into good behaviour and discipline.</li> <li>▪ Are able to constantly engage children into learning.</li> <li>▪ Are not supposed to complain openly about bottom set pupils (neither as learners nor under the behavioural view point) and should “pick up the challenge” instead.</li> </ul>	<p>Ms FL thinks pupils “like a good structure even if they try...to push the boundaries...” (Interview) and regularly reminds them of school expectations: “I have the behaviour expectations on my door, I have this book and I make them copy it out all right? And I try to make them focus on what I expect because some of them they don’t understand that saying “yeah”...and not “yes Miss”...is rude” (interview). Pupils tend to respond positively to her behaviour management approach (see below)</p> <p>She divides the lesson into different activities, using games, videos, music and songs (e.g. 24/11, 16/3) and usually succeeds in gaining pupils’ attention.</p> <p>Talking about this class, she doesn’t like the expression “bottom set” and says instead “[the class] with the biggest percentage of low ability children” (interview). She also pinpoints that her job is “to help them really to do well in my subject but also to grow as individuals” (interview).</p>	<p>High</p> <p>Ms FL’s idea of pupils needing boundaries and behavioural teaching is in line with the school culture. So is her “engaging” approach to teaching. She also seems to share the “pick up the challenge” culture of the school.</p>
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<p>(Good) teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Take control of the class (e.g. are powerful).</li> <li>▪ Exact obedience from pupils (e.g. are authoritative).</li> <li>▪ Exert apprehension from children (e.g. are authoritarian).</li> <li>▪ Do not need external help.</li> <li>▪ Keep shouting to a minimum.</li> </ul>	<p>Ms FL doesn't seem to be especially focused on tackling misbehaviour as her first aim (which is instead: supporting and understanding the children, see Personal Congruence table). However she takes actions –along with the helper – to stay in control of the class (23/2) and to not letting the noise level rise (24/11). She does not expect obedience per se, but as a form of politeness (1/12). Ms FL never called for help from the senior staff; however, sometimes she would mention the head of the year Mr K to calm pupils down (11/11). She looks quite confident but not really “powerful” nor authoritarian, and does not exert apprehension from pupils, who look quite at ease with her and do not hesitate to talk back from time to time (e.g. 16/3). She avoids shouting quite successfully.</p>	<p>Medium</p> <p>Ms FL manages to stay in control of the class without shouting and doesn't resort to the help of senior staff; however she doesn't really addresses the issues of authority, power and apprehension, which are quite relevant to Portside School culture.</p>
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### *A.1.3 Pupils' behaviour*

Usually pupils entered the class loudly (e. g. 20/10, 2/3) and kept chatting for a few minutes until the teacher and the helper would manage to get in control, usually by doing one or more counts down. Although such control had to be regained again from time to time, in terms of pupils' misbehaviour, in varying degrees, the range I observed was between medium and low. A few characters ([Daniel], [Betty], [Jake], [Johnny]) would very occasionally challenge Ms FL (but not as much after February' half term) by answering back (11/11) pretending not to have heard (24/11), making little voices (11/11) and producing noises (3/11). However, on average the majority of the pupils used to calm down when asked to do so, put their hands up before talking and actively (and sometimes happily) took part in the lesson.

### *A.1.4 Summary table*

<b>Personal Congruence Level</b>	<b>Institutional Congruence Level</b>	<b>Pupils' Misbehaviour Level</b>
High	Medium	Medium/low

## A.2 Science: Mr AM

### A.2.1 Personal congruence table

Characteristic of Mr AM	Beliefs	Behaviours	Congruence
He likes his subject although his real interest is in sport science. (Teaching)	“Well basically my interest is in sport science... working in the science sport industry the pay is awful and so I thought that one way of getting down the sport science ...would be through teaching. I have thought of becoming a teacher before as a PE teacher but as I couldn't do that science seems to be a good alternative.”	It is difficult to say whether he likes teaching or not as his face does not give away any emotion (27/4) nor his voice, which is particularly monotone (6/10). However, I can say he doesn't look particularly involved, either, nor look the children (see above).	Low He declares that he likes his subject but does not manifest his liking.

<p>He wants children to be autonomous. (Teaching/ Behaviour Management)</p>	<p>“I would describe myself as a teacher who likes the pupils try and think for themselves as opposed to tell them everything so I like to try things out which means them being more active in the class and perhaps to talk a bit in the class because they would do things for themselves.”</p>	<p>Mr AM allows pupils to work on their own, while he is circulating around the tables helping them out. But, at the same time he constantly threatens to interrupt the experiment (e.g. 11/12, 2/3), to let them copy from the book (e.g. 1/12), to give them a detention (1/12), to keep them at break time (e.g. 30/3) either collectively (3/11) or some of them (25/11), and actually does so very often, but not as often as he had threatened to. Pupils’ behaviour is frequently off task (see below).</p>	<p>Low Although the way he organizes his lessons seems to be congruent with his ideas of independent learning and autonomy, the systematic use of threats is not. Also, the fact that threats are rarely carried out is also a matter of low congruence.</p>
<p>He thinks this class want to learn. (Teaching/ Children)</p>	<p>“They seem to be quite keen to learn and they seem quite keen to try things...this suggests to me they want to do reasonably well in a subject that they enjoy ...they enjoy the subject to certain extent so ...yeah I am...most of them have a good attitude trying to do well in science ....they are not going to become A grade students...but hopefully they'll do the best they can.”</p>	<p>He repeats the instructions several times (even very simple ones) but at the same time complains fiercely that pupils are not listening properly to him (17/11). He doesn’t praise children very often and if he does, it is just in passing (17/11). Pupils on their part pretend not to have understood and work as slowly as they can (19/1). He stated once about some homework: “the most frustrating thing is that you did not even try, if only you had tried, no matter the results.” (10/11)</p>	<p>Low His declarations of intent, with this bottom set year 8 class, did not match his behaviour.</p>



<p>He is not obsessed with control.  He is happy with pupils' behaviour.  He thinks it is getting better.  (Behaviour Management)</p>	<p>"I am not obsessed with control."  "They are not especially badly behaved it's just they call out too much or talk too much when they should be listening." "At the beginning of the year they weren't very good ...they seem to be getting better at it."</p>	<p>He applies quite a lot of shouting ("ladies and gents, right year eight, still waiting, THANK YOU") to calm pupils down, start the lesson and make them listen (e. g 13/10, 3/11). Once he stopped his talking and started it from the very beginning 5 times (18/5). He constantly tells pupils off (e. g. 18/5), puts names on the board (25/11, 30/3), stops pupils for a sermon at the end of the lesson on a regular basis (e. g 30/3, 18/5), uses the half detention-slip technique (1/12), moves pupils away from each other (e. g. 6/10, 19/1).  No improvement was observed in pupils' behaviour.</p>	<p>Low  Despite his declarations of intent, Mr AM constantly seeks some sort of control, doesn't seem happy with pupils' behaviour, and tries different strategies to make them to behave.</p>
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### A.2.2 Institutional congruence table

School culture	Teacher's beliefs and/or behaviour	Congruence
<p>(Good) teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Drive pupils into learning via assertiveness and confidence.</li> <li>▪ Do not show emotions and are not sympathetic. with pupils (e.g. have a “masculine” style)</li> <li>▪ Possess a sense of humour.</li> </ul>	<p>Mr AM tends to allow children some autonomy: “I like to send them off and give a bit of independence in their work” (interview). Rather than by virtue of his assertiveness and confidence, he tries to enhance pupils’ interest by using experiments, which he assumes they like (see Personal Congruence table). It takes Mr AM many efforts to have his instructions delivered (e. g 13/10, 3/11) as pupils often pretend not to have understood (e.g. 17/11).I did not observe Mr AM doing any jokes or showing any sense of humour. He did not show emotions (see Personal Congruence table).</p>	<p>Low</p> <p>Mr AM’s idea of relatively autonomous learning is only partially in line with the school culture, although his approach can still be considered teacher-directed. Despite his lack of emotional display, he does not match the ideal of assertiveness and confidence that is very insisted upon around the school.</p>

<p>(Good) Teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are able to teach pupils into good behaviour and discipline.</li> <li>▪ Are able to constantly engage children into learning.</li> <li>▪ Are not supposed to complain openly about bottom set pupils (neither as learners nor under the behavioural viewpoint) and should “pick up the challenge” instead.</li> </ul>	<p>More than directly teaching good behaviour, Mr AM expects pupils to learn it as a consequence of stopping experiments and/or keeping them “behind” (11/12, 2/3). However, pupils do not seem really bothered by his threats and continue talking and socializing (e.g. 11/12,26/1). Mr AM tries to engage pupils with experiments but with mixed results as pupils did not look particularly engaged (e.g. 3/11, 26/1, 18/5). Although he doesn’t openly complain about this class being a bottom set, he doesn’t see it as a professional challenge to improve their outcomes either: “when I think about some of their backgrounds and some of them have a difficult life..... they could be far worse... in that case I can’t complain so I am quite happy with the way they are going ...they are not going to become A grade students at the end of year eleven but hopefully they’ll do the best they can, they enjoy doing science” (interview). In class he would say things like: “The most frustrating thing is that you did not even try, if you only had tried no matter the results” (10/11) showing his low expectations for their academic results.</p>	<p>Low</p> <p>The role Mr AM plays in engaging children and teaching them discipline is not sufficiently “proactive” compared to the school culture. In fact he does not set himself the challenge of successfully driving bottom set pupils into learning and behaving and basically declares that he is happy with the way they are.</p>
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<p>(Good) teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Take control of the class (e.g. are powerful).</li> <li>▪ Exact obedience from pupils (e.g. are authoritative).</li> <li>▪ Exert apprehension from children (e.g. are authoritarian).</li> <li>▪ Do not need external help.</li> <li>▪ Keep shouting to a minimum.</li> </ul>	<p>Mr AM is not particularly concerned with having control of the class; in fact children are allowed to chat and socialize, as long as they do some work (26/1). He even declared: “I do not expect perfect silence, that wouldn’t be realistic!” (10/11) and “I cannot expect 100% of not talking” (11/5). He would shout and threaten pupils constantly in order to obtain attention from them but he doesn’t achieve obedience (see Personal Congruence table). He officially does not call for help from the year office but he is not authoritative nor does he exert apprehension from the pupils, who tend to answer back (e.g. 10/11) and in general do not pay much attention to what he says (e.g. 19/1). He shouts constantly, mostly to impose his voice over the noise level.</p>	<p>Very Low Mr AM does not really fit into the school model where power, authoritativeness and being in control of the class are viewed as pivotal traits.</p>
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### A.2.3 Pupils’ behaviour

In terms of pupils' misbehaviour the range I observed was generally very high. They entered the class very noisily and it usually took some time for the teacher to calm them down (11/5). However, as soon as he would finish talking, the noise level started to rise again and kept going up until the teacher intervened. Given the teacher’s intervention, the noise stopped for a little but rose again after a little while (and this would happen endlessly throughout each lesson, although some lessons (e.g. 26/1) went slightly better than others). Generally, pupils worked very slowly (19/1); tended to answer back and challenged the teacher (especially [Betty] (27/4) [Rhyce] (1/12) and [Alan] (e. g 2/3, 16/3, 11/5)); continuously asked for help as if they hadn’t understood (17/11); just pretended to work when the teacher was approaching their desk but stopped as soon as he left (e. g. 25/11; 23/2). While working, they kept talking to each other banging stuff on the desks, moving around the room and socializing at the same time (e.g. 26/1). The

(only one) time when the teacher eventually stopped the experiment as a punishment, pupils did not look particularly upset and kept smashing stuff on their tables and laughing (1/12). In general, pupils did not show any apprehension for the threats Mr AM kept landing on them; what they did not want, though, was to lose their break time; that is why the threat of “keeping them behind” got some results. I did not observe any improvement along the year. Only one time, during a test (9/3) I observed the class behaving very appropriately and acting in a perfect silence.

#### *A.2.4 Summary table*

<b>Personal Congruence Level</b>	<b>Institutional Congruence Level</b>	<b>Pupils' Misbehaviour Level</b>
Low	Low	High/very high

### A.3 Geography: Mr EW

#### A.3.1 Personal congruence table

Characteristic of Mr EW	Beliefs	Behaviours	Congruence
He loves teaching. (Teaching)	<p>"I decided I wanted to be a teacher quite young I was 15, 16? And Geography was the subject I enjoyed the most at school and I was good at."</p> <p>"I love the teaching when the door closes and you have a class in front of you, that's the good bit of the job."</p>	Mr EW puts a lot of effort in his lessons, which are carefully structured. He uses different devices like video clips and music to enrich the subject and keep children interested (e.g. 3/11). Although he seems to be quite a controlled person, his facial expression (smile, eyes) and his voice show he likes teaching his subject (e.g. 16/3, 11/5).	High Mr EW's love for teaching matches his classroom behaviour.
His opinion of the class at both academic and behaviour levels is quite positive. (Children)	Well they are very attention seeking this class there are lots who really want my attention ... Perhaps they are not getting enough positive praise from myself and other teachers around the school... To seek attention they do negative things... some of them they get put in those bottom sets because of their behaviour more than their ability... and then they are labelled... they can be bright, but I feel that perhaps in most cases parents are not supportive."	Mr EW evaluates what pupils' say and builds up his lessons on their interventions (e.g. 3/11, 10/11, 17/12); however, it is true that he doesn't praise them very frequently.	High Mr EW's classroom behaviour seems to be congruent with his beliefs.

<p>He believes pupils' behaviour is not an issue for him anymore, despite Alan's challenges. (Children/Behaviour management)</p>	<p>"I think my first couple of years it was hard... and perhaps they recognised that I was nervous... each year it gets easier the reputation in the school so they don't play games and they come in with expectations...yeah I don't worry about behaviour....they think they [misbehaviour acts] have a negative effect on you, but I don't seems to be affected if that make sense?"</p> <p>"Alan... there is a sort of malice... the rest of them they know when you get annoyed of them and they start work as they should but Alan is still the one who will kick up against that."</p>	<p>Mr EW doesn't greet the children at the door and lets them enter noisily, allowing some settle-down time (26/1). By starting the register he expects the class to calm down (26/1) and put their hands up before talking (2/3) and they usually do so. He keeps control over the class and confidently manages their behaviour (24/11).</p> <p>Mr EW doesn't respond to the challenges Alan would confront him with (e.g. 10/11, 26/1 16/3) like making vicious comments under his breath and talking when the teacher is talking (3/11). Mr EW doesn't show he is intimidated by him, either (9/3). He treats Alan consistently and firmly (10/11); once he stopped him after a lesson and made him do a role-play (24/11). Alan's behaviour gradually improved (see Chapter five).</p>	<p>High</p> <p>Mr EW's belief that pupils' misbehaviour is not an issue is congruent with his classroom behaviour.</p>
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He doesn't insist on silence. (Behaviour management)	"I don't insist on silence so talking when I am giving instructions or when someone is asking or answering a question [is annoying] because they are obviously not able to listening and learn from what I am saying or someone else is saying... if they are discussing with a partner or if they are taking in a small group... that's ok but isn't ok when... they are distracting and not getting anywhere where they should be doing not understanding and then wasting time off task."	He usually manages to remain in control of the class till the end of the lesson (16/3) allowing pupils some chatting in between tasks (17/11) and especially during group works (26/1). He doesn't particularly expect silent exits (3/11); however once he made the pupils un-pack and re-pack again in a quieter manner (10/11).	High Mr EW acts consistently with his beliefs. He says he doesn't insist on silence and in fact allows some not-perfect-silence-time in his lessons, particularly during group works.
He doesn't like shouting. (Behaviour management)	"I am not a shouty person so I never get very angry and really shout at a class unless it is not absolutely necessary, that is because it's not my character."	Mr EW very rarely raises his voice; only once he lost control and shouted furiously (3/3); mostly he waits in silence, staring at the pupils for them to calm down (e.g. 26/1).	High



### A.3.2 Institutional congruence table

School culture	Beliefs and/or Behaviour	Congruence
<p>(Good) teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Drive pupils into learning via assertiveness and confidence.</li> <li>▪ Do not show emotions and are not sympathetic with pupils (e.g. have a “masculine” style).</li> <li>▪ Possess a sense of humour.</li> </ul>	<p>Mr EW provides planned, teacher-directed lessons divided into tasks of 20 minutes each. He uses different devices like video clips and music to enrich the subject and keep children interested (3/11). Children respond positively.</p> <p>His body language and his voice show a natural confidence and a good degree of assertiveness (e. g. 23/2, 2/3).</p> <p>He shows some humour from time to time (like 16/3 when he mimicked different local accents or 30/3 when he took part in a bumping cars game) but normally he is quite serious.</p> <p>His behaviour is rational and masculine (i.e. non-emotional); he doesn’t show affection or caring for the pupils, although he acknowledges their difficulties as a bottom set class: “unless there is a space at home for them to work and their parents know ...oh you must have some home work go and do it don’t sit watching telly.... you see in their homework and in the way they turn up at lessons.” (interview)</p>	<p>High</p> <p>Mr EW addresses the features of the school culture in regard the area of teaching. Particularly, he sports natural assertiveness and confidence, which the school culture considers pivotal traits to the teaching profession.</p>

<p>(Good) Teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are able to teach pupils into good behaviour and discipline.</li> <li>▪ Are able to constantly engage children into learning.</li> <li>▪ Are not supposed to complain about bottom set pupils (neither as learners nor under the behavioural view point) and should “pick up the challenge” instead.</li> </ul>	<p>Mr EW is not focused on teaching behaviour per se as a priority, in fact he wouldn't pay particular attention to dress code or punctuality issues (16/3) and only a few times he dealt with homework lateness and lack of equipment (20/10). Mr EW thinks lower sets “are not ambitious towards school...they don't get really enthusiastic” (interview) and therefore he “picks up the challenge” and always starts his lesson with something that captures pupils' interest; e.g. the ingenious ways Mexicans invent to illegally pass the US border (13/10), what black gold is (10/11), why Bhopal (an Indian boy) has to change his name to David (to work in a call centre) (16/3). He normally builds his lessons around some video-clips and music (e.g. 13/10, 2/3); he leads the pupils toward a deeper understanding of the issue in point by stimulating their interventions (e.g. 3/11, 10/11, 17/12).</p>	<p>Medium</p> <p>Although Mr EW does not address the issue of teaching behaviour and discipline as a main teacher's task, all the same he manages to engage pupils both in learning and behaving. He declares his preference for top sets: “I think I find it difficult to get into the mind or empathize with low attaining students” (interview) but does not use it as an excuse not to challenge this bottom set class.</p>
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<p>(Good) teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Take control of the class (e.g. are powerful).</li> <li>▪ Exact obedience from pupils (e.g. are authoritative).</li> <li>▪ Exert apprehension from children (e.g. are authoritarian).</li> <li>▪ Do not need external help.</li> <li>▪ Keep shouting to a minimum.</li> </ul>	<p>Mr EW doesn't show that his priority is controlling pupils. He is quite happy with a level of order where he can talk and the class can listen to him: "I don't insist on silence..." (see Personal congruence table) therefore he allows some chatting when he thinks it is appropriate (17/11) or during group work (26/1). However, he is clearly in charge of the class (e.g. 17/11, 23/2); in fact, he never called for help from the year office and did not use the back up system. He avoids shouting, just talks with a very firm voice (apart from once when he shouted furiously (22/3); "I am not a shouty person so I never get very angry and really shout a class unless it is not absolutely necessary... and when I do shout I think they realize that they have got too naughty" (interview). He looks powerful, confident (23/2) and in control (16/3), and pupils respond positively showing respect, although not apprehension.</p>	<p>Medium</p> <p>Mr EW doesn't completely share the school culture's concern for discipline and control. Nor he can be defined as authoritarian. However, he appears to be in control of the class, authoritative enough to gain pupils' respect.</p>
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### *A.3.3 Pupils' behaviour*

In terms of pupils' misbehaviour, in varying degrees, the range I observed was between medium and low. They entered noisily but then frequently calmed down spontaneously when the teacher started the register (3/11). They looked interested in the subject and actively took part in the lesson (19/1), usually in an orderly fashion by putting their hands up (3/11). A few times, especially during group work, their behaviour was more “bubbling” and they required some extra efforts from the teacher and the helper to remain in control (26/1). Among all the pupils, [Alan] had the most challenging behaviour. For quite a long time he would try to push the teacher to his limits in a sort of implicit power struggle (e.g. 10/11, 17/11, 9/3), which gradually faded. Eventually, [Alan] acted as if he respected Mr EW and participated positively in his lessons (e.g. 11/5, 18/5).

### *A.3.4 Summary table*

<b>Personal Congruence Level</b>	<b>Institutional Congruence Level</b>	<b>Pupils' Misbehaviour Level</b>
High	Medium	Medium/low

#### A.4 English: Mr SV

##### A.4.1 Personal congruence table

Characteristic of Mr SV	Beliefs	Behaviours	Congruence
Teaching is not his first option job but he does his best. (Teaching)	<p>“I graduated at University in 2005 and so I went into a year of training to be a teacher... Partly because I wasn’t too sure what to do with my English degree, so I wasn’t 100% into it... I didn’t find anything which actually does suit my skills so I’ve ended up at doing the thing that was kind of my next best option.”</p> <p>“Every day I come here I am not properly pumped up with: yeah this is it! ...this is my mission yes! It’s more: I would do my best as I have done every day when I was in school ...I don’t let anybody down here because I do my very, very best.”</p>	Mr SV puts efforts into teaching: he does structured lessons using different devices, reads to pupils (15/10) and in general tries to capture their interest. Sometimes he manages to do so, for example the lesson on Big Brother (5/11), Theseo and the Minotaur (25/2) while other times the topic of the day was clearly not relevant enough and pupils showed disengagement and off-task behaviour (e.g. 22/10, 26/11).	High/medium Mr SV continuous efforts to capture pupils’ attention are congruent with his declaration of doing his “best”. However, this does not compensate for his lack of “passion” which makes his choice of teaching intrinsically incongruent.

<p>He has low expectations for this year eight bottom set class. (Children)</p>	<p>“They are not going to be good anyway.” “Obviously they'll never get there.” (Informal chat 21/5)</p>	<p>After winter half term Mr SV went for a positive approach and started praising pupils more often and distributing merits cards. He also would write on the board the top five children instead of the naughty ones (see Chapter five). However, many times he attached a negative or conditional phrase to the praise which gave away his low expectations, for instance: “I’d be very keen to give praise if you do a good job, please make sure this happens” (28/1), or “I have to say you surprised me, I am really impressed with the level of work.... I am incredibly impressed today, do it again” (25/2).</p>	<p>Low Mr SV’s praising behaviour is not congruent with his lack of expectations, which is still surfacing from his words.</p>
<p>He thinks he doesn’t show his feelings. (Teaching/behaviour management)</p>	<p>I never lose my control, I lose it on my inside but I don’t lose it on the outside... I mean I don’t show any anger or frustration.”</p>	<p>He often looks nervous (26/11), stressed (12/11); sad (11/3) and unhappy (15/10); he rarely smiles, doesn’t greet the children when they enter his room, and generally tends to avoid eye contact, particularly with “difficult” pupils like Alan and Mark (e.g. 28/1, 4/3).</p>	<p>Low Despite what he thinks, Mr SV’s non-verbal behaviour actually did show his negative feelings.</p>

He thinks he is a consistent teacher. (Behaviour management)	<p>“I think I established very good habits and patterns very consistently and I feel I’ve come to a stage now where I’m a consistent teacher I’m not necessarily good... but I’m consistent in terms of how I apply these things. I might not have a brilliant control over class year 8 but I will always do that same thing in every lesson and so they know where they stand.”</p>	<p>He did not send out pupils every time they had three signs on the board and vice versa, provoking complaints on the part of the children (12/11). The times he threatened to give detentions (26/11) or call the head of the year (22/10) were actually more than the times he actually did so. He used detention very often but would say about it: “I hate detention I don’t want to give detentions but you are detention-ing yourself... I hate giving detention but it was your responsibility... it is not me giving detention but you choosing to have it” (26/11). When Mark and Alan were chatting, the teacher threatened to move Alan to the front row, but then he moved Mark instead (25/3).</p>	<p>Low His belief in being a consistent teacher does not match his classroom behaviour. Also, he would declare he hates giving detentions but actually gave them frequently, sending an incongruent message to the class.</p>
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He thinks teachers should be pupils' authority figures. (Behaviour management)	"I'd like to think that they are going into the world knowing who is their authority figure and I try and say to them you know: I would talk differently to Mr Henry (the Head) than I would to another teacher because he is my authority figure ....Specifically in a classroom situation where you are supposed to be their authority and to be their guide, to be the one teaching."	He said: "If my head reproaches me I take it very seriously! I do prefer to be praised from him instead of being told off ...it should be the same for you!" (12/11), or "Can I finish please? Excuse me boys? I did not say if you are not bothering with Mr SV any more just have a chat at the back (4/3)" and "I am actually allowed to talk?" (4/3) "Alan? The teacher is talking to you, am I not allowed? (11/3). Instead of treating him as their authority figure, pupils responded to his messages with a patent lack of respect, especially Alan (see below and Chapter five).	Low Mr SV assumption to be pupils' authority figure is actually contradicted by his declarations (which point out he is not).
He thinks he can calm pupils down without shouting. (Behaviour management)	"It doesn't come naturally to my nature to be loud and demanding so I don't do that... I tend to be the type of teacher that will calm them putting somebody's name on the board and send somebody out."	He usually doesn't shout but his voice and body language give away anger and frustration (11/3). Once he slammed the door to get their attention (22/10). He doesn't really calm the pupils down by putting their names on the board as they usually keep misbehaving (26/11), nor do they care about being sent out (12/11.); he also gives a lot of detentions (15/10) or threatens to do so (26/11) or threatens to cancel some enjoyable activity (18/3) but with little effect.	Low Although he doesn't shout, his alternative strategies to calm pupils down are not as effective as he thinks they are.



#### A.4.2 Institutional congruence table

School culture	Behaviour	Congruence
<p>(Good) teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Drive pupils into learning via assertiveness and confidence.</li> <li>▪ Do not show emotions and are not sympathetic with pupils (e.g. have a “masculine” style).</li> <li>▪ Possess a sense of humour.</li> </ul>	<p>Mr SV drives pupils into learning only randomly (see Personal congruence table), he tries to be assertive by using a firm voice or brisk adult manners (e.g. 22/10, 26/11). However pupils, especially characters like Alan and Mark, do not respond positively and challenge him by not making eye contact, parroting, muttering, not listening or pretending not to have heard and answering back (e. g. 12/11, 28/1, 11/3). Mr SV tries to stay in control of his emotions: “I am just constantly trying to stop things affecting me emotionally and I think that if I raise my voice I’d start and get emotionally involved” (interview) but actually his body language gives away his hunger and frustration (see Personal Congruence table). Rather than showing a sense of humour, he makes sarcastic comments like: “tomorrow remember to bring a book that you like! If you need one, go to the library... I don’t think this will damage your image if you stay there for 30 seconds?” (10/12), which pupils do not laugh at.</p>	<p>Low</p> <p>Mr SV does not address Portside School culture’s core features of assertiveness and confidence. Further, he is not really able to not disguise his emotions .</p>

<p>(Good) Teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are able to teach pupils into good behaviour and discipline.</li> <li>▪ Are able to constantly engage children into learning.</li> <li>▪ Are not supposed to complain openly about bottom set pupils (neither as learners nor under the behavioural view point) and should “pick up the challenge” instead.</li> </ul>	<p>Mr SV thinks his job consists of teaching pupils good behaviour in terms of respect for authority: “I am trying to teach life skills as well, I’d like to think that they are going into the world knowing who is the authority figure” (interview). However, he also admits he is not successful in doing so: “when they talk to you like you are their age, it can be very frustrating... how can they stand there and not talk to me, they just ignore me” (interview). Mr SV tries his best to engage pupils into learning but he achieves it only sometimes ( see following table). Mr SV declares his discontent with this class at both academic and behavioural levels: “They are not going to be good anyway.... Obviously they’ll never get there... “ (Informal chat 21/5). “When I was at school we were very, very well behaved in my school and so ...It’s a totally different world, I mean...I have never mixed in these circles before.” (interview)</p>	<p>Very low Mr SV’s attempt to teach pupils respect for authority and his admission of failure in doing so are very far away from the school model. He seems unable to pick up the challenge of teaching a bottom set class and remarks on his cultural (social) distance from them instead.</p>
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<p>(Good) teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Take control of the class (e.g. are powerful).</li> <li>▪ Exact obedience from pupils (e.g. are authoritative).</li> <li>▪ Exert apprehension from children (e.g. are authoritarian).</li> <li>▪ Do not need external help.</li> <li>▪ Keep shouting to a minimum.</li> </ul>	<p>Mr SV seems to be assuming that control should come before learning; however he only randomly succeeded in achieving it. There are quiet, smooth lessons (e.g. 5/11; 25/2) but they seem to happen by chance, in fact the teacher and the helper (talking together at the end of one such good lesson) could not guess why “things have been so good today” (25/2). Mr SV expects obedience but cannot really command it as pupils tend to challenge him (particularly Alan, see Chapter five) by not making eye contact, parroting, muttering, not listening or pretending not to have heard and answering back (e. g. 12/11, 28/1,11/3).</p> <p>Mr SV’s lack of authoritativeness is remarked by his own words: “Specifically in a classroom situation where you are supposed to be their authority and to be their guide, to be the one teaching and things, you think how can they stand there and not talk to me they just ignore me...this doesn’t make sense to me...you are nothing to them, nothing! “ (Interview).</p> <p>Among the six teachers I have observed, Mr SV is the one who more often resorted to the back up system and the senior staff for help; he threatened constantly to report pupils to the year office (and did so very often, particularly with Alan and Mark) and frequently would remind pupils that the head of the year (22/10) or even the head teacher (12/11) had been informed about their behaviour;</p> <p>The head of the year showed up frequently in Mr SV’s lessons (e.g. 15/10, 5/11).</p>	<p>Very low</p> <p>At the core of the school culture there is the idea that teachers have to be naturally authoritative (or even authoritarian) and exert apprehension from pupils. Mr SV did not address any of those issues.</p>
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#### A.4.3 Pupils' behaviour

In terms of pupils' misbehaviour, the range I observed was usually between high to very high. They entered the class very noisily (e. g. 22/10, 12/11), acted cool (e.g. 15/10, 10/12), ignored the teacher for as long as possible (e. g. 28/1, 11/3), pulled annoyed faces at him and replied “what” or “yeah” instead of “yes, sir”(25/3), tried to talk with no hands up (15/10), kept on chatting (22/10), protested against teacher's decisions (12/11), argued back (e. g 10/12, 4/3), no matter how much the teacher told them off. [Alan] (see Chapter 5) was particularly challenging to Mr SV and used to mutter vicious comments under his breath; once he turned his back on the teacher and walked away without permission (25/3). Sometimes other pupils (especially [Mark], [Johnny], [Lee]) would join [Alan] in his challenging behaviour (e.g. 25/3, 13/5) On the other hand, there were lessons (especially when [Alan] was not in class) where pupils would pay attention, participated quite beautifully and kept the noise level quite low (e.g. 25/2, 22/4). Also, pupils exhibited very quiet behaviour during a “cover” lesson (19/11).

#### A.4.4 Summary table

Personal Congruence Level	Institutional Congruence Level	Pupils Misbehaviour Level
Low	Low	High/very high

## A.5 History: Ms GV

### A.5.1 Personal congruence table

Characteristic of Ms GV	Beliefs	Behaviours	Congruence
<p>She likes teaching, especially History and wants pupils to make a connection between History and their daily lives.</p> <p>(Teaching)</p>	<p>“In this job at the end of an hour you can say I have really reached some pupil and you can see the difference in their progress in an hour...doesn’t happen every lesson but most lessons you can say: yes! They have really understood that... that’s so rewarding!”</p> <p>“I really love teaching History ....I would be a competent teacher teaching English or Geography but I don’t think I would be as enthusiastic and care so much, because it’s the subject!” “I find that they can make a connection with that and understand that people in the past were no different, they were born in different time period but if we would be moved backwards or forwards we would react in the same ways and I like them to understand to learn from History.”</p>	<p>Ms GV demonstrates constantly enthusiasm and engagement for the subject in her body language, voice, and facial expression (25/3). She tells pupils how much she likes reading big History books (3/12). To help pupils connect with the subject, she talks in concrete terms about things such as the smell of the blood on the battlefield (22/10), King Charles’ stammer (28/4) or the passion of Elisabeth the First for marzipan (25/2). Pupils’ response behaviour is of great interest and attention (see below).</p>	<p>High</p> <p>Ms GV’s expressed beliefs match her observed behaviour.</p>

She thinks having some fun helps pupils' learning. (Teaching)	"If there is something amusing about History then I will walk kind of.... you know... do that ...daft (she mimics someone walking funnily) and they like that ...a little bit amusing really."	She enhances her lessons by adding funny and horrific details (22/10, 28/4); also makes different voices and accents when reading passages (11/3). Sometimes she sets the lesson as a detective's inquiry (15/10). Often at the end of the lesson she involves children in games or contests and she herself takes enthusiastically part in them (15/1). Pupils' response behaviour is of great interest and attention (see below).	Very high She systematically adds fun traits in her lessons.
She has "presence". (Teaching)	"When I was going into teaching I had a couple of friends who were teachers and I said to them how I would be like and one of them said you have got presence.... and my head of department said that when he was observing me during my NQT you have got presence...I don't know if it is something you can manufacture because my first lesson I had ever stood up in front of a class in my PGCE the teacher wrote down I had presence then it wasn't practice I just had it really."	She patrols the class with a firm pace (4/3); she would sit on top of a desk and constantly sweep the class with her eyes, stopping to glance at every tiny sound that she came across (19/11). She has a regal attitude when she tells pupils off: "go on moaning and we'll discuss this in detail at lunch time, did I make myself clear?" (10/12) or "stand up!" (Snapping and pointing her finger at someone, 12/11). She produces a wooden stick and bangs it in on the floor as a signal the lesson is ending (15/10). Pupils behaved accordingly (see below).	Very high Her behaviour in class shows a high degree of what she called "presence".

<p>She assumes pupils (even bottom set and statemented ones) to be up to her expectations. (Children)</p>	<p>“I don’t design specific worksheets you know cards and things and filling the gaps... I find that with the bottom set classes they can pick up and explain things that a top set doesn’t, they are very good at recalling facts, the information; they are a lot better at that than top sets are... no I don’t think that bottom sets should be taught differently.”</p> <p>“When I take over a class or I meet somebody who maybe has emotional behaviour problems and...I just think...no they don’t, that was then...NOW they are going to be perfect and they are going to work really well for me and I am not going to assume that they are going to be a pain in the neck.”</p>	<p>Ms GV makes clear with her words and her body language and voice tone that she expects nothing less than pupils to understand and follow her lessons. If they hesitate or are not on task, she shows disappointment (20/5) and even some sort of brisk deprecation (15/10) as if she was offended by them not meeting her expectations. Pupils respond positively to this message by being engaged and participating actively (see below).</p> <p>She expects the same level of participation from all children even the statemented ones (e.g. Kay 20/5).</p>	<p>High</p> <p>Her behaviour demonstrates clearly she believes pupils “can do it”.</p>
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<p>She believes bottom set pupils are not supported at home, therefore she tends not to set homework for them. (Children)</p>	<p>“A lot of them I know come from the type of home where ...they don’t always have a pen; they often don’t know where their exercise books are at home so...that happens with the bottom sets I tend to take their books in and I also don’t set lots of homework... and the one who has got issues at home goes home and sitting down and doing their homework is the last thing on their mind...so I tend to find the most valuable learning and I cram a lot into the lessons... homework at home that’s more for top sets kids who have got that kind of support they’ve got a peaceful place where they can go and research.”</p>	<p>She usually doesn’t give homework and often keeps pupils’ books in her cupboard (11/3). She recaps the content of the previous lesson before starting a new one (22/10); she revises the entire topic (e.g. the American Civil War) before the test and adds: “now everyone has got enough stuff for the assessment” (19/12). Only once, before the final test, she declared she wanted them to study half an hour a day (20/5).</p>	<p>High</p>
<p>She does not like patronizing pupils. (Children)</p>	<p>“Bottom set kids know they are bottom set kids and to patronize them even more, sometimes gets a knock-down side, I think... if you praise them not excessively so they don’t value it, say: “that’s was REALLY GOOD they would remember...” “If you talk to them ... not like they were little kids... I have heard some teachers... and I found it very patronizing.”</p>	<p>Ms GV praised pupils briskly but warmly either collectively: “well done! Very mature (10/12); I tell you, you know A LOT!” (19/12) or singly (“well done, good, spot on!”) and she looks as if she really means it. Pupils look proud and happy when she lauds them (e. g. 3/12, 25/3).</p>	<p>High</p>



<p>She thinks she is the one in control and that pupils have to obey. (Behaviour management)</p>	<p>“I think that someone said once you’ve got 30 seconds when you meet a class and then they are sizing you up and I would remember every September I get new classes I open that door and I know that I have got 30 seconds and I have got to get across what I like... I call order for the register and if they don’t do it.... I send them back out again and we do this until I get absolute silence and they sat down and it’s absolute silence and this just reminds them that I AM THE ONE IN CONTROL and if I decide that they have to do something then they do it! ...I think when you try and be popular I think that’s dangerous because ...I see this with parents and teachers as well who just want to be their friends, be popular and go “ok no, no, no... I have asked you three times (mocking a silly little voice) no please I don’t want you to do it...I don’t have it and...RIGHT (very strong voice) that’s what you’re doing, no discussion, I am not gonna ask you again....do it! That’s it!” Then they go and do it ... because children naturally push against the boundaries to see whether they can get away with it... it’s an animal instinct they know who they can go away with.”</p>	<p>She never loses control of the class, as soon as the noise level rises a bit she immediately stops it firmly by saying “too loud!” (8/10), or “I am talking, you are not! (12/11). Rarely, she allows some chatting during group work (3/12). She wants pupils to enter the class quietly and if they do not, she sends them back in the corridor adding irately, “wait until I invite you to enter again. You are entering MY class not wandering around in the playground” (22/10). She often uses a tone of command and gives orders more than instructions (15/10) by spitting short brisk sentences like: “Register, turn around and I will not say it again!” (5/11). In addition to school rules (quiet entering the room, silent register (16/10) hands up before talking (13/5), school uniform (20/5), she consistently applies personal rules like: sitting properly when she talks (10/12) and absolute silence before the bell rings, even for a few seconds (22/10); this rule has always been applied. She would allow a little noisy packing but before letting pupils out she always wanted (and obtained) perfect silence (15/10).</p>	<p>Very high The issue of control and power is pivotal to Ms GV’s teaching practice.</p>
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A.5.2 Institutional congruence table

School culture	Teacher's beliefs and/or behaviour	Congruence
<p>(Good) teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Drive pupils into learning via assertiveness and confidence.</li> <li>▪ Do not show emotions and are not sympathetic with pupils (e.g. have a “masculine” style).</li> <li>▪ Possess a sense of humour.</li> </ul>	<p>Ms GV conducts very planned and organized lessons broken into small bits (22/4) and uses different devices (videos, music, and interactive whiteboard).</p> <p>She treats pupils with an assertive and confident style (“presence”) sometimes giving orders more than instructions (e.g. 15/10, 20/5). She enhances her lessons by adding funny and horrific details (22/10, 28/4); she also makes different voices and accents when reading passages (11/3).</p> <p>Ms GV is neither caring nor indulgent with her pupils; she treats all of them with the same briskness, even the statemented ones (20/5). She acknowledges that bottom set pupils “come from the type of home where ...they don’t always have a pen they often don’t know where their exercise books are at home” (interview) but this does not count as a justification for poor behaviour</p>	<p>Very high</p> <p>Ms GV matches the school culture, especially in her confident assertive style of teaching (which she defines as “presence”) as well as in her masculine, no-frills approach to pupils.</p>

<p>(Good) Teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are able to teach pupils into good behaviour and discipline.</li> <li>▪ Are able to constantly engage children into learning.</li> <li>▪ Are not supposed to complain openly about bottom set pupils (neither as learners nor under the behavioural view point) and should “pick up the challenge” instead.</li> </ul>	<p>Ms GV is very clear about her behavioural expectations: “Somebody gave me this advice ... the first time you get a class ... forget that hour of teaching and just spend it going over what you do expect... basically saying... these are my expectations this is what I expect you to do! ... You have to be emphatic about it” (interview). She sets boundaries and rules and constantly respects them (see Personal Congruence table). She breaks the lesson into small sections (22/4) by using different devices (videos, music, and interactive whiteboard) and talks in concrete terms about daily or horrific things. Pupils’ participation and engagement is high; however, she also stimulates their interventions. For example, if someone is not raising their hand up, she goes and order them to respond (Kay, Sophie, e.g. 25/2, 20/5). She has a good opinion of bottom set pupils:” I find that with the bottom set classes they can pick up and explain things that a top set doesn’t, they are very good at recalling facts, the information; they are a lot better at that than top sets are” (interview).</p>	<p>Very high Ms GV addresses all the features of the school culture: she gave priority to control over learning, is very engaging and not only “picks up the challenge” but overcomes it by assuming bottom set pupils to be better than top sets.</p>
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<p>(Good) teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Take control of the class (e.g. are powerful).</li> <li>▪ Exact obedience from pupils (e.g. are authoritative).</li> <li>▪ Exert apprehension from children (e.g. are authoritarian).</li> <li>▪ Do not need external help.</li> <li>▪ Keep shouting to a minimum.</li> </ul>	<p>Control and obedience are very important for Ms GV and she exerts it constantly in her lessons. She takes control of the class as soon as pupils enter the room (22/10), keeps it the entire lesson and reinforces it at the end by applying systematically the rule of perfect silence before exiting (15/10). She treats every kind of misbehaviour as a sort of defiance toward her personal power. If someone talks, she would say (shouting), “I am talking, you are not!” (12/11), if she is talking and someone swings in their chair, she would command: “sit up! That’s not your lounge” (8/10); if someone is late and does not apologize properly to her, she sends them out again (4/3). Ms GV exerts apprehension from pupils, who never talk back, obey promptly, say “sorry miss” and look contrite (10/12). She never called the year office or the senior staff for help. When threatening to keep someone behind for detention, she would say “make it three times and you will stay with ME at lunchtime” (not mentioning the head of the year).</p>	<p>Very high Ms GV embodies the school model of authoritative/authoritarian, powerful teacher who exerts apprehension from pupils.</p>
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#### *A.5.3 Pupils' behaviour*

I observed a very low amount of pupils' misbehaviour. They seemed to know what was expected from them and acted accordingly. They usually entered the class quietly, put their hands up before talking, said, "sorry miss" when the teacher told them off, wouldn't shout across the class and went silent before the bell rang. They also looked involved in the subject and participated actively in the lessons; even pupils with very low attention span like [Alfie] (12/11). All the characters, particularly [Alan], adopted a deferential attitude with Ms GV (11/3) and looked contrite when reproached (10/12).

#### *A.5.4 Summary table*

<b>Personal Congruence Level</b>	<b>Institutional Congruence Level</b>	<b>Pupils' Misbehaviour Level</b>
High / very high	Very high	Very low

## A.6 Maths: Ms TN

### A.6.1 Personal congruence table

Characteristics of Ms TN	Beliefs	Behaviour	Congruence
Ms TN is enthusiastic about teaching. (Teaching)	“I love it, absolutely love it!!” She comes from a family of teachers and she is very happy to continue such a tradition (informal chat).	She looks very passionate (24/3); she sets mathematical games or quizzes, often enthusiastically taking part in them herself (e. g. 3/12, 10/12, 25/2, 11/3).	High She declares she is passionate and acts as if she is.
She believes in praising pupils. (Teaching/ children)	“When they have done really well I would always tell them: you did brilliantly, you have done fantastically.”	She encourages pupils and praises them frequently (see following box). Goes around the classroom giving stickers and merit slips quite often, definitely more than other teachers I observed (e.g. 5/10, 22/10, 31/3). To help pupils to understand, she goes around the class helping and pushing them (28/4). Pupils looked happy and engaged by her praises (e.g. 26/11).	High Her beliefs and behaviour about praising the children match.

<p>She thinks this bottom set class is brilliant (Children)</p>	<p>“I am so proud of what they have achieved ...this year as a class they have done brilliantly.” “They are such a nice group ...I would be very happy to have the same class again.”</p>	<p>She declares: “I am very pleased with your test results” (26/11); “I have told you, you are better than my other class” (19 /11); “now, would you believe that the form that I am going to do today are level six?! (25/2); “and this actually guys this is really high level stuff but I think you guys can do it” (11/3); “FANTASTIC! I am really, really pleased” (12/5); this is definitely a level five exercise! (19/5). Pupils looked pleased with her praise (e.g. 26/11).</p>	<p>High The happiness she declared about this class was evident in her behaviour.</p>
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<p>She has a behavioural routine with clear rules put in place and reminds pupils of her expectations. (Behaviour management)</p>	<p>“I have always made it very clear when things ... haven’t gone quite as well I would say: don’t forget! And just remind the expectations, you shouldn’t be doing this you need to be listening ...I think this just keep reminding them of what I expect....”</p>	<p>She allows pupils some settling down time (22/10) – yet it got shorter during the year (24/3), then she expects pupils a silent register (18/3) and usually signals it by one (or more) count downs, sometimes very loudly (e.g. 31/3, 12/5); she expects pupils to pay attention, to follow the dress code (19/11), to put their hands up before talking (5/11) to follow her instructions (19/11) and to concentrate on their work; she doesn’t want to be interrupted (24/3) and expects absolute silence before letting pupils out (e.g. 5/11, 3/12). Pupils usually meet her expectations</p>	<p>High Ms TN is consistent in having expectations about pupils’ behaviour and making them clear to the class</p>
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<p>She thinks she is not as harsh as other teachers are. (Behaviour management)</p>	<p>“They have seen that I set lots less detentions, I think, less than other teachers and they really have to push a lot to get a detention, they know that I would kind of listen to them and ...probably not to be quite so harsh on them helps.”</p>	<p>When she adopts her sergeant major style (see Chapter five) Ms TN shouts vehemently “ENOUGH!” (e.g. 31/3, 12/5), “IN SILENCE I said it once and once only!” (5/11), “I am waiting for silence!” (26/11); She stops talking until pupils stop chatting (28/4) threatens to interrupt the practical work (5/11) threatens to call Mr K (e.g.31/3; 21/4), threatens detentions (31/3), sends pupils out (e.g. 24/3, 21/4) reproaches the class collectively (19/11) tells pupils off (e.g. 4/3, 21/4, 28/4). However, she gave only one detention, to Johnny (19/5).</p>	<p>Low Her perception of being “not harsh” does not fit with the adoption of the “sergeant major style”.</p>
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A.6.2 Institutional congruence table

School culture	Beliefs and/or behaviour	Congruence
<p>(Good) teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Drive pupils into learning via assertiveness and confidence.</li> <li>▪ Do not show emotions and are not sympathetic with pupils (e.g. have a “masculine” style).</li> <li>▪ Possess a sense of humour.</li> </ul>	<p>Ms TN has a very planned lesson and confidently and successfully leads pupils throughout it. She looks quite assertive in her sergeant major style, which was more and more effective especially in the second part of the year (e.g. 31/3, 28/4).</p> <p>She allows pupils to tell some jokes from time to time (28/4) and takes part in games and quizzes (e.g. 26/11 3/12) She shows some feminine characteristics like being warm and caring (e.g. with Alfie 11/3), smiling encouragingly (5/11) and talking solicitously to pupils (19/11). She praises them, looks very happy and (almost maternally) proud of them (e.g. 19/11, 26/11, 25/2, 28/4). In the interview she said. “I am so proud of what they have achieved ...this year as a class they have done brilliantly...and just the fact that the effort they put in.”</p>	<p>Medium</p> <p>Ms TN successfully addresses many issues of Portside School culture. However, she also exhibited a caring attitude which is not in line with the masculine style of the school.</p>

<p>(Good) Teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are able to teach pupils good behaviour and discipline.</li> <li>▪ Are able to constantly engage children into learning.</li> <li>▪ Are not supposed to complain openly about bottom set pupils (neither as learners nor under the behavioural view point).</li> </ul>	<p>Ms TN teaches behaviour, especially by adopting her sergeant major style. She systematically applies the school rules and reminds pupils of them (e.g. 19/11) “they can have a joke, can have a bit of a laugh and then they know when they have gone too far.” (interview). Ms TN thinks engaging pupils is her job as a teacher: “I mean some of them are more difficult to get into work” (interview) and therefore she tries and captures their interest by using the interactive board (e.g. 26/11, 10/12), games and quizzes (e.g. 10/12, 31/3, 25/2). She asks pupils to contribute actively to the lesson and they do so (e.g. 26/11, 11/3), she adopts a range of practical activities like drawing (19/11), taking measurements (10/12), building geometrical shapes with Lego (28/4), and blind walking around the room (11/3). Pupils looked usually very involved (19/11). Her opinions and expectations about the class are very high: “the fact that I am seeing them their last period on a Friday and they all have been worked absolutely silent for twenty minutes half an hour is brilliant... I mean I expect a lot from them...and they want to learn and that’s a thing I have to say, that they actually want to learn, which is brilliant” (interview).</p>	<p>High</p> <p>Ms TN is in line with the school culture’s idea of constantly engaging pupils into learning and teaching them behaviour as well as the subject.</p> <p>She also happily addresses the challenge of teaching a bottom set class.</p>
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<p>(Good) teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Take control of the class (e.g. are powerful).</li> <li>▪ Exact obedience from pupils (e.g. are authoritative).</li> <li>▪ Exert apprehension from children (e.g. are authoritarian)</li> <li>▪ Do not need external help.</li> <li>▪ Keep shouting at a minimum.</li> </ul>	<p>Ms TN puts a great amount of effort in keeping pupils' behaviour under control as a prerequisite to teaching. She looks more and more authoritative (although shouty) when displaying her sergeant major style during the year (e.g. 5/11, 25/2, 31/3) and pupils, particularly after Christmas, responded positively by showing obedience and respect, although not actual apprehension. She doesn't use the Back up system but she sometimes threatens to call for the head of the year (e.g. 26/11, 31/3)</p>	<p>Medium</p> <p>Ms TN displays the pivotal traits of the school culture consisting of controlling the class and being authoritative. However, although her "sergeant major style" improved along the year she does not exert apprehension from pupils.</p>
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#### *A.6.3 Pupils' behaviour*

In terms of pupils' misbehaviour, the range I observed decreased from medium to low along the year. During the first terms, pupils would take their seats quite noisily and it took some time (and a great display of “sergeant major style”) for the teacher to calm them down (5/11). Depending on the lesson they would exhibit out of control and on task behaviour alternately (e.g. 22/10, 19/12). By the end of February, however, such behaviour improved noticeably and they did not need more than one count down to stop talking and pay attention (25/2). The amount of time they would spend on task also improved, so did their participation and enthusiasm (e.g. 11/3, 28/4). At the same time they showed increasing compliance and respect toward the teacher.

#### *A.6.4 Summary table*

<b>Personal Congruence Level</b>	<b>Institutional Congruence Level</b>	<b>Pupils Misbehaviour Level</b>
High	Medium	(from medium to) Low

## **Appendix 2**

### **Question prompts for semi-structured interviews**

#### **Outline of question prompts for the interview to the 6 subject teachers**

1. Clarification of anonymity and confidentiality issues.
2. How did you chose this job in the first place and how do you feel about it now.
3. Depending on the individual responses given, prompts were made towards:
  - Feeling about pupils' behaviour in general and this year 8 bottom set class in particular
  - Their behaviour management strategies
  - Their teaching strategies
  - School rules in general and Portside school discipline system in particular
  - Pupils they would find more difficult
  - Top set/bottom set classes
  - Homework

At the end of each interview the teachers were asked whether they wanted to read the verbatim transcription of the interview in order to modify, add or delete anything.

#### **Outline of question prompts for the interview to the senior staff**

1. Clarification of anonymity and confidentiality issues.
2. Information about their career path and their position in the school.
3. Do you think problem behaviour in school has increased since when you first started teaching and (if so) why.
4. Depending on the individual responses given, prompts were made towards:
  - Behaviour management strategies
  - Teaching strategies
  - The most difficult behaviour happening within the school
  - Misbehaviour happening more frequently and why
  - Portside school approach to school discipline
  - Portside school rules, rewards and punishment
  - Bottom and top set classes/pupils

- The role of family and parents
- Characteristics of the “ideal” teacher

At the end of each interview teachers were asked whether they wanted to read the verbatim transcription of the interview in order to modify, add or delete anything.

**Outline of question prompts for the interview to the bottom set year 8 pupils and for the top set year 8 pupils’ focus group**

- Clarification of anonymity and confidentiality issues
- If you don’t feel like you are free to interrupt this interview at any point
- (After a prompt video on misbehaviour is shown)
- Do you think misbehaviour is getting worse?
- Depending on the individual responses given, prompts were made towards:
- Kind of misbehaviour happening more often in their class
- Why (certain) pupils tend to misbehave
- What teachers usually do when tackling misbehaviour
- What teachers do not do (and they should)
- What makes a good teacher
- What makes a bad teacher
- School rules (fairness /unfairness of)
- Homework
- Detention and punishment

## Appendix 3

### List of identified themes and their extensive description (example of second stage of analysis)

#### Voice of the pupils 2 (top set children focus groups)

Note, 6 children (5 boys and one girl) interviewed in two focus groups. Prior to each focus group the video clip on behaviour in school is showed to prompt the discussion. Before starting the discussion, pupils are reminded about their right to withdraw at any stage, if they feel like.

#### Themes from the focus groups:

1. Types of misbehaviour
2. Teachers behaviour techniques
3. The good teacher
4. Power issue
5. School rules

#### Description of the themes

1. Talking about which types of misbehaviour pupils happened to see around the school they actually only mentioned *mocking around* and *talking*, generically referring to misbehaviour as *disrupting the lesson*. One boy said *in our science class we are top group but we are one of the worst for talking*. Another one added *some pupils in my French class [...] if they need instructions she (the teacher) doesn't answer they don't listen and so they just disrupt the lesson*. Despite the credit of top set classes being very calm, pupils in focus groups actually seemed to be very concerned about the problem of misbehaviour as something they had to face frequently. Either because it is hindering them from working properly (*If you have good ones in one class and a couple of bad ones in there as well the bad ones always disrupt the good ones and you don't get enough work done*) and also because it is something very consuming of teachers' time (*some of the teachers [...] spend all their time on the bad ones and sort them out when is actually the good ones who*



are actually doing as they are told). Some also mentioned forgetting homework as a petty misbehaviour and shouting at teachers and back chatting them as something very very bad.

2. How teachers would keep control over their top set classes, which are normally 30 pupils big? The six children enlisted the following techniques: *Teachers have to shout a lot to get the class to calm down...like whack a stick on the table [...] they do a big noise so the class get shocked [...] My French teacher just sends pupils out [...] sometimes it solve the problem but there are always noises in my French class. [...]. My Spanish teacher ...she usually takes names on the board [...] that doesn't really work [...]. My language teacher [...] she just gets fed up and doesn't answer any question? [...] My French teacher she always stops the work 15 minutes to go [...] and then the bell goes ten minutes after even if you haven't done anything wrong. Keeping all the class behind is mentioned often as a technique many teachers use although children say it is not really fair on other pupils who are quiet [...] all the class has to stay behind five minutes when it's like 90% of them hasn't done anything wrong. Apparently there are teachers who think that the more detention they give the more in control they are but pupils seem to be a bit sceptical about it : Some teachers control the class by giving out detentions [...] a lot... so pupils just think whatever... I have got detention anyway! [...] I had detention for forgetting my PE case [...] and I had one because I forgot my French homework [...] just forgetting homework, you could actually forget it rather than hiding it honestly but...and then you get detention [...] I had half an hour detention for not reading and looking out of the window daydreaming and it was only for 10 seconds! Detention is something pupils try to escape: I have noticed some pupils say they cannot stay as they have to catch the bus or their mum is picking them and stuff like that [...] but then they run out and they don't actually go to the bus.*
3. After having mentioned what teachers do in order to maintain discipline, pupils considered what teachers should do to be good teachers. *They need to talk to the pupils more [...], I think they might interact with pupils ..like... showing stuff on the board and watching films and also be quite strict sometimes with pupils who are messing about [...] set more outside lessons if it's like sunny [...] not set work out of the book every lesson [...] also some of the teachers don't give enough praise to laud the good pupils[...] being in a happy mood and do some jokes [...] be humorous [...] being worm and nice, then the class likes them and they might behave , but if they are like push over that might make them worse[...] respecting*

*the pupils ( particularly in relation with the homework issue) [...] None of the pupils said explicitly that teachers need to be fair but many told episodes where the unfairness of teachers was an issue. Like this one : ... in science earlier on, someone shouted out something and a person who didn't say anything had to go and stand in a corner because the teacher thought he was talking [...] and you can't really say anything because then you get in more trouble.*

4. Fairness of teachers is strictly related to their power. Several episodes about the way teachers wielded power have been narrated in both the focus groups. Like the one mentioned above, where the teacher was wrong in accusing someone but children couldn't say anything about it. Another one: *I almost had a row in Math because I didn't write out the questions but because I didn't need to because I can do it in my head [...] she had a go at me [...] now she doesn't say anything [...] but then if I simplify the questions she still shouts at me because I haven't written the question down, but it is the same question!. On this point a boy commented: It is because teacher don't like hearing the other side of the story, what they think is right, is right [...] it could be someone else but because they sought you or they thought they sought you [...] never wanna listen to you.*
5. Finally the groups talked about school rules. They confirmed that they didn't know all of them: *at the beginning of year 7 you write them down but now I can't remember any of the rules that my teacher trained me [...] just the basic ones* and most pupils admit they tend to learn the others by making mistakes and being punished: *they shout at you and you just don't you it again, you do something else and they shout at you again so you got shout at all the lesson for doing different things.* On the issue whether they would like to have a say to the rules they mentioned the existence of the school council but also added it was something that didn't really represent their voice: *they deal with things like the school buildings something like that and they don't even have to listen to us, basically [...] like at the beginnings of this year we just came and had the old school uniform dress and they just told us we had to buy a new one...and they are quite expensive...[...]*

## Summary

Top set pupils seem to bring along quite an authoritative idea of teacher ( in line with the school culture) as the one who has power and doesn't like to be contradicted even if they were patently wrong. In fact many pupils mentioned episodes of unfairness. Shouting is apparently quite a common behaviour from the teachers although children

would prefer them to be humorous and happy, instead. The top lessons I observed were actually very calm but still pupils in the focus groups referred to misbehaviour- particularly the continuous chatting- as something happening on a regular basis and therefore as an obstacle to their learning.

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