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**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES

SOUTHAMPTON EDUCATION SCHOOL

**Social Experiences and Belonging:  
An Ethnography of Children in Two Primary Schools Supporting Children with  
Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties**

by

**Samantha Child**

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2014



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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES  
SOUTHAMPTON EDUCATION SCHOOL

Doctor of Philosophy

SOCIAL EXPERIENCES AND BELONGING:  
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF CHILDREN IN TWO PRIMARY SCHOOLS SUPPORTING  
CHILDREN WITH SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES

by Samantha Child

International policies emphasise the importance of inclusive education in fostering positive peer relations and belonging. These social dimensions are of great importance to young people and their families, and necessary for successful learning and well-being. However, research suggests that children with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream provision experience considerable physical and verbal abuse from peers.

This research examined the social relations and belonging of five main participants (all boys aged 8–10), some of whom had SEN. The study took place in two primary schools, one of which had a resource base for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and autism, and the other a nurture group. The research investigated participants' sense of belonging, *how* participants were treated by peers (and their attitudes towards this) and *why* this was the case, focusing on school practices. The affordances of visual methods in supporting the active involvement of children in research were also explored. Together with fieldnotes and reflexive diary-keeping, a visual approach (in particular, social concept mapping, film making and stimulated recall) was adopted.

The research highlighted the turbulent and complex nature of social relations and identified various needs central to the belonging of participants. This study also showed the challenges of using visual methods with children in educational settings.



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## DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Samantha Child, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

### **Social Experiences and Belonging: An Ethnography of Children in Two Primary Schools Supporting Children with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties**

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. 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;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. 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;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. 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;
7. Parts of this work have been published as:
  - Child, S. & Nind, M. (2012) Sociometric methods and difference: A force for good—or yet more harm? *Disability & Society*, i2-12.

Signed: .....

Date: .....



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With the oversight of my main supervisor, editorial advice has been sought. No changes of intellectual content were made as a result of this advice.



## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ADHD	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
ASD	Autistic spectrum disorder
BESD	Behavioural emotional and social difficulties
CRB	Criminal Records Bureau
DFEE	Department for Education and Employment
DFES	Department for Education and Skills
EBD	Emotional behavioural difficulties
ESRC	Economic Social Research Council
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Act
IEP	Individual education plan
LSA	Learning support assistant
NCRM	National Centre for Research Methods
NG	Nurture group
PGR	Postgraduate researcher
SC	Samantha Child
SEBD	Social emotional and behavioural difficulties
SEN	Special educational needs
TA	Teaching assistant
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations



UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA	United States of America
ISEC	Inclusive and Supportive Education Congress
SA	Support assistant

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This research focuses on the social experiences and belonging of children (boys) in primary education, especially those with special educational needs (SEN). I sought to explore this theme in the context of teaching practices and wider school policies, and essentially from the child's perspective. There are a limited number of studies that focus on children's belonging in schools in the United Kingdom (Frederickson *et al.* 2007) and even fewer that focus on the belonging of children with SEN (Prince and Hadwin 2013). The majority prioritise quantitative, sociometric techniques (e.g. Cambra and Silvestre 2003; Koster *et al.* 2007; Pijl *et al.* 2008). This approach to research fails to show the fluid and messy nature of social relations, in contrast to qualitative studies (Nichols 2008; Nind *et al.* 2011; Ytterhus 2012), nor do they identify aspects of educational practice that support or hinder these social experiences, as studies such as by Mittler (2000), Lloyd (2005) and Cooper and Whitebread (2007) show. Therefore I intended that my research would provide insight into the complexities of belonging and social relations and the dimensions of education that are central to this. Social relations are a key aspect of inclusive education (Ainscow 1997; DfES 2001; 2004)—the field I anticipated my research would contribute to. I also wanted to explore the affordances of visual methods in aiding the involvement of children in research. Underpinning this study is an emphasis on reflexivity, therefore in this chapter I first explain how my own childhood and observations of education influenced this research, before introducing the focus of this study and the questions I sought to answer.

I was particularly interested in inclusive education and the educational and social experiences of young people due to my own experiences of schooling. Starting university at the age of 18 was a tremendously positive, liberating experience as I discovered a love of learning, achieved academic success and developed close friendships. This was very different from my experiences of school in which I struggled with learning and found lessons extremely tedious. As I grew older and school became more focused on exams, I increasingly tired of school and felt I did not fit in due to my academic struggles. I became quite withdrawn, distancing myself from most peers and instead sought solace in my art work, one of the few subjects I felt I was any good at. It was these first-hand experiences that underpinned my decision to research inclusive education and the experiences of young people with similar difficulties (academically or/and socially).

My decision to focus on the social dimensions of inclusive education stemmed from my frustrations with the dominant discourse and with the tendency for the UK government to prioritise quantifiable educational gains, such as exam results, at the expense of other aspects of children's development (Barton and Slee 1998; Armstrong *et al.* 2011). Whilst working and volunteering in various primary schools and special schools I came to understand the problematic nature of social interaction for many children, yet the dominance of an achievement discourse means this is rarely prioritised by practitioners and policy makers (DfES 2001; 2004). Therefore, underpinning this research was a personal concern with the need for practitioners and policy makers to attend to the social and emotional needs of children alongside academic needs.

A few years ago I undertook a small-scale case study at a mainstream primary school that had a resource base for children with specific speech and language difficulties (Child 2008). I focused on the social interactions of four children (aged 6-7 years) who received support from the resource base. The school claimed that they were inclusive as these children spent each afternoon working alongside their peers in the mainstream classroom. Over the course of a term I observed these four children and their peer interactions. Other children often refused to work with these children in class and would call them names and break or take their possessions. These observations underlined that inclusion is about more than a child with SEN being physically educated alongside their peers, but a culture where difference is viewed positively and where all children experience positive social relations and friendship.

I next introduce one of the central concepts to this research, the belonging and social relations of children. The sociological discipline provides particularly rich insights into the concept of belonging: not just an innate feeling but a highly political, hierarchized concept (Crowley 1999; Yuval-Davis 2006). Many of these understandings of belonging refer to marginalised groups and 'not belonging' reflecting its relational nature (e.g. Butler 1990; Christensen 2009). This is closely bound with issues of integration, inclusion and acceptance. For example, Jackson (1990, p.340) explains that to belong is to 'be a part of something, be accepted by others: this is active, tangible and, importantly, acknowledged by others. It is cultural and embodied about both what we do and how we do it.'

Belonging is understood to be fluid, complex and multidimensional (Griffiths 1995). The concept is linked with the need to feel accepted (Booker 2007) and to experience positive interpersonal relations (Beattie 2007). Sociologists such as Jackson (1983); Butler (1993) and

Fenster (2005) argue that a sense of belonging builds up and grows based on the everyday experiences and habits of the person. Tilley (1994); Leach (2002) and Bame Nsamenang (2008) stress the fundamental role of place in determining a person's sense of belonging. They suggest that when a person identifies themselves with a place, they mirror themselves with the surroundings. As with belonging, Morris-Roberts (2004); Holt (2010) and Ytterhus (2012) argue that children's social relations and friendships are far from static and are instead constantly evolving. Some researchers suggest that social interaction is based on hierarchical positioning (e.g. Holt 2004a; McMaugh 2011) and Gagen (2000) argues that this is linked with how societal norms and values are embedded in everyday practices within specific social networks, showing the interconnections between school and family or wider societal norms.

Belonging and social relations are central to inclusive education. For example, the DfES (2001, p.3) describe inclusion as:

...engendering a sense of community and belonging and encouraging mainstream and special schools and others to come together to support each other and pupils with special educational needs.

Moving beyond integration, inclusion reflects an understanding of the need for schools to adapt practice to meet diverse needs, enabling all children to engage in education, both academically and socially (Ainscow 1997; Avramidis and Norwich 2002; Winter & O'Raw 2010). Children and families value inclusive education for the potential social opportunities it may provide (Reay and Arnot 2002; Davies and Lee 2006) and inclusion is considered key in challenging discriminatory attitudes towards people with SEN in society (Thomas 1997; Beckett 2009; Shevlin 2010). However, research suggests that children with SEN, assumed to be experiencing inclusive education, experience considerable isolation and abuse (Holt 2004a; Connors and Stalker 2007; Ward 2007; McMaugh 2011).

The level of physical and verbal abuse that children with SEN experience raises questions about the aspects of educational practice that hinder social relations. Researchers argue that a positive whole school ethos is the key to supporting the inclusion of children with SEN (Carrington 1999; Corbett 1999; Groom and Rose 2005). Visser (2000, p.8) refers to the term 'caring schools' to describe an ethos in which staff embrace and celebrate diversity, are willing to listen to young people and treat them with respect, tolerance and consideration. The importance of practitioners listening to the views of children is further emphasised by

Ainscow *et al.* (1999). Davis (2007) argues that schools will be prevented from becoming fully inclusive until practitioners take account of children's views of specific educational processes, highlighting the importance of a school culture in which young people feel able to challenge the structural, cultural and individual conditions which create disability.

Whilst belonging is identified as a key dimension of inclusion, Woodhead and Brooker (2008) argue that belonging is often taken for granted because it seems self-evident, natural and inevitable. Research by Baker and Donnelly (2001), which sought to explore the social experiences of four children with fragile X syndrome in Australia, revealed that practitioners considered social needs as 'something that can take care of itself' (p.80) giving reasons such as 'the priority is to get the behaviour of these kids under control'. Furthermore, the concept of belonging has largely been ignored by educational researchers in the UK (Frederickson *et al.* 2007). This failure to prioritise the social dimensions of education was further highlighted by Osterman (2000) and Johnson (2009). Yet education is, after all, a social process rather than an individualistic one (Dewey 1958), therefore central to inclusion is a need to value these social relations.

Underpinning much of education is an emphasis on the role of practitioners and wider society in correcting deviance, normalising children's behaviour (Ballard 2003; Lindsay 2003), which conflicts with the values of inclusion and embracing diversity (Bayliss 1997; Davis 2007; Crow 2010). As children receive powerful messages about belonging in the larger environment, Clinton (2008) and Wagner (2008) argue the need for education to respect all individuals and embrace diversity. By identifying children's strengths and nurturing them and by honouring children's differences as something to value, education is strengthening children's sense of belonging. A sense of belonging is about a feeling of 'us' within a classroom. This community is not built on a supposed sameness but on acceptance and respect for differences.

Central to inclusion are the views and attitudes held by practitioners regarding SEN as their behaviour and perceptions are crucial if they are to challenge discriminatory attitudes (Mittler 2000; Barton 2010; O'Brien 2000). The child-practitioner rapport or attachment determines a child's belonging with their wider school (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Unfortunately some research suggests that children with SEN feel they are treated unfairly by practitioners, maintaining negative perceptions of 'difference' (Nichols 2008; McMaugh 2011) and hindering inclusion and therefore belonging and social relations.

Resource bases within mainstream schools have often been used as a way of providing specialist help for children with SEN, whilst providing potential opportunities for inclusion during formal or/and informal parts of the school day. Although some researchers (e.g. Lewis *et al.* 2006) highlight the benefits of this approach, such as opportunities to be with children a similar age or gain the right qualifications, most studies highlight the difficulties this provision poses, such as reinforcing ‘them’ and ‘us’ attitudes (Belanger 2000; Wilde and Avramidis 2011). Interventions such as nurture groups are intended to support social relations and belonging and aiding inclusion. The intervention has been found to improve the social skills and behaviour of young people (Cooper and Whitebread 2007; Ofsted 2011b) and to boost self-esteem and motivation for learning (Garner and Thomas 2011). I therefore welcomed local opportunities to study social relations and belonging in the context of primary schools with these kinds of provision.

Not only was I interested in exploring the social relations and belonging of children, I wished to explore approaches to working with children in research, especially children experiencing social difficulties. This focus largely stemmed from my concerns regarding the tendency for researchers to prioritise quantitative, sociometric techniques (see Child and Nind 2012). It built from my dissatisfaction with utilising semi-flexible interviews and questionnaires with children with speech and language difficulties in an earlier small-scale study (Child 2008). On reflection these methods were detrimental to participant voice and authentic participant-researcher relations, presenting more barriers to participation than they actually overcame. More recently, during an M.Phil in research methodology, I became increasingly impressed with the potential of visual methods in supporting a more inclusive, multimodal approach to research, facilitating the participation of traditionally excluded individuals. I was struck by the potential of this technology in supporting a more inclusive and engaging approach for participants, moving beyond the more familiar emphasis on written and spoken language. Therefore, with regards to my PhD, I set out to explore different visual methods (film making, stimulated recall and concept mapping) as a potential means of supporting the voices of children in research.

I was interested in how video could support a more accessible approach to research with children, including those with SEN. Barton (1996) and Thomas (1997) highlight the detrimental influence of positivist discourses in reinforcing the need for the individual to assimilate in order to be included in society. With regards to this research I was conscious that I needed an approach that would meet the needs and capabilities of each child, rather

than expecting the child to adapt to the research. I therefore thought that the use of visual methods would enable me to focus on the strengths and talents of each child (as advocated by Raggl and Schratz 2004). Various studies demonstrate the considerable benefits of visual methods in supporting the participation of children, including those with SEN. For example, Allen (2005) found that the use of photography with Pacifica and refugee students encouraged their co-operation and overcame the reliance on literacy skills. Aldridge (2007), who used photo-voice with people with learning difficulties, argues that the use of photography and its emphasis on the visual rather than just verbal highlighted the strengths of people with learning difficulties, moving away from the modernist deficit-based approach of the dominant discourse. Hence, I anticipated that my use of visual methods would support a more individualised approach, recognising and embracing diversity.

Alongside the potential benefits of a visual approach, I had some trepidation in following Haw's (2008) discussion of the additional technical demands and their potential to create barriers to participation. Nonetheless, I was attracted to video and the opportunity it could provide for a more holistic stance in which all forms of communication are given equal prominence (following Flewitt 2005). I had been inspired by my M.Phil research regarding the importance of action, gesture, image and speech (as highlighted by Jewitt 2005), and I very much wanted to enable the participation and inclusion of individuals on the margins of school society, likely to be excluded by following the tendency to prioritise literacy (Prosser and Loxley 2007; Allen 2008). Hadfield and Haw (2002) question whether researchers attach too much importance to certain forms of expression, such as verbal skills, resulting in research focusing only on the verbally articulate and stereotyping those who are less articulate as not having the capacity to express themselves in the way required of citizens with rights. I therefore hoped that a more holistic approach towards participant expression would support the voices of children, aiding their involvement in this research.

Early in my methodological thinking I was attracted by the potential affordances of a visual approach for supporting discussion. Heath *et al.* (2010) stress the considerable opportunities the visual creates in recording aspects of social activities in real time, showing talk, visible conduct and the tools, technologies, objects and artefacts. Due to these strengths, Prosser and Loxley (2008) suggest that the visual provides a way of slowing down observation to facilitate deeper reflection. Much earlier, while conducting a literacy project in Peru, Freire (1973) asked participants questions about their lives and struggles and requested the answers in photographs. He realised that visuals, especially if they were made by the people

themselves, could play a key role in helping them to reflect on their own lived experiences, clarifying and articulating their discontent, and framing their ideas for change. This key message is also reflected within the research of Liebenberg (2009).

Besides the considerable potential benefits of a visual approach in providing rich insights into the social interactions and belonging of children, I was aware of the potential limitations, particularly the extent to which using a video camera to film an episode actually distorts the data and the ‘naturalness’ of social reality (a point also argued by Lomax and Casey 1998). For example, when using stimulated recall with teenagers with learning difficulties I often found the young people talked more confidently and with greater openness once I had switched off the video camera at the end of the research episode (Child 2010). Therefore, along with Coffey (1999) or Mazzei and Jackson (2009) and visual researchers such as Pink (2007), I consider it important to be explicit about the situated and socially constructed nature of research, something I knew I needed to do throughout this study.

To summarise, my intention for this research was to explore the social relations and belonging of children in education. I was concerned with children identified by staff as having social difficulties, some of whom had also been identified as having dyslexia, autism or sight impairments. My early reading and previous experience led me to want to examine *how* participants were treated by peers (and their attitudes towards this), their sense of belonging, and also *why* this was the case – exploring the teaching practices and wider school policies which may have been helpful or detrimental in supporting these social experiences. My research questions therefore became:

What are participants’ social relations and sense of belonging during both formal (lesson time) and informal (breaks and lunchtime) parts of the school day?

What teaching strategies and wider school practices support or inhibit the positive social relations and belonging of participants?

I also explored the affordances of visual methods in providing insights into participants’ social interactions and belonging. My third research question was:

How can the visual be used to illuminate the social experiences and belonging of participants?



To gain an in-depth understanding of the social experiences and belonging of children I spent just over one academic year collecting data. I hoped that this period would help me to get closer to social reality (see Hammersley 1992), embracing the subjective and complex nature of their lives and the research process. I undertook the research in two primary schools in southern England, focusing on five main participants (all boys aged 8–10), some of whom had been identified as having autism, dyslexia and sight impairments. I hoped that a case-study type approach would help me to gain in-depth insights into the belonging and social interaction of particular children. I knew that to embrace the subjective, personal, situated and partial nature of knowledge (Coffey 1999) it would be important to keep a reflexive diary and fieldnotes, as well as using various visual methods.

In the next chapter I introduce the key literature regarding belonging, social relations and inclusive education. I then introduce different conceptualisations of participant voice. I outline my methodology and then in the four chapters that follow I present my findings and discuss these insights in relation to other research. I conclude by summarising my main findings, reflecting on the limitations of the research design.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### *2.1 Introduction*

I firstly discuss different conceptualisations of belonging and social relations, many of which stem from theory and research in a multitude of different settings, countries and different groups. This broad approach towards the literature is important as there is limited research specifically on children's belonging in schools, especially in the UK (Frederickson *et al.* 2007) or with children with SEN (Prince and Hadwin 2013). I discuss understandings of belonging from sociology, education and psychology. Much of the research into belonging in education centres on schools in America and prioritises quantitative methods (such as Deci and Ryan 1991) which hinder participant voice (Söder 1990; Child and Nind 2012). Therefore in line with this and the methodological focus in this thesis, in the second part of this chapter, I discuss different conceptualisations of voice and approaches to supporting participant voice.

### *2.2 Sociological conceptualisations of belonging and social relations*

Sociology provides helpful, rich insights into the concept of belonging, a concept that is sometimes vaguely defined or ill theorised within other literature. For example, Antonsich (2010) argues that scholars take the concept for granted, as if its meaning is somewhat self-explanatory. Within the sociological literature, belonging is considered to be a highly political, hierarchised concept (Crowley 1999; Yuval-Davis 2006). By focusing on marginalised groups and 'not belonging', the relational nature of belonging is exposed (Butler 1990; Christensen 2009). Many of the studies focus on marginalised groups (e.g. migrants) and whilst this differs from my focus on children, it is still highly relevant as children are often marginalised in education and wider society. Central to the concept of belonging are understandings of citizenship and democracy (Fenster 2005; Osler and Starkey 2005) and also identity (Weeks 1990), all concepts I discuss in this chapter.

Many theorists argue that belonging is an emotional attachment. For example, Anthias (2013a) conceptualises belonging as experiential, practical and affective. It relates to how we feel about our location in the social world which is in turn is related to formal and informal experiences of belonging. Additionally, belonging is about practices: we articulate our belonging through our practices and this gives rise to our sense of belonging. Similarly,

Yuval-Davis (2006) argues that attachment is one of three interrelated elements in which belonging are constructed. Firstly, belonging is based on social location, next individual identifications and emotional attachments, and lastly the ethical and political value systems with which people judge their own and others' belonging/s.

Miller (2003, p.218) suggests that belonging is 'the quintessential mode of being human [... ] in which all aspects of the self, as human, are perfectly integrated – a mode of being in which we are as we ought to be: fully ourselves'. Similarly, Connerton (1989); Ahmed (2007) and May (2011, p.370) argue that belonging relates to an everyday 'ordinariness' that is unconscious and naturalised. It relates to a sense of 'feeling at home' (Scheibelhofer 2007, p.321). Similarly, according to Bourdieu (1979, p. 171), our habitus fits a specific social field and as long as we remain in this field we are not necessarily aware of our habitus, but rather, it feels 'natural' to us. Therefore, we only become conscious of our belonging, when it becomes threatened, hence the wealth of research on not belonging (e.g. Ahmed 2007; Valentine *et al.* 2009). Butler (1990); Yuval-Davis *et al.* (2005; 2006) and Christensen (2009) stress the close interplay between constructions of belonging and not belonging, highlighting the relational nature of this concept.

The relational nature of belonging is closely bound with issues of integration, inclusion and acceptance. Jackson (1990, p.340) explains that to belong is to 'be a part of something, be accepted by others: this is active, tangible and, importantly, acknowledged by others. It is cultural and embodied about both what we do and how we do it.' Similarly, Anthias (2006) stresses the need to be accepted within a community and become part of the social fabric.

Linked with the concept of belonging, researchers use the term citizenship, a concept that Barbalet (1988) argues is highly fluid but that Osler and Starkey (2005, p.9) explain 'is probably most immediately experienced as a feeling of belonging'. Christensen (2009, p.23) defines citizenship as 'basically about individuals' and groups' relationship with public life, but also about who is included and who is excluded—who is defined as being "inside" the community and who is defined as being "outside" it'. This suggests that citizenship is about being included in society but also signifies the political struggles people experience. For example Hall *et al.* (2000) and Alexander (2008) suggest citizenship reflects an arena in which relations linking individuals to their broader community, social and political contexts are constantly discussed, reworked and contested. Furthermore, Andersen *et al.* (1993);

Shotter (1993) and McEachern (1998) suggest that central to belonging is the role of democracy, in particular the right to have a voice in decision-making and be listened to.

Nichols (2008) and Kebede (2010) argue that belonging is fluid, complex and multidimensional. This understanding is further described by Probyn (1996, p.19) as:

the desire for some sort of attachment be it to other people, places or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state.

Further illustrating the fluidity of belonging, Yuval-Davis (2006, p.1999) explains the various manifestations of this concept:

People can ‘belong’ in many different ways and to many different objects of attachments. These can vary from a particular person to the whole of humanity, in a concrete or abstract way; belonging can be an act of self-identification or identification by others, in a stable, contested or transient way....belonging is always a dynamic process, not a reified fixity, which is only a naturalized construction of a particular hegemonic form of power relations.

Sociologists such as Jackson (1983) and Fenster (2005) argue that a sense of belonging builds up and grows based on the everyday experiences and habits of the person. De Certeau (1984, p.117) describes ‘a theory of territorialization’ through spatial tactics. He draws a distinction between place and space, explaining this as: ‘space is a practical place ... transformed into a ‘space’ by walkers’. As the person goes about their life, they make sense of place through walking practices and repeat this walking as a way of overcoming alienation. Belonging and attachment are on the basis of accumulated knowledge, memory, and intimate corporal experiences of everyday walking. A sense of belonging changes with time as these everyday experiences grow and their effects accumulate. Butler (1993) argues a similar point – that it is the routine repetitions or performances of life that generate our identities and the same could be said for belonging.

Central to discussions regarding social relations and belonging is the concept of social capital. Hanifan (1916) explains that this concept draws attention to the effects and consequences of human sociability and connectedness and their relations to the individual and social structure.

Furthermore, Putnam (1993) in his conceptualisation of social capital draws specific attention to belonging, defining social capital as:

- Social and community networks
- Civic engagement or participation
- Community identity
- Involving people's 'sense of belonging' to the community
- Norms of co-operation, reciprocity and trust with others within the community

Bourdieu (1986) also emphasises the role of social capital, especially the ways in which social capital is deployed to ensure that the 'wrong' kind of people do not enter certain social circles, thus maintaining inequalities. Morrow (2001) applied Bourdieu's theory of social capital to the experiences of young people. She found that schools provided an important kind of 'community' for young people, and time spent with friends at school was likely to engender a sense of belonging. However, the non-democratic nature of school, the content of school work and the relationships between teachers and pupils, potentially hindered young people's belonging.

May (2011, p. 366) argues that belonging 'links the person with the social', a understanding further emphasised by Rose (1988) and Schutz & Luckmann (1974) in relation to the concept intersubjectivity. Miller (2002, p.220) introduces the concept 'ontological belonging', in which she defines belonging as 'a sense of ease or accord with who we are in ourselves' but also 'a sense of accord with the various physical and social contexts in which our lives are lived out'. This highlights the relationship between the abstract and place. Similarly, Tilley (1994); Leach (2002) and Bame Nsamenang (2008) stress the fundamental role of place in determining a person's sense of belonging. In sum, Leach (2002, p.292) defines this process as 'making sense of place, developing a feeling of belonging and eventually identifying with that place'. Central to belonging and place, is an emphasis on memory and autobiographies. This is emphasised by Sandercock (1998) and is one of five elements highlighted in Antonsich's (2010) framework for place-belongingness. The other four elements are relational, cultural, economic, and legal.

Yuval-Davis (2006, 2011) argues that there is a distinction between belonging and the politics of belonging. Antonsich (2010) suggests that belonging should be analysed both as a personal, intimate feeling of being 'at home' in a place (place-belongingness) and as a discursive resource that constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging). For Yuval-Davis (2011, p.4):

It is important to differentiate between belonging and the politics of belonging. Belonging is about emotional attachment, about feeling 'at home' [...] The politics of belonging comprise of specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging to particular collectivities.

Belonging therefore denotes what people feel and their orientations, whilst the politics of belonging denotes those contestations and struggles around who does and who doesn't belong. Similarly, Ahmed (2004) argues that feelings or emotions are not innocent of social structures; therefore it is impossible to understanding the concepts of belonging and politics of belonging as separate.

Research suggests that central to belonging are unwritten rules within society which determine how a person behaves (Bell 1999; Fortier 1999), maintaining similarities between groups. For example, Broström (2002) researched young children's transitions into the education system. This research is pertinent to my study as it showed that children who make these transitions successfully 'feel suitable' in their new setting. 'Feeling suitable' means that a child appears to be the right person to be in this place, such as looking suitable (and not too different from other children), dressing suitably, speaking suitably (not in a language which no-one understands), behaving suitably, playing suitably and so on. Similarly, Bourdieu (1977) described the way that individuals and groups come to feel included or excluded by society, and consequently achieve (or fail to achieve) social status and success. Although Bourdieu focuses on the ways in which the status and success of adults is constructed, the basis of such constructions is in children's earliest experiences of caregiving. He identifies small cultural differences in dialect, language and dress, which combine to form the identity of the child and are then carried into various settings, such as schools. With the 'right' background, children may go through life feeling 'like fish in water'.

Central to discussions regarding belonging is the notion of identity. For example, Weeks (1990, p.88) argues that 'Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others'. Similarly, Schutz (1974) stresses that

belonging is about a 'we group', that is a group with whom we share (some) norms and values, a group with whom we identify. Identity encompasses many complex components of belonging. This includes notions of the self. Erickson (1968) argued that identity encompasses 'the core self' and the 'aspirational self'. This includes both the way individuals have personal and political investments in their 'identity', as seen in Beck's (1992) notion of the 'risk society'.

Other theorists argue that the concepts of belonging and identity have very different meanings. Anthias (2013b, p.8) suggests:

Belonging is always in relation to something outside the self (a place- in the social as well as geographical sense -and is therefore always 'located'), whilst identity has been used more as a possessive characteristic of the individual, as that which defines 'who they are' or 'who they think they are' as well as entailing the construction of bonds with 'similar' others.

Similarly, Pfaff-Czarnecka (2013, p.6) states that identity is a categorical concept whilst belonging combines categorisation with social relating. Glick Schiller (2003) also distinguishes between ways of 'being' and 'belonging'. Ways of being refers to the actual social relations and practices individuals engage in, instead of the identities associated with these actions. Social fields generate categories of identity that are ascribed to individuals or groups. Whilst a person may be embedded in a social field, they may not identify with any labels or cultural politics associated with that field. However, ways of belonging refers to practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group. These actions are tangible, visible actions that relate to belonging such as a Christian wearing a cross. Ways of belonging therefore combine an awareness of the kind of identity that action signifies.

Mouffe (1994) argues that identity is a process rather than a descriptive term. This is further highlighted in the work of Mead (2009) for whom social identities are created through our ongoing social interaction with other people and our subsequent self-reflection about who we think we are according to these social exchanges. Identities are produced through agreement, disagreement, and negotiation with other people. We amend our behavior and our self-image based upon our interactions and our self-reflection about these. Goffman (1959) and Butler (1993) argue that this is something that is experienced and expressed continuously, and performed differently depending on content and timing. Mead (1934) defines two forms of

social interaction in which self-identity is constructed: meaning constructed through discourses and meaning constructed through experience. Similarly, Jenkins (2000, p.10) discusses three 'orders' of social phenomena within society which are all entwined with each other:

1. The individual order – the world of embodied individuals and 'what-goes-on-in-their-heads'
2. The interaction order – The world of co-presence and relationships between embodied individuals, of 'what-goes-on-between-people'
3. The institutional order – The world of patterned, organised and symbolically-templated 'ways-of-doing-things'

Stryker (2000, p.27) therefore argues that the self is 'undifferentiated, unorganised, unstable, and ephemeral' in that the individual identifies the things that need to be taken into account for themselves, act on this basis and try to fit their actions with others.

Brubaker & Cooper (2000) and Anthias (2002) question why researchers still use the concept of identity, arguing that the concept is overburdened and attempts to do too much but also says too little. Foucault (1972) and Derrida (1981) argue that the concept fails to take into account the fluidity, multiplicity and fragmentation of this concept. For example, asking a person about their identity assumes the person has a ready-made story to tell about whom they are and where they feel they belong. The concept does not necessarily encompass the ways in which identity is formed within multiplicities and contradictions of location and placement, such as in relation to gender, ethnicity and class. Anthias (1998; 2001; 2002) proposes the concept of translocational positionality which recognises the need to understand identity and belonging within the location in which it occurs. This recognises the role of context, the situated nature of claims and attributions and their production in complex and shifting locales. It also recognises variability with some processes leading to more complex, contradictory, and at times dialogical positionalities than others: this is what is meant by the term 'translocational'. The latter references the complex nature of positionality faced by those who are at the interplay of a range of locations and dislocations in relation to gender, ethnicity, national belonging, class and racialization.

To summarise, sociologists argue that belonging is more than an innate feeling, but highly political and relational. The concept is suggested to be fluid, contextual and situated and is



also linked with notions of social capital, citizenship, democracy and identity. I next discuss how belonging and social relations are portrayed in educational research and theory.

### *2.3 Educational conceptualisations of belonging and social relations*

As in the sociological literature, a number of researchers such as Tinto (1987); Griffiths (1995); Haza Gutiérrez and Figueroa Fuentes (2008) and Woodhead and Brooker (2008) argue that belonging is dynamic, unstable and contingent, determined by factors such as time of day or location. This was also evident in research by Kember *et al.* (2001) with regard to university students who expressed varying degrees of belonging based on four logical foci—the class group or peer students, teaching staff, the department and the university.

As with belonging, Morris-Roberts (2004); Holt (2010) and Ytterhus (2012) argue that children's social relations and friendships are far from static and are instead constantly evolving. This was evident in a study of the experiences of teenage girls with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (Nind *et al.* 2011) in which two of the girls chatted about how they had made friends again, fully recognising that falling out and making up is, albeit painfully, what happens. Furthermore, Beattie (2007) argues that social interaction is work in progress and takes place in the context of the past, present, and future of the individual's life; not in isolation from others, but in a relational and contextual way.

Some research suggests that social interaction is based on hierarchical positioning. For example, Holt (2004a) argues that non-disabled children often adopt a 'helping' role, such as helping disabled children with their work. This was also evident in research by McMaugh (2011) when one of the participants (Ellie) reported peer 'policing' of her social relationships, which served to starkly remind her that she was 'inferior' in the eyes of other students. However, moving beyond hierarchical positioning between children with and without SEN, Priestley (1999) found that children with disabilities sometimes engaged in hierarchical comparisons of impairments, in which their own disability was compared with the 'worse' kinds of impairments of other children. This suggests hierarchical positioning is not just evident between disabled and non-disabled young people, but among disabled children. Furthermore, Gagen (2000) and Holt (2010) attribute the hierarchical nature of social interaction with how societal norms and values are embedded in everyday practices within specific social networks, showing the interconnections between school and family or wider societal norms.

Common among research regarding social interaction, friendships and belonging are deficit positions in which children with SEN are presented as vulnerable, incapable and passive, highlighting their lack of friends and low social status within their peer group (e.g. Richards 1995; Scheepstra *et al.* 1999; de Monchy *et al.* 2004; Mand 2007). Along with Söder (1990) and Priestley (1999), I therefore question the usefulness of such research that does not look at the ways in which young people who may have SEN function as social actors, negotiating complex identities within a disabling environment. Research shows that being socially included/excluded is a dynamic, ongoing and entangled process (e.g. Hall 2005). Allan (1999) suggests that identity and social interaction is ‘transgressive’ in that it may involve young people not in direct confrontation but in a kind of playful struggle against those who attempt to label them as either disabled or normal or restrict their participation within mainstream classrooms. This process of negotiation is further emphasised by Low (1996) showing disabled students’ agency through speaking out, reasoning with others, using humour, being assertive or aggressive. Davis and Watson (2002) found that children were sometimes assertive with peers, whilst Holt’s (2010) research showed that children who were non-verbal asserted their agency by exchanging smiles with friends. In research by Connors and Stalker (2007), some children reported bullying to their parents and teachers whilst others faced up to the bullies themselves and sometimes exhibited unkind behaviour towards the peers who were bullying them. Lastly, Sam, who was one of the participants in Ward’s (2007) study, reported on how he reflected on factors that made him different and less acceptable, adapting his behaviour accordingly. These studies suggest that children with SEN are far from passive, incompetent individuals, but instead are active and in many ways competent social agents.

The social dimensions of schooling are of considerable importance to young people (Reay and Arnot 2002; Davies and Lee 2006). Cotterell (1996, p.1) argues:

Relations with others lie at the heart of the adolescent experience. Young people are concerned with making and keeping friends, and invest a great deal of energy in group social life in order to do so. They place a lot of importance on belonging, on being included, and on being part of a group; group affiliation not only supplies emotional security, but also is a source of status and reputation with motivational properties.

This importance is further illustrated in research undertaken by Ainscow *et al.* (1999) at a secondary school with a group of young people with varying disabilities. During interviews

with these young people, the most significant and frequently mentioned aspect of schooling was not the formal programme of learning but the possibilities school provided as a source of social encounters. School was seen as a place where there are multiple possibilities to make friends. One young person stated that transferring schools at the age of thirteen had transformed her view of herself, giving her greater self-confidence, the outcome of gaining so many new friends.

The continued use of sociometric techniques (e.g. Farmer and Farmer 1996; Cambra and Silvestre 2003; de Monchy *et al.* 2004) maintain the mainstream assumption that children with and without SEN should interact together, neglecting the view that many children with SEN appreciate being with children with similar labels. Jarvis *et al.* (2003, p.211), focusing on the views of deaf and hearing children and young people, found children talked about the value of peers with 'similar experiences' of deafness alongside other friends. One, with profound hearing loss stated:

Hearing classmates are not nice and I don't feel right. It would be better if I had my deaf friend with me. The teacher said she had to separate us. I was angry inside...

The benefits of commonality felt by young people with SEN indicate that while friendships with non-disabled peers are important they are neither essential nor superior, nor are they necessarily key to belonging. This commonality is further highlighted by Ward (2007); French and Swain (2009) and Nind *et al.* (2011).

#### *2.4 Psychological conceptualisations of belonging and social relations*

The concept of belonging has a long history in quantitative psychological research, mostly undertaken in America. Maslow (1943, p.381) argued that belonging is an intrinsic need, 'a hunger for affectionate relations with people in general'. Similarly, Glasser (1986) asserted that the need for belonging is one of the five basic needs written into the human genetic structure. The concept has been defined in a number of ways, such as the need for affection between people (Murray 1938), the need for relatedness (Deci and Ryan 1991; Vallerand 1997), belongingness (Adler 1939; Maslow 1971; Baumeister and Leary 1995) or the need for positive regard from others (Rogers 1951).

Key to belonging and emotional well-being, is firstly the relationships children establish with their primary caregiver(s) (Bowlby 1969). Kunc (1992); Goodenow (1993a) and Osterman

(2000) argue that belonging is linked with interpersonal relations. Similarly, Baumeister and Leary (1995, p.497) stress the need for regular contact and the perception that the interpersonal relationship has stability, affective concern, and is ongoing. They propose the 'belongingness hypothesis', suggesting that human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum number of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships. Failure to have one's belongingness needs met may lead to feelings of loneliness and social isolation.

Belonging is strongly linked with the need to feel accepted. This is emphasised by Goodenow (1993b, p.25), who describe belonging as:

Based on equitable, non-judgemental, genuine relationships, rather than in highly professionalised interventions students' sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (teacher and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class. More than simple perceived liking or warmth, it also involves support and respect for personal autonomy and for the student as an individual.

Furthermore, Deci and Ryan (1991, p.243) propose that this concept (which they call relatedness) 'encompasses a person's striving to relate to and care for others, to feel that those others are relating authentically to one's self, and to feel a satisfying and coherent involvement with the social world more generally'. The centrality of acceptance for belonging is similarly emphasised by Hamm and Faircloth (2005) in their research into the sense of belonging among teenagers in a racially diverse school in America, and in Booker's (2007) study of the belonging of thirteen African American high school students.

The social dimensions of education are suggested to be crucial to the healthy development and well-being of the child. This was particularly evident within the work of Maslow (1971), who suggested that most emotional illness was due to a failure to meet basic psychological needs. Maslow proposed the well-known 'hierarchy of need' considered essential to the healthy development of the child. In the hierarchy physiological needs come first, then safety, belonging and, ultimately, self-actualisation. Schaps and Lewis (1999) argue that social interaction has a positive causal effect on young people's intrinsic academic motivation, their concern for others, enjoyment of helping others, learning and inclusive attitudes. Such evidence of the role of positive social interaction in supporting the healthy well-being of the child is pertinent. As Kunc (1992) and Schaps *et al.* (2004) argue, institutionalised beliefs in

education prioritise achievement and mastery, devaluing the importance of social experiences and belonging.

Beck and Malloy (1998) suggest that increases in parental working hours and changes in the structure of the 'nuclear' family have meant that traditional vehicles of belonging are less relevant, making it especially important that children experience a sense of belonging at school. Social interaction and belonging is crucial to the functioning of young people in education (Deci and Ryan 1991; Osterman 2000; Giangreco *et al.* 2010) and to self-esteem (Battistich *et al.* 1997). Goodenow (1993b) and Beck and Malloy (2003) highlight the relationship between belonging and young people's motivation. They argue that a sense of belonging increases young people's beliefs in their success, and thus increases their academic motivation. Kaplan and Johnson (1992) and Baker *et al.* (1997) suggest that children who do not feel a sense of belonging at school may seek their own sense of belongingness (in different, more anti-social contexts, such as joining gangs).

Having discussed different conceptualisations of belonging, in the next section I discuss understandings of inclusive education. Lastly, linked with my methodological focus, I problematise how social relations are researched and introduce different conceptualisations of participant voice.

## *2.5 Conceptualisations of inclusive education*

The USA was first to begin the trend towards inclusive education with the introduction of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, and this was later amended to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). In 1990 and then 1997, the policy was further amended to promote 'whole-school' approaches to inclusion (Evans and Lunt 2002). The importance of inclusive education was endorsed by international policy such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994), reflecting what Farrell and Ainscow (2002) describe as *Education for All*. In the UK, over the last thirty years there has been some emphasis on meeting children's SEN in their local mainstream school. Early milestones were the Warnock Report (DES 1978) and the Education Act (1981; 1996). This continued with further educational policy (DfEE 1998; DfES 2001; 2004) and law (such as the Equalities Act 2010) encouraging inclusion. However, lately, educational policy (DfE 2011) has shifted the focus from *inclusion* in the mainstream, to giving families of children with SEN a *choice* regarding schools. In the coming section, I discuss conceptualisations of inclusion, something that is

particularly important as there is a lack of any single accepted definition of inclusive practice (Florian 1998; Slee 2001). I then present the problematic realities of inclusion for many children, before discussing the role of *societal*, *school* and *child* influences in determining the extent to which children are socially included in education. Ainscow *et al.* (2006) stress that the development of inclusive practices in schools is not well understood, demonstrating the importance of my research.

The human rights movement has led to an understanding of the necessity of valuing and treating everyone equally and on the basis of needs. Children have a right to education, as emphasised by the United Nations (UN 1948). Furthermore, the UNCRC (1989) stresses that it is imperative that all children (whether or not they have disabilities) have the same rights to educational opportunities. This understanding is reaffirmed in in other international legislation (such as UN 1993; UNESCO 1994).

Initially educationalists focused on integration, an approach that was defined by Warnock (DES 1978) as *locational* (being educated on the same site as non-disabled children), *social* (such as shared playtimes) and *functional* (joint participation in educational programmes, requiring different teaching etc.). Many researchers (Thomas 1997; Barton 1998) argue that integration places the onus on the child to change in order to fit in with peers and educational practices, meaning that schools remain largely unchanged. Under the 1981 and 1993 Act, integration was entirely conditional, based on the efficient use of resources, effective education of the particular child and not disrupting the education of other children.

In the 1990s the emphasis on integration shifted to inclusion. The difference between the two concepts is highlighted by Ainscow (1997, p.5) who suggests that:

Whereas the idea of integration was seen as preparing children perceived as being special to fit into a school that remained largely unchanged, inclusive education starts from the assumption that all children have a right to attend their neighbourhood school. Therefore, the task becomes one of developing the work of the school in response to pupil diversity.

This definition stresses the rights of each and every child to attend their local mainstream school and therefore the need for education to adapt to meet the broad needs of these young people. This understanding is further emphasised by Avramidis and Norwich (2002, p.131) who argue that:

Inclusion implies a restructuring of mainstream schooling that every school can accommodate every child irrespective of disability ('accommodation' rather than 'assimilation') and ensures that all learners belong to a community.

Winter & O'Raw (2010, p.25) explains that inclusion reflects:

...the principle that students with special or additional learning needs or disability belong in mainstream education. The fundamental principle of an inclusive school is that all children should learn together, regardless of any difficulties or differences. To be an inclusive school, therefore, means that the school accommodates the needs of all students and welcomes diversity as a way to enrich learning for everyone.

Therefore inclusion is about changing educational practice to meet the individual needs of the child, reflecting an understanding of the rights of all to a mainstream education.

Central to inclusive education are positive social relations and belonging. This is emphasised by the DfES (2001, p.3) that asserted that inclusion is about:

engendering a sense of community and belonging and encouraging mainstream and special schools and others to come together to support each other and pupils with special educational needs

This example demonstrates the centrality of *community* and *belonging* to understandings of inclusion. Alternatively, UNESCO (2005, p.5) argues that inclusion is:

...a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education.... [As such,] it involves a range of changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.

Booth (1996, p.34) maintains that it is useful to think of inclusion in education as involving two processes:

...the process of increasing the participation of pupils within the cultures and curricula of mainstream schools and the process of decreasing exclusionary pressures. To attempt the first without the second is self-defeating.

All these definitions emphasise the importance of schools' adapting practice to meet to diversity of needs, also the necessity of challenging and reducing negative attitudes that maintain exclusion. Research suggests that inclusive education may also lead to broader changes within society (Thomas 1997; Beckett 2009; Shevlin 2010). Similarly, Koster *et al.* (2007) found that parents hoped that sending their child to a mainstream school would lead to a change of attitude from other children, potentially resulting in a wider societal transformation of discriminatory attitudes. This is also a strong theme in the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994, paragraph 2) reflecting international policy agreement:

Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective measures of combatting discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.

This suggests that, although inclusion is about changes within education, it is also about much broader changes within society and the invaluable position of schools in challenging discriminatory attitudes, creating a more inclusive society. Having discussed just a few of the many definitions of inclusion, I next outline some of the contentions surrounding inclusive education.

Understandings of inclusion may be contradictory. With regards to the inclusion of two students with autism, Benjamin (2002) reveals that notions of valuing diversity can only be deployed in relation to students who have already been identified as falling short of the required 'standards'. It thus operates to re-inscribe a binary division between able and disabled. Along a similar theme, Skrtic (1991) refers to attempts in the USA to reform the comprehensive school following the introduction of new legislation. This reform led to an emphasis on collaborative practice in creating personalised programmes for those with SEN. Detrimental to meeting needs and leading to a growth in the number of young people classified as 'handicapped', there was a continued emphasis on objective forms of achievement, replicating and adapting existing practice rather than representing a complete change. This implies that central to inclusion, and therefore the positive social experiences of children with SEN, is the importance of education adopting a transformative approach to meeting needs, moving beyond efforts to merely 'patch up' the education system (Ballard 1999; Wedell 2005). Without a transformative approach, Slee (1998, p.131) argues that inclusion represents little but a 'politically correct facade'. This suggests that working towards inclusive education and meeting diverse needs is fraught with difficulties.



Despite the apparent emphasis on rights discussed above, reality may be a different matter. With reference to SEBD and the associated construct of young people as disaffected and unruly, Jones (2003) argues that this construct is used as an excuse to exclude, reinforcing and maintaining their marginalised roles and social exclusion within society and contradicting the emphasis on rights. Furthermore, Mithaug (1998) suggests that fundamental to a child's rights to a mainstream education is a judgement of their capabilities. If an individual is perceived as having an 'equal moral capacity' then the participation of the child in society is considered essential, whereas if the individual is perceived as having 'unequal natural capacity' then society must ensure the protection of the individual; it is this model that underpins segregated education. This demonstrates that societal judgements of personal competence are central to determining the inclusion of individuals within education or society, illustrating the tendency to prioritise certain characteristics over others, presenting a conflict with the issue of rights.

An emphasis on the rights of the child to inclusive education may merely mask other more sinister, competing motives. For example, Croll and Moses (2000) suggest that the drive for inclusion is about the potential role of education in supporting the wider political aims of society, such as international competition and marketisation. Similarly, Kauffman (1989) argues that inclusion is merely a cost-saving activity and trying to force all children to attend mainstream education is just as discriminatory as forcing all children to attend special schools.

Encompassed in the rights perspective to inclusion is an understanding of the importance of valuing all children (such as emphasised by Ainscow *et al.* 2006). For example, Rieser (2001, p.132) suggests that inclusive education is about:

valuing all children irrespective of their type or degree of impairment, or restructuring the institution to remove barriers so teaching and learning takes place so all children can be valued for who they are, participate, interact and develop their potential.

However, there is evidence to suggest that a failure to implement inclusive practice effectively may prove detrimental to young people's attitudes towards inclusion. For example in a study by Lewis *et al.* (2006, p.138) detailing the experiences of children with disabilities and special educational needs, one young person who attended a special school stated:

I think (inclusion for all) is a load of rubbish because it's not fair on the kids that have got learning difficulties, they've got disabilities, and some of the schools have got

steps going upstairs, but it's not really fair on the kids like me who need to be in a special school where they can actually learn new stuff and get more support instead of the teachers having a go at them and giving them pressure and that.

Wilson (2000) is critical of 'purist' models of inclusion, arguing instead for a more pragmatic, careful approach towards inclusion. Reflecting an understanding of these challenges, the Salamanca Statement and UK educational policy (DfES 2001) acknowledge that inclusion might not be suitable for all children.

Within the disability literature there is uncertainty regarding whether inclusion applies to all, or just some, an ambiguity that is highly detrimental to the belonging and inclusion of young people in education. This is emphasised by Cigman (2007) who introduces the term 'universalist' to apply to the inclusion of *all* and the term 'moderate', meaning inclusion for only *some* children. Furthermore, Ash *et al.* (1997, p.614) found that although many non-disabled peers valued inclusive education, due to practical considerations many of these individuals considered inclusion dependent on the type of SEN. For example, one non-disabled peer suggested:

I think we still need different schools for people with more 'learning disabilities', because a lot more time needs to be spent with them. It depends on the 'disability'.

This understanding was further highlighted with regards to children with autism. Alderson and Goodley (1999) found that teachers often felt reluctant about the inclusion of children with autism in mainstream classrooms due to concerns regarding the possible disruption it may cause to the rest of their school or class. Similarly Barnard *et al.* (2002) found that many practitioners raised concerns about the level of support available to children with autism. Reinforcing this understanding, Ravet (2011) argues that the effective inclusion of young people on the autistic spectrum requires practitioners to question the two dominant but contradictory discourses prevalent in the inclusion literature—the *rights-based perspective* that argues the rights of all young people to attend mainstream schools, and a *needs perspective* that highlights the need to maintain a range of educational provision to meet the distinctive group.

Further emphasising the uncertainties surrounding inclusion, Corbett (2001) suggests that in the past inclusion has meant bringing those outside (special) into mainstream schooling, failing to acknowledge that many mainstream learners can feel excluded by inflexible

pedagogy, a limited curriculum and hierarchical ethos. Therefore, rather than the narrow focus on SEN, Barton (2010) and Slavin (2003) among others call for inclusive education to be about meeting the individual needs of all children, reflecting an understanding that every child is exceptional in that no two are alike. This is further highlighted by Booth *et al.* (1998) who state that inclusive education is concerned with reducing all exclusionary pressures and all devaluation of students, whether on the basis of disability, attainment, race and so on. This reflects a broader approach towards difference, challenging oppression within society, focusing on everyone, or on various marginalised identities, and not exclusively on children with SEN.

Research suggests that inclusion is a constantly fluctuating, fluid process (Wilson 1999; Biklen 2000; Benjamin *et al.* 2003). This was further evident in research of Avramidis *et al.* (2002) into the inclusion of young people with SEBD in mainstream education. This research found that the school was more inclusive in some respects for some children at some times and less inclusive in other respects for other children at other times. Similarly, Corbett (1997, p.55) argues that inclusion and exclusion are not polar opposites but ‘a messy series of compromises, adjustments and individual preferences’, an understanding Corbett explains as ‘in-between-ness’.

Research suggests that inclusion (or exclusion) works on a number of different levels and, whilst children are included on certain levels, they may also be excluded on other levels such as socially (Pijl *et al.* 2008; Ward 2007). Rogers’ (2007) case study of the experiences of British parents who had children identified with SEN attending mainstream education showed that although a child may be physically included in a mainstream school, they may be excluded in other respects. This includes practically (they may be removed from class for one-to-one support), intellectually (may not be able to access the curriculum in the same way as peers) and, last but not least, emotionally (sustaining friendship networks and engaging with others socially). Such literature has prompted me to question how the fluctuating nature of inclusion affects a child’s sense of belonging and to what extent this leads to children feeling an increased sense of belonging during certain activities or parts of the school day, a key focus in this research.

Studies show different ways in which educational practitioners meet the needs of children. With reference to education around the world, Brusling and Pepin (2003, p.198) group educational practice into three key groups: the ‘one-track approach’ in which almost all

pupils are included in mainstream provision (such as in Italy or Greece); the ‘multi-track approach’ which provides a wealth of services between mainstream and the special needs system (such as the UK or France, Austria and Iceland); and the ‘two-track approach’, with two separate systems, one mainstream and one consisting of special schools and special classes (such as in Belgium). Although this theory provides an overview of inclusion around the world, the conceptualisation puts too much stress on physical placement, potentially reinforcing an ‘integrative’ understanding rather than ‘inclusive’. Similarly, Warnock (1991) presents the different forms of provision for children with SEN as a linear continuum. My concern with both of these models is that they do not account for the chaotic and fluid nature of inclusion (as discussed previously). In my research I have instead tried to reflect critically on these boundaries when looking at social interaction and belonging in settings that are somewhat ‘in-between’ mainstream and special.

Having explored differing conceptualisations of inclusive education, in the next section I discuss the disappointing realities of how inclusion policy is operationalised for many children and their families, especially with regards to social relations and belonging.

## *2.6 The realities of inclusive education*

Despite the importance of the social dimensions of inclusion to young people and their families (Reay and Arnot 2002; Davies and Lee 2006) and the centrality of these social dimensions to inclusive education, there is only limited evidence to suggest that attendance at a mainstream school results in positive social experiences. For example, a study by Ash *et al.* (1997, p.612) focusing on pupils’ perceptions of being educated alongside pupils with disabilities found that one participant (a non-disabled boy) considered his friend who was paralysed from the waist down as ‘quite a good drinking buddy’. The majority of studies, however, suggest that children with SEN in inclusive education experience considerable isolation and bullying (Audit Commission 2002; Cambra and Silvestre 2003; Warnock 2005; Ward 2007). This was evident in a number of studies carried out in schools around the world, including Spain (Cambra and Silvestre 2003), the USA (Meyer 2001), Holland (Koster *et al.* 2010) and Norway (Pijl *et al.* 2008), although these studies prioritised sociometric methods.

Providing insights into the problematic nature of social relations in mainstream schools, Connors and Stalker (2007, p.21) studied the lived experiences of 26 disabled children aged

7–15 and found that almost half had experienced bullying either at school or in their local neighbourhood. One boy reported that he was ‘made fun of’ at school ‘about nearly every day’. His mother reported he had once had a good day in school because no-one had called him ‘blindie’. Similarly, McMaugh (2011, p.858) found that one-third of disabled children in her study reported that they did not have a single friend in their primary or high school. Most of the 24 children, regardless of the presence or absence of friends, experienced bullying and harassment related to their condition in both their primary school and the new high school environment. One of the participants (Claire) explained that her classmates would frequently call her names, saying things like ‘Oh you’re slow, you’re this, and you’re that. You’re brainless. You’ve got brain damage, you haven’t got a brain’. Lastly, research found that some children with SEN who attended mainstream provision felt embarrassed about being different. This was identified in research by Swain *et al.* (2003) and French and Swain (2009), who highlighted this embarrassment and the effect this had on their relationships with other children.

The inclusion of children and young people on the autistic spectrum is particularly complex due to what Barnard *et al.* (2000) refers to as the ‘hidden’ nature of this disability. Young people with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) are considered to have ‘distinct needs’ (Lewis and Norwich 2005). Humphrey and Lewis (2008) found that their difficulties with social communication, interaction and sensory stimulation and their preference for predictability and routine made inclusion particularly problematic. Daniel and Billingsley (2010) sought to explore the social experiences of boys aged 10 to 14 with autism. Participants explained that they experienced considerable difficulties initiating contact and were worried about being exploited by peers or being perceived as annoying. Humphrey and Lewis (2008) found that children with ASD experienced considerable and regular bullying and teasing, such as name calling and physical violence. Parents, too, have reported worrying findings with regards to children’s social experiences at school. A study by Whitaker (2007) focusing on the perspectives of parents and carers of children with autism in one English county revealed that only half these children and young people were said to have friends.

Unfortunately, research focusing on young people with SEBD continues to present a negative picture of their social experiences in education. Holt (2004a, p.6; 2010) found that young people with SEBD were more prone to bullying and rejection by peers than young people with other disabilities. For example, one of the participants (Liam) was consistently excluded and marginalised within children’s cultures and when asked whether he had any friends

stated, 'No, I don't have a best friend at school—I don't think I have a friend...' Extracts from a research diary focusing on another child with SEBD revealed a similar picture:

Nelson was playing alone. He wandered around for a while, and then went up to a group of boys who sit on his table in class. These boys had been running around and playing. At that moment, they were all sitting down at the picnic tables.... They all got up again and started moving around, playing. They completely ignored Nelson. (Holt 2004a, p.5)

Similarly, Lewis *et al.* (2006) found that, for some children with social/behavioural difficulties, it was becoming more difficult for them to remain included in activities because of friction with other children and this resulted in some feelings of being excluded. It is overly simplistic to assume that attendance in mainstream education will automatically lead to a child with SEN (or any child for that matter) fitting in and making plenty of friends. This is stressed by Pijl *et al.* (2008, p.403), who state that:

physical integration is only a very basic condition (and)... becoming part of the group is not an automatism and...pupils with special needs in particular may need extra support in group participation. Support could focus on the peers, the teachers, and the pupils with special needs or the school organisation.

This literature indicates the need for practitioners to understand the importance of social interaction for young people, and therefore provide the help needed to enable all young people to experience positive social interaction and friendship.

It is important to note that the social experiences of children with SEN are just as problematic in special schools as in mainstream. Although Cook *et al.* (2001) argue the social benefits of attending a special school, such as the benefits of being with people with a similar label; most studies present a negative picture. Wise (1999) undertook a study involving 36 pupils aged 12-16 years, mostly boys, attending one of two special educational establishments for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties in the south of England. Findings suggested that bullying was considered just part of life for participants, who also expressed high levels of discontentment at the apparent lack of concern by schools and teachers regarding their experiences of bullying. Many of the participants reported feelings of vulnerability in certain situations, perceiving inadequate support from teachers in preventing incidents and dealing with reported events. This shows the need for practitioners to play an active role in both

acknowledging and attempting to reduce or eliminate bullying and other social difficulties. Similarly, Norwich and Kelly (2005), focusing on the experiences of young people with moderate learning difficulties in special schools, revealed that many of the participants believed they had lost out in making friends or they had lost friends because of their attendance at a special school.

Whilst there is agreement of the need to create an education system that caters for diversity, there is a lack of clear understanding about how to achieve this (Ainscow *et al.* 2006). Due to factors such as pupil-teacher ratios (Wedell 2008) or the overly prescriptive national curriculum (Bennett 2006), Clark *et al.* (1997) conclude that mainstream education often only becomes less segregated, rather than fully inclusive. This raises questions about how education can be more inclusive, catering for diversity. Jones and Smith (2004) argue however, that there are no simple answers, as what is appropriate in one school may not necessarily be appropriate in another due to the considerable variety of schools with different constraints, cultures or histories. A strong message from the literature is that there is not a single, 'one size fits all' approach to meeting the diverse needs of children, but instead a complex, multi-level approach focusing on structural, cultural and institutional barriers to inclusion (Davis and Watson 2002). I next discuss some of the dimensions of education and wider societal understandings which influence inclusion.

## *2.7 Discourses surrounding SEN*

Our underlying beliefs and values (or discourses) are central to the way we perceive and behave towards each other. Foucault (1972) argues that these discourses create rules and truth, defining what is acceptable or unacceptable in society. This highlights the importance of being aware of these discourses and the ways they have shaped educational practice for children with SEN, supporting or hindering inclusion. In this section I explore the role of medicalised deficit understandings of children and the emphasis on categorising difference, discussing the relevance of this for inclusive education and the social relations and belonging of children.

Within much of society there is a negative, medicalised understanding of difference, such as of children with autism or other SEN. These differences are portrayed as individualised deficits reflecting what Bailey (1998, p.49) describes as:

a professional orientation which is highly focused on pathology, not normalcy, on sickness, not well-being, on the nature and aetiology of the presenting problem itself, not on the individual who has the problem, on dealing with the specific pathology in a centred way, not on the social or ecosystem which surrounds the problem, that is, the patient, his or her family, social and financial circumstances, values and attitudes.

This deficit approach to difference is further emphasised in educational policy. For example, the DfES 2001 (p.85) defines children with BESD as:

Withdrawn or isolated, disruptive and disturbing, hyperactive and lack concentration; those with immature social skills; and those presenting challenging behaviours arising from other complex special needs.

This illustrates the negative, individualised perception of BESD/SEBD reflected by government policy. Being 'different', such as experiencing SEN, is perceived by some groups in society as causing extensive suffering to the individual. This idea is further explored by Bayliss (1998, p.61) who suggests that some of society maintains the perception that people who are 'different' cannot be happy and enjoy a good quality of life, equating 'special' with 'bad'. This is a discourse Oliver (1990, p.1) would recognise as the 'personal tragedy' model.

Thomas and Glenny (2000) argue that the use of the term 'EBD' links together difficult troublesome children with emotional disturbance. In doing so it blurs the motives and knowledge, attributing problems to children rather than considering how the schools could adapt their practice. Therefore, this way of thinking is highly detrimental to the way we perceive individuals, maintaining low expectations and reinforcing harmful stereotypes. Challenging negative, deficit understandings of difference, Connors and Stalker (2010) undertook research with 26 disabled children aged 7-15 who had a variety of impairments. Interestingly, this study showed that none of these children viewed their impairment as a tragedy, nor did they make any reference to feeling loss or having a sense of being 'hard done by'. This raises questions about why participants were immune to these negative understandings. Reflecting a similar, positive understanding of difference, Swain and French (2010, p.153) call for an affirmative model which refers to:



Essentially a non-tragic view of disability and impairment which encompasses positive social identities, both individual and collective, for disabled people grounded in the benefits of life style and life experience of being impaired and disabled.

In the case of this model, the experience of being disabled/different is considered invaluable due to the unique insights that this provides, rather than maintaining a negative understanding of difference.

The dominance of the medical discourse and the tendency to label young people perceived as 'different' can be detrimental to the way we understand children and therefore interact with them. Government policy emphasises the importance of earlier identification of children with SEN, from as young as two and a half years old (DfE 2011), yet some researchers reject this practice (Barton 1988; Söder 1990; Booth and Ainscow 1998; Lindsay 2003). They argue that the medical model and the application of labels detract from the real needs that are being served, becoming a simplistic administrative category supporting the interests of others, marginalising and failing to meet the needs of those who need help. Furthermore, Foucault (1973) argues that language constructs experience, an understanding echoed by Corbett (1995) and Barnes *et al.* (1999). Tomlinson (1985, p. 5) with reference to SEN, argues that this 'masks a practice of stratification which continues to determine children's educational careers by assigning to them an identity defined by an administrative label'. Therefore Ainscow (2000) and Slee (2001) argue that language can potentially act as a vehicle of exclusion. Furthermore, Ballard (2003, p.8) suggests that:

If children are to be genuinely included in the mainstream of education, this cannot involve special education thought and practice. Categorising and naming children as 'special' identifies them as different from others and different in ways that are not valued in present mainstream schools and society

This highlights the considerable dangers of categorising children, greatly hindering inclusion. However, Norwich (2002) presents a counter-argument, criticising the denial of all differences.

The process of categorising children perceived as 'different' reflects functionalist aims. For example, with reference to Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Lloyd and Norris (1999) argue that on the one hand this is a 'label of forgiveness', in that the child is blamed for their 'deviance', shifting the blame away from the role of school or family. On the

other hand, this label results in a clear hierarchical power divide between ‘expert’ and the ‘patient/pupil’, creating a medical discourse that is excluding in that it is difficult for the lay person or other professionals to challenge as they do not have access to this specialised discourse. This argument can also be applied to children with other labels of SEN. This demonstrates the embeddedness of education and labelling in the broader societal context, leading Munn and Lloyd (2005) and Barton and Slee (1998) to question the role of political, social and economic issues in determining the way society treats young people with SEN. This reflects Bronfenbrenner’s theory (1975) that provides insight into the wider circles of influence surrounding a child, such as their peer group, their school or the wider community and the interconnected nature of these aspects. With this understanding, Thomas (1997) proposes that inclusive education is dependent on inclusion within society, requiring a broader societal effort rather than just the role of education.

Continuing this argument about the interconnected nature of education and its functionalist aims, Strangvik (1998) and Oliver (1990) argue that the process of labelling is linked to a need to bring order to society and oppress behaviour that threatens this equilibrium. From this perspective, special education is intended for individuals who fail to conform to societal norms, reflecting what Tomlinson (1982) refers to as structural functionalism. This is evident within Davis’s (2007) cross-cultural comparison of ethnographic data from a number of ‘special’ and ‘mainstream’ schools. In this study, adults tended to focus on ‘difference’ when talking about inclusion, using difference as an excuse to exclude, and demonstrated a failure by the teachers involved to question their own assumptions reflexively. This suggests that where and when educational practitioners continue to focus unreflexively on negative, deficit understandings of SEN, children will carry on being excluded from mainstream schooling.

Dichotomies linked with normalisation are argued to work in a number of ways to maintain the exclusion of some individuals in education. For example, Barton and Slee (1998) and Slee (2001) refer to the market model which encourages competition between schools with the aim of improving behaviour and academic attainment. Therefore, those who do meet societal expectations academically or behaviourally (such as those with learning difficulties) are often excluded from mainstream provision or relegated to segregated specialist provision. With reference to education, Moore *et al.* (1999, p.7) suggest that there is an ‘implicit contract’ between mainstream and specialist provision where regular education supports the specialist provision and in return, specialist provision protects the mainstream from children who might hinder learning and teaching, reflecting functionalist aims. Secondly, Staub (1990) argues

that those in power or majority positions seek to enhance their power by excluding certain individuals, thereby maintaining their privileged status. Tomlinson (1999) argues that in education ‘experts’ and the government adopt policies which protect their own interests whilst legitimating the exclusion others.

The emphasis the medical discourse places on labelling children with SEN also fails to acknowledge and address the complexities of individuals (Bayliss 1998; Crow 2010). The process of categorising maintains a linear and rational understanding of knowledge. This reflects what Foucault (1980) refers to as a ‘regime of power’ in that individuals, who meet the expectations and norms of the dominant discourse, such as with regards to their behaviour, are included in mainstream society whilst ‘othering’ and excluding those individuals who fail to meet these expectations. Both disability and feminist theorists (such as Swain *et al.* 2003) argue that this stems from the perception of ‘difference’ as a threat to existing notions of discipline and normality within society.

One of the dangers of a narrow categorical approach towards ‘difference’ is that it leads to knowledge being constructed as incompatible opposites, such as rational/irrational or subject/object. Usher (1996) argues that these opposites imply differing levels of power maintaining a hierarchical view of knowledge, an understanding that is highly prevalent in feminist and disability theory. With reference to gender, McDowell and Pringle (1992) argue that the dominance of a male discourse has led to the positioning of women into subordinate categories, proving detrimental to their voice and agency. Similarly, but with regards to disability, Finkelstein (2009) states that the narrow societal emphasis on ‘ability’ results in a division between the able and the non-able members of society. Due to the dominance of the able-bodied culture there is no need for them to justify the labels they have created for themselves. For example, public railways are understood to mean railway services for the able-bodied, and the word ‘public’ equals able-bodied. When referring to disabled people, however, a qualifier becomes necessary, for example reference to a space on a train for a wheelchair or a disabled toilet. This example demonstrates the hierarchy of power created by dichotomous thinking, with the dominance of able-bodied people and consequently the marginalisation of the disabled. Although this literature refers to physical disabilities, it also has relevance to children with SEN. Therefore, whilst the positivist discourse continues to rely on reductionist categories, there will always be dichotomies in which individuals who

conform to societal norms are given power, continuing to marginalise individuals perceived as 'different'.

A categorical approach such as that maintained by the positivist discourse implies that there are clear distinctions to be made between people, yet alternative literatures lead me to question whether this is always the case. With regards to the categories 'disabled' and 'non-disabled', Swain and French (2010) suggest that it is not always easy to distinguish as some people are not disabled yet have impairments. Therefore, the dominance of the mainstream discourse and its emphasis on narrow, objective criteria is unhelpful. Alternatively, Thomas (1997) suggests that a child's difficulties in school may stem from a whole multitude of factors, such as ethnicity, background, language or disability, raising questions regarding whether it is appropriate to differentiate between factors. Lastly, Thomas and Glenny (2000) propose that the tendency to prioritise a label may actually distract attention from the possible weaknesses of the school. These examples demonstrate the limitations of the dominant discourse in embracing the complexity of our identities, suggesting these categories may be more of a hindrance than a help. If we apply this to education and the tendency to label children as having SEN, the helpfulness of these categories is questionable.

Ballard (1999) argues the use of terms such as 'special' needs and 'special' education within legislation and organisational arrangements in the education system maintains a categorical discourse in which there is perceived to be two kinds of students and two kinds of education rather than one. Similarly, Corbett (2001) argues that the tendency to associate inclusion with bringing those outside ('special') into mainstream education fails to acknowledge that many mainstream learners can feel excluded by the limited curriculum or hierarchical ethos. This suggests that meeting needs and responding flexibly to diverse learning styles requires a much broader interpretation than reflected within the emphasis on categorisation. It also reflects the concept of 'everyone' in which Hart *et al.* (2004) stress the need to value equally what each child brings to the classroom, working in the interests of all pupils.

Becker (1973) raises the issue of causality and questions whether a label (for example emotional and behavioural difficulties) explains deviance or whether the label actually triggers the behaviour. This reflects what Swain *et al.* (2003) refers to as a self-fulfilling prophecy in that it leads to young people feeling they must conform to these labels. Therefore it is possible that labelling a young person may actually serve to 'abnormalise' behaviour as children start to perceive themselves as 'other.' Hence, Molloy and Latika (2002, p.661)

argue that labelling is ‘counter-productive’ to meeting the needs of young people, highlighting the necessity of considering the limitations of labels in defining the complexity of behaviour and the effect of the label in potentially creating or reinforcing a child’s difficulties.

Moving beyond dichotomous thinking, Collins (1990) proposes an approach based on the ‘interlocking’ nature of identities. This reflects an understanding of the advantages of a non-categorical approach. Within dichotomous thinking there will always be individuals who are marginalised due to overly simplistic criteria therefore, along with Bailey (1998), I consider the approach recommended by Collins to hold considerable potential in creating a society or education system that is more considerate and equitable. I now look at SEN from the social model. Rather than ignoring complexity, Bayliss (1997) argues that the social model presents a far more positive understanding of ‘difference’ in which the complex and chaotic nature of behaviour is embraced and celebrated.

Crow (2010, p.125) highlights the contrasting approach of the social model, stating that it:

shifts the focus from impairment onto disability, using this term to refer to disabling social, environmental and attitudinal barriers rather than lack of ability.

Hence, the social discourse places the emphasis on the role of the environment in socially constructing ‘difference’. This position informed the definition created by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS 1976, p.14), a turning point for societal attitudes towards ‘difference’ in which the causative factors of disability were explained as:

In our view, it is society in which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairment by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society. Thus we define impairment as lacking part or all of a limb, organ or mechanism of the body; and disability as the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities.

Although this definition refers to individuals with physical difficulties, it can also be related to other forms of ‘difference’ such as autism, suggesting that it is society that serves to

disable people. This is further highlighted by Light (2010), who convincingly describes the causative factors of disability as attitudinal, physical and communicational barriers, reflecting the nature and workings of society rather than personal individual attributes.

Despite the increasing societal awareness of the role of the environment in constructing 'difference', Lindsay (2003, p.5) argues that this discourse is often 'illogical' and 'unhelpful', calling for society to consider the child's strengths and difficulties alongside environmental factors. This combination underpins Shakespeare's (2006) 'interactionist' stance, emphasising the interlinking nature of environmental and individualised causes of 'difference'. Crow (2010) suggests that a failure to take into account this interaction and choosing to ignore individualised causes of impairment may prove detrimental, leading to many of the issues surrounding an impairment becoming a taboo subject and resulting in a whole new set of constraints on self-expression. Similarly, Low (2006, p.111) argues that the role of the child is still crucial to determining inclusive practice, arguing for:

a recognition that inclusion is a two-way street which requires the disabled person to come halfway to meet society at the same time as requiring society to make its maximum possible accommodation to him.

This raises questions regarding to what extent inclusion is dependent on the individual or the environment, and who is responsible for this change. A similar view is held by Stangvik (1998, p.148), who describes disability as a 'negotiated social practice' as the person is both constructed and constructing. Hence, Thomas (1999, p.43) proposed the concept of 'impairment effects' to refer to restrictions of activity associated with being impaired, but which are not a disability in that they have nothing to do with the unequal power relations between disabled and non-disabled people. This suggests that the tendency to prioritise either the innate impairment or the effect of the environment is far too simplistic, hence in this study I focus on both dimensions, providing a richer, more nuanced understanding of the social interactions and belonging of the participants.

The theory discussed above is highly relevant to inclusive education as inclusion is underpinned by an understanding of the key role of schools in adapting their practice to best meet the needs of children (see section 2.6). Yet the dominance of the medicalised, deficit discourse and the tendency to label children's whose behaviour fails to conform to norms entirely undermines the purpose of inclusion, tensions Campbell (2002) and Thomas (1997) expose. Similarly, reflecting the conservative, anti-exclusionary model, Mithaug (1998, p.8)

argues that to be included in mainstream education is dependent on ‘the responsible conduct of the individual’, requiring that individuals ‘be of good character’ and be meritocratic in the rewards that they receive through inclusion. Therefore this is about conforming to societal norms, rather than embracing and celebrating diversity as is the intention with inclusive education.

Having discussed the contradictory nature of medicalised understandings of SEN with the principles of inclusive education, in the next section I focus on inclusion at school level, exploring the role of school ethos, the attitudes and roles of practitioners and approaches to meeting the diversity of needs.

### *2.8 The role of practitioners in meeting children’s social needs*

Underpinning much of education is an emphasis on the role of practitioners in correcting deviance and normalising children’s behaviour that conflicts with the values of inclusion and embracing diversity (Baker and Donnelly 2001; Davis 2007). This was evident in a study by Holt (2004b, p.5) in which one of the practitioners, whilst talking about one pupil, stated that, ‘The other children do not want to play with Nelson because he has not got very good social skills’. Davis and Watson (2001) showed how detrimental this kind of view was in alienating a child from their peers and making them an easy target for bullying. In their study one of the participants (Becky) was continuously bullied at the bus stop, and on her way to and from school. This occurred because the other children did not see her as ‘normal’, and because the teachers expected Becky to change her behaviour, reinforcing the bullies’ perspective. As children receive powerful messages about belonging in the larger environment, The Bernard van Leer Foundation (2008), Clinton (2008) and Wagner (2008) argue the need for education to respect all individuals and embrace diversity. By identifying children’s strengths and nurturing them and by honouring children’s differences as something to value, education is strengthening children’s sense of belonging. A sense of belonging is about a feeling of ‘us’ within a classroom. This community is not built on a supposed sameness but on acceptance and respect for differences.

Carrington (1999), Corbett (1999), and Groom and Rose (2005) argue that a positive whole-school ethos is key to supporting the inclusion of children with SEN. Visser (2000, p.8) refers to the term 'caring schools' to describe an ethos in which:

Pupils are seen as part of a community which the school serves; as such they were valued by staff in all their diversity and individuality. Their emotional needs are recognised and addressed, often by staff spending time listening to what pupils have to say. Staff also show this care by setting achievable high standards in behaviour and learning, whilst being tolerant and forgiving of lapses by pupils. Caring is not a soft option, misbehaviour needs to be met 'head on', never avoided, but it is the 'deed' which is confronted not the person.

The excerpt above illustrates an ethos in which staff embrace and celebrate diversity, are willing to listen to young people and treat them with respect, tolerance and consideration. It reflects the need for a broader, transformative, whole school approach, addressing the wide range of needs of young people with SEBD and moving beyond an emphasis on labels to valuing each child as an equal. Schaps and Lewis (1999) worked with 12 elementary schools across the United States. Each school was involved in the Child Development Project, a study which focused on strengthening the sense of belonging among pupils. They found that when only half or fewer of the teachers changed their classroom practices, the improvement in children's sense of belonging and community was much less than when the majority of teachers did so. This illustrates a quandary between the importance of giving teachers freedom and a voluntary commitment to reform but the necessity of all practitioners following this reform if it is to succeed and the results are to benefit young people.

However, despite the need for a whole school ethos which embraces diversity, this is hindered by the dominance of an achievement discourse and narrow perceptions of what constitutes achievement (Dyson *et al.* 2004; Florian *et al.* 2004). This is further highlighted by Black-Hawkins *et al.* (2007), who suggest that schools often resist pressures to become more inclusive because they are concerned that this will have a negative effect on academic achievement. An example of where this conflicting discourse is evident is Cleves Primary School, a mainstream school that also caters for children with profound multiple learning difficulties and places a great emphasis on children's holistic well-being. Despite the inclusionary emphasis of this provision, Ofsted (2006) deemed this school as only satisfactory, creating conflicting tensions. Similarly, research by Davis and Watson (2001)



found that pressure to meet national targets maintained the exclusion of children with SEN from mainstream schools. For example, one head teacher of a mainstream school involved in this study openly stated that they could only have 15 per cent of children with a learning difficulty in any year if he was to meet his national targets. Due to tensions like these, Corbett (1999) argues that definitions of inclusive education need to be located within the culture of schools if they are to have any meaning beyond the purely abstract.

Moving beyond dominant understandings of achievement as something that can easily be measured through examinations, Munn (2000) proposes a very different, broader understanding. She suggests that practitioners should promote achievement in three core areas: academic attainment; achievements beyond cognitive intellect; and a sense of social responsibility. This position on the importance of embracing the diversity of achievements and strengths is similar to my own view: that it is essential to value all individuals for whom they are. Historically, Tonnies' (1855/1981) theory suggests that if the only reason children attend school is because of the individualised interest of achievement, known as *Gesellschaft*, it is probable that education will maintain the binary opposites of inclusion/exclusion or normal/abnormal, as there will always be children who do not perform well in examinations. In contrast, if the role of education is about *Gemeinschaft*, relating to pupils' sense of belonging and community, these dichotomies are less evident due to the greater acceptance of diversity.

Research highlights the importance of schools' focusing on the holistic needs of the child rather than prioritising academic achievement. Schaps *et al.* (2004, p.190) calls for schools to be a *caring community of learners*, reflecting:

the prevalence of positive relationships, norms and values within a school...exists when the full range of students experienced themselves as valued, contributing, influential members of a classroom or school that they perceive is dedicated to the welfare and growth of all its members.

This reflects an understanding of positive social relations. Furthermore, Carrington and Robinson (2006, p.325) maintain that 'School communities that value and respect members and provide a safe learning environment for everyone to express their views, build awareness and develop capabilities together'. Baker *et al.* (1997, p.587) advocate a relational approach to school reform through 'improving the social context at school so that caring connections to others and to meaningful academic work is fostered'. Such community-oriented schools focus

on the quality of the relationships between students, teachers, parents and the wider community, as well as on educational achievement, and are structured to promote a sense of belonging and commitment to achieve academic goals. Similarly, reflecting an understanding of the importance of children experiencing a sense of connectedness (another name for belonging), Berman (1997) called for pedagogy of belonging. He advised that classroom practices and a proper school climate existed for the primary purpose of developing within the individual a sense of self and a sense of connectedness with others. This emphasis on social relations is a key element of inclusion. For example, Farrell (2000) stresses that inclusive education is about each and every child being valued for who they are and playing an active role in their school community. These definitions have in common an understanding of the importance of social and emotional needs, in which all young people are respected, valued and listened to, embracing and celebrating diversity. Rogers (2007, p.59) highlights the necessity of this, arguing that without this understanding inclusive education may merely create an 'illusion of an unfragmented homogenous group', continuing to maintain or even worse reinforce social exclusion for some children.

Central to inclusion are the views and attitudes held by practitioners regarding SEN and disability, as their behaviour and perceptions are crucial if they are to challenge discriminatory attitudes (Mittler 2000; Barton 2010; O'Brien 2000). Research shows the variation in practitioner attitudes towards inclusion and SEN, for example, Avramidis and Norwich (2002) found that teachers' opinions were strongly influenced by the nature and severity of the disabling condition presented to them and less by teacher-related characteristics. Other aspects relating to the educational environment, such as the availability of human support, were also found to be key characteristics associated with attitudes to inclusion. Earlier, Chazen (1994) undertook a review of literature surrounding the perceptions of mainstream practitioners to different kinds of emotional and behavioural difficulties in the classroom and concluded that many mainstream teachers had negative perceptions of, and limited tolerance for, problem behaviour.

Lloyd (2005, p.140) highlights the necessity of establishing a strong rapport between young people with EBD and practitioners for inclusion to be successful. Hence, the role of the practitioner is to provide support which is, 'based on equitable, non-judgemental, genuine relationships, rather than in highly professionalised interventions'. Furthermore, following research into the perspectives of two teenage girls towards their education, Beattie (2007) suggests that their strong sense of belonging was largely attributed to the supportive

classroom interaction between these girls and their teacher, demonstrating the importance of this relationship. However, Cooper (1999) suggests that the challenging behaviour of a young person can lead to the young person becoming an object of dislike and resentment to others around them. This can then become internalised and unwittingly individuals may co-operate with this, maintaining and increasing this challenging behaviour and negative perceptions of themselves.

The teacher–pupil relationship is considered crucial; Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests that before children can feel a sense of connectedness (or belonging – a key dimension of inclusion) with the larger school community they must first develop an attachment to the teacher. Cooper (1999) argues that this in turn fosters positive relationships between students. Pavri and Monda-Amaya (2001) reported on the experiences of thirty children with SEN who attended mainstream schools in the United States. The findings showed that children who perceived their social relationships with adults and peers as being supportive reported having a positive self-concept and belonging in their community, whereas a lack of perceived support was said to lead to lower social competence and feelings of loneliness. Such research indicates the essential role of the practitioner in determining the belonging of children.

Research by Wise (1999) in southern England into the experiences of teenagers with SEBD suggested that the behaviour of these pupils were significantly influenced by the way in which teachers and professionals interacted and built relationships with them on a day-to-day basis. Many pupils wanted teachers to understand them as individuals, to get to know them and to listen to them, and some felt that teachers did not have the time or did not want to listen to them, resulting in teachers misunderstanding situations. This implies a need to move away from traditional power inequalities between the teacher and pupil and to give young people the opportunity to talk and be listened to and taken seriously. In a study by Martin (2011), teenagers at a pupil referral unit were asked to think back on their previous experiences of mainstream schools. A key finding was the lack of support for vulnerable pupils. Many participants reported that there was no-one they felt they could talk to at school.

Research into the educational experiences of school non-attenders by Davies and Lee (2006) showed that the young people considered practitioner–pupil relations, rather than the subjects individual teachers taught, to be central to whether or not they attended school. The young people highlighted the importance of staff treating them with ‘mutual respect’ and in an ‘adult fashion’. Schaps and Lewis (1999), however, argue that despite an increasing emphasis

on young people having greater autonomy and independence, there is a danger that teachers can go too far in withholding too much of their own thinking, being reluctant to confront or control unacceptable attitudes or behaviour.

Despite the number of studies that show the key role of practitioners in determining inclusion (as discussed previously), unfortunately some research suggests that children with SEN are often treated unkindly by their practitioners, maintaining negative perceptions of 'difference'. Nichols (2008) and also McMaugh (2011) reported a number of students used terms like 'being hassled' or 'picked on' to describe relations with teachers, and interestingly students with learning disabilities were found to be the most vulnerable to personal denigration. Similarly, in a study by Nind *et al.* (2011, p.7), one participant with SEBD (Bella) described her relationship with her former school staff as:

my head teacher hated me, and so did the deputy. And basically, all the teachers hated me, which you know, wasn't very nice. So I didn't go to school. I didn't have a tutor because no-one wanted me. [half-hearted laugh]

Leadbetter and Leadbetter (1993) argue that challenging behaviour can be perceived by practitioners as a threat to their own competence in the classroom and their ability to achieve their teaching goals for themselves and their pupils. Therefore, this may partly explain these negative interactions between practitioners and young people with SEBD. However, Chazen (1994) found when practitioners felt part of a supportive school system and they received help on a personal basis and appropriate resources, this boosted their morale leading to more positive attitudes towards meeting diverse needs.

Central to inclusion, is the need for practitioners to listen to the views of young people and adopt a reflexive approach. This is emphasised by Ainscow *et al.* (1999) who stress the invaluable insights pupils have with regards to making schools more inclusive, demonstrating the need to value the voices of young people. Similarly, in a study by Beattie (2007, p.14) one participant explained:

I came to this school originally because I was at a mainstream school (for a year and a week) and I hated everything about it. I was used to being in a smaller group atmosphere and having good teachers that cared about how you were doing. At my other (high school) none of that was happening. One of the guidance counsellors told me to check out this school and when I came here . . . right away, I felt comfortable.

People were really friendly, and so I decided that this is where I was going to come. The students are more involved in what happens in this school, and we make a lot of decisions for the school. I think the more we're involved in it the more we benefit from the school. It helps for a lot of people who have had a hard time socially to come to this school.

Furthermore, Davis (2007) suggests that few adults in schools question the processes and social contexts in which they construct notions of difference, demonstrating the need for greater emphasis on practitioner reflection. Skrtic (1991) describes this way of thinking as 'adhocracy', an understanding that is further emphasised by Ainscow (2000, p.41) who argues that:

Inclusive education is really a process of people enquiring into their own context to see how it can be developed and it is a process of growth. It is a social process which engages people in trying to make sense of that experience and helping one another to question their experience and their context to see how things can be moved forward.

This illustrates the benefits of practitioner reflection in facilitating inclusive practice. With regards to EBD, Lloyd (2005) highlights the importance of this approach in not only increasing our understanding of problem behaviour and how it is constructed, produced and labelled, but also the deconstruction of school practices contributing to this. This recognises behaviour as chaotic and non-linear and moves beyond medicalised deficit thinking, supporting the development of approaches that meet even the most diverse and problematic needs of young people. Bayliss (1998) similarly suggests that reflexive thinking is essential in addressing the complexities surrounding young people and education, supporting the development of an inclusive system.

However, despite the potential benefits of reflexive thinking, Tubbs (2000) questions the usefulness of this approach. Tubbs (2000) suggests that reflexive thinking leads to power inequalities as the practitioner imposes an order on students, presenting conflict with the need to listen to pupils, valuing and respecting their attitudes. Due to these contentions, Tubbs (2000) calls for practitioners to move beyond reflection to focus instead on 'comprehensive' thinking, providing a learning situation based on a more subjective approach in which neither the teacher nor the learner dominates the learning situation. I question the achievability of this due to the teacher/pupil power relations and group dynamics and the inevitable need for

somebody to take control in order to drive the group forward. Alternatively, Hart (1996) advocates 'innovative thinking', suggesting that the agenda of teaching and reflection are so entwined that they should not be separated. Instead, she argues, research should be considered as simply an extension of practice, an application of existing skills and expertise under new circumstances designed to facilitate reflection in particular ways.

Groom and Rose (2005) argue that teaching assistants (TAs) are often the staff members who work closest with young people with SEBD and therefore key in determining inclusion. Research by Blatchford *et al.* (2012) reported that the use TAs can be helpful to inclusion, such as doing jobs for teachers or dealing with 'off-task' behaviour. Similarly, a study by Lewis *et al.* (2006) found little evidence that children felt stigmatised with the help they received. In research by Frazer and Meadows (2008, p.354) one child explained her relationship with her TA as:

She feels like a friend as well. We don't feel embarrassed to go up to her; I think everyone in our class, it would be safe to say, thinks Miss Hart isn't there to teach us, she's there as a friend.

Some studies suggest that these staff may actually hinder inclusion rather than support the process (Davis and Watson 2001; Lindsay 2007). One of the older girls in Connors and Stalker's (2007) study explained how she was annoyed that her special needs assistant would often take her to the younger children's playground at break times, rather than letting her mix with people of her own age. Another participant spoke of how her special needs assistant would take her to the nursery class at lunchtimes because the assistant was friendly with the nursery staff. These examples highlight the detrimental role teaching assistants can have, sometimes hindering inclusion for young people.

This literature review shows that we already know much about the role of the practitioner in supporting inclusion, especially the importance of practitioners establishing a close rapport with children, listening to young people and treating them fairly. However, we know less about the role of interventionist approaches in supporting the social dimensions of inclusion, especially in schools in the UK. I now discuss two different interventions, exploring the affordances of resource base provision and nurture groups in meeting the social needs of children.

## *2.9 The role of interventionist approaches to meeting social needs*

Resource bases within mainstream schools have often been used as a way of providing specialist help for children with SEN whilst giving potential opportunities for inclusion during formal or/and informal parts of the school day. The research relating to this type of provision presents a mixed picture regarding children's experiences of inclusion and their social experiences. In a study by Lewis *et al.* (2006) in which participants reflected on the benefits of their move from a special school to a resource base within a mainstream school, participants spoke of the chances it gave to be with people their own age and have the opportunity to gain the right qualifications. Greenstein (2013) undertook research in a 'unit' within a secondary school. This study was significant in that it showed on the one hand that the young people who attended the specialist provision felt a strong sense of belonging in the unit, but that on the other hand during the rest of the school they experienced considerable bullying, highlighting the complexities of this type of provision.

Belanger's (2000) ethnographic study of a resource base within a primary school showed that children's inclusion in mainstream lessons was not a right, but a process of constant negotiation by the specialist staff. Therefore, although resource base provision is intended to aid inclusion into mainstream schooling, in practice it can create barriers, adding to the complexity of the inclusion/exclusion debate. Wilde and Avramidis (2011) drew on data gathered through interviews with teachers in seven primary schools in the north of England. One teacher who worked in a school with a resource centre explained that she often forgot to include children from the resource centre in her lesson plans as these children were irregular members of the class. Another teacher explained that accommodating children from the resource centre in ordinary lessons on a part-time basis often resulted in disruption of class-based projects. Underpinning these two findings is a clear distinction between 'us', as the mainstream, and 'them', as the resource centre. This highlights the need to engage with issues of power and wider social structures that maintain the exclusion of pupils considered 'different'.

In other ways an interventionist approach has been found to be helpful. For example, Ohl *et al.* (2008) reported on the effectiveness of a three-year intervention called The Pyramid Club. This is a 10-week programme in which children attend a once a week after school club, with the purpose of building confidence, encouraging social skills and sense of belonging. Another intervention is nurture groups which were initially established in the Inner London Education

Authority in 1970 by educational psychologist Marjorie Boxall in response to the growing number of children unable to function at an age-appropriate level in school (Bennathan 1997). This reflected an understanding that if the child has not learnt the behaviour, skills or attitudes appropriate to his/her age, and then the adults must meet them at the level they have reached and offer the help and encouragement that will enable the child to move on towards acceptable standards. This reflects socio-cultural theory (such as Maslow 1970), and Vygotskian (1987) understandings based on the premise that cognitive strategies in learning can be seen in terms of the internalisation of functions first experienced in social interaction. The role of the practitioner is to provide direct support to individuals, providing cues and cognitive 'scaffolding' (Bruner 1978) to assist in using their existing knowledge as means of acquiring new knowledge and understanding.

More recently, the use of nurture groups has been advocated in government policy as a way of meeting the needs of young people with SEBD (for example DfEE 1998; DfES 2004) and according to Colley (2009) there are now more than a thousand nurture groups in the UK. Although schools adapt and tailor the nurture group approach to fit in with the needs of their pupils and staff, crucially these groups offer a practical resource that promotes the social, emotional and educational development of pupils by combining features of a caring home environment with formal curricular demands. Cooper (2004) explains that this provides a bridge to permanent full-time placement in mainstream classrooms.

A number of studies show the effectiveness of this intervention in improving social skills and behaviour of young people, reducing school exclusion (Cooper and Whitebread 2007; Ofsted 2011b). Garner and Thomas (2011) found that attending a nurture group led to children having greater self-esteem in relation to social situations and to achieving learning, more independence and increased motivation in school. These children were more confident, happy and seemed to enjoy school much more. Pivotal to the effectiveness this intervention was the role of nurture staff in identifying and meeting children's physiological, social, emotional and learning needs. Furthermore, Sanders (2007) found that the success of nurture groups was also dependent on a whole-school approach.

Despite the considerable strengths of nurture groups, research findings highlighted some difficulties in relocating children in their mainstream classrooms after a prolonged period in the nurture group. Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) found that pupils 'attach themselves' to their nurture group rather than to their mainstream classroom. This highlights a concern that for



some children this intervention may create dependency that negatively impacts on their inclusion in their mainstream classroom, maintaining and reinforcing exclusion. Bishop and Swain (2000) and Bailey (2007) highlight some of the contentions surrounding this intervention, arguing that it merely serves to reinforce the dominant discourse. In particular, underpinning the intervention is an inherently pathological view of young people and their families. They argue that, although the focus is on growth not pathology, this growth is conceptualised based on 'normal development', 'normal parenting', or 'normal learning experiences'. Therefore, despite claims of non-pathology, this conceptualisation of the need for nurture in the face of dysfunctional families and future disaster is illustrative of the adoption of the normal/pathological duality.

There are also questions about whether the nurture principles should be reflected in whole school practice rather than a small intervention based on segregation and withdrawal. Researchers such as O'Connor and Colwell (2002) argue the importance of a whole school nurturing approach to provide all children with the experiences and opportunities to develop into fully functioning individuals within a mainstream setting. Similarly, Lucas (1999) suggests that when the theory that underpins nurture groups is applied to the whole school, teaching and learning become more effective for all children and morale increases. Creating a nurturing school will support the aims of the National Curriculum, but in the broadest sense, striving to be ever more inclusive, potentially providing an alternative to practitioners who are concerned about the emotional development of children.

Maintaining an interventionist approach, Cambra and Silvestre (2003) and Barrett and Randall (2004) highlight the benefits of interventions such as social skills training in supporting the inclusion and therefore belonging and social interaction of children. Schemes such as the North American Circle of Friends Approach involve establishing a friendship circle around the focus child. Whitaker *et al.* (1998) reported on the impact of this method on the behaviour and social interaction of seven children with autism. Their evaluation of this approach showed significant within-child benefits, such as improved levels of social integration, higher levels of peer contact and reduction in anxiety. This intervention also benefited the children who formed the 'circle' of friends, such as developing greater empathy and understanding towards perceived 'difference'. These findings were echoed in a study conducted by Kalyva and Avramidis (2005) who found that the Circle of Friends Approach was effective in improving a child's ability to communicate and therefore their social skills.

## 2.10 The role of peers in supporting inclusion

Lastly, research shows the important role of peers in supporting inclusion. For example in a study by Allan (1997, p.187) children provided in-depth insights into their attitudes towards peers with SEN. In this study peers stated:

J. We like to be with them [meaning their peers with SEN], help them what we can.

D. Help them to get better every day.

M. So that they will live up to, near enough, our standards, because near enough they need to go.

D. And also the feeling that you're actually doing something.

J. For other people.

D. Instead of just for your pleasure. Because they're getting a lot of pleasure out of it as well. . . Also, it's good experience for in later life, if there's someone in your job, if there's someone, like Brian, with Down's syndrome comes and works with you, it's good experience because you kind of know what to expect.

Giangreco *et al.* (2010) argue that pupils have a key role to play in supporting the inclusion of children with SEN. This understanding was evident in research by Swinson *et al.* (2003) which involved a group of 12 pupils from a specialist school for young people with SEBD. Supported by a specialist teacher and two educational support assistants, these young people were transferred to a mainstream comprehensive school and their behaviour was monitored. Findings showed that a change in school setting had a major influence on the behaviour of the pupils with SEBD and that in particular the behaviour of the rest of the pupils in the class appeared to be a key factor. Therefore, the attitudes of peers towards 'difference' were crucial in determining inclusion. These findings illustrate Becker's (1973) argument regarding deviance as a collective action in that it is believed that the way an individual behaves is linked with the behaviour of others. This example demonstrates the influence of peers on behaviour and consequently the counter-productive role of segregating young people, revealing the potential gains of inclusive education for young people who exhibit challenging behaviour.

Underpinning the actions of peers is embedded discourses surrounding SEN and difference. For example, Allan (1999) argues that a child's actions towards a pupil with SEN varies

between the medical, charity and rights discourses. Similarly, Devine and Kelly (2006, p.129) explain that:

The dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are intertwined with concepts of normality and otherness.... Children, no less than adults, draw on these discourses of difference, interpreting their interaction with others on the basis of their perceived normality or otherness with respect to dominant norms.

With reference to children in care in Ireland, Emond (2012) argued a similar point, describing these comparisons of sameness or difference as the ‘politics of recognition’.

Alongside my focus on social relations, belonging and inclusion, I have maintained a methodological focus on the affordances of visual methods in supporting the voices of participants and generating rich insights into children’s social experiences. This is in contrast to sociometric approaches (Child and Nind 2012). In the next section I discuss different conceptualisations of voice.

### *2.11 What is participant voice?*

The concept of participant voice is important in qualitative research, especially participatory and emancipatory studies and is central within my research. Many similar terms are used synonymously in the literature, such as ‘student voice’ (Giroux, 1986; Orner 2002; Fielding 2004), ‘pupil voice’ (Lewis and porter 2007) and ‘learner voice’ (Facer 2008). Tangen (2008) argues that interest in this concept has grown for legislative, political, economic, and theoretical reasons. Britzman (1989, p.40) explains that:

The concept of voice spans literal, metaphorical, and political terrains: in its literal sense, voice represents the speech and perspectives of the speaker; metaphorically, voice spans inflection, tone, accent, style, and the qualities and feelings conveyed by the speaker's words; and politically, a commitment to voice attests to the right of speaking and being represented.

Arnot *et al.* (2004) extended the voice metaphor to think about voice in terms of ‘volume’ and to which voice is constructed ahead of individuals. They emphasise the extent to which being heard relies on being able to express oneself in an already acceptable style and language, and to analyse those voices that are most and least heard, by whom. Morris (1987,

p.412) suggests that the use of the terms agency and voice refer to the ability of individuals to 'shape and control one's own life', whilst Hadfield and Haw (2001) describe voice as a form of authority or way of exercising power.

Levin (2000) and Rudd (2007) explain that conceptualisations of voice have strong links with educational change and reform, in which young people are apparently valued for their insider perspectives, evident in their use of the term 'expert witnesses' (Flutter and Rudduck 2004, p. 4). MacBeath *et al.* (2006) used pupil voice research as a form of remediation for pupil disengagement and low self-esteem in which learner consultation was aimed at improving pupil achievements and commitment to learning. There are a number of studies which research the use of student councils as a way of supporting pupil voice (May 2005; Whitty and Wisby 2007; Griebler and Nowak 2012).

This concept of voice has been enacted internationally in a variety of ways. Mitra (2001) reported on the United States, in which student voice has been linked with the need to promote diversity and break down class and racial barriers. Fielding and Prieto (2002) describe how, in Chile, secondary students and university researchers co-investigated and planned innovative pedagogies and curriculum materials to develop democracy in education. Flutter (2007) report on how the government in Denmark prioritised student voice as a vehicle for creating democratic schools.

There are different uses of voice. Hadfield and Haw (2001) define them as:

**Authoritative** - This type of 'voice' is intended to be representative of a particular group of young people, of varying sizes.

**Critical** – This type of voice is often about challenging existing policies, practices and views or stereotypes of a group or issue. It is more concerned with presenting unheard or alternative views to a specific audience.

**Therapeutic** - This type of voice validates and supports speakers' own difficult experiences, and suggests ways of coping with similar problems faced by others.

Alternatively, Thomson and Gunter (2005) identify student voice work as having three distinct levels or approaches – consultation (pupils are consulted on a matter and it may or may not have an impact or an outcome); pupil school evaluation or lastly students become researchers in their own right.

The UNCRC (1989; 1991) presents children as individuals in their own right, as social actors, who can form and express opinions, participate in decision-making processes and influence solutions. Most notably Article 12 states that:

governments and nations shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Superficially, this declaration promotes the voices of children in decision-making, yet the emphasis it places on capability, age and maturity in determining participation, raises questions about the commitment of policy makers towards everyone's voice. Furthermore, with reference to pupil consultation, Arnot and Reay (2007, p.311) state that 'the egalitarian mythology of voice as a concept provides a valuable legitimating tool for any government keen to shift attention away from increasingly aggravated social inequalities'. This suggests that knowledge production and voice work in particular ways, either for or against the status quo as Griffiths (1998) and Lather (2009) also emphasise. Although Arnot and Reay are referring to pupil consultation, their argument is also highly relevant to participant voice in research.

Barton (1997) and Lindsay (2003) stress the importance of paying critical attention to what voices we hear and how we hear them, highlighting what Greene (2009) describes as the partial and plural nature of voice. Voice can be equated with identity politics, such as in concerns with hearing women's voices. Edwards and Ribbons (1998) and Alcoff (2009) highlight the dangers of hierarchical ways of thinking, arguing that in speaking across differences such as gender, researchers and policy makers may overlook important similarities and fail to take into account the constant interaction that goes on between categories. Similarly, Hadfield and Haw (2001) stress the dangers in categorising people and matching them up with 'similar' young people, as this can in itself become a very subtle form of silencing by universalising the experience of some to a group which fails grasp the uniqueness of individual experiences.

Fundamental to the emphasis on voice, is an understanding of rights, particularly the rights of young people to be listened to (Ashby 2011; Britzman 1989). However, James *et al* (1998) and Farrell (2000) state that this is often hindered by societal perceptions of the child. In

particular, Danby and Farrell (2004) and Morrow (2005) stress the dominance of developmental perspectives of childhood, emphasising the child's vulnerability and incompetence. As a result of these understandings, O'Brien and Moules (2007) argue that children are positioned into the categories of 'at risk', 'incomplete' or 'not yet mature'. Furthermore, Barnes (1991) and Allen (2008) argue that this legitimises adult power, maintaining discursive practices such as the need for parental consent to take part in research which leads to the privileging of certain voices over others. Holland *et al.* (2008) suggest that research privileges children who are white or middle class, whilst Davis (2007) suggests that society privileges those who are emotionally literate over those who are less amenable.

Oliver (1996), Acker *et al.* (2001) and Mazzei and Jackson (2008, 2009) argue that the positivist discourse portrays understandings of voice as a transparent, singular 'truth', objectifying this as something that can simply be handed down to others. Grover (2004) similarly argues that voice is conceptualised as something someone can 'have' or that is enabled, promoted or 'given' by the 'adult researcher', assuming a sense of neutrality. Prosser and Loxley (2008) call for agency to be perceived as a continuum of varying levels, rather than an 'either-or' scenario. This argument is followed in Hart's (1997) Ladder of Participation which delineates the varying levels of voice and agency within research, from manipulation, decoration and tokenism to a far more consultative and child initiated approach. Here the concepts of agency and voice are closely intertwined. Alcoff (1995), Denzin (1995) and Flick (2002) argue, though, that overly simplistic understandings of voice deny the plural, situated and contextual nature of this concept. For example, Gray (2007), Claiborne *et al.* (2008) and Alcoff (2009) suggest that voice is determined by the geographical, historical and cultural position of the person.

Central to many conceptualisations of voice is an assumption that voice refers to verbal communication. Orner (1992, p.79) suggests that researchers assume voice must be a 'fully conscious, fully speaking, "unique, fixed and coherent self"'. However, this tendency to privilege spoken voice excludes those individuals who do not speak or for whom speech is not always reliable. Instead, DeVault (1999), Schofield (2005) and Lather (2009) call for a broader conceptualisation of voice, or as Mazzei (2009, p. 3) puts it, 'listening in the cracks'. This refers to the need to hear all aspects of interaction, from the words spoken — or typed — to the gestures and silences. Holland *et al.* (2008, p. 19) argue the importance of this in their research: 'by enabling young people to choose *how* they wish to communicate with us,

we recognise them as social actors and begin to move our practice away from adult-centric processes’.

Entwined with understandings of participant voice is an awareness of the importance of taking into account resistant behaviours. Giroux (1983) and MacLure *et al.* (2010) suggest that behaviours should not be rejected, as these behaviours are informed, emerging from the experiences of the excluded and their reactions to this oppression (a form of voice perhaps). Furthermore Ellsworth (1989) describes how some situations are discursively dangerous. Sometimes it is not safe to speak. Piper and Frankham (2007) therefore, stress the importance of engaging in the epistemological and methodological difficulties surrounding voice. Lather (2007) states that as the act of speaking is a mutually constitutive activity, this also requires constitutive listening; demonstrating the need for the act of giving voice to be distinguished from the reception the voice receives. Having introduced different conceptualisations of participant voice, I next discuss different approaches to supporting participant voice and foregrounding the views of children in research.

With regards to approaches to supporting voice Boyden and Ennew (1997) or Kellett (2005) for example, sought to extend the idea of giving children voice to the whole research process, whereas others have included children’s voice among and in dialogue with other voices. Children’s voices are given prominence in some participatory methods designed to elicit them (for example Allen 2008). Carrington *et al.* (2007), for example stress the invaluable role of student insights into inclusion in helping to break down assumptions, values and meanings that block progress to achieving more socially just schools. Children’s voices can be found equally in good qualitative research (Allan 1997; Alderson and Goodley 1999; Biklen 2000; Humphrey and Lewis 2008).

## *2.12 Concluding remarks*

Along with Frederickson *et al.* (2007), my search for literature surrounding the social relations and belonging of children attending schools in the UK found a shortage of studies. There is even less research focusing children with SEN and their social experiences (Prince and Hadwin 2013). The existing studies mostly prioritise the quantitative method of sociometrics which fails to prioritise participant voice or show the fluid and messy nature of social relations or the aspects of educational practice that support or hinder these social relations and belonging. Therefore, my research set out to provide rich insights into not only

the complexities of belonging and social relations but also the dimensions of educational practice that support these social relations and therefore inclusion.





## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### *3.1 Research aims and questions*

I sought to explore the social experiences of children in two primary schools that provided different, additional support for children with social difficulties. The specific focus was on five boys identified by staff as experiencing social difficulties. I investigated *how* these boys were treated by peers (and their attitudes towards this), their sense of belonging, and also *why* this was the case, investigating the teaching practices and wider school policies that may have been helpful or detrimental in supporting these social experiences. My research questions were:

1. What are participants' social experiences and sense of belonging during both formal (lesson time) and informal (breaks and lunchtime) parts of the school day?
2. What teaching strategies and wider school practices support or inhibit the positive social experiences and sense of belonging of participants?
3. How can the visual be used to illuminate the social experiences and belonging of participants?

I adopted an ethnographic approach alongside visual methods. I first explain my decision to use an ethnographic approach, before introducing my rationale for using visual methods.

### *3.2 Ethnography*

I decided to do a children's ethnography as I was interested in children's understanding of their experiences and therefore all my ethnographic observations and interviewing was centred around them. This limited the range of perspectives captured, but deepened the research in terms of its child-focus. I did not want to purely look at the children through the lens of other adults, though obviously, I could not exclude my own adult lens.

Many researchers have used ethnography to investigate peer cultures and identity within education (e.g. Hey 1997; Corsaro 2005; Delamont 2009). Ethnographies are conceptualised

in a number of different ways. For example, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) describe this approach as a particular method or set of methods in which the researcher, over an extended period of time, observes, listens and collects data to provide insights into people's daily lives. Similarly, Atkinson and Hammersley (1994, p. 248) define ethnography as involving:

... a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular phenomena, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them; a tendency to work primarily with 'unstructured data', that is, data have not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories; investigation of a small number of cases, perhaps just one case, in detail ... Analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most.

Alternatively, reflecting a greater understanding of the influence of discourse, Brewer (2000) draws attention to the dichotomy between method (as a collection of methods) and methodology (theoretical and philosophical orientations) and calls for research to be conceptualised as a 'big ethnography', a concept which encompasses both the method and methodology. However, my interpretation of ethnography is most similar to that of Pink (2007, p.22):

... a methodology, as an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing culture and society that informs and is informed by sets of different agendas and theoretical principles. Rather than a method for the collection of data, ethnography is a process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture, and individuals) that is based on ethnographer's own experiences. It does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers' experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced.

This definition illustrates the underlying principles that informed my research: a commitment to providing an authentic, contextualised and in-depth insight into the social experiences and belonging of the participating children. As with Pink, my research reflected an understanding of ethnography as a social process of creating and representing knowledge and strongly linked with my own experiences and identities.

My decision to use ethnography reflected a determination to support the voices of young people, following an argument by James (2001, p.246) who suggested that:

ethnography permits ...a view of children as competent interpreters of the social world. This involves a shift from seeing children as simply the raw and un-initiated recruits of the social world to seeing them as making a contribution to it.

Emond (2005) argues a similar point, highlighting the potentially empowering nature of ethnography for children and argues that this approach enables the child to decide how the researcher is included in their interactions. This reflects my own central value position that the experiences of all human beings are valid and must not be excluded from our understanding. I was however, very aware of the potential of my role in hindering the children's voices and therefore invested considerable time in establishing a close rapport with participants (as I discuss later).

Reflecting an understanding of the importance of first-hand experience of social action and the need to convey the subjective reality of the lived experiences of participants (as emphasised by Pole and Morrison 2003), I spent just over a year collecting data in two schools. I hoped that this period would help me to get closer to social reality (see Hammersley 1992), embracing the subjective and complex nature of their lives and the research process rather than attempting to discover a singular objective 'truth'. The importance of this decision reflects the emphasis Madden (2010) places on the complicated and messy nature of human interaction. Similarly, Eisenhart (2001) stresses the significance of school ethnographies, arguing that everyday life including in schools, is much faster paced, diverse and complicated than it used to be, and therefore an ethnographic approach is important in helping researchers to grasp these complexities. I was interested in what Mason (2002, p.1) refers to as 'richness, depth, nuance, context, multi-dimensionality and complexity rather than being embarrassed or inconvenienced by them', but I deliberately narrowed my focus to the children and their understandings and contexts. Following Fischman (2001), I hoped that an ethnographic approach would support greater understanding of the fluid nature of social relations experienced by participants.

I adopted the role of ethnographic, reflexive participant in order to foreground the perspectives of the children in the study and break down some of the hierarchical barriers

associated with positivist research (Haig 1997). This decision stemmed from a previous experience of undertaking a small-scale study in which I focused on the social interactions of children with speech and language difficulties in education. One of my main approaches to gathering data was through observation, in which I mostly remained at the side of the classroom or in the playground observing and making notes. With hindsight, I realise this role maintained and reinforced hierarchical boundaries between the participants and myself.

Reinharz (1997) identified approximately 20 different selves which she categorised into three major groups:

1. Research-based selves – being a researcher, a good listener, etc.
2. Brought selves – being a mother, having relatives, being a woman etc.
3. Situational created selves – being a resident, being a worker, a friend, sick etc.

This understanding is also reflected in the work of Fine and Sandstrom (1988) and Swain (2006). In terms of my role, I developed and maintained many different positionings in the settings, positionings which differed between schools, children and contexts. For example, I was someone the children could talk to or play games with, a classroom ‘helper’, and also an adult, a researcher and a woman (as well as white, middleclass etc.). These positioning would inevitably influence my interactions with the children, and the entire research process. Whilst certain positioning was unavoidable (for example gender) others were based on a desire to fit into the setting. As Pole and Morrison (2003, p.11) argue, the researcher needs to be ‘reactive rather than proactive’ in that ‘the researcher needs to be able to blend in, to be accepted by the social actors and to be flexible as the particular situation demands’. Rather than sitting passively at the back of the classroom I helped the children and staff, such as tidying the classroom or helping children with their work, seeing these as invaluable opportunities to get to know the children and establish a rapport with them. This however, was not easy due to embedded power relations and situatedness, such as the power relations between adults and children. Clifford (1986, p.9) argues a similar point:

ethnographic work has indeed been enmeshed in a world of enduring and changing power inequalities, and it continues to be implicated. It enacts power relations. But its function within the relations is complex, often ambivalent, and potentially counter-hegemonic.

Therefore, despite my intention to adopt a hands-on role in the settings, there were times when this was not appropriate, such as when disagreements broke out between children, therefore my role was fluid.

Whilst ethnography has been criticised for its subjectivity, lack of precision, and inability to generalise findings (as outlined by Pole and Morrison 2003), I anticipated that this approach would support ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973, p.9). Denzin (1983, p.83) describes such description as presenting ‘detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships.... The voices, feelings, actions and meanings of interacting individuals are heard’. I acknowledge, however, that my descriptions would be limited by my own perceptions of relevance based on the focus of this PhD. Clifford (1986, p.7) states that ‘ethnography truths are ... inherently partial—committed and incomplete’, which may be true of other research also. James *et al.* (1998) suggest that research is often understood through an adult lens. To a certain extent this would be true of own research although I chose to use video stimulated recall to give participants the opportunity to provide interpretations of the images alongside my own interpretations. Solberg (1996, p.54) recommends researchers show ‘ignorance of age’ focusing instead on what participants are ‘doing’ rather than ‘being’. However, within a school context, this is particularly challenging due to discourses which reinforce age segregation, ability settings and deficit understandings of childhood. To help address my adult lens I kept a reflexive diary, which enabled me to reflect on the partiality of the research process, though this research (as all research is) could only ever be partial.

Thomson (2008) and Thomson and Gunter (2007) suggest that a participant being able to say what they think, in the ways that they want, is highly dependent on what they are asked, by whom, and what is expected of them. Mazzei and Jackson (2009) suggest such discourses and power relationships are often ignored. I anticipated that a reflexive approach would be needed to help me to consider some of these complexities and the influence on the findings.

I anticipated that using ethnography would help me understand the role of discourse in creating objects, regimes of power and truth (a point emphasised by Usher 1996), contrasting the emphasis on objectivity as privileged by the positivist paradigm (Haig 1997). For example, I was interested in the dominance of societal discourses which maintain deficit understandings of children as incapable (e.g. Danby and Farrell 2004; Morrow 2005), reinforced in most educational practices (Freeman and Mathison 2009). James *et al.*

(1998) state that the way we see children has a significant influence on the empowerment of this marginalised group within research. I was aware of the influence of discourse in the maintenance of norms (Foucault 1974) and the tendency for groups within education (e.g. those with SEN) to be considered as other (Bauman 1991) or deviant (Becker 1963).

Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p.38) argue that 'no matter how much you try, you cannot divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are what you believe, and what you value. Being a clean slate is neither possible nor desirable'. Therefore, it is important to be explicit about my own background. Prior to beginning the PhD I worked and volunteered in many different schools and whilst this helped me to relate to different children, this may have influenced my role in other ways. For example, I often found myself slipping into a teaching assistant role, a role that is embedded in educational discourse and understandings of childhood which often maintain deficit understandings of children. Furthermore, Nicholls (p.66) suggests that the purpose of ethnography is to 'know strangeness'. I question to what extent my previous experiences of working with children meant that I may have missed valuable observations. My own childhood education was fraught with both academic and sometimes social difficulties and this would be likely to compound my frustrations and disappointment in the face of participants' social difficulties.

Throughout the research I needed to think carefully about the competing discourses and the influence of these on the research. It was important to be transparent about my motives for being in the setting as this would influence the way I presented myself to the children and staff and consequently the research relationship. hooks (1994) argues a very similar point, highlighting the need for the researcher to consider what, how and why s/he speaks for others. Although the needs of the participants and staff would be central to this research and the decisions I made, the need to meet academic requirements necessitated a dual accountability. Therefore, despite my moves towards an ethnographic and visual approach in which I sought to in some ways democratise the nature of the social and material relations of research production, my research would not challenge and ultimately eradicate the power divides as called for by Chappell (2000).

Nichols (1994) questions whether the researcher has the right to represent the other as this maintains traditional power relations. Strecker (1997) argues that ethnographers have tended

to ‘stand between’ their informants and audiences/readers by translating images into words. Although to a certain extent this would apply to this research, I wanted to give children translating powers too. Furthermore, Alcoff (2009) suggests that the impetus to speak for others must be carefully analysed and, in the case of academics, fought against as this reflects a desire for mastery and domination. Although I acknowledge that I probably have the most to gain from this study (such as a PhD), I anticipated that the participants and the participating schools would also benefit. Lastly, I intended that this research would provide insights into the aspects of practice that supported or hindered the positive social experiences of children, potentially becoming a catalyst for school development.

### *3.3 Reflexivity*

Mead (1934, p. 134) defines reflexivity as ‘the turning back of the experience of the individual upon [her or himself]’. Similarly, Wasserfall (1993) and Gilbert (2008) define reflexivity as a way of the researcher being clear with themselves about their own beliefs and objectives. Therefore, Hertz (1997, viii) calls for researchers to engage in ongoing questioning of themselves, such as ‘What do I know?’ and ‘How do I know it?’ Davies (2008) and Kaufman (2012, p.1) provide a useful definition of reflexivity as:

... a process of seeing and a process of being. To be reflexive means that we are fully conscious of the lenses through which we view the world. We understand our situationality and our positionality, our circumstances and our locations.

This fits with the understanding held by Reinharz (1993) and Bryman (2004) of research as personal and of the multitude of identities we occupy that influence research, such as age, gender, social background or education. Understandings of reflexivity have links with action research. For example Stenhouse (1975) and Schon (1983) stress the importance of continuous reflection to understand the complexities and uncertainties of professional practice.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), Fetterman (1998) and Coffey (1999) argue that fieldwork is personal, based on experience, empathy and involvement, contrasting this with positivist understandings of the researcher as a detached, autonomous being. For example, Reay (1996) looked at the difference her working class background made to conducting feminist research and her relationships with the women and reading of their accounts. A similar point is made



by England (1994) in her reflections of doing fieldwork. She argues that the researcher's positionality and biography directly influences fieldwork and that fieldwork is a dialogical process which is structured by the researcher and the participants. Alternatively, Swain (2006) reflects on how his own memories of being a child, meant that he could not help comparing his ethnographic observations of school life with his experiences as a child. In keeping with this, Brewer (2000, p.105) argues that 'ethnographic data is thus autobiographical data: the observation of a single individual or several separate individuals, selectively recorded, provides a portrait from one person's vantage point'. In my own case the impetus to do this research was based on my experiences of education as a child, as a volunteer helper and teaching assistant in various schools. Therefore unintentionally (and intentionally) I bring to this study my own values and beliefs; reflexivity then becomes important in considering how these beliefs may determine the findings or exclude certain individuals.

Central to reflexivity and my research was an understanding of knowledge as socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann 1966; May 2001) and the role of discourses in creating objects, regimes of power and truth (Usher, Pat 1996), contrasting understandings of objectivity (Abercombie *et al.* 2000). Jones (2004) stresses the need to scrutinise what one knows and how one knows it and consider the ways in which the structures created by adults limit children's contributions. Reflexivity is key to establishing what Britzman (1995) refers to as ethnographic authority or what Mies (1983) refers to as conscious partiality. Pillow (2003, p.127) provides a helpful description that I use in this study:

Reflexivity involves reflection by ethnographers on the social processes that impinge upon and influence data. They requires a critical attitude towards data, and recognition of the influence on the research on such factors as the location of the setting, the sensitivity of the topic, power relations in the field and the nature of the social interaction between researcher and researched, all of which influence how the data are interpreted and conveyed in writing.

### 3.4 Case study approach

As Simons (1980) argues, a case-study approach can enable the researcher to embrace the complex and subjective nature of human interaction (and belonging). This is further highlighted by Hamilton (2011, p.2):

A case study approach is often used to build up a rich picture of an entity, using different kinds of data collection and gathering the views, perceptions, experiences and/or ideas of diverse individuals relating to the case. This approach provides what is termed ‘rich data’, as it can give the researcher in-depth insights into participants’ lived experiences within this particular context.

Therefore, underpinning this research was an understanding of the considerable potential of an ethnographic case study approach in generating rich detailed insights into the social experiences of participants, adding to the body of knowledge in this field.

One of my main reasons for adopting a case study approach was that I wanted to understand participants’ social interactions and belonging in the context that these occurred, as emphasised by Gillham (2000). Cohen *et al.* (2007) describe case studies as *situated activities*, and I hoped that a case study approach would help me to see belonging and friendship in a fluid and context-dependent way, rather than as fixed and static as the positivist discourse encourages.

I hoped that an ethnographic case study approach would help me to gain in-depth insights into the belonging and social interaction of a particular group of children. Hence, my research was akin to what Stake (1994) referred to as *intrinsic* case study, reflecting an understanding of the potential of the case to provide something more nuanced than generalisation. Therefore, I tried to embrace and value the particularisation and uniqueness of the data, something Thomas (2011) describes as *exemplary knowledge*.

I intended that a case-study approach would lead to the generation of in-depth data about the belonging and social interaction of the participants. I was interested in the affordances of this approach in adding to existing knowledge, influenced by Danmoyer’s (2000) argument that when we apply schema theory to generalisation the purpose of research becomes to expand the range of interpretations available to the researcher and uniqueness becomes an asset

rather than a liability. Although my main aim for this case study was to understand the uniqueness of each participant in their context, I also acknowledge the argument of Gomm *et al.* (2000) that some form of generalisation is unavoidable. Without generalising the findings, this research would have limited relevance and potential impact. I was also deeply aware of the problems associated with assuming that universal theory and generalisations would develop from this research. In light of these concerns, rather than claiming that this research could produce neat, linear theory, I sought something more akin to what Bassey (1999) refers to as a ‘fuzzy generalisation’, or what Hammersley (2001) describes as ‘cautious formulations’. This reflects an awareness of the need for caution in assuming that the social experiences and belonging of participants could be generalised to all children. Therefore, although this research was mostly *intrinsic*, it was also driven by unavoidable *instrumental* (Stake 1995) intentions.

### *3.5 Fieldwork at Middletree School*

I thought it was important to focus on more than one school as doing so would help me to gain comprehensive insights into children’s social experiences and belonging and the aspects of educational practice that supported or hindered positive experiences. I also hoped that this would help me to understand whether what I was observing was unique to a particular school or an observation that could cautiously be applied also to other primary schools. I only had approximately a year to collect detailed and rich data; therefore I knew it was important not to overstretch myself. I was mindful that the number of cases would dictate the level of detail (Hammersley and Gomm 2000); hence I decided to focus in detail on the social experiences of five children in two schools.

I chose to focus on two primary schools that provided in different ways for children with social difficulties: one was unusual in that it had a resource base for children with SEBD and one had a nurture group. These two schools were neither inclusive nor special but, as Corbett (1997) would say—in-between (see literature review, for further discussion). I anticipated that studying the typical and atypical aspects of these settings would enable me to understand better the social experiences of children and the aspects of school practice which influence them. This follows Schofield’s (2000) argument that qualitative researchers should focus on *what is*, referring to the need to study the typical especially with regards to the choice of site, and also the *what could be*, identifying situations that we know or expect to be exceptional

for some reason and studying them in detail. Lastly, Schofield calls for the researcher to focus on *what may be*, referring to the need to consider educational and social trends to gain insight into the educational issues for the future. I anticipated that my emphasis on the social dimensions of education would raise awareness of the difficulties some children experience in ‘fitting in’ at school, and that my school settings would afford particular insights. Therefore I expected that my research would enable me to infer from my findings something about what is, what could be, and what may be.

My reason for focusing on primary schools was that previous experiences of working in a similar setting and carrying out placements with this age group provided me with some familiarity. Furthermore, as part of my undergraduate degree in education and my Masters, I undertook three small-scale research studies in different primary schools. I therefore felt confident working with these schools and adapting the research process to this age group. I did briefly consider undertaking some data collection in a secondary school, but feedback from a head teacher in a potential fieldwork school suggested that the practical difficulties would outweigh the benefits. This referred to the potential challenges of observing lessons due to the organisational complexity of streaming and subject teaching, which would have made understanding the social relations of each participant with their peers particularly difficult and time consuming. Reflecting on this and the ethical challenges associated with undertaking research with young children meant that I decided to focus on children aged eight to ten. I thought that by this age they would have a basic grasp of my role as researcher in the setting, be able to give voluntary consent (to some extent) and have the language and vocabulary to explain their social experiences and reflect on the research process (see Appendix A for details of the participants). This narrow age band would inevitably contribute to the partiality of the data as would my decision not to include the voices of staff or parents/carers of the participants. Although I could have widened my remit, my decision to focus on only a small number of children was based on my awareness that so often children, especially children with SEN, are excluded from research or their social relations are researched by examining the views of their peers towards a participant, ignoring the participants’ own views and experiences. Furthermore I wanted to dedicate all my field work efforts on engaging with the children in depth as my fundamental priority.

I selected the conveniently local Middletree Primary School, in part due to the school’s emphasis on children’s rights. I first met the head teacher of this school at a university

seminar two years prior to beginning data collection. I was intrigued by the additional resource base and support that her school provided for children with SEBD and autism and I was interested in what this looked like in practice. Having previously spent time in another school that also had a resource base (but for children with speech and language difficulties) I was deeply aware of the difficulties in supporting social inclusion between children in the mainstream school and children in the resource base and was therefore interested in how this school supported inclusion and fostered positive social experiences and belonging.

The supportive and inclusive ethos of Middletree School and the sense of community had been highlighted by Ofsted (2010) as key assets. They found that there were strong relationships between pupils and staff and an ethos in which young people felt welcomed and included, regardless of their abilities or difficulties. I was therefore interested in how the school created an inclusive environment and met a diverse range of needs. I was also interested in the emphasis this school placed on teaching children about the UNCRC (1989), particularly the importance of respecting others and taking responsibility for one's behaviour. This has a considerable overlap with understandings of inclusion and the importance of respecting and embracing diversity.

Middletree Primary School was situated in a town in southern England. This school had approximately three hundred pupils who were mostly of white British origin, although there were a few pupils of Asian or mixed heritage. The number of pupils identified with SEN was considerably higher than the national average with the majority of these pupils having moderate learning difficulties. The proportion of pupils receiving free school meals was above the national average (Ofsted 2010).

The resource base at Middletree School was intended to meet the complex needs of seven pupils with SEBD and autism who traveled to the school from a twenty mile radius. A specialist teacher and six learning support assistants were employed to work with these children, closely monitoring their behaviour at all times during the school day. The purpose of this provision was to provide additional behaviour support to enable these young people to access and engage in lessons provided in the mainstream classroom. These children were also able to choose whether to spend breaks and lunchtimes in the resource base or with their mainstream peers, usually choosing the latter. The children were included in the mainstream class for most of the day but on a weekly basis also received additional one-to-one teaching

with the specialist SEBD teacher working on their individual targets. This resource base was located alongside the mainstream classrooms and here each child had their own desk (referred to as their 'pod'), was shaped as a semi-circle surrounded by high sides providing privacy. Some of the 'pods' also had an area that was curtained off to provide a private place for when things got too much for them. The resource base had another smaller room used as a time-out area, to which the children were taken when they were angry or upset and their behaviour was disruptive or a danger to others.

At Middletree School, I decided to focus on the two Year 5 classes (consisting of 53 pupils), of which three children received additional support from the resource base. The head teacher felt that these would be the most suitable classes because they had the highest proportion of pupils with SEN. During my initial visit to the school I also spoke with the head of the resource base who explained that they were having particular difficulties with the social inclusion of three Year 5 pupils from the resource base into their mainstream class, making these two Year 5 classes an obvious choice for study. Both schools were given detailed information regarding the project and asked to sign a consent form (Appendix G).

I decided to focus on five children in these two classes at Middletree School, reflecting what Stake (1995) referred to as a *collective* purpose. I anticipated that this would enable me to focus on each child as an individual, understanding their behaviour in the context in which it occurred. Atkinson and Delamont (1985) also stress this perspective, arguing that the complex social reality of everyday life cannot simply be treated as a set of objectives or variables to be measured. Of the five participants (aged 8-10), three received support from the resource base (see Appendix A for details of the children). Originally I planned to focus on just children with SEBD and autism but I was concerned that this would potentially reinforce perceptions of difference between peers, having a negative effect on pupil interactions. I decided to instead choose a group of children with a wide range of different needs and personalities, including two children with autism (SpongeBob and Hamster), one with autism and ADHD (Tony), and one with dyslexia and sight impairment (Sonic). This research also focused on Scooby, a boy without a label of SEN but who was experiencing substantial physical and verbal abuse from peers. As data collection progressed, two children with the most complex needs chose not to do the visual activities (Tony and Hamster). Due to my emphasis on listening to the voices of participants, I decided to focus the majority of this research on the three boys who completed the visual activities (as outlined in Appendix A)

and to reflect on the possible reasons Tony and Hamster withdrew. All the participants were boys, raising questions about whether findings would have been different if girls had taken part too. This decision to focus on all boys was not intentional; it was just the way it worked out. Participants were selected based on a number of factors, such as the child's response to the research when I initially explained it to them, the opinions of staff and the likelihood of parents signing the consent form. Another child asked me if they could take part in the research, expressing a strong interest and determination to be involved. However, the child's parents failed to sign the consent forms and therefore this child could not take part. This was ethically contentious but I felt I had to adopt a cautious approach despite my discomfort about going against the child's wishes. I have incorporated a series of descriptive extracts into the findings and discussion chapter to provide the reader with a much greater understanding of the participants and the setting.

### *3.6 Fieldwork at Woodfield School*

This school had been recommended to me by a behaviour support teacher, impressed with the help it provided for children with SEBD. The school was in an area of considerable social deprivation, situated on an urban estate of mainly social housing. It had almost three hundred pupils, of which almost half received free school meals. The proportion of pupils identified as having SEN was much higher than the national average, though this was partly because the school had a resource base for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. Ofsted (2011a) emphasised the strengths of this school, particularly its inclusive and caring ethos, the excellent rapport between staff and pupils and the effective support for children with SEBD, such as its nurture group provision.

I initially began participant observations of children in the Key Stage 2 nurture group, an intervention run by the assistant head teacher and teaching assistant. Around eight children in Key Stage 2 were taken out of their mainstream classes for up to four afternoons a week. These children at times behaved in a disruptive or/and withdrawn way. The nurture group was designed to provide a bridge between home and school. Although the children did some literacy and numeracy, the emphasis was much more on fostering positive peer relations and a strong child-staff rapport. This was supported by the use of peer working, playing games together, sharing snack time, and an open dialogue in which children were encouraged to talk about their day and their emotions. Children could stay in the nurture group for up to four

terms and progress was carefully monitored through the Boxall profile. (See Appendix B for more detailed information about the school's nurture group and what it does.)

I focused on two children aged 8 and 10 who attended the Key Stage 2 nurture group, selected based on discussions with school staff and the children themselves. From my first afternoon with the nurture group I was struck by how open and confident the children seemed in volunteering information about the social difficulties they experienced, which made introducing the research to the children much easier.

Emerson *et al.* (1995) argue that ethnographic research involves two interconnected activities: first-hand participation in an unfamiliar social world and the production of written accounts of that environment. I now discuss the emphasis I placed on writing fieldnotes.

### *3.7 Keeping fieldnotes*

I decided to keep fieldnotes to record observations and knowledge I gained in each setting as I anticipated that this would provide a useful reference point. Lofland and Lofland (1984) highlight the value of fieldnotes, arguing that without keeping fieldnotes the researcher might as well not be in the setting. In reality, on many occasions, the sort of descriptive details you would find in fieldnotes merged with more reflexive thinking. I wrote some fieldnotes whilst in the settings, but tried to limit this, so as not to interfere with my rapport with participants and staff. As soon as I left the setting and got in my car, I wrote more fieldnotes. When I got home I wrote up these descriptive fieldnotes in my reflexive diary and also incorporated more reflexive thinking, such as to consider the influence of context, or my own past experiences, on these observations.

My use of fieldnotes was far from static as it changed as my research progressed, reflecting Lederman's (1990) argument regarding the ambiguous nature of these notes. Similar to Clifford's (1990) model of fieldnotes, I kept initial notes (*inscription*) in which, while in the setting, I would quickly jot down the odd word or brief sentence or a simplistic diagram of, for example, the classroom/playground layout. Then, either in a quiet location (such as in an empty classroom or staffroom) or at home I would write these notes up into much longer descriptions (the process Clifford calls *description*), and lastly undertook *transcription* (something I explain in detail later). The content of these notes also changed as data collection progressed. In the early stages of data collection, these notes represented my initial



impressions of the setting and children and my feelings regarding my identity as a researcher and 'outsider' to the setting. However, as data collection progressed the notes became more focused on observations of my participants. Furthermore, these notes at times merged with my reflexive diary reflecting the messiness of real world research.

My construction of the fieldnotes was dynamic, as I frequently reviewed the notes going back and forth. The longer I spent in each setting the more I understood the social interactions that I was observing, understandings that I incorporated alongside my initial notes. Hence my notes represented a complex and chaotic array of observations, thoughts and feelings regarding my experiences of being in the two settings. Factors such as time and energy influenced the construction of the fieldnotes, leading to variations in terms of the level of detail. The social and personal nature of keeping fieldnotes is recognised by Jackson (1990, p.10), who argues that this process is 'fraught with emotion for virtually all anthropologists'. Fieldnotes are situated, personal and only ever partial (Emerson *et al.* 1995). Whilst making these notes, I made a whole series of decisions about the choice of stories or observations to write. Academic conventions also influenced my notes, influencing my decisions about what observations to record or to ignore. Thus, my fieldnotes were highly interpretive; with no single natural or correct way to write about what one observes, I anticipated that my use of a reflexive diary and memoing approach would help me to consider some of the choices I made and the influence this had on the data and eventual findings.

Geertz (1973) stresses the importance of the researcher keeping detailed fieldnotes if they are to get close to others in order to understand their way of life. This, however, obviously has to be balanced with other factors. On my first day of data collection I frantically wrote notes as I was worried that if I did not then I would have nothing to show for my day. However, I soon realised the potentially detrimental effect of this on my rapport with participants and staff. From then on I made a concerted effort to avoid writing fieldnotes in front of staff and children and this had a positive effect on how I interacted with them, supporting a more relaxed approach. However, the downside of this was that I would often get distracted by helping children and would forget key points.

A significant tension that I experienced during data collection concerned the uncertainty of how much time I should spend in the setting versus writing fieldnotes and reflecting on what I was experiencing. I realised that it was important to allow myself enough time for note

making and reflection, but at the same time I felt a considerable pull to be in the setting more often, as I felt that I would otherwise miss out on key observations. This experience is summed up by Lederman (1990), who describes fieldnotes as a 'bizarre genre' as the researcher is simultaneously part of the doing of fieldwork and of the writing about ethnography. Therefore my fieldnotes were shaped by two movements: a turning away from academic discourse to join conversations with the school settings, and a turning back again.

To summarise, I anticipated that my ethnographic approach would enable me to gain in-depth, rich insights into the social interaction and belonging of participants, whilst also helping me to understand the aspects of school practice that were helpful or detrimental to the participants' social experiences. I intended that my fieldnotes would serve as an invaluable record of what I was experiencing and observing in the setting, whilst my reflexive diary would help me to critically discuss and problematise my experience (though at times this overlapped).

I also decided to use visual methods. Pink (2007) stresses the benefits of doing this, arguing that ethnography and visual methods have much to contribute to each other. Whilst visual methods can inform our understanding of the potential of this approach, ethnography can also support the production and interpretation of visual images. In the next section I discuss my visual approach and position my research design in relation to other understandings of this approach. I then explain my rationale for using this approach before describing the various visual methods I used and the role of this technology in supporting the voices of participants.

### *3.8 Research participation*

Hart (1992) altered Arnstein's (1969) model of public involvement in community development to refer to the participation of children, from no participation, through various tokenistic stages and partial participation to full participation (see appendix O). This sequential, hierarchized model has frequently been applied to research, but maintains understandings of participation as linear and I question whether the three bottom rungs should even be included on a participation ladder. However, whilst I don't agree with the sequential approach this model it is useful in explaining where my research fits. My research mostly fits rung 5 of this ladder ('placation') as the visual activities were adult led in which I consulted and informed the participants about how their input would be used. Moving away

from this linear model, Treseder (1997, appendix P) reconstructs this model as a circle and removes the bottom rungs of Hart's model. On this model my research best fits the 'consulted and informed' category as I designed and ran the research but consulted children who had an understanding of the process and I took their opinions very seriously. Whilst these models are useful in explaining where my research best fits, neither in my opinion adequately acknowledge neither the complexities inherent in participation, such as issues around dialogue nor the fluidity of participation.

Contrasting understandings of participatory methods (such as Bourke 2009), whilst I viewed participants as people whose voices mattered, these children had no input in the research design, analysis or dissemination. The research was planned before I even met the participants. Some, such as Kellett (2005) might see this as tokenistic in that my research was not initiated and led by the children. Others question at what stage the participant needs to be actively involved in the research (Haw and Hadfield 2008) and argue that the concept of inclusive or collaborative research needs to remain fluid rather than rule-bound (Nind and Vinha 2013). Central to my collaborative approach was the necessity of dialogue. Graham and Fitzgerald (2010) argue that participation is about relationships and shared responsibility all of which takes place through dialogue. Therefore my ethnographic approach meant I already had a close rapport with participants before even introducing the activities.

### *3.9 The use of visual methods*

I hoped that the use of visual methods would support a more inclusive and engaging way for children to take part. The importance of this is emphasised by Booth (1996), Raggl and Schratz (2004) and Cuskelly (2005), who suggest that traditional research methods such as written questionnaires hinder the participation of individuals with SEN, treating them as objects of study rather than valued people. To gain a clear understanding of the children's social interaction and belonging, I thought it was important to select methods that would enable me to focus on the individual participant and their strengths and capabilities and give them an active role. I wanted to challenge societal deficit understandings of individuals with difficulties and the expectation that the individual should conform to societal expectations if they are to take part in research. This is also a key argument in the work of Barnes (1996) and Walmsley (2001). Moving away from the traditional tendency to prioritise written and

spoken language, I hoped that a visual approach would provide participants with variety and choice about how they wished to communicate, resulting in a process that was motivating and accessible. This was influenced by Burke (2008, p.25), who argues that visual methods provide ‘accessible, flexible and inclusive tools fit for purpose’. I anticipated that my decision to focus on the capabilities and strengths of participants would result in a research process whereby participants felt able and motivated to take part as valued members rather than objects. I intended that the use of visual methods would support a process in keeping with children’s interests and youth culture. As Rose (2001, p.6) states, ‘the visual is central to the cultural construction of social life in contemporary western societies’, demonstrating the importance of the research process being in keeping with children’s culture, a point also emphasised by BECTA (2002).

I hoped that a visual approach would facilitate a more relaxed atmosphere and break down some of the power inequalities between myself and the participants, supporting a more interactive and empowering approach. For example, prior to the participants making their own video footage I taught each individual how to use my video camera. I thought this was essential to equip the children with the skills to competently make their own videos, reducing the need for these individuals to seek my help, something that would merely reinforce traditional power inequalities. This understanding was based on the work of Connolly (2008) with young women who had been excluded from secondary school, in which she reported the benefits of this approach in changing the power differentials between participant and researcher, supporting a two-way exchange of information, promoting the active involvement of socially excluded young people in the research process. Similarly, Punch (2002) found that many young people had limited experience of direct communication with unfamiliar adults in a one-to-one situation; therefore the use of tasks reduced power inequalities and seemed to increase their confidence in taking part in the interview process.

To summarise, my decision to use visual methods reflected a determination to support the voices of a traditionally marginalised group. I used three specific visual methods which I introduce next.

### 3.10 Social concept mapping

To encourage participants to talk about their social interactions, friendship and belonging, I opted for a social concept mapping technique. Emmel (2008, p.1) describes this process as ‘an interactive approach using accessible and free-ranging visual methods in an individual or group interview setting to interrogate qualitative research questions’. I explained to each participant that this activity would help them to start thinking about which children they would include in their mini film (which was the next activity) and to articulate their reasons for spending time with these peers. Gauntlett (2007) suggests that the process of creating something visual helps the participant to think in a less linear way, presenting something as a whole. I began by showing participants my own participatory social map in which I had written my name in the centre of the page and then the names of the people I spend time with, such as my family and closest friends. I also included on this map some of the activities that I enjoy doing with these people. I then asked the children to create their own participatory social map using a large piece of paper and felt-tip pens. We then used these maps as visual stimuli to promote discussions about these relationships. I filmed this process to enable a multimodal analysis of participant behaviour and to provide a visual record of the sequence in which the map was drawn.

I anticipated that the use of collaborative social concept mapping would help the participants to begin thinking and talking about their social interactions and belonging. Darbyshire *et al.* (2005) adopted a similar approach in their research on childhood obesity. Using focus groups the children were asked to express their own perceptions of play and activity spaces visually, drawing and discussing their own maps showing the social and physical environments where they were most likely to participate in physical activity. The researchers found that use of collaborative mapping supported free responses and individual interpretations. I intended that this task-based activity and the process of drawing the map would enable each participant to have control over the situation, choosing which children to talk about. I also hoped it would enable each child to dictate the length of the activity and to only talk about topics they felt happy and at ease to discuss. This strength is emphasised by Punch (2002) who used a concept mapping exercise in a study with 13–14-year-olds about their problems and coping skills: the young people were asked to indicate all the people who were important to them, discussing who they were most likely to turn to. Punch found this allowed the young people

time to think about what they would like to express, rather than feeling pressurised into giving a quick answer.

I hoped that my visual, concept mapping approach would support the thinking of the participants, moving beyond simply naming the children they spend time with to talking in detail about the reasons they spend time with them, what they like and dislike about these interactions and, lastly, their sense of belonging. Emmel and Clark (2011) highlight the affordances of this approach in supporting this type of thinking. They undertook a similar collaborative social mapping exercise with children and found that it enabled participants to move from description of spatial practices to elaboration and theorisation of the reasons for the ways in which they represented features on their map, demonstrating in-depth reflexive thinking.

Following on from the social concept mapping, I employed a walking interview approach to promote further discussions with participants about their social interactions, enabling them control over the topics they talked about, the places they led me to and the duration of the interview. It is this approach that I now discuss.

### *3.11 Walking tours and film making*

I asked each participant to take me on a walking tour of their school during a break time. I thought that this activity would help the children to talk about their social experiences. I asked the children to film aspects of the tour that they thought illustrated their social experiences of school, for example the games they like to play or the children they play with. I hoped that an initial emphasis on places around their school would then lead to discussions about their relationships with peers and sense of belonging. This understanding of the interconnected nature of place and social relationships also underpinned Morrow's (2001) study with 14–15-year-olds in which they were asked to take photographs of their local environment. Anderson and Moles (2008) used a similar approach in which the researcher went on a walk to a local park with two participants (a mother and the mothers' daughter). Seeing and experiencing this park setting prompted the participants to talk about how they used to go to this park with their dad/husband and to re-trace those steps as a way of remembering this man and revisiting their feelings about this special person. These two examples illustrate ways in which everyday life such as social relationships, are

interconnected, embedded and receptive to place and therefore the potential benefits of such an approach in helping the participants talk about their social experiences.

Underpinning my research was an understanding of the children as ‘experts’ of their own lives, as Kellett (2005) argues. I therefore thought it was important to adopt a flexible approach that would enable them to have some freedom and choice to use their expertise. For example the children chose whether they wanted to work individually or in a small group and where to take me on a tour and what to show me. Despite my determination to facilitate participation, I was aware that Clark and Emmel (2010) argue that this is sometimes problematic as not all participants want to embrace this expert identity. Some of their participants suggested that they would feel self-conscious showing a researcher around the area, whilst others questioned their expert status, believing that they had nothing worth saying. Stalker (1998), who undertook research with people with learning difficulties, similarly argues that researchers need to avoid the assumption that people will automatically want to adopt an active role in research.

### *3.12 Stimulated recall*

As a way of helping the participants to talk about their social experiences and belonging and their attitudes towards my research approach, I included a phase of stimulated recall. This involved showing the participants the video footage that they created during the previous walking tour plus researcher-generated video clips of them engaging in the concept mapping activity. I anticipated that these audio-visuals would provide useful prompts in supporting discussions with the participant. Again this process was filmed to enable me to analyse each participant’s body movements, posture and facial expressions as well as language. I thought the use of stimulated recall would lead to a more motivating, enjoyable and accessible approach for participants. These advantages are emphasised by Allen (2005), who adopted this technique with Pacifica and refugee students and found it encouraged the participants’ co-operation by overcoming the traditional tendency to prioritise literacy skills.

In a previous small-scale study with teenagers with moderate learning difficulties I was impressed by the affordances of stimulated recall in helping the young people to talk about and reflect on their experiences (Child 2010). Therefore, in this study I hoped that the visuals would encourage participants to talk about their images, leading to opportunities to discuss

the different elements of the visual image, such as the location where the image was taken or the people in the image. Raggl and Schratz (2004) refer to the 'multiple realities within school' reflected in photographs, which they argue provide opportunities to bring to the fore the different layers of reality shifting between the foreground and the background, enabling unimportant details to become the main focus of interest. As well as the potential benefits of stimulated recall in the development of comprehensive insights into the young people's belonging and social experiences, therefore, I hoped that this process would lead to different knowledge. Morgan (2007) argues for the considerable strengths of this approach in helping participants to recall how they felt and what they were thinking.

I saw the potential of stimulated recall in helping participants to express their views in a reflective way, as emphasised by Freire (1973) in his literacy project in Peru. He knew that visuals, especially if they were made by the people themselves, would play a key role in helping them to reflect on their own lived experiences, clarifying and articulating their discontent, and framing their ideas for change. Similarly, with reference to photo-elicitation, Harper (2002, p.22) argues that this technique 'mines deeper shafts of different parts of the human consciousness than do words-alone interviews'. I thought it was important that I showed the children the participant- and researcher-generated images as soon as possible after they were produced as I was aware that participants might forget details such as their reasons behind their decision to film certain aspects of school or people. Lyle (2003) draws attention to this in questioning whether retrospective reports accurately reflect access to direct, unordered accounts of previous thought processes without any intermediate ordering of reflections or reasoning. Nonetheless, I knew that at times the stimulated recall would be delayed due to factors such as children's absences from school.

Although I anticipated that the use of stimulated recall would provide deep and reflective insights into belonging and social interaction, I also recognised and valued the highly subjective nature of these images. Mondada (2006) and Booth and Booth (2003) argue that shooting video footage or taking photographs is an embodied exercise of inquiry and analysis. With regards to my research, this demonstrates the importance of being explicit about the socially situated and partial nature of these images. Throughout this process I made a whole complex array of decisions, such as when and where to carry out the research, or in what angle to position the video camera. The children and staff made decisions too, including how to behave during the research. Therefore this study reflected an interconnectedness in which a



whole series of decisions were made by different individuals, contributing to the complexity and partiality of findings. This illustrates the need to understand that the findings from the study reflected only the views of me and some participants in a particular setting, held during a particular period of time.

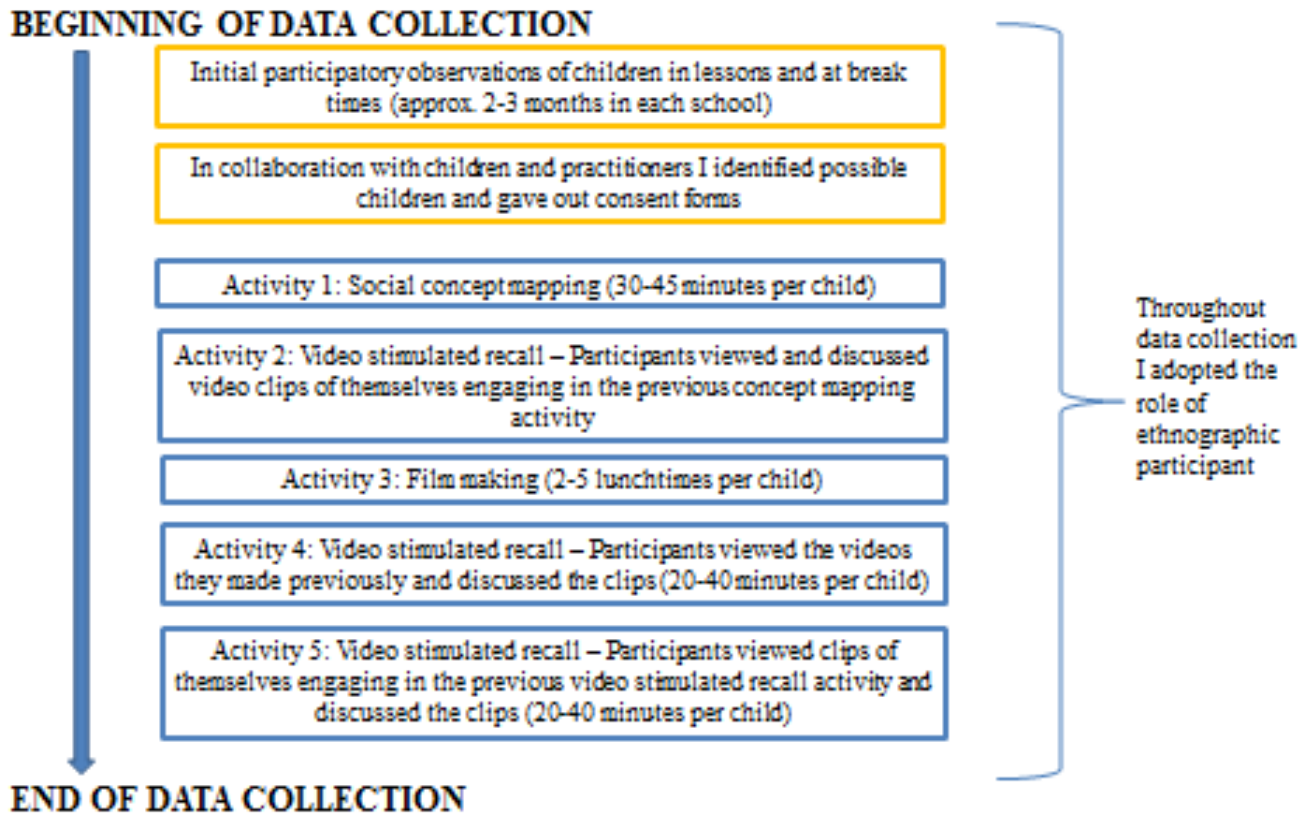
I anticipated that the use of stimulated recall, like the other visual methods, would enable the children to adopt a leading role, for example choosing which images to talk about or ignore, reducing the power inequalities between participants and researcher (an affordance emphasised by Emmison and Smith 2000). Burke (2008), referring to photo-voice, argues that this approach enables an emphasis on the strengths and capabilities of the child, reducing these inequalities, while O’Kane (2000) suggests that this approach enables participants to tell their stories through ways that they have ‘framed’. I was seeking to position the children in the role of valued social actor in the process.

To summarise, this research focused on the social experiences and belonging of children in education as well as exploring the affordances of my methodological approach in supporting participant voice. Underpinning this research was an ethnographic case-study approach in which I adopted the role of reflexive ‘participant’ helper in an attempt to blend in and get to know the children. Various collaborative research methods were also adopted as a way of enabling the young people to play an active and competent role in the study generating rich and varied data. Table 3.1 over page shows how my methods linked with my research questions, while Figure 3.1 illustrates the order in which the methods were employed.

**Table 3.1: My different methods and their relationship to the research questions**

Question(s)	What did I want to find out?	How did I find out this?	What data did this generate?
<p>What are participants' social experiences and sense of belonging during both formal (lesson time) and informal (breaks and lunchtime) parts of the school day?</p> <p>What teaching strategies and wider school practices support or inhibit the positive social experiences and sense of belonging of participants?</p>	<p>Which children the participants spent time with during formal and informal parts of the school day.</p> <p>How other children behaved towards the participants.</p>	<p><u>Ethnographic Observations</u> I adopted the role of participant adult helping the children and staff where possible.</p>	<p>Fieldnotes</p> <p>Reflexive diary</p>
		<p><u>Concept mapping</u> Some of the participants drew concept maps to show the children they spend time with at school. This approach was used to prompt discussion and was filmed.</p>	<p>Visual concept maps</p> <p>Fieldnotes – brief notes about how the approach worked in practice and the children's responses</p> <p>Reflexive diary</p> <p>Visual and verbal data showing each child creating their map</p>
			<p>Fieldnotes – as soon as each child had finished the activity I briefly wrote down the key points.</p> <p>Reflexive diary</p>
			<p>The images created by the participant</p> <p>Visual and audio data of the child interacting in the process</p> <p>Fieldnotes</p> <p>Reflexive diary</p>
	<p>The aspects of school practice that was helpful or detrimental to the social experiences and belonging of participants.</p>	<p><u>Walking tour of the research setting and film making</u> Each child was asked to take me on a walking tour of their school during lunchtimes. They were given a video camera to record aspects that they thought showed their social experiences and belonging.</p>	
		<p><u>Video stimulated recall</u> Each child was asked to look at the images they created during the walking tour. This approach was designed to facilitate discussion about belonging etc. The process was filmed.</p>	
	<p>The affordances of different methods in supporting the participation of young people.</p>	<p><u>Video and audio stimulated recall</u> At various points during the research the young people were asked to watch video clips from the study. These clips were used to help each young person talk about their experiences of taking part, which was filmed.</p>	<p>Visual and audio data of the participants</p> <p>Reflexive diary</p> <p>Fieldnotes</p>

**Figure 3.1: Sequence of research methods**



### 3.13 Ethical issues

Echoing the views of Neill (2005), underpinning this research was an understanding that it is unethical not to do research with children as they have as much right as anybody to have their voices heard. Yet, as Jones and Stanley (2008) argue, society continues to marginalise and exclude children from participating in research. The dominance of the positivist discourse has led to the positioning of individuals into hierarchies of superiority with regards to age (Allen 2008; Barnes 1991) or competency (Alderson 2005) resulting in comparisons about the extent to which children differ from adults (Morrow 2005). Due to these understandings O'Brien and Moules (2007) argue that children are positioned into the categories of 'at risk', 'incomplete' or 'not yet mature' emphasising their vulnerability and the need to protect these young people from harm. However, contrasting these negative and disabling attitudes

towards childhood I tried to embrace a more positive understanding of this age group. This reflects what Alcoff (1991) refers to as the plurality of voice, an understanding of the differences between the experiences of children and adults and a determination to celebrate these differences rather than ignore them.

Although my research reflected an understanding of the strengths of children, I was still very aware that I had a responsibility to ensure my participants were not harmed in any way by this research. Both the parents and the two schools were given detailed information regarding the project and asked to sign a consent form (Appendices G and H). Scott *et al.* (2006) argue that the major ethical dilemmas concern balancing protecting children from harm and exploitation and increasing participation. Reflecting an awareness of this dilemma, I gave considerable thought to planning a study that would enable children to play an active role whilst reducing the likelihood of harm. For example, I monitored participants' body language for signs of fatigue or distress so that if I was at all concerned I could swiftly terminate the research to allow enough time to comfort the child and/or seek assistance from staff. I also asked the children to choose their own pseudonyms, which I used in all written text (such as fieldnotes), to ensure that the names of participants and the school involved remained anonymous. These two examples demonstrate how I tried to protect the young people from harm whilst supporting their participation; however I found achieving voluntary informed consent was more challenging.

Ethical guidelines stress that research participants must understand the consequences of their involvement, and in terms of my research this was highly problematic. Aldridge (2007) stresses the considerable difficulties in enabling people to grasp conceptual notions of confidentiality, authority and most importantly the consequences of granting permission, something that was particularly pertinent in this study due to the nature of the participants and their difficulties. To support the children in making an informed decision about their participation, I asked them to listen to a brief, informal, interactive talk in which I explained my research to them using visual prompts to reinforce the main ideas (see Appendix C). I also gave them an information sheet comprising a limited number of carefully chosen words and pictures to reinforce the main ideas (see Appendix D). The design of this information was strongly influenced by the Joseph Rowntree/Norah Fry 'Plain Facts' leaflets (Townesley and Gyde 1997) intended for people with learning difficulties. The thought and attention I gave to helping the participants understand the research process was made explicit in my detailed

protocol and papers for the ethics committee (Appendix E) and the risk assessment (Appendix F). I hoped that planning how I would explain the research to the children and devising accessible resources would support their informed decision regarding participation.

Research guidelines, such as those by BERA, emphasise the importance of gaining parental consent for children to take part in research. I began by explaining to the children the research, emphasising that consent was optional. Once a child indicated an interest in taking part, I sent an information sheet and consent form home with them for their parent(s) to complete (Appendix G). I felt slightly uneasy with this process, which seemed to undermine the children's rights to make their own decisions. A similar point is made by France (2004) and Mason (2004) who stress the detrimental effect of parental/carer consent on a child's right to voluntary consent in maintaining perceptions of incompetence and consequently the traditional power inequalities. Heath *et al.* (2007, p.415) conclude from their research that:

Researchers rarely challenge the consent practices of gatekeepers, however much they might disapprove of them. In this context, our findings cause us to reflect upon the degree to which we as researchers are complicit in the denial of children and young people's agency and competency by continuing to seek access via sites where the right to opt in and out of research on one's own behalf is known to be frequently denied or diluted.

This begs the question of how to overcome the frequent exclusion of children and young people from research. Though the societal discourse and its emphasis on the 'care' and 'protection' of vulnerable individuals is essential, this discourse simultaneously maintains an excuse to silence children and young people. It also raises questions regarding where research should be carried out. Whilst institutions such as schools provide almost instant access to large numbers of young people, I am unsure how and to what extent educational discourse influences the behaviour and voices of participants. Jones (2004), Heath *et al.* (2007) and Prosser *et al.* (2008) all draw attention to the need for researchers to adopt a critical reflexive approach in helping to avoid the silencing and exploitation of children. In my reflexive diary I was able to explore the role of gatekeepers such as the parents of participants or the head teacher in determining the findings.

Despite the attention I gave to supporting the participants in making an informed decision regarding participation, the uncertain nature of research made this difficult. Homan (2001)

suggests that researchers can rarely if ever know the full extent of what participation may entail or put in advance all the possible outcomes of participation. Hence, throughout the research and influenced by Flewitt (2005) and Renold *et al.* (2008), I regarded participation as ‘provisional’, reflecting an understanding of the fluid and fluctuating nature of research. Flewitt (2005) stresses the importance of ensuring that participants are given formal and informal opportunities to say ‘no’ in a safe environment. I therefore frequently reminded the children, both visually and verbally, that participation was optional and that they could opt out at any time. Resources used ranged from formal consent forms (see Appendix D) at the beginning of data collection to red cards for children to express ‘stop’. This could be described as an ethics of care approach, interpreting ethical codes in ways that fitted the needs of participants and stakeholders, as advocated by Gorin *et al.* (2008). The importance of this is emphasised by Stanley and Sieber (1992) who suggest that, though there is a close relationship between the law and ethics, not everything that is legal is ethical, maintaining exclusion.

One of the main ethical dilemmas that I was faced in planning this research was the authoritarian nature of most schools and the typical child–teacher relationship which makes undertaking research in these settings particularly problematic. Children have a right to make an informed voluntary decision regarding their participation in research; yet educational discourse frequently deprives children of the option, requiring them to comply with the adult’s agenda, a topic which is explored in greater detail below. Though both schools embraced my research with considerable enthusiasm and interest, I was aware of the conformist nature of each setting and the impact this might have on a child’s decision to take part, a point also highlighted by Valentine (1999). Heath *et al.* (2007) argue that voluntary consent is much harder to achieve than it may seem due to the inequalities between researchers, participants and other gatekeepers. Linked to these concerns, Arnot and Reay (2007) call for the development of a ‘pedagogic voice’ in engaging with the power relations which create voice. I anticipated that my decision to keep a reflexive diary would be a useful tool in helping me to explore the impact of power differentials such as child/adult on the voluntary consent of participants.

Despite the emphasis I placed on establishing a strong rapport with participants, creating a more interactive process, at times this was problematic due to competing discourses. On the one hand I unavoidably occupied the identity of ‘visitor’ or ‘adult’ whilst in the settings, but I

also attempted to be someone that the children would hopefully want to talk to. For example, with regards to dress code, I felt obliged to dress smartly in school to, conform to professional expectations, yet at the same time I acknowledged that this formal appearance may have made establishing a strong rapport with the children harder to achieve. I tried to differentiate myself from the school staff. For example, I introduced myself to the children as ‘Sam’ rather than by my title and last name (as the children usually call their school staff) in an attempt to make this distinction clear to them. I wished to avoid the children thinking of me as school staff, because of the school emphasis on discipline and compulsory participation and its conflict with research guidelines and their emphasis on voluntary informed consent.

My decision to use visual methods came with a number of additional considerations regarding ethics, yet there is an absence of accepted ethical guidelines with regards to these visual methods (Prosser 2008). Furthermore, researchers argue that the ethical guidelines and scrutiny that do exist render aspects of visual research nearly impossible or place substantial limitations on the researchers’ practice (Prosser and Loxley 2008; Wiles *et al.* 2008). I tried to manage some of these ethical issues by establishing a strong rapport with participants (stressed as important by, for example, Harper 1998; Pink 2007; Renold *et al.* 2008). However, I faced challenges in terms of the longevity of the images, and what to do with the images once data collection was over (a challenge also highlighted by Wiles *et al.* 2008). I also faced difficulties explaining some of these ethical issues to participants in ways they understood, such as explaining how the images would be used (Pink 2007).

### *3.14 Analysis and grounded theory*

Grounded theory was initially developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in the mid-1960s and provides a series of linear steps for the researcher to follow in the analysis of the data, leading to the emergence of key findings. The purpose of this approach is ‘the discovery of theory from data’ (p. 1). They advocate delaying writing the literature review until data analysis is almost complete to keep the researcher as free and open as possible to discover and avoid contamination (such as forcing data into pre-existing concepts/understandings which distort or do not fit the data). I worry that this maintains an understanding of the researcher as detached and neutral theory-free data. For example Kelle (1995) suggests that researchers investigating culture and social interactions bring with them their own lenses and conceptual networks which cannot be avoided. Bryant (2009) therefore argues researchers cannot claim

the data is pure induction. Instead I intended that analysis would reflect an understanding of the co-construction of knowledge between myself, the participants and wider cultural influences. Constructivist grounded theorists 'advocate recognizing prior knowledge and theoretical preconceptions and subjecting them to rigorous scrutiny' (Charmaz 2008, p. 402). This had strong links with reflexivity. When I analysed my data, I used my reflexive diary to reflect on my decisions and the influences. For example, Lipson (1991) argues that reflexivity requires critical self-reflection of the ways in which the researcher's background, personality, personal assumptions, position etc. can impact on the research process, particularly the analysis of the data.

Traditionally, analysis of data has been perceived as something that happens once data collection has been completed. However, Huberman and Miles (1998) define data analysis as involving three processes: data reduction (selected units of the data from the total universe of data); data display (bringing the information together in some format); and conclusion drawing (interpretation of the findings). These sub-processes occur before data collection (during research design), during data collection (as interim analyses are carried out), and after data collection (developing the finished analysis). Similarly, Hennink *et al.* (2010) argue that analysis is a continuous process in that it interweaves with other aspects of the research process. Bryant and Charmaz (2007) stress the benefits of this approach and suggest that it supports the consistent interaction of the researcher with the data, enabling data collection and analysis to proceed simultaneously, each informing and streamlining the other. I anticipated that I would adopt this kind of approach to data analysis, beginning the analysis in the early weeks of data collection, leading to a continuous process of studying the data and embracing the ambiguous nature of findings.

About two weeks into data collection I started reading through my fieldnotes and reflexive diary. Using some memoing (discussed later) I gradually began coding the data from the field notes and diary using NVivo. However, this was not done in a linear way as I frequently went back over the data, amending the codes as my understanding of the findings developed. Due to developing medical difficulties, the official transcribing of the participants multimodal communication during the visual activities was only carried out after I left each setting. This was due to logistical factors – My health meant that the intensive concentration, time and energy required to transcribe this data was going to be problematic. I paid to use a transcription service that helped with the spoken word but I still transcribed the visuals



myself. Once I had a set of complete transcripts I then went back to analysing the data cyclically going back over my fieldnotes and reflexive diary. I acknowledge that the delay with the transcripts was not ideal and undermined my initial intentions for a cyclical approach. During data collection, I did however watch the clips from the visual activities and I wrote brief notes arising from the clips, such as areas to further examine during data collection.

I hoped that my decision to apply a cyclical approach would enhance the analysis process. To a certain extent, this supported an open-ended, continuous and chaotic approach towards studying the empirical world, while helping to add rigour to the study by building systematic checks into both data collection and analysis (Charmaz 2006). Not only did the use of a grounded theory-type approach add rigour to the study, but the process of moving back and forth between empirical data and emerging analysis helped me to immerse and familiarise myself with the data, as Timmermans and Tavory (2007, p.509) argue:

when used with care and common sense, grounded theory may help focus ethnographic research, instil deep familiarity and awareness of one's data, and connect field research with broader sociological literatures.

However, Bryant and Charmaz (2007) highlight the problematic nature of this process as it involves a leap from detailed description to the more abstract, conceptual level, and may rely on only a limited number of individual cases or an idiosyncratic selection. I needed to be mindful of this but I knew that involving more children or schools, or spending more time in the field would have meant that I was less familiar with the data.

Coding supported a form of data reduction, an approach Corbin and Strauss (1998, p.3) describe as 'analytic processes through which data are fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form theory'. This process was highly beneficial in helping me to organise my data and made it easier to locate all segments of data on a particular issue, a feature of this method also emphasised by Hennink *et al.* (2010). However, although coding is a form of data simplification, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) argue that this approach can also be used to expand, transform and reconceptualise data, opening up more diverse analytical possibilities. This suggests that coding is not simply a process of simplification or reductionism but a process of transformation.

As I read through my reflexive diary, fieldnotes and transcripts of the participants' visual and verbal communication, I attempted to code or categorise data. The codes were mostly inductive as they arose from the actual data. However, these codes were not divorced from myself and my own experiences and interests in education and acknowledge that this had some influence. For example, my knowledge and enthusiasm for research regarding inclusive education (such as school ethos) might have led me to look for data to identify under this theme and code, highlighting that it is impossible to divorce oneself from the process entirely, again reflecting strong links with reflexivity and ethnography in terms of the co-construction of knowledge.

Below are some examples of my very earliest codes:

In class, in playground, in lunch hall, chatting, adventure playground, play dates, birthday party, exclusion, crying, Sonic, Jeremy, tag, lack of responsiveness, struggles to belong, finds lessons upsetting, struggles with behavior, inflexibility of educational provision, play, friendship box etc.

As I progressed with the coding, I organized the codes into categories. This reflected what Hammersley and Atkinson (1993) refer to as the funneling process. For example:

Category: spending time with peers (codes: abuse, playing together, eating lunch, tears, name calling etc.)

I then changed this category to *enjoying spending time with peers* and devised a new category labelled *spending time with peers – problematic* to encompass the codes linked with abuse and peer bribery. Based on the codes, I then introduced a new category labelled *fluid nature of peer relations* as most of the peer relations were fluid and the previous categories did not allow for this. These codes and categories continued to change, the more time I spent studying the data. In chapter 4 (section 4.11) I used five subheadings to explain the different dimensions of practice which supported or hindered belonging. These subheadings arose mostly from the data. For example, below is the first subheading I used in section 4.11:

*a. The need to experience meaningful interpersonal relations with children and practitioners in safe spaces (section 4.11)*

This subheading stemmed from my coding:

**Category:** Importance of interpersonal relations with peers

**The most commonly coded codes:** The role of nurture - supporting friendship = belonging, fluidity of belonging, belonging- importance of friendship, belonging has decreased due to bullying etc.

**Category:** Importance of interpersonal relations with practitioners

**The most commonly coded codes:** Tell their teacher - but the unkind behaviour continues, patience of staff, head teacher - pastoral support, belonging - dependent on how staff treat you, staff – passive, lunchtimes - the need for more options, letting children choose pairs - negative effect

**Category:** The need for safe spaces

**The most commonly coded codes:** The need for closer supervision in playground, sufficient staffing - support inclusion, staffing - guarding, LSA support - facilitates inclusion, communication between staff - walkie talkies, playground staff - alert to fighting etc., belonging and place - adventure playground, belonging – nurture, belonging – resource base

See appendix M for details regarding how the other four themes I refer to in section 4.11 arose from coding the data. I continued this process of coding until I reached the stage where I could identify no more new issues in the data, something Glaser and Strauss (1967) refer to as saturation.

The number of times I selected each code to label data was important as there was considerable variation from codes I'd only selected once to those codes I'd selected twenty times. When I wrote up the findings (chapters 4 and 6) I placed most emphasis on the commonly coded themes but also tried to bring in some on the less commonly coded themes too. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) stress the importance of looking for deviant or negative cases as they often strengthen the analysis by illustrating the complexity of the phenomena and the researcher's reluctance to engage in an easy gloss over of difficult evidence. With regards to my own research negative cases included:

- During stimulated recall Cherrybomb explained 'I don't really fit in with anything. If I'm in nurture I don't fit in, if I'm in lessons I don't fit in and if I'm at home I

don't fit in'. This was completely the opposite of everything else he'd told me during data collection.

- Spongebob explained 'I think I fit in at play. I like playing with Jeremy'. Jeremy often abused Spongebob in the playground. This contradicts the rest of my findings which suggested that when participants experience positive relations with peers this boosts their belonging. Similarly, when they experience abuse participants explained that this was highly detrimental to their belonging.
- On all occasions but one, Scooby blamed his teacher for the abuse. However, in the playground he explained to me that he was subjected to peer abuse because 'I am so boring no one wants to be with me. Look at Spongebob – people like him he's funny.'

Despite the benefits of coding in helping to organise data, Dey (2007) argues that coding is merely a metaphor that is inappropriate to the requirements of analysis. The coding metaphor implies a one-to-one correspondence through the identification of clear rules and invariant features. Dey argues that this is at odds with the theory-laden nature of categorisation, therefore codes are highly subjective 'provisional, prototypical and permeable in nature' (p.183). Reflecting an understanding of this messy and subjective nature of coding, I used e memo writing throughout the study. Lempert (2007, p.245) describes this process:

It is the fundamental process of researcher/data engagement that results in a 'grounded' theory. Memo writing is the methodological link, the distillation process, through which the researcher transforms data into theory. In the memo writing process, the researcher analytically interprets data. Through sorting, analysing, and coding the 'raw' data in memos, the grounded theorist discovers emergent social patterns. By writing memos continuously throughout the research process, the researcher explores, explicates, and theorises these emergent patterns. It is the methodological practice of memo writing that routes the researcher in the analysis of the data while simultaneously increasing the level of abstraction of his/her analytical ideas.

Memos were therefore used as a narrative tool for developing ideas and elaborating the social worlds of research sites. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) state that memo writing helps the researcher to question what one knows, how such knowledge has been acquired, the degree of certainty of such knowledge, and what further lines of inquiry are implied. Therefore this

approach to some extent helped me have analytical conversations with myself about the research data. Rather than being linear and tidy, these memos were very much work in progress, messy and chaotic. Furthermore, Hennink *et al.* (2010) suggest that this approach brings transparency to the research process through a trail of analytic decisions, demonstrating the affordances of this approach.

In terms of my own use of memoing, about two weeks into data collection I started reading through my fieldnotes and reflexive diary. I was reluctant to start coding too soon as I wanted to gain insight into each extract as a whole first and the different insights different methods allowed for. Therefore, I produced almost fifty memos to summarise extracts and my early thoughts before beginning to code. In hindsight these codes were not as reflexive as I had initially intended, hindering the potentials of this approach. For example:

Memo (02.10.11): This diary extract is about my early impressions of the school. I was expecting great things. I was surprised that the teacher used paired activities in this way, as it clearly made Hamster sad.

During analysis I also used these memos to help in my self-awareness about my reactions to particular extracts. This I thought was important due to the personal and emotive nature of data collection and the similarities with my own childhood experiences. For example:

Memo (17.11.11): I clearly was not impressed. My sense of disappointment and frustration really comes through. It makes me angry just reading the extract; let alone what those children are going through.

This was different to my reflections in my diary as the memos tended to be quick thoughts whereas when I wrote in my diary I would do so for forty-five minutes or more at a time. There were times when these memos acted as reminders to go back over particular extracts to see if a new code was relevant to the experiences of children at both schools:

Memo (06.07.12): I keep noticing that the participants discuss belonging in relation to being good at something (for example Spiral and maths). I don't recall children at Middletree pointing this out as much. I must go back to this data and check.

I now explain my decision to analyse the participants multimodal communication, something I did to varying degrees of success.

### *3.15 Analysis and multimodality (see appendix N for an example of a transcript)*

Within this study I placed some emphasis on multimodal communication. Rather than prioritising language, my use of visual methods to a certain extent enabled me to address the multiplicity of ways or modes in which we communicate our thoughts, such as action, gesture, image, and speech, something Jewitt (2009, p.14) describes as a ‘multimodal ensemble’. I anticipated that my emphasis on multimodality would lead to a more inclusive approach in which all modes or forms of communication were treated equally. This contrasts the traditional emphasis on literacy that Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) refer to as ‘monomodality’. Flewitt (2005) researched communication within pre-school education and demonstrated that, despite all forms of expression carrying meaning, the more easily accessible modes of spoken and written language were prized in the settings. Similarly, Hadfield and Haw (2002) argue that monomodality has led to researchers attaching too much emphasis to certain forms of expression such as verbal skills, resulting in research focusing only on the verbally articulate and stereotyping those who are less articulate as not having the capacity to express themselves in the way required of citizens with rights. Bourne and Jewitt’s (2003) multimodal investigation, of the ways in which the interpretation of a literary text was constructed through social interaction in a multi-ethnic urban secondary school English classroom, showed that pupils’ understanding of the text was communicated through not just verbal and written modes but other modes such as gesture and posture, mirroring the findings of Kress *et al.* (2004). These examples illustrate the different ways in which we communicate, hence the importance of embracing multimodal data. This led me to anticipate that a multimodal approach would mean more inclusive methods responsive to the diverse ways of communicating, supporting the participation of these children, a group frequently silenced.

I anticipated that the use of visual methods would also enable participants to not be confined to the rules and structure that the use of language presents. Beattie (2004) argues that the one-dimensional nature of language means that the speaker is forced to segment meaning into its component parts which are strung out through time in a linear fashion. Language is therefore confined by rules. However, the gestures that accompany language do not convey meaning in a linear and segmented way; rather, they convey a number of aspects of meaning at the same time in a single multidimensional gesture. Therefore, I hoped that my emphasis on visual

ways of communicating would give the participants greater freedom to break away from this linearity.

The primary rationale for my focus on multimodal communication was the potential of this approach to lead to detailed insights not accessible through other modes. This is emphasised by Heath *et al.* (2010), who state that multimodal data provide additional details surrounding a communicative act that language fails to provide, such as the people, location and objects, enabling the researcher to understand how different aspects interact in this unfolding exchange between individuals. Therefore, multimodal analysis would enhance my research, providing rich sociological insights not accessible by other means and potentially lead to a more holistic, unified and comprehensive understanding of human interaction. However I still needed to be cautious, for, as Flewitt (2006) argues, multimodal analysis often fails to provide insights into what might have happened before or after the filmed research episode. This would influence the eventual findings, demonstrating that although a multimodal approach provides richer data, it is still only partial and situated.

I firstly transcribed and coded all the verbal data in these video clips, before then doing the same with the visual data (such as gesture and movement), a process Flewitt *et al.* (2009) refer to as *intramodal* analysis. This enabled a visual approach in which the analysis and transcription of participants' speech was located in the broader context of their total multimodal resources, similar to the analysis adopted by Flewitt (2006), providing a richness of data. I then attempted to combine the modes to explore the influence this would have on the overall findings (something Flewitt *et al.* 2009 describe as *intermodal* analysis). My decision to transcribe and analyse the data in this way reflected a determination to give the visual data as much attention as the verbal. I was also interested in how different modes of communication interacted and contributed to each other, a concept Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) refer to as the 'visual syntax' and Baldry and Thibault (2006) as the 'resource integration principle'.

Having previously worked with video data in which I analysed each mode individually and then combined the data, I was under no illusion that this would be a simple or quick process. I was aware of the considerable time needed first to transcribe the different modes and then to organise and analyse the data, but I considered the benefits to outweigh the limitations. Dicks *et al.* (2006) emphasise the problematic nature of this process and Machin (2009) argues this

risks creating a 'post hoc analysis', meaning a tendency to construct concepts around our existing understandings. Aware of these limitations I still anticipated that this type of analysis would prove invaluable due to its holistic and inclusive approach towards communication.

I was also aware of the ambiguous nature of visual data, making the process of transcription and analysis highly problematic. For example Flewitt *et al.* (2009) question how far researchers should take transcription with regards to micro- or macro-analysis. Moreover, Machin (2009) questions whether it is acceptable to use a language-based model to mediate multimodal meanings or whether multimodal data require a transformation of the tools used to describe them, to a more analytical approach that can both accommodate their variability and reflect their complexity. This poses a number of crucial questions for the researcher. I hoped a reflexive approach would help me to consider and at least be aware of the partiality of these transcriptions.

Based on my previous experiences with video data, I anticipated that one of the considerable strengths of this multimodal approach would be the detail it would generate in terms of the situatedness of communication. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) stress the importance of taking into account both the immediate situation in which meanings are exchanged (the context of situation) and the broader culture in which the participants are embedded. Similarly, Halliday (1994) emphasises the socially situated nature of communication as it is shaped by the norms and rules operating them and by the motivations and interests of the individual in a specific social context. However, despite these benefits, Morgan (2006) questions how much of the context it is necessary to consider and what means should be used to describe this. I anticipated that the time I had spent getting to know the participants and observing them in school would be invaluable in helping me to understand the situatedness and context of their communication.

I was already familiar with Transana visual analysis software and planned to use this to organise my video footage and later to transcribe and code it. However, technical problems with the programme led me to use NVivo instead. Due to the time-consuming nature of this process, I carefully broke down the video data into short clips which I later transcribed and then analysed. This decision was based on my own personal judgement regarding the relevance of the video data to the research topic. However, as I discuss above, I acknowledge that this stage may have led to useful data being disregarded.



I transcribed the verbal and visual data (see Appendix N for example), which was extremely costly with regards to time. Heath *et al.* (2010, p.72) describe the importance of this process in providing ‘a fundamental vehicle for developing analytic insights into the organisation of a particular episode of action or activity’. This suggests the significance of transcriptions in supporting the development of theory. This process represented a form of translation in which the complexity of verbal and visual data was reduced to a script reflecting what participants said and did during the research. Rose (2000) suggests that there can never be an analysis that captures the single truth, as every translation involves decisions and choices. There will always be viable alternatives to the possible choices made and what is left out is as important as what is present. Hence, Oliver *et al.* (2005) argue that this process is merely a powerful act of representation, calling for researchers to incorporate reflection into their research design by interrogating their transcription decisions and the possible impact these decisions may have on participants and research outcomes. With regards to my own study, I intended that keeping a reflexive diary would provide an invaluable avenue to explore some of these issues and the possible influence they may have had on the overall findings.

Within this chapter I have tried to provide detailed insights into the decisions I made in the translation and analysis of data. This importance of being explicit about these processes, acknowledging the situatedness and partiality of data, is emphasised by Dant (2004). Rose (2000) argues that if these techniques are made explicit, then the reader has a better opportunity of judging the analysis that has been undertaken, providing an intellectual and practical open-space for analyses to be debated.

### *3.16 Summary*

To summarise, this study was strongly influenced by interpretivist, feminist and disability discourses. Reflecting an understanding of the rights of all individuals to have a voice and be listened to, considerable thought and attention was given to planning a study that would empower and facilitate the participation of children, including children with social difficulties who are more often excluded or marginalised. The influence of feminist and disability discourses also led to a certain extent an emphasis on the plural, situated and contextual nature of ‘truth’, reflecting an understanding of the complex and subjective nature of human behaviour. This approach also underpinned the emphasis I placed on the ‘provisional’

optional consent of the children, taking into account the fluidity of the research environment, and a planning process that embraced these uncertainties.

I adopted an ethnographic case-study approach for its potential to lead to rich, detailed insights into the social interactions of the children. Due to my role as an active participant in the two settings, the children responded to me in a relaxed way, increasing the authenticity of the data. However, I incorporated more structured, visual methods alongside ethnography to help participants tell their own side of the story using various modes of communication.



## **CHAPTER 4: THE SOCIAL EXPERIENCES AND BELONGING OF CHILDREN IN TWO PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

### *4.1 Introduction*

Using data from my fieldnotes, diary and visual activities (see appendix K for examples of concept maps), I now present insights into the participants and their social experiences. The five main participants undertook the visual activities and allowed me to spend time with them observing lessons and break times. I also refer to the findings from two other participants (Tony and Hamster) who opted not to do the visual activities. Data collection was carried out from September 2011 to December 2012 and my insights are limited to this period, and limited also to social interactions in schools. With so much of children's interactions taking place out of school time, the consequential portrait of school interaction is just a narrow slice of their social lives. I firstly situate the findings within the context in which the fieldwork occurred and therefore provide my initial impressions of each school before discussing the social experiences and belonging of each participant. Due to the nature of belonging as not necessarily see-able, data regarding this concept stem only from the children's visual activities, but findings relating to social relations and inclusive practice stem from the visual activities, fieldnotes and reflexive diary which merged in part, with each containing material that might belong in the other. I acknowledge in hindsight that my voice comes across more than the children's at times during this chapter, something I reflect on in chapter 6.

### *4.2 My initial impressions of Middletree and inclusion*

Before, visiting Middletree School, I had already heard much about the provision from discussions with the head teacher:

I first met the head at various seminars in which I listened in awe and intrigue as she spoke in detail about her school and the opportunities the school offered for children with special educational needs. The school had also won an important award for listening to pupils and came across as a forward thinking, inspirational school. ... When the day finally came to visit the school for the first time, I was eager and excited to see the school for myself. I had high expectations (diary, 02.06.2011)

Discussions with the head raised my expectations which may have influenced my initial impressions of the school. On my first visit I was left feeling disappointed at what I observed, reflections I discuss next. Furthermore my impressions of Middletree were initially tainted by the way I was treated by staff on my first visit:

As I entered and waited by the reception window I could hear a discussion between two adults about something entirely unrelated to school. It was a long wait. I felt small and an outsider. This was not a nice feeling... Eventually, after many attempts to interrupt with a polite 'excuse me', they stopped their conversation and one of the women gruffly asked, 'you here for a placement?' When I explained my purpose for visiting, they went silent and buzzed me through, pointing to where I should sit. As I sat on a chair that had seen better days I was surrounded by old furniture and chairs and a small painting made by a child; it was a bleak, depressing place in which to wait and reflect on how unwelcome I felt ... never had I been treated with such disdain and over the years I had visited many schools. These school staff at reception were middle aged women whereas I was in my twenties – I question whether I would have been treated differently if I was their age, perhaps reflecting the dominance of discriminatory age related practices ... I am often mistaken for much younger. The staff may have assumed I was one of the many college students they have visiting their school, reflecting an example of how staff were quick to position me into a subordinate role, similar to how education sometimes positions children and young people into marginalised roles and implied understandings of competence. ... I felt frustrated by their judgements of me and wondered what other similar, unhelpful, reductionist understandings I would observe (diary, 02.07.2011)

This helped me to understand how the school may have maintained and reinforced hierarchical understandings, and how it felt to be initially be positioned as an 'outsider' in the setting. As a white, middle class women, living in the United Kingdom, in some ways this was not a feeling I was used to. As data collection progressed I became more and more aware of how the participants were positioned by peers and staff and how they also engaged in this process, positioning others (section 4.6 for example).

On my first visit to the setting the head showed me around the school. I had mixed feelings about what I observed:

On the twenty minute tour, two children stopped us to tell the head that other children were treating them unkindly. On the one hand I was impressed with the head's clear rapport with children and I admired her for this, feelings that were linked with my own experiences of education ... When I was a child, my head was like a dragon – I was terrified of her; everyone was, even the staff I think. She had a loud bellowing voice and strict demeanour. Her rules made the school feel like a prison ... However; I am also concerned why these children had felt the need to stop us ... Why didn't they tell their class teacher? (diary, 02.07.2011)

Influenced by my own experiences of being a child and my reading of the literature, I was impressed by the head's rapport with the children, something I considered essential to inclusive practice. As data collection progressed I became more and more aware of the importance of rapport – I observed occasions where staff listened to children and adapted practice (mostly in the resource base), but contrastingly, children spoke about how they felt the abuse was ignored by their teacher and how this made them sad (e.g. sections 4.5 or 4.11). This research reinforces my understanding of the importance of practitioner rapport. In hindsight I regret not interviewing these practitioners to gain their views on the matter and acknowledge that this research was one sided. Also, at times, I sometimes put off asking practitioners questions about what I was observing as they appeared so busy and I did not want to distract them from the children who were their priority.

The school had additional provision for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and autism and previous discussions with the head teacher led me to expect something striking. Instead I was met with an austere and unfriendly impression:

We entered the resource base, which was large, airy and light. Distinctly different from any other classrooms I had seen, this room comprised a collection of unique, cumbersome, solid-looking semi-circled desks or 'pods' arranged in a semi-circle, allowing for an empty space in the middle for play. Each child had their own pod where they stored stationery and pictures. On the walls were photographs of the children and bar charts indicating the number of behaviour points each had been awarded the previous week ... Beside the resource base was a smaller room used for 'time-out'. The plain walls and limited furniture gave the room a stark, institutional feel (diary, 02.07.11)

Having previously undertaken a small scale study investigating the inclusion of children who attended a resource base for part of each school day (Child 2008), I went into Middletree sceptical of the strengths of this provision in supporting inclusion. In hindsight, this may have influenced the way I responded to the school and observations. I am aware, looking back, that there were more benefits to this provision than I initially acknowledged – for example the knowledgeable and experienced staff and their flexibility in aiding inclusion (findings I discuss later in this chapter).

Children spoke of the abuse they experienced and therefore their dislike of playtimes. For example, Sonic explained ‘ I hate playtimes. People are horrible to be and call me a four eyed freak’ (concept map, 21.11.11) or Scooby explained ‘every time I go in the playground Arabella is mean to me. I tell her to go away but she just won’t. She gets me into trouble which I don’t like’ (concept map, 01.12.11). My observations showed a similar picture, something I reflect on in my diary:

Based on my reading of the literature and experiences of working in schools. I equate inclusion to be partly about a caring community and one where children look out for each other and I was therefore shocked by my observations and discussions with children.... Once children had finished their lunch most went out in the playground. Like the hall, the playground was small, cramped and noisy—full of exuberant shouting and laughing. Groups of children huddled around the edges of the playground chatting to their friends, or in the case of one girl, stood alone appearing bored. In the middle children ran around in a boisterous frenzy playing games like hide-and-seek, ‘It’ and cops and robbers. The children were often rough and would frequently get into verbal and physical fights. I was surprised by the level of abuse .... Due to my work in schools I was used to supervising breaktimes, however, I was shocked by what I saw. For example, when a child fell over ... This may have been a nearing the end of term phenomenon, and it may be that my negative response was exacerbated by my high expectations... I felt so sorry for these children and concerned about the effect of the abuse on them. It also brought back memories from when I was a child and experienced abuse from a girl in my class. These feelings are bound to have influenced my reactions to what I saw and how I later interacted with the children and staff (diary, 02.07.2011)

This impression went against my understandings of inclusion. I was concerned by how unfriendly the lunchtimes felt as my understandings of inclusion suggest the importance of schools being welcoming places.

Having explained my initial impressions of Middleton School, I next discuss the participant's views and my own interpretations of the children's social experiences and belonging.

#### *4.3 One group and their social relations*

I firstly provide contextual details regarding the participants:

These children were having a difficult time at school (treated unkindly, difficulties with the work and/or managing their behaviour etc.). SpongeBob had been excluded from his previous school and this was detrimental to his confidence (as evident by discussions with him) and Sonic had recently been moved back a year and was having to adjust to a new class and the peer abuse that came with this. These children were also having a difficult time at home due to sibling rivalry, parental divorce and family financial worries. Therefore I came into these children's lives at a time when their school and home life was fraught with stress and worries. This may have influenced their relationship with me – having previously experienced bullying when I was a child and also struggled academically, I was able to empathise with them (fieldnotes based on informal discussions with the children, 18.10.2011).

When I began observing this group in the playground, SpongeBob really stood out due to his favourably playful and loud personality, though in hindsight question whether in focusing on this child, I inadvertently silenced other possible participants who may have had less favourable personalities (e.g. very shy). Below is my interpretation of Spongebob:

My observations of SpongeBob showed that he tended to lead the play and 'boss' other children. He had a 'larger than life' personality and loved to act and make people laugh, hence his choice of pseudonym, 'SpongeBob'. He liked to be the centre of attention, tell jokes and do magic tricks and developed a reputation amongst some peers for being funny. This perhaps reflects his attempts to navigate away from deficit understandings of children with SEN and develop a more positive identity. During



break times he would either play in the resource base or the playground, surrounded by a close-knit group of friends. SpongeBob's favourite game was cops and robbers, but he also liked to play football and act out stories. He had a keen interest in trains and Thomas the Tank Engine and, if given the opportunity, would talk for hours about this topic (Fieldnotes, 19.10.2011)

Many of the other participants also described Spongebob as funny, for example Sonic explained 'I like Spongebob because he makes me laugh' (fieldnotes, 11.10.11). Alternately Scooby stated 'Spongebob treats me nicely – he's not mean to me like some children' (fieldnotes, 02.12.11). However, Hamster stated 'he's too noisy. He gets angry all the time and I don't like that' (fieldnotes, 04.10.11). There was considerable rivalry between the two, something I discuss in section 4.7. Whilst I tried to get to know Spongebob as an individual, in some ways my understandings of Spongebob were influenced by dominant medical and educational discourses. For example in my fieldnotes I wrote about his diagnosis of autism and the difficulties he experienced (08.10.11). Similarly, reflecting an educational discourse, in my fieldnotes I wrote information such as 'he seemed extremely pleased to be asked by the teacher to be light monitor' (01.10.11) and 'he puts his hand up lots in lessons, seeming keen to answer the teachers questions' (04.10.11). When it came to individual work, he struggled to concentrate, becoming angry and frustrated, sometimes losing his temper:

During mainstream lessons, when SpongeBob was in the room, there was a tense .... atmosphere. His LSA sat up straight at the side of the room clutching her walkie talkie and other children seemed wary of him. In nearly all the mainstream lessons I attended, something small would happen (e.g. a child using the pencil SpongeBob wanted) and he would quickly become very angry and show aggressive behaviour. He would then be escorted out the room by two adults as he kicked and screamed and taken to the time out room.. .. This suggests the dominance of norms within education regarding behaviour – Spongebob failed to conform to these norms and therefore was excluded from lessons. I found this frustrating to observe. He is good at so many things, yet reductionist expectations regarding behaviour maintain and reinforce his exclusion (diary, 02.11.2011)

This has therefore given me insight into how the dominance of norms within education in some ways led to the exclusion of Spongebob from these lessons and the importance of understanding children within the contexts in which their behaviour occurs.

SpongeBob was close friends with Scooby who described the boy as 'he's kind to me, we play pirates.' Similarly other children explained that 'Scooby helps me lots. He comes into the resource base and does draw and talk with me every week' (Toby, 18.11.11). Through observations, I came to understand SpongeBob as a kind, patient and cheerful boy who enjoyed nothing more than playing together with SpongeBob. Scooby saw past SpongeBob's difficulties and treated his friend as an equal. Scooby achieved well and had few difficulties in lessons, but socially he lacked confidence. Break times were stressful and upsetting as most days he was picked on by a girl in his class. On a number of occasions he informally told me about his social anxieties and at times was in tears about this, especially his disappointment regarding the limited number of friends he thought he had. I reflected on this in my diary:

It's really hard to see Spongebob in tears due to his social difficulties. It frustrates me that within education and wider society having children to play with and be friends is portrayed to be the norm and labels such as 'loner' are attached to people who meet these norms. This is reinforced through interventions which aim to support social relations. Whilst of course this is important, I worry it puts additional pressure on children experiencing social difficulties (diary, 18.11.11)

As data collection progressed the head of the resource base realised the difficulties Scooby was experiencing and let him visit the resource base, where he usually played with SpongeBob and sometimes Tony, a quiet and introvert boy with autism. In the resource base they would run around the desks playing cops and robbers, pirates or news reporters, with Scooby leading the games, repeating these play rituals most days. SpongeBob and Scooby appeared happy and relaxed, inseparable.

As data collection continued, SpongeBob and Scooby spent more time with Sonic:

Sonic comes across as shy. He told me he had previously been moved back a year. This was something many peers made fun of. Most peers stay away from him. I question to what extent the dominance of a developmental perspective on a child's

academic capabilities and the streaming of children based on age (as at Middletree) proved detrimental to his inclusion and peer acceptance. It is so hard to see him experiencing abuse day after day and feel powerless (diary. 21.11.11)

This has reinforced in my mind the potential dangers of narrow, developmental understanding of childhood. Scooby explained that ‘Sonic is my third best friend... he makes me laugh and we run around together... we play a Minotaur game... like the Greek monster’ (concept map, 01.12.11), something Sonic also talked about with great fondness. However, despite their friendship, the boys frequently fell out with each other. For example, when Scooby was out in the playground filming a game he liked to play (‘It’), Sonic came over to join in, only for Scooby to push him out of the way and say ‘You’re not my friend. I don’t want you in my film’ (06.12.11). Sonic went on to explain:

Scooby is being really mean to me... he was just saying go away when I was asking him if he wanted to play with me... or do this with me. (stimulated recall, 03.02.12)

This highlights the turbulent nature of their friendship, as I discuss further later.

SpongeBob, Sonic and Scooby were friends with Tony. SpongeBob and Tony would only see each other in the resource base at registration, morning break and the afternoon session when they played happily together, appearing relaxed and content. For example:

As I walked into the resource base this morning, SpongeBob, Tony and another boy were chasing each other around the room playing pirates and pretending to have sword fights. They had beaming smiles on their faces as they chased each other, and as usual, SpongeBob was at the centre of this game, telling the two boys what to do, in his usual bossy way. SpongeBob was the loudest shouting ‘Ay, ay captain’ and giggling to himself (fieldnotes, 08.10.11)

Other days they would play cops and robbers, another of SpongeBob’s favourite games. Observations and discussions with children suggest that in many ways the resource base provided a sanctuary where children were mostly free of abuse. This contrasts my previous observations of children in another school (during my M.Ed.) which had a resource base – in this study the children talked about how they hated being in the resource base and felt alienated when they went into mainstream lessons. in hindsight I realise this may have tainted my early impressions of Middletree.

SpongeBob explained animatedly:

Tony is bang on my friend... I mess up some things, he cleans things. I break some things he fixes things... he does the fixing and cleaning and I do the messy bits and breaking parts... and the loud bits. He's a bit of a chatterbox (concept map, 05.12.11)

Scooby was also close to Tony. When I explained to him that we would be making a film about break times and the children he liked to play with, straightaway he responded by saying 'does that mean I can film Tony in the resource base?' before explaining:

Me and Tony are best friends... every morning I walk up from my house to school... around the corner... and every morning he canon bolts on to me... jumps onto me ... it makes me laugh... we have lots of fun together (concept map, 01.12.11)

Scooby went onto describe how, every Tuesday afternoon, just he and Tony would draw and talk with the teacher in the resource base. Scooby explained that he enjoyed this activity as he spent time with his 'best friend'. My observations showed that during lessons, Scooby would regularly sit with Tony and, when they went to lunch, they would often line up at the classroom door together. SpongeBob, Scooby and Tony usually ate their lunch together in the hall before going into the resource base to play, running around the room being pirates or cops and robbers. Other days, SpongeBob and Scooby went out into the playground to play games with other children in their social group leaving Tony inside where it was less noisy.

SpongeBob, Scooby and Sonic were also friends with other children outside their immediate friendship group, such as Jeremy and Anna. In lessons, once children finished their work, they were allowed to choose a game to play and SpongeBob would often play computer games with these two children:

Jeremy was of a stocky build, and about a foot taller than the other children. He was very often unkind to peers, getting into fights, barging other children out of the way, making threats and swearing at them. Many of the children were understandably intimidated, wary and fearful of him. One of his IEP targets was to be kinder to other children. Anna on the other hand was a very timid, quiet and gentle girl, who didn't have many friends. She would often spend break times with another boy called Hamster who was just as introvert and quiet (fieldnotes, 10.10.11).

As they played together they appeared happy and at ease with each other:

SpongeBob quickly finished his literacy work and rushed over to a box which contained laptops. With great enthusiasm and excitement he speedily grabbed a computer and went and sat on the sofa in the reading corner and began playing computer games. I could hear his cheers and quiet chuckles as he completed the different levels in the game, gently clapping his hands and stamping his feet in delight. As Jeremy and Anna finished their work they also grabbed a laptop and went over and joined SpongeBob on the sofa. They contently chatted together and helped each other with the different games (fieldnotes, 01.12.11)

My observations showed that on days when Jeremy and Anna were absent or occupied finishing work, SpongeBob would engage in mostly solitary play, appearing discontent and uneasy, seeking reassurance from his LSA.

#### *4.4 The fluidity of social relations and belonging*

During the last six years my understandings of social relations and belonging have changed considerably, and this was strongly influenced by data collection. In my diary I wrote:

I initially became interested in social relations during my M.Ed. when my supervisor at the time was doing research investigating the social relations of children in education using mostly quantitative measures (sociometrics). The further I progressed with my PhD the more I became frustrated by these methods in maintaining overly reductionist understandings of social interaction. The more I studied other research and did my own research, increasingly I became aware of the complexities and the influence of context and situation, insights sociometrics exclude. It worries me that sociometrics continue to dominate so much research. For example when I attended the European Conference for Educational research, over half a day was taken up with sociometric research presentations, whilst my research was one of very few studies which examined social relations using a highly qualitative approach (diary, 08.10.13)

My observations of breaktimes showed that SpongeBob would often play with Emmanuel, a boy from another class. He explained, 'Emmanuel, he's also one of my friends. I like trains he

likes cars' (concept map, 05.12.11). In his mini film, SpongeBob chose to create a clip of himself and Emmanuel doing a running race, and commented on how much he enjoyed this. However, towards the end of data collection there was evidence to suggest that the relationship between SpongeBob and Emmanuel was becoming more problematic:

When SpongeBob watched his mini film during stimulated recall, particularly a clip of Emmanuel, his facial expressions changed from looking happy and laughing to frowning. He then explained to me that 'this video clip was filmed just before me and Emmanuel broke up. We're enemies right now... I've fallen out with Emmanuel a couple times but this is the first time we've ever done it about a girl.' Later, as we continued to watch SpongeBob's mini film, he said 'I keep trying to get Emmanuel to be friends with me but I just can't get him back' and then went on to ask me if I knew how to mend the friendship (stimulated recall, 10.12.11)

I felt very unsure of my role – when Spongebob sought advice from me I didn't know what to say, a dilemma I discussed in my diary:

I am pleased that I have developed such a good rapport with Spongebob but at the same time I am struggling with the ambiguities of my role. I gave Spongebob reassurance about his social difficulties and suggested he talk to Emmanuel or/and the resource base staff. However, somewhere I felt I just didn't do enough to help him (diary, 11.12.11)

This fluidity in the changing nature of friendship dynamics was also evident in my observations of SpongeBob's social relations with a boy in his class, Bart. On one occasion, the teacher asked the class to go and sit at their tables to begin independent work. Bart suddenly called over to SpongeBob:

'I've saved you a seat' and SpongeBob went scurrying off to this table and sat down next to him, appearing relaxed and happy. (fieldnotes, 09.11.11)

However, as soon SpongeBob sat down, Bart tried to persuade SpongeBob to allow him to go to 'bring a friend' time in the resource base. SpongeBob would not be persuaded and responded, asserting 'no because you might be silly'. SpongeBob later seemed sceptical and deliberated about whether to include Bart as a friend:

In an unsure voice he began describing his relationship with Bart stating, 'He is annoying at times. Sometimes he can be on my side and sometimes he can be on the bad side.... He's usually on the bad side twice a day... well probably more than twice a day now (sad tone of voice) but sometimes he can be on my side' (almost shouting). When I asked SpongeBob what he meant by the 'bad side' he responded by saying, 'Sometimes he makes fun of me, calls me nasty names and copies Jeremy by ganging up on me'. (concept map, 05.12.11)

Similarly, despite positive interactions between SpongeBob and another child, Jeremy, during free play, lunchtimes showed a very different picture. On two different occasions, I went into the playground to see Jeremy treating SpongeBob badly, for example:

I suddenly spotted SpongeBob lying on his back on the ground with Jeremy towering over him with an intimidating look on his face. At first sight, I wasn't concerned and thought this was just another game. However, as I went nearer, I saw Jeremy kick SpongeBob. Jeremy suddenly spotted me, and I heard him say to SpongeBob, 'I would have beaten you up more', before going back to his game. SpongeBob lay there on the ground appearing shocked and then rushed indoors, where he remained for the rest of lunchtime (fieldnotes, 09.11.11).

In a similar incident Jeremy and another boy had SpongeBob pinned to a wall with their hands around his neck. When I later asked SpongeBob about Jeremy he explained that Jeremy was often horrible to him and said 'he's been like [...] swearing at me [...] everything in the book' (15.11.11). Jeremy was seen being unkind to other children as well. However, I acknowledge in hindsight that my own social difficulties as a child may have influenced the way I responded to these observations.

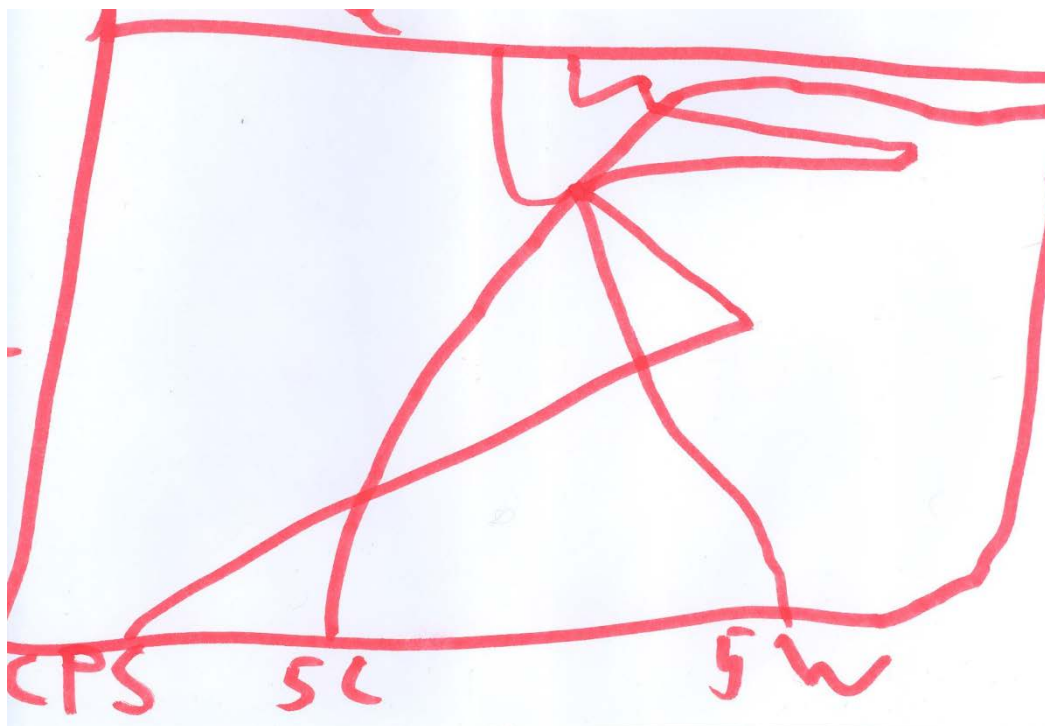
Sonic spoke of similar inconsistencies. During the concept mapping activity (21.11.11), he explained that he wanted a boy called Tom in his film and, when I asked him why, he said 'because we used to be really good friends... for about the first four weeks of term... we used to play together.' Likewise, during this same activity Sonic also told me 'I'm in a gang... it feels really happy as I have friends there. It's not like an evil gang with horrible people.... It's a group.' This is an example of how participants initially organised their social worlds.

Sonic explained he was part of a ‘gang’ and for the first few seconds I was horrified. This very word conjured many negative understandings in my mind reflecting how gangs are often portrayed in the media – linked with drugs, fighting and crime. This is an example where language may maintain these negative understandings, just as the category SENs may do. My concerns quickly dissolved as he went onto explain the role of his ‘gang’ and links with friendship. However, I acknowledge that my initial horrified expression may have influenced the insights Sonic disclosed (diary, 21.11.11)

About two months later, when I asked Sonic about his gang and he explained that:

It’s changed a bit. I’m still in it but I’m not much playing with them (the other gang member). I’m more like playing with other people.... Like my best friend Adam.  
(fieldnotes, 16.02.11)

When I analysed data from the visual activities and fieldnotes, it was obvious that for Scooby, SpongeBob and Sonic, belonging was fluid and situated, mirroring findings relating to social interaction. This was particularly evident in Sonic’s response during the concept mapping activity (21.11.11), in which he chose to draw a chart (see Figure 4.1) to show his belonging explaining in a fed up and sad voice ‘it [my belonging] just gets worse and worse’.



**Figure 4.1: Sonic’s chart – designed to show the fluidity of his belonging from his old school (CPS) to his previous class (5C) and his most recent class (5W).**



#### *4.5 The problematic nature of social relations*

When I analysed the data, many of the most frequently used codes related to the problematic nature of social relations (e.g. 'physical abuse'; 'being ignored', 'name calling'). All three children spoke about the difficulties they experienced socially. For example:

I asked SpongeBob, 'Who do you spend time with at school?' He appeared slightly puzzled and paused for about five seconds before he responded with, 'Well I do usually spend time with my friends'. This was said in a very monotone, matter of fact voice; as if he was trying to please me by giving me the response he thought I wanted to hear. I responded with, 'Good and who are your friends'? Again there was another short pause before he responded in a sad, frustrated tone of voice, 'Well I don't have any of them now because most of them have all quitted with me'. He leant across the table towards the photographs of his class and said in a sad voice 'I'll point to the friends I have and then I'll tell you if they've quitted with me... Yeah they've fell out... OK let's start over here (pointed to the pictures with a pen), Tody (looked up from photos) fell out... Jack never want to be my friend.... Tray is off because I don't think I want him. (concept map, 05.12.11)

SpongeBob continued listing children who he had fallen out with, indicating how frustrated and sad he felt about this. As SpongeBob listed children, he also talked about the reasons these children were no longer his friends. He looked sadly into his lap and explained:

He [Tray] keeps distracting me in the class and he never wanted to be my friend so I don't know why he's on the list. (concept map, 05.12.11)

Observations of these children showed they tended to keep away from each other. Similarly, he pointed to the photographs and said:

These are some of my friends. Some of them are and some of them aren't.' When I asked, 'Why are they not your friends?' he replied, 'Because they don't want to know me'. (concept map, 05.12.11)

I often saw some of the boys in his year group make fun of SpongeBob, calling him names and trying to provoke him.

Like SpongeBob, Scooby experienced upsets. On two occasions I found him crying in the playground declaring ‘nobody like me... everyone hates me’ (fieldnotes, 02.11.11). Arabella in particular hounded him:

It was morning break and it was a grey dismal day. I could hear the laughs, the giggles, the shouting, and the chitter-chatter of girls huddled together talking about who they fancied and what they were going to do at lunchtime. One younger boy with mousey brown hair was balancing on the wall near the road; other children practiced their skipping, skipping by themselves or in twos, whilst others ran around the playground in an excitable frenzy, dodging their peers and attempting to run away from a girl who was chasing them. Scooby was standing by the climbing wall talking to Harriet. As I walked around the playground... I saw Arabella come running up to him, squeezed his cheeks... and stood on his foot, causing him to cry and lash out at her, pushing her to the ground. The teacher came marching over to the children and told Scooby off whilst Arabella stood up and went back to her skipping, with a big grin and a look of satisfaction on her face. Scooby walked away with his head hung low and slumped to the ground. He put his hands to his face and started to cry. I could really empathise with this child and felt sorry for him as I comforted him. It was upsetting to see such abuse and injustice. I felt frustrated ... this prompted me to speak to his class teacher (fieldnotes, 04.11.11)

Similarly, Scooby also talked at these social relations:

‘When you’re in the playground what sort of games do you play?’ There was a brief pause and his facial expression changed from looking happy to really sad. With a slightly nervous smile he replied ‘Get angry’, before going on to explain that ‘Arabella pushing and shoving me around makes me angry. As he says this he looks behind for a moment as if checking that Arabella is not around, before his eyes drop and he stares at his pen, looking really sad. I asked, ‘So have you ever told Arabella that you don’t like it?’ Straightaway he responded by saying, ‘Yeah but she just carries on... and that's when I get angry and that's why I retaliate’. (Exaggerates ‘that’s why I retaliate’ by slowing voice slightly, speaking slightly louder, moving head up and down.) (concept map, 01.12.11)

When I asked Scooby if he had told his teacher about the bullying he replied, 'Yeah but she hasn't stopped it'. In an angry, determined tone he went on, 'She [the teacher] needs to punish her much more... 'cause I know I don't like it when I retaliate... because it gets me into trouble.' Sonic also talked about the abuse, explaining that 'I've told the teachers about this but they don't do anything. All they're doing is just telling them off but that doesn't do anything. I told Mrs (name)... Miss (name) umm and Miss (name)... They just don't do anything.' I found this incredibly frustrating and I felt uneasy about the situation. This led me to speak with the class teacher but I felt very unsure about doing so:

It's so hard to see these children suffering. I feel powerless to help them. I spoke with their class teacher but I am not sure this did any good. As a human being I want to help, but as a researcher, I'm not sure whether this is my role. I don't want to upset the teacher as I am so reliant on her, but at the same I can't just do anything (diary, 06.10.11)

In the playground, my observations suggest that the role of staff reflected unproblematic understandings of social relations – staff were there to maintain the physical containment of children in the setting. Children also spoke about the difficulties they experienced in getting any help. For example Sonic explained 'I hate going in the playground. The other children are unkind to me, yet staff just don't do anything about it' (fieldnotes, 21.11.11). I however acknowledge that staff did not have a voice, and this is one of many occasions where it would have been particularly useful to interview staff. One exception was the head of the resource who allowed Scooby to spend break times in the resource base. She spoke with Scooby on numerous occasions to find out about the difficulties he was having and, towards the end of data collection, introduced a buddy scheme to help children experiencing social difficulties. I further discuss the role of practitioners in section 4.11.

Along with SpongeBob and Scooby, Sonic also experienced a lot of verbal and physical abuse. Sonic told me about another occasion where a boy had taunted him during a game of football:

because I went on the wrong team Callun started having a go at me. So I said I'm on this team like I was told... so Callun snatched my glasses from my face... then he ran around the court so I kept chasing him to get my glasses back... I could barely see where I was going... it was a blur... I fell over... Other children were laughing....

Callun was laughing. Eventually he gave me back my glasses. I don't go on the sports courts anymore (stimulated recall, 03.02.11)

Later he said that 'Callun is nicer now'. He explained that some children try to defend him:

Like if they [the child being unkind] push me they [Sonic's friends] try and get them away... like remember yesterday I could have really badly hurt myself... Jordan pushed me over... really hard ... and I hit my head on the climbing wall (concept map, 21.11.11)

Both SpongeBob and Sonic explained that the way they were treated affected their sense of belonging:

Yeah I do feel part. When I'm not being bullied I've been bullied about twice this month. Last Monday last Wednesday and last Friday in the dinner hall and probably all the people who have not got their name on here they have been bullying me either lunchtime, break, any session they've been bullying me... Jeremy and Bart sometimes don't help. They just walk away and pretend they have nothing to do with it. I more often feel part of the resource base because when I'm in there I usually don't get bullied (SpongeBob, concept map, 05.12.11)

Sonic said in a sad, hesitant voice:

I don't feel as if I fit in because there's loads of naughty people including me in this school... every person I want to play with is naughty... think of the risks.... I could get hit or hurt.... I feel like I don't belong here.... because I feel.... SpongeBob saying I'm a Year 6 and I don't feel like I should be in Year 5.... But I don't fit in with the other children (concept map, 21.11.11)

This suggests that peer relations were key in determining a sense of belonging (see section 4.11 for further details).

Working with these children changed my understandings of childhood and education, something I reflected on in my diary:

I went in having read the literature and working in schools enabled me to understand children from the perspective of teaching assistant. Yet I was unprepared for how hard

it was going to be to get to know these children and see in reality the social difficulties they experienced day after day. Therefore this research changed my own understandings of childhood and made me more empathetic in my rapport with these young people. I believe society often portrays childhood as carefree, but getting to know these children has helped me to understand childhood as often problematic and stressful. This aided my rapport with the children (diary, 16.02.12)

Similarly:

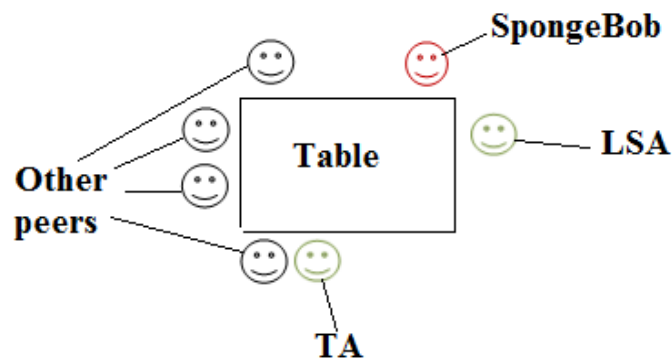
Growing up, my parents placed such a strong emphasis on education – I was encouraged to spend as much of my weekends and holidays as possible doing school work. My Mum was a teacher and my parents scrimped and saved to send me to the best school in the area. At school I was never very academic but I grew up understanding the immense value of education – it enabled me to get to university and shaped my personality, especially my commitment to learning and determination to keep going, no matter how difficult the work got. I went on to study education at university, reflecting a dedication to improve schooling for young people. Therefore, seeing these children struggling makes me absolutely furious. Education is so important yet participants' experiences of education are being tainted by their social difficulties (diary, 05.03.12)

Therefore, in hindsight, I believe my own values placed on education meant I found it much more frustrating the more I learnt about these children and their social difficulties. I felt powerless to help, highlighting the struggles of doing ethnography.

#### *4.6 Peer attitudes*

For SpongeBob, although he had a small, close-knit group of friends, many of his peers were quite wary of him:

The teacher asked the class to go to their tables and get on with their work. SpongeBob sat down at his allocated table for numeracy and then the rest of the children on his table came and sat down as well. However, these children sat quite a distance away from SpongeBob, as shown in Figure 4.2.



**Figure 4.2: SpongeBob’s table for every lesson and the children he sat with**

Although the peers who were sat on the same table spoke confidently amongst themselves, there was absolutely no communication between SpongeBob and these children. These children appeared slightly wary of SpongeBob. The only communication SpongeBob experienced during this activity was when he ‘ordered’ the LSA to fetch him some scissors (fieldnotes, 05.11.11)

My observations suggest that a failure of the mainstream teachers to effectively adapt lessons to meet the needs of SpongeBob led to the boy often becoming frustrated and angry in lessons and he would then be led out of the classroom kicking and screaming. This may have maintained negative peer perceptions towards SpongeBob (something I discuss in detail in the next section). This may have reflected societal expectations and norms regarding behaviour, suggesting the interconnectedness of school with wider society.

Beyond the close-knit group of friends, SpongeBob, Tony and Hamster had very limited interaction with other peers. The exception to this rule was when peers would occasionally help the children from the resource base. For example:

At the end of the lesson today, the class were lined up by the door about to go to lunch. However, Tony ignored the teacher’s instructions and instead lay on the floor under a table with his shoes off. The class continued to wait but Tony refused to line up. The teacher and the rest of the class were starting to get impatient, fidgeting and chatting to peers. A petite girl with pigtails went over to Tony, picked up his shoes

and patiently helped him put them on and encouraged him to do as asked. Before long Tony and the girl were in the line leaving the classroom for lunch (fieldnotes, 08.11.11)

In hindsight, I wonder to what extent the girls' behaviour reflected unhelpful understandings of children with SEN as pitiful or incompetent. Alternatively it may reflect an understanding of the importance of being helpful and keenness to please staff, characteristic teachers reinforced through the use of rewards. Observations of SpongeBob and Hamster showed that they too often lost their possessions around the school, forgetting to bring their coats in from the playground or losing their exercise books. On these occasions peers would sometimes step in to help these children.

The children with SEBD and autism were at times unkind to each other. On my first day with one of the classes Hamster approached me and said, 'You know SpongeBob, he shouts a lot and I don't like it when he does that' (fieldnotes, 21.06.11). In the playground these two children often had confrontations with each other, such as on the football pitch, and staff would have to intervene. There was a much tension and resentment between them and they would frequently try to provoke each other.

SpongeBob, Emmanuel, Bart and Anna were sat together in the lunch hall on one of their usual tables. Hamster was also sat with them. SpongeBob started the game, 'Hands up if you like me?' and all the children on the table put their hand straight in the air. He then asked the question 'Hands up if you don't like Hamster'. As quick as a flash, SpongeBob had his hand up as high as he could reach. Before I knew it Hamster was up on his feet in a complete rage and attempted to kick SpongeBob. The LSA intervened and Hamster sat down again with a frown on his face and began the game 'Hands up if you don't like SpongeBob' (fieldnotes, 08.10.11)

I question to what extent SpongeBob's behaviour was an attempt to gain the approval of peers or highlight his dominance. I reflected on this in my diary:

Much of the research focuses on the problematic social relations between children with and without the label of SEN. Whilst this research has its uses, I have concerns that it may reinforce and maintain understandings of children with SEN as other. Furthermore the emphasis on these labels fails to consider the other characteristics of

children that may make social relations problematic. There is however less research on the tensions and animosity between children with the label. I wonder to what extent my research showed the boys struggles to gain dominance, reinforcing the dominance of some and the marginalisation of other children. This I believe mirrors patterns of power within society (diary, 08.10.11)

When I started reading the literature on children's social relations, I was aware of the difficulties children with SEN experience with peers without this label, however I was less aware of tensions and animosity between those with the same label, showing how my understandings of social relations have changed.

On another occasion:

SpongeBob sat eating his lunch as usual with Anna, Bart, Jeremy and Scooby. When Hamster walked past SpongeBob's table with his tray of food, SpongeBob said in a very loud voice 'Let's all boo [Hamster]' and the whole table shouted 'Boo'. Hamster walked on past with a very sad expression on his face and slammed his tray on the table appearing upset. (fieldnotes 01.12.11)

The findings from this study show the problematic, complex and fluid nature of social interaction and belonging and the highly detrimental effects of physical and verbal abuse on a child.

Before I present the main findings from Woodfield, I note that my role and relationship with the children was quite different compared with Middletree. While I initially adopted the role of helper, I became more of an observer in the setting, partly because of my own health difficulties but also due to the school's strict hierarchy:

There was a traditional, no-nonsense approach towards behaviour, especially the emphasis on the need to treat adults and each other with respect and be polite, all reinforced with a clear system of rewards and sanctions. If a child broke the rules they were answerable to a member of staff, who clearly cared for the children, but who had a very strict persona. This maintained a clear hierarchy and boundaries between children and adults, making establishing a rapport and blurring the boundaries, like I did in the first school, much harder to achieve. Whilst at Middletree School I used play as a tool for aiding early interaction with the participants (e.g. I sat around a box



of Lego with participants and their peers), at Woodfield, the few times I tried to do the same, I received strange looks from the nurture leader which made me feel uncomfortable and prompted me to adopt a more observational role. This different role inevitably will have influenced the findings as I did not develop such a close rapport with the participants (fieldnotes, 18.06.12)

I firstly situate the data within the context that the interactions occurred – I present my initial impressions of the school before discussing the social experiences and belonging of two boys.

#### *4.7 Woodfield School*

Data collection at Woodfield was carried out in the summer and autumn terms. The two boys who were my participants attended a school in an area of a city labelled as having considerable social deprivation. In my diary I describe my initial impressions of the school, which in hindsight should really have gone in my fieldnotes:

As I turned off the busy main road for Woodfield School, towering above me were blocks of grey, bleak-looking flats. I was entering part of the city with one of the highest levels of social deprivation in the country, where crime, vandalism and gang behaviour were common. The school stood behind high, austere prison-like gates, surrounded by rows and rows of monotonous, run-down social housing... I was slightly nervous about entering this school, as this was the first time I'd been in a school situated in an area of substantial social deprivation, Coming from a middle class background, this environment was alien to me and I felt slightly nervous and uneasy, but reassured myself that this school had come highly recommended from a behaviour support teacher in my department. I was eager to see the school (diary, 27.04.2011)

My initial concerns and anxieties soon changed as I walked through the school entrance:

It was lunchtime on a balmy June day. As I approached the school reception I was greeted by two polite, helpful and chirpy Year 6 children. I was impressed by their high standards of behaviour; something I later found was evident across the school.

As the children buzzed me through the entrance door it was like entering a different world. I was met with a mesmerising array of colour, as books lined rows of shelves and window sills and the walls were plastered with children's work. This room was part corridor and part library and felt welcoming and lived-in, with an exciting, bustling feel. Through the window I could see both boys and girls running around playing football and gathered in groups. As I continued along the corridor the noise of children laughing, chatting and shouting grew louder. The school had a wonderful welcoming feel, and I felt at ease in this environment ... This was more profound given the slightly tense feel at the previous school (diary, 27.04.14)

As I continued along the corridor, approaching the nurture room, I was met by what initially appeared to be an ordinary door like every other in the school. As I slowly pushed the door open, I caught my first glimpses of a world where the social and emotional needs of the child were prioritised. Far from being a usual Key Stage 2 classroom, this was cross between a pre-school and a home environment. Surrounding me, in this cosy and compact room was a home corner, an impressive wooden fort and other toys as well as computers, a pet cat and a large fish tank containing two turtles. In large, clear writing on the wall were the class rules and the behaviour board (a tool for managing behaviour evident in all the classrooms). On the wall, in pride of place, stood a plaque made by a girl from the nurture group, illustrating its purpose (Figure 4.3) (diary, 27.04.14)



**Figure 4.3: The purpose of the nurture group**

Sat at the table were the two nurture group leaders, cheerful and friendly, chatting to children and eating their lunch. A child was sat with them happily munching their food and a group of boys were gathered around a box of Lego and playing table football, appearing calm, happy and relaxed. I was struck by how well these children got on together and how kind and polite they were, sharing the toys between themselves. These children had chosen to go into nurture for lunchtime, rather than go out into the playground, an option every child in Key Stage 2 was given. This couldn't be more different than Middletree and I was relieved to be in a school where practice reflected a holistic understanding of the child (diary, 27.04.14)

Outside in the playground children looked equally content. They had a vast range of space to play in, including tarmac areas, large areas of grass, woodland, a vegetable plot and various play areas. Most impressive was the extensive National Lottery-funded adventure playground consisting of a zip wire, swings, and slides, climbing

equipment, bridges and a sandpit. Walking out into the playground, I felt a sense of excitement as children were gathered in small groups chatting to friends, playing football, exploring the adventure playground, chasing each other down the slides and digging in the sand. No child was alone, nor did I see any unkind behaviour. In every direction I could see staff observing the play, ready to intervene if necessary. Lucy, a Year 5 child, had the important role of 'Buddy'. Wearing an orange jacket she ran around the playground ready to help or play with children if they did not have anyone to spend break with (diary, 27.04.14)

This was a world away from the surroundings beyond the school gates, but also a world away from Middletree School where the atmosphere was tense. The children at Woodfield appeared relaxed and this seemed a happy and calm environment:

After lunch, back in the nurture room, the calm atmosphere continued as children enthusiastically came in one by one to begin their nurture group session, appearing confident and at ease. Staff greeted each child with warmth. As children entered the room they went straight over to stroke the ginger cat and said hello to the turtles before going to their tray, getting out their books and settling down to work quietly. The children seemed friendly and intrigued about who I was and what I was doing in their group and, without prompting, started telling me all about nurture and asking me questions... Never had I been in a school where the children were so polite and calm. I was extremely impressed and excited about this school. This contrasts stereotypical understandings of children from deprived areas as unruly etc. understandings that are maintained within the media. Whilst I understood that these perceptions were little more than social constructions designed to control society and maintain a sense of other, I admit I was slightly nervous as this was so different from my own middle class background (diary, 27.04.14)

... After snack time children cleared away and started a different activity. In circle time at the end of the session the class members were encouraged to reflect on their own behaviour and the behaviour of their peers and then to nominate a child as 'Badger of the Day'. Although children would often nominate the peer who had previously nominated them, it did at least enable the class to talk openly about different behaviour and how it makes them feel. The children praised and encouraged

each other. This environment felt so supportive and friendly and I was impressed at how open the children were. I was excited about doing data collection in this school (diary, 27.04.2011)

I now focus specifically on two boys who attended the nurture group – Cherrybomb and Spiral. It is important to note that it was much harder to do playground observations at Woodfield as the playground was so large and spread out around the school, whereas at Middletree, the playground was small and cramped, I could keep a close eye on participants.

#### *4.8 Cherrybomb and Spiral*

Through observations and discussions with Cherrybomb (his chosen pseudonym) I came to understand him as a creative and quiet boy who enjoyed PE, playing in the school's adventure playground and also history sessions, as he was fascinated by the past (as evident by observations and during the visual activities). He liked to play computer games, make films and go skating. Cherrybomb was in Year 5 and he had a younger brother and older sister also at the school. He experienced academic, social and behavioural difficulties.

Cherrybomb explained that he was good friends with Spiral, who was two years younger and my observations suggest similar. When I informally chatted with him during nurture sessions, I found out that the boys became good friends when they had started going to nurture two terms before. My observations suggest that Spiral was a polite, helpful and smartly dressed boy who liked playing with Lego, skating, swimming and computer games. His favourite part of the school day was maths, at which he considered himself good, and also break and lunchtimes. He disliked being picked on, something he explained to me both during snack time and also during the visual activities.

Most of the time Cherrybomb appeared calm and relaxed in nurture. He explained confidently that:

I fit in at nurture.... I join in and stuff.... and children talk to me.... and include me in their games.... It's actually been helping me a lot... Sometimes in Year 4 I got bullied by the Year 6s but since I've been coming to nurture that's not happened. (stimulated recall, 08.07.12)

During informal discussions, the two nurture group leaders endorsed this view of how the intervention had improved the social skills and behaviour of the children, though these improvements were less evident on the occasions I observed Cherrybomb in his lessons:

After break the children came into the classroom and sat on the carpet. Straightaway, Cherrybomb sat down on the floor but began to distract other children. Independently, he made a decision to go to the calm down zone at the back of the classroom. He then began shouting in a loud voice appearing very angry and upset. In an attempt to ignore the behaviour, the teacher began the lesson, but Cherrybomb continued shouting out and throwing pencils etc. – generally being extremely disruptive. The teacher stopped the lesson for a moment and went over to Cherrybomb. She tried to understand him ... His behaviour brought the lesson to a standstill. The teacher in a calm, firm but fair voice explained to Cherrybomb that he could either join in with the lesson or go to nurture and straightaway he walked out the room (fieldnotes, 02.07.2012)

Through attending the nurture group, Cherrybomb and Spiral become close friends and they would frequently play together. For example:

I came into nurture to find Cherrybomb, Spiral and two other children on the floor gathered around a box of Lego. The children appeared calm and relaxed giggling and joking with each other. Although in a group of four, Cherrybomb and Spiral played their own game, swapping bits of Lego, looking happy and confident. Spiral said to Cherrybomb 'I'll swap this for a bomb' only for Cherrybomb to respond, 'Who wants a green suitcase that'll keep you alive?' The game continued, as the other children sat quietly playing with the Lego alone, Cherrybomb shouted out in an enthusiastic, animated voice, 'I've got a laser' and Spiral said 'Oh no it's going to kill me'. They continued to share their Lego with each other, completely absorbed in their play (fieldnotes, 03.07.12)

During snack time each day, these children frequently told their peers about what the two of them had been up to out of school such going to the skate park, swimming or playing computer games at each other's houses. Spiral would often help Cherrybomb with work, as he would easily get agitated and frustrated. Despite Cherrybomb's friendship with Spiral, at

times he would still be quite withdrawn, choosing to work away from all the other children, something the nurture group leaders explained was linked with low self-esteem.

In nurture, Cherrybomb often played with a quiet, shy boy called Edward who had autism and was part home-schooled. Their favourite activity was computer games. Interestingly despite all the times I observed these two playing together, Cherrybomb failed to mention Edward during the visual activities. On three occasions I asked Cherrybomb why, but every time I got the same response ('I don't know'). When I asked the nurture leader, she wasn't sure either – though she did suggest that it could be because Edward only attends the school part-time and even then he is often absent.

Behaviour was considered by both Spiral and Cherrybomb as key to their belonging:

I think it [belonging] has changed a lot... nurture has changed my behaviour... I'm calmer... I'm better at controlling my anger. (Cherrybomb, stimulated recall, 08.07.12)

Similarly, I recorded:

I introduced the issue of belonging, explaining that, 'You know last term, we talked about belonging? So belonging is when you feel that you fit in somewhere, so you might feel part of your class, or part of you nurture group'. He had a blank look on his face and there was a pause for a moment as he seemed to be thinking hard. In a quiet voice he said, 'I think I belong in nurture' and went on to explain it's 'Because I'm always good and calm and friendly.' The frown had returned to his face, and he looked really fed up '... when I'm in class I sometimes have wobbles... in the playground people get into fights with me... sometimes... I try and walk away but they keep on following me and hurting me.' The frown on his face had deepened and he stared down at the table looking very sad (stimulated recall, 02.10.12)

This suggests that in nurture Cherrybomb found it easier to manage his behaviour and that behaviour may be a key dimension of belonging (something I discuss in section 2.11)

#### *4.9 Social relations at breaktimes*

My observations showed that Cherrybomb and Spiral experienced some positive social interactions at break times. Spiral explained:

My favourite place to play is in the woods... I often play with my friend Brad and umm I'm not really allowed to play with him because he's in a different year. We play It and hide-and-seek... he chases me. He's really, really fast.

Children were only allowed to play with children in their year group, but Spiral chose to ignore the rule, playing in the woods because it was out of the way and therefore he was less likely to get found out. Spiral was particularly keen to film the adventure playground, especially the sandy areas, explaining 'I like to play in the sand... we play who can make the biggest mountain and make castles together... I play with Lisa and James' (video, 06.07.12).

However, when I first spoke with Spiral during snack time, in a sad, serious voice he explained very openly that peers were treating him unkindly on a regular basis. Later he said:

That's one of my friends... her name is Abby... she's in the next class to me'. When I went on to ask 'So what sort of games do you play with Abby?' and Spiral responded 'I don't really play [with her], just sometimes when I'm alone, when I'm lonely I just play with her.' When I asked 'How often do you get lonely?' he had a frown on his face, appearing really sad but went on to say 'not a lot... I get less lonely than I used to'. Still with a sad frown on his face, looking down at his mat, he went onto explain that going to nurture has helped 'me make friends'. (04.10.12, stimulated recall)

Friendship was also a difficult subject for Cherrybomb. When I once I asked him how his day had been he told me in an upset voice, with his head hung low, staring at the ground, that children were being unkind to him, stealing his friends and that he no longer had any friends at all. The nurture leaders explained that Cherrybomb did not have any friends because he got into so many fights; he did not want the children who would be friends with him, but wanted to be friends with those who did not have anything to do with him.

I asked Cherrybomb 'Where in the school do you like to play, or who do you like to play with?' Straight away his body posture changed dramatically. He went from sitting up straight appearing confident and enthusiastic to leaning over/slouching and



rubbing his eyes, completely masking his face from me.... 'I want my friends to do it'. In an apprehensive, hesitant voice he went on to say 'I don't want... I just gotta ask them to do it'. I still had no eye contact from him as he continued to stare at his lap, fiddling with a pen and picking his nails. I asked 'OK, who would you like to be in your film?' He again responded in a slightly hesitant, unsure voice, saying 'umm Sally... she's... umm ... umm ... Sally... Megan... that's all'. (concept map, 10.06.12)

Cherrybomb had a history of getting into fights with peers, so now tended to avoid the lunch hall, eating his food in the nurture room with the nurture leaders and other children. He told me, sounding fed up, that 'I normally stay in at lunchtimes... normally I've no-one to play with.' He sat slouched over his desk looking fed up and sad as he said this (Concept map, 10.06.12). Social difficulties were clearly a worry to Cherrybomb, as he went on to explain 'I used to worry that when I went to big school... I would get beat up by all the Year 6s' (Concept map, 10.06.12). Later he added:

Because normally the people... err when I was in Year 4, I always used to get beat up and stuff... yeah... And when they hurt me I hurt them back... and that was also the Year 6s who did that... that's why I thought beating them up would be good... because they all beaten me up since Year 4. (stimulated recall, 08.07.12)

Cherrybomb experienced much unkind behaviour but he was also unkind to other children. Cherrybomb's other favourite place to go at break times was the adventure playground:

I asked 'Where would you like to film them [your friends]?' Straightaway he looked up and stuck to his arm out confidently to point at the adventure playground. His eye contact has changed from looking down on the ground to making eye contact with me and he sat up straight. (concept map, 10.06.12)

Every year group had allocated time when they could use this facility. As soon as Cherrybomb was allowed to do so, he would run around the playground, down the slides and along the rope bridges as well as playing on the swings. He played alone, although occasionally said hello to peers. During the few times the adventure playground was closed, his behaviour would often escalate, becoming angry and frustrated.

#### *4.10 Social interaction in class*

Cherrybomb experienced a number of social and behavioural difficulties in his Year 5 class. Observations suggested that he particularly struggled with whole-class teaching, when he found it difficult to sit on the floor, instead wandering around the room and fidgeting. During individual work he would frequently become distracted and reliant on an adult for prompting. Cherrybomb struggled academically and, when he made mistakes, he would get angry and give up, refusing to do any more work. At times he would be quite withdrawn, such as declining to join in with group activities or listen to the teacher, but at other times he would be extremely disruptive, such as firing pencils at children or shouting and screaming. The only lessons he seemed to really engage with were PE and history.

Cherrybomb's sense of belonging during lessons was dependent on the work. This was evident when Cherrybomb explained that he often felt excluded:

Probably most of the time, because I don't really fit in with anything, 'cause if I'm doing difficult work at school I don't fit in. (stimulated recall, 08.07.12)

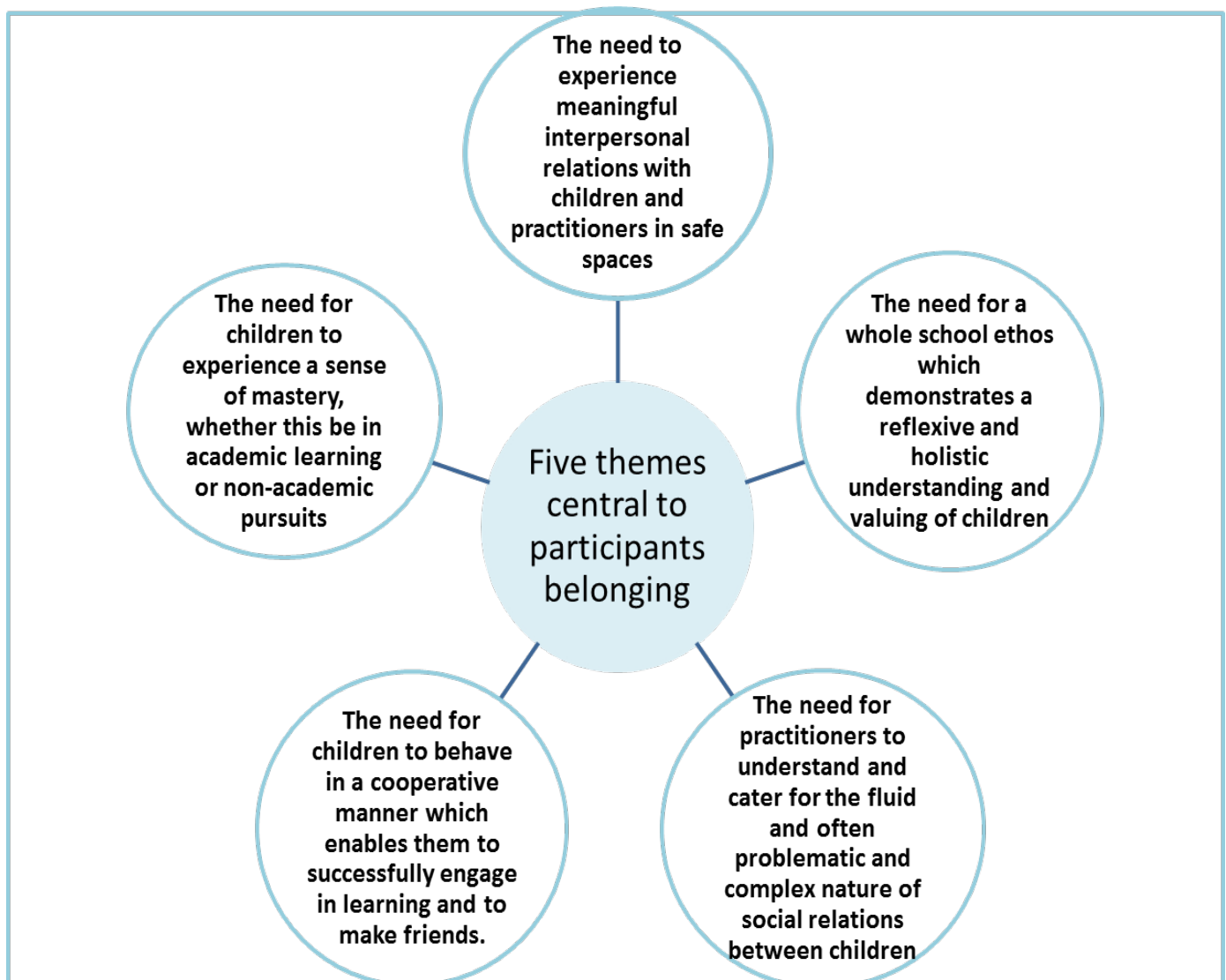
Similarly when I asked Cherrybomb whether there were any times he felt he belonged he explained, 'When I don't get that much work, because usually we get lots of work' (fieldnotes, 08.07.12).

He also went on to say:

Well normally on school trips I fit in... But not the trip to see the Mary Rose. That was pretty boring, I went to Mary Rose, yeah, and we had to do sketching of the – you know, Henry VIII boat... we had to sketch the whole thing... it was really difficult... I couldn't sketch it (fieldnotes, 08.07.12)

This suggests that the need for academic work to be accessible was important to Cherrybomb's sense of belonging. I expand on this in the next section.

#### *4.11 Dimensions of practice influencing participants' social experiences and belonging*



**Figure 4.4: The key aspects of educational practice which determined participants' social relations and belonging**

When I analysed the data I identified five themes central to participants belonging. See appendix M for details of the coding process and an explanation of the origins of the different themes.

Appendices I and J also provide an overview of the findings relating to the role of the resource base and the nurture group in supporting the social relations and belonging of participants. I discuss many of the points raised on these concept maps in this coming section.

*a. The need to experience meaningful interpersonal relations with children and practitioners in safe spaces*

The most frequently coded theme ('belonging and the importance of peer relations') from the visual activities was the importance of meaningful peer relations and feeling included for participants' sense of belonging. For example, Scooby explained that when peers included him in their games he felt he belonged, but on occasions where peers excluded him he felt he didn't fit in (visual activities). This was further confirmed by data which suggests that being treated unkindly was often detrimental to belonging. For example, SpongeBob explained, 'Yeah I do feel I belong when I'm being not bullied like. I've been bullied about twice this month: last Monday, last Wednesday and last Friday' (concept mapping, 05.12.11).

Interestingly, Cherrybomb explained that he felt he belonged in the adventure playground and chose to film the playground. Nearly every time I saw him there he was alone, but he may not have felt alone. At Middletree data suggested that meaningful interpersonal relations were key to belonging. However, at Woodfield, Cherrybomb went on to explain 'I love playing in the adventure playground. It's so much fun'. This emphasis on enjoyment and fun was similarly emphasised by Spiral during the stimulated recall in which he explained 'I fit in in certain parts of school.... especially art, maths and guided reading because I enjoy doing them'. Interestingly, this emphasis on belonging and enjoyment is only evident in the data relating to Woodfield, not Middletree (I discuss this in greater detail later in the chapter).

Some of the data suggests that closely supervised play was helpful in fostering meaningful peer relationships. At Middletree children played games such as cops and robbers or pirates together in the resource base before registration and break times. At break times and lunchtimes children from the resource base chose whether to stay inside or to go out into the playground with the rest of their year, and this play was closely supervised by LSAs. SpongeBob usually went into the playground where he played games like 'It' or hide and seek, interacting with children his age rather than staying in the resource base. All the participants spoke about how play helped them to form friendships and establish a sense of belonging. However, this was dependent on close supervision. At Middletree, the shape and crowded nature of the playground and the fast pace of children's movements meant supervision was much harder to achieve than in a classroom setting. A couple worrying situations occurred, for example:

I had just arrived in the playground and suddenly spotted SpongeBob pushed up against a wall, surrounded by a group of boys from his year. I was perturbed—this did not look like play. SpongeBob looked scared—he was quiet which was rare for him. Two boys had their hands around his neck. I rushed over and as soon as the boys saw me, the group dispersed, leaving SpongeBob standing silently appearing shocked, before rushing indoors (fieldnotes, 01.12.12).

On another occasion I entered the playground to find SpongeBob on the floor with Jeremy towering above him. As I went closer I overheard Jeremy say to SpongeBob ‘I would have beat you more’ (see section 4.5 for further discussion of this incident). My data included observations of another child from the resource base, Hamster. On one occasion, Hamster was gathered with a group of girls in the playground who were giggling and tickling each other and generally being silly. I then went off to another part of the playground and later heard from staff that this situation had escalated when Hamster had attempted to gouge the eyes of one of the girls, resulting in her having to go to hospital. These observations highlight the need for close supervision to facilitate the development of safe and meaningful peer relations.

In the mainstream Year 5 classes at Middletree School, once children had completed their work each day they were allowed to play games, such as computer games, play-dough or Lego. The use of this and other play often supported interactions between children with and without SEN. This aided the development of friendships based on similar interests and personalities rather than being impairment-specific (see section 4.3). It also enabled children to show different parts of their character, potentially challenging peer perceptions. However, the use of play was not always helpful in supporting social interaction and sometimes peer attitudes towards difference hindered these opportunities:

During free choice, Tony is first to get the pirate ship and fort out as other children finished their work. Carlos comes and joins Tony with the fort. Together they play again with a plastic Lego boat and a crystal. Other children also gather to play with the pirate ship, though Carlos is the only one to play with Tony. He is truly engrossed in this play. Other children hovered behind, glancing at his play, unsure whether to join in. They seem wary of Tony. Carlos (with a toy horse in his hand) states that Tony is a horse that bites. I asked why and he said it was because of his biting. Other

children play with the pirate ship ignoring Tony. Eventually the other children get fed up and leave Tony playing all by himself (fieldnotes, 05/11/2011)

This example shows the detrimental influence of peer perceptions on social relations, suggesting that whilst play opportunities are often helpful in supporting interaction, at times these benefits were hindered by negative peer perceptions of children considered to be, and experienced as being, 'different'.

Central to supporting peer relations during play was the role of adults. At Middletree SpongeBob was closely supervised by experienced LSAs who tended to adopt an observational role, only intervening if absolutely necessary. However, this did require careful management as, despite the considerable benefits of play, at times SpongeBob would rush his work so that he could play or would become agitated and angry when the other children started taking the computers whilst he was still working, something that often happened (e.g. Fieldnotes 02.12.2011; 09.01.2012). Rather than adapting practice to meet SpongeBob's needs and avoid situations like this, the emphasis was placed on SpongeBob adapting his behaviour to conform to the expectations of staff. Reflecting a similar within-child, individualised understanding, when I informally spoke with staff about the social difficulties Scooby and Sonic were experiencing, staff blamed the boys' behaviour and personalities. These two boys were frustrated and felt powerless about this situation – during the visual activities and informal discussions they explained that they had sought help from staff, only for these adults to do nothing about it. This reflects a blaming of children for their social difficulties by staff (and some blaming of staff by children), rather than these staff attempting to change practice to address the difficulties these children were having.

At Middletree School, Scooby and Sonic had little choice but to go out into the playground most days, where they became a target of abuse. I wrote in my reflexive diary:

... every playtime these boys experience abuse – it is painful for me to even observe this, let alone how it must feel for these boys. They have no where they can get away from it. ... It is however possible that my own childhood experiences meant that I made a bee-line for negative interaction or attributed my own emotions to what I was observing.. However, on numerous occasions I found Scooby in tears in the playground and when I talked to him about why, it was always the same reason linked with the abuse he was experiencing (diary, 15/10/2011)

Whereas at Woodfield School there was a wealth of strategies in place to help children experiencing social difficulties and different activities and places in the school for children to go at break times. This catered for the different personalities, needs and interests of pupils. For example, the outdoor space was divided into a number of play areas with wooden equipment for children to climb, balance or jump on, a football area and a sheltered outdoor seating area, providing variety. There was also an impressive enclosed adventure park with lots of swings, slides, climbing apparatus, a zip wire and sand to dig. Children seemed to get on remarkably well together, something a recent Ofsted inspection also pointed out. Those children who spent lunchtimes in the nurture room also engaged in play, from computer games to Lego. Cherrybomb and Spiral spent many break times playing with children in nurture where they established close friendships and belonging. In my reflexive diary (01.07.2012) I wrote of my sense of relief at the responsiveness of this school in adapting practice to the needs of children. However, the availability of exciting play areas did not always guarantee successful social play, for example:

As soon as Cherrybomb arrived at the football pitch, he enthusiastically marched over to the goal and barged two children out of the way, both of whom wanted to be in goal. Despite the other children attempting to reason with him, he refused to move and the boys stormed off and took their place away from the goal. The game began and Cherrybomb had a big grin on his face appearing relaxed and content. However, he failed to follow the rules, constantly barging other children out of the way. When it was time to go in, the children gathered around Cherrybomb and explained to him that due to his behaviour he had one red and two yellow cards. This meant he would not be able to play football again at lunchtime. He looked fed up and with his head hung low he stormed off (fieldnotes, 01.07.12)

This example demonstrates not only how children policed the rules of play and the challenges of team games, but the difficulties Cherrybomb experienced in rule-based play.

During nurture sessions, play was again much used in fostering interaction. Whilst undertaking the concept mapping activity, Cherrybomb spoke of how he came to know Spiral through attending nurture and playing games. During these sessions children often gathered around a box of Lego. The nurture leader would stand back, but at the same time avidly listen to the children's conversations, ready to intervene if necessary. For example:

The children went back to playing Lego. Spiral had most of the bricks in front of him leaving another boy with barely any and a large frown on his face. The nurture leader intervened, saying 'remember to use an I statement'. Slightly unsure and cautiously, the boy said 'I don't like it when you don't share'. The children returned to their Lego, dividing the bricks equally between themselves (fieldnotes, 18.06.12)

In this instance, and on other occasions in nurture, the nurture leader modelled ways of effectively managing problematic social situations, whilst teaching children valuable lessons about the importance of sharing and thinking of others. Spiral and Cherrybomb explained how friendship was central to their belonging, affirming the value of the school's interventionist approach in modelling behaviour and developing social skills. At Middletree School participants didn't know how to manage social situations (e.g. abuse) and would often seek advice from me:

Today during the visual activity SpongeBob asked me how he could make friends with a boy in his class who he'd fallen out with. Similarly, Scooby and Sonic had asked me similar questions when they sought advice regarding their social difficulties. Whilst this demonstrates the close relationship I had with the children I also feel very unsure of my role ... This demonstrates the complexities of doing an ethnography and this was something I felt constantly unsure of. When children sought advice from me, I tried to be helpful as possible giving advice, but at the same time I felt unsure about whether this was my role. Part of the reason these concerns were so profound, was because there appeared to be only limited pastoral support. Therefore I perhaps filled an important gap in the schools provision, yet I felt this wasn't my job to do (diary, 27/02/2012)

The longer Scooby experienced abuse the more his confidence dipped, highlighting the value of interventionist approaches if used cautiously.

At Woodfield School, both Spiral and Cherrybomb spoke about their strong rapport with nurture staff and how instrumental this was for their sense of belonging in nurture (see section 4.9). This rapport was also evident during observations of the group; for example, for no obvious reason, Cherrybomb approached the nurture leader and hugged her. In front of the staff, the children also spoke very openly about how they were feeling, for example explaining that they were sad because they had seen graffiti on a nearby building or because



another child had hurt them. On another occasion, during a conversation about lunchtimes and ways of handling unkind behaviour, Spiral put his hand up and said to the class, ‘if someone is being unkind to you, you just tell the adults in nurture and they’ll sort it out’ (fieldnotes, 06.07.12). In my diary I reflected on my emotional response:

I have considerable admiration for staff. The staff care such a lot for these children – just being in nurture I can feel the warmth between the staff and children. Having myself worked in schools, I know this is not easy to achieve. It takes time and effort to build this rapport, and with the competing demands when working in schools, I know this is a challenge (diary, 04.06.2012)

The way practitioners responded to physical and verbal abuse was also important to fostering safe spaces and children’s belonging. At Woodfield School, despite the sheer size of the playground, meal time staff continuously observed play. On the few occasions children were boisterous, such as ‘pushing each other and rolling around on the ground’ (fieldnotes, 04.06.12), an adult quickly intervened. Thus, not only was there a high level of supervision but staff readiness to act. Children felt that they could depend upon staff when needed, which added to their belonging. At Middletree School, in the lunch hall the children were well supervised by at least three mealtime assistants and one resource base LSA, all of whom responded promptly to abuse. Yet in the playground physical and verbal abuse was rife—behaviour staff tended to ignore it, only occasionally reporting fighting to the class teacher. This did not help children’s struggle to belong socially, as this physical and verbal abuse was considered by the participants to be extremely detrimental to their feelings of well-being and belonging. Furthermore, Sonic and Scooby both spoke about how they felt staff were not doing enough to help them with their problematic social relations or to stop other children’s negative behaviour towards them. At the time I wrote:

.... I was observing Scooby, Tony and Sonic in their class for the first time. The class sat silently getting on with work, supervised by the teacher and two teaching assistants. Suddenly, out of the quietness came the crystal clear voices of five peers as they hurled abuse at Sonic – calling him all kinds of cruel names and making fun of him for being moved back a year. The abuse went on and on whilst the rest of the class were silent. Although it’s common for children to be cruel to others, I was

surprised that there were staff in the room, yet the abuse continued ... What has Sonic done to deserve this? (diary, 06/11/2011)

I wrote about the strength of my emotional response, my anger and these feelings led me to discretely intervene on this occasion – I started a conversation with the children who were hurling the abuse and this provided enough of a distraction that the children stopped this behaviour and went back to their work. I acknowledge that this was an occasion where it would have been extremely useful to speak with these staff. Every time I attempted to speak with them during the week or two after, they appeared so busy and I did not want to disturb them from what they were doing. After all their main priority was the children and not my research, but I do regret not persevering for longer.

Scooby and Sonics frustrations regarding their perceived lack of help left them feeling alienated and excluded. This suggests that practitioners' readiness (or lack of readiness) in responding to abuse was a factor in Scooby and Sonic's belonging, highlighting of the need for practitioners actively to facilitate safe spaces for interactions and relationships to develop.

*b. the need for practitioners to understand and cater for the fluid and often problematic and complex nature of social relations between children*

A few of the most commonly used codes during the analysis of the visual activities, reflexive diary and fieldnotes referred to the fluid and situated nature of children's social relations and belonging ('fluidity of social relations'; 'social relations and playground'; 'pro-activeness of staff' etc.) For example, analysis showed that children's social relations varied from the playground and classroom, or between different games. Scooby explained that peers would play football with him but refused to play on the climbing wall. Similarly, despite positive interactions between SpongeBob and Jeremy during free play in lessons, lunchtimes showed a very different picture as Jeremy subjected SpongeBob to both physical and verbal abuse. This suggests that, although belonging is determined by social relations, certain contextual school factors facilitate or hinder these social interactions ('role of play'; 'nurture – free of abuse' etc.) My ethnographic approach, particularly the extended duration in the two settings, helped me to understand and see for myself the fluid, situated and contextual nature of social relations, whilst the visual activities provided some of the participants' interpretations, attitudes and personal experiences regarding social relations and especially belonging.

My research raises questions about the extent to which educational provision accommodates this fluidity in children's social lives. Practitioners at Woodfield School provided children with a wealth of options for break times, such as supervised football, playing with toys in nurture, the adventure playground or making up their own games on the grass or tarmac areas of the playground (as discussed in the previous section) . This was not a 'one size fits all' approach but accommodated the different personalities and preferences of pupils. If a child did not want to go outdoors at break times, they could play in nurture instead, where staff kept a record of children attending. As part of their high intervention strategy the school also had a grievance folder where children could write down their social difficulties. Spiral described this strategy as 'helpful because the teachers sort it out the next day' (fieldnotes, 04.06.12). These examples show an understanding of the often problematic nature of social relations, and highlight the school's drive to meet the diverse and varied of needs of pupils. I was impressed (and relieved) by the variety of provision at Woodfield. For children who attended the mainstream school at Middleton (rather than the resource base) and found break times problematic, there were few options. Scooby and Sonic dreaded playtimes, but felt they had no other option and as a result felt excluded. This was also evident during my first day observing lessons:

During the whole class teaching on the carpet, the teacher asked the class to choose a peer to work with and the children quickly paired up. All the children around Tony moved to sit with their backs to him. He sat there looking helpless and upset –sat in a rocking position, with his arms crossed, facing the wall looking fed-up. My heart went out to him as he was the only child without a partner and looked clearly sad. I felt angry at what I observed, as the upset was inadvertently caused by the teacher and her limited understanding of Tony and the social difficulties he experienced ... I felt frustrated by what I observed. This did not meet my initial impressions of the school when the head told me about the provision for children with SEN. This observation reinforced my understandings of inclusion, in particular the importance of schools adapting practice to support the needs of children, reflecting the importance of an individualised approach ... My own work in schools however, helped me to understand how difficult this is in reality to achieve (diary, 06/07/2011)

The data from the visual activities, field notes and diary ('flexible staff'; 'individualised resource base' etc.) suggest that a strength of Middletree School, was the flexibility of the resource base (but not the rest of the school) in enabling children to choose whether to stay in the resource base or go out into the playground, and this play was mostly well supervised. The visual activities and observations of Spongebob showed that this was important in enabling SpongeBob to find his own place or group to belong, enabling him to develop positive social interactions and sense of belonging whilst often overcoming and challenging negative understandings of difference. For example, SpongeBob increasingly established an identity for himself among peers as being a comedian and good at acting. He found a small group of friends in his mainstream year group with whom he felt a strong sense of belonging. These children treated him with kindness and acceptance. He would move fluidly between the resource base and the mainstream playground. Therefore, in some ways SpongeBob skilfully challenged negative understandings associated with the resource base, creating a positive identity for himself. This was facilitated by the freedom and flexibility of break time provision for children in the resource base, catering in some ways to the complexity of needs. Although on other occasions he did experienced considerable abuse, therefore the flexibility of the resource was not a guarantee for positive social relations and belonging at all times (as previously discussed).

At Middletree School, observations showed the important role of staff from the resource base was evident in aiding movement between the base and mainstream, helping children to find a place to belong. The staff were experienced, knowledgeable and flexible. This helped SpongeBob to establish his own social positioning within his year group, providing greater opportunities for social interaction than were evident in the resource base. Nonetheless, the children's movement between the resource base and mainstream was still highly problematic due to the actions of other children and staff reflecting broader, conflicting institutional beliefs that undermined the good intentions of the resource base staff. For example, the resource base reflected a strong emphasis on meeting the needs of the individual child, whilst the mainstream had a less personalised approach and the conflicting ethos created and reinforced a 'them and us' perspective:

Every time I observe SpongeBob in mainstream lessons the same happens. He listens avidly and puts his hand up frequently during whole class teaching appearing really engaged but this quickly changes when he begins the independent work. It's like a

ticking time bomb, every time...he starts to struggle with the work,, he gets angry and frustrated, his behaviour escalates and he is led out of the classroom kicking and screaming...It is so frustrating to observe as it may merely reinforce negative peer perceptions of SpongeBob and these eruptions could be avoided/reduced (diary, 10/02/2012).

Similarly, discussions with children and observations showed that the fraught, chaotic and noisy nature of the playground at break times was often too much for Tony and Hamster to cope with and, as a result, these children often remained in the resource base as this offered a more personalised environment, contrasting the rest of the school. Therefore, despite the good intentions, experience and commitment of the staff from the resource base, movement between the two provisions was often problematic, reinforcing exclusion.

For children who attended the mainstream school at Middletree (rather than the resource base) and found break times problematic, there were few options. Apart from 'special play' once a week, children had no choice but to go out into the busy, cramped playground, which did not appear to meet the diversity of children's needs. Scooby and Sonic dreaded playtimes, but felt they had no other option and as a result felt excluded. As time went on the head of the resource base increasingly allowed Scooby to spend break times in the resource base, reflecting an understanding of the social difficulties he was experiencing. She also introduced a once a week 'lunchtime club'. It would be interesting to go back to the school to see whether this initiative has continued or whether the school have reverted back to a blanket approach to break times. My data highlight the necessity of schools understanding the often problematic and fluid nature of social interaction and belonging and ensuring children are given options and support for negotiating unstructured parts of the school day in particular.

*c. The need for a whole school ethos which demonstrates a reflexive and holistic understanding and valuing of children*

The school ethos was central to the movement and belonging of children between specialist interventions (resource and nurture) and mainstream classes. Both interventions (resource base and nurture group) were built on the assumption that children with SEBD, autism or poor social skills are *different* or *other* and therefore require *expert* help to correct perceived

*deficits* or bridge social worlds. Observations showed that underpinning practice at both schools was an emphasis on school rules that maintained broader societal norms with regards to behaviour and conforming to these rules were reinforced by the use of rewards. However, what differed between the two schools was the extent to which their interventions related to the whole school ethos. At Middletree, the resource base was entirely separate provision with specialist staff and a different daily timetable, rules and sanctions, reflecting a ‘them and us’ approach (as also discussed in the previous section). Whilst this reflected an individualised approach, this contradicted mainstream practice, something I reflected on in my diary:

From studying the research regarding inclusive practice and previously working in various schools, I was very aware of the challenges of supporting inclusion, but discussions with the head raised my expectations. However as data collection progressed, I became more and more frustrated and disillusioned by mainstream practice, in particular their ‘one-size ‘fits all approach within the mainstream school and it was difficult to observe the detrimental effect of this on participants day after day. I had considerable empathy for these children . This reaffirms in my mind the importance of a whole school individualised approach (diary, 26.11.11)

At Woodfield, in contrast, rather than the nurture group feeling like an ‘add on’, this intervention was a valued part of the school, evident in how teachers and TAs would frequently come into the group to discuss a child’s progress and seek advice or share snack time. Similarly, the nurture group used the same behaviour strategies and rules that I observed in class lessons. This suggests that the nurture group was embedded in the practice and ethos of the wider school, instead of being separate as at Middletree.

The two schools also differed considerably with regards to the extent to which the provision tailored the practice to meet individual needs, rather than expecting the child to alter him or herself. At Middletree School, when children from the resource base attended mainstream lessons their inclusion was dependent on behaviour. Observations showed that as a soon as a child became disruptive verbally (loud, rude or threatening) or physically (hitting, kicking, throwing objects at others) they would automatically be excluded from the class by the teacher without any warning. SpongeBob was merely a visitor in mainstream lessons, and his right to be there was determined by the extent to which he conformed to behavioural norms. The same was also true for Hamster and Toby. Their inclusion in the ordinary classes was,

therefore, conditional. Little was happening to challenge negative understandings of difference. At Woodfield School the provision placed greater emphasis on meeting the diversity of all children's needs, whether through interventions like nurture or through the class teacher tailoring lessons to meet individual needs, highlighting a difference in ethos and understandings of inclusion between the two schools.

Not only did the research suggest a difference between the two schools with regards to meeting diverse needs, it also showed contrasting understandings of the purpose of schooling, this was something I reflected on in my diary:

Education and wider society often promotes academic achievement which I believe reflects a determination to compete globally. I consider this to be grossly unfair to children. For example, for Spongebob achievement might be learning to manage his anger or for Hamster he might aim to mix more with peers, linked also with school practice. Yet these important developments are rarely noticed as education promotes an understanding that achievement must be about attainment based on certain school subjects determined by policy makers. My annoyance with this approach partly stems from my childhood – I was terrible at exams and this was detrimental to my confidence. The more exams I failed, the more I felt I didn't fit in at school. Therefore I understand how damaging overly reductionist understandings of the child can be (diary, 08.01.12)

I however, acknowledge that my own experiences of education will inevitably have influenced these findings.

At Middletree School, there was a clear emphasis on children's academic needs (reinforced through stickers, certificates etc.) but my observations and discussions with the children suggested that only limited attention was given to their social and emotional needs. This was evident by the lack of help or strategies in the mainstream available to children experiencing social difficulties. Similarly, during observations at breaktimes, Scooby explained 'I don't know what to do... I don't know how to stop the abuse and my teacher won't help' (01.12.11). Scooby explained similar concerns, though I acknowledge I did not gain the practitioners views on this matter, limiting these insights. As time went on, the head of the resource base realised the difficulties Scooby was experiencing and at the end of data collection introduced a buddy scheme and lunchtime club Scooby spoke very positively about

this intervention, especially the buddy scheme – During observations he explained ‘I love being a buddy – it’s less stressful. I feel under less pressure to always play with my peers. I get to help other children too’ At Woodfield School, there was a clear understanding of the need to meet not only academic needs but children’s social and emotional needs too. This was evident by the wealth of strategies available, like ‘bubble time’, the ‘work it out area’ and the Key Stage 2 nurture group. For example, Spiral explained ‘if you have difficulties finding someone to play with, you just ask the teacher or write it in the grievance folder and they will help you’ (observations 18.06.12). Similarly Cherrybomb explained ‘the work it out area is great. It gives me time to calm down before I do something I regret and get into trouble’ (20.06.12). My observations showed children using these strategies, and on most occasions the strategies appeared to be helpful – though on occasions Cherrybomb would use the ‘work it out area’ and still appear angry afterwards.

When physical or verbal abuse did occur among the children, these schools dealt with this in contrasting ways. Observations at Middletree School showed that on the few occasions a child was sanctioned for fighting, the child would receive a detention when they would sit and copy out lines. Although these children informally explained that they found detentions tedious, it did nothing to help practitioners understand the reasons for the fighting or to teach the child how to manage playtimes more effectively, avoiding violence. I had considerable empathy for the children at this school where memories of my own childhood experiences rose to the fore. For example:

Observing Tony made me feel really sad. In only a few hours in the setting I observed how other children were very unkind to Tony, calling him names, leaving him out etc. He was clearly anxious when it came to mixing with peers and he told me about how another child was hurting him. I left feeling quite concerned about this child and what this child was going through on a daily basis. ... staff ... talk about the inclusive ethos of the school as from what I observed today with regards to Tony this is far from the case. This school does not match my understanding of inclusion ... Schools are in such a powerful position to challenge negative understandings of difference ... However what I observed today, just makes me angry that the school can call itself inclusive and yet it seems to be missing a most fundamental dimension of inclusion which is the social side of education (diary, 02.07.2011).



This was different to Woodfield's approach. For example, on a number of occasions I overheard conversations between the nurture leaders and children, in which they talked about previous incidents of inappropriate behaviour, such as playground fights. This was handled patiently, calmly and clearly; the adults discussed why the behaviour was inappropriate and the consequences for doing so, helping children to reflect on what had happened and think about different ways of handling that social situation. This enabled staff to gain insights into the reasons for certain behaviour, enabling them to better support the children's needs, aiding future social interaction and belonging.

Whilst the findings suggested that the previous three themes I identified applied to most participants the last two themes were less universal amongst the children.

*d. The need for children to experience a sense of mastery, whether this be in academic learning or non-academic pursuits*

At both schools children talked of a sense of mastery as being important to their belonging and social relations. For example, Scooby explained 'I fit in in certain parts of school ... I fit it at art, maths and guided reading which I really like and it helps me because I used to find writing is really hard ...but now I do well in it' (concept mapping, 01.12.11). Similarly Spiral explained 'I like maths...I am top of my year. I am good at it and fit in' (observations, 12.06.12). Cherrybomb said the same with regards to PE. Cherrybomb struggled academically and explained that these academic difficulties meant he did not belong in lessons (discussed in section 2.10). He went on to explain how he usually felt a sense of belonging when his class went on school trips because the work was easy, but he felt excluded at the most recent trip to a maritime museum because he was unable to do the work (drawing a boat). Interestingly, Spongebob and Sonic did not mention mastery – yet my observations showed they experienced academic difficulties too.

These findings also highlight the importance of schools developing inclusive practices to enable all children to excel and succeed and therefore feel a sense of belonging. At Woodfield School staff mostly adapted the curriculum to meet the needs of each individual child. For example:

Today I found out that the nurture group is open to all children. What I was particularly impressed by was when staff explained that they'd keep a record of

children who are attending the nurture group at lunchtimes and if a child attends a lot, indicating social difficulties, the staff will try and sort out someone and play with. This is another example which illustrate the impressive awareness and understanding of the social difficulties many children face and the proactiveness of staff in addressing these social difficulties (fieldnotes, 06.11.12)

This individualised approach was also evident when I observed lessons. For example:

I was particularly impressed by the way the teacher managed the behaviour of one particular boy. The child kept have quite severe outbursts and temper tantrums in which he becomes very disruptive. On two different occasions I could tell the boy was starting to get angry and began having a temper tantrum, over I'm not sure why. Rather than the teacher telling him off she instead sat down on the floor with him and started tickling him saying comforting things like ' who has stripy pants'. The boy sat wriggling, laughing on the carpet appearing much happier and calmer. The teacher's strategy was very effective in diffusing the situation. He then followed the teachers' instructions and got on with his work like the other children, looking at a rock on his table (chalk) and starting to draw it. Later on I could sense another outburst was building. He looked less calm and distracted from what he was doing. The teacher quickly spotted this and went over and tickled him again. Again he became much calmer (fieldnotes, 03.07.12)

It would have been easier for the teacher to send the child out of the room, but instead her individualised approach helped this child remain in the lesson and engage in learning.

*e. The need for children to behave in a cooperative manner which enables them to successfully engage in learning and to make friends.*

Key to social relations and belonging for Cherrybomb, Spongebob and spiral was their behaviour; these were the children in this research who experienced the most difficulties with their behaviour. For example, during stimulated recall (02.10.12) Cherrybomb explained ' I think I belong in nurture.... Because I'm always good and calm and friendly... when I'm in class I sometimes have wobbles (referring to his behaviour)'. Similarly, my observations

showed that in lessons SpongeBob struggled to behave in the way the school wanted him to (such as staying calm) and as a result many peers were wary of him and tended to keep their distance (see section 4.7). Conversely, Scooby and Sonic rarely experienced difficulties with behaviour which might explain why behaviour did not seem to be important for their belonging.

The importance of behaviour in determining social experiences for some children raises questions about how schools manage behaviour. In the resource base at Middleton School, each child had a report card that encouraged safe behaviour (for example no biting) and they would earn points. On a weekly basis these points were plotted onto a bar chart and displayed on the wall in the resource base. Staff placed great emphasis on this system, something the children found very motivating. They frequently reminded children of their points and introduced exciting rewards. However, when children attended mainstream lessons, aside from their dedicated LSA there were no other obvious behavioural strategies in place. These children were expected to conform to the school's perception of socially acceptable behaviour.

At Woodfield School, there were a number of extremely well thought out behavioural strategies in place, and this resulted in less disruptive behaviour. There was strong emphasis on rules, from how to behave to who to play with. In every class I observed, including nurture, there was a behaviour board with all the children's names on Velcro. Children either moved their name up the behaviour board or down, depending on behaviour, in a clear system of rewards and sanctions. This behaviour approach was used consistently in the different classes and practitioners often encouraged children to recite the rules to themselves or their peers. Behaviour at break times and in lessons was generally impeccable, something their recent Ofsted inspection also noted (2012). However, at times the school rules restricted social interactions. One particular rule that stood out was that children were only allowed to play with others the same age, although this rule did not apply in nurture. This came up during stimulated recall (08.07.12), in which Cherrybomb talked about the children he played with out of school. He explained that he wanted to play with two girls who went to the same school and lived almost next door to him, before going onto say:

Well I don't play with them because we're not allowed to play with people that are smaller than us... it's not fair because I play with my brother all the time.

Similarly, during the concept mapping activity (10.06.12), Spiral stated 'It's not fair because I want to play with (name) but I'm not allowed'. On one occasion I overheard a conversation in which a child was being told off for playing with a younger boy during the previous break time (05.06.12). The nurture leader then went on to remind the children that they should only play with children their own age or year group. This was because in the past, there had been incidents where older children made trouble for younger peers by asking them to do things against the school rules, such as stealing. Frequently children were banned from the lunch hall, playground, school trips and sports day due to poor behaviour, especially fighting. For example a boy who attended nurture explained that he had been banned from the playground 'for about a year' due to fighting. He was also banned from the lunch hall for similar reasons, eating his lunch in nurture instead. Although these examples highlight the pro-activeness of the school in managing behaviour, it also raises questions regarding the extent to which their no-nonsense approach towards behaviour restricted social interactions.

At Woodfield School, alongside the clear emphasis on rules, practitioners encouraged pupils to be reflective and manage problematic social situations themselves, rather than always going to an adult for help. A number of strategies were in place to aid this development. For example, Spiral frequently used 'bubble time', a strategy designed to encourage children to talk between themselves about their social difficulties, working out a solution. This was evident when:

I arrived in the nurture room to find Spiral and three other children sat on the carpet talking through a disagreement they had at lunchtime in the adventure playground in which a child got hurt. Spiral and his peers spoke with confidence about what had happened, reflecting on their behaviour and what they could have done differently (fieldnotes, 11.07.12)

Therefore, 'bubble time' was a strategy designed to scaffold learning, helping a child to reflect on their social behaviour and work out different ways of handling a particular social situation. Similarly, Spiral explained 'I like it bubble time ... it helps me understand sometimes why I fall out with other children' (observations 11.07.12). As friendship was considered by participants to be a necessity for belonging, this highlights the value of interventionist approaches. On the walls in the nurture room were posters about bullying and how to behave, such as reminding children to use their 'golden words' (please, thank you

etc.). On various occasions I saw children looking at a poster called 'keeping calm strategies' and there was also one called the 'problem-solving ring of choice'. This poster told children various steps in managing social difficulties, explaining that if a child is doing something they do not like, they should 'tell them to stop... count to 10... go to another game... ask an adult for advice'. These examples highlight the importance that Woodfield staff placed on social relations and demonstrate their interventionist approach.

Every classroom I went into at Woodfield School had a 'work it out area'. This was a designated 'calm down' zone where children could go to if they were angry or upset and wanted some time to think.

Back in the classroom I came in to see three girls chatting in a corner of the classroom about a disagreement they had. This was a comfy looking area with a colourful bean bag on the ground and above it a poster titled 'keeping calm strategies'—after a couple of minutes the children had worked out the disagreement and came and sat down on the carpet with the rest of the class. I was impressed by how calm the environment was. Though I would to what extent the fraught, tense environment at the previous school meant that I noticed the calm and orderly feel much more than I would've (fieldnotes, 01.07.12)

Spiral spoke of the benefits of this approach, in which he stated, 'when I have wobbles I use it.... It helps me to stop and think about what I've done and become calmer' (Fieldnotes, 07.06.12). Cherrybomb explained:

It's helpful sometimes, except when really angry or done something really wrong like hitting someone. If this happens I go straight to Miss... (name) ... Last year when I used to use the calm down zone, the Year 6s kept coming in and beating me up when Miss (name) wasn't there. (stimulated recall, 08.07.12)

Woodfield School also utilised a friendship box in which children could write positive comments about their peers, such as who had helped or played nicely with them. At the end of the day the plaudits were read out by the teacher and many of the children smiled or laughed when they heard what peers had written about them. At the start of the next school year this approach was adapted slightly and, instead of the friendship box, at the back of every classroom was a photograph of each child and peers were asked to stick self-adhesive

comments beside the pictures. These are just a few of the many strategies this school used to manage the social and emotional needs of children, reflecting an extremely nurturing whole school ethos where practitioners focused on the social and emotional needs of the child as well as academic needs.

#### *4.13 Summary*

My research suggests that for all participants the following were central to their belonging and social relationships:

1. Meaningful peer relations, often supported by practices such as supervised play, in the modelling of appropriate behaviour to improve children's skills and close child-practitioner relations.
2. Practitioners' understanding of the fluid, complex and situated nature of children's social interactions made evident in provision which takes this into account.
3. A school ethos underpinned by not only an awareness of the need to tailor practice to meet the different needs of children but also the importance of supporting social needs alongside academic needs, embedded in whole school practice.

For some of the children the following were also important:

4. Mastery of aspects of school life - being good at something.
5. Behaviour (supported by effective behaviour strategies) so as not to disrupt interactions with others.

In the next chapter I discuss some of these findings in more detail in relation to the literature.



## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Introduction

Having provided in-depth insights into participants' social experiences and belonging and the associated dimensions of education, I now discuss these findings in relation to the literature and how my research adds to the body of knowledge. This study provides particularly interesting insights into children's experiences of belonging, which has been under-researched, especially in the UK (Frederickson *et al.* 2007). This research, therefore, helps to fill an important gap in the literature by providing qualitative, multimodal insights into children's sense of belonging in two schools in the UK, highlighting the aspects of practice that supported or hindered the children's sense of belonging from their perspective. These findings are particularly valuable as studies have shown that belonging is one of the most important needs for students to function well in all types of learning environments (Maslow 1968; Giangreco *et al.* 2010). Belonging is important for motivation and engagement in learning (Goodenow 1993b; Beck and Malloy 2003) and self-esteem (Battistich *et al.* 1997), whilst reducing the likelihood of a student seeking their own sense of belonging in more anti-social contexts like gangs (Kaplan and Johnson 1992).

### 5.2 The influence of peers

When participants talked about their belonging, the most commonly discussed theme was their relationships with other children, mirroring Probyn's (1996, p.19) definition of belonging as the need for 'some sort of attachment' or McMillan and Chavis' (1986) emphasis on group *membership*. In research by Ainscow *et al.* (1999) and Davies and Lee (2006), although their participants were on the edge of being excluded from school, these young people talked positively about their social relations with other peers and the multiple social opportunities school provided. Therefore, my findings reinforce this message and illustrate the relevance of friendships to younger children's sense of belonging.

Different from existing models of belonging or community (McMillan and Chavis 1986; Pooley *et al.* 2007), however, my findings indicate that for the children belonging was a constantly evolving process rather than fixed. This provides support for Probyn (1996, p.19) who suggests that 'the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to



belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state'. My data further illustrate how belonging is dynamic, unstable and contingent, even among children in primary schools. Yuval-Davis (2006) makes a similar point but with regards to belonging and ethnicity.

My research showed the fluidity of participants belonging and how this changed over time and context. For example, in the case of Sonic, over time he adjusted to his new class and started to make friends and gain a sense of belonging. Similarly, Spiral and Cherrybomb discussed how their belonging changed in nurture as they gradually formed close friendships with each other. This demonstrates how participants belonging developed and grew over the time and the influence of educational practices such as play in supporting this. This understanding is further emphasised by Jackson (1983) and Fenster (2005), but my research shows how this is reflected in the social experiences and belonging of young children.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) argue that essential to belonging is a need for a *shared emotional connection*, but do not expand upon this. The data reported in this thesis provide additional insights into the characteristics of these emotional connections, such as the need to feel included by peers, a point Anthias (2006) also makes but in relation to migrants. This aligns with Hamm and Faircloth's (2005) research among teenagers in a racially diverse school in America and Booker's (2007) study of African-American high school students. Our research endorses Goodenow and Grady's (1993, pp.60-61) description of belonging as 'the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment'. Despite the absence of this in Pooley *et al.*'s model of belonging (2007), I argue, based on the data here, that feeling included and accepted by peers is vital.

Interestingly, at Woodfield, whilst feeling accepted and included by peers was still important, Cherrybomb and Spiral also spoke in detail about the relationship between belonging, mastery and behaviour. These boys felt they belonged in the nurture group but less so in the rest of the school where they particularly struggled with their behaviour and academic attainment. This perhaps reflected the relational nature of belonging, as identified by Butler (1990). A person usually becomes aware of this feeling, when their sense of belonging is threatened, hence the wealth of studies focusing on marginalised groups and not belonging

(e.g. Ahmed 2007). Bourdieu (1979) also argues a similar point and suggests that we only become conscious of our belonging when it becomes threatened in some way. For Cherrybomb and Spiral their mastery and behaviour at times threatened their belonging, hence why they were aware of this.

For all the participants, school reflected a constant negotiation of power and the need to seek *membership* (McMillan and Chavis 1986) and therefore belong. For example, SpongeBob would frequently join in with peers in calling Hamster (another boy with SEBD) ‘psycho’ or ‘weirdo’, which suggests that he engaged in hierarchical positioning. SpongeBob perhaps considered him superior to other children in the resource base and the name calling reflected an attempt to distance himself from his peers in the resource base and belong elsewhere. Holt (2004b) highlights similar insights in her discussion of the friction and problematic social relations between two children attending a resource base. This suggests that these children organised their social worlds through hierarchical positioning in an attempt to gain membership within a desired group. Although McMillan and Chavis (1986) identify *membership* as central to belonging, they do not identify the characteristics of this and how children become a member of a group. I am able to expand somewhat on their theory in providing detailed insights into the fluid and hierarchical of social relations and the constant negotiations involved in seeking and maintaining membership within a group.

Social hierarchy and membership were not fixed for the participants in this study, but were fluid as participants negotiated or ‘transgressed’ (Allan 1996) their varying identities within formal school regimes and the informal practices of practitioners and pupils. For example, in terms of formal practices, at Middletree School Sonic had previously been moved back a year, therefore he was new to the class when I started data collection. Along with others, I argue that the tendency to categorise children based on age (and implied understandings of competency) maintained an insider/outsider status. Therefore, when Sonic was moved back a year he not only had to negotiate his identity as an ‘outsider’ or other to his new class but also this challenged the socially constructed perception that age equals competence (the older the child, the more competent they are). Many children in his class made fun of him because of his academic difficulties. At first, Sonic struggled to adjust to his ‘outsider’ role. However, as time went on he found a group of children with similar interests and as data collection progressed he was increasingly accepted by peers as one of them. Similarly, Schutz (1974) stresses that belonging is about a ‘we group’, that is a group with whom we share (some)

norms and values, a group with whom we identify. This however was still in flux, an understanding emphasised by other educational researchers such as Griffiths (1995). Scooby was also part of this group, but rather than being accepting of Sonic he often was in fights with him, attempting to push him out of their social group. Scooby seemed to resent Sonic for joining his social group. When I spoke with Scooby informally he said that he was worried that Sonic would take his friends away from him. Unlike other models of belonging (McMillan and Chavis 1986; Pooley *et al.* 2007), this highlights the complex negotiation of power and the sometimes fragile nature of the social hierarchy. The children's action reflected a determination to fit in and be accepted as one of a group.

SpongeBob was in some ways skilful in negotiating power and the social hierarchy, searching for a group to which to belong. Although he attended the resource base, he often went out into the playground with the rest of his year group at break times. In order to navigate his outsider status, he built an identity for himself as being 'funny' and peers spoke of how they liked playing with him because he made them laugh. This suggests that his identities were created through ongoing social interaction and self-reflection, mirroring an argument by Mead (2009). SpongeBob rejected negative identities regarding SEN and his attendance at the resource base. This helped to differentiate himself from his peers, highlighting 'difference', but difference in a positive rather than a negative way, as often perceived of children with SEN. This identity helped him to make friends with children outside of the resource base. This ability to create a positive identity, an identity that was perhaps considered more socially acceptable by peers than an identity based on his behaviour and difficulties was important for his belonging.

Although SpongeBob was a valued member of the same clique as Scooby and Sonic he also showed an interest in joining the largest clique within his year group. This consisted of around eight boys who behaved in a very boisterous and violent way and who on a daily basis physically and verbally abused children in their class such as Sonic. SpongeBob often used some of the privileges (such as 'bring a friend time') he received for improving his behaviour to encourage or bribe children from this clique to interact with him. However, at times this backfired as he became the target of physical and verbal abuse from children in this group; echoing studies that emphasise the high levels of bullying experienced by children with autism (for example, see Humphrey and Lewis 2008).

For all the participants, school reflected a constant negotiation of power and belonging in navigating the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. For example, SpongeBob would frequently join in with peers in calling Hamster (another boy with SEBD) ‘psycho’ or ‘weirdo’, which suggests that he engaged in hierarchical positioning. Holt (2004b) highlights similar insights in her discussion of the friction and problematic social relations between two children attending a resource base. This suggests that these children organised their social worlds through hierarchical positioning in an attempt to gain membership within a desired group. Gagen (2000) and Holt (2010) attribute the hierarchical nature of social interaction with how societal norms and values are embedded in everyday practices within specific social networks.

Sociometric studies (e.g. Koster *et al.* 2007) are often premised on an understanding that children with and without special needs should interact together. However, my research suggests that whilst friendships with peers without special needs may be important, they may or may not be seen as essential or superior by children. The findings suggest that for a child to belong it is important that they are accepted as a valued member of a peer group, but whether or not their peers have SEN does not necessarily influence their belonging. For example SpongeBob spoke in detail about how he was friends with Tony, another boy in the resource base (as discussed in section 4.3). There are echoes of the findings of Morris (1999) and Jarvis *et al.* (2003) here. I suggest that it is helpful to value all friendships as equal, as what is important is for a child to find a group where they are accepted and therefore belong.

Although one of the main arguments for inclusive education is the potential social opportunities it may provide (UNESCO 1994), this study revealed the sometimes problematic nature of social interaction. While participants at Middletree School had ‘friends’ (see sections 4.3 and 4.4), they were also frequently subjected to physical and verbal abuse from peers. Such patterns have been found before (Audit Commission 2002; Warnock 2005; Holt 2010 and Ward 2007). This was especially the case for SpongeBob, who experienced considerable physical and verbal abuse (see section 4.6). In the mainstream school, his behaviour did not conform to the behaviour of most of his peers or practitioners, therefore he was considered as other. This may reflect functionalist aims in which children who fail to meet the expectations of practitioners with regards to behaviour are relegated to the resource base. For example Slee (2001) argues that the the market model encourages competition between schools with the aim of improving behaviour and academic attainment and this

maintains the othering of children who fail to conform to these expectations. This reflects what Foucault (1980) refers to as a 'regime of power'.

When I spoke to SpongeBob about his social difficulties he struggled to understand the difference between 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' behaviour, making him vulnerable to being at either end of cruel interactions with peers. Similarly Lewis *et al.* (2006) found that for some children with social/behavioural difficulties, it was becoming more difficult for them to remain included in activities because of friction with other children and this resulted in some feelings of being excluded. My research identified the highly detrimental effects of physical and verbal abuse but also the detrimental effects of being ignored by peers, as was the case when Cherrybomb and Spiral would go into the playground. This was found to be extremely detrimental to participants' belonging, leaving them feeling alienated and excluded. This reflects Baumeister and Leary's (1995, p.497) 'belongingness hypothesis'—that 'human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships'. Therefore, unless a child experiences some positive interpersonal relationships this can lead to isolation and loneliness.

Even though the participants experienced physical and verbal abuse from peers, they were often far from passive in how they managed this behaviour. For example, participants reported bullying to their teacher, while other children stood up to peers or asked their friends for help. Despite one boy's attempt to bribe SpongeBob into allowing him into the resource base at lunchtime, he would frequently be assertive and refuse to do so. Therefore, based on the evidence from this study, I support the argument made by Davis and Watson (2002) and Connors and Stalker (2007) that children are active and (at least to some extent) competent social beings. It is important not to oversimplify these social constructions of participants—at times SpongeBob was vulnerable to abuse, but other times he would assert his authority and abuse others, therefore these socially constructed identities were fluid, contextual and ambiguous. This echoes the findings of Nind *et al.* (2011) who found that young children were simultaneously regarded as 'dependent' and 'independent' with multiple identities constructed for and with them. Participants were neither fully included all the time by peers nor were they fully excluded all the time. Instead their social relations reflected a fluid role, something Corbett (1997) refers to as 'in-between-ness'.

Despite SpongeBob's ability to sometimes navigate skilfully the complex social positioning, reducing the stigma associated with the resource base and negative perceptions of 'difference', not all children were able to do the same. In the classroom at Middletree School, peers rarely interacted with Tony from the resource base. On the few occasion's peers they did, it usually involved offering help with work or putting his shoes on. This suggests that Tony was positioned into a marginalised, subordinate role, and perceived as in need of help, reflecting a charity discourse. Allan (1999) argues that a child's actions towards a pupil with SEN varies between the medical, charity and rights discourses, hence peers play an important role in determining the inclusion of children with SEN and therefore represent 'inclusion gatekeepers' (Allan 1996). This was based on research with older children and again my research shows how this starts early on in children's lives. Such gatekeeper functions may be even greater without a whole school ethos to counter. Similarly, Devine and Kelly (2006, p.129) explain that:

The dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are intertwined with concepts of normality and otherness.... Children, *no* less than adults, draw on these discourses of difference, interpreting their interaction with others on the basis of their perceived normality or otherness with respect to dominant norms.

With reference to children in care in Ireland, Emond (2012) argued a similar point, describing these comparisons of sameness or difference as the 'politics of recognition'. My research showed peers' acceptance of a child as a member of their social group and establishing a sense of belonging relied on this child behaving in ways perceived as normal in the local/dominant school culture.

A failure to conform to these norms resulted in othering, hindering peer acceptance and therefore belonging. Thus, the behaviour of the child, the behaviour of their peers and wider societal perceptions all play a role in children's belonging. Although Pooley *et al.* (2007) identify people as key to belonging, both their model and that of McMillan and Chavis' (1986) model neglect the role of society in determining belonging. This study, then, provides new insights into the concept of belonging and the interconnectedness of this with society.

### *5.3 The influence of broader society*

It is important to consider these findings in the context of wider society and the influence of external dimensions on a child's social experiences and sense of belonging. Gagen (2000, p.213) argues that 'learning environments... are often the spaces through which children become aware of, and begin reproducing social identities that circulate through broader social space'. In many ways hierarchical positioning is not only evident in school but in wider society too, such as with regards to gender, ethnicity or class. Education is not only a period of socialisation in which children learn what is and what is not socially acceptable behaviour, but that this socialisation and positioning is linked with the environment outside of school, such as home. Holloway and Valentine (2000, p.779) argue the need for schools to be viewed 'not as bounded spaces, but as porous ones' produced through their webs of connections with wider society, connections linked with our different identities, like gender. This understanding is clearly reflected in my own research findings with regards to belonging as I go on to show. It highlights the shortcomings of other models (e.g. McMillan and Chavis 1986; Pooley *et al.* 2007) in presenting belonging as an island instead of showing the overlapping nature of this concept with broader circles of influence outside of the school setting.

Continuing discussion regarding the overlapping circles of influence, participants' belonging was strongly influenced by inclusive education policy. For example, SpongeBob had a thirty-minute taxi ride to school, whereas the majority of the children outside of the resource base lived within walking distance of the school. This hindered opportunities for SpongeBob to interact with peers outside school hours, a limitation of special provision also identified by Avramidis and Wilde (2011). This is an example of the everyday practices that excluded SpongeBob, keeping him at the social margin. With reference to women with intellectual disabilities or people with mental health conditions, Welsby and Horsfall (2011) and Parr (2006) argue a similar point, identifying ways in which every day social practices exclude them from much of society. Therefore my research provides additional insights into the ways in which resource base provision may hinder school belonging and therefore inclusion and this is particularly at the detriment of children who often experience considerable social difficulties anyway, such as children with SEBD and autism.

#### *5.4 The influence of practitioners*

Unlike McMillan and Chavis' (1986) model of community, my research identified that central to belonging was not only interpersonal relations with peers but with practitioners. In the nurture group at Woodfield School children talked about how staff helped them with their difficulties and this strengthened their sense of belonging. During nurture session, on his own accord Cherrybomb demonstrated warmth towards the nurture leader by wrapped his arms around her for a hug, indicating the strong bond and trust they had. Hamm and Faircloth (2005) also emphasise importance of trust between the practitioner and student, whilst Nichols (2008) highlights the need for staff to treat young people kindly if a young person is to feel a sense of belonging. Davies and Lee (2006) identified key qualities of this relationship, especially the need for 'mutual respect' and being treated in an 'adult fashion'. My research indicates the potential value of nurture provision in boosting children's belonging, providing children with additional one-to-one help, aiding the development of a strong rapport based on trust, respect and patience.

The converse regarding staff trust and belonging is also true. Abuse was most prevalent at Middletree School. In the playground at lunchtimes, I observed a lot of fighting and threatening behaviour as well as unkind name calling, yet staff only occasionally reported fighting to the class teacher, ignoring other abuse. Scooby and Sonic blamed their teacher for their social difficulties, particularly what they perceived as her failure to stop or help them manage the abuse. Similarly, in a study by Nind *et al.* (2011) a young woman excluded from mainstream school explained:

when you're sat there with your hand up for 20 minutes, and get fucked off with it, so then you go and, you just start doing something different because you can't do the work, and then they think you're just doing it to be a pain in the arse. Well, NO! You're the one that didn't come to me when I asked for help, so in actual fact, you brought it on yourself really.

Unfortunately, lack of help was highly detrimental to participants' rapport and sense of trust with their member of staff, leaving these children feeling let down and alienated. This reflects an understanding of the need to *matter* to the teacher, an understanding identified by McMillan and Chavis (1986) as crucial to belonging. Scooby and Sonic felt that they did not matter to their teacher because, if they did, their teacher would have helped them. This hindered their belonging and trust in that teacher. This is further emphasised by O'Connor



and Colwell (2002) in relation to children with SEBD and by Nichols (2008), who investigated the belonging of Hispanic students in education. Nichols found that belonging was impacted negatively when students thought teachers were unfairly picking on them or not helping them. My research endorsed the literature indicating the need for staff to take such behaviour seriously and foster a strong rapport with young people. A failure to do so may give children the impression that they are not important or they do not matter, ultimately harming their belonging and self-esteem.

The need for the child to feel that they *matter* to the teacher is linked with a whole school ethos where children feel understood and accepted. At Woodfield School participants felt the majority of staff listened to them and valued their opinions, especially in nurture. This reflects what Schaps *et al.* (2004, p.190) refers to as a ‘caring community of learners’ describing this as:

the prevalence of positive relationships, norms and values within a school... exists when the full range of students experienced themselves as valued, contributing, influential members of a classroom or school that they perceive is dedicated to the welfare and growth of all its members.

This understanding is further emphasised by the Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education, which argues that inclusion should be ‘founded upon a moral position which values and respects every individual and which welcomes diversity as a rich learning resource’. The importance of listening to children and encouraging peers to listen to each other and respect different opinions is a process Beattie (2007) that Nind *et al.* (2011) highlight as important. At Woodfield School, this was reinforced through school and class rules and strategies such as ‘bubble time’. Children spoke with considerable honesty about their problematic social relations. However, at Middletree School, SpongeBob and Sonic felt largely undervalued and ignored feelings which stemmed from the ongoing physical and verbal abuse they were experiencing and their frustrations that their teacher was not doing more to help them with these difficulties. Ainscow *et al.* (1999) argue that listening and respecting pupils’ views is essential to inclusive inclusion as children can provide invaluable insights. Furthermore, Davis (2007) argues that schools will be prevented from becoming fully inclusive until practitioners take account of children's views of specific educational processes. With regards to belonging, a number of researchers argue the necessity of democracy and the right to have

a voice and be listened to (e.g. Shotter 1993; McEachern 1998) and my research shows the relevance of this to children. Building on McMillan and Chavis' model (1986) regarding the need to *matter*, my research provides evidence that processes of listening to children and understanding and valuing them is key to belonging. Furthermore, the understandings provided by children and young people are key in shaping and tailoring education to meet different needs, potentially enhancing their sense of belonging, even voice.

At Middletree School there was considerable variation in the way practitioners managed behaviour and this was a central factor in determining participants trust in their teacher and rapport with them and therefore also important to belonging. In a study focusing on 12 elementary schools across the United States, Schaps and Lewis (1999) found that inconsistencies in the level practitioners acted on abuse was highly detrimental to young people's sense of belonging or community. This indicates that my findings are not unusual. Research suggests that often practitioners underestimate the frequency with which children are bullied (de Monchy *et al.* 2004). At Middletree School two participants spoke of their frustrations that their class teacher was not doing enough to stop the physical and verbal abuse they were experiencing. Interestingly, it was mostly the children in this particular teacher's class who were unkind to other children, suggesting that if this teacher had been more proactive in encouraging positive social interaction, the social difficulties experienced could have been greatly reduced, creating a happier and calmer environment for the children. Specifically, my data suggest that important to children's belonging are the way practitioners respond to abuse or any other difficulties a child may be experiencing. A failure to be seen to act damages the trust and rapport between the child and practitioner, hindering belonging.

Just as my research identified the importance of children being accepted by peers, the acceptance of practitioners regarding difference was also important to participants' belonging. This refers to the need for practitioners to tailor practice to children's needs, welcoming and celebrating diversity and in many ways relates to academic learning. For example, Spiral and Scooby explained how they felt they belonged in maths because they did well at the subject, whilst Cherrybomb said the same but with regards to PE. Cherrybomb struggled academically and explained that these difficulties meant he did not belong or feel welcome in lessons but that he felt better on some school trips. For these participants, attainment was part of making friends and fitting in. This mirrors a study by Devine and Kelly (2006) of the peer relations in one multi-ethnic Irish primary school and the finding that academic ability was useful in

helping children make friends. My findings suggest that central to belonging is the need for practitioners to accept and embrace the diversity of needs and therefore tailor work accordingly. My research adds to the literature in highlighting that attainment is a key component of belonging. To enable a child to succeed and therefore belong requires practitioners to tailor practice to meet diverse needs. A failure to do so merely maintains exclusion.

Inclusion at Middletree School reflected what Ainscow *et al.* (2006) refer to as ‘narrow’ inclusion, as practitioners placed emphasis on meeting the needs of children with SEN rather than all children. This would explain why Scooby felt there was no help available to help him manage his social difficulties. This is further highlighted by Corbett (2001), who argues that there has been an inference that inclusion meant bringing those outside (special) into the privilege of mainstream without acknowledging that many mainstream learners can feel excluded. Building on this, my research has provided in-depth, multimodal insights into the belonging of children, many of whom did not have an official label of SEN but did experience considerable social difficulties and a lack of belonging. This raises questions regarding whether, by focusing on children with labels, other children who experience similar struggles fail to receive the help they need.

My study highlights the importance of a whole school ethos for inclusion by illustrating its role in supporting social interaction and belonging. This ethos was particularly evident at Woodfield School by their commitment to the nurture group principles and other strategies like ‘bubble time’ or the friendship box discussed previously. This reflected an understanding of the importance of social relations and belonging, something Tonnies (1855/1981) referred to as *Gemeinschaft*, contrasting an emphasis on purely academic learning and assessment referred to as *Gesellschaft*. At Middletree School, however, staff tended to prioritise the academic needs of the child, resulting in less emphasis on other needs, such as the need to develop friendships. There was very limited help for children experiencing social difficulties. Therefore, despite being a ‘rights-respecting school’, much of Middletree School focused only on the children’s academic needs. This reflects what Kunc (1992) and Osterman (2000) refer to as a set of institutional beliefs that stress competition and individualism, ignoring a sense of community, belonging, friendship and other social and emotional needs. Instead, Cooper (2008) argues that inclusion is about the promotion of social, emotional and academic engagement for all.

As previously discussed the social relations and belonging of participants, and therefore inclusion, was highly fluid, dependent on setting, day of the week or period of the school day. My research showed that participants' behaviour often reflected a chaotic and complex interplay between inclusion and exclusion in which participants' belonging and social relations were highly fluid. This relates to what Corbett (1997) refers to as 'in-between-ness'.

The resource base at Middletree School was largely for children with a Statement of Special Needs and the label of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties or autism. This reflected categorical thinking and emphasised deficits over capabilities. Davis (2007) argues that disabled children's abilities go unrecognised whilst their inability to meet developmental norms are frequently reinforced through daily interaction with educational practitioners and other professionals. This understanding of difference reflects what Mithaug (1998) refers to as the conservative argument, highlighting a culture of conformity and normalisation leading to children being labelled. However, discussions with Spongebob and observations of all three boys from the resource base showed the benefits of being labelled, with regards to the additional support it provides. Findings suggest that the application of labels led to children accessing additional resources which helped them to make friends. For example, SpongeBob's relationship with Tony. Similarly, with regards to the nurture group, Cherrybomb spoke of how attending nurture had helped him get to know Spiral. However uncomfortable I may be, with labelling children, the findings from this study suggest the benefits that came with labels, especially the additional help.

Labels such as SEN stem from educationalists understanding of 'appropriate' behaviour or norms, reinforcing what Ballard (1999) argues are perceptions of two kinds of children or two kinds of education. This way of thinking has maintained a duality of appropriate/inappropriate behaviour and presented those children who failed to conform to these norms as different or other. This normative framework influenced the children's perceptions, too. In many children's eyes Hamster's actions did not conform to their expectations of appropriate behaviour and this was perceived in a negative way. The data show how school actions can be helpful but they can also reinforce negative understandings of difference.

At both schools the emphasis on difference and the tendency to label educational provision as 'special' (resource base or nurture group) or 'mainstream' maintained an assumption that these two forms of provision are different. Although the resource base at Middletree School

had many more members of staff than in mainstream, fewer children and an emphasis on meeting individual needs, there were few other differences between special and mainstream. In the mainstream school participants were constructed as ‘ordinary’ whilst those in segregated provisions ‘special’ or different. My findings fit well with Nind *et al.* (2011) and Corbett (1995), who call for practitioners to understand the subjectivities involved in constructing ‘special’ and ‘mainstream’ provision as completely distinct. It has been argued that inclusion is a fluid process, and that schools are not unequivocally one thing or another but rather sites in which complex processes intersect (Clark *et al.* 1999). Moreover, it is argued that inclusion is not a ‘single dimensional variable’ (Avramidis *et al.* 2002, p.33). The data from this study generated in settings in which children move between special and mainstream classes help to show the nuanced nature of inclusion and belonging. I see this as lending support to Farrell’s (2008) argument for ‘optimal learning’ (p.23) that refers to creating a learning environment that best enables and supports the individual to develop holistically.

In many ways the resource base at Middletree School maintained negative attitudes towards difference, as it gave practitioners the option of excluding children if they failed to conform to norms. Therefore, some practitioners failed to accept and embrace these differences, a characteristic I have previously argued are important to belonging. A failure to accept diversity merely reinforces a ‘them and us’ approach, maintaining narrow dichotomous understandings of difference. Other research focusing on resource bases in mainstream schools presents a similar picture. For example, in research by Belanger (2000), a class teacher from one primary school with a resource base stated, ‘children can be integrated if they are in a good mood’. However, whilst I have concerns about the role of resource bases in maintaining negative understandings of difference (which stems from a previous small scale study I understood in a similar setting for my M.Ed.), the findings from this study show the benefits of the resource base. In some ways the provision provided a space where children enjoyed better treatment at the hands of their peers—where children and staff were more tolerant and accepting. This was the same with the nurture group as participants had a strong sense of belonging, which raises questions about whether it is better to belong somewhere, even if this sits alongside some forms of segregation.

At Middletree School, my research showed the strengths of the resource base, especially the experienced and knowledgeable staff and the flexibility of these staff in facilitating the ‘in-

between-ness' of children, helping these children to cross the traditional boundaries between special and mainstream and find their own social groupings and belonging. This meant these children were able to attend mainstream lessons and had the freedom to choose where they spent their break times. Therefore children from the resource base were able to establish their own social positioning within their year group hierarchies, providing greater opportunities for social interaction than evident in the resource base. However, despite the good intentions and commitment of staff from the resource base, the children's in-between status was highly problematic. This was due to the actions of other children and staff reflecting a conflicting ethos. Although SpongeBob formed friendships with children outside of the resource base, he also experienced considerable physical and verbal abuse as peers perceived him as 'different'. Similarly, the fraught, chaotic and noisy nature of the playground at break times was often too much for children from the resource base to cope with and as a result, they often retreated back to the resource base. Although the resource base prided itself on its individualised approach, with its different school routine and different reward system, this reinforced a dual system in the school as a whole.

Varying understandings of difference raises questions about the extent to which education should adapt to meet needs. At Middledree School there was a broad spectrum of different attitudes towards difference, from treating children the same in the mainstream school (which resulted in children spending most periods in the time-out room) to treating children differently and meeting individual needs (resource base), and these opposing views were highly problematic, creating tension and conflict between the resource base and the rest of the school. This was an integrative approach, rather than inclusion (DES 1978). Although children physically attended the same lessons, Campbell (2002, p.12) argues that inclusion is 'not simply about equality of access to schooling, but about equality of circumstance, participation and outcomes'. The importance of this understanding was highlighted in my research as the 'one size fits all' approach within the mainstream school usually resulted in SpongeBob becoming increasingly agitated, frustrated and angry, resulting in being excluded from mainstream. This highlighted the need for practitioners from both the resource base and the mainstream to come together and agree one whole-school approach, understanding the complexity of needs.

At Woodfield School there was greater consistency in approach. Practitioners challenged dichotomous, negative conceptualisations by embracing the view that every child is different,

often viewing difference positively. The dominant principles underpinning the nurture group were the same caring values embedded in whole school practice. Therefore, the nurture group was not a separate entity but a valued part of the schools' provision in meeting the individual needs of the child. There was clearly helpful.

The emphasis Woodfield School placed on listening to the views of each child enabled the school to move beyond dichotomous generalised assumptions regarding the needs of children, to gain better insights into the actual needs of their pupils, valuing the complexity and variation among children. Listening to children is part of what makes a school inclusive (Beattie 2007; Ainscow *et al.* 1999). This was certainly the case at Woodfield School as the process of listening to children helped practitioners gain insights into the complex nature of participant's inclusion from the perspectives of these young people and plan educational practice accordingly. This led to actions that reflected this complexity. For example, at break times children had a wealth of activities and games available to play, with the aim of meeting the variation within the school. The nurture group was just one way the school tried to meet the different needs of children. This variety of provision showed an understanding of the fluidity of children's needs and social positions. In-between-ness was considered a valued position to be in, rather than dichotomous understandings which maintain a perception of behaviour as fitting into neat objective categories. Therefore, central to the school's drive for inclusion was an understanding of the complex and subjective nature of children's behaviour, and the importance of this being central to the schools educational practice.

### 5.5 Summary

To summarise, my research provides interesting insights into the concept of belonging in the context of inclusive education. The majority of studies in this area prioritise quantitative sociometrics methods or focus on schools in the USA. Although psychological studies provide an overview of belonging, they do not show the fluid, complex and subjective nature of belonging, nor do they focus on belonging from the perspective of participants. Therefore my research helps to fill an important gap in the literature by providing rich insights into the complexities of this concept and social relations, as experienced by children attending primary schools in the UK.

Although psychological and sociometric research dominate the field of social relations and belonging, these approaches fail to provide insights into the aspects of educational practice that support or hinder social relations. I question how schools can become more inclusive and therefore foster social relations and belonging without this information. My research showed that the most important dimension for inclusion was interpersonal relations with both staff and peers. Although contextual and situated factors had a role to play with regards to influencing these interpersonal relations, the need to be treated with respect and kindness from all those involved in the school community was a fundamental theme underpinning participants' belonging.

My study showed not only the immense importance of peer relations for a child to feel a sense of belonging, but also the complex and fluid nature of these interactions. Although these findings are nothing new, my research does raise questions about the extent to which educational provision catered for the fluid, fluctuating and unpredictable nature of these social relations. A 'one size fits all' approach merely alienated and further excluded children, highlighting the necessity for schools to tailor provision to meet the evident complexity of social needs.

This research also had a methodological focus in which I examined the affordances of visual methods in aiding participation, findings I discuss in detail in the next chapter.





## **CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS - THE AFFORDANCES OF VISUAL METHODS IN SUPPORTING THE VOICES OF PARTICIPANTS**

### *6.1 Introduction*

This research had a methodological as well as substantive focus, in which I explored the strengths of social concept mapping, film making and stimulated recall in supporting children's voices but also the considerable challenges in doing so as well. These methods were not used in isolation but interconnected with my ethnographic participant role. The findings stem from the multimodal transcripts of participants' involvement in the visual activities and also from my diary and fieldnotes.

### *6.2. Tony and Hamster*

Two children chose not to take part in any of the visual methods. This was something that in some ways surprised me as participants had initially seemed keen. These boys had the most complex needs and my lack of experience of working with children with as complex needs as these boys may have been detrimental to their engagement. In hindsight I think I was slightly naïve in hoping to be able to effectively tailor the activity to meet their complex needs. Towards the end of data collection I did try introducing an alternative activity:

Both boys had a keen interest in drawing and when I asked them if they would be willing to draw pictures they both said yes and seemed enthusiastic. I gave the boys their own special folder with different paper, pencils etc. and both myself and three LSAs explained to the children that I wanted them to draw pictures of people they like to play with or anything to do with the playtimes (e.g. games, places in the school etc.). I left the activity with them for about 2 weeks (but dropped in every few days to see how they were getting on). Whilst they were keen to draw pictures – the only pictures they drew were of aliens (Hamster) and dinosaurs (Tony) – for both boys these most likely reflected rituals to do with their autism. They spent nearly all their free time doing activities relating to these rituals. Due to data collection coming to an end and ill-health I decided not to pursue this anymore with the children (fieldnotes, 12.02.12)

I regret that I was not able to effectively adapt this activity for them, but in hindsight I think I was rather naïve. At the beginning of data collection, staff raised queries regarding how I would get on with these participants due to their complex needs, but I felt it was only right to give these children the opportunity if they so wished.

### *6.3 Social concept mapping*

The participants approached the concept mapping activity in a positive way and each worked on the activity for nearly half an hour and was on task throughout, despite the inevitable background noise. Their enthusiasm and motivation were evident in their body language, for example:

As I soon as I had explained the activity, Cherrybomb grabbed the paper from my lap and a blue pen and started to write his name in the centre of the page. He appeared enthusiastic, purposeful and focused and made lots of eye contact, sat upright with his legs crossed resting the paper on his lap. (concept mapping activity, 10.06.12)

During stimulated recall, participants talked about their experiences of the concept mapping activity, for example Scooby explained how he found the process engaging: ‘I enjoyed all of it... it was fun ... I definitely enjoyed the writing down’ (02.11.11). Similarly, Sonic explained ‘it was good. I liked the activity. It helped me think’ (09.11.11). It is impossible however, to separate these visual methods from the personal nature of doing research. My rapport and empathy for these children and their social difficulties is likely to have influenced participant’s engagement in the research. For example:

Today Scooby told me about how he liked working on the visual activities because I understood him and his social difficulties. He talked about how he felt his teacher failed to acknowledge that there was a problem (the peer abuse) and therefore found it therapeutic talking to me. I’ am pleased that he was so positive about the process but wonder to what extent the activity supported his engagement. (fieldnotes, 05.02.12)

Furthermore, it is hard to know to what extent the children’s motivations were linked with a desire to progress to the film making. They seemed so excited about using the video camera (after the video familiarisation activity) and frequently asked me when they would begin the filming. I introduced the concept mapping activity as something that would help them think

about their social relations ready to do the filming. My decision to film the concept mapping was also appealing to the participants as they were excited to see themselves on film. For example, they frequently asked if they could view the clips, highlighting the influence of the video camera and the novelty element on participant's engagement in the concept mapping activity.

My fieldnotes suggest that the process of creating the map was influenced by situated factors. For example, their teacher gave participants permission to miss parts of lessons, which may have influenced their motivation. At the beginning of the concept mapping process, Sonic explained his reasons for doing the activity, stating 'I need help making friends'. Towards the end of the research process Sonic said to me 'I've made friends now, I don't need your help anymore' (Fieldnotes, 08.02.2012), further suggesting that his reason for taking part in the research was linked to a desire to make friends. Other children spoke of their frustrations that their school was not doing enough to manage unkind behaviour (see Chapter 4). This raises questions about what the children hoped to gain from the study and whether this materialised. It is possible that children took part in the research because they thought this might lead to help with their social difficulties. I frequently emphasised to all the participants that I was a visitor in their school and therefore could not directly help them with their friendships, but I did explain that their school would receive a summary of the findings and hopefully they would act on this. I wrote about some of these tensions in my diary, for example:

I still sense Scooby and SpongeBob are pinning their hopes on me – that I will help them. I feel powerless. I remember what it felt like to be a child and reliant on adults – I have such empathy for the participants but I am unsure what I should do. Whilst I feel I have a duty to help these children I also don't want to offend the school (diary, 02.02.12)

I went on to speak with the class teacher but still felt frustrated as the teacher appeared to focus on the children's deficits, rather than changing practice.

In some ways, the activity was quite prescriptive, i.e. children were asked to create diagrams to show the places, games and people they interact with in school. In many ways I regretted not adopting a more participatory approach:

I find this activity frustrating. It is meant to support participation, yet I designed the activity, planned the research questions etc. How involved were the participants? Yet in order to get funding to do the research I had to create a proposal etc. demonstrating how at odds the research funding system is with supporting participation. Ideally if I were to do this research again I would seek the involvement of participants at a far earlier stage – the participants would design the questions, the focus, methods etc. They would be co-researchers. But then again this approach is totally at odds with the authoritarian nature of the school system (diary, 25.11.11)

The participants did however have some agency about what days they worked with me and sometimes changed their minds because they wanted to play certain games or with certain children, demonstrating what is referred to as provisional consent (Flewitt 2005) or process consent (Heath *et al.* 2007). Children sometimes chose to adapt the visual concept mapping activity. For example, Sonic asked to draw a chart to show how his sense of belonging had decreased during the year (see Figure 4.1). This showed how the use of concept mapping at times facilitated a more collaborative and flexible process. Participants also chose what information they divulged and the length of the activity. For example, after SpongeBob worked conscientiously with me on his concept map for nearly thirty minutes he stopped and politely explained ‘I think I should go back now otherwise I will get behind with my maths and be in big trouble with the teacher’ (concept mapping activity). Whilst this shows my close rapport with SpongeBob it also shows his subjection:

Doing research with children is in many ways at odds with wider understandings and education. For example, parents needed to give consent which undermines the rights of children to choose whether or not to take part themselves. It also portrays children as incapable, immature etc. which presents conflict with my understandings of children as competent social beings and understandings which underpinned my research. This undermines my efforts. Furthermore, I had no choice but to conform to the expectations of practitioners – such as to keep the activities short so as not to be too disruptive to the children’s school work (diary, 06.12.11)

This suggests a conflict between a rights based approach to participation (underpinning my research) and societal discourses which maintain deficit understandings of children.

The collaborative nature of the concept mapping activity led to ethical dilemmas regarding the need to protect the participants from harm. For example:

As I turned on the microphone Sonic was smiling and giggling. He appeared to be enjoying himself as he waved at the camera, stuck his fingers on his head to look like horns or ears and then poked his tongue out. This behaviour stopped as I asked Sonic if he wanted to finish his concept map. Still with a beaming smile on his face and sat up straight, he asked in an enthusiastic and jovial tone of voice ‘Can I do a friendship list?’ He soon started writing a list of names on his paper before saying ‘I want to put them in order from friend to non-friend... (looks down at the photographs of his year group)... have I put Samuel? (Writes name on friendship list)... have I put David? (he continues adding names to his friendship list and then pauses)... **really these are my only friends at the moment ... I’ve only got four friends** (he says this in a slightly upset frustrated tone of voice)... a big no-no to Tom and a big no-no to Scooby (he went down his friendship list and put a cross beside these two names) and I don’t really see Samuel... and it’s only David I’ve got to play with’. (Concept mapping activity, 21.11.11)

Whilst the flexible and collaborative approach supported participation, it also led to tricky ethical issues as it exposed a shortage of friends. I would not have asked a child to write a friendship list due to the possibility that this might upset them, but because Sonic requested to do so and I valued his rights, I allowed this.

This was something I felt very uncomfortable with. The last thing I want to do is upset a child. Maybe in hindsight in my efforts to support participation and the rights of children, I went too far, highlighting a fine line between the rights of all to take part and the need to protect children from harm (diary, 21.11.11)

Sonic appeared sad when he realised his limited number of friends and, despite the attempt to comfort him, this example shows that methods cannot negate the sensitivity of the subject matter. A minute or two later, Sonic returned to his usual self, making faces in front of the camera, appearing happy again, and suggesting that his sadness was short-lived or perhaps suppressed.

The collaborative nature of the concept mapping activity (and the other visual activities) was to a certain extent aided by my ethnographic participant role, as this facilitated rapport and knowledge of the children that helped me to understand the children's input within the context in which their social relations occurred. Similarly, this role enabled the children to get to know me, aiding participation during the visual activities. This was particularly important as during my first few visits to Middletree School, SpongeBob was wary of me, frequently swearing at me when his LSA was not looking (Fieldnotes, 02.10.11). This soon changed as he got used to me. Therefore regular presence was important in gaining SpongeBob's trust and consequently his research participation and voice in this research. This indicates how the combination of ethnographic involvement alongside activities designed to support collaboration can support participant voice. However, I am unsure about the extent to which the promise of using the video camera encouraged his collaboration. SpongeBob and also Cherrybomb frequently talked about the films they made at home and both were thinking about buying a camera. This suggests that the novelty of the camera may have overshadowed their voluntary consent to take part. Without an ethnographic role, however, I may not have known about these influences.

Whilst my role and especially my rapport with the children were helpful in supporting participation, this role was challenging. My past experiences of working and volunteering in primary schools meant that my helper role came naturally to me. However, when I started participant observations in the playground I felt less sure of my role. For example I reflected:

In the classroom I felt at home, yet in the playground I feel much more awkward. I want to be more involved rather than standing at the side but I'm just not sure how. Break times are the only times during the school day the children are free from many of the restraints of adults, therefore it feels wrong to impose myself on them. I'm hoping as I get to know the children better and their play; I will learn how to manage participant observation during these informal periods (diary, 01.11.11)

As data collection progressed [at Middletree], I am noticing that I am developing a routine of walking around the playground talking to participants and their peers. I also sometimes sit down observing from a distance. At times children invited me to join in their games, invitations I accepted. Other times staff asked me to supervise areas of the playground, something I felt uncomfortable doing, but went along with as I did

not want to offend the school. I was concerned this would reinforce understandings of me as a teacher and the associated power divides. However, in reality this proved less of an issue (fieldnotes, 12.01.12)

It was easier to slip into the role of ‘helper’ at times when children were more dependent on adults; however, in hindsight I acknowledge to a certain extent that this undermined my understandings of children as competent individuals. For example when I helped children with work I was conforming to the educational discourse and understandings of children as immature or incompetent. However, I am not sure what other role I could have adopted in the classroom, demonstrating a dilemma of doing ethnography in schools. At times I found it difficult to achieve the correct balance between being an active participant in the setting whilst avoiding overstepping the mark and being intrusive or interfering. On one occasion:

I was observing SpongeBob and his friends during free play at the end of a lesson. One child asked me in an unsure, hesitant voice ‘can I ask you to go away?’ leading me to leave this group alone (fieldnotes, 09.10.11)

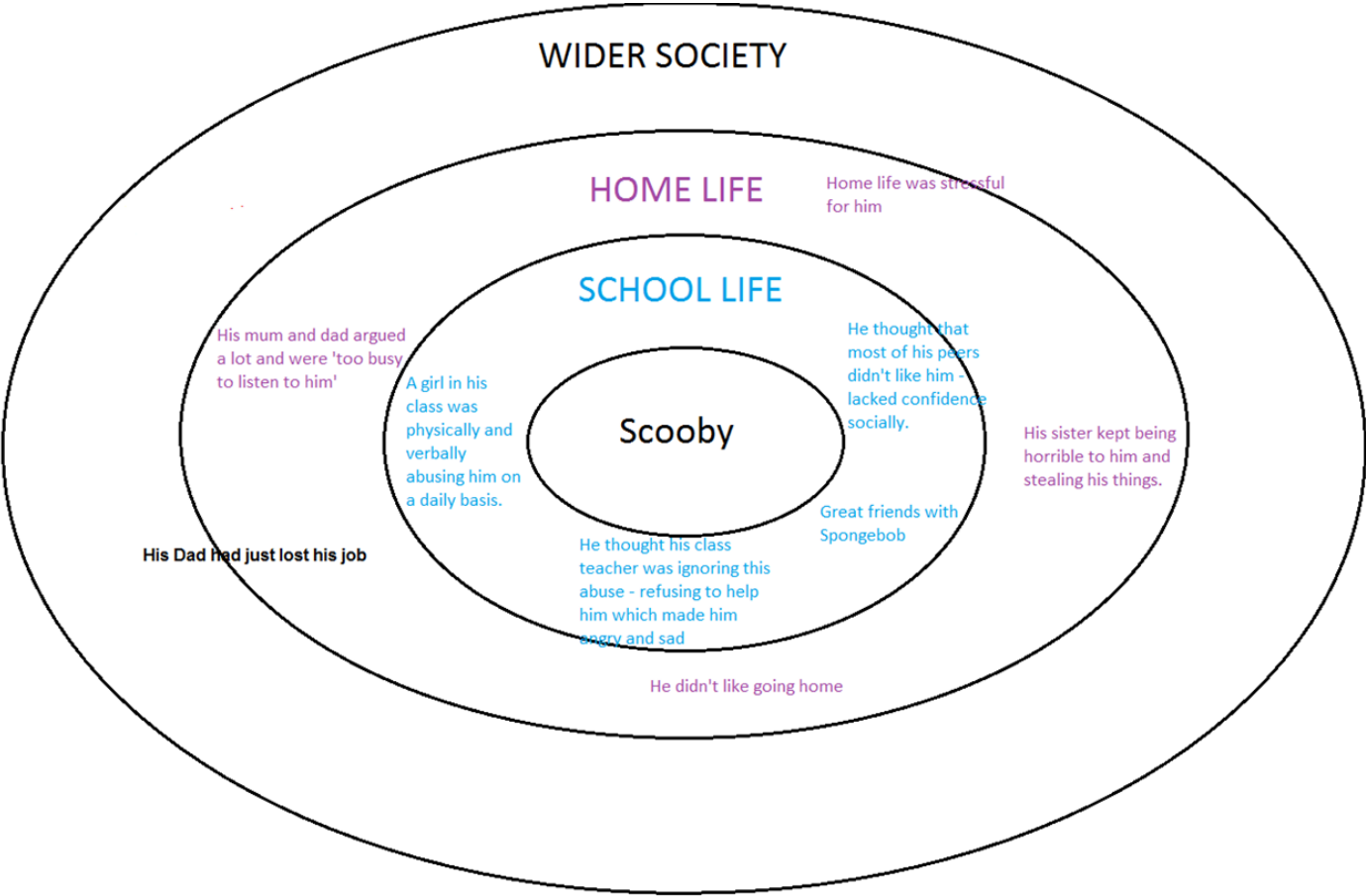
Although just once at Middletree School I sensed participants wanted to be left alone, it illustrates the tricky balance between being a participant and being intrusive. A similar incident happened at Woodfield which led me to feel redundant at times. Therefore despite the strengths of collaboration in supporting the voices of participants in this study, at times my ambiguous role was something I found difficult to balance.

The concept mapping activity (and the other visual activities) provided insights into the abstract and implicit nature of belonging, insights that could not be gained through ethnography alone. My data sheds light on the personal and sometimes sensitive nature of social interaction and belonging as experienced by participants (see Chapter 4). Their willingness to share such sensitive information may have been less, however, if they had considered me a ‘stranger’, and so here again the interconnectedness of the visual methods with my ethnographic ‘participant’ role was beneficial. Not only this, but this role helped me to understand the participants’ social experiences and involvement in this research within the appropriate context. For example, during my time in the playground observing, Scooby often chose to tell me about his problematic social relations at school and the resentment he felt towards his family. With this information in mind, I constructed a schematic diagram (Figure 6.2) to show the interconnectedness of education with wider contextual factors and spheres of



influence on Scooby's involvement in this research. I however, acknowledge that in some ways these insights were one sided as I did not interview Scooby's family or the school. Creating the diagram led me to question the extent to which Scooby's enthusiasm to take part in the research was linked with a need to talk to somebody about his social difficulties, a need that this activity fulfilled perhaps no better than another might have done. Scooby asked to take his concept map home (the only child to do so) and later told me about how he had it displayed on his bedroom wall, suggesting that whatever his motivations were for undertaking the activity, the process clearly meant a lot to him.

Figure 6.2: The interconnected spheres of influence in Scooby’s life



It transpired that visuals were useful prompts to aid discussion about belonging. For example, when Sonic chose to draw a chart (Figure 4.1) to show how his belonging had gone up and down over time, this led to discussions about the reasons for this change in belonging:

I don't feel as if I fit in because there's loads of naughty people including me in this school... but **like** everyone every person I want to play with is naughty. (concept map, 21.11.11)

It also led to Sonic sharing insights into his social interactions at his previous school:

I had lots of friend at my old school. I did have a lot of people trying to get me but I can run away nice. There was a lot of good hiding places there. (concept map, 21.11.11)

Sonic's decision to adapt the activity to create his own visual prompts led to particularly interesting data regarding belonging over a period, and the contextual and situated nature of his social interactions. During stimulated recall children spoke about how the concept mapping activity helped them to think about their social experiences and belonging. For example, Cherrybomb explained 'it helped me a lot... it helped me to concentrate and think of ideas', though I am unsure whether this was to do with the visuals or linked with the discussions the activity led to. The use of social concept mapping also facilitated rich reflections about the reasons participants spent time with certain children, what they liked and disliked about these interactions and their sense of belonging. Instead of thinking in a linear way, participants would frequently dart back and forth between different parts of their map, adding in bits as they went and explaining their reasons for this. Thereby, these drawings in some ways show the messy nature of our thought processes and the fluid nature of social interaction.

Underpinning this research was an understanding of the multitude of ways or modes through which people communicate and participate in research, and the importance of a research process which supports these different modes of communication. To overcome literacy difficulties, during the concept mapping activity, participants chose to do drawings or I wrote for them. One participant who experienced considerable difficulties with expressing his views verbally explained how his use of drawings was helpful as 'sometimes I don't know how to put it into words' (23.11.11). My decision to film this activity proved helpful in adding to the

richness of data. For example, my multimodal transcript of Cherrybomb during the concept mapping activity showed how his communication changed. At the beginning of the activity he seemed overwhelmingly keen to take part, evident in his eye contact and upright, purposeful posture, but dramatically changed as I began asking him about his lunchtimes:

Cherrybomb is sat slouched rubbing his eyes and face, almost as if masking his face from me. He explains that he wants friends to be in the film, though this is said in a very hesitant and unsure way. He becomes quite fidgety sitting slouched looking at the ground. I lose all eye contact with him. His eyes seem focused on his hands and lap as he picks his nails. (concept mapping, fieldnote, 10.06.12)

As soon as the conversation moved away from social relations to the places in the school he would like to film, his body language changed again as he looked up, smiling, and pointed to the adventure playground. Throughout the concept mapping activity and stimulated recall I noticed this was a common pattern of behaviour for Cherrybomb. When he talked about children he 'got on' with and the nurture group, he spoke in a confident and animated voice, made plenty of eye contact and sat up straight. However, when he spoke about his problematic social relations he would slouch, screw his face up, pick his nails, doodle and make little eye contact. My multimodal transcript of Sonic during the concept mapping activity showed a similar level of richness of data. For example:

As soon as Sonic sat down, he appeared enthusiastic, picking up the Dictaphone from the table. Once I explained the activity he straightaway grabbed the red pen and started writing his name in the centre of the page. When I asked him who he likes to play with, he quickly wrote Scooby at the top of his page and went on to say, 'We normally play like the Minotaur and me the owner and we like capture SpongeBob'. He had a big smile on his face before he went onto to write this name on his map. '... and I really, really (emphasises the word 'really' with his voice) like playing with David (he searches for a photo of David on the table), me and David like playing Star Wars' (Social concept mapping, fieldnote, 21.11.11)

This multimodal transcript not only conveys Sonic's enthusiasm for taking part in the study but his positive feelings towards certain children.

Despite the affordances of multimodal analysis this approach proved very time consuming and involved a lot of patience. At times I fell into the trap of analysing the data in relation to the verbal and struggled with the ambiguities (e.g. levels of detail, analysing the modes together, separately etc.) Also, my decision to analyse the data myself was highly detrimental to participant voice:

I've gone to such effort to establish a close rapport with participants, yet it's me that is going to analyse the data. This makes the whole process of research feel very false and disempowering for participants. I am merely reinscribing hierarchical boundaries between participants and myself (e.g. age, maturity and competency), completely undermining my previous efforts. This perhaps reflects sociological understandings of surveillance and control or subjection – whilst participants involvement in the research was undermined by the different expectations/rules within education and wider society, so is my role too (diary, 08.12.12)

This suggests that despite efforts to support participant voice, the process of analysis was engrained in broader societal perceptions of children, and rather than challenging these unhelpful understandings, the process of analysis merely maintained and reinforced these understandings.

To summarise, in some ways my use of concept mapping resulted in a more engaging, collaborative and inclusive approach, supporting the voices of participants, but in others ways my collaborative intentions were quite prescriptive and hindered by research design, school factors and wider discourses. The strengths of this approach were enhanced by my ethnographic involvement, in particular rapport, which enabled most participants to feel confident and at ease sharing personal information during the activity. Lastly, my ethnographic role provided contextual and situated insights to enable me to analyse participant's social experiences and research involvement within the wider interconnected spheres of influence, though acknowledge if I had interviewed practitioners or the families of participants, this would have added to this richness of data.

#### *6.4 Film making*

Once participants had created their social concept maps, they went into the playground during lunchtimes to undertake their filming. Although this constitutes video-aided collaboration, it

would be easy to oversimplify the interaction as something complete and perfect, which it certainly was not. I next discuss the messy nature of film making and explain the strengths of combining ethnography with this method, better supporting participant's voices.

Participants greatly looked forward to making their films, evident by the number of times they asked me when and where they would be doing the filming. SpongeBob and Cherrybomb were particularly keen; they both told me about the films they had made at home regarding unrelated topics, reflecting the embedded nature of video in youth culture. Although the novelty and excitement linked with the filming encouraged participation, in some ways the process was problematic. For example:

Today was very frustrating. Cherrybomb began to do his film, but unlike the other children, he just walked around and around the playground looking through the video camera lens. I only have so long to work with him, and unless he actually clicks record, we won't have any images to discuss in video stimulated recall. This perhaps reflects competing discourse – CherryBomb's desire to produce a perfect film (reflecting the dominance of technical considerations) and my need to complete the research process. Also I wonder to what extent this was linked with CherryBomb's problematic social relations. What does a child who experiences considerable social difficulties film when they make a film about playtimes? (diary, 21.06.12)

CherryBomb's emphasis on the aesthetics was further highlighted when he explained the reasons for filming particular people or places, stating, 'I thought it would make a good clip'. Similarly, at Middletree, children spoke about how aesthetic considerations influenced the filming, e.g. choice of children to include.

Some children also spoke about their anxieties regarding film making. Many of the children were slightly apprehensive regarding how peers would respond to them with a camera in the playground. For example, Cherrybomb and Spiral explained that they needed to ask their peers if they would take part in the film. They appeared quite hesitant, perhaps reflecting their limited status with peers or their lack of confidence. Sonic was also apprehensive because he was worried other children would take the camera from him. I too was deeply aware of the responses or perceptions of peers towards the activity:

At times I feel uncomfortable about the process. The participants have enough troubles fitting in and yet their participation in this study may further differentiate these children from their peers. To what extent is this research reinforcing the sense of othering these children experience in their daily lives? Is this ethical? (diary, 03.12.11)

During filming, peers would frequently ask if they could be in participants' film, although the participants usually refused. On three different occasions children approached me and asked why only a small number of children were making mini films and whether they could take part as well. Although I emphasised the amount of work these children had done, I question to what extent my differential treatment and the exciting and appealing nature of video may have led to resentment from peers. I considered offering a taster session for children who did not have a chance to take part, showing them how to use the camera and so on, but due to shortage of time this did not go ahead. This raises ethical concerns regarding the potentially detrimental role of research in hindering participant relations and reinforcing perceptions of 'other'. This is not particular to the visual methods, but the attractiveness and novelty of filming may have heightened the potential. Too often research papers draw attention to the motivating, accessible and engaging qualities of visual methods, but rarely is the potential effects of the research on peer perceptions discussed.

The use of film making enabled the participants to tell their stories through ways that they 'framed', although it is important to note that it was me that chose the research questions, methods etc. raising questions about the extent to which the research was tokenistic as whilst participants acted with agency, this agency was constrained by the purposes of this study. Participants led me around their school choosing whom and what to film, whilst I adopted a background role. The participants had the freedom to choose what they portrayed, when and through what modes. They also adapted the activity as they so wished something that both pleased and frustrated me at the same time. For example, Spiral explained 'I want Tommy from next door to be in my film. He is really funny'. When I asked why, he said 'I don't actually play with him but I thought he'd be a good actor in the film'. I was pleased that participants had the confidence to adapt the activity, but at the same frustrated and concerned in terms of the extent to which the adapted activity would answer my research questions. Whilst participants seemed to understand the purpose of the activity, at times they got carried away by the excitement of using video, showing how the novelty of the activity sometimes hindered the research. On other occasions SpongeBob and Scooby asked if I could film some

of the plays they produced during their break-times, such as *Pirates of Penzance*. Whilst I agreed to do so, and this was useful in enabling me to observe their interactions, at the same time this took valuable time away from other participants who I could have been observing. This highlights the challenges of doing research which supports collaboration in some ways – the dual accountability of the researcher in meeting the needs of the participants (needs which may not be directly relevant to the research) and my own research needs.

Not only did the film making enable participants to have some control over content, it also determined my own role:

I invested so much time in thinking through approaches to supporting participation but I failed to consider how participants might position me. I wonder whether inadvertently this reflected deficit understandings of children embedded in education (diary, 21.11.11)

At times participants proceeded as if I was not there, and at other times they positioned me in the role of helper (asking me to hold coats and so on) or camera person. This suggests that participants felt comfortable and at ease with the activity and with me. I question whether they would have been so relaxed and at ease if they had considered me a ‘stranger’ and had we not developed rapport through my ethnographic observer/helper role.

Despite my intentions to design a process that was highly collaborative, in practice this did not always work out. One child who wanted to participate was prevented from doing so by lack of parental consent. This was an occasion when the bureaucracies associated with consent actually undermined the rights of the individual, suggesting that what is legal is not necessarily ethical (Lewis 2010). A child who treated other children very unkindly, her participation in this study probably would have resulted in particularly interesting insights.

School and societal expectations also hindered children’s participation in this research. For example, Sonic was determined he wanted to film children beating him up, as this was something he frequently experienced. Similarly, Cherrybomb decided to stage a fight that he filmed. I wrote about these dilemmas and uncertainties in my Fieldnotes and diary. For example:

Today Sonic asked if he could film children beating him up. I felt awful – on the one hand this was a very reasonable request as this reflects the abuse he so frequently



experiences but on the other hand I am very conscious of where the film could end up. What school wants a film about their setting which focuses on abuse? I was trapped – I cannot afford to fall out with the school but at the same time I'm undermining Sonic's right to choose what to film (fieldnotes, 02.12.11)

Therefore, although I encouraged Sonic to talk about these problematic social relations, I felt I had no choice but to press Sonic into only filming positive clips showing good behaviour. These actions went against my initial intentions and beliefs surrounding the need to respect the views of everyone and the importance of reciprocity. This inevitably distorted the data, and going against the rights of the participant and is something I regret. It also highlighted concerns regarding the ownership of these films and where these films might eventually end up.

This study showed that logistical factors also hindered participants' involvement. For example, these films were strongly influenced by who was in the playground when the filming took place. Spiral described his experiences of carrying out the filming, stating 'it was a bit tricky... because at first I was struggling with to find some people'. Sometimes participants were unable to find their chosen peers to film and would quickly choose other children, their pragmatic approach potentially distorting the data.

Lastly, my own anxieties sometimes hindered the agency of participants. I was highly conscious that I was bringing a brand new video camera into the playground, where it could easily be broken. I therefore walked around the playground with the participants as they filmed, trying to shadow them rather than dominate the process. On one occasion when I tried to take a step back a participant was involved in a fight, so I realised the filming needed to be closely supervised. Through walking around with participants during this process I gained insights into how other children responded to the children and the filming.

Having discussed the challenges of collaborative film making in supporting participants voices but also the messy and imperfect nature of this process, in the final section I explain my findings relating to stimulated recall.

### *6.5 Stimulated recall*

Video stimulated recall involved the participants watching a) participant-generated video clips from the film making and b) researcher-generated video clips of participants engaging in the concept mapping activity and stimulated recall. It was intended that this approach would aid discussion, providing a child's perspective of the video clips, alongside my own analysis.

All the participants were excited about watching their mini-films. For example I noted Spiral:

Sat up straight, with a calm and enthusiastic look on his face, Spiral stared at the computer screen looking mesmerised. He leaned forward resting his chest on the table to get a closer view of the computer screen. Leaning closer and closer to the screen, he laughed out loud, struggling to keep a straight face. When I asked him about the clip he responded in a confident, enthusiastic voice. Despite the considerable background noise of children playing, he appeared focused and engaged (fieldnotes, 08.10.12)

Similarly, Sonic:

Sat on the edge of his chair leaning over the table with his nose almost pressed against the screen, Sonic appeared eager and excited to view the clips. He had a beaming smile on his face and chuckled as he viewed the clips (fieldnotes, 03.02.11)

These descriptions show how excited and motivated children were to take part in the stimulated recall; there was a certain level of novelty in that children looked forward to seeing themselves on the screen and this would no doubt have aided motivation.

The accessible and novel nature of stimulated recall supported a collaborative process. For example, participants frequently chose to pause or go back over clips they had previously watched. I initially worked on the principle of asking the participants to choose which clips they discussed. However, this led to participants getting carried away watching the clips, with less discussion than I would have liked. I then tried giving the participants their clips to watch at their leisure, such as during their lunchtime and asked the children to choose clips to tell me about the next day. This led to long discussions about issues not particularly helpful for the research, whilst clips in which I was particularly interested were ignored. I decided to select these clips then sat down with the participant and, as we watched each, I asked them in an open-ended way to tell me what was going on and so on. I made it clear to participants that

they could move on to the next whenever they wanted and that it was not compulsory for them to discuss every clip. I found that this led to more productive and focused discussions, whilst participants still had the option to skim if they so wished. The confidence and agency of participants in doing so was aided by our strong rapport.

Watching the video clips helped participants to recall how they felt and what they were doing and consequently to articulate these experiences better. For example:

When SpongeBob watched his mini film during stimulated recall, particularly a clip of Edward, his facial expressions changed from looking happy and laughing to frowning. He then explained to me that ‘this video clip was filmed just before me and Edward broke up. We’re enemies right now... I’ve fallen out with Edward a couple times but this is the first time we’ve ever done it about a girl.’ Later on as we continued to watch SpongeBob’s mini film, he said ‘I keep trying to get Edward to be friends with me but I just can’t get him back’ and then went on to ask me if I knew how to mend the friendship (stimulated recall, 10.12.11)

Again, because of my ethnographic involvement, when participants began telling me about their social experiences during the visual activities I already had some insight into these social interactions. This aided these conversations and my understanding of their context. The use of stimulated recall enabled each participant to explain their reasons for choosing to film particular children or places, prioritising their voices over my own. For example, when Spiral went out into the playground with the video camera he chose to film a dinner lady. Without Spiral’s analysis I could easily have misunderstood the reasons for this focus. Instead, when Spiral told me about the clip he explained that the dinner lady was a family friend and nothing to do with the focus of this research. Similarly, during stimulated recall some children explained that they chose certain children to be in their films purely for aesthetic reasons. Without this insight, I may have incorrectly assumed these children were linked with their social experiences.

Not only did stimulated recall provide useful prompts to details about social experiences, it also provided insights into the research process. For example, whilst Sonic watched a clip of himself during the concept mapping activity, one of the questions I asked was whether there was any aspect of the activity he did not like. He paused for a few seconds before responding:

I got a bit scared when I saw the red card... because I'm always scared of red cards... I've only ever got one red card at this school and its bad... when I saw the red card I wanted to run away. Red cards are always bad... next time you should try a green card a green card for go (Stimulated recall, 10.12.11)

The red card I had introduced as an optional aid for the children in deciding and communicating whether or not they wanted to take part in the research, unaware that during the previous academic year the school had used red cards as a way of managing behaviour. In Sonic's mind, a red card was something to be feared rather than a helpful tool for aiding voluntary consent. Not only did stimulated recall aid this discussion; it helped to uncover new insights from the child's perspective.

Despite the value of stimulated recall in aiding in-depth discussion, it fails to show what might have happened before or after the video footage. This highlights the partial and situated nature of this research. To a certain extent these limitations were minimised by my decision to adopt an ethnographic participant role and a reflexive stance. This provided important insights into the contextual and situated factors surrounding participants' social experiences and involvement in the research. For example, during time spent observing in the school I spoke with Sonic's class teacher, who informed me that Sonic had been moved back a year some months prior to beginning this research and therefore was still adjusting to his new peers.

Not only did participants' verbal communication during stimulated recall provide new, child-centred insights, my decision to record the activity enabled me to position participants' verbal input in relation to their broader multimodal resources. I focused on both auditory (speech, tone of voice, pauses, etc.) and visual input, particularly posture, eye contact, movement and facial expression. My decision to use multimodal analysis involved a whole host of challenges, making the process of analysis more time consuming and complex. Influenced by Flewitt *et al.* (2009) I began by transcribing and analysing each mode separately (intramodally). The short extract below came from video footage of Scooby during the concept mapping activity and shows how I initially transcribed the visual and verbal communication:

### **Auditory**

Researcher: *So when you're out in the playground what do you do?*

Scooby: *...get angry.*

Researcher: *Okay, what makes you angry?*

Scooby: *Arabella pushing and shoving me around.*

Researcher: *Have you ever told the teacher that you didn't like it?*

Scooby: *Yeah and she hasn't stopped it (in an angry/frustrated tone of voice).*

### **Posture**

Sat upright in the chair, with his arms resting on the table

### **Movement**

Sits flicking a red pen in his hand and turns to look at me. When he speaks about his teacher, he quickly glances behind him first.

### **Eye contact**

Looks straight ahead

### **Facial expressions**

Sat sucking in his cheeks before making an awkward/nervous smile and laugh when he explains about Arabella. He has a big frown on his face

### **Eye contact**

Makes much eye contact.

I found this experience of transcribing and analysing each mode separately extremely tedious. Increasingly it felt pointless, as each separate mode had little meaning and the possibility of misunderstanding a participant's communication was high. I then combined these transcriptions (intermodally) and carried out the analysis process again. For example:

'When you're in the playground what sort of games do you play?' There was a brief pause and his facial expression changed from looking happy to really sad. With a slightly nervous smile he replied 'get angry' before going on to explain that 'Arabella

pushing and shoving me around makes me angry. As he says this he looks behind for a moment as if checking that Arabella is not around, before his eyes drop and he stares at his pen, looking really sad. I asked 'So have you ever told Arabella that you don't like it?' Straightaway he responded by saying 'Yeah but she just carries on ... and that's when I get angry and that's why I retaliate.' (Exaggerates 'that's why I retaliate' by slowing voice slightly, speaking slightly louder, moving head up and down) (Concept map, 01.12.11)

Combining modes resulted in a far more holistic, unified and meaningful description of participant interaction, as it provided rich insights into the situated construction of social reality.

## *6.6 Summary*

My research showed the challenges of using visual methods in illuminating the social experiences of participants and aiding participation, but also the challenges as well. For some children the use of visual methods alongside an ethnographic participant role was beneficial in supporting greater collaboration, reflection and inclusion, enhancing the potential of the visual methods. In the next chapter I discuss some of the main findings in greater detail and in relation to the existing literature, outlining how these insights add to or differ from other research.







## **CHAPTER 7: REFLECTION ON THE AFFORDANCES OF VISUAL METHODS IN SUPPORTING THE VOICES OF PARTICIPANTS**

### *7.1 Introduction*

In this chapter I grapple with some of the challenges and dilemmas I faced in using collaborative visual methods with children. While some researchers have highlighted the dangers of ‘succumbing to political ideology and methodological fashion’ (Prosser and Loxley 2007, p.55), I hoped my research would explore the potentials and critically engage with the limitations of collaborative visual methods as discussed in relation to research with children and teenagers (Nind *et al.* 2011; Enright and O’Sullivan 2012; Wall *et al.* 2013). With regards to participatory approaches, Packard (2008) argues that it is incorrect to assume that participatory visual methods are more enabling for participants or ethically or morally superior to other types of research and this is very relevant to my own use of visual methods.

### *7.2 Doing collaborative research*

In contrast with seeing agency or participation as an ‘either-or’ fixed notion, along with Kirby *et al.* (2003) and Allen (2008) my research showed the fluid and problematic nature of participation. Interaction between participants and myself differed depending on context, day and situation, a point also emphasised by Thomson (2007). Whilst I sought to facilitate the agency of participants in this research, such as teaching children how to use the video camera, at times this led to participants adapting the activities in ways that were less helpful to the research. For example, SpongeBob and Scooby asked if I could film some of the performances they liked to act out at break-times. Whilst I agreed to do so, at the same time I felt uneasy about this as this took time away from other children who I could have been working with. However, as a researcher valuing agency I felt I should perhaps also value the children’s rights to turn a research activity into something different.

Whilst I set out to design a research process that involved some collaboration with the children, in many ways the process became quite prescriptive. For example, whilst the use of collaborative film making enabled participants to tell their stories through ways that they ‘framed’, it was me that planned the research questions and research design and me that analysed the data. With reference to people with learning difficulties, Ward & Fly (1994) and Barnes (1996) call for researchers to work in partnership with participants at all stages of the

research process. This was not something I undertook to achieve, having entered the setting with clear research questions and methods set out in my funding proposal. This is common; Ward and Simons (1998) stress the pressures academics face in bidding for funding and producing findings in a relatively short time, leaving little time for the genuine involvement of participants in research.

As with O’Kane (2000), I gave participants choices, such as choices about when to work with me, what information to disclose, and whether or not to take part. For Kellett (2005) this would be tokenistic as the research was not initiated and conducted by the participants, nor did participants have input at all stages of the research. For many this kind of involvement would count as what qualitative researchers regularly do, but not particularly collaborative research. Despite interest in a collaborative approach, this was often hindered by my constraints as a doctoral researcher. For example, some of the participants asked if they could continue the research for much longer and their peers frequently asked if they could take part in the research too, but my limited timescale precluded this. Trying to meet the needs of the participants alongside academic requirements is challenging, demonstrating an academic dualism highlighted by Walmsley and Johnson (2003) and Piper and Frankham (2007).

The partial nature of my methods as collaborative inevitably silenced participants. The requirements of the two schools and the need to restrict the amount of time I worked with the children on the research were limiting factors. Townson *et al.* (2004, p.73) write of ‘being partly included, which also means partly rejected, by someone else’ highlighting the dangers of research which was not more collaborative, but the children had no expectations of being more fully involved. Without meaning to though, I maintained exclusion of some children from this research by being dependent on parental consent. Only children whose parents could read or were organised in completing the consent form were able to take part. Furthermore, the mother of one particular participant refused to allow her daughter to take part in the study. This child was particularly unkind to her peers, and without her as a participant the research focused much on the voices of children who experienced peer abuse and much less on the children who abused others. Heath *et al.* (2007) criticise researchers for failing to question the actions of gatekeepers and are therefore being complicit in the silencing of voices but the co-operation of gatekeepers is sometimes necessary.

### 7.3 Participant voice

The methods used enabled the participants to provide insights into the abstract and implicit nature of belonging, understandings that could not have been gleaned from observation alone. Children also provided insights into the sensitive and personal nature of social interaction, discussing their social anxieties. With reference to visual methods, Allatt and Dixon (2004, p.80) discuss the strengths of a collaborative approach in supporting voice, arguing that visual methods have the ability to ‘widen the window on the world of those being studied, bringing the intricacies of their lives closer to both researcher and audience’. Although this was true to a certain extent (especially for the collaborative filming), the tangibility of the visuals is also key - during the social concept mapping activity and stimulated recall, the use of visual methods provided helpful prompts to support participant voice and provided participants space to think, reducing pressure to respond to a question straightaway. For example, Sonic, spoke about how in lessons he would pretend to drop his pencil as a strategy to give him time to think, but during the concept mapping activity he didn’t need to do this, as the process of creating the map gave him the time he needed to collate his thoughts.

As with other visual methods, social concept mapping led to in-depth discussion about participants’ belonging and the reasons they spent time with particular children and what they liked and disliked about these interactions. However, there are few studies that use concept mapping to support participant voice in this way (one exception is Emmel and Clark 2011). Instead most research which uses this approach, presents social relations quantitatively, failing to allow for the plurality of social experiences and the influence of context. For example, social concept mapping has been most commonly used to identify the patterning of social connections that link a set of actors (Freeman 2000) and specific researcher-defined attributes of a network such as the strengths and weaknesses of ties (Hogan *et al.* 2007). This approach does not take into account the plural and complex nature of social relations. My approach to social concept mapping, while relying on the spoken word as well as the visual, did at least help children to reflect on their experiences.

My research showed the value of visual methods in aiding participant reflection, helping participants step back and reflect on their images and consequentially to articulate these experiences better in interviews (a strength also emphasised by Freire 1973 and Liebenberg 2009). During stimulated recall, participants would pause the clips or go back and review clips, highlighting the value of this technology in slowing down observations to facilitate

deeper reflection. However, despite these strengths, the topics of discussion were strongly linked with, and perhaps constrained by, the video clips, images that were sometimes opportunist due to the need for each child to complete the collaborative filming over a few lunch times.

The strengths of visual methods in supporting the reflective voices of participants, as discussed above, demonstrates the importance of conversation alongside the visual. Although the collaborative film making activity generated interesting video clips, without the reflective discussion that went alongside this the insights would have been limited and less representative of the children's ideas. This is further emphasised by Greenfield (2004) who utilised child-directed photography to discover what the pre-school children in her class valued in their outdoor play area.

#### *7.4 The use of visual methods to support participant voice*

Many researchers (such as Banks 2001; Pink 2007; Cremin *et al.* 2011) highlight the strengths of visual methods in supporting collaborative methods, for example, suggesting that this technology provides 'accessible, flexible and inclusive tools fit for purpose' (Burke 2008, p.25). However, two children opted not to take part in the visual activities. At the beginning of data collection the head of the resource base stated that these two boys would be the most challenging to engage in the research due to their autism. These children seemed keen to take part and I did not want to deny them, but I found that the children very quickly lost interest in doing the visual activities. Furthermore at times technical or aesthetic considerations linked with the use of video dominated the research process. For example, one participant spent most of the first lunchtime with the camera just walking around the playground looking for the perfect shot and other participants explained that they filmed certain children, because they were funny or a good actor. Haw (2008) similarly found that aesthetic considerations influenced participants' use of video in research.

As well as participants being excited about the filming, some participants were apprehensive about the process, especially regarding how peers would respond to them with a camera in the playground. For example, Cherrybomb and Spiral explained that they needed to ask their peers if they would take part in the film. They appeared quite hesitant. Sonic was also apprehensive because he was worried other children would take the camera from him. During the walking tours, Clark and Emmel (2010) similarly found that some participants were self-

conscious of being seen doing the research. I was also deeply aware of the responses or perceptions of peers towards the activity, in particular the role of the activity in drawing peer attention to these children and how this was compounded by the use video. Logistical factors also hindered participant voice during the collaborative filming. For example, these films were strongly influenced by who was in the playground when the filming took place. Sometimes participants were unable to find their chosen peers to film and would quickly choose other children, their pragmatic approach potentially distorting the data and what they might have wanted to say or show. Furthermore, occasionally peers did not want to be filmed which the participants and I respected. This limitation would also have had detrimental consequences for what the children could say during video stimulated recall as these images were used to prompt discussion.

Participants existed in a contradictory state of simultaneously opposing and submitting to discursive forms of power, reflecting Foucault's (1980) theory of subjection. For example, whilst children chose to film the games and areas of the playground in which they liked to play, as well as the children they played with, at times the choice of images was restricted by the focus of this research and also societal and school expectations. Sonic was determined to film children beating him up, as this was something he frequently experienced and another child decided to stage a fight that he filmed. I was concerned at how this clip would look to other people; especially as children were due to take these films home, hence I intervened, demonstrating how societal (and my) concerns restricted the choice of clips. This is something I felt awful doing and regret, but I felt accountable to the schools. I did encourage Sonic to talk about these problematic social relations instead, pushing him towards a different, less problematic communication medium. Therefore although visual methods may support collaboration (as stressed by Allen 2008; Emmel 2008 and Liebenberg 2009), they are not always experienced as 'fun', engaging, fitting or productive.

### *7.5 The ethical dilemmas surrounding the use of visual methods*

My research was underpinned not only by an understanding of the potentials of visual methods in supporting participant voice but also, as Neill (2005) argues, that it is unethical to refrain from research with children, as they have as much right as anybody to have their voices represented. While I believed in the importance of valuing the experiences of all human beings, reflecting feminist (Reinharz 1983; 1992) and disability discourses (Oliver

1990; 1996) I found (echoing Strecker 1998 and Ward and Simons 1998) that not everyone wants to take part in research, or all aspects of it (such as the participants who chose not to do the visual activities) all of the time.

Underpinning this research was an awareness of traditional, dominant understandings of childhood which maintain deficit, hierarchical understandings of young people (as highlighted by Allen 2008; Barnes 1991; Alderson 2005). Due to these understandings children are often positioned into categories of 'at risk', 'incomplete' or 'not yet mature', emphasising their vulnerability and the need to protect these young people from harm (O'Brien and Moules 2007). Challenging deficit understandings of childhood, I was determined to embrace a more positive understanding of this age group. This reflected what Alcoff (1991) referred to as the plurality of voice, an understanding of the differences between the experiences of children and adults and a determination to celebrate these differences. However, in hindsight, I am unsure how successful I was at achieving this. The exclusion of parents, practitioners and Hamster and Tony's decision not to undertake the visual activities has led me to question whether I achieved this.

As with Scott *et al.* (2006), my research showed the challenges of supporting participation whilst protecting young people from harm. Although I invested considerable thought into planning research that participants would find engaging, when participants used the video camera they attracted sometimes unhelpful attention from peers. Many participants also mentioned their anxieties and apprehension regarding how peers would respond to their wanting to film them. These examples raise ethical concerns regarding the potentially detrimental role of research in complicating participant relations and reinforcing perceptions of 'other'. This is not particular to visual methods, but their attractiveness may have heightened the risk. Too often research draws attention to the motivating, accessible and engaging qualities of visual methods, but rarely to the potential effects of the research process on peer perceptions of participants and the anxieties of participants in terms of how others may perceive them.

When I planned this research I invested care in supporting the voluntary consent of participants and in establishing close rapport. I was concerned that, due to the authoritarian nature of schools, participants would feel obliged to take part, a concern many researchers discuss (Mahon *et al.* 1996; Valentine 1999; Heath *et al.* 2007). However, in practice, participants frequently asked me and the staff about when they would be starting the research

and often changed their minds about working with me on particular days because they wanted to do something else (such as play football); this indicates both an understanding of the voluntary nature of the participation and strong rapport. There were, however, a few tricky situations. For example, SpongeBob explained to me how he was no longer friends with a boy in his class (see previous chapter) and then went on to ask me for advice about how to mend this relationship. I provided encouragement, explaining that, in time, the children would hopefully ‘make up’. This child was upset and confused about his friendship problems and I wanted to help but I was unsure whether this was my place to do so. On another occasion, Sonic adapted the concept mapping activity to suit his needs, but in doing so came to the realisation that he had few friends. At the end of data collection (especially at Middletree where there was limited pastoral support), I gradually reduced the amount of time I spent in the setting, but felt uncomfortable as it felt as though the children had come to depend on me as a friendly face and someone they could talk to. Booth (1998) highlights similar challenges in collaborative research with women with learning difficulties noting those eleven years on from the first project, she was still in contact with five participants who had attached their own conditions on their participation in the research.

#### *7.6 Combining ethnography with visual methods supported voice*

My choice of methods provided insights into the subjective nature of voice and knowledge. For example, during stimulated recall participants provided their interpretation of the video clips alongside my own. The emphasis on participant reflection was important to understanding actions as embedded within the context or the subjective and the messy nature of social relations (highlighted by Harrison 1996 and Madden 2010). Such insights were further enhanced by my decision to use participatory observation. Spending an extended period of time in each setting helped me to understand social interaction within the naturalistic situation and context, leading to more comprehensive insights. I gained insight into the interconnected spheres of influence in Scooby’s life (previous chapter) for example, and how this may have potentially influenced the way he responded to the activity. This indicates the value of combining visual methods with an ethnographic approach looking at the situatedness of knowledge and social relations.

My decision to initially adopt a participant role enabled me to establish a strong rapport with participants and ‘get to know’ each child as an individual before introducing the visual

activities. Furthermore, during participant observation the children chose how to include me in their interactions (a strength stressed by Emond 2005), so when I introduced the visual activities participants were already used to this collaborative relationship. As two children chose not to partake in the visual activities, my ethnographic role clearly did not guarantee the involvement of all children in all aspects.

My participant role helped me to get to know the children and for the children to get to know me, supporting collaboration. Packard (2008) and Didkowsky *et al.* (2010) argue a similar point, suggesting that visual methods will not inherently reduce power imbalances between participants and the researcher, nor will they encourage participation or mitigate language barriers; it is only when visual methods are combined with sensitive reflection by the researcher about their role in co-constructing the research environment and the intent of shifting power to the participant that previously silenced perspectives can be audible. However, this approach proved extremely time-consuming and emotionally draining too. It was not easy to see children experience ongoing abuse and I felt powerless to do anything about it.

Not only did the film making enable participants to have some control over the content of our dialogue, it also determined my own role. At times participants proceeded as if I was not there, and at other times they positioned me in the role of helper (asking me to hold coats and so on) or camera person. This suggests that participants felt comfortable and at ease with the activity and with me. Prior to data collection I had invested considerable time in planning a research process that would facilitate the active involvement of participants, but had failed to consider how participants would position me. I question whether they would have been so relaxed and at ease if they had considered me a ‘stranger’ and had we not developed rapport through my ethnographic observer/helper role.

## 7.7 Summary

To summarise, my decision to use visual methods brought with it practical and ethical challenges and my methods were only in part collaborative. My decision to use ethnography first, provided insight into the fluidity of social relations and enabled me to understand participants’ voices in a situated and contextual way. In many ways, however, I was left dissatisfied with the research design, concerns which I discuss in the conclusion.



## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

In this chapter I firstly discuss the main findings from this study relating to the belonging and social relations of children in school settings and the possible implications for inclusive education. Whilst I set out to understand the complexities, partial truths and multiple subjectivities (as emphasis by Lather 2007) of children's social experiences, I am unsure about the extent to which I achieved this. I therefore discuss the limitations of my research design before concluding with an insight into my research journey and how the PhD has changed my understandings of doing research.

### *8.1 Belonging and social relations*

My research suggests that central to children's belonging is often the importance of their relationships with other children and the prevalence of abuse (physical, verbal, or being ignored) was detrimental to this. This demonstrates the importance of schools prioritising this aspect of inclusive practice and understanding the often problematic nature of social relations. A failure to do so, in the case of Sonic and Scooby, left these children feeling excluded and alienated from peers.

Children's social relations and belonging were constantly evolving rather than fixed, highlighting the importance of schools catering for this fluidity. For example at Woodfield, the nurture group was just one of many strategies in place to help children experiencing social difficulties. In-between-ness was considered a valued position to be in, rather than dichotomous understandings which maintain a perception of behaviour as fitting into neat objective categories. Therefore, central to the school's drive for inclusion was an understanding of the complex and subjective nature of children's behaviour, and the importance of this being central to the schools educational practice.

For all the participants, school reflected a process of constant negotiation of social relations and identities, demonstrating the need to avoid overly simplistic constructions of children as passive. The ability to create a positive identity as part of building peer acceptance and membership within a group, leading to belonging, is an important finding. Spongebob was quite skilful at this, though on other occasions he and others experienced abuse. At times navigating these different identities and social relations came at the expense of others, such as

Hamster. Furthermore, Tony struggled to overcome the stigma associated with the resource base and the dominance of a charity discourse limited peers relations with him.

Sociometric studies (e.g. Koster *et al.* 2007) are often built on an understanding that children with and without special needs should interact together. However, my research suggests that whilst a friendship with peers without SENs is important, they may or may not be seen as essential or superior by children. The findings suggest that for a child to belong it is important that they are accepted as a valued member of a peer group, but whether or not their peers have SEN does not necessarily influence their belonging. I suggest that it is helpful to value all friendships as equal, as what is important is for a child to find a group where they are accepted and therefore belong.

In some ways the resource base provided a space where children enjoyed better treatment at the hands of their peers—where children and staff were more tolerant and accepting. This was the same with the nurture group as each participant spoke of how the nurture group had helped them form friendships and improve social skills and behaviour and have a strong sense of belonging. This raises questions about whether it is better to belong somewhere, even if this sits alongside some forms of segregation.

My research identified that central to belonging was not only interpersonal relations with peers but with practitioners too. The value of the nurture group and wider school in prioritising the child-practitioner rapport, providing one-to-one help and building relationships based on trust, respect and patience was found to be central to participants belonging. This was similar in the resource base at Middletree School but unfortunately was not evident in the rest of the school - Scooby and Sonic felt they had no one to turn to for help. This was highly detrimental to participants' rapport and sense of trust with their teacher and left these children feeling let down and alienated. This further highlights the necessity of staff taking such abuse seriously and understanding the importance of their rapport with children. A failure to do so may give children the impression that they are not important or they do not matter, harming their belonging and self-esteem.

Listening to children is important as it helped practitioners to move beyond generalised assumptions to gain better insights into the actual needs of each child. This was strongly evident at Woodfield School as the process of listening to children helped practitioners gain insights into the complex nature of participant's inclusion from the perspectives of these

young people and plan educational practice accordingly. At Middletree however, Scooby and Sonic felt they were not listened to and this was detrimental to their belonging.

At Middletree School there was a broad spectrum of different attitudes towards difference. From meeting individual needs (resource base) to treating children the same (mainstream) and these differing approaches were highly problematic to inclusion. This highlighted the importance of a whole school approach to inclusion, understanding the complexity of needs. At Woodfield School there was greater consistency in approach in which practitioners challenged dichotomous, negative conceptualisations by embracing the view that every child is different, often viewing difference positively. The principles underpinning the nurture group was embedded in whole school practice and therefore the nurture was a valued part of the schools strategies for meeting needs, rather than a separate entity.

Central to the children's sense of belonging was the need to feel they mattered to their teacher and this was linked with a whole school ethos where children felt understood and accepted. At Middletree School, the resource base staff were experienced, knowledgeable and flexible in facilitating the 'in-between-ness' of children, helping these children to cross the traditional boundaries between special and mainstream and find their own social groupings and belonging. Although the resource base prided itself on its individualised approach, the provisions different school routine and different reward system was not embedded in whole school practice.

Some participants (but not all) also suggested that belonging was linked with a sense of achievement, highlighting the importance of practitioners effectively adapting lessons to meet the needs of children. A failure to do so, left children feeling excluded. Similarly, some participants also suggested that their behavioural difficulties influenced their belonging, emphasising the importance of effective behaviour strategies.

## *8.2 The affordances of my research design*

This research enabled me to examine the affordances of visual methods in supporting children's participation and voice. I strongly believe children have a right to have a voice in research, and my use of visual methods to some extent supported this. Most participants (apart from Tony and Hamster) were extremely enthusiastic about doing the visual activities. The tangibility of the activities was mostly helpful in aiding discussion, providing

participants with prompts and space to think, yet my decision to use these visual methods was fraught with additional challenges. For example, aesthetic and technical considerations, logistical factors and ethical considerations all of which made messy the idea of facilitating participant voice. I had not anticipated that some participants would feel apprehensive about how they would be perceived by peers during the collaborative filming and the use of video contributed to this. Not all participants took part in the visual activities. I regret not spending more time communicating with these children and adapting the research process accordingly. I inadvertently focused more on the children with less complex needs (who appeared more interested in the research), maintaining some of the traditional exclusion of certain children in research. At the same time I respected these children's rights to choose whether or not to take part. I did not want to inadvertently coerce these children into taking part. In placing so much emphasis on supporting participation it is important to remember that not all children want to take part in research of the kind offered to them. Beresford (1997) found that participation depended on the type of SEN children experienced and my approach was better suited to those without the most complex needs.

Whilst I planned to gain insights into the participants' belonging and social relations through the eyes of these young people, in hindsight I realise my voice was louder than the children's, reflecting the partiality of my visual approach. If I were to do research in schools again, I would move towards a more participatory approach (alongside other methods) in which children would be involved as partners in the research, such as designing the research or analysing the data.

Setting the visual methods in the context of an ethnographic participant role enabled me to establish a close rapport with most participants and gradually introduce the research and the potential consequences to the children of taking part. For example, during the visual activities participants frequently changed their minds about when they wanted to work with me and two chose not to take part at all. My research experience perhaps lent support to the argument of Nind (2008) that if the research is well thought out and executed, it may lead to more ethical research, but this takes a lot of care and experience to achieve.

I opted to use ethnography in order to reduce some of the power inequalities between the participants and myself and also to help me understand the fluid and contextual nature of social relations and belonging. Data collection greatly aggravated my health difficulties, meaning I was forced to reduce the amount of time I spent collecting data each day, though I

did extend the data collection period by three months. My fluctuating and poor health meant I had much less energy and concentration to grapple with the nuances. Therefore in some ways the potentials of this research design was not pursued as much as it might have been. At times I also struggled with the competing demands of being in the setting and thinking reflexively and this influenced the extent to which I was reflexive at different stages of the research. Thinking reflexively was not something that came naturally to me and was a very different way of thinking to what I was used to. This was the hardest aspect of the research and I acknowledge that I was not as reflexive as I intended and this is something I regret. Kaufman (2012) suggests that this way of thinking takes considerable practice, to be cultivated, encouraged and taught. This is a skill I hope to work on in the future. Furthermore, there were times when I struggled with the messiness of the data and this led me to initially oversimplify the findings. As a person I like my work to be very orderly and this contradicted the messiness and ambiguities of doing ethnography.

The research activities provided insights into participants belonging and social relations, demonstrating the worth of listening to children. Towards the end of data collection, the head of the resource base at Middletree introduced a buddy scheme and lunch club for children who were struggling socially, perhaps indicating that the research had some impact on how things at the school were seen. Throughout data collection I was constantly juggling the needs of the children and school with my needs as a researcher and I was nervous about offending the school staff that I was so reliant on. In hindsight I regret not being more confident and assertive with staff at Middletree regarding the social difficulties participants were experiencing. If I could go back in time I would encourage staff to have a proper consultation with the children or even carry out the consultation with staff, listening to and involving them as a vehicle for better collaborative understanding and practice.

### *8.3 How have I changed?*

Undertaking this research has provided me with different insights into children's lives. Prior to this study, I had mostly worked with children in support roles, but doing this research has in some ways helped me to better understand participants, a process that was exciting but also often emotionally draining. These emotions were compounded by my own childhood and the social and academic difficulties I experienced. Doing this research has therefore made me

more aware of the challenges and anxieties children face every day and has made me more determined to help children.

In terms of my knowledge of doing research, this PhD has reinforced in my mind the importance of participant voice and the need to reduce power inequalities, the importance of respecting the different ways in which we communicate and designing research accordingly. In the future I hope to further develop my qualitative expertise and approaches to supporting participant voice. Whilst the PhD has been an extremely difficult process compounded by my health, it has also been an immensely rewarding, enjoyable and exhilarating experience too.

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## **APPENDICES**



**APPENDIX A: TABLE SHOWING BASIC DETAILS REGARDING EACH PARTICIPANT**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>SEN</b>	<b>Has social difficulties</b>	<b>Attends resource base</b>	<b>Attends nurture group</b>
Scooby	9	Middletree		Yes		
Spongebob	9	Middletree	Yes – autism	Yes	Yes	
Sonic	10	Middletree	Yes – dyslexia and a sight impairment	Yes		
Tony *	9	Middletree	Yes—autism and ADHD	Yes	Yes	
Hamster *	9	Middletree	Yes—autism	Yes	Yes	
Harriet *	9	Middletree		Yes		
Cherrybomb	10	Woodfield School		Yes		Yes
Spiral		Woodfield School		Yes		Yes

**\*Tony and Hamster who had the most complex needs chose withdraw from the research.**

**I undertook observations of these children but they did not take part in the visual activities. Similarly, Harriet left the school half way through the research.**

## APPENDIX B: INFORMATION SHEET DETAILING THE NURTURE GROUP PRINCIPLES

### What are Nurture Groups?

Nurture Groups are a small group provision within a school, supporting the children in school, who have had difficulties, into mainstream education. There are usually about 8-10 children in the group at any one time, with a specially trained class teacher and a Nurture Group practitioner.

### Who are Nurture Groups for?

Nurture groups are set up for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties stemming from attachment issues. These children may, for a variety of reasons, have missed out on the early learning experiences that promote good development and readiness to learn. Some children may have experienced disrupted relationships in their early years and so have difficulties in learning to trust adults and in relating well to other children. As a result, the children typically either display high emotions or can be very withdrawn. These children need a significant level of support and may well be at risk of exclusion. Entry into the Nurture Group is carefully considered through a staged referral procedure and the use of a range of assessments carried out over time.



### What is different about a Nurture room?

The Nurture Group room is designed to have a nurturing home atmosphere with a sofa and a cooking area where food is prepared and shared. Food, the most fundamental expression of care, is shared at 'breakfast' and 'snack' times with much opportunity for social learning. An emphasis is placed on communication and language development through intensive interaction with a few adults and other children.

### What do the staff provide?

The trained staff provide support for the child's positive emotional and social growth and cognitive development, at whatever level of need the child manifests. This is done by responding to the child in a developmentally appropriate way. They provide a safe base and trusting relationships with reliable adults in which the missing early learning experiences can be reinstated. The adults in the Nurture Group work together, modelling adult co-operation, sharing, discussing and problem solving. They work closely with the classroom teachers and a range of other professionals in a multi disciplinary manner. They also work closely with the families. They carry out assessment using a range of tools, design, interventions and write an IEP for each child.



### Planning?

Systematic and collaborative planning is crucial to the success of a Nurture Group. Time is allocated on a regular basis to allow for ongoing assessment, the development and monitoring of collaborative IEPs, liaison with teachers and other professionals involved. Time is also needed for planning the appropriate way to start and finish placements in the Nurture Group. Attention to the exact detail of successful reintegration back into the child's classroom will also be a key feature of the collaborative planning process.

### Involvement of other agencies

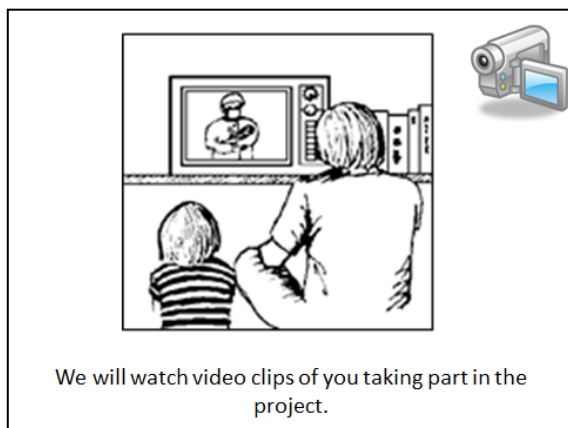
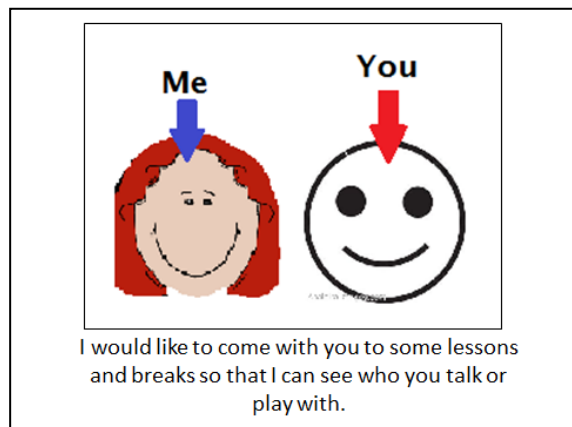
Interagency involvement for children in the Nurture Group is an effective way of supporting both the children and the staff. Advice and support is sought directly from a range of health, social work and education professionals.







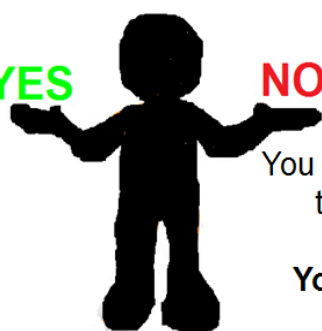
## APPENDIX C: VISUAL PRESENTATION FOR POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS





**YES**

**NO**



You don't have to  
take part.

**You choose**

Thank you for listening



## APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

### My research

#### What do I want to find out?

##### Who am I?



My name is Sam and I want to do some research with young people at your school. This research is for some work I am doing at university.

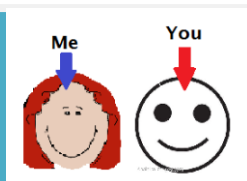
##### Why am I in your school?



Research is finding things out. I want to find out about your social experiences at school. I'm interested in your relationships with other pupils, how these pupils treat you and whether you feel you belong and fit in at school.

I want to work with you because I think the more adults understand the experiences of children, the more they will be able to help them.

##### If I choose to take part what will this involve?



I will follow you to some of your lessons and playtimes.



I will ask you to draw pictures and diagrams and make a photograph book to show the children you spend time with in school, where and what you do. I will film this.



playground. You will be lent a camera so you can take photographs of this walk.

how you video clips of you taking part in this research and ask you what you thought of it.

### **What will happen to the information I give you?**



This information will go into a long book and some shorter pieces of writing. This will be read by people interested in education like your head teacher.

### **Who will this research help?**



This research will hopefully help the staff at your school know how they can better support you and other children to form closer relationships with pupils and increase their belonging. It could also help children in other schools too.



**But you don't have to take part. You can choose**



If you want to know more about this, you can ring Sam on 07774528639

**Thank you for reading this**



## Young Person Consent Form

**Project: Friendship and belonging**

**Researcher: Sam Child**

**Read each sentence carefully and if you agree with what it says write your name in each box.**

**Yes I would like to take part.**

**I understand that I do not have to take part.**

**I understand that I can change my mind anytime.**

**I understand that I will be filmed taking part.**

**Name**\_\_\_\_\_

**Date**\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E: ETHICS COMMITTEE APPLICATION

**Project Title:**

The social experiences and sense of belonging of children and young people (including those with emotional and behavioural difficulties) attending school

**Researcher(s):** Samantha Child

**Student ID number:** 23729821

**Supervisor:** Professor Melanie Nind

**Email:** M.A.Nind@soton.ac.uk

Part One	YES	NO
Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent? (e.g. children with special difficulties)	X	
Will the study require the co-operation of an advocate for initial access to the groups or individuals? (e.g. children with disabilities; adults with a dementia)	X	
Could the research induce psychological stress or anxiety, cause harm or have negative consequences for the participants (beyond the risks encountered in their normal life and activities)?		X
Will deception of participants be necessary during the study? (e.g. covert observation of people)?		X
Will the study involve discussion of topics which the participants would find sensitive (e.g. sexual activity, drug use)?		X
Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing or physical testing? (e.g. long periods at VDU, use of sport equipment such as a treadmill) and will a health questionnaire be needed?		X
Will the research involve medical procedures? (e.g. are drugs, placebos or other substances to be administered to the participants or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind?)		X

Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses or compensation for time) be offered to participants?		X
Will you be involving children under sixteen for whom additional consent will be required?	X	
Will you have difficulties anonymising participants and/or ensuring the information they give is non-identifiable?		X
Will you have difficulty in explicitly communicating the right of participants to freely withdraw from the study at any time?	X	
Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS?		X
If you are working in a cross-cultural setting will you need to gain additional knowledge about the setting to be able to be sensitive to particular issues in that culture (e.g. sexuality, gender role, language use)?		X
Will you have difficulties complying with the Data Protection Act (e.g. not keeping unnecessary personal data and keeping any necessary data locked or password protected)?		X
Are there potential risks to your own health and safety in conducting this research (e.g. lone interviewing other than in public space)?		X

If you have answered NO to all of the above questions and you have discussed this form with your supervisor and had it signed and dated, you may proceed to develop an ethics protocol with the assistance of the Ethical Protocol Guidance Form which must also be completed. If you have answered YES to any of the questions, please complete PART TWO of this form below and adopt a similar procedure of discussion with supervisor, signing and proceeding to develop an actual ethical protocol with the assistance of the Ethical Protocol Guidance Form. Please keep a copy



of both forms and protocol for your records. Only in exceptional circumstances will cases need to be referred to the School's Research Ethics Committee.

**Part Two** For each item answered 'YES' please give a summary of the issue and action to be taken to address it.

**1. Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent? (e.g. children with special difficulties)**

This study will involve approximately 10 young participants aged 7 to 16 some of which have a statement of special educational needs. The welfare of these participants will be paramount at all times. The research will be conducted in a classroom and other locations within the school which the participants are familiar with, and a member of staff will be nearby. Having previously worked in learning support assistant and volunteer roles in various settings for children and teenagers with special educational needs, I have experience of responding to the needs of young people with such needs. I have undergone all the relevant CRB checks.

Whilst in each setting I plan to adopt the role of 'adult participant', helping the children and staff where possible. However, there is the possibility that children may forget or be confused by my two different roles. Therefore, I will frequently remind the children that I am here for research purposes. The presence of the video camera should act as a visual prompt.

Throughout data collection I will monitor participants' body language for signs of fatigue or distress and respond to such signs by suggesting that data collection be suspended.

If a participant shows signs of discomfort or stress, this research will be briefly terminated to allow enough time to comfort the young person and/or seek assistance from staff members.

This young person will then be asked whether they wish to continue and I'll remind them that participation is optional.

A brief interactive visual presentation and pictorial information sheet will be used to explain the

research to the young people, and will include an explanation of my role as researcher, why I've chosen them and their possible involvement within the study. It is anticipated that this verbal/visual mode of communication will be more inclusive than relying on the written word. During this presentation, and throughout data collection I will frequently remind participants that their involvement in this research is optional and that they can withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. During data collection each participant will be given a red card. If a participant decides they no longer want to continue with part or all of the research, they can use the red card to communicate these feelings and then return to their class. Participants are likely to talk about their relationship with other peers. At the beginning of data collection, each class will be asked to listen to a short, interactive verbal presentation detailing my role as researcher and what I will be doing in their school. Over the course of the research I will talk with the children whose names have come up during the study. I will explain that they can choose whether or not I use the information I have on them in this research and they will be given an accessible information sheet. At the bottom of this sheet is a form which they can return if they do not want me to use their information. There will be a small box located in a central point in the school where they can place their opt out forms. The aim of this box is to reduce pressure on the children to conform. These children will also be given a parental information sheet and opt out form to take home. Again parents will be asked to fill out the form and place it in the opt out box if they don't want any information regarding their child to be used in my research.

**2. Will the study require the co-operation of an advocate for initial access to the groups or individuals? (e.g. children with disabilities; adults with a dementia)**

This research will be carried out in two schools in the local area. One of which will probably be a primary school and the other probably a secondary School.

Written information outlining the aims, nature of the study, duration and methods will be given

to the head teacher of each school. I will then meet with each head teacher to further discuss this research, providing opportunities to answer queries and negotiations regarding issues such as accessibility and feasibility.

**5. Will the study involve discussion of topics which the participants would find sensitive (e.g. sexual activity, drug use)?**

This research will involve children talking about potentially sensitive issues such as friendship and their sense of belonging at school. It is possible that this could lead to participants getting upset. I will monitor participants' body language for signs of fatigue or distress and respond to such signs by suggesting that data collection be suspended. If a participant shows signs of discomfort or stress, this research will be briefly terminated to allow enough time to comfort the young person and/or seek assistance from staff members. This participant will be asked whether they wish to continue and I'll remind them that participation is optional.

**9. Will you be involving children under sixteen for whom additional consent will be required?**

Children aged 7 to 16 will be involved in this research. Through observations and talking with teaching staff I will identify a group of approximately 5 children in each school as possible participants. These children will be shown a brief visual presentation of the research, explaining what participation will involve and that it is optional. During this presentation, I will give each young person a piece of card with their name on. I will request that during the next hour at their own leisure they put their name card into either the green 'Yes I want to take part' box or the red 'No I don't want to take part' box located at the back of the classroom, situated slightly away from the rest of the group, emphasising that parental/guardian permission will also be sought from those interested in participating. Towards the end of the day, I will discreetly look at the names in the green box. The purpose of these boxes is to facilitate voluntary consent. At the end of the session, I will try and briefly talk with the parents or guardians of the young people who expressed an interest in participating in the research and I will give them a

parental/guardian information sheet and consent form to take away and return the following week. During these short informal conversations with parents I will state that if they have questions my telephone number is on the information sheet and that I will be in school next week if they want to ask me anything about the research.

**10. Will you have difficulties anonymising participants and/or ensuring the information they give is non-identifiable?**

With regards to written text (such as Fieldnotes) pseudonyms will be used to ensure that the names of participants, the school involved and the charity remain anonymous. All data (written and visual) will be securely stored and retained in keeping with university policy. Data stored on the computer will be kept on the university server and password protected. The only other people viewing the data will be my university supervisor and participants. These precautions will be explained in the literature given to participants and their parents/guardians and also the charity. Should the question of publication arise at a later date, I will discuss this with the schools.

**11. Will you have difficulty in explicitly communicating the right of participants to freely withdraw from the study at any time?**

The participants will be asked to watch a brief visual presentation about the research, and during this short presentation I will emphasise that participation is optional, and that if they choose not to participate this will have no negative consequences, rather participants will join back in with what the rest of their class are doing.

At the beginning of each data collection session, I will talk to the participants about what this research session will involve. They will each be given their name labels and given 15-20 minutes to decide for themselves whether or not they will participate in the research that day, placing their name label in the correct box situated at the back of the classroom. I will emphasise that participation is optional, and that is if they decide not to participate this is absolutely fine and

they will just join in with what the rest of their class are doing. I will also frequently verbally remind the participants that their involvement is optional. During data collection each participant will have a red card, which they can hold up if they want to withdraw/stop the research.

Signed: S.Child

(Researcher)

Date: 27/06/2011

**To be completed by the Supervisor (PLEASE TICK ONE)**

☒ **Appropriate action taken to maintain ethical standards - no further action necessary. This project now has ethical approval.**

☐ **The issues require the guidance of the School of Education's Ethics Committee. This project does not yet have ethical approval.**

COMMENTS:

Signed (supervisor on behalf of SoE Research Ethics Committee):

Date:

**Title of Project:** The social experiences and sense of belonging of children and young people  
(including those with emotional and behavioural difficulties) attending school

**Name of PI/Student:** Samantha Child      **Bid/Student ID no:** 23729821

**A. CHECKLIST**

HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT HOW YOU WILL ADDRESS:	YES	NO
your responsibilities to the <b>participants</b>	X	
your responsibilities to the <b>sponsors</b> of the research		NA
your responsibilities to the community of <b>educational researchers</b>	X	

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED HOW YOU WILL:	YES	NO
fully inform participants about the nature of the research;	X	
ensure participants agree to take part freely and voluntarily;	X	
inform participants that they can withdraw freely at any time;	X	
justify deception of participants if this is necessarily involved;		NA
offer protection for any vulnerable participants or groups in your study;	X	
manage the differential 'power relationships' in the setting;	X	
avoid any pressure on participants to contribute under duress or against their free will;	X	
guarantee that any research assistants or support staff involved in the project understand and adhere to the ethical guidelines for the project;	NA	

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED:	YES	NO
what procedures to set in place to ensure a balance between a participant's right to privacy and access to public knowledge;	X	
how best to provide anonymity and confidentiality and ensure participants are aware of these procedures?	X	

the implications of the Data Protection Act (1998) particularly in respect to the storage and availability of the data.	X	
disclosure of information to third parties and getting permission from the participants to use data in any reports/books/articles.	X	
how you are going to inform the participants of the outcomes of the research;	X	
how to handle any conflicts of interest arising from sponsorship of the research e.g. a chocolate company sponsoring research into child nutrition, or your own vested interests if any;	X	
how you will protect the integrity and reputation of educational research.	X	
for PGR research, have you thought about the implications of the thesis being available electronically'.	X	

Having considered these questions draw up specific procedures for how you will handle the collection and dissemination of data in your research study.

## **ETHICS PROTOCOL – Bid/Student ID no: 23729821**

### **Protocol**

**Study Title:** The social experiences and sense of belonging of children and young people (including those with emotional and behavioural difficulties) attending school

### **Background:**

The purpose of this research is to explore the social experiences and belonging of children and young people in education (some of which have emotional and behavioural difficulties).

This research will examine both *how* participants are treated by peers (and their attitudes towards this) and their sense of belonging, but also examine *why* this is the case, investigating the teaching practices and wider school policies which are helpful or detrimental in supporting these social experiences. My research questions are:

1. What are participants' social experiences and sense of belonging during both formal (lesson time) and informal (breaks and lunchtime) parts of the school day?
2. What teaching strategies and wider school practices support or inhibit the positive social experiences and sense of belonging of participants?

To answer the questions above, a highly qualitative, visual approach will be adopted, utilising specialist research methods (walking interviews, photography, stimulatedstimulated mapping and collaborative social mapping). This study will also have a methodological focus, investigating the affordances of these methods in providing insights into participants' social interactions and belonging. Hence, the final research question is:

3. How can the visual be used to illuminate the social experiences and belonging of participants?



**Method:**

Reflecting an ethnographic approach, I will spend approximately one academic year collecting data in two different educational settings. This extended duration will enable me to experience the setting, getting closer to social reality and enhancing my understanding of social interaction and belonging. This approach has the potential to lead to rich and insightful findings.

Instead of adopting the role of passive observer I will play the role of participant adult, interacting with and helping the children and their peers as much as possible. It is hoped that being in the setting on a regular basis and putting time and effort into interacting with participant's and trying to get to know them as unique individuals will strengthen the rapport between participant's and myself. It is anticipated that this collaborative role will lead to the pupils and staff accepting me as a member of the school, rather than an 'outsider' to the institution and as a result participants may respond to this research in a more open and relaxed way, increasing the authenticity of the data in representing the lives of these young people.

Throughout the process a reflexive diary and Fieldnotes will be kept as a way of embracing the subjective, contextual and personal nature of research.

Various different visual, collaborative methods will be utilised in order to enable participants to play an active and valued role in communicating their social experiences and belonging.

The use of visual methods is a way of making this research for engaging and inclusive, overcoming barriers to participation for young people who may struggle with written or spoken literacy. More precisely, these methods are:

Collaborative social mapping: Working one-to-one each participant will be asked to take part in an informal collaborative mapping exercise, placing the participant in control of the research situation. Using a large piece of paper, each participant will be asked to map out

who they interact with and will be used as stimuli to promote discussions about these relationships. This exercise will be filmed to enable a multimodal analysis of participant behaviour. Each participant will undertake this exercise twice, once with reference to interactions with peers during lesson time and the other focusing on break time interactions.

Walking interviews: Working one-to-one, I will ask each participant to take me on a tour of their lesson as a way of illustrating their attachment/ or lack of attachment with peers. They will be given a digital camera to capture their thoughts. Again, participants will have control in choosing where to lead me and what they take photographs of. Each participant will undertake this exercise twice, once with reference to interactions with peers during lesson time and the other focusing on break time interactions. These interviews will be audio recorded and detailed Fieldnotes will be written (particularly important as issues of background noise may at times make it difficult for the audio recording to be accurately transcribed).

Photo albums: In a one-to-one situation, I will give each participant the photographs they took during the walking interviews. They will be encouraged to talk about why they chose to photograph the people or situations that they did and what the photographs show. Each participant will be asked to create their own photo album to tell a story of their belonging and social experiences in lessons and break times. Participants will be given a great deal of freedom and choice regarding how they go about this exercise, such as the photographs they use, whether or not they provide captions to go alongside the photographs and also the possibility of including other images and drawings etc. This will be an informal, interactive exercise and it is hoped that the activity of designing their photo album (action over cognition) will help participants to verbally articulate their social experiences and belonging. This process will be video recorded to enable an analysis of not only speech but also gesture and body movement etc.

Stimulated recall – Showing video clips of the participants taking part in both the social mind mapping and photo album exercises, participants will be encouraged to discuss their responses to these activities. Participants will also be asked to listen to audio clips of the walking interviews and be encouraged to discuss their response to this exercise as well. The stimulated recall will be carried out no more than ten days after each exercise (ideally) so that the participant's experiences of each activity will still be familiar to them. It is anticipated that this method will provide methodological insights into the affordances of the visual in providing a window into participant's social worlds.

Each of these activities will be carried out at a time most convenient for the young people and staff and also in a location within the school setting where the participants are familiar with, such as the classroom or the playground. A member of staff will always be nearby.

### **Participants:**

This research will be carried out in two schools in the local area, one of which will probably be a primary school and the other probably a secondary school.

The study will involve approximately ten young people aged 5-18 some of which have emotional and behavioural difficulties. In each school, I will identify a class to observe, which will be decided upon based on two criteria:

As I have a particular interest in emotional and behavioural difficulties (a group traditionally excluded in research), I will be looking for a class in which young people and children who have this label attend.

The agreement of key staff within the School.

Once I have identified a class in each school, during pilot studies I will undertake ethnographic observations of the peer interactions between children or young people (some of which have emotional and behavioural difficulties) in this class. I will also discuss with key staff (such as class teacher) the pupils they think would be suited to this research. It is

anticipated that both these observations and discussions will enable me to identify a subset within each class to base this research on. My criteria for choosing a subset are:





A group of children or young people within this class which includes individuals labelled as having emotional and behavioural difficulties who spend a great deal of time together.




The interest of pupils to take part in this research, as well as the agreement of their parents and key staff within the school.




**Procedure:**

The table below show my schedule for undertaking this research in school 1. Once data collection (including analysis) in School 1 is completed, I will then repeat this schedule for School 2.



	Method	Description of what I will be doing
<b>Week 1</b>	Ethnographic observations (Pilot study)	I will spend a few days with a class both myself and key school staff think would be suitable for this research. I will undertake an ethnographic observation of this class and through doing so identify a possible subset to base this study on. I will explain my research to the class and subset and seek consent from possible participants and their parents.
<b>Weeks 2–3</b>	Ethnographic observations	I will watch the focus children interacting with peers and the way peers treat them. During these observations, rather than sitting at the sidelines and just watching, I will adopt the role of helper, aiding the children and staff (e.g. helping children with work).

<b>Weeks</b>  <b>4–7</b>	Activity 1 –  social  mapping	<p>Working 1:1 or in a small group (depending on what each child would prefer), each focus child will be given the opportunity to create their own visual map (with pen and paper) to show the relationships and interaction they have with peers during lessons. This activity will be very informal and used as stimuli to promote discussion about their relationships with peers. This activity will at a later date be repeated, but this time with reference to break times (rather than lessons)</p> <p> This will be filmed</p> <p> This will take 30-60 minutes per child</p> <p><b>Location for this activity:</b> A quiet space away from other children e.g. empty classroom, staff room or playground.</p>
	Reflection	<p>Focus children will be shown video clips of themselves taking part in the previous activity and encouraged to talk about their responses to the activity.</p> <p> This will be filmed</p> <p> This will take 20-30 minutes per child</p>

		<b>Location for this activity:</b> A quiet space away from other children e.g. empty classroom or staff room.
	Observations	Continue observing focus children during lessons and break times.
<b>Weeks 8–10</b>	Activity 2 – Walking interviews	<p>On a 1:1 basis (on in a small group) each focus child will be asked to take me on a walking tour of their classroom during a lesson and encouraged to talk about <b>what people and teaching practices mean to them</b>. They will be given a digital camera to use during this process.</p> <p>This activity will also be repeated during a break time as well</p> <p> This will be audio recorded.</p> <p> This will take 20-45 minutes per child.</p>
	Reflection	<p>Focus children will be shown video clips of themselves taking part in the previous activity and encouraged to talk about their responses to the activity.</p> <p> This will be filmed</p>

		 This will take 20-30 minutes per child  <b>Location for this activity:</b> A quiet space away from other children e.g. empty classroom or staff room.
<b>Weeks 11–13</b>	Activity 4 – Making photo albums	<p>Each child will be shown the photographs they took during the walking interviews. They will be encouraged to talk about why they chose to photograph the people or situations that they did and what the photographs show.</p> <p>Each child will be asked to create their own photo album on the computer to tell a story of their belonging and social experiences in lessons and break times. Participants will be given a great deal of freedom and choice regarding how they go about this exercise, such as the photographs they use, whether or not they provide captions to go alongside the photographs and also the possibility of including other images and drawings etc. This will be an informal and interactive activity.</p>  This will be filmed   This will take 45-60 minutes per child  <b>Location for this activity:</b> A quiet space away from other children e.g. empty classroom or staff room.



	Reflection	<p>Focus children will be shown video clips of themselves taking part in the previous activity and encouraged to talk about their responses to the activity.</p> <p> This will be filmed</p> <p> This will take 20-30 minutes per child.</p> <p><b>Location for this activity:</b> A quiet space away from other children e.g. empty classroom or staff room.</p>
<b>Weeks 14–15</b>	Finish data collection	Finish off activities and observations
	Participant validation exercise	At a date convenient for the class I'd like to come back for a few hours so that I can check my findings with the children.

## **Analysis:**

Video footage will be analysed using Transana software. All discussions will be transcribed, and then utilising a system of coding the main themes will be highlighted. A similar approach to analysis will be applied to the reflexive diary and Fieldnotes. Results will be clarified with participants.

## **Ethical issues:**

### The involvement of vulnerable young people

The needs and rights of my participants will at all times be central to this research process. The research will be conducted in a classroom and other locations within the school which the participants are familiar with, and a member of staff will be on hand. Having previously worked in learning support assistant and volunteer roles in various settings for children and teenagers with special educational needs, I have experience of responding to the needs of young people with such needs. I have undergone all the relevant CRB checks.

The potential risks to participant well-being have been considered, and although thought unlikely given the focus of this study, if a participant shows signs of discomfort or stress, this research would be briefly terminated to allow enough time to comfort the young person and/or seek assistance from staff members. This young person would then be asked whether or not they wish to continue and I would remind them that participation is optional.

Throughout data collection I will be monitoring participants' body language for signs of fatigue or distress and respond to such signs by suggesting that data collection be suspended.

### Informed consent

**Opt in consent for focus children:** Every effort will be made to ensure that this research is communicated to participants in a clear and transparent way, supporting informed consent. A short, interactive verbal/visual presentation will be shown to possible participants of this

study, detailing my role as researcher, why I have chosen them and their possible involvement within the research. As an approach to facilitating voluntary consent, during this presentation I will give each young person a piece of card with their name on. I will ask them to during the session put their name card into either the green 'Yes I want to take part' box or the red 'No, I don't want to take part' box located at the back of the classroom, emphasising that parental/guardian permission will also be sought from those interested in participating. I will then discreetly look at the names in the green 'Yes, I want to take part' box. At the end of the session, I will briefly talk with the parents or guardians of the young people who expressed an interest in participating in the research and I will give them a parental/guardian information sheet and an accessible participant sheet to take away and also consent to return the following week. During these short informal conversations with parents/guardians I will state that if they have questions my telephone number is on the information sheet and that I will be at the next session to discuss any concerns.

Once data collection starts, I will ask participants to complete a brief consent form. At the beginning of each data collection session, I will get all the participants together and will talk briefly with them about the research and their role. I will then ask participants to repeat back to me what the research is about and what it will involve. They will each be given their name labels and will have 15-20 minutes to decide for themselves whether or not they will participate in the research that day, placing their name label in the correct box situated at the back of the classroom. I will emphasise that participation is optional, and that if they decide not to participate this is absolutely fine and they will just join back in with what their class is doing. I will also frequently verbally remind the participants that their involvement is optional. During data collection each participant will be given a red card. If a participant decides they no longer want to continue with part or all of the research, they can use the red card to communicate these feelings and then return to their lesson or break time.

**Opt out consent for peers:** At the beginning of data collection, a short, interactive verbal presentation will be shown to each class in the school, detailing my role as researcher and what I will be doing in their school. Over the course of the research I will talk with the children whose names have come up during the study. I will explain that they can choose whether or not I use the information I have on them in this research and they will be given an accessible information sheet. At the bottom of this sheet is a form which they can return if they do not want me to use their information. There will be a small box located in a central point in the school where they can place their opt out forms. The aim of this box is to reduce pressure on the children to conform. These children will also be given a parental information sheet and opt out form to take home. Again parents will be asked to fill out the form and place it in the opt out box if they don't want any information regarding their child to be used in my research.

#### Data protection and anonymity

With regards to written text (such as Fieldnotes) pseudonyms will be used so that the names of participants, the school involved and the charity remain anonymous. All data (written and visual) will be securely stored and retained in keeping with university policy. Data stored on the computer will be kept on the university server and password protected. The only other people viewing the data will be my university supervisor and participants. I will not be collecting any personal details regarding the participants such as full names, addresses and dates of birth. These precautions will be explained in the literature given to participants and their parents/guardians and also each school.

Should the question of publication arise at a later date, permission will be sought from the school.

### Feedback

Once this research has been completed I will talk to the young people about the main findings and verbally thank them. I will provide an information sheet for the school and parents/guardians of participants detailing the main findings and also thanking them for their co-operation.

## APPENDIX F: RISK ASSESSMENT



School of Education

### RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

#### Activity:

The purpose of this research is to explore the social experiences and belonging of children and young people in education (some of which have emotional and behavioural difficulties). This research will examine both *how* participants are treated by peers (and their attitudes towards this) and their sense of belonging, but also examine *why* this is the case, investigating the teaching practices and wider school policies which are helpful or detrimental in supporting these social experiences. This study will also have a methodological focus, investigating the affordances of visual methods in providing insights into participants' social interactions and belonging. To answer the questions above, a highly qualitative, visual approach will be adopted, utilising specialist research methods such as walking interviews, photography, stimulatedstimulated recall and collaborative social mapping). A reflexive diary and Fieldnotes will also be kept. Once data collection has been completed after analysing the data I will check back with participants regarding the results.

#### Locations:

This research will be conducted on the school premises, such as in classrooms, the hall and the playground.

**Potential risks:**

Psychological – a participant may become distressed.

**Who might be exposed/affected?**

Young people age 7-16 (some of which have a statement of Special Educational Needs)

**How will these risks be minimised?**

Throughout data collection I will monitor participants' body language for signs of fatigue or distress and respond to such signs by suggesting that data collection be suspended.

Participants will be frequently verbally reminded that they do not have to participate. Each participant will also be given a red card. If a participant decides they no longer want to continue with part or all of the research, they can use the red card to communicate these feelings and then return to their class.

This research will be conducted where there are other adults nearby.

**Risk evaluation:**

**Low**

**Can the risk be further reduced?**

**No**

**Further controls required:****Date by which further controls will be implemented:****Are the controls satisfactory:**

**Yes / No**

**Date for reassessment:**

**Completed by:**

_____	_____	_____
Name	signature	Date

**Supervisor/manager:**

If applicable

_____	_____	_____
Name	signature	Date

**Reviewed by:**

_____	_____	_____
Name	signature	Date



**APPENDIX G: PARENTAL/ CARER INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT  
FORM**



UNIVERSITY OF  
**Southampton**  
School of Education

## **Information sheet for parents/guardians (1)**

**Title of research: An investigation into children's social experiences of education**

*Please read this information carefully as it will help you to decide whether you want your child to take part in this small research project. If you are happy with everything you will be asked to sign the consent form.*

### **What is the research about?**

- I am a PhD student at the University of Southampton.
- Working with two schools in the local area, I'm carrying out research into the social interaction, friendship and belonging of children.



### **Why has your child been chosen?**

- When I explained the research to the class, your child was enthusiastic to take part and I think your child may enjoy being involved.

### **When will this research take place?**

- I will spend roughly 1 term in the school during 2011/12.

### **What will happen to my child if they take part?**

- 4-6 children in one class will take part.
- This research will be carried out during both lessons and break times and will fit in around the needs of the children and staff.

- To understand when and how your child interacts with other children I will observe your child during lessons and break times.
- The research will also consist of different activities which will involve your child:
  - Drawing pictures and making a photo book.
  - Leading me on a tour of their classroom and playground and taking photographs of this.
  - Being filmed taking part in the study.
  - Watching video clips showing their involvement in the activities and talking about the experience.

### **Are there any benefits in my child taking part?**

- This will be made into an enjoyable and motivating process for the children.
- Each child will be able to take home a photo book which they will have made themselves comprising of photographs they have taken.
- The research will also help me to meet the requirements for my university studies.
- This research should generate new knowledge about the social experiences, belonging and interaction of children. This could potentially benefit both children in this school and further afield in the future.

### **Are there any risks involved?**

Although unlikely, if your child were to become uncomfortable or distressed the research would be temporarily suspended while the child was comforted and reminded that their involvement in this study is optional. Your child can stop at any time.

### **Will my child's participation be confidential?**

To keep the children unidentifiable in the written report of the study, the full names of the children and other personal details such as addresses and dates of birth will not be collected or used in this research. All computer data will be password protected and securely stored on the university network server. Other than me, the video data will only be viewed by the participants and my university supervisor. Should the question of publishing the research arise at a later date, contact will be made with the school, but again no real names would ever be used.

**What happens if I change my mind?**

You have the right to withdraw your child from this research at any point without having to give a reason and without negative consequences.

**What happens if something goes wrong?**

In the unlikely case of concern or complaint, until the end of September 2011 please contact Professor Melanie Nind (M.Nind@soton.ac.uk). Alternatively, from October 2011 onwards, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee (Professor Ros Edwards R.S.Edwards@soton.ac.uk).

**Where can I get more information?**

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to make contact with me on 07774528639.

Thank you for your time. Should you give your consent for this study, this will build upon the body of knowledge on the social experiences, belonging and interaction of children.

Samantha Child

Signed:



## Parental/guardian consent form

**Title of research:** An investigation into children's social experiences of education

**Researcher:** Samantha Child, School of Education, University of Southampton

*Please initial the boxes if you agree with the statements:*

I have read and understood the information sheet (version 1)  
and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research.

☐

I agree to allow my child to take part in this research project  
and their data to be used for the purpose of this research.

☐

I understand my child's participation is voluntary and I may  
withdraw them, or they may opt out at any time without  
negative consequences.

☐

**Name of young person (print name):**

.....

**Name of parent/guardian (print name):**

.....





## Information sheet for school (1)

**Title of research:** An inquiry into the social experiences and belonging of children  
(including those with behavioral, emotional and social difficulties)

**Researcher:** Samantha Child, School of Education, University of Southampton

*Please read this information carefully as it will help you to decide whether you want your school to take part in this research project. If you are happy with everything you will be asked to sign the consent form.*

### What is the research about?

I am a PhD research student working in the area of special educational needs and inclusion at the University of Southampton. I'm undertaking a study into the social interaction, friendship and belonging of children (including those with behavioral, emotional and social difficulties).

I'm looking for two schools in which to carry out this research in.

### Why has this school been chosen?

From speaking with the head teacher, I'm interested in the role of this facility in supporting the social inclusion of children with behavioral, emotional and social difficulties. However, I'm also interested in the social experiences of children without this label as well.

- The rights-based ethos of your school fits in well with my research approach.  
Particularly the belief that every child has the right to have a say and be listened to.
- The close proximity of the school to my base in Southampton is also an advantage.

### What will happen if the school chooses to take part?

- Next academic year, I would like to spend 2-3 days per week for approximately 1 term in your school.
- With your help and guidance I will identify 4-6 focus children (which include **some** with behavioral, emotional and social difficulties and some without) ideally in Key Stage 2.

The research will involve:

- **Observations:** During lessons and break times I will watch the participants interacting with peers and the way peers treat them. I will adopt the role of helper, aiding the children and staff where possible.

- **Social mind maps:** Working one-to-one in an informal and interactive way, participants will be asked to draw a picture diagram to show who they interact with and their relationships with these peers during both lessons and breaks. These drawings will be used as stimuli to promote discussion and will be filmed.



- **Walking interviews (with a video camera):** Working one-to-one each participant will be asked to take me on a walking tour of their school during a lunch time and use a video camera to record their journey



- **Mini-films:** Each participant will watch the video clips they created during the walking tour and talk about them.
- **Participant reflection:** At various points during the research, each participant will be shown video clips of themselves taking part in the previous activities and encouraged to talk about their responses to these tasks. This will be filmed to aid the research.
- I will also keep **notes** and write a **diary** in which I'll reflect on what I'm seeing and the research process.

The needs of staff and pupils will at all times be central to this research and every effort will be made to minimise any possible disruption (though unlikely).

### **Are there any benefits to the school taking part?**

- It is anticipated that this research will provide useful insights into the social aspects of schooling, such as social interaction, belonging and friendship experienced by pupils (including those with behavioral, emotional and social difficulties). Findings should highlight some of the school practices which are helpful or detrimental to children's social experiences and could be used to inform change.
- This will be made into an enjoyable and motivating process for the children and they will get to take home their own photo book showing their experiences of school.
- This research will also help me to meet the requirements for my university studies.



**Are there any risks involved?**

Although unlikely, if a child were to become uncomfortable or distressed the research would be temporarily suspended while the young person was comforted and reminded that participation is optional. The participants can stop at any time.

**Will pupil's participation be confidential?**

To keep the participants unidentifiable in the written report of the study, the full names of the children and other personal details such as addresses and dates of birth will not be collected or used in this research. All computer data will be password protected and securely stored on the university network server. Other than me, the video data will only be viewed by the participants and my university supervisor. Should the question of publishing the research arise at a later date, contact will be made with the school, but again no real names would ever be used.

**What happens if I change my mind?**

You have the right to withdraw your school from this research at any point without having to give a reason and without negative consequences.

**What happens if something goes wrong?**

In the unlikely case of concern or complaint please contact my supervisor, Professor Melanie Nind (M.Nind@soton.ac.uk). Alternatively, from October 2011 onwards please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee (Professor Ros Edwards R.S.Edwards@soton.ac.uk).

**Where can I get more information?**

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to make contact with me on 07774528639.

Thank you for your time. Should you give your consent for this study, this will build upon the body of knowledge regarding the social interaction, friendship and belonging of children.

Samantha Child

Signed:



## School consent form

**Title of research: An inquiry into the social experiences and belonging of children**  
**(including those with behavioral, emotional and social difficulties)**

**Researcher:** Samantha Child, Southampton Education School, University of Southampton

*Please initial the boxes if you agree with the statements:*

I have read and understood the information sheet (version 1)  
and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study

I agree to allow my school to take part in this research project  
and their data to be used for the purpose of this study.

I understand my school's participation is voluntary and I may  
withdraw the setting, or opt out at any time without negative  
consequences.

**Name of school:**

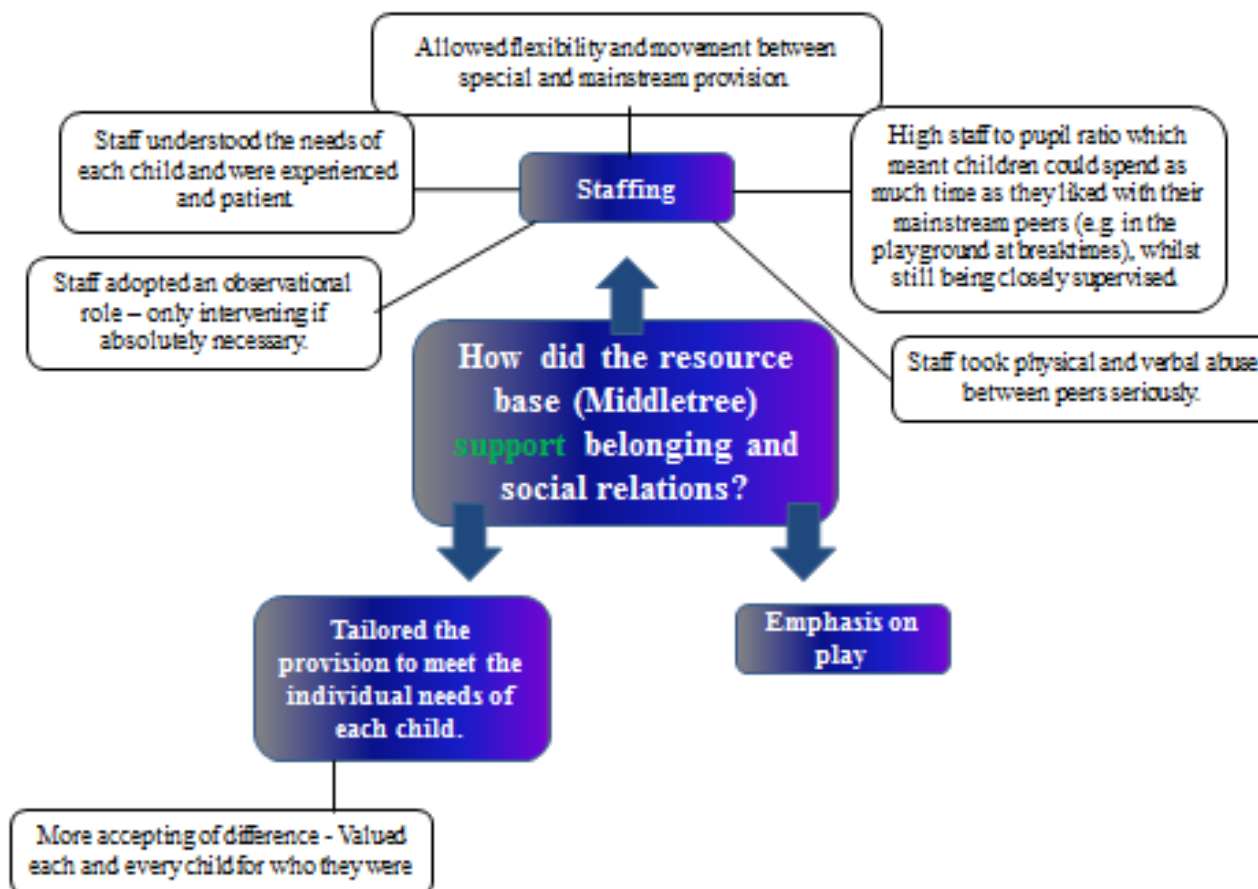
.....

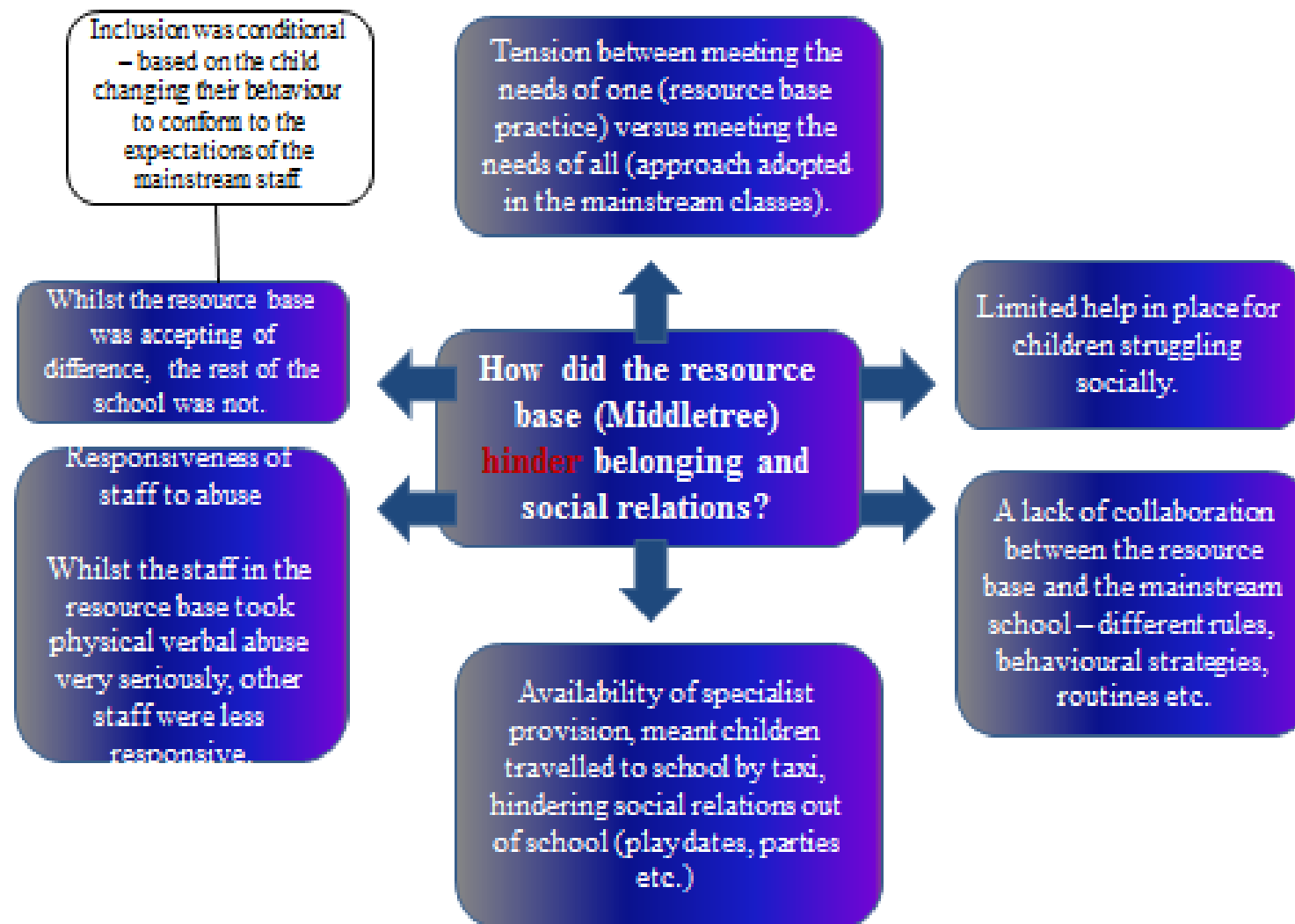
**Name of staff member (print name):**

.....

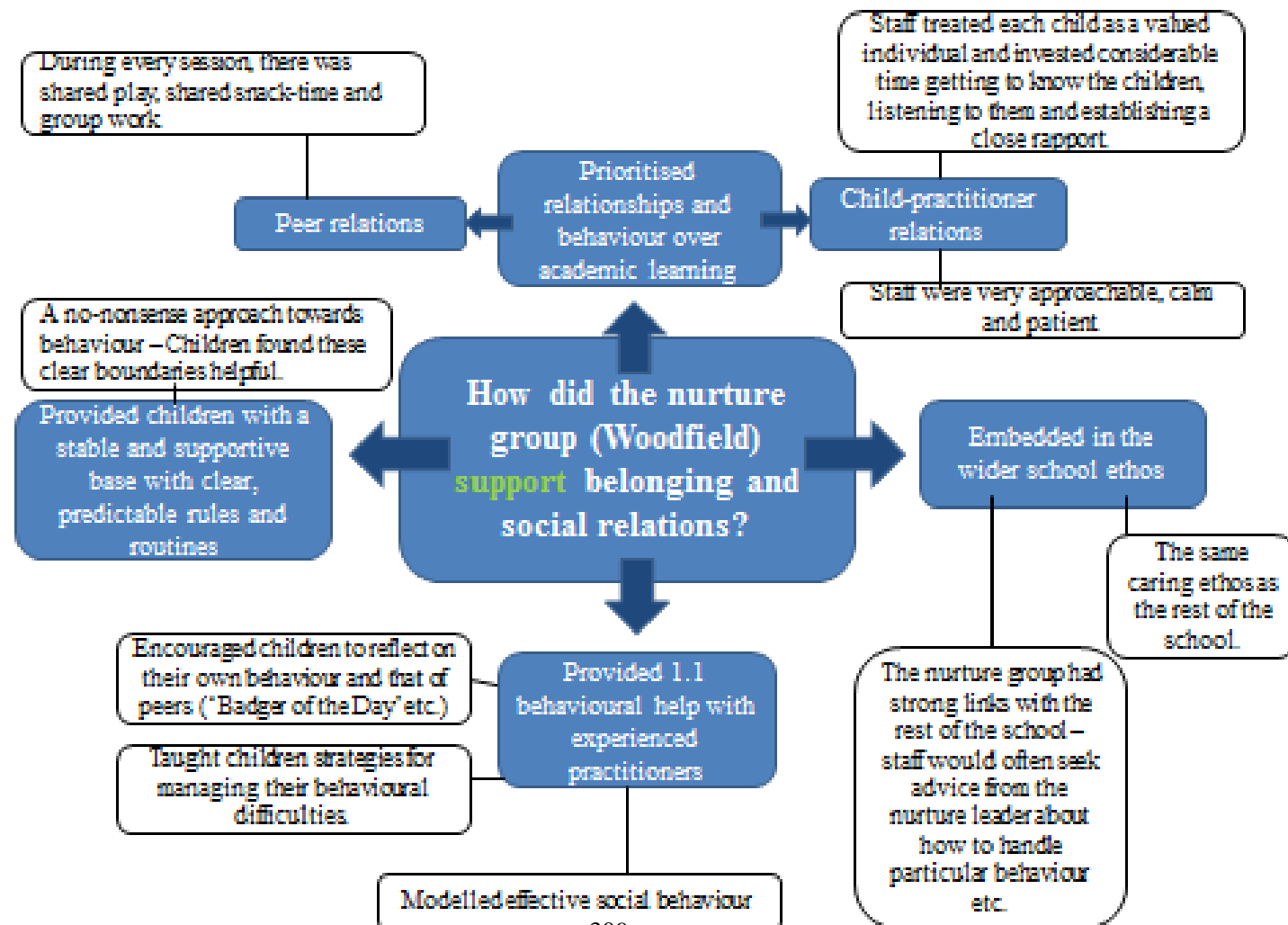


## APPENDIX I: ROLE OF RESOURCE BASE IN SUPPORTING OR HINDERING PARTICIPANTS' SOCIAL RELATIONS AND BELONGING

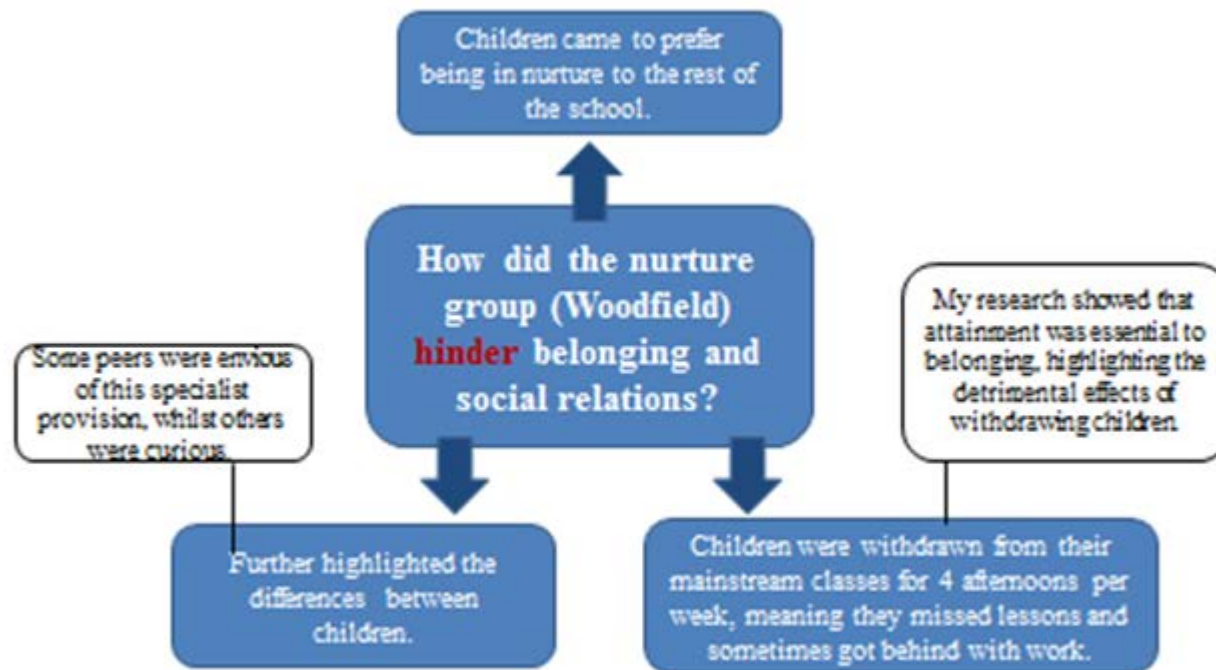




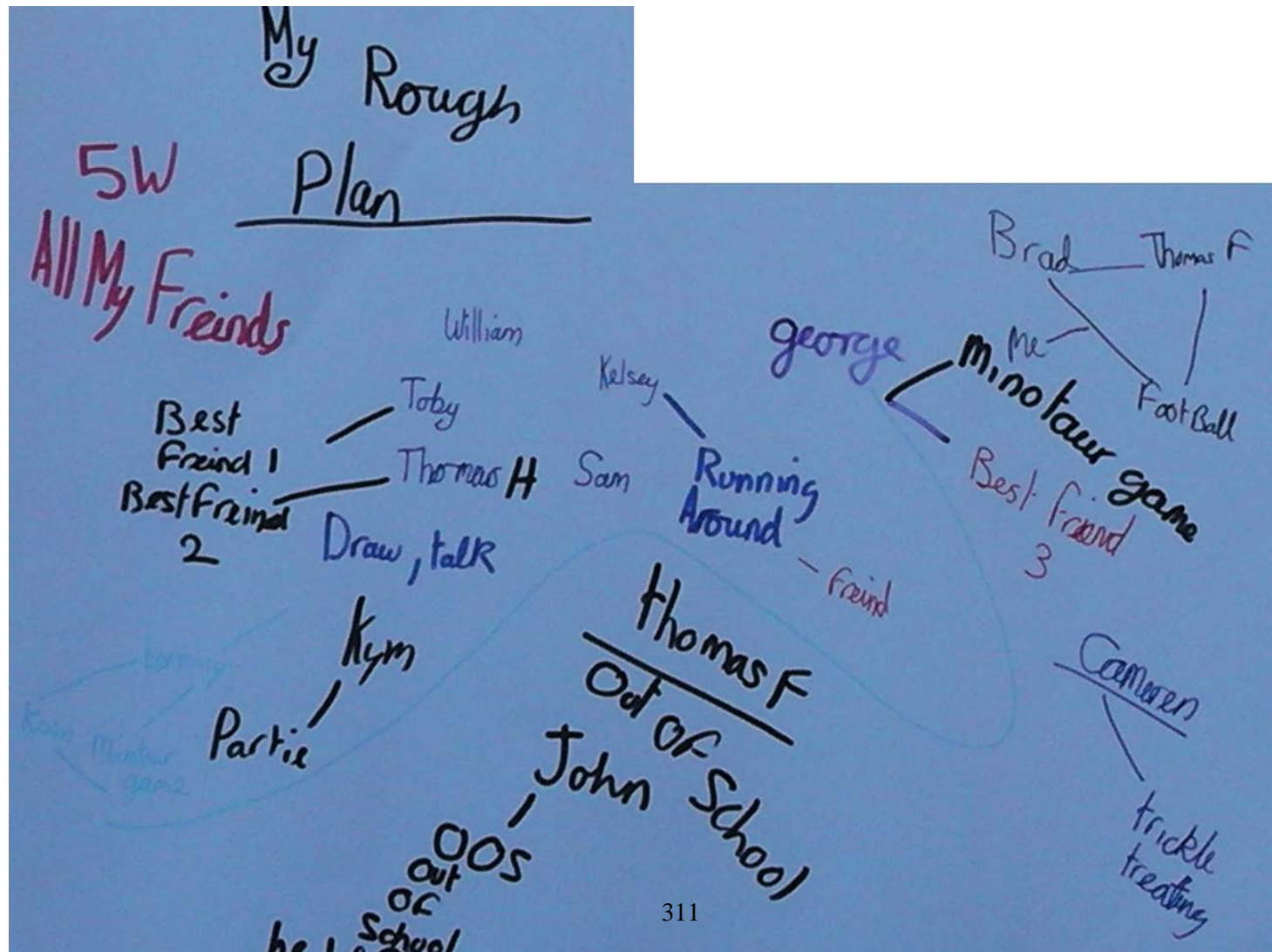
## APPENDIX J: ROLE OF THE NURTURE GROUP IN SUPPORTING BELONGING AND SOCIAL RELATIONS



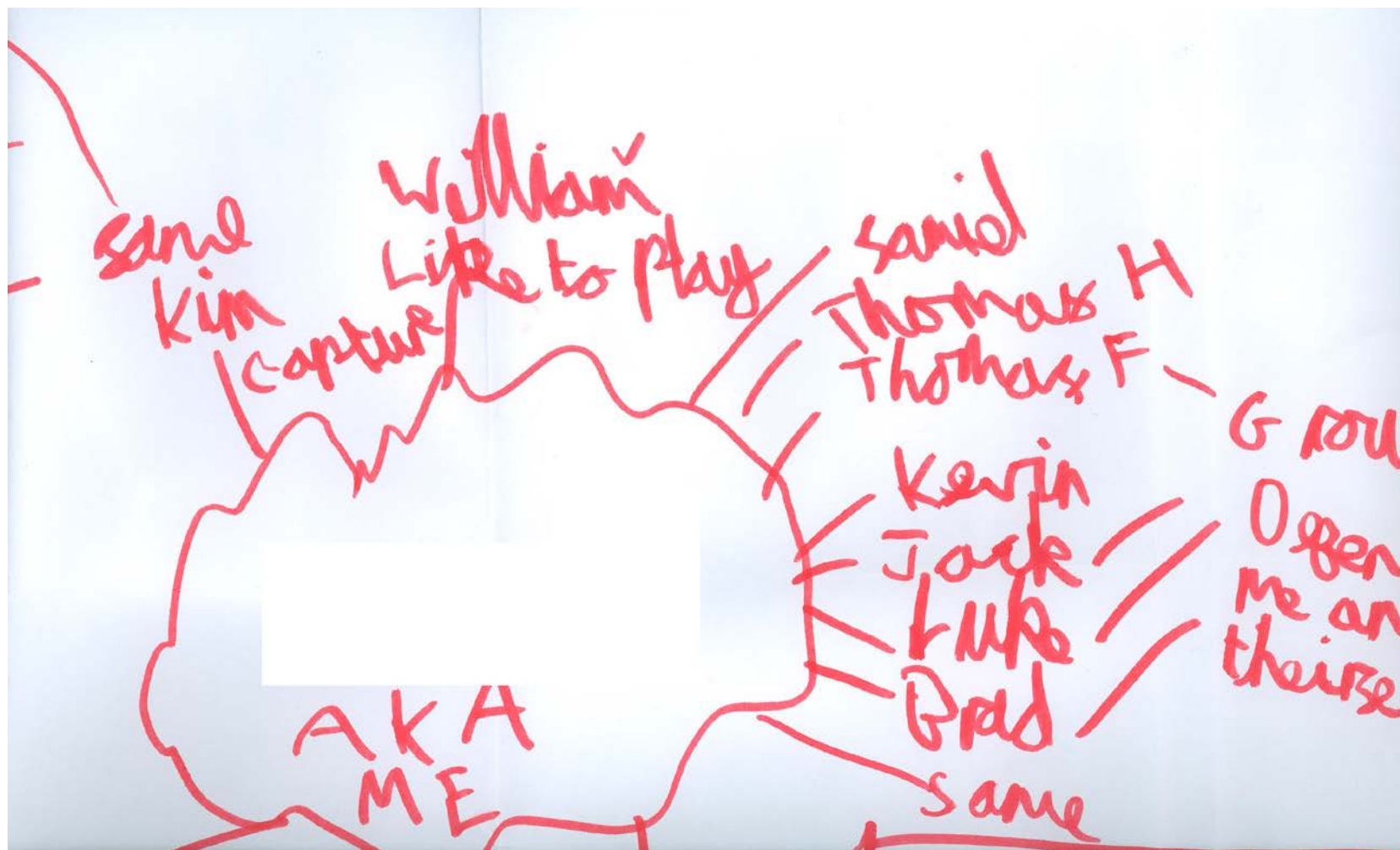
## THE ROLE OF THE NURTURE GROUP



## CONCEPT MAPS

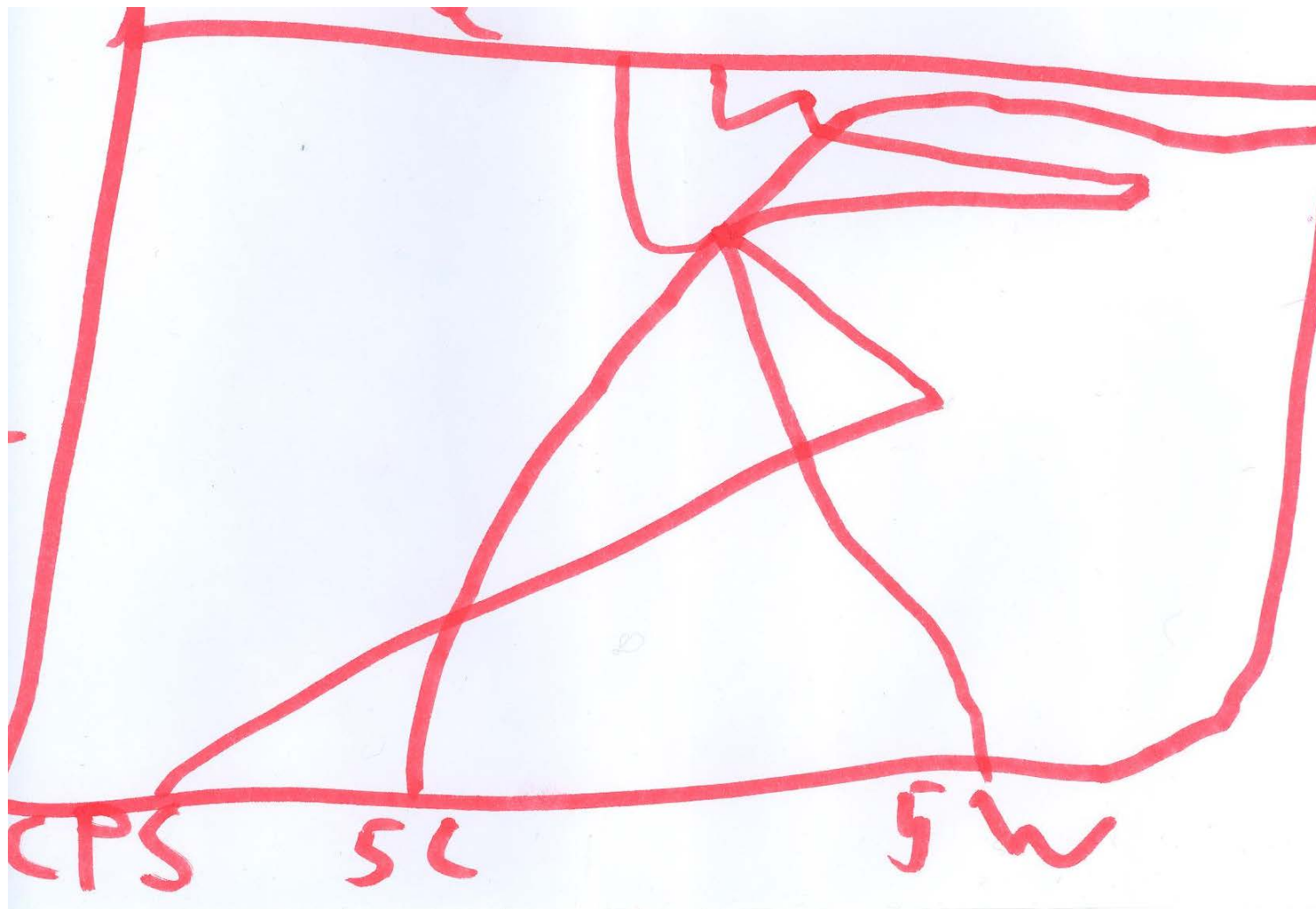






don't meet  
friend List  
1 Samuel X  
2 Thomas F X  
3 Alex V  
4 William X  
5 Thomas H mean

Lastly, during the same concept mapping activity, Sonic chose to draw a chart to show the fluidity of his sense of belonging between schools and classes:



## APPENDIX M

### CODING RELATING TO THE FIVE THEMES IDENTIFIED AS KEY TO PARTICIPANTS BELONGING IN SECTION 4.11

*The need to experience meaningful interpersonal relations with children and practitioners in safe spaces (section 4.11)*

**Category:** Importance of interpersonal relations with peers

**The most commonly coded codes:** The role of nurture - supporting friendship = belonging, fluidity of belonging, belonging- importance of friendship, belonging has decreased due to bullying etc.

**Category:** Importance of interpersonal relations with practitioners

**The most commonly coded codes:** Tell their teacher - but the unkind behaviour continues, patience of staff, head teacher - pastoral support, belonging - dependent on how staff treat you, staff – passive, lunchtimes - the need for more options, letting children choose pairs - negative effect

**Category:** The need for safe spaces

**The most commonly coded codes:** The need for closer supervision in playground, sufficient staffing- support inclusion, staffing - 'guarding, LSA support - facilitates inclusion, communication between staff -- walkie talkies, playground staff - alert to fighting etc., belonging and place - adventure playground, belonging – nurture, belonging – resource base, value of free play.

*b. The need for practitioners to understand and cater for the fluid and often problematic and complex nature of social relations between children (section 4.11)*

**Category:** Interventionist approach

**The most commonly coded codes:** Buddies, Friendship box - draw attention and praise good deeds, friendship box - Boost confidence, wealth of options at playtimes, limited options at playtimes, value of nurture, value of resource base, close supervision.

- c. The need for a whole school ethos which demonstrates a reflexive and holistic understanding and valuing of children*

**Category:** Ethos

**The most commonly coded codes:** Individualised but whole school, individualised but only resource base, accepting of difference, ignores difference, tensions between resource base and mainstream.

- d. The need for children to experience a sense of mastery, whether this be in academic learning or non-academic pursuits*

**Category:** Mastery

**The most commonly coded codes:** Belonging - dependent on being able to do the work, belonging – enjoying doing the work, belonging - maths, belonging – guided reading, belonging – PE, belonging – school trip.

- e. The need for children to behave in a cooperative manner which enables them to successfully engage in learning and to make friends*

**The most commonly coded codes:** learning to walk away, Children – angry/frustrated, child frustration –worse by lessons, belonging – nurture, belonging - dependent on good behaviour

## APPENDIX N

### AN EXAMPLE OF A MULTIMODAL TRANSCRIPT

#### Scooby - Concept mapping

Sat up right with the blue pen in his hand, he looks ready to begin the activity. When I first explained the participating film activity, he straightaway asked 'does it have to be outside or can it be inside in [ ]...for example if I wanted toby in (the film) I could do in [ ]'.

Straightaway, he wrote his name in the centre of the page and appeared ready to get on with the activity.

S: When you're in the playground what sorts of things do you do? There was a brief pause and his facial expression changed from looking happy to really sad. With a slightly nervous smile he replied 'get angry' before going on to explain that Kelsey pushing and shoving me around' makes me angry. As he says this he looks behind for a moment as if checking that Kelsey is not around, before his eyes drop and he stares at his pen, looking really sad. 'Have you ever told the teacher that you didn't like it?' Before replying to the question he slowly nods his head, peers behind him and says in a frustrated tone of voice 'but she hasn't stopped it'.

S: So have you ever told Kelsey that you don't like it?

Scooby: Yeah but she just carries on

S: She carries on

Scooby: Then when she does... that's how I retaliate (verbally exaggerates the word 'how')

S: ohh that must be hard for you. Is there anything that might help you with that?

Scooby: No

S: Is there anything a teacher could do that might help you?

Scooby: Yeah punish her a bit more (verbally exaggerates the word 'punish')

S: Maybe tell Kelsey and tell her that you don't like it when she does that.

Scooby: (Nods head) and I know I don't like it when I retaliate because it gets me into trouble.

Ok. What about other children? Straightaway he responds by saying 'Toby' and goes to write his name on the map. He then pauses umm...umm as a struggling to think of other children. He looks around the playground before saying 'Thomas' and goes and write his name on his map... 'In the mornings I ran away from Sam'. As he says this he has a beaming smile across his face, and appears happy, the happiest I've seen him during the activity. I ask 'How does Toby treat you' Straightaway, as if without thinking he replies 'Yes. Me and Toby are best friends but I've never been around his house...we do draw and talk together...the teacher says words and we draw...we do it on Tuesday afternoons.'

'What do you like doing with Kelsey?' As soon as I asked this question the frown on his face returned and he looked really sad and fed up. Before replying he looked behind him and then said 'nothing really'. 'So have you ever told Kelsey and you don't like it.' Straightaway, as if without thinking says 'yeah...but then she just carries on and that's when I get angry and that's how I retaliate. (Exaggerates 'that's how I retaliate' by slowing voice slightly, speaking slightly louder, moving head up and down).

'Is there anything that you think might help you? Anything teacher could do that might help you' Straightaway he says in an angry voice 'yeah punishes her a bit more (exaggerates the word 'punish' with angry tone of voice)...and I know that I don't like it when I retaliate. Because it gets me into trouble (strong, determined voice)

'So shall I put by Toby 'best friend'... every morning I walk up from my house to school... at around the corner... and...? Every (exaggerates the word) morning he canon bolts on to me... jumps onto me... it makes me laugh'

## APPENDIX O

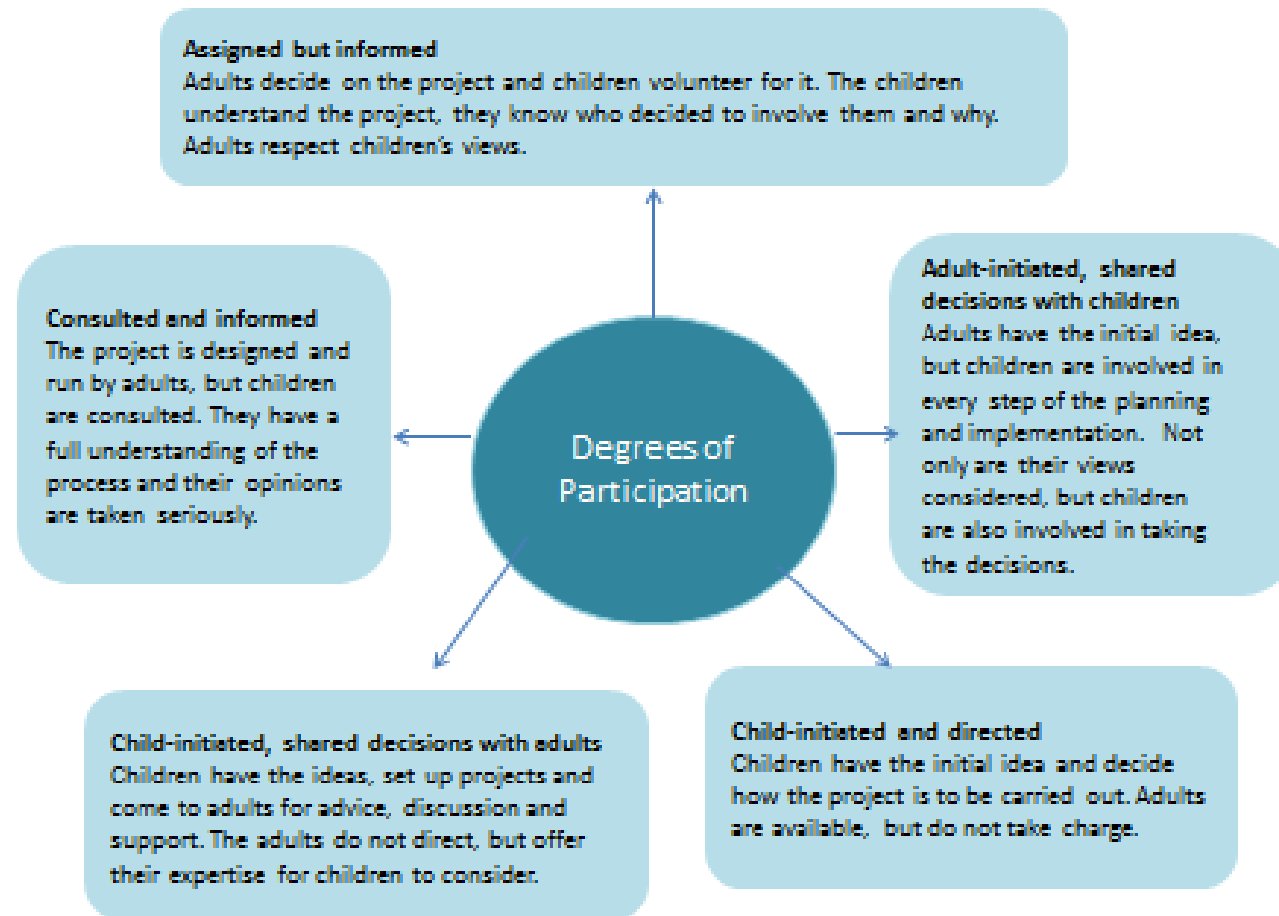
### HART'S LADDER OF PARTICIPATION





## APPENDIX P

### DEGREES OF PARTICIPATION



Treseder (1997)