

FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES

Southampton Education School

The Experiences of School Pupils (11-18) in the Zeitgeist of Performativity and Accountability

By

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis illuminates the educational experiences of school pupils (11-18) in a culture of performativity and accountability. It explores the tension between accountability, autonomy and performativity in English schools within an historical context and elucidates the experience of individuals within the English state school system. The study uses a biographical approach to explore the experiences of individuals who have recently experienced the English education system over the course of school years 7 to 13.

Single-question narrative interviews were conducted with four participants who had recently completed compulsory education. These experiences are analysed through the lens of Literary Narrative Analysis (LNA) rather than more conventional methods. The thesis explores how the traditional methods of analysing literary texts can also provide a useful tool for the analysis of narrative interviews.

The findings demonstrate that there is an orthodoxy in the narratives of participants' school lives, suggesting an unwitting acquiescence to the masterplots authored by the pervasive grammar of the broader education system. Within these masterplots there are episodes of enlightenment and equilibrium, exchanges with inspirational characters and epiphanies through friendship and engagement in music and the arts. Teachers appear as both protagonists and antagonists, but participants' narratives are also replete with dark plots of falling action and catastrophe, with their lexis replete with references to stress and anxiety, strengthened by powerful figurative representations of death and zoomorphic metaphors. The thesis concludes that government policy for surveillance and quality assurance of the school system must also enable provision for supporting young people as individuals, providing equally valued opportunities for the study of the arts as well as in the core academic subjects.

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Academic Thesis: Declaration Of Authorship

I, NIGEL ALLEN MATTHIAS declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research:

The Experiences of School Pupils (11-18) in the Zeitgeist of Performativity and Accountability

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. None of this work has been published before submission

Signed:

Date:

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NM

1 *Introduction*

It is often said that education and training are the keys to the future. They are, but a key can be turned in two directions. Turn in one way and you lock resources away, even from those they belong to. Turn it the other way and you release resources to give people back to themselves (Robinson, 2011, p.15)

I have been a teacher throughout my adult life and have spent my professional career trying to improve the experiences of the young people in my care and to help them unlock the potential that Robinson (2011) describes above. I am, of course, not alone. In times of great change in education, teachers, governors, parents and ministers all appear to be striving to improve the quality of education for young people, amidst the latest statistics and international comparisons. However, surprisingly little is known and reported about the impact of the school system, laden as it is with measures of performativity, on the individual narrative experiences of young people. The rationale for this thesis is to look beyond the broad statistics and to provide a rich, qualitative illustration of the narrative experiences of people within the education system.

1.1 The Policy Context

Whilst successive governments continue to emphasise the importance of education, it is hard not to see the current state of compulsory education in England and Wales at something of a crossroads. The year 2014 saw the first ever drop in General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) performance in English and Welsh schools (DfE., 2014), but instead of causing dismay, this news was greeted with a fanfare by the coalition government who called it a triumph and cited the change as evidence of a more valuable and rigorous curriculum (Gibb, 2014, p. 13). The policy rhetoric continues to be loaded with traditionalist semantics of 'rigour,' 'knowledge' and 'value', with ministers declaring that this form of traditional education is fundamental in fuelling an improvement in the economy.

Ministers claim that of greatest importance is the need to ensure that the courses and qualifications which young learners study 'are of the highest possible quality, and that they work for young people, not politicians' (Gibb, 2014, p. 13). The time has come to question whether this is simply further political rhetoric or whether the life experiences of young people

factor into political decisions. It must be questioned if this relentless thirst for 'knowledge' and 'facts' is a panacea for the ills of the society and the economy and whether this is even a legitimate purpose of schooling. There is frequently espoused counter-argument that this greater emphasis on regurgitated facts and stressful examinations is actually doing more harm than good to the young people of England and Wales (Robinson, 2013). Too often, however, this debate is presented as a binary – the progressives yearning for a skills-based approach in stark contrast with the traditionalists' desires for a knowledge-based and 'rigorous' curriculum (Claxton, 2008; Robinson, 2011). Perhaps pupils can 'be encouraged to sharpen their wits, ask questions, and think for themselves - all without chucking out Shakespeare or the Periodic Table?' (Claxton, 2008, p.13) or perhaps the most significant challenge is providing what Young (2007, p. 10) terms 'knowledge differentiation' where pupils encounter knowledge that is non-local and counter to their previous experiences. It is my contention that it is time to question the impact on pupils caught in the middle of this omnipresent educational pendulum and consider whether they will truly benefit from the return to the 'rigour' of the traditional education system or be collateral damage in an increasingly internecine battle between the traditionalists and the progressives.

1.2 Personal Context

Whilst this thesis is a biographical study, some element of autobiography helps in situating the research into a specific context. In 2012 – although it was not revealed to the public until much later - Ofqual (England's examination regulator) instructed an examination awarding body to change the i/GCSE English Language grade boundaries against its will just days before that summer's results were published. Letters subsequently leaked to the Times Educational Supplement (Stewart, 2012) demonstrate that Ofqual had ordered the exam board Edexcel to make changes beyond what "might normally be required". This resulted in over 12,000 pupils not achieving the all-important grade 'C' in June 2012. Ofqual (2013) maintains that it acted properly and has a duty to maintain standards. Those are the headline statistics, but in my context it meant seeing over seventy young people - who had worked tremendously hard for five years - opening their brown examination envelopes to a receive the devastating news that they had not achieved the 'gold standard' of five A*-C GCSE grades including English and

mathematics. This was my first day in the job of Assistant Headteacher with a responsibility for pupils' progress.

I quickly discovered that had our pupils entered the examination a few months earlier they would have achieved the higher grade with work of identical quality. Word quickly spread of other schools that had developed strategies for raising achievement, including early and multiple entries into the same subject with different examination boards. As an extreme illustration of the issues, a freedom of information request to the examination board the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) noted that one student had retaken their key mathematics examination twenty-nine times in order to achieve the desired grade (Assessment and Qualification Alliance, 2014).

My own school's performance improved – teaching and learning sharpened and a newly focused and rigorous examination strategy saw a rapid rise in pupils' achievement.

Innovations were introduced: 'Walking Talking Mocks' where teachers would take pupils through example questions with a 'visualizer' camera and a microphone, statistically predicted papers, regular rigorous examinations were introduced and I led the introduction of a complex system of 'diagnostic therapy testing' (DTT) to help boost pupils' performance. Results improved dramatically (see Figure 1-1) and the school's rapidly improving performance was acknowledged by Ofsted (2014) in their inspection report. There was a feeling of elation amongst my colleagues as our English results moved from 62% (A*-C) to 84% (A*-C) with a similar rise (17%) in mathematics. Pupils opened their envelopes with delight and doors were opened to further education and employment. Despite this elation, however, the presence of the 'performativity panoptic' was undeniable and ubiquitous (Perryman, 2006, p.148).

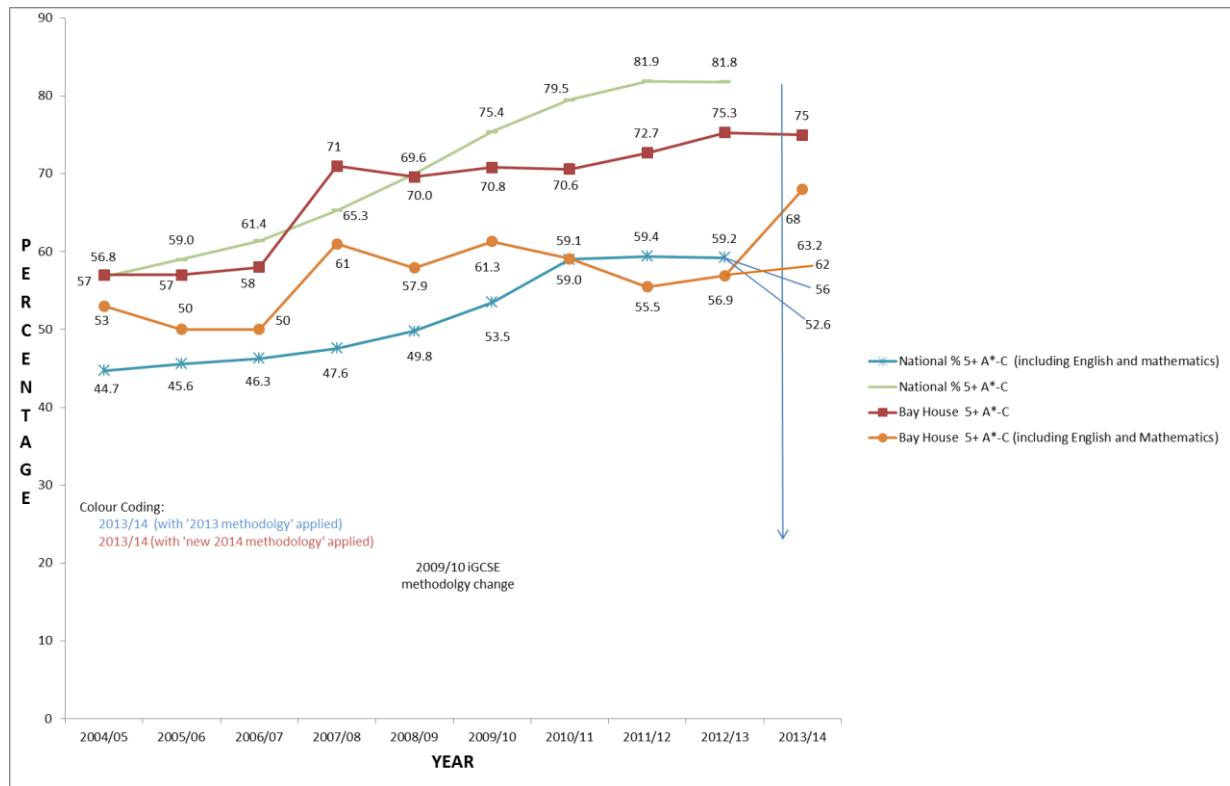


Figure 1-1 Research School Performance 2004-2014

In the national context, press reports continued to lambast the 'reduced demand' of GCSE examinations (Ofqual, 2012) and the government called for greater rigour and a return to a knowledge-based curriculum. Suddenly an explicit subject hierarchy seemed to have been imposed on schools; the DfE launched the 'English Baccalaureate', which provided greater reward in school performance tables for progress in English, mathematics, science, humanities and languages. GCSEs were to be 'strengthened' or replaced, vocational education was dismissed (Gove, 2014) as 'irrelevant' and 'overly bureaucratic' and a dramatic overhaul of school performance was announced (Gove, 2014). As an educator I felt that my professional judgment and accountability was being seized by those who had little understanding of either the system or the young people that it is meant to serve. There also seemed few avenues for teachers to express their views or explore the implications of these changes in greater depth. I felt compelled to return to academic study to try to make new meaning from my own experiences. More importantly, there was also very little reflection on pupils' experience of these changes. The voices of the people at the centre of this maelstrom of educational reform were absent from the political rhetoric and there remains a paucity of research about learner narratives within the context of this era of performativity.

1.3 Research Aim

The aim of this study is to explore the narratives of pupils across the period of their compulsory schooling (age 11 to 18) to elucidate their experiences in a culture of sweeping changes to school performance measures and examination reform. I have become increasingly interested in exploring pupils' educational experiences, identities and academic self-concepts. Within the context of the most dramatic changes to school accountability systems for over thirty years (Fischer Family Trust, 2014), I set out to illustrate how these pupils' stories can capture authentic experiences of schooling and afford pupils greater agency and a voice in a system that reduces and 'commodifies' learners (Ball, 2010, p.155). This commodification necessitates a type of homogeneity in the view of what constitutes an academically successful student (Benjamin, 2002).

Whilst schools continue to be judged on pupil achievement as defined by a series of centrally defined 'metrics', little is known about the influence that this has on pupils' academic choices – particularly at Key Stage 3 (Harland et al., 2003). Even less is known about the impact that this has on their experiences and self-concepts, with existing studies tending to focus on the cognitive mechanisms by which they might make their subject and course choices (CfUBC., 2010). These measures of 'performativity' (Ball, 2010), which encompass curriculum, assessment, achievement expectations and other forms of accountability seem to exist in a state of ideological invisibility, and real debate is needed about the ethics, necessity or justification for the intensive surveillance that takes place in the education system (Lumby & English, 2010). Specifically, my aim in this research is to consider the experience of pupils' educational and life narratives following the introduction of the *English Baccalaureate*, the DfE's *Progress 8* performance measure and the shift from a 'skills-based' to a 'knowledge-based' National Curriculum. This is important empirically because there is only a small and insecure knowledge base about pupils' lived experiences and the requirement to acquiesce to the narrow definition of success as defined by the culture of performativity (Perryman, 2006).

In light of my professional experience I would also anticipate that more general insights from inside the 'performativity panoptical' (Perryman, 2006, p.148) of the examination system may also support other pupils who are influenced by these factors (Perryman, 2006). From the outset, I hoped that this research would offer schools a new opportunity to embrace an

authentic freedom to see 'the holistic value of the child rather than as a 'potential achiever of grades, contributor to test scores or fodder to feed the economy' (Lumby & English, 2010, p. 123).

1.3.1 Emergence of the Research Question

The research question asks how best we are able to understand the experiences of school pupils (11-18) in the zeitgeist of performativity and accountability. This question was generated as a result of, and developed in the context of rapid political change to the English and Welsh education systems. Despite Gove's (2014) declaration that education 'allows individuals to become authors of their own life story' much of the rhetoric was concerned with the broader social and economic impact of policy decisions. However, advocates of these reforms argue that the policy oeuvre was composed of – and was underpinned by - the values of emancipation and liberation (Gove, 2014).

The policy framework - arising from both the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition agreement and later the Conservative government – was characterised by the pace and extent of reform. The number of academies rose dramatically, GCSE examinations were reformed to end modular assessment and coursework, national pay frameworks for teachers were scrapped, Qualified Teacher Status was no longer mandatory for academies and 'Progress 8' was brought in to replace the legacy 5 A*-C accountability measure in secondary schools. In addition, University teaching training programmes were gradually being replaced by the School Direct programme.

Although courting less political and press attention, perhaps the most significant of these changes, was the brand new 'core knowledge' curriculum. Gove's chief concern was that a liberal curriculum denied pupils access to knowledge because of schools' tendency to promote and cultivate abstract thinking skills (Claxton, 2002) and 'learning to learn' over a more academically focused curriculum based on a deep knowledge of subject disciplines. Traditionalists saw this focus as 'soft' and negligent in not teaching children the core foundation or reasoning.

Ministers were open about the influence of E.D. Hirsch, culminating in the publication of the essay by Nick Gibb (2015) entitled 'How Hirsch Came to Shape UK Government Policy'. In adopting a narrow perspective on Hirsch's work, policy was constructed that focused on academic performance

in core curriculum subjects and core knowledge. Hirsch's (1987) work on Cultural Literacy is somewhat controversial; he lambasts what he considers a 'cafeteria-style education' system he believes results in a steady diminishment of commonly shared information between generations and between young people themselves. He argues that a 'shopping mall high school' system is merely an effective recipe for cultural fragmentation. Hirsch (1987) argues that to be culturally literate is to possess the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world.

The political focus on schools as agents of justice, measured through the proxy of the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, also became linked to the discussion of core knowledge. The 'pupil premium' was introduced as additional funding for publicly funded schools in England with the aim of raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils of all abilities and to close the gaps between them and their more advantaged peers. This policy was, however, merely part of a series of wider reforms that mirrored Hirsch's (2013, p.45) argument that:

advantaged students who arrive in the classroom with background knowledge and vocabulary will understand what a textbook or teacher is saying and will therefore learn more; disadvantaged students who lack such prior knowledge will fail to understand and thus fall even further behind, relative to their fellow students.'

In Hirsch's (1987) view, children from poor and illiterate homes remaining poor and illiterate is an unacceptable failure of our schools because they are compelled to teach a fragmented curriculum based on faulty educational theories. Advocates of this model (Gibb, 2015) believe that this type of core knowledge curriculum is designed so that every child from every background can benefit. It represents what children from all social groups can be taught. In this model, the teacher's role is not to facilitate learning defined by the children themselves as interesting or relevant to their lives but to open up new possibilities that children simply don't know about and enable them to learn. The argument continues that if children come from homes with lots of books and computers and educated parents, they may get enough help to overcome the inadequacies of a bad school, but if they rely almost entirely on the school for knowledge and skills, they will fall behind and stay there.

Hirsch's model provided the Government with a rationale, albeit narrowly focused, to develop policies that appear to offer a more inclusive curriculum and as a result improve educational attainment for all. However implicit in this policy movement is a dismissal of the liberal approaches

to education from figures such as Freire (1968) the Brazilian educationalist with a commitment to the education of the poor. His vision of an effective curriculum was characterised by a rejection of the model whereby a teacher communicates knowledge to his or her pupils, because it deprives learners of the opportunity to challenge received wisdom and develop their own contrary perspective. Even advocates of Hirsch's (1987) model, recognise that Freire was correct (Gibb, 2015) and that society's culture and body of knowledge is disproportionately the product of those who have themselves benefited from a rigorous academic education and acknowledge this as the reason for promoting equality through a rigorous and fixed academic curriculum for all.

As a result of these debates I became more interested in exploring the narratives of pupils across the period of their compulsory schooling (age 11 to 18) to elucidate their experiences in a culture of sweeping changes to school performance measures and examination reform. In particular, I became increasingly interested in exploring pupils' educational experiences, identities and academic self-concepts within the context of these dramatic changes to school accountability systems and policies (Fischer Family Trust, 2014).

1.3.1.1 The Purpose of Education – a broader debate?

It is, of course, important to recognise that debates about the purpose of education are far broader than a discussion of the dichotomy of skills vs. knowledge - just as the effectiveness of schools is more nuanced and complex than their capacity to improve pupils' examination outcomes. For politicians, education is sometimes depicted as the 'engine of the economy' (Gibb, 2015) designed to ensure that young people receive adequate preparation for a life of work. For others it is aesthetic, cultural and ethical - the foundation of culture, an opportunity to instill resilience, moral character and enable children to flourish by exposing them to the best of what has been thought and said (Robinson, 2013).

However, in the context of this emerging policy framework, the literature review in this thesis and the focus of the study is constrained primarily to the skills vs. knowledge debate in an attempt to contextualise the experiences of pupils as they navigate their way through the changing landscape of assessment and policy reform. In this study, I set out to illustrate how these pupils' stories add

greater substance to this debate by capturing their authentic experiences of schooling with the aim of affording pupils greater agency and a voice in a system that reduces and 'commodifies' learners (Ball, 2010, p.155).

In the next chapter I present a review of the existing literature, focusing principally on the theory, policy and praxis of educational reform in England and Wales. In Chapter 3 I present arguments for the greater inclusion of pupil voice in qualitative social research, and in particular the use of pupils' biographical narratives. There is a justification of the interpretivist philosophical position I have taken in this study. Chapter 4 is comprised of a series of vignettes offering rich details about my participants' stories. The fifth chapter provides an analysis of the data from the narrative interviews and a discussion of the findings in the context of the extant literature. I make a series of conclusions and recommendations in the final chapter.

2 A Review of the Literature

This chapter reviews the literature relating to the theory, policy and praxis of educational reform. As the ultimate aim of this thesis is a richer understanding of pupils' educational narratives, this chapter explores how academics, policymakers and educators have sought to enhance the quality of pupils' educational experiences through centuries of debate and reform. It begins with a historical debate about the purpose and function of schools, and particularly the debate between the progressives (sometimes known as the 'reformers') and the traditionalists. The second section is devoted to methods devised to improve the school experience, and particularly the emergence of 'school effectiveness' literature and the historical development of the English and Welsh school system. The third section is a synthesis of theory from the literature alongside the recent national policy context. I end with a discussion about the nature of autonomy and accountability in English and Welsh schools and ask how a learning focus, which values pupils' narratives and holistic experiences can be maintained in a culture of performativity.

2.1 Traditional and Progressive Education

This thesis is concerned with developing a greater understanding about what enhances experiences of schooling and education, building on the existing debate about what is already known about how best to improve educational provision. At the heart of this debate is the clash between the traditionalists and the progressives. The phrases 'traditionalism' or 'back to basics' education refer to the long-established customs found in schools – a sort of grammar of schooling as Tyack and Cuban (1995) put it. Alongside the traditionalists, there exists a group committed to 'progressive' educational reform and more 'holistic' approaches to individual pupil needs. The progressives believe that the focus on rote learning and memorisation in traditional education is damaging for pupils, whilst the traditionalists believe that progressivism can lead to a reduction in standards (Robinson, 2011).

Whilst it is challenging, there have been attempts by progressives to identify the characteristics that constitute good learning. Claxton (2008), for example describes the capacities for learning using the 'four R's' model:

Resilience: being ready, willing and able to lock on to learning. Being able to stick with difficulty and cope with feelings such as fear and frustration.

Resourcefulness: being ready, willing and able to learn in different ways. Having a variety of learning strategies and knowing when to use them.

Reflectiveness: being ready, willing and able to become more strategic about learning. Getting to know our own strengths and weaknesses.

Reciprocity: being ready, willing and able to learn alone and with others.

Progressives, such as Claxton (2002) argue that if schools can draw more fully on the experiences and learning that occurs daily in homes, playgrounds, streets and workplaces then it is possible to maximise the educational opportunities at the heart of our schools – and stop the fixation with arid numbers and performance tables. Critics, however, perceive this as a lowering of standards and argue that the quality of pupils' experiences suffer as a result (Sahlgren, 2015). Biographical studies of pupils can add 'rich' and detailed portrayals of a unique series of stories to inform practice and add to knowledge of educational purpose and philosophy (Simons, 2009). While, therefore, the emphasis of this study is focused upon a very specific context, episodes of 'nuance, the sequentiality of happenings in context, the wholeness of the individual' (Stake (1995, p. xii), it sits within a much wider body of literature concerned with improving the quality of educational experience that begins with the philosophy of education.

2.2 A History of Educational Debate

The quality of schooling and the educational experience more broadly is, of course, not a new subject for academic debate. Scholars have long debated the importance and philosophy of education, but as Papastefanou (2013) notes, the big problem now is that the 'good' for the individual and the 'good' for society that Plato and Aristotle thought was best served by a state education system is now contested. Although this debate is often presented as a reductive

binary debate between the progressives and the traditionalists, there is much that can be learned from the past to provide an education system for the future (Robinson, 2013). This educational debate can be traced back as far as Socrates and Plato.

Despite leaving no formal writing, Socrates became known to scholars as one of the world's great teachers (Taylor, Barnes, & Hare, 1999), an image which has endured despite his oeuvre only existing through his role as a protagonist in Plato's dialogues. Perhaps his most important contribution to pedagogical development, and thus to the quality of learner experiences, is what has become known as the Socratic method, in which teachers take the role of skeptic and questioner, leading their pupils towards a solution by illustrating inconsistencies in their assumptions and beliefs (Hare, 1982).

The Socratic Method gets its name because in Plato the reader sees Socrates continually deploying 'aporia' (in the rhetorical sense) – a simulation of real doubt when he certainly seems to have an answer in mind (Gray, 1984). As a pedagogical approach this method is sometimes regarded as superior to lecturing (Claxton, 2008) as it allows for independent thought rather than the passive reception of knowledge. Brickhouse & Smith (1994), however, are critical of readings of Plato's Socrates as the paradigm of the Socratic teacher, citing three principle reasons:

1. Plato's Socrates frequently claims to have a lack of knowledge about his subject matter.
2. He frequently denies that he is a teacher and that he has any knowledge to teach (although there is an argument that this is an ironic strategic decision to enhance the impact of the 'aporia' in the rhetoric.)
3. The common understanding of the Socratic method is relatively straightforward in that it is a 'constructive' path from ignorance to understanding. Plato's Socrates is somewhat 'destructive' as he is often looking to refute the one he is questioning.

However, Socrates' influence on education, and its subsequent influence on pupils' experiences, extends far beyond the Socratic method. He believed that there were distinct and hierarchical types of knowledge, ranging from the fundamentally important to the most trivial. He acknowledged that most of society is aware of a great many 'trivial' things. For example, he stated that the craftsman is in possession of important 'contextual' knowledge - the practice of his craft - but that this information is important only to himself, the craftsman. But this is not the knowledge that Socrates deemed most important. The most important of all knowledge is

“how best to live,” positing that this is not easily answered, and most people live in a sort of ethical and ideological ignorance (Brickhouse & Smith, 1991, p. 30).

The teachings of Plato are also significant to any study of school narratives as he argues that it is only through a full education and the rigorous pursuit of philosophy that individuals can liberate themselves from the limiting factors of desire, ambition and passion. In doing so, he argues, that they can accede to a greater level of understanding, enlightenment and knowledge (Hare, 1982) – surely the ultimate aim when attempting to enhance the schooling experience. Plato also demanded a sense of morality and profound responsibility on behalf of the true teacher as they were also responsible for the fate and health of their pupils’ souls. In this respect his stance differs from Socrates in his requirement for the teacher to have sufficient subject knowledge to protect against falsities in order to guide his pupils towards truth and virtue. His teachings also come with a significant caveat, that the educator ‘must never be a mere peddler of materials for study and of recipes for winning disputes, nor yet for promoting a career’ (Hummel, 1994, p. 329).

In *Republic*, Plato extends his view that there should be a state system of compulsory education – to some degree a state governed standardisation of the pupil narrative - but as Papastefanou (2013) notes, he did not argue for a common school for all but rather a careful observation of children and their perceived inclination towards academic or vocational studies. It is a matter of some debate whether Plato believed that an individual was born with an inflexible nature but it provides an interesting historical forerunner to what is now commonly termed the nature (genetic) and nurture (environmental factors) debate (Claxton, 2008). What is clear is his advocacy of an educational system that begins with common foundations before diversifying into distinct branches and disciplines (Papastefanou, 2013).

2.2.1 Aristotle and the Beginnings of the ‘State Controlled’ Pupil Experience

Like his mentor, Aristotle also advocated that the state should have explicit control of schooling – that the pupil experience should be dictated by state authority - but unlike Plato he proposed an ‘equality’ of education that was the same for all. His argument was that education was a process of molding the individual to suit the expectations of society.

No one would dispute that the legislator must busy himself especially about the education of the young . . . Since the whole city has one goal, it is evident that there must also be one and the same education for everyone, and that the superintendence of this should be public and not private.
(Barnes, 2000, p. 82)

Aristotle also describes with some precision the ways that the ruling authority should regulate the lives of its citizens. As Barnes (2000) contends each political regulation, however benevolent or altruistic in purpose, is a curtailment of liberty - and in Aristotle's claim that the citizens 'all belong to the State' the reader may detect the beginnings of a totalitarian ideology. It is also important to note that whilst Aristotle and Plato held these views, these assumptions were not necessarily widespread or seriously shared by their fellow citizens (Papastefanou, 2013b). Young Athenians received little formal education (limited to literacy, numeracy and musical performance) and those who did, received it from schoolmasters who were often poorly paid and little respected – giving an indication of just how little society valued the 'quality' of pupil experiences.

2.2.2 Locke and Rousseau – the Birth of the Progressive Educative Ideal

Perhaps the birth of what modern literature terms 'progressive education' – and its more nuanced measures of education quality and experience - can be traced back to the work of John Locke, particularly his *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (Locke, 1693). Matheson (2014) considers Locke's key contribution to the debate to be his thoughts on education's impact on the formation of the human being. Locke's work is much more focussed on the pupil experience in that it is clear that educators should be more concerned with instilling good habits into children before becoming focused on academic and intellectual knowledge.

Locke valued the *experience* of pupils (although he does not use the term narrative) as he perceived that any knowledge or truth was actually the product of experiential learning rather than manipulation of pre-existing knowledge. The work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762) furthered this line of thinking. Through the device of the fictionalised narrative (a sort of *Bildungsroman*) of his main protagonist *Emile* (and to a lesser extent Sophie), he demonstrates his view that the subordination of the student to the teacher and the rote learning of facts do not constitute a valuable education. This is also a seminal text in terms of educational narrative study, as the choice of form demonstrates the author's desire to explore educational

quality and impact in a nuanced, complex and qualitative fashion. The text is also significant in that it begins to explore the extent to which the child is a product of society.

Rousseau's view is not, however, without its critics. Schaeffer (2013) is heavily critical of what she sees as overly-simplified and 'idealised' models of political freedom (what she terms 'the general will' (p.7) and individual freedom (as expressed through his protagonist Emile) which she sees as 'little more than seductive but illusory chimeras that mask the deepest operations of power'. In addition, Locke (1693) believed that at birth the mind could be considered as something of a 'blank slate', which was not replete with rules for the processing of data. He argues that it is actually the sensory experiences of the individual that lead to the construction of data processing 'rules' as well as the addition of data itself. He coins the term 'tabula rasa' to describe this theory.

2.2.3 Kant, Dewey and Rational Autonomy

The debate about pupil experiences and educational values continued with the publication of Kant's (1899) *On Education* which furthered the debate to include the idea of 'rational autonomy' – that is autonomy that makes good use of reason. Importantly, Kant notes that this capacity to 'dare to think' is an inherent part of human nature – not something that the individual can choose to acquire. In these terms, the quality of education provision can be measured by the degree to which subjects are able to exercise individual agency – quite the opposite of the view that education should fuel the needs of the state. Procee (2006) notes, however, that Kant's case for 'reflection' and agency in education – whilst very attractive in some regard – actually serves to highlight the failure to provide the necessary conceptual clarity that needs to form around a theory which is rather scant on detail. Whilst it is a field full of promise for improving 'professional proficiency' and 'fostering personal growth', it suffers from a lack of 'an epistemology of reflection' (Procee, 2006, p.252).

Perhaps the last of the 'key' texts related to pupils' educational experiences is Dewey's (1916) *Democracy and Education*. It was his belief that schools were 'anti-democratic' in that they dictated subject matter to learners without their interaction and engagement. In the traditional school, learners' voices are absent from the discourse surrounding subject matter discussions and they become at best 'passive agents' whose experiences are deemed entirely irrelevant to the process. Therefore, Dewey (1916) proposes an entirely different and radical

approach where pupils are active participants in curriculum and pedagogical design and where their experiences are co-constructed, useful and relevant.

Dewey (1916) argues that because the traditional schooling model is arranged using a system of pre-existing judgements made by adults about 'what is best' for the young, the content of such curricula is composed outside of the present life-experience of the learner. Consequently, the curriculum is limited as it becomes intrinsically a product of the past rather than the present. He is, however, careful to note the danger that 'progressive' educators do not ignore the past but instead use its achievements to prove the 'means at command' (p.65) or understanding the present. Dewey's (1916) work, however, has far more to offer to the debate in recognising the false dichotomy of progressivism vs. traditionalism and offering a reasoned middle ground, arguing that in practical matters of education we are compelled to compromise.

The highly influential work of Vygotsky (1987) must also be acknowledged, particularly on thought and language and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is often understood as the way in which the acquisition of new knowledge is dependent on previous learning as well as the availability of instruction. Vygotsky argued that a process of reasoning emerged through practical activity in a social context – an aspect of the schooling experience often overlooked by performance metrics. Also significant is Montessori's (Montessori & Gutek, 2004) work which stresses the importance of development learners' initiative and natural abilities. Her work is characterised by an emphasis on independence, freedom within limits, and respect for a child's natural psychological, physical, and social development – once more overlooked by modern metrics of performativity.

2.2.4 The Purpose of Education – a Summary

The philosophical debates about the purpose of education are complex and nuanced, however many are fundamentally concerned with the development of knowledge and skills. There is, however, some middle ground – with virtually all schools concerned with providing learners opportunities to excel and narrow social disadvantage. Where the progressives and the traditionalists differ is in their mode of achieving these aims and in what constitutes an improvement in the quality of experience. This theoretical debate, however, has one critical voice missing – that of the pupils themselves who experience these theoretical arguments in

practice. As Dewey (2012) contends, philosophical principles about education remain abstract and only become concrete with application.

2.3 Praxis – the Establishment of British Schools (1800-1944)

Historians such as Gillard (2011) are convinced that there were what we would now recognise as schools as early as the Roman occupation but that a national system of education took hundreds of years to establish (Williams, 1961). It was not until the Hadow Report (1931) that a comprehensive history of schooling in England was published, citing the New Lanark School established by Robert Owen as one of the first and most influential of its kind. The report notes the focus for children under six was 'whatever might be supposed useful that they could understand, and much attention was devoted to singing, dancing, and playing' (Hadow, 1931, p.3). What is key from this early literature is that these emerging schools were driven by a particular ideology – that of mass education across all classes of society. It would be remiss, however, to overlook the challenges to such policies. Williams (1961) notes the political resistance – sometimes vicious and hostile – to educating the poor and vulnerable in society.

2.4 The Influence of the 'Butler Act' and Beyond on the Pupil Experience (1944-1988)

Perhaps the most influential policy to affect schooling in England was the Education Act 1944 which saw the introduction of the 'tripartite' system. This system consists of three different types of secondary schools: grammars, technical schools and secondary moderns. Importantly the Act also allowed for the formation of 'comprehensive' schools which combined these strands (Williams, 1961) but few were initially established. Pupils were 'filtered' into the secondary school using a centrally defined examination termed 'the 11-plus' which was designed to sort and distribute pupils to schools according to their abilities and aptitudes. However, the praxis of the policy was challenging:

in practice the number of grammar schools, for the academically inclined, remained unchanged, and few technical schools or comprehensive schools were established. As a result, most pupils went to secondary modern schools, whether they were suitable or not, meaning that the majority of education funding went to the secondary modern schools [but were still disproportionately underfunded compared to grammar schools]. (Williams, 1961, p.26)

In retrospect, one of the most significant outcomes of the Act was its status as a catalyst for the education and mobilization of women and the working class giving them access to secondary school and increasing the percentage entering higher education. However, this new, supposedly egalitarian, education system increased the working class awareness of their disadvantaged and 'subordinate' social position and created a bitter class division between the working and middle class (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Such issues led to the rise of the neo-Marxist educational critics, most notably Bowles & Gintis (1976) seeing schools as little more than vessels for capitalist reproduction.

A decade earlier, Jackson and Marsden (1962) had refuted the meritocratic ideology prevalent at the time that the performance of working-class children in grammar schools proved that anyone who wanted to get on and had the talent to do so could succeed in education. According to their study, only those children who were already in effect middle class did well. Their work built on the study undertaken by Floud, Halsey and Martin (1956) which demonstrated that the problems of assimilation of children from working class origins were very real and tangible. In effect this process relied upon pupils accepting, often alien school values, to fully engage with the traditional processes of institutions.

Although their research focused on the American school system, there is much in their work that can be applied to the 1944 Act and beyond. In addition, Bernstein (1971) argued that different aspects of society adopted different language patterns (which he terms 'codes') that influence the ability of different social classes to succeed in schools. This idea is extended in the work of Bowles & Gintis (1973), in whose model there are three basic foundations: the class system, the occupational system and the educational system, which exist both independently and interdependently but which ultimately contribute to the retention of the educational and societal status quo.

There are three essential elements in the Bowles & Gintis (1976) model. They describe:

1. A class system that exists in the typical Marxist sense (i.e. there are two fundamental classes set up in opposition).

2. An occupational system organised into a distinct hierarchical system of positions where there are gradations of income attributed to each level.
3. An educational system, which mirrors this hierarchy, with a series of gradations (and indeed statuses) attributed to schools.

The way that Bowles and Gintis (1973) present the occupational system is, however, somewhat subtle and nuanced. The occupational and educational systems are closely interrelated in that they reflect each other and help to reproduce the corresponding system. As they put it:

the nicely stratified and rational occupational system, and the school system itself, are best grasped as institutions designed primarily to preserve the fundamental inequality rooted in the class system (p.12).

Marxist educational critics perceive this inequality pervades the pupil experience of schooling and is an inevitable product of a modern capitalist society. In this paradigm the ruling class has to rule by a combination of persuasion and force. The process, they argue, is complex – with some policies designed to deliberately confuse and contain conflict whilst others are unintended consequences of the development of modern institutions such as labour markets. There are, however, many critics of this stance with Reynolds (1995) noting that pupils are taught to appraise and question, to know about social and political matters. Reynolds (1995) also argues that it would be impossible for British capitalists to completely rule schools in this fashion, as Local Authorities - and increasingly Academy schools - have a great deal of freedom in the matter of organising education and that individual teachers have a degree of freedom and autonomy within the classroom.

I argue that such political readings are hugely significant to this study as they underpin the narratives that learners experience within the school system. The choices presented to learners are part of a carefully constructed system designed to maintain the status quo and limit choice, narrowing and standardising the learner experience.

The origins of the current educational zeitgeist of increased autonomy from central government can be traced back to the Educational Reform Act of 1988. This Act provided an important legislative change which facilitated both primary and secondary schools opting out

of local authority control whilst retaining central government funding. This had huge implications with just under a third of all state schools choosing to reform in the new system (Benn & Chitty, 1996). However, under further legislation in 1998 these schools (known as 'grant maintained') were abolished and replaced by 'foundation schools', which had even greater autonomy over their affairs. (See the next section on context of the research school for further implications of this change.)

2.5 The Emergence of School Effectiveness Literature and its Relevance to this Study

Whilst much of the debate in this chapter has been about the differences in the broad educational philosophies of 'progressive' and 'traditional' teaching, early attempts to attribute achievement gains to one 'style' or the other generated little success (Bennett, 1976) and often disregarded more holistic measures of pupil experiences and narratives. Despite this, in the last fifty years there has been an increasing desire to ascertain what 'best practice' looks like in schools – both in Britain and abroad (Muijs & Reynolds, 2010). Perhaps the first key piece of literature in this field was the 1966 US Government commissioned report entitled *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Coleman, 1966). It still remains widely cited in the field of educational research (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Muijs & Reynolds, 2010) as one of the largest studies with more than 650,000 students included in the sample.

The Coleman Report is often used by critics making an argument that school funding - and indeed school in general - has very little impact on student achievement and that student background and socioeconomic factors are far more likely to determine educational outcomes. This is highly significant within the context of this study as it suggests that education policy has only a peripheral impact on pupils' life trajectories. The report also indicates, however, that the quality of teachers and schools did have some impact on educational outcomes (Gamoran & Long, 2006). On a similar theme, Goldstein (2012) argues that school league tables often have negative side effects, although these can be reduced if they are used only as internal tools to improve performance by the institutions involved and not published or made publicly available. However, I maintain that any internal use of such tools should also take into account a more nuanced view of what constitutes successful learning (e.g. that of Claxton, 2008) and not merely acquiesce to the metrics defined by government.

The Coleman Report demonstrated the growing appetite in Universities and government policy units to explore the effectiveness of schooling – although the voice of pupils is still strikingly absent. The first significant undertaking was by Lezotte and Brookover in the 1970s, who began the task of identifying key performance metrics for schools that were in decline or on a trajectory of improvement (Lezotte & Brookover, 1979). Their work determines that staff in declining schools tended to have low expectations of pupils' innate abilities. Whilst Lezotte and Brookover's (1979) research took place in American elementary schools, a team of academics were conducting a similar piece of research in British secondary schools. Their text, Fifteen Thousand Hours (Rutter, 1982) reached similar conclusions to the American school effectiveness research – identifying a series of key metrics for school effectiveness. These studies also influenced Lezotte's (1991) creation of the 'correlates for school effectiveness' which he continued to refine across two generations of his work. His 'final' list in 1991 defined positive school correlates as:

1. Instructional leadership.
 2. Clear and focused mission.
 3. Safe and orderly environment.
 4. Climate of high expectations.
 5. Frequent monitoring of student progress.
 6. Positive home-school relations.
 7. Opportunity to learn and student time on task.
- (Lezotte, 1991, p.16)

Gamorong and Long (2006) note that, in the light of these persisting patterns, there was still very little optimism about the capacity of school systems to bring about equality of opportunity for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds in the sense of equality of examination outcomes, let alone equal participation:

What would it take for contemporary policies to bring about equal opportunity? This could occur in one of two ways. First, policies could be enacted across the board that have greater benefits for disadvantaged students than for their more advantaged peers. Second, policies that have similar effects on all students could be focused mainly on disadvantaged students. (Gamorong and Long, 2006, p.4)

2.6 Challenges to the Orthodoxy of Schooling – the Impact on Pupil Experiences

The publication of Holt's (1964) seminal work, *How Children Fail*, saw one of the most incisive challenges to the traditional school system which he perceived to be detrimental to pupils' success. In Holt's (1964) view, children have an inherent love and passion for learning but many instinctively hate to be 'taught' in a formal environment. He argues that schools have a detrimental impact on pupils' learning because they push pupils to strive for the approval of teachers for a series of 'right' answers that are ideologically driven. The school system, he argues, does not facilitate an opportunity for children to see any value in thinking and discovery but see success as defined by a narrow series of school-defined metrics. Holt also sees end of year achievement tests as a shallow measure doing little to assess real learning due to cramming and short-term gains, and principally because the tests are not relevant to the real world and have little capacity for practical application. Interestingly, Holt distinguishes between the 'intelligence' measured by achievement tests and the informal learning that takes place beyond the classroom:

If you live at a small school, seeing students in class, in the dorms, in their private lives ... you can't escape the conclusion that some people are much smarter part of the time than they are at other times ... somewhere along the line, his intelligence became disconnected from his schooling. Where? Why? (Holt, 1964, p.14)

2.7 Hirsch and 'Cultural Literacy' – the Impact on Pupil Experiences

One of the key debates in the school effectiveness literature – and therefore an intriguing measure of the quality of pupil experiences - is the extent to which schools should be concerned with the development of skills or knowledge. Some scholars, notably Hirsch (1987), attribute the inefficiency of schools to an incoherent approach to the development of what he terms 'key knowledge' (p.5) – that which allows pupils to be culturally aware. Hirsch (1987) also argues that teachers' opportunities for efficient learning are limited by their lack of knowledge of learners' prior grades and achievements, a criticism echoed by the recent publication from the Sutton Trust (Higgins, 2014).

In this view, the quality of pupils' experience is determined by the acquisition of knowledge, which, according to Hirsch (1987), is composed of what he terms 'intellectual capital',

comprising the facts and skills that a person possesses at a given moment. His work also suggests that the more knowledge and skills individuals acquire, the more readily they can acquire new information. In this respect, learning is constructivist in nature as it builds on 'blocks' of previous knowledge. Hirsch (1987, p.24) figuratively terms existing knowledge the 'mental Velcro' that allows additional knowledge to become attached to it, and thus in this model a memory replete with facts learns better than one without. In terms of evaluation of the pupil experience, however, one of the key criticisms of Hirsch's work is not concerned with the theoretical model he presents, but rather the *praxis* of his ideas. Squire (1988) shares the concern that schools who are used to a reductive assessment model will simply take Hirsch's work as a basis for selecting test questions and may simply 'parcel out these minutiae of content into traditional scope and sequence' (p. 12) rather than concentrate on the holistic educational experience. Other critics choose to focus on the nature of the knowledge selected, which appears ripe for criticism and even parody:

Why must [learners] know the dates for two world wars, for example, and not the dates for the signing of the Magna Carta or the French Revolution, which in the long run probably contributed more to western culture? Why is *Chicken Little* included but not *Three Billy Goats Gruff*? Why not 'The Concord Hymn' and 'The Second Inaugural Address' if we seek to understand traditions. Why Greta Garbo and Marilyn Monroe and not Katharine Hepburn or Elizabeth Taylor? The danger of lists of this kind is that they quickly become regarded as definitive.

(Squire, 1988, p. 77)

There is some evidence of Squire's (1988) criticisms in the praxis of the work in British schools. Advocates of Hirsch's ideas in the UK, and particularly the think tank Civitas (Hirsch, Holdren, & Briggs, 2011) have begun developing his work into practical guides for teachers in English schools (e.g. What Your Year 1 Child Needs to Know) but such movements pay little consideration to the pupil experience, prioritising an academic curriculum composed by those who currently hold this knowledge.

Squire (1988) does reserve some praise for Hirsch, noting that his work is cogently reasoned and provides a useful start for a debate about education and the quality of the educational experience. This view is shared by Scholes (1988) who sees the 'ends' of Hirsch's argument as difficult to resist, but feels that the means proposed to reach them are woefully inadequate,

branding them hyperbolically as educational 'voodoo' (p.324) where results are to be achieved in a ridiculously easy fashion.

Tchudi (1988) argues that the problem with Hirsch's cultural literacy is that it simply cannot be 'scientifically prescribed' but instead it should be considered organic, growing and evolving from the complexity of children's experiences – the key focus in this study - both in school and out. He argues that language and acculturation are not 'automatic' processes but 'natural' ones – that knowledge of cultural literacy is actually the Trojan horse of extensive reading, fluent writing, speaking, listening and thinking which benefits all learners. It is, he argues, highly reductive to reduce enculturation to a chronological 'greatest hits' of factual knowledge. Hirsch (1987) claims his text as a change to a 'losing game', but Tchudi (1988) sees it as little more than a 'tweak to the old one' (p.73).

As House et al. (1991) note, the underlying disputes that exist between the advocates of cultural literacy and the progressives are founded in their differing visions of how culture is produced in society and the function that educational institutions have in 'transmitting' that culture through differing pupil experiences. Ultimately, they argue, these are choices about what type of society we should have. There are similarities in the arguments of House et al. (1991) and Tchudi's (1988) Trojan horse, but here the critically literate learner is compared to the cryptographer, reconstructing through analytical reasoning, as even the quickest learners do not immediately understand everything that they read. In this paradigm, the learner experience needs to be concerned explicitly with nurturing the process of learning as well as the factual content.

There is also some evidence that Hirsch's approach is little more than a superficial proxy for high-quality pupil experiences. Sledd and Sledd (1988), for example, are scathing in their criticism of Hirsch's claim that cultural literacy is a profound conception, instead branding it 'telegraphic, vague, superficial, hazy, imprecise and limited in extent'. Perhaps a more reasoned middle ground is evident in the work of Shamshayooadeh (2011), clarifying that one does not have to *entirely* adopt Hirsch's arguments. It is feasible, for example, to agree in a broad sense with the basic notion of cultural literacy as an indispensable pedagogical tool while taking issue with the extensive, core cultural list that Hirsch proposes.

In the context of this study, it is difficult not to be seduced by the *end product* of Hirsch's ideals – the production of culturally literate and socially mobile pupils. There are, however, considerable problems in applying his ideas to the broader, qualitative notion of pupil experience. I question whether measuring the acquisition of facts and figures, no matter how culturally significant, can be any more than a superficial proxy for a high-quality, broad experience of schooling. Furthermore, it can be argued that Hirsch's work is also oppressive in encouraging a pedagogy that transfers the status quo of power and knowledge from one generation to the next, making the pupil's experience one of the passive recipient.

2.8 Freire and the Oppression of the Learner Experience

Freire (1968) is concerned with the 'oppression' of the pupil experience. His most famous analogy is to compare education to the 'banking' model, which he argues undermines the potential of education as an instrument for liberation. It is liberation that he sees as key to the learning experience. He proposes a mutual process, which is 'world mediated' and that sees people as uncompleted beings - conscious of their incompleteness. This is in direct contrast to the banking model in which the teacher does not 'communicate' in the traditional sense but instead offers a series of what he terms 'communiques' which are actually banking deposits which pupils are required to passively receive, commit to memory and repeat on demand. He is heavily critical of the shallow nature of this process in which the scope of learning only goes as far – to continue the metaphor – as receiving, filing and storing the deposits.

In Freire's (1968) view, the traditional school model depicts the schooling experience as little more than a process of teachers passing selected knowledge into an ever-revolving audience of entirely passive pupils. In this type of system teachers are the 'epistemological authority' (Freire, 1968, p. 101) and any pre-existing knowledge that pupils might have is entirely ignored, aside from that which was previously deposited (this is, at least in part, the praxis of Hirsch's (1987) *Cultural Literacy* model discussed above). Freire argues that this leads to a fragmented, biased and heavily politicised view of reality. In these terms, knowledge becomes a 'gift' that is the sole property of those who consider themselves to be 'learned' for those who they consider to know very little. In Freire's (1968) critique of the system, the teacher must, by very definition, present themselves to pupils as their 'necessary opposite' using their absolute ignorance to justify their own existence. In some respects, his text is a 'call to arms' that

demands a revolutionary pedagogy that attacks the prescriptive methods of the dominant elites:

Revolutionary praxis must stand opposed to the praxis of the dominant elites, for they are by nature antithetical. Revolutionary praxis cannot tolerate an absurd dichotomy in which the praxis of the people is merely following the leaders' decisions – a dichotomy reflecting the prescriptive methods of the dominant elites. Revolutionary praxis is a unity, and the leaders cannot treat the oppressed as their possession. (Freire, 1968, p.36)

This 'pedagogy of the oppressed' is not, however, without its critics in its pursuit of enhanced pupil experiences. Weiler (1991) laments Freire's failure to address patriarchal privilege or sexist oppression, as he often seems to assume that 'the oppressed' are male peasants or workers. She also notes the lack of specificity in his work, noting the 'high language' of his text cannot begin to address the specificities, ambiguities and contradictions of political systems that lead to oppression. In failing to articulate this complexity, she argues, Freirean educators could see their efforts defeated by an increased hopelessness and failure of clarity. Some scholars, however, believe that there is *too much* clarity in some of his work. Torres (1993) argues that despite his revolutionary rhetoric, his work is still founded in a fixed curriculum. Torres presents a caveat, however, noting that 'we can stay with Freire or against Freire, but not without Freire' (p.17).

The relative merits of the works of Freire and Hirsch are at the core of the issues explored in this thesis. Whist both theorists strive to create education systems that enable pupils to flourish in society, one does so by imposing a value system condensed into facts and key knowledge whilst the other advocates a revolutionary pedagogical approach that challenges the epistemological authority of schools and teachers. This view is shared in the work of Illich (1971, p.2) who bemoans the 'funneling' of education and instead proposes a series of 'webs' which heighten the opportunity for participants to share an ethic of learning, sharing, and caring. In a sense both advocated a 'fixed curriculum' (Torres, 1993, p.17) and are *authorial* in that they seek to alter the narratives of schooling, although Freire does more to empower pupils as protagonists, offering them agency rather than a defined, prescriptive curriculum experience.

2.9 Performativity and Accountability: English National Education Policy (2010-2014)

In a recent speech, Nick Gibb (2015, p. 2) called Freire's approach 'anti-intellectual' and claimed that the support of a knowledge based curriculum was 'not a political issue of left and right, but rather a choice whether to stand behind aspiration and social justice, or to take the easier route of excuses and low expectations.' Despite these claims, it is clear that curriculum, assessment and ultimately the pupil experience are, in reality, a highly political issue. The next section of this chapter outlines the national policy picture – together with the relevant academic critique - under which I conducted the narrative interviews, providing a context for the data that follows in Chapter 4.

2.10 The National Picture

An understanding of the national policy and performance context is essential for understanding the temporal dimension of this study in mapping the journeys of individual pupils as their narratives span the introduction of the new school performance measures. Whilst the discussions in the review of the literature have until now been historical, it is worth noting that many of issues raised by the neo-Marxist movement in the 1970s are still prevalent in the current context. Bowles and Gintis (2001) have subsequently recognised the shortcomings of their work as a reflection of a temporal 'political context' in which they were working and they have since tried to place their work into the new context of 'performativity' that schools are faced with worldwide:

[in the original work] We avoided for the most part the question of what schools *should* be, focusing instead on what schools actually are and do. We also neglected to devote much attention to how economic systems other than capitalism might better facilitate achieving the enlightened objectives of schooling. We took it as obvious that a system of democratic, employee-owned enterprises, coordinated by both markets and governmental policies, was both politically and economically viable as an alternative to capitalism. (Bowles and Gintis, 2001, p.3)

Perhaps the most striking change in government policy has been to the top line performance measures that are the metrics for school success. In 2014 the percentage of pupils obtaining the DfE's GCSE benchmark of five A* to C passes including mathematics and English fell for the first time – but this seeming drop in performance is really only part of a more complex picture of ideological and political change. Changes to performance measures are so complex that

even the DfE (2014) concede that it is now impossible to compare across different years because of methodological change.

Most notably, Wolf's (2011) recommendations have been implemented in the DfE performance metrics. In particular, this means that no qualification can count for more than one GCSE, and no more than two approved high-value vocational qualifications can count in performance tables. This change is significant, as Wolf's (2011) assertion that education should 'lead to progression into a variety of jobs or further learning' has led to a developing discourse of 'employability' in the sector. The DfE's (2013) response to Wolf's report cited it as affirmation of the belief that:

too many 14-16 year olds are doing courses with little or no value because performance tables incentivise schools to offer these inadequate qualifications ... young people are being deceived and that this is not just unacceptable but morally wrong (p.4).

The implications of Wolf's (2011) review of vocational qualifications and the DfE's examination reform rules (2013) can be seen in the dramatic impact on school performance data, with a huge crash in performance in 2014 (see Figure 2-1). This information is difficult to interpret – leading many to question whether schools' performance has suddenly worsened. The following information needs to be taken into account:

- 1) From 2014 only qualifications which meet the new 'quality' criteria (Wolf, 2011) are included in the data. This means the removal of around 3,000 unique qualifications from the performance measures between 2012/13 and 2013/14.
- 2) The associated point scores for non-GCSEs have been adjusted so that no qualification will count as larger than one GCSE in size. For example, where a BTEC or NCFE certificate may have previously counted as four GCSEs it will now be reduced to the equivalence of a single GCSE in its contribution to performance measures.
- 3) The number of non-GCSE qualifications that count in performance measures have been limited to two per pupil.

Before 2014 school performance table measures were calculated using the 'best' result that a pupil achieved in a subject, regardless of the number of times they may have been entered for it. In September 2013, in order 'to address the significant increase in early entries' (DfE, 2013),

the department announced that only the first result a pupil achieved would count in performance measures from 2013/14. This new rule came into effect immediately with regard to English Baccalaureate subjects and was expanded to apply to all subjects in 2014/15. This new rule only affects a school's performance measure calculations; pupils will still be accredited with every grade achieved, regardless of the number of entries.

As illustrated in Figure 2-1, the additional '2013 methodology' data removes the rules regarding the Wolf Review recommendations and early entry policy from the calculation of performance measures. It is intended to provide a point of comparison, using a proxy set of results based on 2012/13 rules. However, there are limitations to this data. It cannot reverse the behaviour of some schools that happened in response to the policy changes nor can it mitigate for any cohort effect (differences in the abilities of pupils between years). For example, when the government changed the rules to count best rather than first entries, some schools will have adjusted their behaviours and stopped entering pupils for qualifications in the same patterns that they may have done before the policy was introduced. In these cases a pupil's first entry may be their only entry. This means their result will not change when the '2013 methodology' is applied to the 2013/14 data.

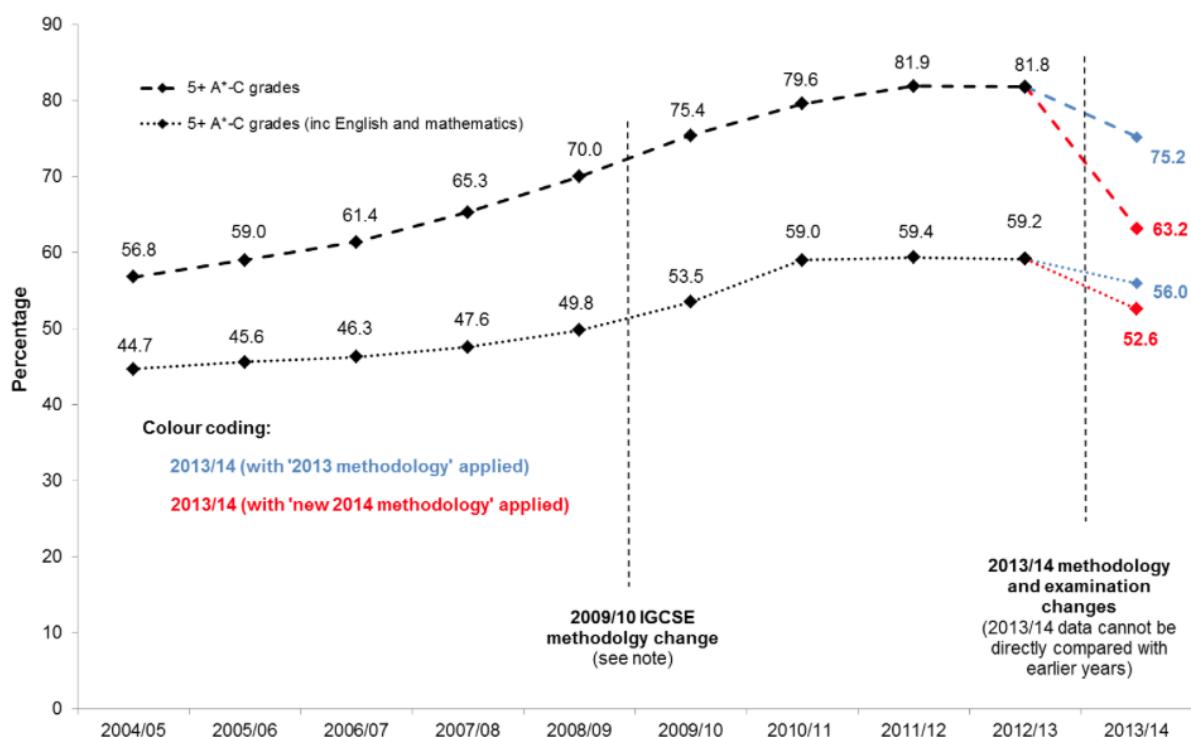


Figure 2-1 Secondary School 'Gold Standard' 5 A*-C E&M Performance 2004-2014 (DfE, 2013)

Since the formation of the coalition government in 2010, and the signing of the Conservative – Liberal Democrat Coalition Agreement (2010), there has been a dual rhetoric of increased freedom and accountability for schools. As trailed by the Liberal Democrat manifesto (2010), a funding premium (later termed ‘The Pupil Premium’) for children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) was established, incentivising schools to take these pupils by giving the school more resources to devote to them. The coalition also introduced the Academies Act (2010) which made it possible for all publicly funded schools in England to become academies, vastly increasing their degree of autonomy in issues such as setting teachers’ wages and diverging from the National Curriculum.

There is strong evidence that self-regulation and autonomy, particularly from central government, is essential in enabling professionalism to be exercised without partisan political ideology (e.g. Gunter, 2011). Seemingly in acquiescence, the DfE’s (2013) consultation on accountability changes declared that ‘assessment and accountability systems should be the servant, not the master, of excellent teaching’ whilst bemoaning the tendency of previous systems to provide perverse incentives for inappropriate curriculum decisions and qualification routes.

It is difficult, however, to perceive that the declared aim that the policy is designed to ‘promote pupils’ deep understanding across a broad curriculum’ is anything other than an ideological steer and a continuation of the pantomime rhetoric in which the coalition government is cast as the heroic protagonist of English education in a narrative of despair. Part of this narrative has been the rapid growth in academisation following the Academies Act (2010) which has seen nearly half of secondary schools in England break their accountability association with their local authority (Lumby & Muijs, 2013). This policy can, however, be seen as part of the banner of change that Ball (2010) terms ‘polycentric governance.’ In this system the key responsibility for education shifts away from central government hierarchy and into a ‘heterarchical’ system in which a complex web of relationships exists between organisations, funders, government agencies, school leaders and local authorities.

Although based on the American school system, Wholstetter and Sebring’s (2002) assertion that schools ‘trade increased autonomy for increased accountability’ has a degree of resonance with recent policy developments in the English system. A review of the DfE policy timeline

from 2010-2014 seems to suggest a curious paradox between greater freedoms and a drive from what Halstead (1994) terms 'contractual' accountability in which school leaders are expected to deliver high performance with regard to standards, outcomes and results (see Figure 2-2). Glatter (2003) notes that this form of accountability measure is based on either an implicit or explicit 'contract' with the ruling authority. Glatter (2003) also describes an alternative model of 'responsive accountability' that is more concerned with process than outcomes.

2.11 Freedom and Surveillance in Coalition Government Policy

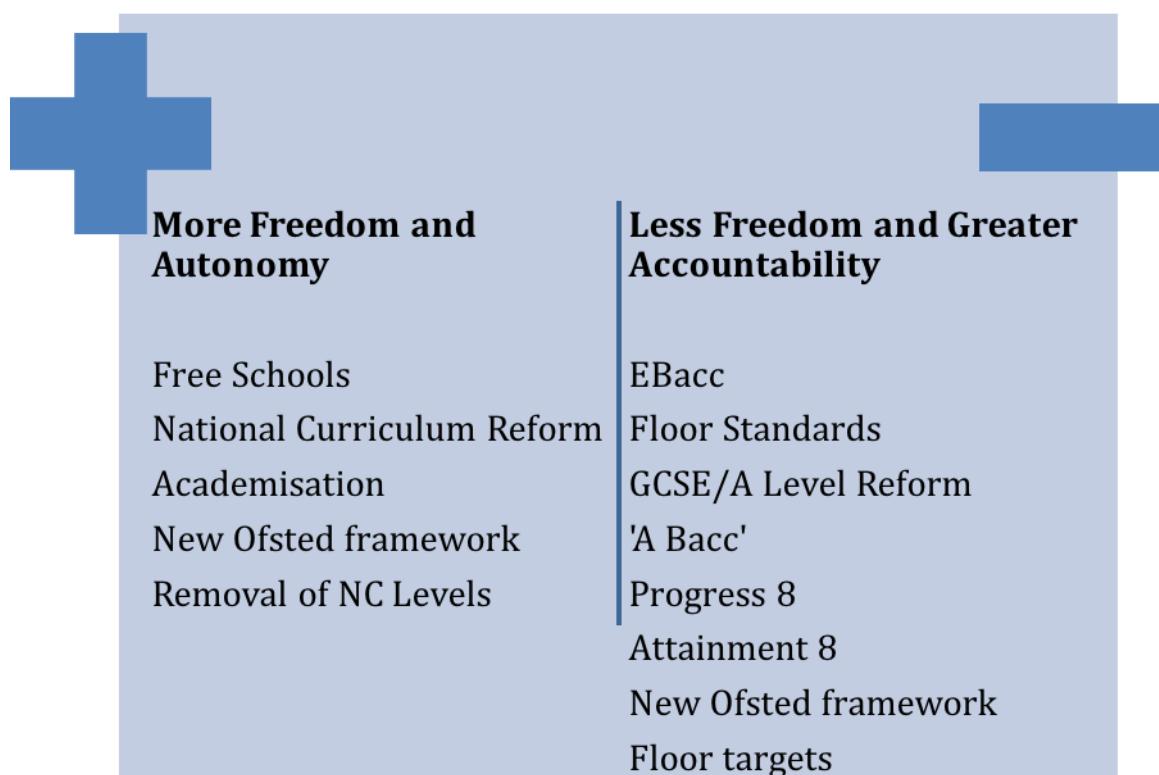


Figure 2-2 Autonomy and Accountability in Coalition Government Policy

The introduction of the new 'Progress 8' measure comes at the same time as the newly published framework document for consultation on the new National Curriculum (DfE, 2013b), which champions the return to the 'core knowledge' of key facts, tested by challenging terminal examinations. This new performance measure actually increases the 'performativity' aspects of the English Baccalaureate (often referred to colloquially as the 'EBacc') which was created by the DfE to recognise performance in what they term the 'key academic subjects ... that carry

real weight for entry into higher education or for getting a job' (DfE, 2013b). Critics, however, bemoan the lack of research into how certain sets of subjects complement each other and impact on post-16 choices (Cadwallader, 2013).

In effect, the way that *Progress 8* is calculated forces schools to place a greater emphasis on this suite of qualifications (see Figure 2-3) with English and mathematics and the English Baccalaureate subjects accounting for at least 70% of every secondary school's performance. I would suggest, however, that this was necessary, given that the DfE's (2013) own analysis conceded that there had been no significant change since 2011 in the proportion of Year 9 pupils who have chosen to take the English Baccalaureate combination of traditional subjects. There is, however, an argument that the unintended consequences could be that schools pay less attention to lower achievers in their efforts to 'chase their slice of an already cut pie' (Isaacs, 2014, p. 1).

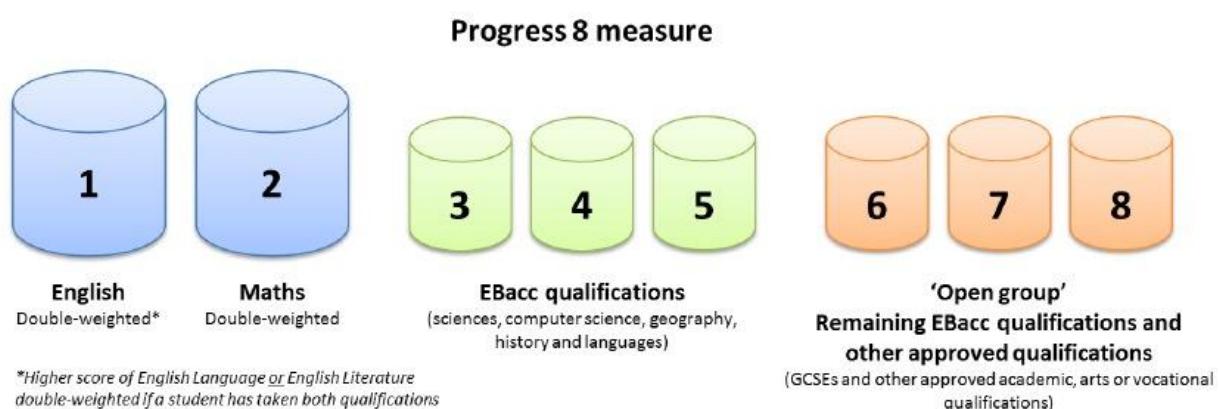


Figure 2-3 The requirements for Progress 8

There are two contrasting interpretations of these developments, with pessimistic commentators describing a return to shallow, 'rote-learning' and bemoaning the narrowing of the curriculum and the reduction of opportunities for creativity (Robinson, 2013). Supporters see these new measures as an opportunity to enhance academic rigour and 'restore' the British education system to be amongst the best in the world (DfE, 2013). The statistics certainly seem to suggest the process is 'working' (see Figure 2-4) with dramatic rises in the numbers of pupils sitting humanities subjects, sciences and languages and large increases in pupils achieving the English Baccalaureate (see Figure 2-5).

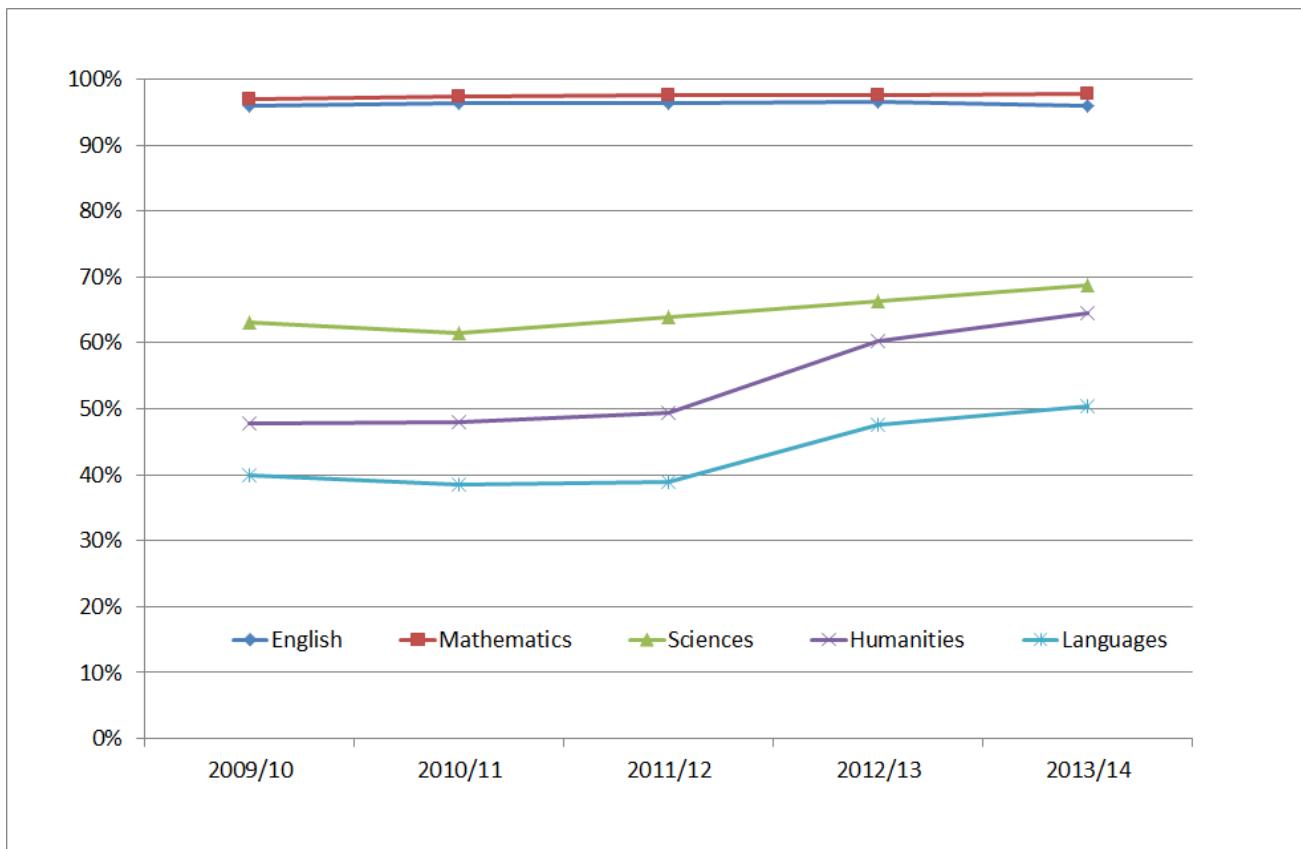


Figure 2-4 National Percentage of Entries for EBacc Components 2009 to 2014

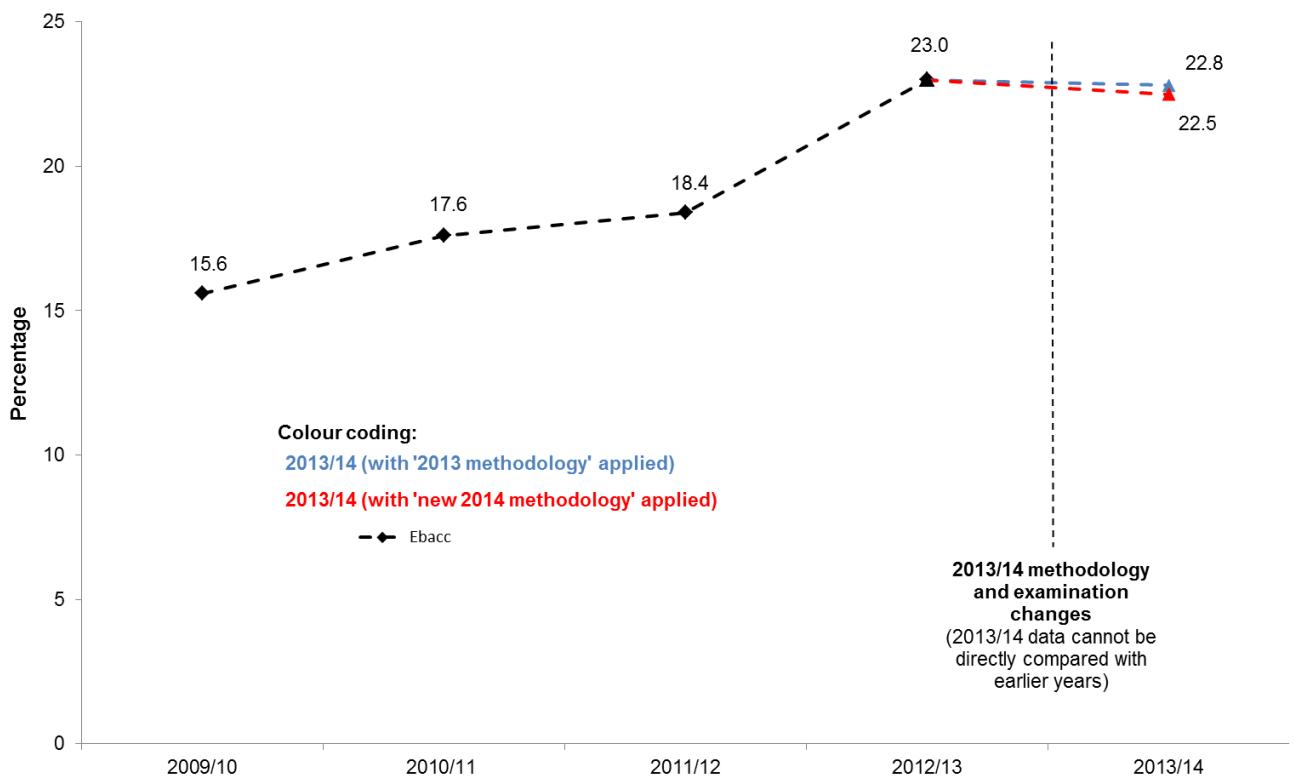


Figure 2-5 Percentage of Pupils Achieving the EBacc (Dfe, 2015)

2.12 Autonomy as Façade?

As the Conservative Government's policy oeuvre increases the surveillance on schools, the supposed autonomy offered continues to diminish. Perhaps the one exception is with regard to pedagogy, which remains notably absent from the policy canon. Once more this is ideologically driven, but not necessarily the preserve of one political party as historically in the English and Welsh curriculum decision-making has been divided between central government's concern with content and schools' concern with pedagogy (Lumby & English, 2010). This omission of pedagogical research evidence in itself is still a highly political act as it diminishes the status of pedagogical change despite vast research evidence of its fundamental importance to school effectiveness (Mulford, 2003) and teacher quality (Muijs & Reynolds, 2010).

There is another degree of critique in the literature that explores how schools are unwittingly enacting the government's will because their contexts necessitate their perusal of a free-market ideology:

Since schools ... are required to make themselves attractive to families who are most able to exercise choice of school for their children, low-attaining students, students who demand high levels of attention and resource, and those who are seen not to conform to school and classroom behavioural norms, are unattractive to many schools. (Muijs et al., 2011, p. 86)

The new methodology for calculating school floor standards under Progress 8 also means that far more schools would be deemed to 'underachieving' (see Figure 2-6) with almost twice the number of schools missing the government's floor standards in the new system. In real terms, this means that an ideological change commits a further five-hundred schools to the status of 'failing' without a real-term change in their performance. The new mandate for schools to report the Progress 8 measure on the front page of the DfE's (2015) website also demands an acquiescence to the school's 'behavioral norms' that Muijs et al. (2011) describe in their work.

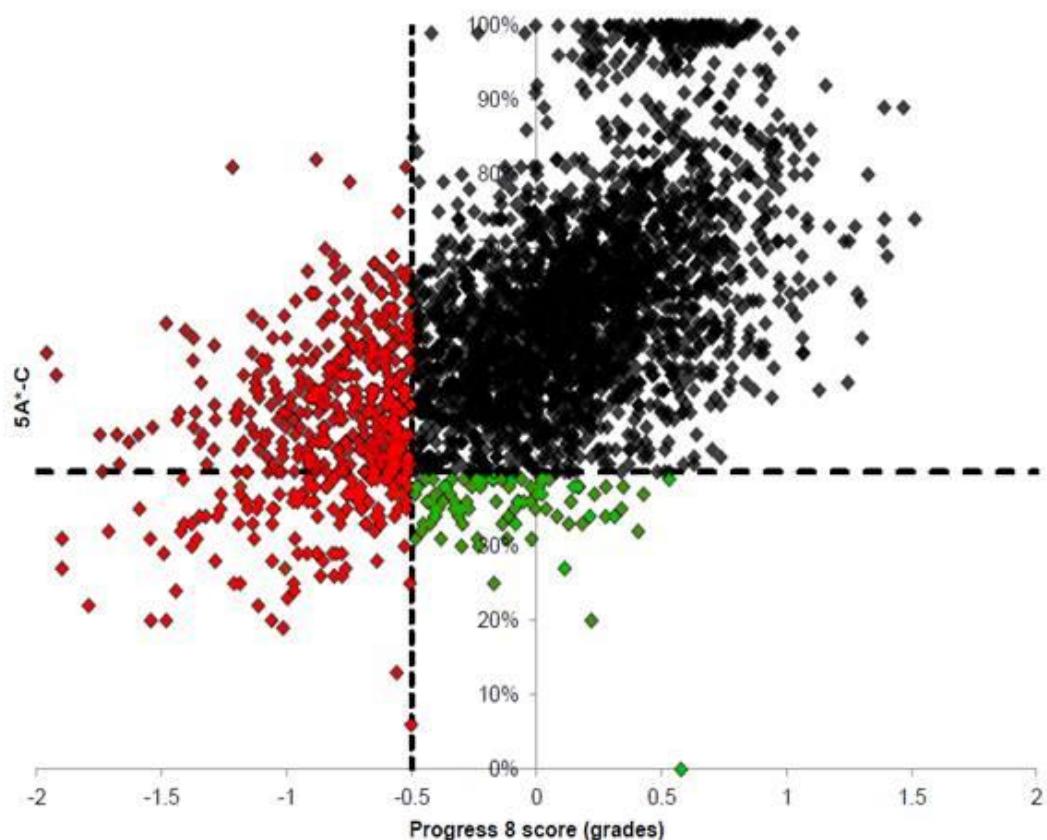


Figure 2-6 Floor Standards 5A*-CE&M vs Progress 8 (DfE, 2015)

If the DfE's (2012, p.4) assertion is truly that schools will 'improve most when teaching professionals have the autonomy to decide how best to teach their pupils' then there must be a rigorous evaluation of the performativity culture that surrounds schools. If, as I have argued

here, the façade of autonomy amounts to little more than enacting the government's will, then the final irony is that its long-term fate is almost certain failure. As Tyack & Cuban (1995) contend, mandates tend to work better in collaboration with teachers where goals are explicit and shared. Until this is accomplished, the traditional 'grammar' of schooling is likely to resist any governmental levers for change, whether these are explicit instructions or through the façade of autonomy. Despite this, schools remain under enormous pressure to acquiesce – they need to conform to changes on the one hand but the dominant traditional 'grammar' on the other appears to be diametrically opposed, leaving schools, teachers and pupils in a position of inevitable failure.

2.13 The Inertia of the School Experience

As this thesis is ultimately concerned with the individual experiences of schooling, it is essential to engage with the conceptual challenges to reform, which have great potential to influence these individual life narratives. With this in mind, I explore the apparent paradox of the desire for change in educational institutions, juxtaposed with the apparently rigid formula to which our schools have adhered for more than a century. First, the challenges for educational reformers are considered, with their complex nuances and implications for changing teaching practice. Next the various theoretical models that exist as 'drivers' for overcoming these impediments in educational institutions are discussed.

2.14 Factors Impeding Change

The recent Coalition Government White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (2013a) advocated a radical reform of schools, incorporating sweeping changes to the structure of these organisations, as well as leadership, curriculum and assessment reforms. Despite the hyperbolic rhetoric, this can be seen at best as the latest in more than a century of attempts to reform the educational system and at worst a linguistic façade designed to 'deaden thought and encouraging collusion in sustaining inequality' (Lumby & Muijs, 2013, p.4). The calls for change, however, are not all politically motivated. The arguments of the reformers and iconoclasts are wide ranging: from the bombastic political rhetoric demanding change for social justice, to the radicals demanding a focus on creativity and the arts (Lumby & Muijs, 2013, p. 26) and the research-driven community's desire to build an education system which is

founded on sounder educational principles. And yet, as Tyack and Cuban (1995) contend, what they term the essential 'grammar of schools' remains principally unchanged despite more than a decade of attempts at pervasive reform agendas. The research presents a rather pessimistic notion that schools are doomed to be forever atavistic and that both the reformers and the iconoclasts are doomed to fail.

2.15 The Institutional Grammar of Education

The 'grammar' that Tyack and Cuban (1995) describe - the classroom layout, the award of grades and credits, the setting or banding of students and the division of the curriculum into subjects (see Figure 2-7) - is, of course, a historical development and not intrinsic or a primordial invention. They also argue that the more 'prestigious' institutions are always better able to 'protect' their intrinsic values from national and local reforms driven by legal regulations and accreditation or examination requirements – allowing the inherent grammar of schooling to prevail. They also cite the timing of interventions, noting that this is a key factor in whether changes are successful.

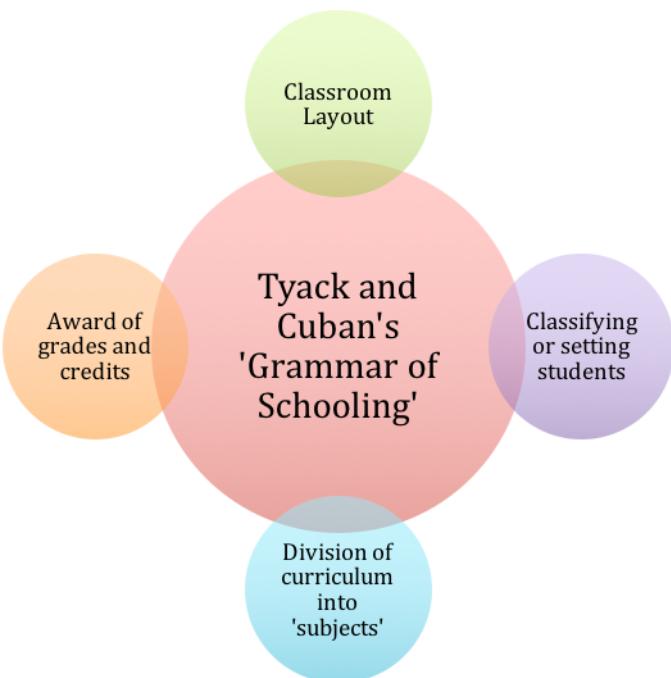


Figure 2-7 Summary of Tyack and Cuban's (1995) Grammar of Schooling

Some commentators, however, see the continuing presence of this 'grammar' as part of an interminable political cycle, noting that changes towards knowledge-based 'traditional curriculum' or skills-based models are merely the latest swing in a figurative '25-year educational pendulum' Tyack and Cuban (1995, p. 6). Tyack and Cuban (1995), however, do not accept this proposition, noting that although policy talk is cyclical, long-term trends are embedded on different timetables, which do not necessarily correlate with the zeitgeist of political rhetoric. They also argue that one of the key reasons why reform is difficult is that schools see themselves as part of a wider 'network' of organisations whose grammar is omnipresent. For example, a school's decision to offer what they believe is a diverse and experimental curriculum is problematic if universities or employers do not accept these qualifications. Publications such as the Russell Group's (2011) *Informed Choices* and the creation of the English Baccalaureate (2011) have strengthened this institutional grammar by coercing schools to acquiesce to a normative model through rigid accountability measures. The counter argument is, however, that once established, the real reason that institutional grammar persists is that it facilitates teachers' ability to discharge their duties in a predictable fashion to cope with everyday tasks (e.g. controlling the behaviour of pupils) and to 'sort' people for future roles in school and beyond. Whilst the DfE (2013) claim that these institutional features are principally about reducing labour costs and affirming organisational status as a 'valid' school, other critics go further in exploring the socio-political dimension. The Neo-Marxist politico-philosophical movement in academia in the 1970s saw schools as agents of capitalist reproduction (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 29). In this view, schools replicate the labour market and facilitate the bourgeoisie's control of the workforce; their adherence to an institutional grammar is a deep-rooted and ideologically driven strategy.

2.16 Performativity Culture

Alongside (or perhaps part of) this 'grammar' is the growing performativity culture in which schools operate. There is compelling evidence that this culture – whilst commonplace - does not yield improved results in either learning or performance (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Indeed there is evidence that this can be counter-productive, with schools that stress a focus on formal academic achievement actually seeing a decline in results (Watkins, 2010). Other commentators highlight this as part of a 'discourse of derision' (Forde, McMahon, McPhee, &

Patrick, 2006) in which the teaching profession is perceived as being unable to deliver the requisite standards of education required by society. Such views are consistent with Ball's (2003) concept of 'management panopticism' – an inescapable performativity culture which pervades all aspects of teachers' work and which contributes to the educational inertia by constructing an environment of anxiety and fear. Lumby & English (2010, p. 219) go even further, noting that such pressures can trigger obsessive and irrational behaviour in educators.

Perhaps it is significant to note, however, that Ball (2003, p.226) argues that it is not necessarily performativity in itself that restricts high quality learning, as this could have the potential as a vehicle for changing the perception of academic work. The problem with acquiescence to the system, however, as he concludes is that it is at the cost of an autonomous, ethical self-concept for teachers who hand over the intellectual challenge of defining quality to politicians and civil servants. Perhaps this forced absence of autonomy and ethics can in part explain why performativity culture leads to an atavistic attitude from many teachers. As Lumby & English (2010) note, certain 'rituals' in education are uniformly repeated to acquiesce with the demands of policy and legislation to such an extent that any deviation would cause anxiety and unease, whilst leaders demand such acquiescence to maintain an increasingly fragile sense of control over their workforce.

Despite the efforts that have been made to bring about improvements in schools, some children and young people remain marginalised by current arrangements and educational orthodoxy. Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006) argue strongly that that the development of more inclusive schools remains one of the biggest challenges facing education systems throughout the world.

2.17 The Challenges of Improving the Experience of Schooling

What improves teaching and learning is entirely pertinent to this thesis as developments in this area can have a huge impact on the educational experiences of students by developing cultures in which everyone is respected and where policies and practices enable all students to be engaged in learning (Ainscow et al., 2006). A wide range of approaches to this issue emerge in the research literature. One of the most prominent voices of recent years is that of

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) who identify the following building blocks as being necessary for the establishment of a self-improving system:

1. clusters of schools
2. the local solutions approach
3. co-construction of solutions
4. system leaders

Key to these models is the principle question of where teaching professionals sit within the change agenda. Wiliam (2007) contends that the most important factor in educational change is the teacher in the classroom, particularly in terms of what they *do* rather than what they *know*. He also argues that the professional development research shows that many change initiatives alter teachers' thinking without ever impacting upon their practice – a pedagogical mirror of Tyack and Cuban's (1996) argument about institutional grammar. Similarly, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) also perceive that the connection between teacher development and institutional change is obvious, but simultaneously lament the surprisingly few attempts at systematically researching the link between the two. Recent legislation in England and Wales has been designed to reform both education in schools and teacher education. The two sets of reforms are rarely considered together despite their obvious link. Hargreaves (1994) argues that there is an emerging associated shift in the values and practices of teachers, called the new professionalism which has at its heart a synthetic relation between professional and institutional development. This new professionalism can be seen as a driving force towards what has been called the post-technocratic model of teacher education, one for which many teacher educators are currently not well prepared.

Others focus more keenly on pedagogical development. Muijs and Reynolds (2010) note that despite teaching and learning being the most important process happening in schools, it is only in the last decade that the use of educational research to improve teaching has taken root in the UK. They maintain that the lack of research can be attributed, at least in part, to the historical belief that teaching was a creative process rather than a scientific technology of practice that can be learned. In the absence of a truly rigorous and substantial body of knowledge about what constitutes effective practice in educational organisations, the vacuum has been filled by professional organisations such as Ofsted, the General Teaching Council and more recently The Teaching Agency. The judgment of these bodies, however, is potentially

problematic as 'change drivers' as they have not always been research based and may be open to political manipulation. Ainscow et al. (2006, p.11) also note that there is the teacher implementation dimension, with many practitioners arguing that:

they have to work hard to minimise the excluding pressures from policies, which in encouraging competition between schools can lead to a narrow view of the achievement of students

Sebba (2007) also argues that educational research must prove itself useful in demonstrating what works and why within realistic structural opportunities and the constraints that operate in a highly political landscape. There is also a tension that emerges from the literature about how schools' performance might be damaged - either in reality or in the way their outcomes are reported publicly - if they were to become 'too' inclusive (Dyson & Millward, 2000) which gives little incentive for schools to promote a more inclusive or differentiated pedagogy. There are, however, strong opponents of this view.

Despite the recognition that teachers are fundamental to lasting change from such a wide range of commentators (Wiliam, 2007; Muijs & Reynolds, 2001; Turner-Bisset, 1999), the understanding of how to measure teacher competence is still relatively simplistic. The recent government publication of the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012) is merely the latest in a long history of standards or 'metrics' to measure the competence of teachers and drive educational change. Such documents, however, are flawed with particular criticism leveled at the lack of gradations for each measure of competence (Dunne & Harvard, 1990). Perhaps the most serious criticism, however, is that the list is only a partial representation of what it means to teach. Turner-Bisset (2001) argues that such 'standards' are not likely to drive educational change as they ignore the substantial knowledge base that teachers require in order to do the job well, as a professional, and that a series of prescriptive standards ignores the complex reasoning, thinking and synthesis which underpins the best teaching.

A diagrammatical representation of this theoretical model (see Figure 2-8) demonstrates the complexity of these overlapping knowledge bases in creating the 'expert teacher.' Turner-Bisset (1999) herself comments that in practice it could be seen as esoteric and a long distance from the real concerns of everyday teachers and argues that teaching is a deeply complex,

intellectual and practical activity. It is a creative act, in which the expert teacher selects from the store of experience and repertoire of teaching strategies and representations; selecting the most appropriate ones for their purposes.

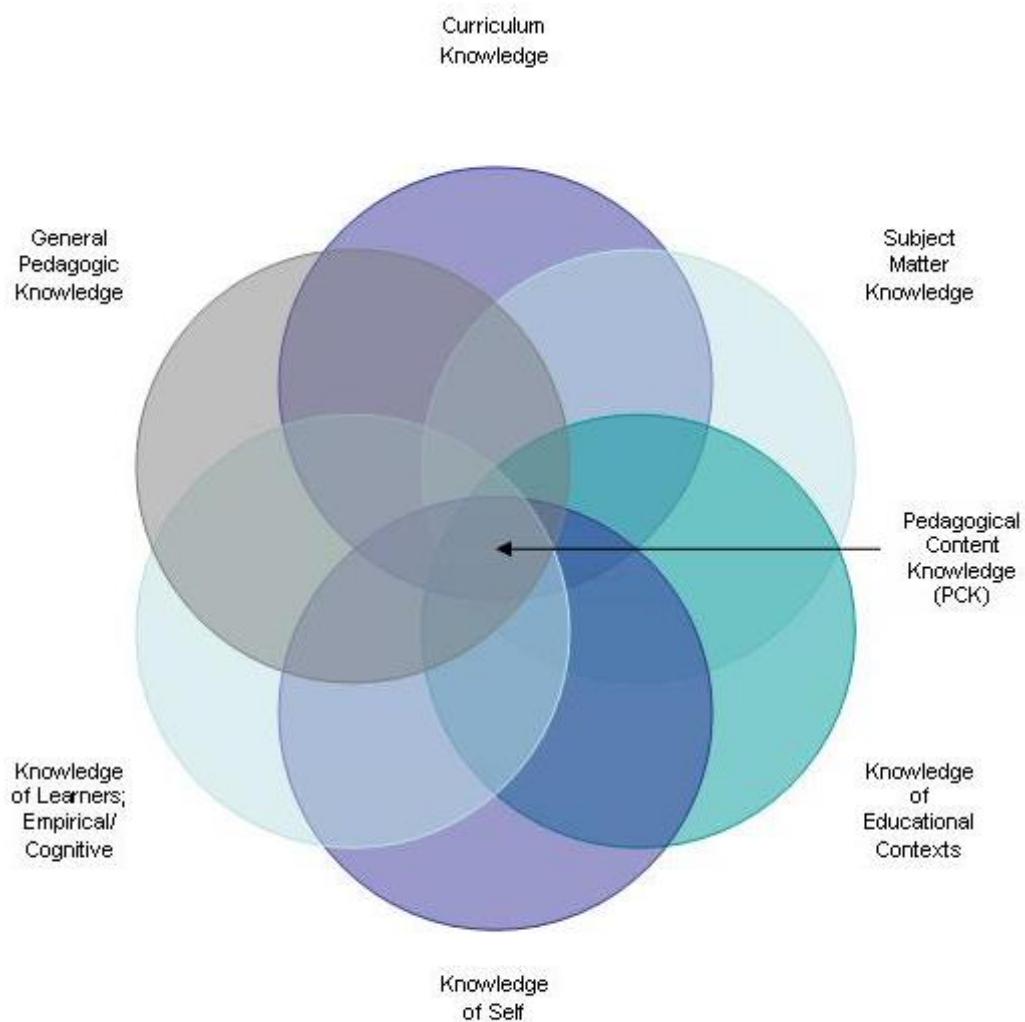


Figure 2-8 Venn Diagram of Turner-Bisset's (1999) PCK Model

Given that such 'knowledge bases' exist, it is curious that so little educational reform focuses on Pedagogical Content Knowledge (or even pedagogy), instead often being concerned with assessment or curriculum (DfE, 2012). Indeed, Muijs & Reynolds (2010) note that historically, governmental approaches to pedagogical development has been somewhat *laissez faire* and argue that for longer-term embedded change and growth certain pedagogical practices can - and need - to be mandated.

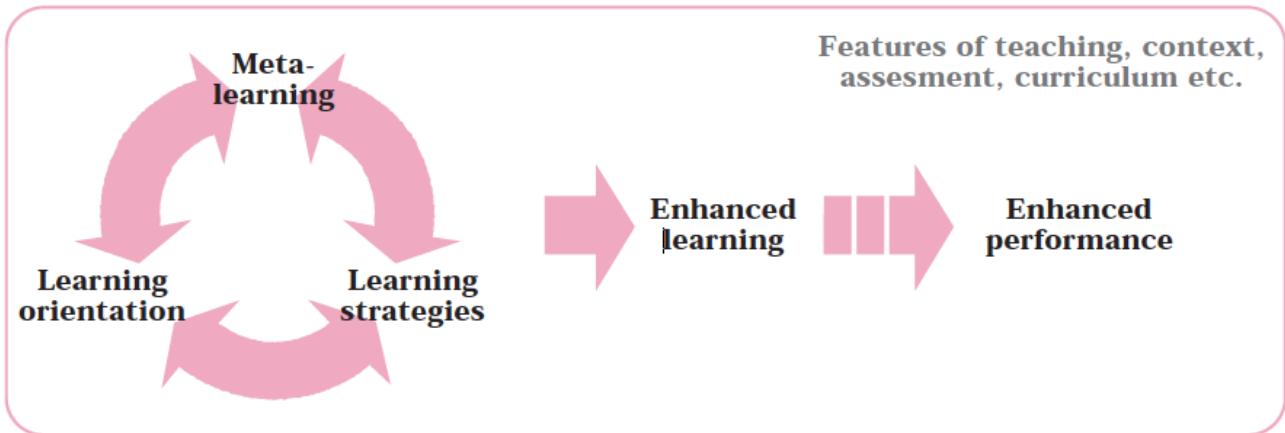


Figure 2-9 Watkins (2010, p.2) Learning about Learning Enhances Performance

2.18 The Pupil Voice in School Improvement

It should be recognised student voice is certainly not just about supporting school improvement but has educational benefits in its own right. Participating students can find the experience 'valuable to their learning as well as developing confidence and leadership skills' (Pekrul & Levin, 2005, p. 2) and it can help to address the 'applied culture of silence' (Freire, 1968, p.14) which is centred around issues that students are keen to discuss. Given the scope of the research question (see 1.3.1) in this thesis, however, the focus in this section is constrained to the literature concerned with pupil voice and school improvement.

Advocates such as Cook-Sather (2002) describe student or pupil voice as having a legitimate perspective, presence and active role in the processes of school improvement. It is for this reason, Rudduck (2007) argues, that interest in student voice has re-emerged. There is also a call from progressive educators to review the practices, structures and value systems that dominate schooling and juxtapose sharply with how young people live their lives in modern society. Enthusiasts such as Levin (2000) argue that education reform simply cannot succeed without much more direct involvement of students, for the following reasons:

- Effective implementation of change requires participation and buy-in from all those involved; students no less than teachers;
- Students have unique knowledge and perspectives that can make reform efforts more successful and improve implementation;

- Students' views can help mobilize staff and parent opinion in favor of meaningful reform;
 - Constructivist learning, which is increasingly important to high standards reforms, requires a more active student role in schooling;
 - Students are the producers of school outcomes, so their involvement is fundamental to all improvement
- (Levin, 2000, p.3).

There is broad agreement in the literature about the potential of student voice for school improvement. Perhaps most significantly, it offers teachers and researchers important insights into the schooling experience from the perspective of different students and groups of students as "expert witnesses" (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004, p.4). Secondly, there is a political and ethical benefit in engaging students as active citizens. Holdsworth (2000) argues that this helps to support the minimalist curriculum for citizenship education in English schools and strengthens the emphasis on democracy and agency for future citizens.

There is also evidence that students have more investment in school improvement efforts when they are engaged as partners (Cervone & Cushman, 2002; Cook-Sather, 2002) and that listening to student voice can encourage school leaders to make important decisions and effectively prioritise decision-making about school improvement (Critchley, 2003; McLaughlin & Mitra, 2003). In addition, there is evidence that actively engaging pupils as research partners strengthens pupils' trust in adults' investment in student voice and school improvement (Wilson & Corbett, 2001) and that policy-making is more effective when students are partners in the process (Evans and Anthony 2001). Smyth (2006. P.288) also contends that school reform must be connected to the 'aspirations, lives and needs' of young people if it is to be truly transformative.

There have, however, been some attempts to explore the value of student voice, challenging the assumption that it is always a good thing. Lodge (2005) identifies trends that have contributed to this unexamined assumption and asserts that there are two dimensions which need to be analysed to examine the effectiveness of student voice: the degree to which students are regarded as being active in participation in school life, and the purpose for which their voice is being used. A distinction, she argues, must be drawn between those that are for community purposes, such as

the improvement of learning, and institutional purposes such as improvement in the appearance of the school.

Pedder and McIntyre (2006)'s study, for example, demonstrated that pupils were able to quickly determine how they and their peers learned most effectively and what motivates them, and that higher achieving pupils expressed awareness of the perspectives that shape the practices of their teachers.

Fielding and Rudduck (2002, p.8) also comment that the potential of pupil voice has been lessened by the unfortunate 'climate of short-termism...[that] may burn out before its transformative potential has been fully appreciated.' There is also a concern that if the pupil voice is captured as part of inspection processes that pupil voice will merely become another facet of surveillance, rather than a dialogue with teachers about improving standards and the holistic experience of schooling. If this is not avoided then there is a danger that teachers may view pupil voice research with anxiety and distrust and as another potential source of criticism (Macbeath, Demetriou, Rudduck, & Myers, 2003).

Despite these challenges, however, there remains a highly convincing case for the authentic and considered application of pupil voice for school improvement. A wide range of empirical studies of pupil voice research (Morgan, 2006; Pedder & McIntyre, 2006; Rudduck, 2007; Thompson, 2009) have consistently demonstrated the importance of practical contributions of student consultation for school improvement.

2.18.1 The Potential of Narrative Approaches

Whilst there is a proliferation of literature about pupil voice in school improvement, narrative approaches to pupil voice remain underrepresented. Bragg and Manchester (2012) argue that narrative approaches to student voice can reconfigure the power relationships in schools in unexpected but not unwelcome ways. Most significantly they believe that by 'finding voice' pupils and schools can gain a new understanding rather than a (re)statement of what [they] already know. Flutter and Rudduck (2002) also question whether the topics 'permitted' for discussion with the pupils in schools are ones that are perceived as significant by the students themselves. There is also

the question of whether these discussions are occasions for genuine dialogue in which students can speak, without fear of retaliation, of concerns, passions and interests which are rooted in their developing sense of justice or academic self-concept. Narrative approaches are, by their very design, interested in the rich, qualitative data that is perfectly matched to the complex nature of pupil voice. In addressing the underlying narratives, this method surely has the potential to address some of the weaknesses of short-termism and limited applications of pupil voice in the field of school improvement.

2.19 Literature Review - Some Conclusions

Analysis of the literature has led me to four major critiques that underpin this study; these relate to:

1. The theoretical debate about educational purpose and praxis.
2. The development of school effectiveness literature.
3. The ideological clash between the development of skills and the passing on of knowledge.
4. The policy changes in British schools from 1966 to the present day (and particularly since 2011).

These areas are all subtly interlinked, as central to the policy changes is a socio-political theoretical debate underpinned by the clash between 'traditionalist' and 'progressive' ideologies. From Aristotle and Plato through to the contrasting paradigms of Hirsch (1987) and Freire (1968), the history of educational philosophy is riven with the ceaseless conflict between these opposing ideological camps.

In keeping with this politicisation of education, educational policy from 1966 onwards seems to be replete with ideology but strangely lacking in a basis in research. As an educator, I question whether I should celebrate the increasing numbers of pupils taking the English Baccalaureate or see it as another triumph of ideology over the freedom of pupils. Equally, I feel I must determine whether I am delighted or appalled that the very tenets of education that were being debated by Aristotle and Plato are still at the core of contemporary debate. Despite

the seeming 'will' to change, the literature suggests that the progressives and the reformers have been unable to have much impact and that the traditional 'grammar' of schools remains pervasive (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). It is time to question whether educators are doomed to unwittingly enact the will of government in order to acquiesce with wider societal expectations about what is defined as success.

There is, however, still some hope for school autonomy. Politically-motivated policy changes to curricula and examinations rarely touch upon either the complexities of pedagogy and policy-makers rarely consider the reasons why a century of 'tinkering' (Tyack and Cuban, 1995, p.1) has made very little difference to the way in which schools operate. Perhaps most critically, however, it is the voices of *learners* that seem strangely absent from this debate. As the myriad of government reforms continue, the time has surely come to stop allowing young people to become collateral damage in this internecine battle of the ideologues. As educators we need to ask 'what works?', but surely we must also be morally obligated to ask what the impact of this is on the young people in the care of the profession. Seldon (2010) claims that too many schools in Britain have become 'factories' and that whilst results (at least on paper) have improved, but he questions at what cost to learners. Whilst his work declares that schools do not give students nearly enough responsibility, it appears somewhat ironic that their voice remains curiously absent from his argument and conclusions. There is one passage in Holt's (1964) work that struck me as particularly resonant with the debate about the purpose of schooling:

Someone asked the other day, "Why do we go to school?" Pat, with vigor unusual in her, said, "So when we grow up we won't be stupid." These children equate stupidity with ignorance. Is this what they mean when they call themselves stupid? Is this one of the reasons why they are so ashamed of not knowing something? If so, have we, perhaps un-knowingly, taught them to feel this way? We should clear up this distinction, show them that it is possible to know very few facts, but make very good use of them. Conversely, one can know many facts and still act stupidly. The learned fool is by no means rare in this country. (Holt, 1964, p.16)

As this chapter demonstrates, despite centuries of debate, and decades of policy change (see summary in Figure 2-10), a serious question is emerging in the debate of cultural literacy and 'core knowledge' as to whether educators are in danger of educating a generation of 'learned

fools.' Furthermore, does the increasing focus on performativity means that the system is little more than a factory model that is damaging our young people's creativity, resilience and academic self-concepts? I began this thesis with a quotation from Robinson (2011) discussing education as a figurative 'key' to opportunity. I now end this chapter by reframing that question of whether our learners believe that we are turning the key to release resources or locking away their ambition behind a door of ideology and performativity. Learners at the centre of the performativity panoptic can teach us much, but as researchers and educators, we must question whether policy-makers are truly listening. Ultimately, I set out to design a study that would give a voice to those who have been silenced by the system and to help educators to understand far more about what happens inside the performativity panoptic.

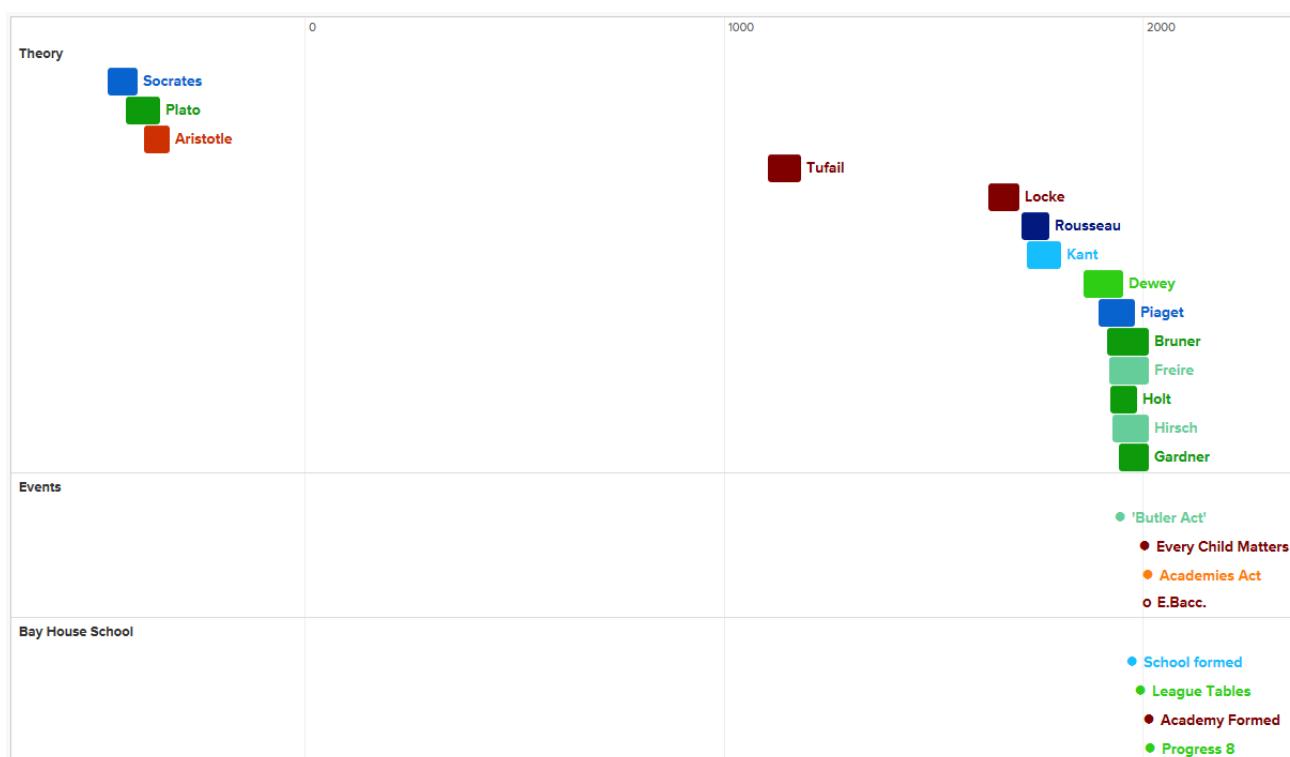


Figure 2-10 A Timeline Overview of Theory, National and School Policy

3 *Philosophy, Methodology and Methods*

3.1 Introduction and Summary

In this chapter I summarise the philosophical and methodological approach I have taken, with particular emphasis on narrative and biographical methods and their relevance to my study. I begin with a discussion of the main philosophical debates around the social sciences and a justification of the interpretivist stance that I have adopted.

I offer a personal standpoint (Harding, 2004) on why a biographical method has proven such a compelling method for this study, where my aim is to explore the narratives of pupils across the 11-18 period of compulsory schooling and to elucidate their experiences in a culture of sweeping changes to school performance measures and examination reform. There is a further discussion about why researchers might find narrative methodologies apposite for social research. A detailed description of the narrative interview design is then included before a discussion of the ethical implications of the project, including the emancipatory potential of using narrative to illuminate the experiences of individuals. Finally, I offer a justification of the unconventional Literary Narrative Analysis (LNA) method I have adopted. I explain my fascination with exploring narrative in the literary text and how such an approach could be illuminating in the social sciences. I describe the approach I have taken to coding the data before providing a detailed analysis of my findings in Chapters 4 and 5, which includes an analysis of a series of key literary narrative devices.

3.2 Towards a Definitive Lexicon – a Note on the Terms ‘Biography’ and ‘Narrative’

Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou (2008) note that the definition of 'narrative' is in dispute, but there is also much debate about whether it is important to define narrative in the first place. As a further complication, the terms 'narrative' and 'biography' are often used interchangeably in the methodology literature. Denzin (1989, p.27) notes that a variety of particular approaches come under the heading of auto/biographical research, including:

life, self, experience, epiphany, case, autobiography, ethnography, auto-ethnography, biography, ethnography story, discourse, narrative, narrator, fiction, history, personal history, oral history, case history, case study, writing presence, difference, life history, life story, and personal experience story.

Sikes (2007) argues that testimony, performance ethnography, participatory action research, confessional tales, socio-poetics, collective autobiography and diary research could also be added to that list. I consider this study to be one of biography, but even the definition of this term is controversial. Smith (1994, p. 287) notes that even the dictionary definitions are in conflict (with the OED's definition excluding women by defining biography as 'the history of the lives of individual men'). For the purpose of clarity, and as employed in this thesis I am defining 'biography' as the written history and interpretation of a person's life. *Narratives* (and the narrative interviews I used to capture them) in this context are defined as the stories, of the whole of a life or part of it, that comprise these written histories. While I agree with Wengraf (2001) that biography cannot exist without narratives, the reverse is not necessarily true.

3.3 Philosophical Position

Although the different philosophical schools are referred to by a range of different terms and exist within a spectrum of competing paradigms, there is broad agreement in the literature that the most distinct philosophical cleavages educational researchers will need to consider are the paradigms of positivism and interpretivism. While many subtleties exist within each paradigm (Cohen & Manion, 1980; Moses & Knutsen, 2012) only the facets which are relevant to my thesis are discussed in this chapter.

I have opted to embrace the stance adopted by interpretivists because here any formulation of knowledge about human behaviour has to tackle the complexity of the human condition. In doing so, it must draw on our understanding of how meaning is established and constructed through human action. Crucially, I adopt the interpretivist stance that people do not just 'experience' the world objectively, they filter their perceptions through the human mind. This is important to my study's concern with the unique, individual experiences of participants within the English system of schooling. I recognise the key criticism that interpretivism does not allow for generalisations in the positivist sense because the small number of cases do not represent the whole population (Hammersley, 1993). However, qualitative researchers invoke

the principle of ‘fuzziness’, in which assertions can be said to be imprecisely probable to address this (Schofield, 1990). Lincoln and Guba (2000, p. 40) also argue that where two contexts are similar there is a degree of transferability that they term ‘fittingness’.

3.4 Theoretical Paradigms in Practice

In my dual role as both a deputy headteacher and a doctoral researcher, I recognise that educational research remains a controversial – and much criticised – component of school reform. Positivists such as Slavin (2002) attribute the lack of faith in educational research methods to the lack of philosophical and methodological rigour. The positivist tendency is to be supportive of the ‘experiment’ model of the natural sciences, noting that although ‘experiments’ are not unusual in education they are:

usually brief, artificial experiments on topics of theoretical more than practical interest, often involving hapless college sophomores. Far more rare are experiments evaluating treatments of practical interest studied over a full school year or more.
(Slavin, 2002, p.16)

Thus, Slavin (2002, p.16) and others contend that the scientific revolution in education will only be considered a relevant and rigorous foundation for policy change when it focuses on ‘replicable programs and practices.’ I question whether such dogmatic assertions are entirely possible – or even always desirable - in practice. As Beed and Beed (2000, p. 135) assert, in the social sciences ‘the objects of interest ... probably do not possess the properties that tend to be measured by the natural sciences’. They go further by arguing that any meaningful comparison of the relative ‘rigour’ between the social and natural sciences may actually be impossible as it is ‘not even certain whether the “complexity” of any individual system can be measured’.

It is also important for philosophical critics of educational research to remember that classrooms - and in this study, the narratives of schooling - are not entirely analogous with the contrived, unreal and artificial world of the laboratory. Cohen and Manion (1980, p. 175) assert that ‘schools and classrooms are not the antiseptic, reductionist analysable world’ that is the necessary foundation of the theoretical paradigms of the natural sciences.

One of my key concerns in designing the research has been ensuring validity – and indeed sorting out which conceptualisation of validity was most relevant in my context. Initially I struggled to synthesise the unique qualities of biographical research with traditional notions of 'validity', latterly finding that Lather (1986) offers a useful reconceptualisation of this issue, with her reworking of the clichéd metaphor: explaining that interpretivists are between a 'rock and a soft place'.

The "rock" is not the unassailable validity of positivist research findings but rather the need to establish the trustworthiness of data which are "qualitative, fleeting, and, at times, frankly impressionistic" (Reason & Rowan, p. 185). For new paradigm researchers, the task becomes the confrontation of issues of empirical accountability in our methodological formulations, the need to offer grounds for accepting a researcher's description and analysis, and the search for novel, *workable* ways of gathering valid data.

(Lather, 1986, p.206)

Even with this helpful formulation, biographical methods remain particularly complex, with the interview process relying on the reconceptualisation of 'human beings as narrators of and products of their texts' (Sandelowski, 2007, p. 162). However, I quickly recognised that when theories were synthesised with practice, threats to the overall reliability and validity of the data can never be entirely eradicated but their impact can be 'attenuated by attention to validity and reliability of the study' (Cohen & Manion, 1980, p. 179). Whilst positivists tend to strive for predictive, convergent and criterion-based studies, I was more concerned with Lather's notion of 'workable' validity and preferred to focus on 'authenticity' of responses.

Given the methods I have adopted and the interpretivist lens I employed, attention becomes drawn to trustworthiness and credibility, which Lincoln & Guba (1985) describe as being comprised of by four key measures: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Whilst much of their techniques designed to ensure trustworthiness (e.g. prolonged engagement, thick description and keeping an audit trail) are entirely relevant to my study, others such as triangulation and persistent observation are not entirely suited to biographical studies and difficult to apply in this case. Riessman (2008) adds that it is the issues of correspondence and coherence that lead to the ethical use of narratives. In practice this means that scholars explicitly describe their mode of enquiry and 'use methods appropriate to their research questions, epistemologies, and situated perspectives' (p.26).

Perhaps her most complex assertion is that the validity of narrative research lies in its ability to inform future studies and contribute to social change by empowering participants. Whilst it was clearly impossible to guarantee adherence to these at the planning and design stage, this was certainly a key aim.

A further model that helped in making this pursuit of validity more practical was that presented by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber (1998) who propose the principles of width, coherence, insightfulness and parsimony. In this model the 'width' is determined by the comprehensiveness of the evidence, which I have addressed through the transparency of the research process and by positing other possibilities of my interpretations in Chapters IV and V. The 'coherence' is addressed through the construction of the literature review and the connections made with existing studies, 'insightfulness' is about resonance with 'lived experience', which is integral to my study. Lastly, 'parsimony' requires that the work is concise and has an aesthetic appeal, which is in keeping with the requirements of the EdD thesis.

I see any such criteria as a list of traits that are open to reinterpretation in the context of the method, condition and purpose. As Sparkes & Smith (2009) argue, as the researcher I needed to adopt the role of the connoisseur in determining how my study would be conducted in a fair and ethical manner. Morrow (2005) also argues that the criteria for judging quality in qualitative research is constantly in flux and as such I needed to be constantly aware of emerging criteria in my chosen methodology.

Whilst I have clearly stated that this study comes from an interpretivist standpoint, I accept that some scholars argue that such ideological idealism is impossible, as individuals' 'ontological and epistemological position[s]... are like a skin not a pullover; they cannot be put on and off whenever the researcher sees fit' (Marsh & Furlong, 2002, p. 17). I, however, reject this assertion as this research is problem-driven in the pursuit of 'truths' and the adoption of my position is based around the aims of my study rather than a dogmatic adherence to a methods-driven approach.

3.5 Why Choose a Biographical Research Method?

Biographies fundamentally comprise the vicissitudes of intention, carefully organised in time (Bruner, 1987; Ricoeur, 1983). Because human intentions drive narratives, a comprehension of stories helps us to better comprehend social phenomena. As such, a biographical method was apposite to the aims of my study because of its unique qualities in connecting the private and the public spheres, of student experience on the one hand and educational policy on the other. As Chamerberlayne et al. (2002) note, the biographical method stands alone in its capacity to link the personal and the social, to facilitate the mix of individual and researcher narrative and to provide empowerment in professional practice. My desire to explore pupils' narratives within the national educational system is hardly unique; it mirrors the greater turn of the social sciences since the early 1990s (Chamberlayne et al., 2002) to more closely interrelate human and sociopolitical development, what Gottfried (1998, p. 452) describes as the need to 'prise open the different dimensions of lived totality'.

In addition, biographical studies also have the potential to provide people living in modern society with its tendency towards alienation and fragmentation with an increased sense of selfhood and purpose by constructing their evolving narratives (McAdams, 1985). In this view the self is actually a 'life story' which supplies our identity. Bruner even argues that the role of the narrative, forms the basis for 'negotiability', the process whereby an individual presents themselves to the world through a storied version of their life (Bruner, 1986, p. 181).

This notion of participants presenting 'storied versions' of their lives is appealing in making meaning of the complex processes of education, and also concurs with Denzin's (1986, p.17) holistic judgment that 'the goal of [biographical] investigation is to reveal how ordinary people give meaning to their lives, within the limits of the freedom given them.' Chamberlayne (2002, p. 9) goes further by noting that gerontologists often see biography and narrative maintenance as an important contributor to the 'maintenance of identity, the presentation of the self and the transference of key cultural and personal elements: even a guarantee of immortality at the end of life'. Narrative thus becomes a cohering mechanism to make sense of temporal lives (Ricoeur, 1983). Despite these strengths, I was also aware of the caveats in such arguments. For example, McAdams (1985, p.125) notes that these stories are always 'filtered' by the social, historical and cultural context in which they are reproduced:

If the first principle of stories is that they exist to be told, then any consideration of narrative coherence must eventually come to terms with the characteristic assumptions regarding what kinds of stories can and should be told in a given culture, what stories are understandable and valued among people who live in and through a given culture. And the same consideration cannot be divorced from cultural expectations regarding what kinds of lives people should live.

What is clear, however, is that the individual biographies that emerge from these stories – whilst single and unique – also have the power to illuminate the more general by making more vivid our awareness of the relationship between personal experience and the wider society (Wright-Mills, 2000). Wright-Mills (2000, p.8) memorably argues that the sociological imagination ‘enables its possessor to understand the larger scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life’ and to connect ‘personal troubles to public issues.’

3.6 A Personal Perspective on Narrative and Biography

My rationale for selecting a biographical method goes beyond the ‘professional’ and is an equally personal fascination. Just as Barthes (1966, p. 16) contends, ‘the history of narrative begins with the history of humankind [as] there does not exist, and has never existed, a people without narratives’, I have been fascinated by stories for as long as I can remember and I begin this section with a brief narrative of my own. Influenced by the work of Harding (2004) and her concept of ‘standpoint theory’ I feel that my own narrative is an important part of the methodological approach I decided to adopt. Harding (2004) offers a post-modern approach on the researcher’s *perception* of reality, which states that the sum of our day-to-day experiences has an influence on our opinions and attitudes.

I was born to a working-class family (my mother was a cleaner and my father a lorry driver) in a household with only two books that I can recall (a children’s pop-up bible rarely opened and a copy of Charles Lamb’s *Tales from Shakespeare* inherited from a family friend). Given this background, it was perhaps unusual that I was drawn to the study of literature, eventually graduating from the University of Southampton with a degree in English in 2001. I then qualified as a teacher of English with a PGCE from the University of Birmingham in the following year. The research of Macmillan, Tyler & Vignoles (2013) suggests, given my

background, I had only a tiny probability of graduating from a Russell Group University. My own status as an outlier in the wider educational narrative has always forced me to ask questions about my academic self-concept and identity. These questions relate to the accuracy of my recollections and the relevance of such if we are to accept Bruner's (1986, p.709) assertion that 'a life as led is inseparable from a life as *told*—or more bluntly, a life is not "how it was" but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted.'

My professional role as a teacher has also given me a different narrational perspective; I see events of others mediated through my own experiences. I have adopted the role of narrator in this study but with a desire to embrace a range of other voices, as 'any story one may tell about anything is better understood by considering other possible ways in which it can be told' (Bruner, 1986, p.708). Whilst reading for the EdD and particularly the unit concerned with auto/biography, I have glanced across the bookcase in my office many times and been reminded of Nick Hornby's (2007) words in the *Polysyllabic Spree* in a new light.

All the books we own, both read and unread, are the fullest expression of self we have at our disposal. ... But with each passing year, and with each whimsical purchase, our libraries become more and more able to articulate who we are, whether we read the books or not.

Whilst there is a certain appeal in literature being to 'articulate' who I am, I have come to understand that as a father, husband, son, teacher, learner and researcher I do not consider that it is merely my library that is able to articulate who I am, but rather a synthesis of the *life narratives* of the many people with whom I have interacted over the course of my life. Perhaps in this context it is less surprising that, in trying to understand more clearly aspects of my personal and professional lives, I was drawn to explore the experiences of others through their narratives.

3.7 Narratives of Schooling – What is missing from the 'Pupil Voice' Literature?

There is a 'narrative' gap in what has become known as 'pupil voice' research. In this part of the chapter I explore what is meant by 'epiphanies' in narrative literature and discuss its omission from the canon of pupil voice literature. I offer a definition of what is meant by 'pupil voice' and a brief analysis of the relative merits and caveats of pupil voice as an emancipatory tool.

3.7.1 What do we mean by Pupil Voice?

The concept of 'pupil voice' remains something of a contentious area. Fielding (2011) argues that the voice of pupils can be a radical agent of change, which impacts on both pedagogy and curriculum. It is also considered to be the extent to which learners are active agents in decision-making which has a direct impact on the quality of teaching and learning which they experience. Hipkins (2010, p. 86) contends that these definitions do not go far enough and explains that 'pupil voice' has become something of a 'catch-all phrase that appears to be underpinned by at least five different types of pedagogical application, each of them linked to a different body of theory.' Hipkins' model is summarised below in diagrammatical form (see Figure 3.1).

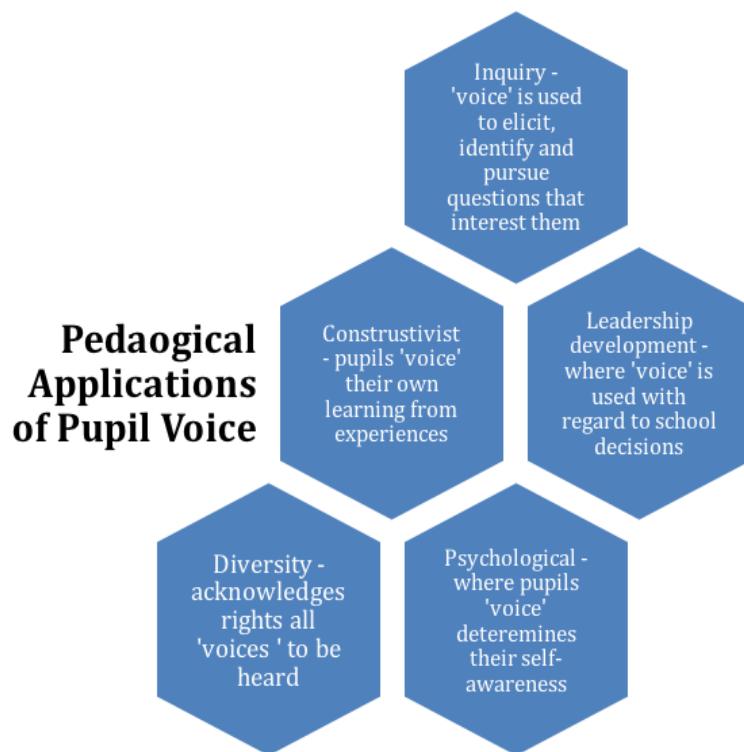


Figure 3.1 Diagrammatical Summary of Hipkins' (2010) Pedagogical Applications of Pupil Voice

In essence, her work notes that 'pupil voice' research usually relates to either constructivism, where pupils construct meanings from their learning experiences or inquiry approaches where pupils elicit and pursue questions that interest them and make links to their own lives. It also encompasses leadership development (where pupils contribute to organisations' decision

making processes) or psychological development (where pupils are encouraged to enhance their reflection skills in order to regulate their own cognitive processes). Finally, it is concerned with diversity, where the rights of all learners to be 'heard' are considered, particularly with regard to Special Educational Needs or minority groups.

3.7.2 Pupil Voice and Narrative

Hipkins' (2010) work is concerned with voice but seems to almost entirely overlook *narrative*, and in particular how the wider political and social context impacts upon the 'day to day' negotiations of pupils in the school that are often far from arbitrary (Benjamin, Nind, Hall, Collins, & Sheehy, 2003). This is also true of the wider literature, where the voices of those who are excluded from the system or overlooked by the research community are often absent (Clarke, Boorman, & Nind, 2011). Whatever criticisms of the validity of *narrative* that exist, there seems little doubt that the personal narratives illustrated by memoirs, biographies and autobiographies have a unique potential to paint vivid pictures of the human experience. It is for this reason that Ricoeur (1991, p.73) argues that human lives become more understandable when they are interpreted within the context of the stories that people tell about themselves and within the narrative 'genres' borrowed from fiction and history.

The use of pupil voice in school policy is still a relatively recent phenomenon, with major developments predominantly in the last century as previously children were 'considered to be passive, silent, compliant, submissive and incompetent spectators of life events' (Cheminais, 2008, p. 1). Recently, there has been a dramatic change, however, to embrace pupil voice. Flutter and Ruddock (2004) note that in times of great change and education reform exploring learning through the eyes of those most closely affected has the greatest potential to improve the quality of education as they are the 'expert witnesses'.

Indeed, as Flutter and Ruddock (2004) contend, although the rhetoric about hearing and responding to the learner voice has been a clear policy agenda for a number of years, learners are still seldom consulted and remain largely 'passive' agents in the complex change processes at work in educational organisations. It is also important to caution against what Nieto (1994) considers an overly romanticised view of pupil voice that considers their views in isolation

from other key stakeholders. There also remains debate about the accuracy of the notion that all pupils desire the opportunity to speak out and whether or not everyone can (Curtis, Roberts, Copperman, Downie, & Liabo, 2004). Whitty and Wisby (2007) also caution against schools' tendency to include pupil voice because of their desire to acquiesce to the current policy zeitgeist, noting the difference between such 'surface' engagement and genuine provision which requires a degree of influence, authority and power to be passed to pupils. There are also real concerns about the ways in which the voices of pupils with special educational needs are interpreted and used in the school system, a phenomenon Fielding (2011) considers typical and terms as 'marginalization, condescension and [merely] prudential inclusion.' Lundy (2005) goes even further, noting the lexical problem in phrases such as 'pupil voice' that actually limit the obligation for schools to implement article 12 of the United Nations' Conventions on the Rights of the Child. She argues that for meaningful pupil interaction to happen the concepts of space, voice, audience and influence must be fully implemented. Essentially, in these terms, Pupil Voice cannot be a 'bolt-on' but must be weaved into the culture of organisations and have tangible, meaningful impact on policy and pupils' experiences.

These concerns are echoed across the literature, with frequent references to pupil voice rarely having an influence on school performance metrics as 'rarely are their voices taken seriously into account in policies devised to improve teaching, learning and achievement' (Wood, 2003, p. 390). This resonates with the discussion about performance metrics in the literature discussed in Chapter 2, where I noted that the clashes between the progressives and the traditionalists often seemed to overlook the narratives of lived experience in defining measures of success.

Perhaps then, what is missing from the literature is real consideration about pupils' *narratives*, which is highly significant if we are to accept Ricoeur's (1983) view that narrative provides a similar referential function to figurative language. Just as metaphors allow us to see the world in a way that is not possible through direct, literal description, narrative allows us to understand the temporal nature of existence through the bridge of the poetic power and plot of narrative. As such, narration has the potential to *illuminate* pupils' experiences in a way that the tacit acceptance of the pupil voice strategies does not. Whilst Whitty and Wisby (2007) note that almost all schools in England and Wales now have a school council, and the general

response from teachers and pupils tends to be positive, I question whether there is enough here to really appreciate the rich pupil experience. Whilst advocates of pupil voice such as Alderson (2000) consider that the creation of school councils can be seen as evidence of a concrete manifestation of pupil voice theory, there is still work to be done. There is scarce evidence that policies are in place to ensure that pupils participate in formal, democratic and transparent activities that are linked to the broader governance of the school. When any 'pupil voice' initiative gains any real power or authority though, there is immediate controversy, particularly with regard to pupils helping to make decisions about the appointments of staff or with regard to evaluating the quality of classroom instruction. The professional association NASUWT (2015) argue that:

youngsters making judgments about the suitability for posts and competence in the classroom of those who teach them must be seriously questioned by the profession rather than accepted as either a natural extension of the concept of student voice or an appropriate interpretation of it

Greene and Hogan (2005, p. 3) recognise the dramatic paradigmatic shift that took hold as researchers embraced pupil voice, whereby children were increasingly recognised as 'sentient beings who can act with intention' and who have not only future value, but present value, as well; but I question whether this process has gone far enough in exploring the wider experiences of young people's schooling. One aspect of biographical research that is conspicuously missing from the pupil voice literature is the notion of narrative *epiphanies*. Denzin (1989) argues that there are four kinds of epiphanic moment: the major upheaval, the cumulative, the illuminative and the relived. In the context of my study, young people emerging from the school system may attribute specific meanings to life course events (e.g. examination results, curriculum choices, setting, transition from primary to secondary school) that they consider to be epiphanic. Denzin (1999, p.70) notes that these epiphanies have the potential to 'leave marks on people's lives' and help us as researchers to understand their significance. In a similar fashion Erben (1998, p.7) adopts the term 'specific events' but chooses not to place the same emphasis on the 'drama' of these moments, noting that this is not necessary for them to become significant and immediate in people's narratives. In the context of this thesis, I use a blend of both Denzin (1998) and Erben's (1998) definitions, (although I differentiate between what I term 'kernel and satellite' events - see definition later

in this chapter) to demonstrate the range of core and peripheral narrative events and how they combine to constitute the overall pupil experience.

Whichever definition of epiphanies is chosen, there is little recognition of the significance of individual 'specific' events in the pupil voice literature. On the contrary, Tangen (2008), for example, asserts that most 'pupil voice' educational research still treats pupils as 'end users' or even 'consumers' of educational provision but does not always acknowledge that their 'experiences, ideas, choices and relationships are interesting in their own right' (p.157). The research literature also makes several assumptions about representation, with Mazzei and Jackson (2012) noting that there are epistemological limits to use of pupil voice. Even when researchers try to use the 'exact words' of learners as if they are transparent they are betraying the unequal power relationships that are present, tacit – and sometimes exploitative – research agendas. Sometimes this 'exploitation' is an unwitting product of the suppression of narrative that is a by-product of traditional qualitative methods.

3.8 The Suitability of Biography for this Study

Biographical research is particularly apposite for this research as it offers a distinctive way of conceptualising the social activity (Miller, 1999) of schooling. Bell (2005, p.34) argues that it is biographical approaches to both inquiry and analysis that are most appropriate when the researcher is attempting to delineate such intensely personal snapshots of human experience. She notes that narrative inquiry typically involves auto/biography, the 'reconstruction' of life stories, and even the verbatim inclusion of excerpts from participants' stories to illustrate the wider themes elicited by the researcher or team. Wengraf & Chamberlayne (2006) attribute the vast increase in the popularity of biographical methods to their value for exploring the 'lived-experiences' of research participants. One of the key aspects of biographical research methods is their potential for sampling this form of 'lived' experience (Silverman, 2009) through the variety of past and present events described.

In addition, Josselson (2007, p.16) contends that through the process of narrative interviews, researchers can learn the:

individual meanings of complex and nuanced aspects of their lives including relationships ... their families their work, and their selves. [Researchers] can learn

about all the experiences, from joy through grief, that together constitute the human condition.

It is, in this respect, what Josselson (2007, p.534) calls a 'relational endeavor' that is concerned with collecting, documenting and reflecting on people's personal experiences, in this study the complex and nuanced range of experience that constitute compulsory schooling in the English state system.

3.9 The Potential of Narratives

The 'narrative turn' in the social sciences – which Denzin (1989) considers to be a fait accompli – is rooted in the notion that there is no alternative to narrative in describing the personal life history of people (Alheit & Dausien, 1999). Chamberlayne et al. (2002) term this 'the lived experience' to describe this principle whilst Goodson & Sikes (2001) advocate the potential of narrative research to answer 'big' questions about identity in educational settings. Whilst some positivists would consider openness in competing interpretations as something of a vice, this is often seen as a virtue in narrative studies (Czarniawska, 2004) as the research seeks to understand the complex nature of the human experience and understand the lived life.

Theorists also note the potential of narrative for probing the relations between the observation of human action, the action itself and the telling of actions. Ricoeur (1983, p.52) argues that each life event and act does not exist in isolation, but rather involves what he terms 'a logic of emplotment', with each and every life event linked intrinsically and causally. Through the telling of events, he argues, there exists a narrative emplotment and this offers a degree of coherence to seemingly separate events, people motivations and temporalities. In this view, life narratives must be given some degree of context in the same fashion that 'masterplots' and genres offer a coherent framework for the analysis of the literary text (see Chapter 5). Ricoeur (1983) also argues that narrative can be a mediating concept for linking the poles of 'promising' – where selfhood is maintained in spite of temporal change - and 'character' where permanence of disposition continues.

In addition, biographical researchers may see a benefit in such methods for treating narratives as individual, holistic 'wholes' and accepting that what participants have to say about their own

experiences and self-concepts provides richer data than research assumptions and questions (Wengraf, 2001). For this reason, Wengraf & Chamberlayne (2006) note an increasing number of studies, such as this one, are starting to use narrative methods to address 'applied' issues of policy and practice – making it particularly appropriate in the field of education where there are distinct challenges for measuring the 'abstract' qualities of learning. Understanding the individual's unique and changing perspective as it is mediated by context takes precedence over questions of fact. In the narrative perspective, 'context' includes both positioning in social structure and time, which is as important as the social context of the interview itself (Miller & Brewer, 2003). In addition, there is the important notion of 'narrative coherence'. Since one of the defining features of the narrative form is 'coherence' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p.37) we must question how this affects our knowledge of the potential *incoherence* of life as it is lived in reality.

One of the most compelling reasons to adopt the narrative interview method is Greenhalgh and Hurwitz's (1998, p. 48) assertion that the study of narrative offers a unique opportunity for constructing an understanding that cannot be arrived at by any other method or means. Their work sets out a series of seven cyclical principles for narrative research which are all subtly interconnected and need to be constantly revisited through the process, which I have summarised diagrammatically here (see Figure 3-1). In this study, the most apposite and compelling is the 'ethical dimension' which reflects what 'should have been done' in particular circumstances and the 'inherently subversive' nature of the method, and finally the 'tension' in the method (Bruner, 1987) between the canonical and the unexpected that reflects the tensions explored within the literature review in Chapter 2. Indeed, Mishler (1986) contends that giving particularly close attention to stories that participants construct has a greater potential to radically re-examine existing practices than more 'traditional' methods of qualitative research. Mishler (1986, p.53) argues that other forms of qualitative research can unwittingly 'train' interviewers to interrupt rich narratives with shorter, suppressed responses.

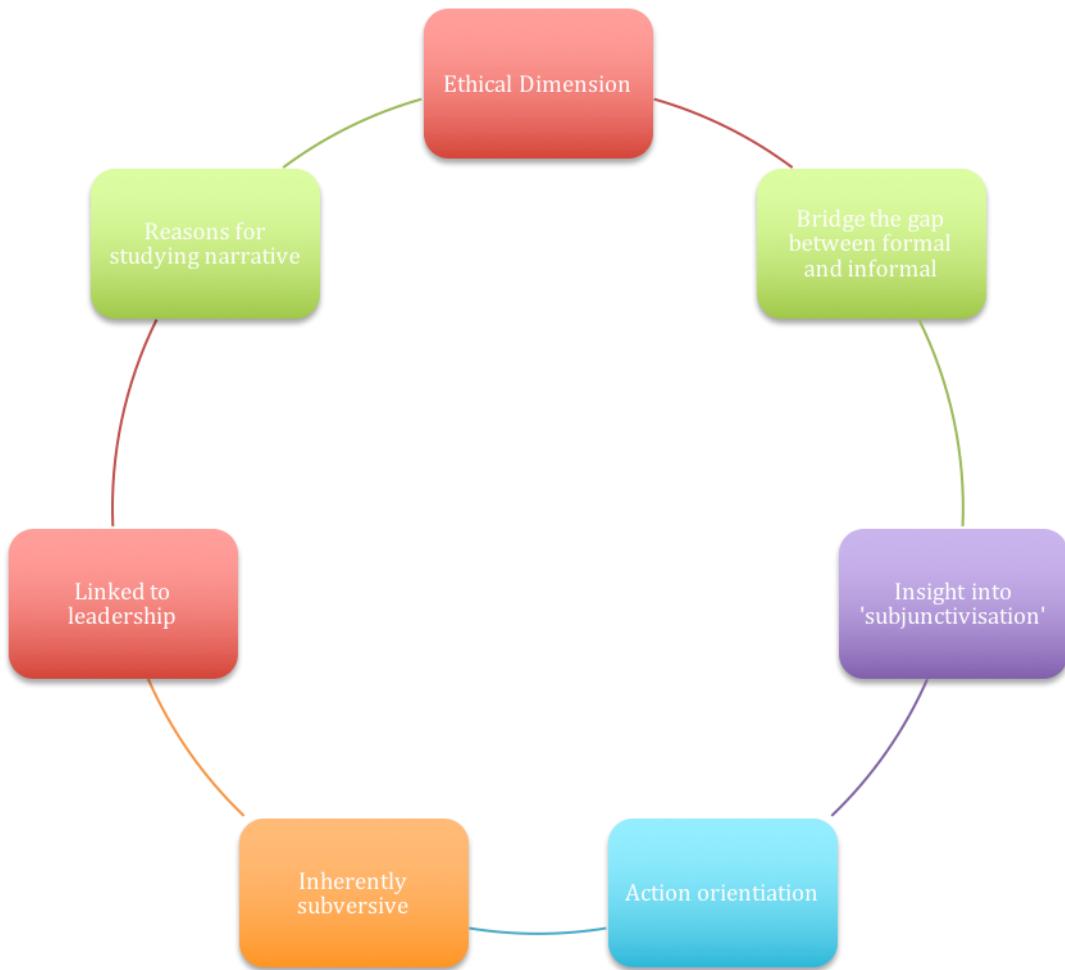


Figure 3-1 A Summary of Greenlalgh and Hurwitz's (2005) Reasons for Studying Biography

3.10 Power and Biographical Writing

Perhaps as a direct result of the power of the biographical method as outlined above, there are significant ethical concerns that are intrinsically linked to the method. The process of 'life writing' is, perhaps of necessity, steeped in concern for ethics and power relationships. Indeed, Barton (2005, p. 317) contends that the very process of research becomes something of a 'social' activity and that, as such, it involves 'interactions and relationships with a range of individuals and groups which entail ethical, procedural and political issues'. Despite these complex concerns, however, the use of narrative is essential in this study as it offers a valuable opportunity for advocacy and empowerment. Denzin (1989) argues that narrative researchers 'must always be interventionist' which is particularly pertinent to this project as I seek to give a voice to those who may otherwise have been 'passive agents' of the educational system and who had not necessarily been allowed an opportunity to construct and tell their personal narratives.

3.11 Towards an Ethical Framework

As well as the broader ethical concerns discussed at the beginning of this chapter, it is also important to consider the emancipatory potential of biography, together with the method's potential to enable the exploration of individual life narratives as illustrations of wider social, cultural, economic and educational factors (Josselson, 2007). This is the key reason that this thesis is constructed around the 'stories' of others. As Couser (2004) notes, however, ethical scrutiny must be at the forefront of the study as the research participants could be argued to be, disempowered or marginalised as little is known about their unique contexts. Josselson (2007, p.17) argues that the central challenge of the ethical conundrum in biographical research is rooted in the researcher's 'duality' as they are required to construct a relatively intimate relationship with the research participant (normally initiated by the researcher) whilst retaining a professional, scholarly role in the research community (see diagrammatical summary in Figure 3-2).

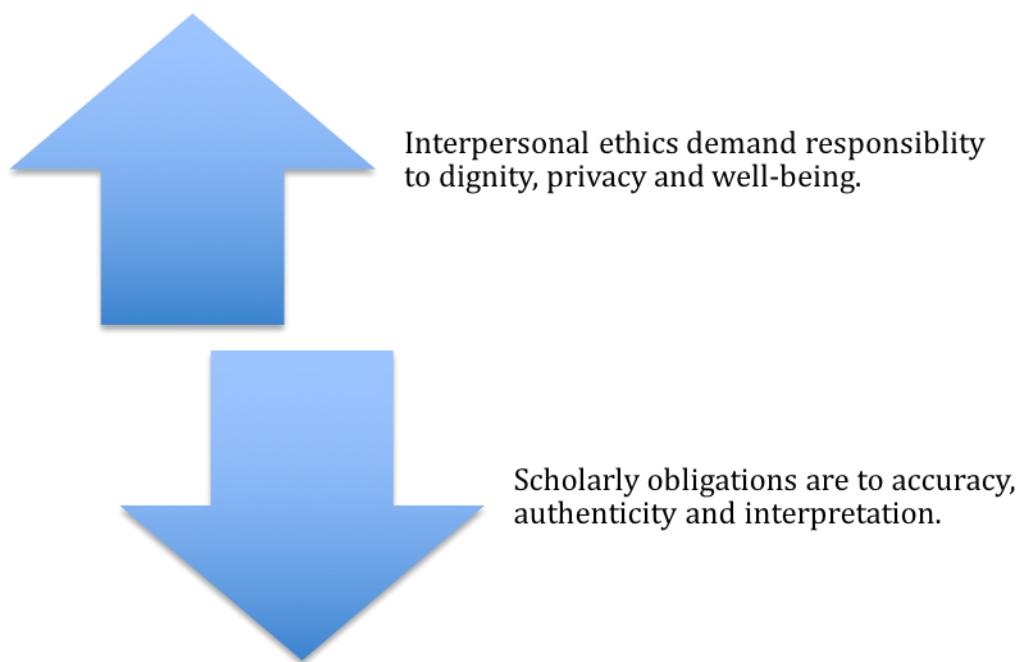


Figure 3-2 Summary of Josselson's (2007) ethical conundrum

One of the first ethical questions I faced was whether I had the right to speak and write for the participants in my study. The responsibility of narrating their experiences as a third party was certainly worthy of some discussion, particularly as I could be seen to be in a 'privileged'

position – an ethical issue that extends beyond the writing of participants' stories. I use the term as defined by Alcoff (1991) where the authority of the researcher may be enjoyed by virtue of their gender, race, class or sexuality. This is particularly pertinent in the context of my research as I am operating in several different roles – that of the white, male middle-class teacher, Deputy Headteacher and researcher – and it was potentially difficult for my participants to be able to put aside their perceptions of me as a figure of authority. I did take several steps to address this, ensuring that the interviews took place outside of a school office, and several weeks after the participants had left school. I also ensured that I had no direct teaching contact with any of my participants.

Whilst an ethic of care sits behind my study, as a researcher I was conscious of being caught in Josselson's conundrum (see Figure 3-2) of wanting rich data driven by relevant and vivid pictures of participants' experiences of schooling whilst simultaneously having genuine concerns that these vivid pictures would become a painful invasion of privacy. Narrative methods are not exclusive in being governed by ethical principles, but what is meant by 'research ethics' in qualitative research remains a matter of some debate and is perhaps further exacerbated when looking at the personal stories which are constructed through narrative methods. Morrow & Richards (1996, p. 5) define ethics in qualitative research as a set of 'moral principles and rules of conduct' and consider the responsibility placed on the researcher to be respectful and fair to participants.

Such concerns make Bell's (1987) assertion that all ethical research should be founded upon the 'informed consent' of the participant somewhat problematic with regard to narrative studies, although it was still possible in this study to follow the guidance of Blaxter et al. (2006) in reaching agreements about how my participants' data would be used. In the context of this study, this was agreed before the interviews commenced and I was able to share transcripts and plans regarding the analytical processes with my participants.

There is, however, an argument that being ethical is more complex and goes beyond the gaining of consent, and that it is central to a dilemma that researchers face in the pursuit of truth. Cohen & Manion (1980) note that researchers continually need to consider the complex tension between the scholarly constraints placed upon them as professional researchers in the pursuit of 'truth', and the threat to their participants' values, privacy and rights. This

phenomenon, that Cohen & Manion (1980, p.75) term the 'cost/benefits' ratio, is summarised with perspicacity by Cavan (1977, p.18):

Being ethical is a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others. Being ethical limits the choices we can make in the pursuit of the truth. Ethics say that while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better.

Merrill & West (2009), however, present a far more complex view of ethical responsibility with regard to narrative. They contend that being ethical is about thinking proactively about 'values' – a carefully considered sense of what is ethically appropriate in a reciprocal research relationship rather than the simple notion of avoiding harm. If being ethical is grounded in treating people with human dignity (Cavan, 1977, p.19) then the researcher must accept that doing research can never truly be 'value neutral' with this being particularly pertinent in the case of biographical research. They determine that researchers must retain a commitment to principled and ethical endeavour during the process:

Biographical research can be a fundamentally humanistic as well as a respectful endeavour, and it is important not to lose sight of this in the desire to get results. (Merrill & West, 2009, p. 168).

This was particularly significant for my study as I realised that when my participants were narrating their educational experiences there was a significant probability that their stories would contain intimate detail. For this reason, the establishment and preservation of trust was crucial to the process (Merrill & West, 2009). In addition to this sensitivity, I also ensured that no information about or obtained during the interviews was shared beyond my supervisory team. The interview data was only be available me, stored in password protected areas on my personal computer. Where I used quotations from participant interviews in constructing the analysis chapter, I have used pseudonyms and taken other necessary steps to reasonably disguise the identity of the research participants.

Throughout the interview process I made it obvious to participants that they may withdraw their consent to participate at any point. This was clearly indicated through the consent documentation and made clear at every stage throughout the process (e.g. a verbal reminder was given prior to the interview). One of the most significant ethical concepts referred to in the research design is 'voluntarism' within which the issue of 'timed consent' is important. I did

everything possible to adhere to Alderson's (1996) guidance that there is an ethical responsibility to give participants the option to opt-out of the research at any time.

Somewhat paradoxically, biographical researchers can sometimes, however, be criticised heavily for telling too much truth. Monette (1998) claims that sometimes controversial narratives can provide details that society is simply not ready to accept because of deep-rooted cultural inhibitions and prejudices. It has also been argued that both the act of creating biography and its content can confirm the 'power' and 'status' of both the researcher and the participant. Eakin (2004, p.5) asks whether this 'casts a shadow' over the method as it poses the question of whether you have to have a story in order to be considered a person - particularly important with vulnerable participants who are suffering from Alzheimer's disease, memory loss or dementia. This view is contested by Ryan et al. (2009, p. 146) who argue that both biographical and autobiographical studies can help research participants to offer 'full expressions of personhood'.

Because the participants in my study lived their experience of schooling in a social context, their individual 'privacies' were – in reality - largely shared, making it hard to demarcate the boundary where one life narrative concludes and another begins. It is through our shared sense of composition, Montello (2006) argues, that we are privileged in developing a complex web of communications that form our shared-narratives. For this reason, the biographical researcher must ask whether 'life writing' can be considered a form of 'trespass'. Rather hyperbolically, Malcolm (1994, p. 16) sees the biographer as 'a professional burglar, breaking into a house, rifling through certain drawers that he has good reason to think contain the jewelry and money, and triumphantly bearing his loot away.' I ensured that my participants were entirely comfortable sharing their narratives and that anything they wished to remain 'private' would be omitted. In one instance, a participant asked for reassurance of anonymity and I redacted some information from the transcripts and analysis that could potentially make that individual identifiable.

(Goodley, 2004, p. 165) argues that biographical researchers need to work 'relationally, emotionally and empathically with the people whose stories [they] are hoping to tell'. However, as Merrill & West (2009) note, too often such research activity is based on minimal involvement because of restrictions in time and funding. They are also heavily critical of the

'industry' of research that sees researchers 'missing out on the longer-term gifts ... [of] relationships with people who can enhance a researcher's knowledge of the word' (p.40). There was a challenging reality in the context of my study, with my participants all leaving to study at University or abroad making further access problematic.

Whilst there are a range of examples of how narrative approaches (oral narratives, interviews, personal testimonies) have been used in emancipatory studies (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002) the issue of validity remains contentious. In defence of narrative methods, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) argue that the very process of eliciting stories has the virtue of 'indexicality' – a form of 'anchoring' of original accounts to concrete events that can be proved to have happened – thus ensuring a degree of validity. Whilst other advocates of the method, such as Ezzy (2013), make claim to the emancipatory potential of narrative, the question of 'validity' remains complex. Sapsford and Jupp (1996) perceive validity as the measurement or characterisation of what the authors claim, and the process of ensuring that the interpretations of the data are fair and just. Therefore, it is fundamental that the researcher ensures that the structure of a piece of research determines the conclusions that can be drawn from it and, most importantly, the conclusions that should not be drawn from it (Cohen and Manion, 1980).

Beyond this, there are still profound theoretical differences in interpretation when it comes to the concept of research 'validity'. When theories are synthesised with practice, threats to research validity can never be entirely erased (Cohen & Manion, 1980) but their impact can be 'attenuated by attention to validity and reliability of the study.' Interpretivists tend to be less concerned with validity, preferring to focus on 'authenticity' (arguably a type of validity) of responses. There is also the 'realist' perspective that argues that the validity of biographical studies is derived from the extent to which the work is a convincing account of past events (Moses & Knutsen, 2012). Critical realists such as Bhaskar (1975), however, argue that validity is partly founded in an 'internal' account of the past, which is always 'mediated' through the present, including linguistic and relationship issues (Merrill & West, 2009). In order to address this notion of validity, I asked my participants to verify the authenticity of the transcripts and the narrative vignettes, making amendments as appropriate.

Perhaps the greatest criticism of the 'validity' of biographical research is the view that biographies derived in collaboration with participants are 'time-limited' snapshots of what

Wengraf (2001) terms the 'official press-release' perspective. However, the methods that I have adapted and deployed challenge these issues by collecting narratives that comprise my participants' educational biographies.

As a novice biographical researcher I found myself in a position of both great privilege and great responsibility in conducting this study. As I have argued in Chapter 2, researchers often ignore pupils' voices, and this study had the potential to afford emancipatory opportunities, to give a voice to the relatively disenfranchised and marginalized. As a researcher I also had a great responsibility to distinguish between an exploitative voice of self-aggrandizement and offering an opportunity to hear the 'truth' of the genuine voice of resistance and struggle (Hooks, 1989). In employing narrative methods, my need to respect human dignity was magnified by the 'personal' nature of the data and the ethical code outlined in this chapter was as fundamental to the project as the discovery of 'truth'.

3.12 The Research Design and Process

In this section I justify my selection of the participants and explain the choice of interview method as a Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative (SQIN) and present in some detail the interview schema for this study. I primarily based the interview design on the model developed by Jovchelovitch & Bauer (2000). The section concludes with some thoughts on data analysis and its distinct separation from the interview process.

3.13 Choosing the Participants

I selected as research participants four adults who were former students of the schools used in this study. The rationale for this was that they had recently completed (within three months) their academic studies at Key Stage 4 (GCSE Level) and Key Stage 5 ('A' Level) and as such, they were able to communicate their first-hand experiences of studying in the current climate of examination reform. I also selected participants that represented as broad a range of pupil characteristics as possible (e.g. gender, range of attainment based on GCSE Average Point Score (APS)) in such a small sample size.

At the time of the research the participants were 18 years-old and had left full-time compulsory education, therefore there would be no reason for me to assume that they could not give full informed consent. I decided to follow the guidance of Alderson (1995) that competence to consent should be defined by three guiding principles: the participants' wisdom, understanding and freedom. This guidance suggests that participants must always be assumed to be competent to provide their consent to participate and that the researcher's onus should be on proof of *incompetence*. Unlike most research deemed to reflect 'pupil voice', the participants of this study would not be under the responsibility or care of others and as such it was not necessary to obtain permission from parents or carers. As a courtesy, however, the schools used in this study were consulted and gave permission for the school site to be used for the interviews, even though the participants are alumni of the organisation.

One of the most challenging questions was how many interviews would be sufficient in order to answer the research questions. Baker and Edwards (2012) pose the question 'How many qualitative interviews are enough?' and conclude that the answer is 'it depends':

The usefulness of [the guidance] ... depends upon ... epistemological and methodological questions about the nature and purpose of the research: whether the focus of the objectives and analysis is on commonality or difference or uniqueness or complexity or comparison or instances. Practical issues to take into account include the level of degree, the time available, institutional committee requirements
(Baker and Edwards, 2012, p.42)

For the purposes of this study, and having undertaken a trial narrative interview with a different volunteer, I decided that four narrative interviews would provide sufficient data and fitted the scope of the project.

3.14 The Interview Process

Denzin & Lincoln (2008) define the interview process as the collection of the array of 'life documentation', which describes the central 'turning-point' snapshots of time in individuals' lives. As Wengraf (2001, p.149) concludes:

All [interview] design strategy is a compromise, and any implementation is further compromise. Your theory of interviewing subjects and process, and your overall

research design, dictates what is an acceptable compromise and what, in given conditions, is unacceptable or counter-productive for your particular research purposes.

The interview process used in this research is adapted from a variety of different models (Wengraf, 2001; Flick, 1998) but it is most closely aligned to the guidance offered by Jovchelovitch & Bauer (2000) in that it follows the 'three phase' model, which I explore in further detail below. Schutze (1977) argues that a certain degree of systemisation is important in the narrative interviewing process as all stories are constructed from a series of underlying rules that create a sort of self-generation schema. Jovchelovitch & Bauer (2000) see this process as a three stage schema which is summarised diagrammatically in Figure 3-3.

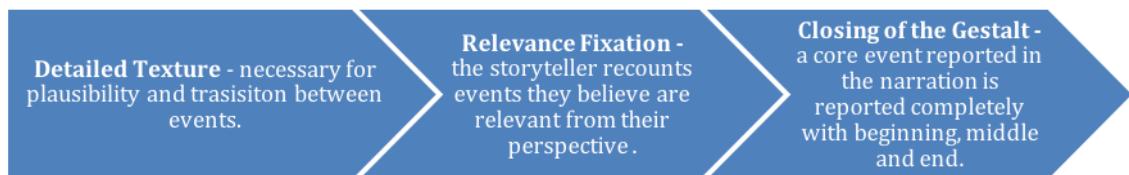


Figure 3-3 Schema of Narrative Interviews

Such interview schemas make the assumption that the interviewee is able to best reveal their stories using spontaneous language to narrate their experiences, however there is both a paradox here (the constraints of the tacit rules of conversation 'confine' rather than liberate powerful storytelling) and a rather big assumption that interviewees will 'just talk' without adequate structure. Gubrium and Holstein (2002, p.256) are critical of such assumptions:

People seldom just "burst out" in stories. It takes work. For a narrative to emerge, the teller must be able to string together multiple sentences while retaining the attention of listeners without having them intrude into the conversation with anything more than signals that they are being attentive. A narrative space must be established in the give-and-take of social interaction. For the narrative to run its course, the speaker must sustain the line of talk—in cooperation with those listening to the narrative. In other words, in one way or another, narratives must be invited, incited, or initiated.

My challenge in this study, as with all narrative research, was how to elicit powerful narratives without 'confining' participants' stories within a series of tacit or explicit rules. To achieve this, I used an adapted version of the elicitation technique advised by Jovchelovitch & Bauer (2000).

3.15 Setting the Scene for Narrative Interviews

I explained the context of this study in broad terms to the individual participants both verbally and in writing. I then reminded them of the information on the Participant Information Sheet (see p.181) and asked for their permission to record the interview onto a USB digital recorder. The procedure for the narrative interview was then shared: first the uninterrupted story (I used the terms 'narrative' and 'main narration' as in the pilot interview the terms used by Jovchelovitch & Bauer proved to be the source of a little confusion) before a later questioning phase. A few 'rules' were also shared with participants, particularly that once the narration began that the interviewer would not interrupt unless there was what Bauer (1996) terms a 'coda' in which the participant signals the end of the narrative. I also explained that I would abstain from any comment with the exception of non-verbal indications of 'active' or attentive listening (i.e. smiling, nodding, hand gestures).

Only at the end of the period of 'active' listening did I begin my questioning phase. At this stage examinант questions of the interviewer were modified into immanent questions to 'plug' any gaps in the overall narrative. At the end of the 'formal' interviews the digital recorder was left running (contrary to the advice of Bauer (1996)) as I was uncomfortable with the ethical implications of formally ending the recording but still collecting the data. Participants were made aware that the tape was still running. This is a controversial area, and in some respects depends on the researcher's interpretation of the 'gestalt' principle.

The 'whole' that was the unit of analysis in our research was not the 'whole' person (as if that is ever knowable). Rather it was all we managed to accumulate relating to a particular person who took part in the research. As well as the transcripts from both interviews, we have our memories of meetings with that person...what was said about our participant by others. But this definition refers only to an external reality. Maybe the gestalt principle is best understood also as the internal capacity for holding those data together in the mind.

(Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p.38)

For the purpose of this study, the principle of 'gestalt' is closely aligned with the principle that the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of many parts. Wertheimer (2000) – considered one of the founders of gestalt psychology - objects to the way that social scientists have proceeded from 'below to above'. He believed that it was impossible to:

achieve an understanding of structured totals by starting with the ingredient parts which enter into them. On the contrary we shall need to understand the structure; we shall need to have insight into it. There is then some possibility that the components themselves will be understood.

Arguments about the 'gestalt' aside, the contextual information provided during the 'fifth stage' of the interviews was an important source of data for the project (Bauer, 1996). A more detailed schema for the interviews is provided in Appendix I on p.181.

Table 3-1 A Detailed Interview Schema

Phase	Rules
1. Preparation	The field of research was explored and examanent questions were formulated
2. Initiation	The initial topic for narration was formulated using stimulus material and 'full information' for participants (see ethics)
3. Main narration	There were no interruptions during the main narration with only non-verbal encouragement to continue the 'flow' of the narration.
4. Questioning phase	In this stage only questions using the narrator's language can be used. Non-opinion or attitude questions can be asked and there can be no arguing or challenges to contradictions. Examanent questions become immanent questions.
5. Concluding talk	Once the formal interview ends the candidate can continue to talk. For ethical reasons, it is made clear that the conversation is still being recorded which is significantly different from the advice offered by Jovchelovitch & Bauer

3.16 Narrative Interview Design

In common with most methodological branches of the social sciences, there are various different competing and complementary narrative interview designs (Bauer, 1996; Wengraf, 2001) all of which share a set of key characteristics that ensure that the 'researcher's responsibility is to be a good listener and the interviewee is a storyteller, rather than a respondent' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p.7). The method is unique amongst interview methods in that it offers no fixed or 'defined' starting or finishing points. Andrews et al. (2008)

also contend that since there is no commonly accepted definition of 'narrative' there are no also self-evident categories on which to focus.

I use the metaphor of a computer screen to convey the role of a narrative interviewer. Imagine hitting the minimize icon on yourself as the interviewer, so that within the interview you shrink in significance and the 'screen' - the space of the interview - is filled by the teller and their story (Gunaratnam, 2016).

Narrative interviews can be synthesised into the following key principles:

- The narrative interview begins with one open question that Wengraf (2001) calls a 'SQUIN' (Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative). This carefully constructed single question was, in my case: "Please tell me the story of your life in education, all the events and experiences that have been important to you personally; how it all happened. Begin wherever you like, I won't interrupt; I'll just take some notes for afterwards"). It is offered at the outset with the interviewer obliged to keep any promises made in the question.
- The interview is not interrupted with questions. The researcher is required to facilitate a 'free' development and closure of a 'gestalt' by the participant. This may, on occasion, lead to the researcher being confused by the response of the participant or narrative. It is, however, fundamental that the researcher does not interrupt to find out 'why', or interrupt for clarification. Wengraf (2001) notes that if an interviewer interrupts the gestalt of a joke before the ending, the joke is weakened or destroyed. If you interrupt an initial narrative, the narrative interview is weakened or destroyed.
- Unlike some other qualitative frameworks, narrative research offers no 'defined' starting or finishing points (Andrews et al., 2008) as the very definition of narrative is itself a cause of some critical debate (Andrews et al., 2008). As well as the structure, the agenda is also open to development and change depending on the participant's experiences.
- There is a principle of conceptual 'openness' rather than an attempt at adherence to a prior hypothesis.
- Narrative interviews are 'experience centred' in that they are meaningful, definitively 'human' and represent experiences, transformations and changes.

- The general principles or ‘maxims’ of communication are followed but moderated by a concept of ‘active listening’ (Wengraf, 2001; Bauer, 1996).

There are some challenges to the principle of a SQUIN. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) consider that if a project has a definite theoretical structure (they cite crime/risk and anxiety as an example from their study) this could be an important frame for eliciting the key information resulting in the production of a series of key questions. Following pilot interviews, I rejected this stance as I felt that I was unwittingly ‘training’ my participants to provide information within tacit parameters. However, Chamberlayne et al. (2002) note that the silences and awkwardness that sometimes result from narrative interviews may also present some problems in terms of researchers’ and participants’ power within the process. To mitigate against these problems, some researchers constrain the open processes by adapting the SQUIN to reflect a family or career story and in this instance the SQUIN was adapted to ask participants about their experience of schooling (see example SQUIN above). The approach I adopted is summarised in Table 3-2.

Table 3-2 Bauer's (1996) Rules for Successful Elicitation in Narrative Interviews

Bauer's (1996) Rules for Successful Elicitation in Narrative Interviews	Adherence in this Study
<i>Phase 1: Presenting the initial central topic</i>	
<i>Rule 1.1</i> The initial topic needs to be experiential to the interviewee. This ensures his or her interest and is likely to lead to a detail account;	All participants are 'expert witnesses' (Flutter and Ruddick, 2004) as they have just completed thirteen years of compulsory education. Candidates were given full information about the study through the ethics process and Participant Information Sheets. 'Voluntarism' also ensured that participants had a keen interest in the study.
<i>Rule 1.2</i> The initial topic must not be a merely personal matter, but a matter of social or communal significance;	Education is widely acknowledged as a matter of social and communal significance. There is acknowledgement in the wider literature that real debate is needed about the ethics, necessity or justification for the intensive surveillance that takes place in the education system (Lumby & English, 2010).
<i>Rule 1.3</i> The informant should be vividly interested in the topic which concerns their own experience. This interest is not to be explicitly referred to.	Although I prefer the term 'participant' to 'informant' (the latter having negative connotations), this rule was adhered to by nature of the participant selection process. Participants could also choose to opt-out at any time if their interest waned.
<i>Rule 1.4</i> The topic must be broad enough to incorporate all the events of interest. It may be leading in the sense that the informant is inclined to develop a long string of past events which led to the event/problem of the study.	The breadth of the research topic has been the source of much debate between the researcher and the supervisory team. It is 'leading' in the sense that it is interested in the cumulative experiences of education across a long period, mapped against a zeitgeist of performativity and policy change.
<i>Rule 1.5</i> Avoid indexical formulations, i.e. do not refer explicitly to dates, named persons or places.	This rule was fully adhered to.
<i>Phase 2: Main Narration</i>	
<i>Rule 2.1</i> Restrict yourself to active listening and non-verbal or paralinguistic feedback (Hm..., yes..). Do	There is consensus in the literature (Wengraf, 2001; Bauer 1996) that although this sounds relatively simple

<p>not interrupt the narration by any question. While listening develop in your mind or on paper the questions for next phase of the interview.</p>	<p>it is often hard to achieve in reality. I undertook several pilot narrative interviews in order to 'rehearse' the formal interviews before the data was collected.</p>
<p><i>Rule 2.2</i> If the informant is marking the end of the story, probe for anything else he or she may want to add 'is that all you can tell me...?'</p>	<p>Wengraf (2001) notes that when narrative researchers are successful they will nearly always spontaneously end their account by saying something like "Well, that's it, that's my story, that's how it happened". I noted that a participant's silence does NOT necessarily indicate an ending.</p>
<p>Phase 3: Questioning</p>	
<p><i>Rule 3.1</i> Ask only questions concerning events like 'what happened before/after/then ...?' Do not directly ask for opinions, attitudes or causes (no why-questions).</p>	<p>I practised the narrative interview process in a pilot interview, noting the accuracy in this instance of Wengraf's (1995) assertion that 'it is a common experience for investigators to carefully craft interview questions, only to have participants respond with lengthy accounts—long stories that appear, on the surface, to have little to do with the question.'</p>
<p><i>Rule 3.2</i> Ask only immanent questions and use only the words which the informant has used. Questions only relate to events mentioned in the story. The interviewer translates his examenent questions into immanent questions.</p>	<p>This sounds simple but is incredibly difficult to apply in the interview situation (Wengraf, 2001). The pilot interview was essential in this regard.</p>
<p><i>Rule 3.3</i> Do not point to contradictions in the story of the informant to avoid a climate of cross-examination.</p>	<p>As above (see note on analysis at the end of this chapter).</p>
<p>Phase 4: Concluding Talk</p>	
<p><i>Rule 4.1</i> At the end of the interview, the tape recorder is switched off, but the most interesting discussion often appears. Talking in a relaxed mood after the 'show' often throws light on the more formal accounts given during the narration. This contextual information proves in many cases to be very important for the interpretation of the data.</p>	<p>This principle was not fully adhered to for ethical reasons and because of a differing interpretation of the 'gestalt' (see full discussion above).</p>

Whilst it is conventional to include a full discussion of data analysis in the methodology and methods chapter, in this thesis this information is included in the fifth chapter. My justification for this is that it mirrors the process that narrative researchers adopt when undertaking interviews; that the avoidance of interpretation at the interview stage is actually an integral part of the method. Wengraf (2001, p.3) explains:

[narrative] researchers may *ask for feelings, but only to get to narratives*. Their job is to avoid any interpretive action in the interview. In the interview, *as a BNIM researcher you focus on collecting more narrative data*. You start to move towards an 'interpretation' only after the interview.

As Hollway and Jefferson (2000) note, those unfamiliar with narrative research find the distinction between 'collection' and 'analysis' surprising and possibly even counterintuitive as they assume that participants should be asked to analyse their own contributions. However:

people can only be their own best explainers if they conform to the model of the rational, information-processing subject of psychology. This, [they argue] leaves a lot out and distorts researchers' views of subjectivity.
(Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p.307).

There is strong agreement in the literature that researchers, particularly those from the fields of medicine and education, have difficulty adjusting to this system as they are closely attuned to 'explorations of feelings' – traditionally even when they ask for narrative they are doing so to get to feelings and states of mind (Wengraf, 2001). I wanted to be clear that the narrative interviews were an entirely separate entity from the analysis and I did not design the process around creating neatly 'code-able' data. In reality, such efforts are likely to be counterproductive or even pointless as there is some evidence that participants will resist such 'shackles' to tell their stories.

3.17 Literary Narrative Analysis

Literary narrative analysis predates the narrative turn in the social sciences but its guiding principles – that through the study, evaluation and interpretation of literature, society can gain a greater philosophical understanding of life and culture – are relevant in this context. Gergen and Gergen (1998) argue that we do not just use narrative to live our lives as stories but our

relationships also take the form of narratives. Narrative can also construct our personalities and idiosyncrasies (McAdams, 1985). In this view, any given moment in our lives is fundamentally nonsensical unless it can be placed into a wider context, and becomes part of the narrative unity of human life (MacIntyre, 1985) which is perhaps where the formal structures of literary criticism can prove useful.

Could I truly *understand*, for example, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960) by merely coding the text and searching for themes? Perhaps, I could understand the concerns of the *story* but in doing so but I would have missed the beauty and construction of the *narrative*. In any case, the schools of qualitative research and literary analysis are not entirely distinct. A review of the literature demonstrates that narrative theory has always had a close relationship with literary fiction, yet the theory has also asserted the much broader significance of narrative. As this thesis began to develop, I recognised that as well as the research aims set out in Chapter I, a secondary methodological aim began to emerge – to explore the potential of LNA to elucidate the complexity of life narratives. This chapter also explores the extent to which these disparate schools of literary analysis and thematic interview analysis can be aligned and poses the question of to what extent literary narrative analysis can serve as a theoretical paradigm for the analysis of life narrative interviews.

3.18 Organising and Interpreting the Data

I discuss the experimental ‘literary narrative analysis’ approach I have adopted and provide a justification for how I have adapted the more traditional processes of thematic analysis for the purposes of this study, and describes the creation of the Literary Narrative Analysis (LNA) framework and how this was used as a tool for the analysis of my interview data.

3.18.1 Towards a model of Literary Narrative Analysis

Despite my rejection of thematic analysis for the reasons described earlier in this chapter, I still felt that there was something that could be drawn from the *processes* described by advocates of the method such as Braun & Clarke (2006) in constructing my Literary Narrative Analysis framework. Whilst there are many different models of Thematic Analysis, some sit more

firmly within the realist or post-positivist paradigms (Guest, Macqueen, & Namey, 2012). Therefore, despite this experimental method, I wanted to apply a rigorous approach to the process and made the decision to adapt Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase approach to thematic analysis (TA) as well as their fifteen-point checklist for ensuring quality. Their approach, although originally conceived for application in Psychology, resonates with the systematic approaches taken in the field of literary criticism. The six stages were adapted as follows:

- Stage 1 This aspect was identical to the approach used in thematic analysis. I gained a deep familiarization with the data through the process of immersion by repeated handling of the text. In this stage I became conversant with the data, principally through repeated listening to the interview recordings and reading and rereading the transcriptions and my field notes. I decided to transcribe the interview data myself and although this process was extremely time-consuming and laborious it proved an effective way of becoming conversant with the data. It was during this initial process that I began the generation of early codes.
- Stage 2 In stage two I began to move away Braun and Clarke's (2006) 'pithy labels' for thematic analysis and instead began to interrogate the data for literary narrative features. In doing so I adopted a creative approach as advocated by Erben (1998) and tried to ensure that those features were grounded in the participants' narratives.
- Stage 3 Whereas in thematic analysis the researcher is required to 'code the codes' to identify similarities with the data thereby constructing themes within the data, in my study it was instead important to group each of the ideas identified into 'master features' (e.g. leitmotifs, symbols, metaphors are grouped in a master category of 'motif').
- Stage 4 As in thematic analysis, the fourth stage involved a review of the master features, ensuring that they fitted with the coded quotations and the entire data field and a literary narrative map was then created. During this stage the literary feature codes were merged, collapsed or in some cases split.
- Stage 5 In stage 5 I refined, named and defined the literary narrative features, seeking to identify the essence of each category. The final stage involved compiling a cogent argument from this analysis, which incorporated a selection of pertinent quotations and the connection between the analysis results, the research statement and reviewed literature.

This five-stage process provided me with a strong framework for conducting the analytical process but I still felt that I needed a more systematic framework to check against at each stage to ensure consistency, trustworthiness and quality. Braun and Clarke's (2006) checklist for

thematic analysis was a useful starting point and an adaptation of their fifteen-point checklist for thematic analysis (TA) was used to create what I am calling Literary Narrative Analysis (LNA).

I followed as closely as possible Braun and Clarke's (2013) process of analysis but adapted as appropriate to the experimental method I had chosen. I transcribed each interview as soon after they were conducted as possible (and within a fortnight). The transcriptions were read and reread many times, in order to achieve a complete sense of immersion and familiarisation with the data and to gain a sense of the complete narratives for my participants. Then the entire data set was coded for literary narrative features, during this process I applied, where possible, short concise terms to summarise the literary devices and features I discovered. Numerous codes were created at this stage. Figure 3-4 provides an extract from one of the narrative interviews which demonstrates the initial coding process.

I wanted to have that experience but there was - like to the point of science teachers and kind of senior management getting involved, saying, no [redacted] should do triple science, she's clever enough to do it, I think she should. Me and my parents - I'd said to my parents I don't want to and they supported me through saying no, I'm not going to do it [redacted] which was ultimately the right decision because I got two A-stars and I don't think I would have otherwise. I had seen the content, I didn't think that I could achieve as well so I went with what I wanted to [redacted] but there was such a push [redacted] there really was. Choosing options was a massive deal in [redacted]. It was, you need to choose the ones which you're best at, you need to choose at least one that you know you're going to really enjoy.

There was a lot of pressure on these options will then kind of say [redacted] what you're going to do later in life. [redacted] There was like a deterministic kind of view. If you do this and if you don't take history, you won't do history

Comment [MN1]: Antagonists

Comment [MN2]: Protagonists

Comment [MN3]: Heroic character / presentation of self

Comment [MN4]: Closure / dénouement

Comment [MN5]: Antagonists

Comment [MN6]: Climax – Freytag's pyramid / Acts and Happenings

Comment [MN7]: Prolepsis

Comment [MN8]: Masterplot

Figure 3-4 Example of LNA Coding

Further examples of coded transcripts of my participants' biographies are available in Appendix V (p.199).

At the next stage, I reread the transcripts to review the overall LNA coding. For clarity – and in a similar process to that used in thematic analysis – I made the decision to modify some codes to ensure consistency across the dataset. For example, codes which had similar meanings or described similar categories were merged, although some codes which were vague or lacked

precision in their meaning were split. Table 3-3 illustrates how multiple initial codes, which were modified and merged into a single code.

Table 3-3 Initial and Refined LNA Codes

Initial Codes	Refined Codes
Metaphor	Motifs, Symbols and Figurative Language
Symbol	Motifs, Symbols and Figurative Language
Motif	Motifs, Symbols and Figurative Language
Leitmotif	Motifs, Symbols and Figurative Language
Chronology jump	Narrative Time and Chrono-logic
Brief coverage of time period	Narrative Time and Chrono-logic
Paratexts	The Limits of Narrative
Marginalia (field notes)	The Limits of Narrative
End markers	Closure and Endings
Uncertain future	Closure and Endings
Time jump	Analepsis and Propelsis
Flashback	Analepsis and Propelsis
Rivals	Agon or Conflict
Repeated theme	Agon or Conflict
Enemies	Antagonists
Friends	Protagonists
Heroes	Protagonists
Comment on interview process	Narrative Metalepsis
Extra-diegetic comment	Narrative Metalepsis
Hopes and fears	Character and Self
Justification of action	Character and Self
Exile	Masterplots
Pursuit of happiness	Masterplots
Virtue	Masterplots

A further illustration of this is included in Chapter 5 as part of the findings from my data analysis. This provides a visual description of the relationship between the major literary narrative analysis feature of 'masterplots' and its associated sub-devices.

3.19 Conclusions

In this chapter I have provided a justification of my choice of biographical research, arguing that the interpretivist lens is entirely apposite for a study aimed at eliciting the unique, rich life

narratives that combine to form the biographies of the participants. The single-method approach I adopted is defended on ontological and epistemological grounds, given my research aims and the unique potential of narrative studies to paint vivid pictures of the human experience by constructing the educational biographies of my participants in the context of the national zeitgeist of educational change. I also explored the emancipatory potential of 'narratives of schooling', particularly as there is such little regard for pupils' epiphanies in the current body of pupil voice literature. The practicalities of adhering to an ethical code in biographical studies is a central concern of the study and was used to inform the design of my study. Finally, I presented the use of Literature Narrative Analysis (LNA) as an alternative to the conventional modes of thematic analysis used in the social sciences, arguing for its potential to illuminate a complex data set in a way not possible using more conventional methods.

4 *Findings and Protagonist Biographies*

4.1 Introduction

This chapter commences with an extended vignette for each of the four participants whom I refer to as 'protagonists' in-line with the literary method of analysis applied in the chapter that follows. These biographies of the protagonists' lives in education set the research within a lived, time context of the participants' education until the age of eighteen. The names of the protagonists and settings (schools) have been changed or redacted to protect their anonymity. These narratives provide a full context for the data analysis using the Literary Narrative Analysis (LNA) method in Chapter 5.

4.2 Narrative Vignettes

I have chosen to represent the findings of my study using the vignette technique as it can help to provide an authentic representation of the experiences of participants (Barter & Renold, 2000). Hughes (1998, p. 381) sees the use of vignettes as significant as they are 'stories about individuals, situations and structures which can make reference to important points in the study of perceptions, beliefs and attitudes'. Barter and Renold (2000) also encourage the use of authentic vignettes because of their emancipatory potential for future research, and as presentations of 'real case' material they can encourage the further disclosure of significant and sensitive material from young people.

4.3 Liu

Liu always 'really valued education' because of the strong influence of her parents. Although her parents did not receive any formal education, from very early in her life they 'enforced their ideals' on her and ensured she learned mathematics and basic literacy before she started formal education. She was educationally advanced in comparison with her peers in the early years of school and ended up being 'ahead of other pupils quite early on' with confidence in one subject giving her 'confidence across the others'. However, she did notice a few gaps in her literacy skills as her parents had only spoken Chinese at home and became 'a little socially

'awkward', not interacting with others as well as she would have liked. Liu felt, however, that her friendships were bolstered by being 'quite good at sports' although she notes that did not continue into her later years! She was very quiet and serious about her education, supplementing what she learned formally at school with extra resources at home and in the context of the family church 'where her parents met' and she would 'lose herself in reading'. Her parents' busy lives 'running the takeaway' meant that Liu was given plentiful reading materials to 'distract' her from boredom.

At infant school, Liu recalls being only one of 'four or five pupils with a different ethnicity' and relying on her sister (who was two years older) to help support her English skills. Despite this, she recalls being 'pretty much always top of the class' through her infant school education. In Year 3 she had a bad experience with a teacher who was dismissive of an incorrect answer she gave in class and vividly recalls her 'pull[ing] a weird face...and then turn[ing] away to another pupil'. After this she became far more reticent to interact in class and often preferred to learn in the quiet, solitary environment of the library. She still recalls 'the look on her face ... and other kids sniggering in the background' and attributes this to becoming 'really lonely and socially worse' during this period. She spent a significant amount of time in her early years' learning to play the piano and playing in front of her peers, teachers and parents. She found playing the piano gave her a huge amount of confidence despite her skills being relatively undeveloped. Despite Liu's own reservations about her talent, she recognised that 'she was good enough to be perceived as quite good for [her] age.' She recalls that it was:

an environment that [she] was comfortable in as when I was behind the piano I couldn't really see anyone. It was just something that I felt comfortable doing...whereas talking in front of the class I hadn't had practice in doing that kind of thing before and I just felt really nervous. I just kept on thinking, are they laughing at me, are they bored.

In terms of assessment, she 'oddly really enjoyed tests' because she found them 'relatively OK, easy even' but sometimes felt that she was 'overlooked' because of her strong academic performance and teachers did not really notice when she struggled with a difficult topic. Her Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) at age eleven passed without incident and she felt she was 'pretty set' to do well because of the external preparation, 'working from a book at home', rather than because of the work with her teachers. Throughout this period, she continued to

spend hours in the library, immersing herself in the history of Romans and Greeks that was not covered on the school syllabus.

Liu was 'quite intimidated' by the move to a much bigger secondary school environment, which also saw an increase in the instances of racism which continued to get a 'a little bit worse' with each passing year and continued into the Sixth Form. She recalls walking around the school where 'every now and again ... there would be [racist] abuse hurled' at her by passing strangers although it rarely happened in the classroom. Her tutor was sympathetic to her problems and reaffirmed that racism was wrong but Liu remained frustrated that there was no formal education about racism, particularly as 'people should just know [that is wrong] but some people just didn't'. She remembers the difference between streamed and mixed sets, enjoying the different environment that was created in each subject area as result. Key Stage 3 still remains some of a 'big blur' for her although she was concerned that the work was not of a challenging enough standard to prepare her for GCSEs.

Liu's options choices were based on what she perceived to be 'the most academic subjects' but she responded with 'horror' at the prospect of having to study electronics – particularly as choosing 'cooking was even worse'. She continued to explore her fascination in other topics through time in the library and – despite her earlier fascination with the subject – opted against History because of poor teaching and 'hours copying out of textbooks'.

Liu laments the 'relaxed' attitude in Year 10 that meant a 'mad cramming' of knowledge in Year 11 that led to an increase in her anxiety. She maintained a strong level of academic performance, and was unconcerned about her progress in Electronics as she 'didn't want to study it in the first place'. She became concerned with her progress in Science, 'a major issue' because of inconsistency with staffing and a 'knowledgeable, nice teacher' who had difficulty in 'control[ling] the class'. The problems became so great she decided to 'cram it all in ... to teach myself in the last three months.' She ended up achieving three A* grades 'so it can't have affected [her] much in the end'.

Once her examinations started at the end of Year 11 she became very stressed, 'I remember a lot crying, a *lot* of crying', and the counter-productive anti-stress session that the school ran which meant she missed 'more and more' lessons. She felt that her motivation had 'died'

before her GCSE examinations and she was paralysed by the stress she encountered. Liu had selected to do a higher-level FSMQ (Free Standing Mathematics Qualification) but regretted it and 'ended up not putting any effort in whatsoever' as she wanted to focus on her core GCSEs. Despite some very good results she felt a great sense of anticlimax when she collected her results as some of her peers had stronger grades. Although she 'wasn't really upset ...I remember[ed] thinking mine are quite average by comparison'.

Once Liu began the Sixth Form she worked much harder at AS and A2 and her motivation was resuscitated from its 'death' at GCSE. She particularly enjoyed the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) which allowed her to explore a challenging subject – the depiction of domestic violence - in depth and at her own pace. She relished studying subjects that 'she wanted to do...as that was the main thing' but she also regretted not selecting Sociology. She rejected this as it was not a 'facilitating' subject, instead opting for Physics at A Level as 'she was worried it wasn't what Universities thought was a good subject to do'. Classical Civilisation also gave her the chance to renew her early fascination with history in a more formal setting, but Liu found the class quite challenging because of the 'bigger numbers' and 'more distant' teaching.

She also bemoans the lack of formal education about prejudice and racism which 'just wasn't there' and continued to be absent throughout her entire school and college career.

4.4 Melissa

Melissa's life in education began before the statutory age for formal schooling, as she attended a local prep-school in the year before starting infant school which gave her 'kind of a head start' over other pupils. She was one of the oldest pupils in her year, and her mother decided that she needed to be pushed 'especially in maths'. Melissa did not feel challenged at pre-school and felt she was not making quick enough progress as 'she couldn't count to one-hundred as the oldest in the year'. She, did however, enjoy this experience and saw it as positive in helping her establish good relationships with her peers.

These high expectations continued into Year 1, where from Melissa's first day at school she was 'expected to excel', particularly in mathematics and English, and was often given challenging

tasks to complete in school. She found mathematics more challenging than English, where she flourished from any early age. As early as five or six she was taken out of the mainstream curriculum for additional enrichment opportunities. Although Melissa realised the benefits of this later, at the time she felt that she was being isolated from her peers and friendship group 'which was helpful but also very strange'. She felt that this meant that she was labeled as 'different' and 'clever' as it was an 'exclusive' opportunity for a small number of pupils. She was very conscious of being 'singled out ... to do Junior School sort of work' with more literature and comprehension-based activities. Overall, however, she enjoyed the experience of being an infant-school pupil where she felt she was part of a 'vibrant school community' replete with a sense of 'community' and 'excitement'.

Melissa particularly enjoyed the cultural education, which focused on British and international aspects of education, such as the St. George's day events. She remembers a sense of excitement about 'arts and crafts', jumping on 'bouncy castles' and 'face painting' in a school that 'always tried to make things interesting' for pupils – describing it as the most 'culturally influential' school she ever attended. Junior school was quite daunting for her in comparison, having felt like a 'big fish,' in her smaller classes at infant school. Nevertheless, it was here that she found 'her release' in 'something extra'- her passion for music and, in particular, playing the piano. It was such a huge part of the curriculum that she went 'out of her way [to] embrace every opportunity' particularly within the school productions which she loved taking part in every year. She recalls the 'amazing passion' that the Head of Music had in getting the pupils back after school to sing harmonies in different languages. She saw assemblies as her 'time to shine' and 'actually express herself' in a way that she could not do in traditional academic subjects. The only 'bad thing' she noted about the 'acceleration' of these 'enrichment' experiences were their exclusivity as they were only available to a 'small amount' of pupils.

Melissa also appreciated the 'engineering' that took place in forcing pupils to mix with different pupils from different backgrounds and across the ability range, with the 'tables and stuff constantly changing' and effectively 'forcing' her to talk to people. On reflection, she believes that her 'strongest life friendships' were forged during this time which she attributes directly to 'the way [she] was taught'.

Around this time Melissa faced her first real problem at school at the age of nine when she was the victim of bullying about her appearance as she 'was very tall, [she had] always been very tall and straight down. Very thin.' While this was dealt with swiftly – although 'not subtly' - by her teacher, it came as a shock to her and reaffirmed her belief that 'everyone has to deal with bullying at some point'. This mostly took the form of 'name calling, stuff like that' and it gradually went away. There were still academic pressures, however, and she believed that she 'was destined to achieve Level 5s across the board' - a stance reinforced by her parents buying up revision guides and teachers furnishing her with additional homework and exercises in the run-up to the SATs examinations. The exam preparation period was 'crazy' with the 'clever ones like her' given 'extra sheets' and 'revision exercises'. She recalls the profound effect of seeing a friend vomit over her examination paper because of anxiety, noting that she had a very 'pushy mum' and that experience 'really sticks out ... [because] she couldn't take any more physically' but as a 'first symbol of exam pressure ... that was pretty strong'. Once more there was some catharsis through music when she took part in a song called 'SATs Blues,' which she recalls better than the rote learning intended for the examinations! She 'loved it because it was all about, *oh no* I can't remember my five-times tables and that sort of stuff.'

Melissa then moved on to a 'really good' secondary school with a 'fantastic' headteacher who made a real impression on her as a 'larger than life' character' who imbued the school with a sense of 'fun' to the extent that she considered him a 'blessing' to the school. She recalls this as the most positive experience of her education and certainly 'her most enjoyable school'. She recalls how this headteacher always remembered her name and those of her friends, which made him something of an inspirational figure – one of a series that had begun with the Head of Music in her Infant School. Her first memory of secondary school was sitting in the hall undertaking some unexpected examinations (Cognitive Ability Tests or CATs). In a way she preferred these to the SATS as there wasn't the same opportunity to become anxious and worried but she vividly recalls her first impression that 'this is what we are here for, for grades and exams'. Melissa was streamed into top sets in most subjects, but really relished the opportunity to do art and music lessons in 'relaxed, fantastic departments'. She started having lessons in both singing and the piano, which would later give her the 'added extra of UCAS points for University applications' but she was more motivated 'by improvement rather than grades' at this stage. She never felt these lessons 'were a chore [as it was] a reward just being there...an outlet where I could be creative'. School trips stood out as being particularly

memorable, with visits to the Tate Modern and field trips in Geography particularly useful as it kept her interested and motivated in the classroom too.

Education suddenly became much more complicated at the end of Year 9. Melissa desperately wanted to study music and art but the school railed against it 'because she was clever,' and insisted 'to the point of senior management becoming involved,' on her studying triple science at the cost of an option choice. She was, however, supported by her parents and stuck to her original decision. She recalls that options was 'a massive deal,' and that she felt coerced into choosing subjects because of her level of achievement rather than her level of interest. She considered herself to be something of a 'guinea pig' at this time and considered some of the pathways she was guided down in the school's options procedure as 'pointless' in her context – a process she considered to be 'an absolute mess'. She perceived her school as having a 'deterministic' view, being told that her choices then would directly impact on her life chances reflecting in hindsight that much of the advice that was given was inaccurate, particularly that not studying a subject at GCSE would rule it out at A Level. She was told to 'choose the ones you're best at' and to 'ignore the ones that are easy, even if you enjoy them.'

After collecting her GCSE results Melissa returned home to find 'her Geography teacher already on the phone' because she had missed an A* grade by two marks. She was not keen to have the paper remarked as she 'had the result' she wanted but the school would 'not let it drop' and she received the higher grade on appeal. She sees this as indicative of the pressure to 'always get an A*', even when you have what you wanted and more' that followed her through her educational experience. This was mirrored in her career advice, with her ambition to become a teacher dismissed as she had to the talent 'to become something amazing'.

Following her experience at Key Stage 4 – where she was an exceptional achiever - Melissa found her Sixth Form experience quite challenging and 'didn't really enjoy it' having been pressured to attend 'the highest achieving...the best local college'. On reflection, however, she wishes she had followed her passion for music having 'got right through the audition stages' at another provider but did not believe that it was as highly valued as the more traditional academic pursuits. She does, however, conclude that she made a good decision attending a more traditional, academic Sixth Form despite the 'massive step up' and 'incredible pressure' that she endured during this time. Her experience was improved with the help of an

'absolutely inspirational' biology teacher and a close group of friends. She did note, however, that 'there [was] not one person who hasn't had some kind of abnormal behaviour...everything from self-harm to depression to anxiety attacks – they can't get out of bed' as a result of examination pressure.

At the time of the interview Melissa was awaiting her A Level results with an expectation of performing well but accepted that it was 'University or bust' for pupils when they receive their examination results.

4.5 Michael

Michael found the early years of his education very simple and an introduction to the 'basics of life'. He remembers it was really about having an opportunity to 'meet people and connect' but there was very little in the way of formal preparation for tests and examinations. Later he was introduced to the basics of literacy and numeracy – 'simple things like adding, subtracting, multiplication, stuff like that' - but found considerable difficulties with this from his early years. He was supported by staff outside of lessons to help him catch-up and would spend 'double the time' doing tasks in class. He knew this was useful 'and it helped [him] to catch up in the end'. He found the curriculum somewhat limiting, principally being focused on English and mathematics and gradually managed to 'wean himself off' additional help from tutors.

Michael enjoyed the greater diversity of lessons enriched by the study of Geography and History (particularly the Egyptians) in the later years of primary education noting that it was a 'relief to be writing your own stuff' and felt a sense of relief that his literacy and numeracy had improved to a good standard. He also has strong memories of 'golden time' where he was given the agency to explore areas of interest which would allow him to be 'calm' and 'absorb' knowledge rather than prepare for the 'hectic' time of academic studies where the class 'steamed through it all very quickly'. He still felt he was 'learning stuff' and it was still 'educational in some sense' but did not see this as part of a formal curriculum in any way. He also enjoyed the pedagogical differences, with the class splitting into groups 'where one would do Egypt, one would do China [and] then we would all come together and show what we know'

By this stage Michael's academic studies had become 'much more laid back' and did not seem as rigorous in comparison; he became a little frustrated by the teacher putting on films 'which didn't seem educational...but were a chance to relax and absorb' the content from the day's lessons. By the time he reached Year 5 and 6 there was a much greater emphasis on personal and social education, with opportunities for enrichment coming in the form of films and books and the opportunity to debate important issues at greater length.

The standards of academic rigour, however, continued to rise in English and mathematics, with clear setting policies being introduced (his classmates designated as 'Dolphins' were expected to read harder books) which provided Michael with a chance to 'know [his] abilities' and 'limitations'. At this point the class was divided and Michael was placed into one of the lower groups where he received preparation for the SATs examinations and additional support from his teacher. He was also grateful for the presence of:

a helper ... who stayed with us the whole year. She didn't help me personally but I did spend more time getting support which got my reading right up again because [I had] started to fall behind again.

He then began the process of sitting SATs papers 'over and over' having been told his result would affect 'what group I would be in when I went to secondary school'. By the time of the tests he was 'just frazzled, it was too much for me ... and the [feedback] was disheartening'.

A reasonable set of SATs results saw him placed in middle-sets in Year 7 but it was 'hard because [he] was separated from everyone [he] knew from primary school and ... didn't have any friends.' He distinctly remembers doing a 'mock up Dragons' Den' activity in English which forced 'us to work together and work on our confidence' which made him stressed and agitated but was ultimately a good thing as it forced him to 'deal with [his anxiety] and then talk to other people.' He felt that in Year 8 his teachers treated him with 'more respect' and he felt less pressure to perform as teachers 'already knew his abilities'. He also learnt to sit near people who would help him as he was 'smart enough to do that'.

He found the process of selecting options frustrating as his choices were limited and he was forced to study subjects that were of little interest to him – 'resistant materials, electronics,

stuff like that'. He found himself in an Electronics class where his peers were also negative because of their perceived lack of 'agency' in selecting the subject. Despite this, he continued to make good progress across the rest of his subject choices. He remembers his surprise at achieving a grade B in Electronics despite 'not being able to do any of the practical work ... by the end of the lesson I would know [how to do] it but I didn't know why?'.

The preparation for examinations was 'stressful' and 'horrible' and he hated being constantly reminded of the remaining time until the end of the year. He was resistant to teachers experimenting with pupil-driven lessons and felt that it was little aid to his learning in the run-up to important examinations. He was 'stressed out in Year 11' because it was 'all exam focused' and the 'teachers were stressed too ... especially towards the end of the year'. He particularly 'hated' it when teachers reminded him of the number of lessons remaining because he never felt he had enough time to cover all of the subject content. He found the 'mock' sessions particularly challenging 'worse than the final exams themselves' because his poor-performance seemed to indicate that his 'fate was sealed' and that he would perform poorly in the summer no matter what he did. The final exam 'season' itself was particularly stressful for him as he vividly recalled searching for his name badge in a room of hundreds of other anxious pupils: 'that really bothers me. That pressure. That silence'.

In contrast, his Sixth Form experience was much more positive as Michael loved being treated in a more adult fashion and loved the opportunity to explore his own ideas rather than simply regurgitating facts. He loved the class discussions 'where you could participate, then go home and research, pull all that in for exams ... it felt like it was really useful.' He felt that he was part of a 'really smart' learning community and his peers set up Facebook chats to share their learning outside of lessons. He found that the friendly and respectful environment of the college meant that many of his previous examination anxieties quickly disappeared in a climate of 'friendliness and respect'. He did worry that his employment outside of school was having a detrimental impact on his studies as he would 'get tired from the very long shifts' and was concerned that he would not get strong enough A Level grades to get into his first choice university.

4.6 Ciaran

Ciaran began his formal schooling in Ireland in a sort of ‘mixture of pre-school and primary in one’ at the age of three where his experience was ‘fun but a bit strange’ and he forged some friendships that still endure into his adult life. He then moved to two different European countries where he ‘did not actually go to school for a whole year’ before settling in a third county and learning a foreign language. His entire education there was based around language acquisition and he was taught ‘no English, no maths, no nothing’ during this period with the remainder of his classmates fluent in ‘Dutch, French, Spanish, Portuguese’ – anything but English. He recalls it being a ‘weird environment’ in which it was ‘hard to socialise and make friends’ because everything was ‘sign language and pointing’. He is no longer in touch with anyone from this time as he jokingly notes – he ‘didn’t really catch any [of their] names.’

At the point at which he became a fluent native-speaker, Ciaran moved back to England and started in Year 3 making the whole process of learning the foreign language ‘for nothing really – pointless’. He felt that he had missed out on the basics of literacy and numeracy: “cat, hat, what’s a verb, what’s this, basic maths” and felt he was ‘playing catch up all [his] life’ as a result. His strong Irish accent also made it difficult to communicate with his peers (“I couldn’t pronounce the end of my words”) and to make friends. It was a ‘rough’ year. With the ‘special help’ and support of ‘really good’ teachers, however – which mostly happened outside of lessons - he began to make progress and fit more easily into friendship groups in Years 4 and 5. In Year 5 he discovered drama which became his passion and still remains so as it helped him to ‘come out of [his] shell’. He performed a lead role in a stage production and the passion he developed for acting ‘showed [him] he could do it...it gave [him] his first [professional] acting agent’ and contract. The acting gave him the ‘confidence to speak’ and to ‘start learning more’ and - although academic lessons remained a struggle – he enjoyed his experiences up until Year 5 and 6. At this stage he started to get into minor trouble, what he calls ‘playground rough and tumble’ which he attributes to his status as an ‘outsider’ who ‘couldn’t speak, couldn’t talk’ and had to slowly ‘merge his way’ in to friendship groups.

At secondary school Ciaran continued to feel like an outsider – he had ‘long curly hair’ and was ‘different in a more eccentric way’ because of his accent, evoking memories of his experience in Year 3. It was a ‘scary year’ where the division in tutor groups and set changes meant he was

'split up from [his] friends ... blah blah blah'. He saw this separation as part of a repeated cycle, one in which 'he found his feet then had to move on' although he recognises that he formed some of his strongest friendship bonds during this time. At the end of the year he was put in 'every single bottom set' because his English and mathematical skills 'were so low'. He had a tutor assigned to him, working on basics like 'I before E' and stuff like that, and felt like 'a bit of an outcast'. In Year 8 he started to improve academically - he was 'actually getting somewhere...which was incredible' - and once again drama became a much bigger part of his academic and social life. He also discovered a 'great love' for basketball and other sports which were 'great fun'.

By the time the options process came around in Year 9 Ciaran was fully aware of his academic strengths (the natural sciences, drama, English literature) where he was 'half decent...because of the tutoring'. He was proud that he had gone from 'barely being able to spell my name and talk a full sentence to being in a top set' but still found literacy a challenge. His real enthusiasm was, however, for drama 'it was just incredible' and for cooking. He won a competition and he had the opportunity to take a full-time job in a restaurant at the age of sixteen but decided that 'education was more important' and that his true 'calling' was to become an actor. He recalls with some anger and frustration a teacher telling him his dream was 'unachievable' and 'risky' , a process that he described as 'horrible ... I'll never forget it. I remember it so clearly', but he was determined to follow this path. In the following year he noticed a 'little jump' in the challenge of his subjects, but wasn't concerned as his passion for drama remained as a 'little tickle at the back of mind' which kept him motivated.

He found his examination preparation at GCSE very stressful and found it difficult to balance his academic studies with his drama and sport commitments. Despite this, Ciaran secured a strong set of GCSE results – ironically only failing one written examination in drama as he 'didn't focus at all on that'. He remembers the stress of 'sitting at desks, herded like cattle' with 'intelligent people' very focused on getting 'to Oxford and Cambridge'. He felt that he was 'average' and therefore examinations were not a 'priority'. Despite this, his stress was significant enough that he began to take medication before each examination.

Following his GCSEs Ciaran proceeded into the Sixth Form to study for A Levels where the pressure 'dropped like hawks' upon him. He had picked his choices based on which subjects

'the Russell Group Unis would like' and the 'more intelligent, sophisticated subjects' but suffered from depression and found little joy in his studies. The increase in standard was 'ginormous' (sic.) and 'some days [he] just couldn't get out of bed' only attending English and drama regularly. His attendance dropped and he was required to repeat a year. He found it particularly challenging as he 'felt old...especially with [his] beard and everything. Everyone thought [he] was about thirty' but the repetition of subject content was a huge advantage and his peers considered him very knowledgeable. 'People asked me stuff and like, I don't know...it was nice to be on their wavelength.' He was also assessed for special access arrangements for the examinations 'which helped because [his] spelling was atrocious'.

All this time Ciaran's study of acting and drama remained a constant source of pleasure for him. He was offended that teachers would not attend his theatre productions 'they were invited to every single one' and at senior staff 'shouting at us during rehearsals' because they should have been in other lessons. He continued to 'live for the appreciation of the crowd' as he could not imagine a life 'in a lab, behind a desk ... [as he would] go crazy, go mad.' He auditioned for a series of high-profile theatre schools but found the whole process 'difficult and very stressful' and expensive.

Ciaran remained frustrated throughout this time that the arts were not perceived with the same level of credibility as the sciences and 'facilitating' subjects – 'they're the only thing that affect people, make people laugh, make people cry ... but they're not priorities not like academic subjects'. With his passion for the arts cemented, he hoped to secure strong A Level results and to study drama at University. He acknowledged however, that it would 'come down to the grades, you need the grades to get in' but was hopeful that he would secure sufficient UCAS points to make his ambitions a concrete reality.

4.7 A Summary of Protagonists' Stories

All four protagonists tell stories of success, but their routes and plotlines are strikingly different. Whilst Liu and Melissa share narratives of educational privilege, these sometimes appear at the cost of their true agency in exploring interests and desires. Both Liu and Melissa bemoan the pervasive nature of the performativity discourse and lament the limited range of disciplines they could pursue. Michael found the experience of schooling more challenging, particularly

the rigid pressures of performativity between the age of fourteen and sixteen. In contrast to Melissa, however, he welcomed the increasing freedom of Sixth Form study and began to flourish in an environment that offered him a greater sense of self and opportunity for academic exploration. In contrast, Ciaran delivers a restitution narrative, overcoming a series of challenges to chase his idealistic career and personal ambitions. Like Melissa and Liu, he shared his frustration that the arts were undervalued and that he became only a small part of a greater system of performativity, measured by a limited range of academic metrics. Each protagonist was aware of the explicit discourse of school performativity, resisting or acquiescing to different degrees and plotted their own narratives towards a successful denouement.

5 Analysis of Findings and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide an analysis and discussion of the findings, following the interviews conducted with the participants. I then explain use Literary Narrative Analysis to illuminate the narrative vignettes presented in the previous chapter. I make a clear distinction between *narrative* and *story* and demonstrate how the process of coding, described in Chapter 3, revealed a set of sub-features that were common across all four narratives. I then provide a detailed analysis of the data in the context of the existing literature, using a systematic literary framework to illuminate the pupil experiences. The chapter concludes with a summary of my findings.

5.2 Using Literary Analysis to Explore Life Narratives

Narrative theorists (Labov, 1997; Bruner, 1987) describe how we tell stories about troubling events in our everyday experience in order to regain some sense of equilibrium in our lives. Given my background as a teacher of English Literature, it is perhaps not surprising that my own search for equilibrium has often been rooted in the literary text and my preferred methods of teaching and learning have often involved stories and anecdotes. Put another way, I have always, in both my academic and professional contexts, deployed 'narrative [as a] machine to think with' (Richards, 1924, p.24) in my approach to attaining a deeper, more subtle understanding of both literature and life.

If I wanted to learn more about a text – to 'unpack' it in order to see it in a different way – I have come to rely on methods of literary analysis rather than the techniques more typically associated with qualitative social science research. So whilst I was initially keen to use a method of thematic analysis, I became increasingly uncomfortable with what I saw as an attempt to 'break down' the coherence and cogence of my participants' data into themes, as although I may be able to retain the *stories* I felt that I would lose the *narratives*.

The findings which follow, illustrate the rich, qualitative stories of my participants and illuminate a greater understanding of their experiences. I quickly came to realise that I am an active part of this process, a sort of hybrid between editor and critic, but I also acknowledge that as a researcher I can only understand their life accounts from my perspective, and in doing so my participants may appear to speak vicariously about their own life experiences. To overcome this, my participants' words are quoted verbatim from the interview transcripts, although the interpretation is mine. Whilst each biography is unique, there are several commonalities that exist between my participants' stories and together they form the basis of the analysis that follows.

5.3 LNA Features and Sub-Features

In Chapter 3 I described in some detail the coding process for identifying LNA features and sub-features. It was this process, (summarised in Figure 5-1) that provided the outline structure for this chapter. Binary oppositions, the limits of narrative, motifs, closure, ergodic composition, chronologic, masterplots, metalepsis and character depiction are common features to all four narrative data sets. Each one of these 'master features' also has a number of sub-features which I systematically explore. I have included a guide to this terminology in Appendix II (p.183) as readers may not be familiar with the lexicon of literary analysis.



Figure 5-1 LNA Features and Sub-Features Relationship

5.3.1 *Dramatis Personae – the Protagonists and Antagonists of Schooling*

In this section of the chapter, I explore the depiction of the 'cast' in their narrative interviews, including the participants' construction of protagonists and antagonists. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the narrow form of the educational narratives collected in my interviews, the *dramatis personae* were limited to the narrator, parents, friends, siblings, teachers and other school staff whom the literature suggests have a key influence on social relationships and motivation in school (Wentzel, 2003). In many cases the 'supporting cast' play only a minor role in the participants' stories but significant others such as teachers and parents feature more prominently as protagonists and antagonists. This categorisation is actually quite challenging, however, and the depiction of some 'cast members' allows them to fit into several

categories (or even interchange between them at different times) even within the individual narratives of my participants (Figure 5-2).

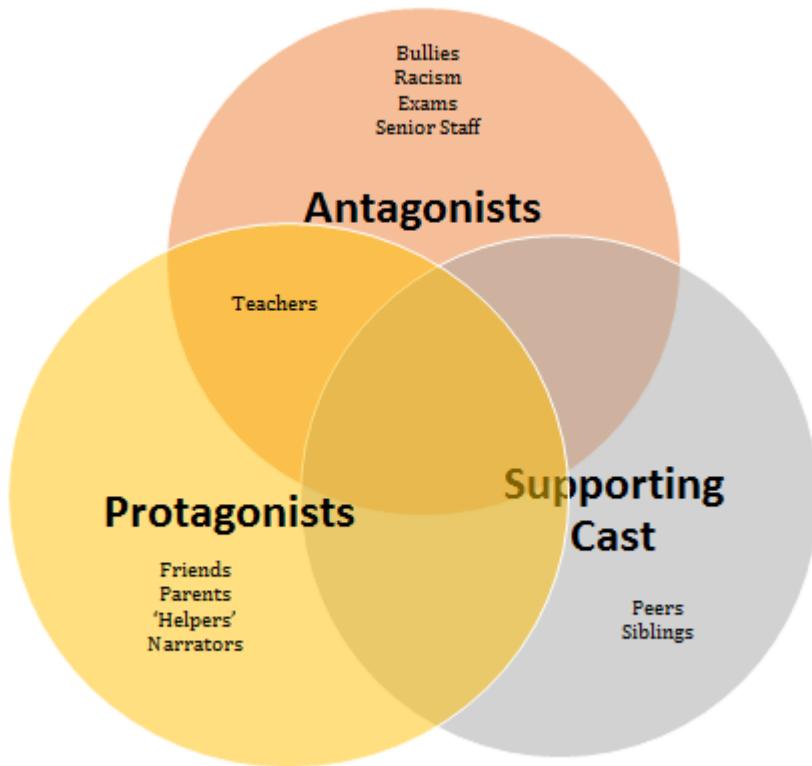


Figure 5-2 Antagonists, Protagonists and Supporting Cast

The changing nature of some of the 'cast', when read in the context of the wider interview, often seems to correlate with shifts in power, authority and agency in the individual's life narratives. For example, Ciaran becomes agitated when a teacher tells him his career ambitions are unrealistic but praises a teacher who harnesses what he believes to be his natural talent in drama. This occasion illuminates some of the fears described by Robinson (2013) and Claxton (2008) about the marginalisation of the arts, and also the need for further research about subject combinations and careers advice (Cadwallader, 2013).

In narrative terms, I was not surprised to see these protagonists and antagonists feature, particularly as there is broad agreement in the literature that most narratives are driven by conflict and they are at their most interesting when questions of power are at stake (Abbott, 2008).

5.3.2 *Protagonists*

Three of the four respondents cited a teacher as a heroic protagonist. The praise in some cases bordered on deification with teachers said to 'shine' or 'glow' or be 'larger than life'. For instance:

we had a fantastic head teacher who I think was an absolute blessing to the school...he was just so bubbly and you'd see him around and you would think, he's a good guy so you would have a better impression of the school. He was always very quick to ask you how you were. He'd remember names...He was just - I don't know, quite an inspirational person. He was larger than life.
(Melissa)

Whilst it is already known that teachers play an important role in the trajectory of students throughout the formal schooling experience (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008), what was unusual in this instance was the reference to school leaders. In each instance, the references to teacher protagonists focused on the leadership influence of teaching staff, rather than their day-to-day interactions with participants. These 'characters' also always appear during the early 'acts' of my participants stories and usually occur in periods that were not perceived as stressful or 'performative'. Existing literature suggests that the characteristics that students most value are a genuine interest in their welfare and making an effort to help them (Lumby, 2013) and in the case of my participants there was praise for teachers who were interested in making 'connections' or fostering interaction between children. Their language was often replete with the semantic field of friendship, with references to 'care', 'bonding' and 'relationships' particularly notable. Occasionally, this was also linked to the quality of teaching and learning where 'those lessons got [them] used to school life' (Michael) or prepared them for the challenges of schooling that were to follow – or helps them to avoid, as Claxton (2008, p.1) puts it, being 'ready for a life of tests, but not the tests of life'.

In addition, three of the four participants praised the actions of their parents in contributing to their academic success. Parents were often referred to as 'supportive' and 'helping' in the narratives. In Melissa's case their intervention allowed her to challenge the orthodoxy of the options system by supporting her refusal to acquiesce to the pressures of teachers and the school system. Freire (1968) considers the great humanistic task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves from the oppression of the system is how Melissa's parents dealt with this

situation. However, in narrative terms, there is a significant difference in the presentation of parents. In their 'characterisation' of their parents participants' language was often much more 'concrete' as opposed to the more abstract descriptions of teachers:

I remember being quite ahead of all the others. I remember my mum used to give me basic maths books. Because my parents met at the church, I learnt a lot from there as well because they went through some of the basics as well there.
(Liu)

Research suggests the attitudes and aspirations of parents (and of children themselves) predict children's educational achievement (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). However this association between parental aspirations and a child's attainment is particularly complex and affected by the nuances of interrelationships and studies struggle to prove any definitive causality because of the range of complex variables that influence the experience of schooling. The protagonists' stories here help to illustrate how parents can play a much wider role in their children's narratives *beyond* schooling, whereas teachers play a role that is almost entirely a 'kernel' (see Appendix II p.183) for a definition and wider discussion of these terms) element of their educational story.

5.3.3 Antagonists

All four participants' stories contained 'characters' who were cast in the role of antagonist. Ciaran's story, for example, seems to hinge on a negative experience of a teacher who challenged his career aspirations in early secondary school:

a teacher went to us, right, I want you to write down on a bit of paper what you want to be when you're older. I went, I don't know. He went, no, you have to put something down. Forced everyone to write something. I put actor and he laughed, which was horrible. It was horrible...he laughs and goes, that's not going to happen, you need to pick a reasonable one. So that's always been a little tickle at the back of my mind. I'll never forget it. I remember so clearly.
(Ciaran)

Ciaran's recollection is particularly notable because of the vivid language he uses. The repetition of adjective 'horrible' juxtaposed with the depiction of the laughing, dismissive antagonist sits alongside his powerful declaration that he will 'never forget it [as he] remember[s it] so clearly.' I believe it is also significant that Ciaran reimagines the episode figuratively as a 'tickle' in his mind, and he refers back to the incident at several key kernel

moments in his narrative. This clearly illustrates the warnings in the literature about the impact of the absence of high-quality career advice and subject combinations (Cadwallader, 2015) and also the damage that can be done by not ensuring an inclusive and personalised curriculum (Ainscow et al., 2006).

Other participants' stories also suggest the influence of antagonists on both kernel and satellite elements of their 'plots'. Liu recalls an incident in her fourth year of school where her incorrect response to a question caused her teacher to 'pull a really weird face and turn the other way to another child.' Whilst it initially seems to be a satellite event, her use of repetition and antistrophe emphasise her belief that it 'really, really impacted' on her and from this 'point onwards [she] didn't interact much at all in class because it really made [her] feel embarrassed'. Such instances are particularly illuminating as despite the recognition that teachers are fundamental to high-quality pupil experiences (Wiliam, 2007; Muijs & Reynolds, 2001; Turner-Bisset, 1999), the understanding of how teachers' competence links to the development of learners' self-concepts and confidence is still undeveloped.

5.3.4 *Character Types in Narratives of Schooling*

Just as there are a series of 'masterplots' to which most narratives adhere, there are also a series of defined and expected character 'types' in the literary world (e.g. the outcast and the hero). In terms of autobiographical narrative, however, there is a further layer of complication – and one that has been explored at length by critics of literary texts. Porter Abbot (2008, p.134) argues that composing your autobiography without the sense that you are 'fictionalizing by displacing yourself with a type that is either more heroic, more pathetic, more honest, more whatever... can be hard work.' There is also the problem that the readers will tend to under-read and over-read characters and discover 'types where none were intended' (Porter Abbot, 2008, p.140) and there is no guarantee that adding more detail to the narrative will remedy this. These generic character types are presented in Table 5-1.

Character Type	Participant Quotation
Self as 'outcast' / 'outsider'	I was a bit of an outcast. I always felt as an outsider at [name redacted]. I don't know, because I came in there mid-way through Year 3, couldn't speak, couldn't talk. I came in there

	<p>and didn't know anyone, everyone knew everyone from Year R or from some pre-school they went to. But I slowly merged my way in. (Ciaran)</p> <p>I think having a focus at that point I remember being serious for a child. I remember being a little bit socially awkward and so I didn't interact with others as well as I could I have. (Liu)</p>
Self as 'prodigy'	<p>There were no other students involved, a lot of my friends would never go to see that which, again, is this whole 'exclusive' the 'clever people' thing. (Melissa)</p> <p>We were definitely sectioned off, I was different. I don't know if I mentioned, in senior school we had to do an extra project which excluded us from some of the homeworks that were set...I really enjoyed the project [but] it was just quite exclusive. (Melissa)</p>
Self as 'disadvantaged'	<p>So I pretty much played catch up all my life. It was hard at first because I came over here, I didn't really speak very well English. I couldn't pronounce the end of my words, thick Irish accent. (Ciaran)</p>
Self as 'survivor'	<p>I don't regret putting my heart into it. I don't regret doing bad, I don't regret doing good. It all happens and I've survived it. (Ciaran)</p>
Self as 'anonymous'	<p>I felt like a number again that year with the school. (Ciaran)</p> <p>I know I was good for the statistics. (Liu)</p>
Self as 'elder'	<p>Yeah, as I say I was one of the oldest which did mean there was a push on me already (Melissa)</p>

Self as 'victim'	So I went to this school where I was the only Irish person there, well the only English-speaking person in my class, everyone else was French, Spanish, Portuguese. No one spoke English and all we did was learn Dutch. So no English, no maths, nothing, just Dutch. By the time I nearly learnt the language enough, I would leave and we moved to England. So I spent the whole time learning the language, missing my education for nothing really. (Ciaran)
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Table 5-1 Character Types in the Narrative Interviews

In this respect, critics argue that there is an inherent conflict between type and reality, that the use of 'types' in characterization can obscure the reality of one's self. The most striking literary example of this is Sartre's (1964) 'Les Mots' where the author abandons his story aged eleven as he frees himself from the illusion that he could adhere to the noble type defined by the literary tradition.

Accepting my status as an active interpreter I was certainly able to identify some key 'types' of characters in the narrative interviews. I admit to a degree of surprise though, at how simply the stereotypical character types could be applied to the narrative data, with the clear images of the 'outcast', 'prodigy' and 'survivor' not only being implied but sometimes being explicitly *named* in the narrative account. A sort of meta-commentary on character-types (often beginning with the phrase "I was a..." or "I had become a...") became a characteristic of the interviews. What was most striking was that even in instances where my protagonists depicted themselves as heroic, they were never immune to the metaphors of 'sickness' or 'death' which occur across all the narratives (see Motifs, Symbols and Figurative Devices). There is resonance here with Freire's (1968) notion of oppression, as he argues that a sense of identity must be present to facilitate a genuine struggle with the oppression of the education system.

5.3.5 Constituent and Supplementary Events (Kernels and Satellites)

During the process of analysis, I quickly perceived occurrences of events that were *missing* from the participants' life narratives. Many of these events seemed to be satellite rather than kernel events. For example, in Liu's interview she fleetingly described (only for a few seconds but on four occasions) the racism she had experienced during her school life. Her stronger point was about what was missing from her education – the absolute condemnation of racism from the school:

Yeah. I just - I don't remember whatsoever teachers having a lesson against that kind of bullying. I don't remember anyone sort of just going outright, this is not okay....they should have really just sat down and spoke about types of bullying, racism.
(Liu)

There are advocates who call for a 'language to speak to racism' (Dei et al., 2014, p.6) and the data here suggests that at least one of our protagonists has perceived this as a significant absence in educational experience.

Broadly, the kernel and satellite events (summarised in Figure 5-3) were consistent across all four narrative interviews. Kernel events tended to be about progression between different stages of the formal education system although this was not always chronological with time-jumps signposting particular key events which informed later or early parts of the narrative (see section on prolepsis and analysis (p.187)).

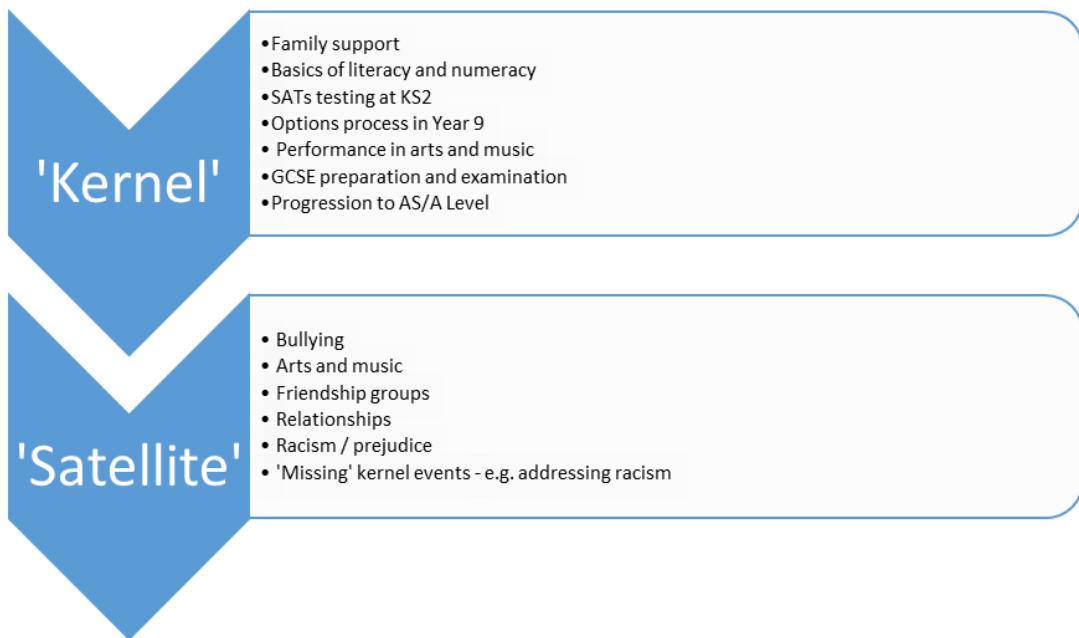


Figure 5-3 Kernel and Satellite Events

Figure 5-3 clearly indicates that there is a definite chronology to certain kernel events, suggesting that the agency of the individual is actually quite limited and follows a predefined 'plot' of progression through the grammar of school (Tyack & Cuban, 1980). This resonates with the theory of masterplots from the field of literary criticism, which is explored more fully in the next section of this chapter. It is also important to note that arts and music appear as both kernel and satellite events, with participants themselves struggling (in the case of Liu) to decide on their importance in their narrative's progression. It is also significant that participants perceive its status as a key kernel event (Ciaran; Melissa) and that this is as an act of rebellion against the prescribed grammar of their schooling.

5.3.6 Educational Narrative Masterplots

Thus far, this chapter has been focused on narrative devices, but in addition to these features there is also the important notion of 'plot' as suggested by the chain of 'kernel' events that occur in each narrative interview. The recognition of masterplots in literature is essential as it plays a powerful role in questions of identity, values the understanding of life (Porter Abbott, 2008) and also resonates with the view of Ricoeur (1983) who sees emplotment as a telos or movement toward a destined or predetermined end.

One of the first aspects that I identified in my analysis of the data was the explicit awareness that some participants displayed about the pre-defined 'plots' to which they were expected to acquiesce. Melissa was particularly vocal about this:

There was a lot of pressure on these options which then kind of say what you're going to do later in life. There was like a deterministic kind of view.
(Melissa)

The determinism that she described was mirrored by Liu's comments that she was 'expected to do well' from the early years onwards. It also seems particularly significant that Melissa challenges the perceived orthodoxy of academic pathways:

There is definitely something that goes right the way through education for me. That you go to school to get good grades. You work hard and you will be rewarded with the good grades and at the end of that if you've got good grades you'll get a good job. Whereas actually I don't think that's true all the time.
(Melissa)

What is so striking in Melissa's narrative is the pervasive power of this message, another manifestation of Tyack & Cuban's (1995) grammar. It seems little has changed from her perspective since Bowles & Gintis (1976) demonstrated how an egalitarian, education system promised a series of opportunities that did not always mirror the reality, and since Jackson and Marsden (1962) were refuting this kind meritocratic ideology as much as fifty years ago. Melissa is able to see, from 'inside' the system that there are occasions where young people progress through education along a predetermined route that may not entirely suit their needs, a point echoed by Wolf's (2011) review of vocational education. Her perception mirrors that of Claxton (2008) who sees the system as a series of reductive and synthetic tests, rather than preparing pupils for the genuine tests of life.

I was not expecting to find examples of the 'orphic journey', but Ciaran startlingly described part of his educational experience as 'hell' and supported his assertion with a prison metaphor:

it was a sentence here. I felt trapped. I felt trapped during my sixth form especially, I felt locked. It was a sentence for me. It was hell. It was the most difficult three years of my life. To be free from it, it's just lovely, I feel free again.
(Ciaran)

The verbs and nouns he selected ‘trapped,’ ‘locked’ and ‘sentence’ are hyperbolic but also come from the semantic field of punishment and reflect his sense of entrapment by the system, in stark juxtaposition with the utopian vision of education as a tool for liberation (Robinson, 2013). There is also a degree of typicality across the interview data, with two other participants described the examination period at GCSE as either ‘hell’ or ‘hellish’. In some senses, for Ciaran there was also a cross-over between the orphic masterplot and that of his ‘rags to riches’ tale in overcoming adversity.

Then I came over [to England], but because I was so old, I went straight into Year 3. So I missed a normal Year R, Year 1, Year 2. So I missed a whole basic spellings, cat, hat, what's a verb, what's this, basic maths. So I pretty much played catch up all my life. It was hard at first because I came over here, I didn't really speak very well English. I couldn't pronounce the end of my words, thick Irish accent.

(Ciaran)

Participants also note the ‘grueling’ pressures of the ‘relentless’ testing and examinations and what perceive as the constant realignment of classes and friendship groups, which Ciaran describe as ‘hell’. Despite these observations, all participants’ narratives did proceed beyond these difficulties to some form of equilibrium (which I discuss in more depth on p.129). It should also be noted that Melissa sees an irreducible narrativity (Ricoeur, 1983) in the education system – that every stage is linked, causal and defines the nature of the subsequent activity. Similarly, Ciaran’s experience with language difficulties also echoes Bernstein’s (1971) codes that can limit the ability of some individuals to experience success in school.

5.3.7 ‘Generic’ Masterplots and Structure

In this section I consider some of the different frameworks for ‘generic’ masterplots and literary structure and how they manifest themselves in the interview data. Further details regarding generic masterplots are included in Appendix II (p.183).

5.3.8 Equilibrium to Restoration

The Bulgarian critic Tzvetan Todorov remains one of the most important voices in any debate about literary structure. His work is essentially theoretical and non-descriptive as he strives to

achieve a 'logical rather than a spatial significance'. Nevertheless, it is possible to take this theoretical framework and apply it to the data I collected in my narrative interviews. Todorov (1969, p.75) argues that a 'minimal complete plot can be seen as the shift from one equilibrium to another...the two moments of equilibrium...are separated by a period of imbalance, which is composed of a process of degeneration and a process of improvement.'

Ciaran certainly cites a restoration of equilibrium at the end of his story, in his return to physical and academic 'health' and his commitment to study:

I got my life on track, I picked my feet up, I got fit and healthy and I'm going to do this now. I studied my arse off that year. It was like I'm focused now.
(Ciaran)

It was like I would actually shock myself in my final A2 written. I got Us, [unclear] in my mocks, came out with the highest in my year, overall. It was incredible. All my teachers were like, yeah, we don't know how you've done this... But it was a little bit [of a] confidence boost for me, shows me that all the hard work I'd put in over the years has paid off for something in the end.

(Ciaran)

Ciaran's reflections also resonate with Holt's (1964) work in not seeing a sense of achievement or value in his earlier years of schooling but instead seeing his success defined by a narrow series of school-defined metrics.

With my protagonist providing such a positive 'affirmation' of the narrative journey it was quite straightforward identifying a resonance of Todorov's (1969) framework in my data. However, I began to feel uncomfortable in using this frame as a lens for better understanding the data. I can appreciate that when Marxists or psychoanalysts deconstruct literature, they are not interested in a knowledge of the text itself, but in an understanding of the abstract structure that manifests itself through that work; here, however, it is the individual nature of rich narrative that pervades. Whilst Todorov sees 'structural analysis of literature [as] a kind of propaedeutic for a future science of literature' (1969, p.72) the positivist overtones of this view seem to clash with the philosophical approach I have taken in this study.

5.3.9 *Acts and Happenings – Freytag's Pyramid*

Although Freytag's (1863) work was conceived to be applied to five act plays, his dramatic arc does provide an intriguing lens for analysis with the data from my interviews. The main passages of the 'journey' he conceives are exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and catastrophe/denouement. My interview data is mapped against these principles in Table 5-2.

Table 5-2 Freytag's (1863) Pyramid and Narrative Interview Data

	Freytag's (1863) Expectation from <i>Technik des Dramas</i>	Liu	Melissa	Michael	Ciaran
Act I – Exposition	Early material provides the theme, setting and introduces the 'cast'.	Has high regard for education because of parental influence. Education is 'serious' at home before school begins but there are gaps in literacy as Chinese is spoken at home.	Is educated at prep school before her compulsory education begins. Is identified as gifted and expected to excel from the very beginning of her education.	He recalls the start of formal education being very basic and about making connections. He struggled academically and needed support outside of class to keep up.	Sees himself as an 'outsider' and 'other' who travels between several countries before starting his English education later in Year 3.
Act II – Rising Action / Complication	Increase in tension and uncertainty developing out of conflict. A complication can sometimes add a further narrative twist.	She performs well across the curriculum and enjoys playing the piano. She makes her options choices based on what universities consider to be valuable.	Enjoyed a range of cultural education in KS1 and KS2. Found a 'release' in music and the arts (piano and school productions). Makes good academic progress.	He noticed his peers being divided up into different groups and began to recognise his 'strengths and limitations.'	Begins to fit into the English education system and starts to make good friendship groups. Notices gaps in his knowledge of literacy and mathematics.
Act III – Climax	Traditionally located in the third act of a play. The climax is the moment of greatest tension in the narrative. This is sometimes referred to in the wider literature as the 'crisis'.	Her motivation 'dies' (in figurative terms) before her GCSE examinations and she suffers from stress. She suffers instances of racism at school.	Wanted to study music and art but the school 'railed against it' and choices were challenged by senior management. Is shocked by the academic pressure placed on her peers which results in sickness.	He enjoyed secondary school but found the options process frustrating. As a result he found himself in classes with demotivated peers and felt that he was treated 'like a number' in a stressful exam period.	Is told that his choice of career is 'unrealistic' by a teacher and becomes very frustrated. Achieves more highly than expected in his GCSE examinations.
Act IV – Reversal / Falling Action	Sometimes referred to as the <i>peripeteia</i> . Sometimes this can be an admirable trait but can also be the protagonist's downfall.	There is a sense of anticlimax after her GCSE results. She renews her focus at Sixth Form and begins to flourish academically.	She sees the pressure on her peers increase and feels that there is 'a mountain of work' building. Despite this, she makes good progress.	He enjoyed his Sixth Form education where he felt he had greater opportunities to creative and be treated like an adult.	Suffers from depression and stops attending college. Repeats a year and finds comfort in the study of drama. Is frustrated this is not valued as he would like.
Act V – Reward / Catastrophe / Denouement	A moment of catastrophe sees a hero suffer (or be rewarded) for an earlier choice. After the moment of last suspense the denouement disperses previous tension and provides closure.	She regrets some of her options choices. There is an absence of clear denouement but laments the lack of formal education about prejudice for her peers.	She believes if she has chosen a different Sixth Form she would still be studying music and regrets her choice. She anticipates getting good A Level grades and going to University.	He was concerned that his employment outside of school may have had a detrimental impact on his A Level performance. He was anxiously awaiting his results to decide on his next steps.	Performs better than expected in the AS retake examinations. Has 'no regrets' about his decisions and intends to take drama at University and awaits his A Level results.

Even a cursory glance at this data shows some limitations in the model. Firstly, the lack of 'denouement' in the participants' narratives is obvious but perhaps not unexpected given that each participant was expecting an important set of examination results in the near future. However, the sense of 'exposition' is clear in each of the narratives and provides some determining factors that help the 'audience' (in this case the interviewer) make sense of the complication, climax and falling action.

The moments of climax (sometimes termed 'the crisis') appears in strikingly different ways across my four protagonists. For Liu it is the figurative 'death' of her motivation as a form of depression, whilst for Ciaran and Melissa it appears more as a challenge to the orthodoxy of the education system. The period of 'falling action' is far more complex. Melissa sees her acquiescence to institutional expectations as her peripeteia – and sees her final denouement as catastrophic in the respect that she lost her opportunity to study music. This, however, can be countered by her strong A Level performance and success in gaining a place at a Russell Group University. In addition, Liu's peripeteia appears to be behind her 'reversal' in reaching a rewarding denouement of improved performance in the Sixth Form.

In some respects, the 'learning narratives' composed by my participants are attempting to achieve what Alheit and Dausien (1999) see as an even greater link between the conceptual and methodological challenges, exploring their journey across the education life course as narrative. In their view, participants in such research need to construct 'learning biographies' which allow them to reflexively arrange their personal experiences in such a way that they develop a meaningful life-history and self-concept. What Sparkes & Smith (2016, p.82) call 'our very sense of selfhood and identity'.

Crucially, this experience provides a perspective that can be communicated – and one that is 'socially viable' - for guiding their actions. I would argue that the information in Table 5-2 illustrates one way in which biographical approaches can recognise the complex associations between individual actions and social contexts. Melissa, for example, has no illusions about her 'free will' in the system and despite her attempts to challenge the orthodoxy of the options process continues along the traditional academic path that is 'expected of her' before she even begins preschool. Liu is unable to act on her love of certain subjects during her phase of 'rising action' because she has to acquiesce to the rules of the system ('what universities like'). It is

the third act (the 'climax') of Ciaran's story that sees the depiction of his most emotive event – his teacher's dismissal of his career aspirations – but he is able to recognise that the teacher is merely a reflection of the context of the wider system where vocational pragmatism and academic choices are valued above artistic aspirations. His experiences mirror the view in the literature that the hegemony of performativity is so pervasive that it is overriding the more holistic aspirations of schooling (Jeffrey & Troman, 2009).

5.3.10 Analepsis and Propelsis

Whilst masterplots suggest a certain degree of chronology and linearity in narratives (see Appendix II), this is not always true of literary texts or narrative interviews. For example, where Ciaran recounts his frustration at achieving a set of poor grades during Year 11, he explains his position of frustration by 'jumping' back in narrative time to [school name redacted] during the five years prior to this stage.

Okay, [name redacted], this girl was incredibly smart. She was A-level standard in [name redacted] during SATs. It was like, I'm going up against someone like that, I know nothing. I did my best but I didn't care. I'll be honest, I didn't - I wasn't fussed. I knew I had a lot of work to do but I just took it on the chin and dealt with it. It was the best idea to be honest. I think I got - I don't know what bands, I, I think, apart from maths and my speaking. Shall I go back to Year 11, yeah?
(Ciaran)

I also consider it significant that analepsis occurs in the interview data when participants were recalling their extra-curricular or non-examination activities. Liu makes little mention of her study of music until her narrative reaches secondary school but then makes a jump in narrative time, noting that music was actually a 'big part' of her story:

I remember at my junior school they had a music department and because I played piano at that point - this was actually quite a big part that I've completely forgotten - I played piano from a really young age...
(Liu)

Her recollection is significant because she is actually affirming her study of the piano as a kernel event, even though it initially appears to a satellite or peripheral happening. In terms of chrono-logic (see Appendix II) and external narrative time, the account of her music education is comparatively tiny but it does lead to one of her key motifs – the confident girl behind the

piano shielded from the scrutiny of her 'judges'. This resonates with the work of Goffman (1958) who differentiates between the frontstage role that people perform in public which is open to societal judgement and the backstage role where refinement of the self can take place without public scrutiny that the individual would find unpalatable. From this perspective Liu is performing a frontstage self that is designed to construct specific impressions in the minds of others whilst the piano provides a physical screen, like a mask, to conceal her backstage self which is reserved for her private contemplation. However, if such role-playing becomes extremely divergent the individual can experience emotional dissonance and this can threaten their sense of self. In Liu's case her front stage self appears to have given her the confidence to cope with her backstage anxieties, however, the distinction between the front stage 'mask' that she adopts and her backstage role do appear to complicate her construction of self. She revisits this theme later when she describes her 'internal' ambition to study sociology at A Level but instead acquiesces to the public scrutiny of subject choices from universities and employers.

Similarly, instances of prolepsis seem to correlate with moments of emotional anguish. When Liu recounts her interactions with her teacher in Year 3 (see antagonists) she immediately jumps in narrative time to the impact this had on her in Key Stages 3 and 4:

I do think that actually influenced me up until secondary school. So I think it did really impact me because I just remembered the look on her face and then all the other kids sort of sniggering in the background, that kind of thing.
(Liu)

Perhaps the most significant analytical observation I can make about the occurrence of analepsis and prolepsis is that the references *backwards* in narrative time tended to make reference to positive aspects of education that were beyond the traditional curriculum. As Bruner (1987, p. 693) notes, our narrative life is a 'selective achievement of memory recall' and my protagonists' recollections are highly significant 'editorial decisions' in the composition of their life narratives. For example, through the process of composition my protagonists were able to judge in retrospect that these events constituted an important part of their holistic experience - even if they were initially absent or satellite events in their plotline. In contrast, the instances of prolepsis almost universally linked to positive experiences, for example, Michael's assertion that the pedagogy of the primary classroom

appeared out of his narrative chronology, alongside his description of revision for GCSE examinations:

So it prepares you for later on when you have to ask for help I guess. Because you can't just do it on your own so you have to develop your social skills which I guess that was doing. So I think that was good, yeah.
(Michael)

Michael's view mirrors, to some degree, what Matheson (2014) considered to be key to Locke's educational philosophy – that the *pupil experience* should be more concerned with instilling good habits into children before becoming focused on academic and intellectual knowledge. This is also mirrored in how Melissa's early experience of music helped her to hold the arts in such high esteem later in her educational narrative and how Liu's initial values about education (gleaned from her parents) seemed to influence the orthodoxy of her choices and respect for the 'facilitating' subjects as prescribed by the Russell Group universities. There appears to be a submissive acquiescence to the prevailing culture and institutional grammar of schooling (Tyack & Cuban, 2005) and also an acknowledgement of the influence of the institutional power of the Russell Group (2011) and the impact of performativity measures such as the English Baccalaureate (DfE, 2008). This also serves as evidence of the conflict between the desires of the individual and the good of the state that stretches back as early as Plato and Aristotle (Papastefanou, 2013). It also suggests that Aristotle's desire for the state to regulate the individual pupil experience (Barnes, 2000) is still very much in evidence. There also appears to be an explicit awareness of their status as commodities (Ball, 2010) with a performativity culture, but a subtle awareness of the greater potential of education to provide a holistic experience (Claxton, 2008) in preparation for a varied adult life.

I would also argue that analepsis and prolepsis in the context of narrative interviews are the beginning of *closure* for participants, not because they are 'conclusions' in the sense that they come at the end of internal narrative time, but because they are often overt attempts to make connections between events and in doing so make sense of their lives. This attempt at narrative closure can be seen as both acquiescence to and performance with social approval. It is part of a wider tendency that my protagonists' displayed to ascribe to traits and roles that facilitate the development of their own self-concept (McAdams, 1985).

5.3.11 Closure and Endings

The concept of 'closure' initially appeared to be one of the most challenging literary metrics to apply to the data as the age of my participants (all nineteen or under) meant that their life-stories were very much teleologically driven. Despite this, I felt it was possible to determine an end to their narrative of compulsory education and certainly possible to determine whether there was any degree of *closure*. Firstly, it was important to keep the two concepts distinct. As Porter Abbot (2008, p.56) notes, 'closure is entirely distinct from an ending as it does not have to come at the end of a narrative; in fact, it does not have to come at all.'

As Porter Abbot (2008, p.59) notes, codes and formulas by their very nature thrive on their inflexibility, citing the example of Morse Code, where we can trust its reliability because it is absolutely rigid and any slight modification means that we have the formula for something different. If narratives were to operate in the same fashion then our literature would be replete with 'stereotypes and wooden clichés' (p.59). That said, my participants were able to acknowledge a certain formulaic approach to their education – as noted by Tyack and Cuban (1995) - that was cyclical in nature. Ciaran noted that the continual reliance of the system on 'sifting and sorting' people based on academic ability had unfortunate and unwitting social and academic implications. After returning to England after a period of living abroad he just started to make friends before the process of selection began again, disrupting once more his burgeoning sense of self-concept:

Then I came to England and I'd been at [school name] and I've made my friends and I've actually stayed with friends for longer than three years. You come to Year 7, right, time to pick tutor groups everyone, you're going to be split up from all your friends. So it starts all again. Again and again.

(Ciaran)

Perhaps the clearest distinction here is closure at the level of expectations (see discussion in Appendix II) and I anticipated to some degree what my participants might say in their interviews. At the level of questions, I was more apprehensive, as this LNA feature is concerned with enlightenment. Whilst at the level of expectations there is a 'narrative chain' of successive and linked events, at the level of questions there is instead a chain of questions that demand a chain of answers.

In the case of the data presented here, at the level of *questions* there are various questions that are implied in each participant's 'story' that are directly linked to my research aim of elucidating the experiences of individuals in a culture of sweeping changes to school performance measures and examination reform. In exploring pupils' educational experiences, identities and academic self-concepts, I had the following examinант questions at the beginning of the narrative interviews:

- Has the participant's experience of education been positive?
- Has the composition of the various events of the narrative contributed to 'success'?
- Were experiences in earlier years worthwhile because of their later contribution to academic and social success?

Broadly, my participants' reflections on their academic stories were positive and their close adherence to overriding master plots suggests a simultaneous acquiescence to the expectations of the pervasive performativity culture of the education system. All four candidates discuss 'success', 'achievement' and 'doing well' in terms of their relative performance in examinations and accreditations (consistent with the view presented by Holt, (1964)). Intriguingly, however, it is the sum of their cumulative experiences *beyond* assessed curriculum that provides an authentic sense of 'success' in the narrative in the way that Claxton (2008) presents the holistic purpose of schooling. For Ciaran, Liu and Melissa in particular, it is both their formal and informal experiences in the arts that supplement their academic successes and allow them a sense of 'home' or 'a place to belong'. For radical education reformers such as Robinson (2011) - who considers creative and arts education as crucial as literacy - this could no doubt been seen as evidence of creative disciplines being marginalised by performativity measures such as Progress 8 (DfE, 2015) and the English Baccalaureate (DfE, 2011).

In addition, all candidates were critical of the stressful experience of measuring the academic success rates of learners with only the extent of their emotive language and imagery being a differentiator – with some making only fleeting reference and others constructing vivid and emotive metaphors (see p.141). In some form, all four protagonists offered a rationale or critique of when they felt that the cost/benefits ratio of certain approaches to teaching and learning resulted in a negative experience even if it led to academic success – in each case

participants used either analepsis, prolepsis or some form of figurative device in their expression of their experiences. These narrative techniques are analysed in more depth in the relevant sections of this chapter.

5.3.12 The Absence of Closure

It is common for consumers of texts to bemoan the author's inability to properly 'close' their narrative, but the presence or absence of narrative closure cannot always be taken as a degree of success or failure. Some relatively basic texts (e.g. advertising, instructions) end unequivocally but certainly do not contain the level of narrative complexity in the data here. Of course, given that each of the participants were A Level students, as an interviewer I was already aware that they had achieved a certain threshold of academic success but I still found myself strangely empathic of their hopes, fears and anxieties. I can attribute this to what Gerrig (1993) terms 'anomalous suspense' in literature – the phenomena that allows us to laugh at jokes we have already heard and cry at the ending of Shakespeare's *King Lear* despite having already experienced its tragedy on numerous previous occasions.

There is also the complex matter of interpretation, where some readers can find narrative closure where others cannot. In the case of the data here this is particularly complex as sometimes the narrator is also the protagonist and sometimes their capacity to find (or fail to find) narrative closure is a part of the story and becomes a sort of meta-narrative. There is also the complex question about whether narrative must end? The literary canon is replete with examples of prequels and sequels and culturally we seem content with postponing the end, and therefore the final perception of narrative shape (Krueger, 2000). Three of the four participants made comments about their narrative continuing ('we'll see what the future brings'; 'I guess I'll find out in the summer') and retained an element of uncertainty about what their future education would bring. It is significant that each of these comments related to examination success, with these narrow metrics seen as the most significant measure of their success (Holt, 1964) rather than a broad, varied experience of schooling (Robinson, 2011) although the proximity of the interviews to their examinations may also have had an impact.

Despite these issues, several participants did seem keen to provide some level of dénouement to their narrative. Ciaran, for example, declared that it had 'been a ride' but was defensive of

his decisions, formulating his story as a form of what Frank (1995) terms the 'restitution narrative':

I don't regret any of the decisions I've made along the way. I don't regret putting my heart into it. I don't regret doing bad, I don't regret doing good. It all happens and I've survived it.
(Ciaran)

It appears significant that none of my participant were keen to attribute significant regret to any of their actions or choices. Even in the case of Liu, who explains that she wishes she had studied a different range of subjects, she was swift to qualify this with an affirmation about her success in the subjects that she had chosen. Frank (1995) notes that people with chronic illness and disability can find it difficult to tell a story which does not appear to have a happy ending, and to a degree the same assertion can be applied here. Whilst his educational future appears uncertain, Ciaran is keen to provide a coherent narrative with a positive conclusion as part of his construction of self (McAdams, 1985). In some respects, I can interpret this as the participants' wishes to retain a degree of agency in evaluating their choices, which, after all, determine the unique direction of their own life narratives. There are questions, however, about the extent to which children's negotiations are 'free' and the extent to which they are oppressed by the wider education system (Freire, 1968). There is also a sense that they are unwilling to take on the role of 'victim' and wish to maintain their agency through the way they respond to the events of the past, even though these may have been out of their control. The process of narrative construction can be seen to enable my protagonists to construct a more coherent sense of sense.

It is surely more accurate to consider that these choices and roles are 'in part produced through a complex constellation of systemic indices of difference - primarily those of social class, 'race'/ethnicity, gender/sexuality and perceived academic ability' (Benjamin et al., 2003, p. 558). Furthermore, I would question whether the attempts at closure are actually an evaluation or justification of their choices, or simply further evidence of structural impact of societal influence on the journey of the individual. Melissa actually references this explicitly at one stage, noting that the educational 'life course' journey is presented by teachers and administrators but is actually a 'lie' (in the view of Bowles & Gintis (1973) used to main

societal hierachal norms) but significantly it does not stop her taking the expected steps in the educational 'masterplot'. The discourse of performativity appears to be dominant, but Melissa is able to recognise that there are a number of competing discourses about the wider value of education.

5.3.13 Motifs, Symbols and Figurative Devices

Two participants referred to their examination or revision periods using the metaphor of 'death' as a way of representing their anxiety. Michael referred to the death of his 'social life' around the period of examinations but the figurative device was presented with even greater force in Liu's interview:

I remember people telling me that you put a lot more effort into AS level than GCSE but because I sort of died for the three months before my GCSE exams
(Liu)

Here her 'death' could be read figuratively as a symbol of her lack of motivation - or perhaps even as an absence of stress in a 'survival' context triggered by depression -paired as it was with her absence of stress. Liu was the only candidate not to bemoan the stress of GCSE preparation, with her hyperbole demonstrating a negation of her identity - the self extinguished by the pressure of exam preparation. It is notable that the symbol she used to describe her emotions carries such negative connotations. The frequency of figurative devices in the data also increased when participants were discussing the examination season and options pathways. There were several zoomorphic metaphors deployed which compared pupils to 'cattle' and 'guinea pigs':

You're sat there, you'd all be like - it'd be like cattle, herding in, silence, no phones, put them away, blah blah blah blah blah.
(Ciaran)

I was put in an accelerated science group which I never thought went anywhere. We were the guinea pigs, yeah, it didn't go well.
(Melissa)

The reference to 'herding' also falls within the same semantic field and the accompanying 'blah blah blah' seems to verify Ciaran's view that it was extremely 'routinised' and also supports Michael's assertion of 'not being treated like individuals'. In addition, three participants

referred to the way that they were perceived as 'statistics' as part of an amorphous mass. Similarly, Melissa stated that she found the 'academic side of education quite regimented' and the semantic field of the military pervades several aspects of her narrative. Much has been written about the need for schools to be courageous in escaping the 'management panoptic' (Perryman, 2006) and to maintain their convictions, values and ethos but the experiences of participants in this study suggest that there are real challenges in implementing this within the culture of performativity (Ball, 2003). For example, Ciaran felt that he was reduced to little more than a statistic, not even having the status of an animal, within the wider education system:

I felt like a number again that year with the school. It was very like, one per cent, you need these grades, blah blah blah. Then when we're picking universities, this is when I went, I'm going to go for my drama schools.

(Ciaran)

Perhaps it is not surprising that schools are concerned with statistical performance, as Wholstetter and Sebring (2002) assert – in the modern school system schools have 'trade[d] increased autonomy for increased accountability'. Some critics would also argue that this is actually the function of education, to educate differentially to prepare learners for hierarchically distinctive roles in the economy and society (Freidenberg, 2009) and as such, Ciaran is losing his own agency as the institution becomes an agent of capitalist reproduction (Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

There was also the recurring theme of medicine and sickness. Ciaran spoke in some detail about how he would self-medicate – or positively manage depending on interpretation - before every examination by dropping 'Rescue Remedy' on to his tongue as a relaxant to 'chill the nerves a little bit'. Perhaps even more dramatic was Melissa's account of one of her classmates vomiting during an examination because of the pressure:

To the point where I was doing my English which was write a story about this beginning sentence and the girl opposite me who I was really close with, she had really bad anxiety about it. She was just sick all over her SATs paper and it was like, oh my gosh, she's got that worried about this exam. It was nothing... she had to kind of get a new paper and get on with it because they had to test her.

(Melissa)

This image is all the more stark because of the school's seemingly blithe insouciance about the physical condition of the person. As Ball (2003) asserts, there appears to be a real ethical issue with acquiescence to the system here which comes at the cost of an autonomous, ethical self-concept for teachers. Interestingly Melissa notes that they 'had' to test her – it appeared to be a mandate rather than a choice, perhaps a reflection of what Halstead (1994) terms 'contractual' accountability in which school leaders are expected to deliver high performance with regard to outcomes and results. She appears to suggest that any kind of agency has been removed from those directly involved. Robinson (2011) argues that it is a moral prerequisite that teachers and pupils should be able, and encouraged, to challenge forms of assessment that are having a negative impact, but acknowledges that this ideal is often far removed from being a reality.

Where experiences of schooling have been much more positive, they often seem to be underpinned by motifs and symbols associated with an ethic of care but also emotional trauma. For Liu the symbol of the piano becomes a 'shield' from judgment of teachers and examiners whilst Ciaran, for example, uses a simile to denote that drama has transcended the notion of a subject discipline and become 'like a family' and likens to finishing the course to a bereavement because of the 'loss' he suffers. He also reconstructs the abstract in a concrete fashion – describing the subject as the 'one place I belong'. These symbols are highly significant in helping him to construct a more complex and nuanced academic self-concept, one defined by his holistic experiences rather than a set of examination grades.

5.3.14 *Binary Oppositions*

Grbich (2012, p.225) also presents a parallel in an analytical approach taken in biographical analysis in the social sciences, where binary oppositions can be sought in the data to 'clarify meaning and focus' when seeking to construct the narrator's identity. There are certainly binary oppositions present in the narrative data I have collected, which when analysed seem to strongly echo, resonate with and reinforce the dominant educational ideologies identified in Chapter 2. These oppositions are summarised in Figure 5-4 below.

Primary Category	Opposition Category
<p>Stress</p> <p>Year 11 was stressful. It was the most stressful time I've had in my life so far. It was constantly on you, constant homework (Liu)</p>	<p>Enjoyment/Relaxation</p> <p>I enjoyed [drama] so much...it was a place where I belonged and I could just relax (Ciaran)</p>
<p>Enrichment</p> <p>We were taken into a special class...a group of us were the top people and we would do things like comprehension. That was good to push us, I think, but it did kind of reinforce that if you were clever you're a little bit different and you will be taken out of things. (Melissa)</p>	<p>Academic Support</p> <p>I was given extra help from a teacher...no a helper in Year 6. It wasn't the bottom group but some of us needed a bit more support. (Michael)</p>
<p>Academic Pressure</p> <p>Then as we went through juniors it got towards SATs which there was a lot of pressure for. That was probably the most pressure I'd experienced until that point which is crazy. (Melissa)</p>	<p>Freedom from Academic Curriculum</p> <p>I think things like music and art are so important when there's so much academic pressure on children, and drama...there's not really that much opportunity for kids to just get out there and just say who they are rather than, this is the grade I'm going to get (Melissa)</p>
<p>Loss of Confidence</p> <p>I do think that actually [negatively] influenced [my confidence] up until secondary school...I just remembered the look on her face and then all the other kids sort of sniggering in the background. (Liu)</p>	<p>Increase in Confidence</p> <p>Because I did this drama group that came in after school and I performed Oliver and I was [redacted for anonymity] ...it was an eye-opener. It gave me confidence, it showed me what I could do and it started my acting passion. Then that stuck with me for the rest of school. (Ciaran)</p>
<p>Anonymity</p> <p>We are the one percent; we are the best. We get numbers, figures every assembly...you felt like you're just a number. (Ciaran)</p>	<p>Identity</p> <p>It was, oh thank goodness, we can do music. We can actually express ourselves which was really great and started off a life in music for me to be honest. (Ciaran)</p>

Figure 5-4 Binary Oppositions in the Interview Data

Within the interview data the most powerful oppositions were the rigid nature of traditional curriculum – perhaps most closely aligned to the theory of Hirsch (1987) and the English Baccalaureate (2011) performance measure in policy - juxtaposed with the ‘freedom’ and expression of the arts curriculum advocated by Robinson (2013). There were also powerful conflicting threads of freedom and direction with regard to curriculum choices and assessment pathways. Melissa appeared torn between the ‘crazy’ pressure of the academic system and the opportunity to explore the arts. The activities that were designed to be ‘enriching’ were sometimes perceived negatively as they reaffirmed the defined character types and masterplot of the prodigy, with Melissa noting that it reinforced ‘you were different...and taken out of things’ away from peers. Conversely, Michael celebrated the support he was given in academic disciplines as ‘some of us needed it’.

Also notable is the stark juxtaposition between the identity of the individual (‘who they are rather than this is the grade’) and that of the passive ‘number’ (‘we are the 1%. We are the best’) within the wider education system. There is striking resonance in this data with Aristotle's early claim that the citizens 'all belong to the State' and real evidence of pupils' experiences of the education system's failure to recognise the holistic value of them as individuals rather than the ‘potential achiever of grades, contributor to test scores or fodder to feed the economy’ (Lumby & English, 2010, p. 123).

5.3.15 Narrative Time and Discourse ‘Chrono-logic’

There is one key area in which literary narratives and narrative interviews share the unique quality that only exists in narrative texts – its ‘chrono-logic’ or double temporal logical. All narratives entail some form of movement through time in the ‘external’ sense (the duration of a play or novel in literature) and also an ‘internal’ sense (the duration of events that constitute the plot).

In the case of the interview data, there is a startling difference between the first temporal logic of the ‘external’ world of the interview and the ‘internal’ diegetic world of the narrative. All the participants noted on occasions that they were not able to recall large parts of their education (in terms of ‘internal’ chrono-logic) with great clarity and sometimes struggled to attribute meaning to this:

It's just a big blur. I think maybe that says something and the fact that I don't remember anything. I think there wasn't - there was just general learning stuff but I don't think it was some points, it was like a high enough level of teaching to prepare me for GCSE.
(Liu)

Although a quantitative measure seems somewhat jarring in a study of this nature, as an interviewer and critic I was aware of the choices of internal chrono-logic participants were making during the interviews; at the analysis stage the stark differences in internal chrono-logic became an important aspect of their narratives. These differences are presented in Table 5-3.

Table 5-3 Narrative Chrono-logic

	Participants	Year R	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4	Sixth Form
Internal Chrono-logic Duration (as % of schooling)	All	1 year (7%)	2 years (14%)	4 years (28%)	3 years (21%)	2 years (14%)	2 years (14%)
External Chrono-logic duration (as % of interview)	Melissa	4%	5%	23%	8%	23%	39%
	Ciaran	5%	5%	22%	11%	27%	28%
	Liu	1%	7%	30%	3%	24%	35%
	Michael	2%	4%	21%	6%	32%	35%

The examination periods, despite contributing less than a quarter of the internal chrono-logic, still dominated the external phase of narrative time (see Figure 5-5 in which the four layers represent the four participants). This may suggest that participants considered the period of their education steeped in performativity and accountability to be more memorable or influential. The concern here is that the literature suggests that high-stakes tests tend to distort the curriculum and schooling in ways that deprive students of meaningful learning (Jane, 2011) and that this is a demonstration of a schooling culture that defines success by a narrow series of quantitative metrics (Holt, 1964).

It may, of course, simply be that these events are more recent, however, if this is true then it is difficult to explain why Key Stage 3 features less prominently in the narratives than Key Stages

1 and 2. It should also be noted that these figures may have been unwittingly influenced by my own ergodic composition (see section later in this chapter).

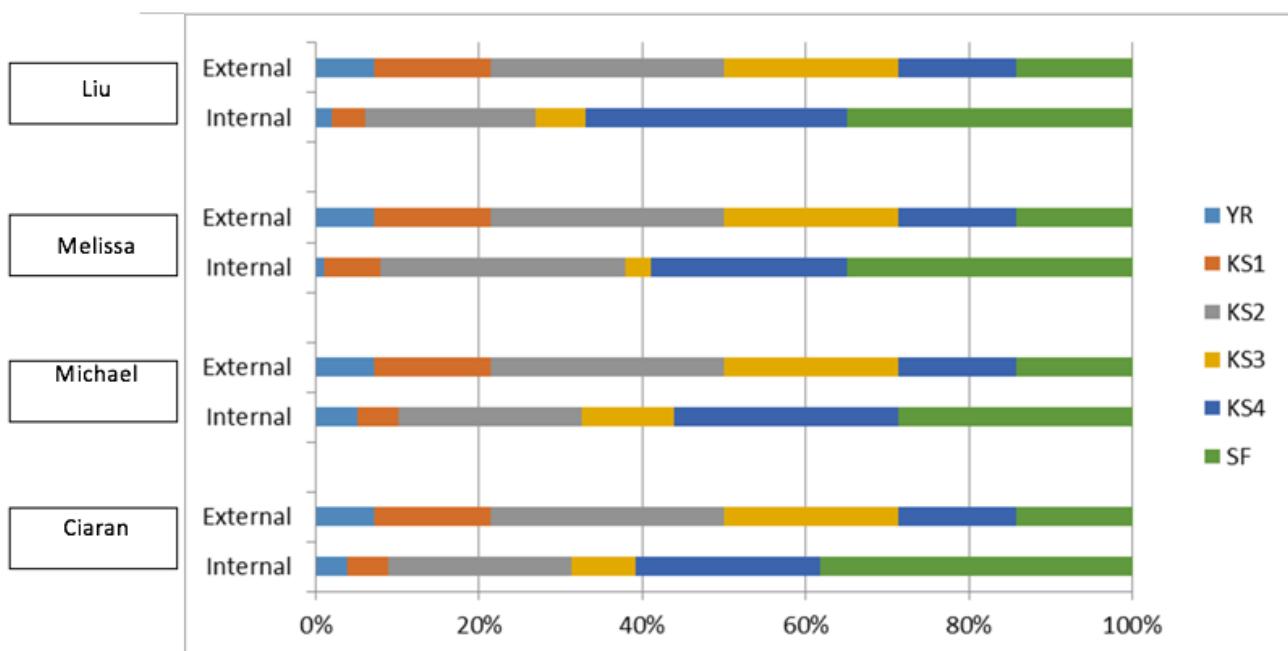


Figure 5-5 Internal vs External Narrative Time (Chrono-logic)

I used chrono-logic as a 'lens' which facilitated a deeper understanding of some of the more subtle narrative devices that are deployed within the data, particularly that of narrative time and metalepsis. Whilst the numbers themselves merely provide a different way of knowing the data regarding the participants' life experiences, they do have the potential to sharpen the focus of other aspects of narrative analysis.

5.3.16 Narrative Metalepsis

Interestingly on occasion my participants stepped outside of the conventional limitations of narrative metalepsis by providing a meta-analysis on their narrative composition, and in each instance this coincided with a moment of powerful emotional resonance. For example:

So many people put pressure on good unis. That's all the talk is here. 'Get into the good uni'. Now at this point I am...I'm happy going to the one that we'll chat about in a little bit, but it was so much pressure at that point
(Ciaran)

Here Ciaran notes that in the present 'real' world of the interview he is 'happy' but within the context of the 'storyworld' his stress and anxiety about academic performance was very real. In commenting on his own structuring and ordering of his narrative he is also entering the third 'world' of production commentary. In Melissa's interview, she also makes explicit the difference in her current judgement about examination pressure and her judgement within the context of the storyworld:

I didn't know it at the time but I don't know if there should be that sort of pressure at that age.
(Melissa)

In making this explicit break from conventional narrative metalepsis, she once again addresses the issue of anxiety and pressure. The same technique is used in Liu's interview to discuss her choice of subjects. She laments – at least partially – her decision not to study sociology as she did not believe at the time of the 'storyworld' that it was highly regarded by universities:

I really enjoyed sociology, I was really, really good at it I think but I didn't know it at the time. Well, in the end I was and then I didn't pick it in the end because I heard universities didn't really like it as much as some other ones or didn't find it as good as a traditional subject. I kind of regret not doing it because I did really enjoy it.
(Liu)

Free from the constraints of the internal narrative time, she explains that she has revised her view. I also was able to conclude that any instances of this form of meta-commentary and breaking of conventions only seemed to appear when my participants were making comments about external pressures – whether that was academic performance or acquiescence to the 'grammar' of subject choices (e.g. the English Baccalaureate (DfE, 2013) or the Russell Group's Facilitating Subjects (2011)).

As Lumby (2007) argues, the oppression can be read as so deep rooted in schools that it largely goes undetected and unchallenged. Liu did not feel that she had the agency to challenge the view of the Russell Group institutions (2011) and instead became part of a system that teaches young people to acquiesce to educational orthodoxy (Lumby, 2007; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

5.3.17 Paratexts

The pressure created by the need to perform was also apparent in the supplementary material I collected around the interviews. This section of the data is somewhat unusual in that it exists outside of the formal transcripts that describe the interview process, but instead comprises my field-notes, recollections and other documentation such as that related to the ethics procedures. The parallel in the analysis of the literary narrative is what Genette (1987) terms 'paratexts' - the materials that exist on the edge of the narrative – but, in the context of this study, can be central to participants' stories.

For example, one of the candidates choose to make notes before and during the interview (see Figure 5-6) which I have included here with her permission. In these notes she capitalises the word 'STRESS' under the subheading of 'Sixth Form' as well as including two 'emoticons' of unhappy faces to supplement her commentary on music, and places the emotive expression 'wow' next to Biology.

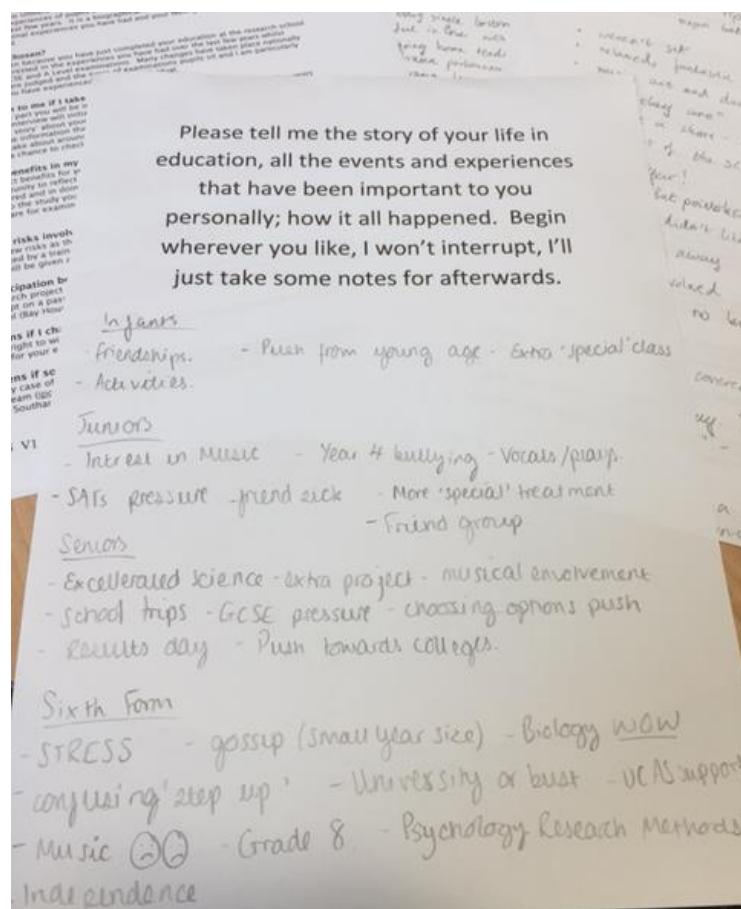


Figure 5-6 A Photograph of a Protagonist's Interview Notes

This is significant as the literature suggests a positive and significant relationship between examination anxiety, and depression (Akinsola & Nwajei, 2013). Liu also comments in her notes about her concern that her stress would have an impact on her academic performance. The literature suggests she is right to be concerned, with Owens et al. (2012) finding that higher levels of anxiety and depression were associated with lower academic performance. Furthermore, they conclude that academic performance is reduced in instances of anxiety or depression as a symptom of increased examination-specific worry because it impinges on working-memory and central cognitive processes.

In addition, the inclusion of the emoticons here were particularly intriguing as in both my field notes and the transcript I had seen no negative connotations with regard to her experience of studying music – only that its absence in her story was a cause of some disappointment. This is a phenomena that has recently also started to appear in the literary world in the last two decades, perhaps most famously in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, where Haddon (2003) uses ‘imagetexts’ as part of what Ong (1982) calls the era of secondary orality. In his view, words are no longer ‘static things, quiet black marks pressed onto a white page’ and this can also be applied to the notes I collected from my interview participants. It seems particularly pertinent that the strong motifs and binary oppositions of stress, and the marginalisation of the arts in juxtaposition with the academic, are reinforced by the ‘imagetexts’ in the paratext documentation.

5.4 Connections with Existing Pupil Voice Literature

Several aspects of the findings accord with the literature relating to pupil voice and school improvement discussed in Chapter 2. Most pertinently, this study supports Flutter and Rudduck’s (2004, p.4) view that pupil voice can be used to harness the perspective of different students and groups of students as “expert witnesses.” Perhaps most strikingly was Liu’s powerful – if fleeting – description of the racism she had experienced during her school life, which resonates with the advocates who call for a ‘language to speak to racism’ (Dei et al., 2014, p.6) which is discussed in detail elsewhere in this chapter.

Further resonance can be seen between the LNA process of character classification and what Lodge (2005) identifies as key aspects of the effectiveness of student voice. For example, Lodge (2005) asserts that the degree to which students are regarded as being active in participation in school life, and the purpose for which their voice is being used are crucial to its effectiveness. As Ciaran identifies with the 'self as outcast' in the LNA model he provides something of a meta-commentary on this process, but is simultaneously engaged with the narrative interview as an opportunity to author the dénouement of his own master narrative. Equally, the LNA process illuminates Melissa's view of irreducible narrativity (Ricoeur, 1983) that suggests that she had previously only been a 'passive' voice in the system.

The data also suggests that students are frustrated in not always being engaged as partners in the school improvement system as advocated by Cervone & Cushman (2002) and Cook-Sather (2002). The exploration of analepsis and prolepsis in my protagonists' accounts revealed the prevailing and pervasive power of the institutional grammar of schooling (sometimes with school leaders cast as antagonists) and performativity. Whilst the existing literature suggests that listening to student voice can encourage school leaders to make important decisions and effectively prioritise decision-making about school improvement (McLaughlin & Mitra 2003; Critchely 2003), this study suggests that the pervasive power of the performativity panoptical (Ball, 2003) can make that incredibly challenging in practice.

One further striking – and perhaps controversial – connection with the existing pupil voice literature is related to Levin's (1999) assertion that students are fundamental to the improvement of school standards as they are the co-producers of school outcomes. Students were able to explicitly identify their importance as producers of outcomes, but this often manifested itself negatively – through the lens of the LNA analysis – as shown by frequent figurative references and zoomorphic metaphors in which protagonists referred to themselves as 'cattle' or 'guinea pigs'.

However there is also a disconnect presented in the data between Smyth's (2006) contention that school reform must be connected to the 'aspirations, lives and needs' of young people (p.288) and the experiences of Melissa and Liu. Both of their narrative accounts describe scenarios in which the institutional grammar and performativity culture of schooling meant that curriculum and educative agency was seized from them. The narrative interviews did facilitate a form of meta-commentary on

their own characters and experiences (often beginning with the phrase “I was a...” or “I had become a...”) which suggests an awareness of the importance of the connection, and perhaps the lost opportunity, that Smyth (2006) describes.

In summary, there is some resonance with the conclusions drawn in this study and the wider pupil voice literature. It is evident that the use of narrative analysis here has harnessed the potential of pupils as ‘expert witnesses’ but further clarifies how pupils sometimes consider themselves only to be passive agents whose narratives are dictated by the persuasive power of the school system. It also illuminates the challenges in addressing the pervasive power of the performativity panoptical in practice and how pupils can feel exploited as the passive producers of outcomes in a system that is only interested in academic performance.

5.5 Advantages of Literary Narrative Analysis over Traditional Methods

Braun and Clarke (2006) cite one of the benefits of qualitative analytic methods as its flexibility. Most forms of qualitative analysis offer a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data. In some respects all the variants of qualitative analysis minimally organises and describes a data set in rich detail. However, Literary Narrative Analysis (LNA) has the potential to go further than this and interpret various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). I believe that LNA falls within the spectrum of qualitative analytic methods that encompasses conversation analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis, discourse analysis and narrative analysis.

As both a teacher of literature and a social science researcher, perhaps I should not have been surprised at the potential of LNA for elucidating complex and rich data. Studies from Mar (2006) and Oatley (2009) conclude that individuals who analyse literary fiction appear better able to understand people, empathise with others and view the world from different perspectives. This link persisted even when the possibility that more empathic people choose to read novels was disaggregated from the data. Mar’s (2010) study also found that the results were more powerful when applied to children, who were able to construct a ‘mental model’ of the intentions of others and thus have broader insights about their own and other’s lives. In this study, Literary Narrative Analysis (LNA) illuminated some key issues that would otherwise have remained undiscovered.

For example, the LNA identification of the *dramatis personae* illustrated how teachers could be perceived simultaneously as both protagonists and antagonists; revealing the complex relationship between teachers and pupils in what Freire (1968) sees as an aspect of a ‘system of oppression’. Equally, the identification of masterplots and acquiescence of protagonists to predefined character types (e.g. self as outsider/elder/survivor) identified a series of significant ‘kernel’ or constituent events that would otherwise have remained invisible (e.g. Liu’s reference to hiding behind the piano to shield her discomfort). Equally, the identification and application of generic masterplots (e.g. the journey from equilibrium to restoration) allowed for a more holistic and rich interpretation of protagonists’ narrative journeys.

The LNA process also allowed for seemingly insignificant or fleeting detail to be recognised as kernel events. For example, it was the LNA process that facilitated the identification of Liu’s *peripeteia* and its conclusion to her ‘reversal’ in reaching her *denouement* of improved performance. Further conclusions can be reached by the ‘meta narrative’ features of LNA (e.g. the absence of closure and paratexts) – such as the unwillingness of participants to engage with the ‘victim’ persona in a defined ending and the use of emoticons as a paratexts to denote a level of stress or performance anxiety around examinations.

In summary, Literary Narrative Analysis (LNA) offered a greater opportunity to explore aspects of the research topic. In particular, it was possible to illuminate the complex relationships between ‘characters’ in the education system and the unwitting acquiescence of protagonists to educational masterplots. The method facilitated a broader, more holistic interpretation of narrative journeys whilst the meta-narrative features exposed a new layer of data that would have been ignored by more traditional methods.

5.6 Summary of Findings

In this chapter I have provided an analysis of the narrative interviews, using the features traditionally associated with the narrative analysis of literary texts to illuminate the lived experiences of the participants. In undertaking this form of narrative analysis, I was open in declaring my fascination with narrative from the literary text as a way of seeking equilibrium

(Bruner, 1987). Just as I have been able to use the identification of narrative features to help illuminate depth and meaning in my study of literature, I believe that this method helped me to interpret and understand the lived experiences of my participants in a far more complex, subtle and nuanced fashion than thematic coding would have facilitated. I have also included some reflections of the strengths and limitations of Literary Narrative Analysis (LNA) as an appendix to this thesis.

Narrative theorists (Labov, 1997; Bruner, 1987) describe how we tell stories about troubling events in our everyday experience in order to regain some sense of equilibrium in our lives, and here I was able to use the structures and frameworks from the literary texts to establish a sense of equilibrium in my participants' stories. Through this approach I gained a sense of the pre-defined social structures (Bowles & Gintis, 1973) that pervade the narratives of individual experiences of the English school system, with the 'cast' consistent across all four interviews with only the nature of the roles (protagonists and antagonists) shifting across and within their narratives. The hyperbolic depiction of characters – ranging from the near-deified teacher to most malevolent villains crushing one of the participant's career aspirations – are just one example of the techniques employed in the emotive narratives to elucidate what is already known about the orthodoxy of the schooling system (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) and the challenges to pedagogical and institutional oppression (Freire, 1968).

Whilst each of the narrative interviews is unique in that only the participant has *lived* that experience, there was much common ground – not only between the interviews but also with defined character 'types' from the literary world. Whilst my participants could be aligned to defined character roles, their individual stories could also be seen to resonate with predefined 'masterplots' that betrayed their claims of agency (Lumby, 2005) and resistance to the system. Within these 'masterplots' there are certainly moments of enlightenment and equilibrium, exchanges with inspirational characters and epiphanies through friendship and engagement in music and the arts (Robinson, 2013). But these narratives are also replete with dark plots of falling action and catastrophe. My participants' lexis is littered with references to 'stress' and anxiety, strengthened by powerful figurative representations of death and zoomorphic metaphors.

As each narrative follows its sequence of conventional, system-led kernel events through its complications towards its climax, the only breaks from narrative orthodoxy come through analepsis and prolepsis and my participants began to reconstruct the chronology of their own stories to make new meaning and give a context to their experiences. The binary oppositions illustrate the tensions of the performativity system; one which allows freedom of expression in the arts and through developed pedagogy but seems to exist in juxtaposition with the relentless ordering, sorting and testing of the amorphous pupil mass that exists within the school system.

6 Conclusions, Recommendations and Reflections

6.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the study and provides a synthesis of my findings. I revisit the research aims and discuss the findings of the study, arriving at conclusions which have implications for practice. The aims of my research were to explore and understand the narratives of pupils across compulsory education in order to elucidate their experiences within a culture of 'performativity' (Ball, 2003, p.215) and 'surveillance' (Lumby & English, 2010, p.107). To achieve these aims, I conducted narrative interviews, using a SQUIN (single question aimed at inducing narrative), and a process of Literary Narrative Analysis (LNA) to achieve a rich, qualitative understanding of participants' experiences. In addition to making recommendations arising from my conclusions and some suggestions for further research, I offer some autobiographical reflections about the impact of doctoral study on my own professional practice.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

Given that this research was designed to provide a unique insight into the educational experiences of my participants and their perceptions of the performativity culture that permeates the English school system, it would be unwise to generalise the results without recognising some significant caveats. Most significantly, the biographies present here are time-limited and therefore not exhaustive as participants' stories continue in a process of 'ceaseless renewal' (Elbaz, 1987, p. 13) beyond the boundaries of these pages. By design, my study was not intended to be a representative sample of society or an ethnographic study of a range of pupils, but rather an in-depth study of individuals. Despite this, there is still much to learn from the narratives of the participants in this study that can contribute to the wider educational debate.

6.3 Reflection on Research Aims

The original contribution to knowledge of this thesis lies in the rich and novel exploration of the individual narratives of pupils who have experienced the recent zeitgeist of school performativity, and the way in which this addresses the paucity of research in this area. This includes an exploration of the pupil experience of wide-ranging changes to school performance measures and examination reform. The reflections below are original in delineating the participants' educational experiences, their identities and how they have formed their academic self-concepts under this overarching policy framework. The extent of participants' explicit knowledge of performativity, and their explicit acceptance of – and acquiescence to – the current system of performativity was particularly striking.

6.3.1 *Research Aim 1 – To What Extent are Learners 'Commodified' by the School System?*

One of the key themes that emerged from the review of the literature was the tendency of the school system to reduce and 'commodify' young people (Ball, 2010, p.155). The narrative interviews in my study were intended to afford participants agency and a voice to comment on this amongst a range of other phenomena, capturing their authentic experiences. One of my key findings was the extent to which pupils were *explicitly* aware of this commodification and the discourse of performativity. Participants made direct references to how they were 'good for the statistics' or 'feeling like a number'. Even when intended in a positive sense (for example, being told that 'we are the [top] 1%'), this was sometimes perceived negatively. Participants were also aware of competing discourses about the broader, holistic value of education (Robinson, 2013), but sometimes presented their engagement with these discourses as subversive or unorthodox in comparison with the prevailing culture of their schools. It was often activities beyond the traditional curriculum that resulted in a love of learning (Claxton, 2008).

The participants were also explicitly aware of the orthodox homogeneity in the view of what constitutes an academically successful student (Benjamin, 2002), with frequent references to 'intelligence', 'smart people' and 'the academic subjects' in their narratives. There was also a strong sense of segregation between those people identified as having a strong academic talent and other pupils, with the process of sorting young people into different bands and streams perceived almost exclusively negatively by participants. The data analysis in Chapter 5

demonstrates how participants saw this as a zoomorphic process of 'herding' where young people were merely 'sifted and sorted' into groups based on academic test scores.

6.3.2 Research Aim 2 – What Influences Participants' Curriculum Choices?

Participants shared experiences of oppression that resonate with Freire (1968) famous analogy of the 'banking' model, and sometimes bemoaned the lack of opportunity for education to become an instrument for liberation and creative expression. Participants complained of the stressful impact of examinations and narrow focus of the curriculum. Whilst the rigorous preparation for examination was seen to offer opportunities for future success, participants did not explicitly see this as part the 'cultural awareness' that Hirsch (1987) advocates.

This study also sought to understand how participants perceived the influence of the school system on their academic choices. In Chapter 1 and in the review of the literature in Chapter 2 I also commented on how schools are judged by how many pupils achieve success, as defined by a series of centrally defined 'metrics'. The narrative interviews produced new evidence to support Black's (2008) assertion that more stringent performance measures have a negative impact in making schools less inclusive. This is illuminating as little is known qualitatively about the influence that performance metrics have on pupils' academic choices – particularly at Key Stage 3 (Harland et al., 2003). Participants told of the pressure that they felt to acquiesce to schools' requests to opt for EBacc subjects even if that was at the cost of following their passion in the arts.

Participants also reported that vocational options were blithely dismissed ('there's this thing called BTEC ... but you don't want to worry about that. It's not for people like you') or explicitly denigrated by school staff. It was evident that participants were keenly aware of a 'hierarchy' of subjects within school, with the arts not considered as prestigious as traditional academic disciplines. What was also evident was the impact that this had on participants' self-concepts, with some made to feel that their subject preferences were juvenile or irrelevant in comparison with the pervasive authority of Universities and government performance measures which advocate STEM and related disciplines. As noted in Chapter 2, existing studies have tended to focus on the cognitive mechanisms by which pupils make their subject and course choices (CfUBC., 2010), but few have considered the power dynamics of the school

system on pupils' affective domain of the self . This study was illuminating in this regard, with a vivid depiction of how an individual's desire to study the arts rather than triple science was met with a 'serious' intervention from the school ('to the extent that senior management got involved') and how that progress in the arts was seen as a distraction from the core 'academic' curriculum.

Participants also displayed an awareness of post-16 'performativity' (Ball, 2003) measures, which had an influence on AS and A Level selections determined by how they believed Universities would perceive their choices. Participants did, however, express the need to challenge the orthodoxy of the system with explicit reference to what they perceived to be the 'lie' that acquiescence to traditional academic pathways would see them flourish throughout their life course. In many respects, participants provided a tangible challenge to the state of ideological invisibility about performativity.

6.3.3 Research Aim 3 – What Can We Learn about the Experience from Inside the Performativity Panoptical?

This study is concerned with the experience of pupils in a zeitgeist of performativity and a policy context that has seen a drive for traditional values (see p.48). These policies are the subject of much critical debate – with the progressives yearning for a skills-based approach in stark contrast with the traditionalists' advocating a high-stakes testing, knowledge-based and 'rigorous' curriculum (Claxton, 2008; Robinson, 2011). The participants in this study help to illuminate the implications of the concrete application of these disparate philosophical principles for individual pupils (Dewey, 2012).

The narrative interviews contained vivid and emotive episodes of participants' peers, suffering serious depression, self-medicating and even vomiting as a result of the pressure of examinations. In one instance a participant discussed his personal depression and how it had necessitated him repeating an entire year of schooling. All participants reported instances of high-stress as commonplace and often used powerful emotive or figurative devices to express their view. In some respects this appears to be the chalk-face reality and impact of schools' inability or unwillingness to see 'the holistic value of the child' rather than as a 'potential

achiever of grades, contributor to test scores or fodder to feed the economy' (Lumby & English, 2010, p. 123).

However, the picture was also more nuanced with many positive instances of education inside and beyond the formal curriculum. Protagonists recounted the wonderful experiences provided by schools in the arts ('it was wonderful, a place where I belonged') - and in one particularly vivid instance - the 'personal' experience provided in preparation for A Levels that made him feel particularly valued as an individual, even in the context of extreme examination pressure. Therefore, it is evident that in some instances schools are still able to offer a bespoke, valuable and positive educative experience despite the pressures of performativity.

6.4 Recommendations

There are a number of recommendations arising from my research. As Lincoln and Guba (2000, p. 40) argue, there are sufficient similarities between the contexts of the narratives presented here that there is a degree of transferability (what they term 'fittingness') to the majority of schools in the English state system. Therefore, whilst the results are not entirely generalisable, I would still consider that the narratives point to a number of points that are worthy of schools' consideration:

- i. *For school leaders and governors.* Schools need to demonstrate judicious balance between acquiescence to performance measures and the need to offer children and young people access to the sciences, humanities, arts and practical learning. Participants clearly expressed how some young people need time to discover where their true talents and interests lie and yet schools can unwittingly 'guide' them into an academic or vocational pathway before they are ready. Schools must make brave choices that provide an appropriate balance of academic, artistic, vocational and civic education even if it is at the cost of their own performance in official statistical measures.
- ii. *For school leaders and governors.* Schools must do more to support – and demonstrate they value – pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Liu's narrative in particular demonstrates that time must be found to ensure that moral education

is delivered effectively. Explicit opportunities need to be created to allow young people to understand the difference between right and wrong and be able to evaluate their and others' viewpoints. It must not be assumed that racism and other forms of discrimination are being challenged across the entire school curriculum. Schools should do more to enable teachers and pupils to recognise and tackle discrimination by building an inclusive community.

- iii. *For policy makers and school inspectors.* School performance measures need to be radically overhauled to value curriculum breadth and balance. Specifically, the EBacc measure should be removed with immediate effect and the 'Progress 8' measure adjusted to accredit league table points equally across all subjects beyond English and mathematics. This study highlights the impact of performance measures on limiting the choices for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Instead of prioritising STEM (and other traditionally 'academic') subjects, ministers should hold schools to account for the breadth and balance of their curricula. This is particularly crucial as presently disadvantaged learners are more likely to have arts subjects withdrawn, and to have their GCSE option blocks affected; with 65% of schools with high FSM reported changing their GCSE options as a result of the EBacc compared to 30% of schools with low numbers of disadvantaged pupils (DfE, 2015).
- iv. *For schools and parents.* Care and subtlety must be applied in recognising that for some pupils schooling can be a difficult – and at times emotionally distressing. In some cases, advocacy groups intent on raising awareness about an epidemic of exam stress may unintentionally contribute to a further intensification of the performativity culture. Educators and parents can do more by emphasising the significant but limited function of examinations in holistic education. The participants in this study demonstrated their understanding that being well-educated means more than just being able to perform well in tests. They recognised the discourse about wider education and that education is a prerequisite in being prepared for life by developing tangible qualities which employers value and the skills that enable us to interact with other people. This study demonstrates that some pupils' experiences provide a love of learning that they perceive as being at least equal to the achievement of strong examination grades.

- v. *For schools and examination boards.* More needs to be done to design and promote worthwhile, rigorous vocational qualifications. Despite the recommendations of the Wolf Review (2011), the participants' stories confirm that these reforms have not been entirely successful and that vocational learning is still seen as the poor relation of academic learning and there is no parity of esteem between the two. Whilst the recent reform of these qualifications has sought to make the practical more academic, this has often been to the detriment of both. In many cases, these qualifications are still pitched at low-achievers in the school system. As the participants in my study demonstrate, the system is still denying some young people the opportunity to recognise the inherent value of craftsmanship and the richness of practical and technical competences.

- vi. *For teachers, school governors and school leaders.* Schools should incorporate meaningful opportunities to explore pupil narratives to support policy development and the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning. Participants spoke positively about their – albeit limited - opportunities to speak and to listen and to express themselves as individuals. Perhaps more steps could be taken to allow pupils to recognise that their individual talents and personalities make them more than potential achievers of grades or contributors to performance table points.

6.5 Recommendations for further research

Whilst this study illuminates some aspects of the individual experience of school pupils in the age of performativity, further research is needed about the ethics, necessity and justification for the intensive surveillance that has become a part of the school and examination system. The literature review revealed that scant attention has been paid to this area of enquiry. I would like to see a comparative, longitudinal study examining a wider range of pupil narratives from a number of learning contexts and experiences. In addition, it would be enlightening to undertake further research on teachers' and governors' own narratives. This would help to determine how their experiences of the performativity culture are helping to shape their professional practice and thus the experiences of the young people in their care.

6.6 The Practical Application of Literary Narrative Analysis (LNA)

I believe that this thesis highlights a perennial lost opportunity in the school system – that the narrative voice of learners leaving school is not captured or properly explored. In a landscape of extraordinary performativity, the school system has become reliant on the role of the inspectorate (both Ofsted and HMI) to ‘validate’ the standard of education that schools provide for their learners. The inspectorate’s assessment is based on a universal set of criteria, acting as a comparative tool through which teachers and parents can analyse school performance but is almost entirely driven by quantitative data and reductionist ‘universal’ observations of teaching and learning. The limited scope of inspections fails to appreciate what makes a school effective and ignores the potential of a resource that is both powerful and readily available – the narratives and voices of the former pupils who are leaving the system every year.

Whilst the processes developed in this thesis are undoubtedly complex and the result of skilled training, there are related approaches that could be adopted in schools without overly onerous training. Fundamentally, any practitioner or researcher interested in adopting a narrative stance is principally interested in the stories and storying that shape people’s lives (e.g. MacAdams). Whilst the semantics of Literary Narrative Analysis (LNA) might seem convoluted, like other narrative techniques it is merely a lens to help put into perspective the stories that produce our lives, and are available to us in the varied cultural worlds that we inhabit. I propose that school leaders could apply the basic principles of LNA by following a relatively simple framework.

Firstly, schools need not be too concerned with the various different competing and complementary narrative interview designs (Bauer, 1996; Wengraf, 2001) so long as they adhere to the key characteristics that ensure that the ‘researcher’s responsibility is to be a good listener and the interviewee is a storyteller, rather than a respondent’ (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p.7). In simple terms, teachers could be trained to begin narrative interviews with one open question, what Wengraf (2001) calls a ‘SQUIN’ (Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative) and to ensure that the interview is not interrupted with questions.

In terms of the analysis, I believe that schools could adapt the guidance from Ezzy (2002) on conducting narrative research, without the onerous and expensive process of training all

practitioners to become experts in LNA. I believe that there would be much merit in adhering to the following guidelines:

1. Compile the stories
2. Analyse the content, the discourse, and the context of each story, focusing on insights and understandings
3. Compare and contrast stories for similarities and differences in basic narrative features
4. Consider the effects of background variables (i.e. gender, age, political zeitgeist)
5. Identify stories or content that illustrate the themes, narrative features, and insights

I would also propose, from the data collected in this study, that schools could consider employing the following 'refined' LNA codes to categorize data collected:

- Motifs, Symbols and Figurative Language
- Narrative Time and Chrono-logic
- The Limits of Narrative
- Closure and Endings
- Analepsis and Propelsis
- Agon or Conflict
- Antagonists
- Protagonists
- Narrative Metalepsis
- Character and Self
- Masterplots

Whilst I recognise that the lexis might be off-putting to the non-specialist, there is also the potential for schools to utilise their existing resources (e.g. their English Literature and Sociology specialists) to deliver training to colleagues. Often there is a disconnect between teaching professionals' subject knowledge and their capacity and utilization in delivering professional learning to their colleagues. This is particularly wasteful in light of the current political and social interest in narrowing the gap and the Pupil Premium.

The LNA process also has the potential to be a low-cost and emancipatory approach to giving a voice to disadvantaged learners. In this way, the potential of Literary Narrative Analysis (LNA) can be practically realised and distributed to other stakeholders. This technique has the potential to elucidate the political, social and relational aspects that combine to produce the narratives of stakeholders. There is also the potential of using this technique to explore the narrative lives of other stakeholders including parents, teachers, school leaders and governors.

6.7 Personal Reflections

I have little doubt – even as my own autobiography continues to evolve – that my Ed.D. experience will become a ‘kernel’ event in my own life narrative. It has undoubtedly had an enormous influence on my professional stance, ethics and practice as a teacher and school leader. It has supported my reflections in understanding the responsibility and impact of the school system, and how unquestioning implementation of policy driven by performativity can have a detrimental impact on young people, even if our intentions are entirely altruistic.

Whilst the adoption of Literary Narrative Analysis (LNA) was somewhat unconventional, I hope that my thesis can also make a methodological contribution in relation to how we might understand the pupil experience. Although at the times it proved challenging, I am glad to have taken the risk and ventured into the unknown methodologically, as it helped to illuminate aspects of my participants narratives that would otherwise have been left unseen. Perhaps more than ever, I am convinced of the potential of ‘narrative [as] machine to think with’ (Richards, 1924) that enables a richer understanding of the complexities of the pupil experience in the state education system in England.

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Appendices

Appendix I – A Fifteen Point Checklist for TA/LNA

A Fifteen Point Checklist for TA/LNA

Process	No	Braun and Clarke's (2006) Criteria for TA	My Criteria for LNA
Transcription	1	The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail and the transcripts have been checked against tapes for 'accuracy'	As Braun and Clarke's TA
Coding	2	Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process	As Braun and Clarke's TA
	3	Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive	Literary narrative features have not been generated from a few vivid examples but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive
	4	All relevant extracts for each theme have been collated	All relevant extracts for each literary narrative feature have been collated
	5	Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set	Literary narrative features have been checked against each other and back to the original data set
	6	Themes are internally coherent, consistent and distinctive	Literary narrative features are internally coherent, consistent and distinctive
	7	Data has been analysed – interpreted, made sense of – rather than merely paraphrased or described	As Braun and Clarke's TA
Analysis	8	Analysis and data match each other – the extracts illustrate the analytical	As Braun and Clarke's TA

		claims	
9	Analysis tells a convincing and well-organised story about the data and the topic	As Braun and Clarke's TA	
10	A good balance between the analytical narrative and illustrative extracts is provided	As Braun and Clarke's TA	
11	Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases adequately	As Braun and Clarke's TA	
12	The assumptions about thematic analysis are clearly explicated	The assumptions about the experimental method are clearly explicated	
13	There is a good fit about what you claim you do and what you show you have done – i.e. describe method and reported analysis are consistent	As Braun and Clarke's TA	
14	The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis	As Braun and Clarke's TA	
15	The research is positioned as <i>active</i> in the research process; themes do not simply 'emerge'	The research is positioned as <i>active</i> in the research process; narrative features are actively discovered and interpreted and do not simply 'emerge'	

Appendix II – A guide to Literary Narrative Analysis

Introduction

As readers of this thesis may not be entirely familiar with the terminology used from the study of literary narratives, definitions and examples are included here as an appendix. I have also included some reflections on the limitations of the method and the challenge associated with ‘ergodic composition’.

The Distinction between Narrative and Story

Given that these two terms are so often used interchangeably, I appreciate that it may be useful to define my terminology. Porter Abbot (2008) defines narrative as the representation of events, consisting of both story and narrative discourse, distinct from the ‘story’ that is merely an event or sequence of events. This is distinct from narrative discourse which can be defined as the way in which those events are represented.

However, the lexis surrounding narrative, both in the field of literature and of social science, is fraught with inconsistency and controversy. Even once we accept that *narrative* is distinct from ‘story’ in that it refers to the representation of events and not the events themselves. To illustrate this distinction it is common for critics of narratology to adopt the terms *fabula* and *sjuzet*. These terms originate from Russian Formalism (Porter Abbott, 2008) and refer to the raw material of the story and the means by which the story is organised. The distinction is perhaps best understood through a worked example.

In Quentin Tarantino’s Pulp Fiction (Tarantino, 1994) the film begins with an all-action shoot-out in a café which takes place chronologically near the end of the film’s timeline. The story is then told through a series of flashbacks. In this example the ‘fabula’ of the film is the sum of the cumulative events of the film’s protagonists and antagonists whilst the ‘sjuzet’ is the way the story is told through the film, including the non-chronological flash-backs and flash-forwards (referred to in the literary world as *analepsis* and *prolepsis*). Considering this, for the purposes of this thesis, I am defining the difference between events and the way in which they are *presented* as the key difference between story and narrative. I believe that illuminating this

distinction through the adoption of a literary narrative analysis approach can support a deeper understanding of my narrative interview data.

Dramatis Personae

Any analysis of literature needs to begin with its cast or characters, without which it is arid. To borrow a term from the world of theatre, the ‘dramatis personae’ is the phrase often used to refer collectively, in the form of a list, to the main characters in a dramatic work.

Protagonists and Antagonists

A protagonist is the main *positive* entity (not necessary ‘character’ although this is most common) in a work of literature. With many characters surrounding the protagonist, finding that main character can sometimes be more challenging than expected. In the case of my narrative interviews, the central protagonist is also the narrator *and* the author.

In juxtaposition, most literature (partly because of – or certainly intrinsically linked to - the common acquiescence to *masterplots*) sees at least one entity who is opposed to, struggles against, or competes with another – the opponent or adversary. The depiction of antagonists is evident in all four narratives and is often some of the participants’ most emotive content.

Character Types

Just as there are a series of ‘masterplots’ to which most narratives adhere, there are also a series of defined and expected character ‘types’ in the literary world (e.g. the outcast and the hero). In terms of autobiographical narrative, however, there is a further layer of complication – and one that has been explored at length by critics of literary texts. Porter Abbot (2008, p.134) argues that “if you want to write your autobiography without the sense that you are fictionalizing by displacing yourself with a type that is either more heroic, more pathetic, more honest, more whatever...it can be hard work.” There is also the problem that the readers will tend to under-read and over-read characters and discover ‘types where none were intended’ (Porter Abbot, 2008, p.140) and there is no guarantee that adding more detail to the narrative will remedy this.

Kernels and Satellites

In addition to ‘defined’ character types, which are required for a narrative to succeed, there are also expectations about the ‘happenings’ which allow a narrative to proceed. This is an area in

which the literary analysis of narrative adopts an entirely different lexis from the social sciences. Whereas in the qualitative research literature there is frequent reference to epiphanies (Denzin, 1989) in literary studies narrative events are usually divided into what Chatman (1978) terms 'kernels' and 'satellites'. 'Kernels' are the constituent events that are essential in the advancement of the story, not necessarily turning-points or epiphanies but essential to the chain of events that constitutes that the story. 'Satellites' are the supplementary; they appear to be extra or superfluous. As an active researcher, the presence of these events in the interview data led me to ask why it had been included in the narrative in the first place.

Masterplots

In English and world literature there are a number of 'base' stories that recur endlessly throughout the canon, many of them intrinsically linked to specific cultures and individuals. The term 'master narrative' is sometimes used but this is really a technical error since many versions of the same plot can exist in different narrative versions.

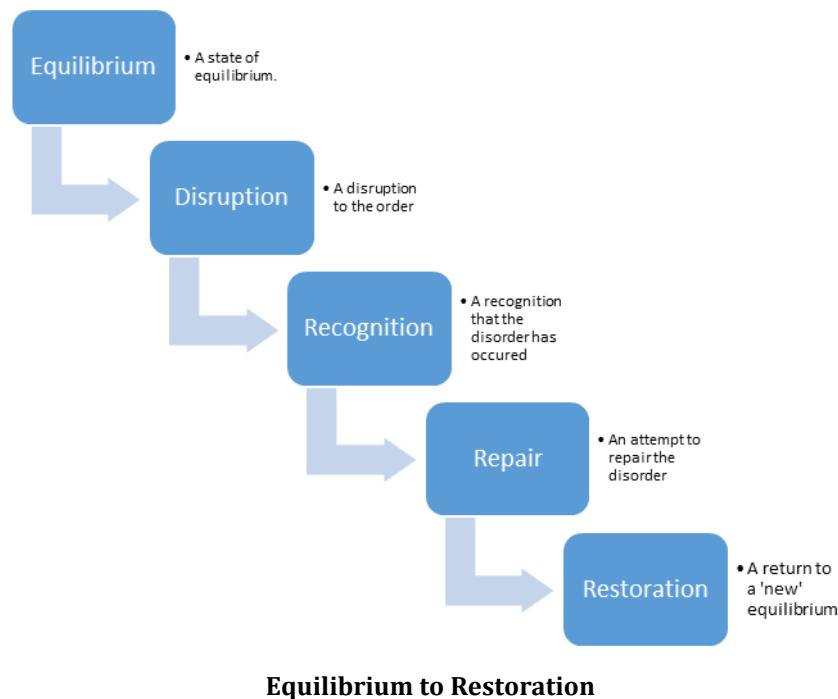
The following list is not exhaustive but covers the most frequently occurring masterplots (Barnet, Berman, & Burto, 1964):

- Coming-of-Age (initiation and/or awakening),
- Rags-to-Riches (pursuit of happiness)
- Rise and Fall (tragedy, vice punished, pride before the fall)
- Virtue Rewarded (Cinderella story)
- Learning journey ('Bildungsroman')
- Origins (family saga, creation story, epic)
- Self-sacrifice (hero's martyrdom)
- Underdog (struggle against impossible odds, forbidden love)
- Picaresque (road narrative, quest, adventure story/romance)
- Faustian plot (temptation/bargain with the devil)
- Exile/banishment (stranger in a strange land)
- Orphic journey (descent into hell)

A range of critics argue that each of these masterplots is composed of a series of essential components but with subtly different overarching frameworks. The two components that are indisputable are the notion of the events and the entities (Berman & Slobin, 1987). 'Entities'

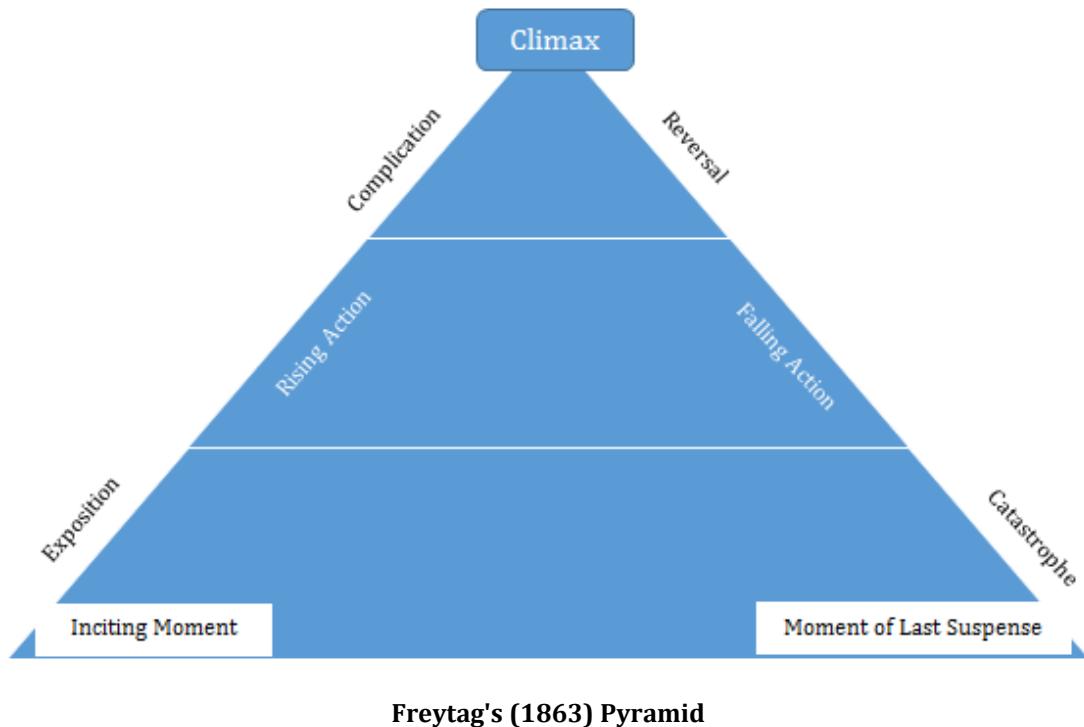
are usually characters but sometimes can be animals or even inanimate objects that are anthropomorphized. The third component is setting or a narrative world, although some narratives can exist without setting. Palmer (2004, p.154) coins the term 'storyworld' and notes that each one 'contains ontological gaps or spots of indeterminacy...as no discourse could ever be long enough to say in its story all that could be said about the whole storyworld.' Several critics, however, have constructed more complex and comprehensive frameworks which provide a useful lens for the narrative data in this thesis, including Todorov's (1969) principle of equilibrium and Freytag's (1863) pyramid.

In essence, Todorov (75) believes that any narrative text can be seen to move through a series of pre-defined 'stages' called equilibrium, disequilibrium, acknowledgement, solving and a 'new' equilibrium (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).



Narrative texts in the literary world – depending on the genre - are typically divided into chapters, stanzas, and acts (Brooks, 1984). This structural division is usually closely linked to the notion of 'plot'. So far I have not confronted the concept of 'plot' and its relationship with narrative. Most critics agree that that narratives without some minimal form of plot are entirely incomprehensible (Brooks, 1984; Porter Abbott, 2008). Brooks defines plot as the principle of interconnectedness and intention in moving through the discrete elements –

incidents, episodes and actions of a narrative. For the purposes of this thesis, perhaps Freytag's *Die Technik des Dramas* (1863) provides the most comprehensive framework for the structure of plot.



'Analepsis' and 'propulsion'

Analepsis is commonly known by the more populist term 'flashback'. This essentially means that material is introduced to the *narrative* from a chronologically earlier part of the *story* (the opposite of propulsion which sees material from a later part of the story being introduced). In participants' accounts, analepsis seems to coincide with measures of expectation and examinations.

Motifs and Figurative Devices

Perhaps alongside plotting, motifs and figurative devices are amongst the core features of literary narrative criticism. However, these terms are often misused in a *narrative* context. In a literary sense a motif must be a discrete phrase, image or object that is repeated in a narrative (with a leitmotif being an even stronger form of repetition). The difference from a symbol is essentially a question of *force*. The symbols and motifs that occur and recur in the narrative interviews were startling in their emotive power.

Binary Oppositions

As well as the focus on figurative devices, narratologists are also interested in the identification and interpretation of binary oppositions in texts. This school is based on the work of Levi-Strauss (1958) who argued that meaning in narrative could often be derived from the presence of binary oppositions. His work was less concerned with the structure of the narrative but the deeper layer of meaning arising from the themes contained within the text. 'Binary opposition' can, therefore, become a way in which narratives are subconsciously interpreted by readers. According to Levi-Strauss (1958) the existence of these 'binaries' within a text serves to develop often powerful layers of meaning that work to maintain and reinforce a society or culture's dominant ideologies.

Chrono-logic and Narrative Time

Just as in the above discussion of chrono-logic and narrative time, I felt it was important for any analysis of my interview data to consider that there are always simultaneously at least two 'worlds' in the narrative data. Firstly there is the 'narrative storyworld' (Palmer, 2004) and secondly the 'real' world in which the interviews were conducted where the narration itself takes place.

Narrative Metalepsis

In the vignettes in Chapter 5 the second world is invisible as the narrator was extradiegetic. It could also be argued that this chapter could be a third layer of production as it contains a commentary on the production and therefore both the storyworld and the world of the narration. In literature, as in my interviews, the world of narration is nearly always later than the narrative world (as is told in the past tense as necessity). This is, however, contested by some critics, most notably Cohn (1978) who advocates the use of 'simultaneous narration' (73) in the present-tense and therefore the merging of the storyworld and the real world for increased authenticity in recollection.

The Limits of Narrative

As well as what occurred within the chrono-logic timespan of the interview and the diegetic 'storyworld', I was also interested in exploring what happened *beyond* the fringes of this time. In the world of literary criticism, critics often note that at the edges of a narrative often lies

another narrative. Perhaps most famously found in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) where each narrative serves as a frame for the one nestled within it. This 'framing narrative' – so commonly used in the analysis of literary fiction – is also present in the data here.

Paratexts

Just as the paper, the texture, the binding may influence the way we read a novel, the recording, the setting, and the style of the transcription are all potentially 'paratexts' in the narrative interviews discussed in this thesis. It forced me as a researcher to ask, as the literary critic does when they reach the novel's end-notes, when does the narrative end and the 'real' world begin?

Narrative Frames

The outer frame of the informal setup of the interview (including the ethics documentation, my field notes, the informal conversation before the tape recorder was switched on) serves as a sort of prelude and coda to the inner narrative, then different narratives within this are stacked like Chinese boxes.

In possibly the most comprehensive study of frame theory, Goffman (1974, p.563) reminds us that the narratives of individuals are merely fictive copies of the real experience:

In looking at frames of everyday, actual doings involving flesh-and-blood individuals in face-to-face dealings with one another, it is tempting and easy to draw a clear contrast to copies presented in fictive realms of being. The copies can be seen as mere transformations of an original, and everything uncovered...can be seen to apply on to the copies. However...the variables found in nonliteral realms of being are also found in the organization of actual experience.

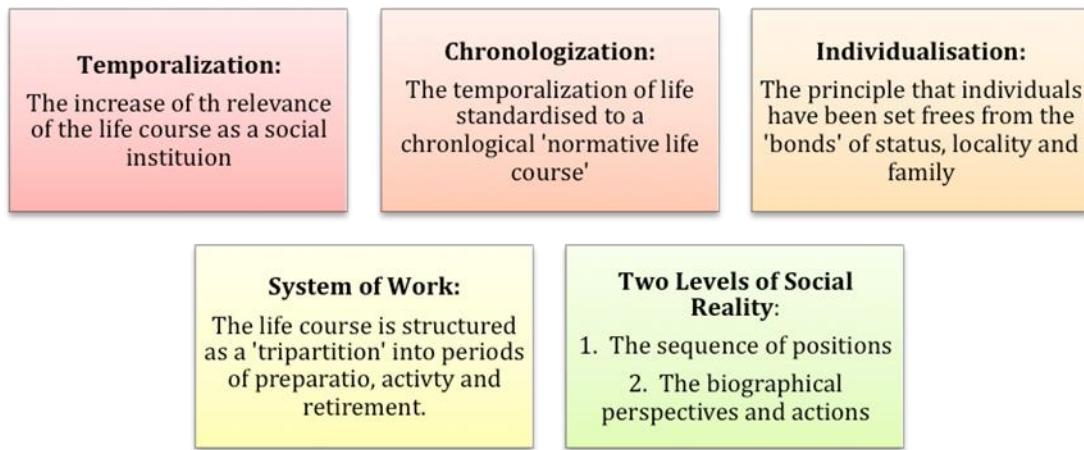
For example, in my field notes I recorded Michael's anxiety before the interview that his story wouldn't be interesting enough and whether he could be 'personal' in his comments. I also noted that he was in a heightened state of emotion as he was about to move away from his friends and family in the next two days and 'may not see them again'. I was particularly surprised by one my participants' questions about anonymity. He was concerned that his name would not be used in the data as he was likely to disclose sensitive information about the depression from which he had suffered. In my field notes I recorded that he was 'agitated' and 'nervous' although this quickly dissipated once the recording began.

I also noted that two of my participants asked if their interview 'was OK' and 'what I was looking for' after the tape had stopped. One questioned whether it 'was a bit boring' and whether 'anyone would want to listen to that'. I likened this to the relationship between the writer and the editor, seeking approval for the quality of the submitted text and also to Freire's (1968) view that the voice of the oppressed was silenced, particularly when it is not part of a culturally approved 'norm' (Hirsch, 1987). This was particularly interesting as at the later stage no participants questioned the quality or accuracy of the written transcripts. I questioned whether this was a force of acquiescence to the expectation of 'masterplots' (see Educational Narrative Masterplots) in that my participants were seeking a form of 'genre approval'.

This pre and post-interview 'framing' of the narratives forced me to question the extent to which the interviews themselves had become a part of the 'performativity' culture that was described elsewhere in their interviews? Had my participants felt that they needed to 'perform' or acquiesce to a set of unwritten and unspoken metrics?

Freytag's (1863) Pyramid

There is a synergy between Freytag's pyramid with the the 'life course' paradigm, defined by Giele & Elder (1998, p.22) as 'a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time'. Freytag's (1863) work provides a similar function to the lifecourse paradigm, in enabling social scientists to move beyond the analysis of structural 'social relations' and temporal approaches that seek to trace the narrative of individual lives over a period of time (Giele & Elder, 1998). In some respects, Freytag's structure is more similar in nature to how Kohli (1986) sees the life course as a rather more prescriptive route, framing it in five propositions that are summarised diagrammatically below.



A Diagrammatical Representation of Kohli's (1986) Framing of the Life Course

In my analysis, both Freytag's Pyramid and the 'life course' become institutional models that describe the movement of the individual through a set of social positions and biographical orientations. I would argue that both models emerge principally as a response to the challenge for the social sciences and literary critics of integrating the 'structural' and 'dynamic' knowledge into a coherent and comprehensive analytical approach. My application of Freytag's Pyramid also illuminates the debate around the clash between the influence of social structures and the agency of the individual. These issues similarly emerge in traditional methods of data analysis with Chamberlayne & King (2000) attributing the interest in biographical and narrative methodologies to their aptness for tracing these 'interconnections' that exist between the structural factors and the agency of the individual. Advocates of this approach argue that the exploration of individual life narratives can illustrate wider social, cultural, economic and educational factors (Johnson, 2007).

A Note on Ethics and Freytag's Pyramid

An ethical problem also arose as I began to apply this framework, as it required a determination of genre arising from the classification of the dénouement. In Freytag's (1863) structure a comedy ends with the protagonist in an elevated position from that held at the story's outset. The tragedy ends with a catastrophe in which the protagonist is in a worse position. In applying Freytag's principles, I started to question my ethical right to represent my participants' stories in this way. Was my reframing of their story accurate? What is ethical? Frank's (1995) extraordinary text *The Wounded Storyteller* goes further, seeing the telling of the story as an ethical act above the physical one as to tell one's life is to become

responsible for it also. In Frank's (1995) perception, the stories of individuals become an ethic of the age as they give a voice to those who have previously only been the subjects of the reports of others.

'Ergodic' Composition

Although my intention as a narrative interviewer was to be passive in only posing a SQUIN, I found myself providing some 'mechanical organisation of the text' (Aarseth, 1997, p.763) in my prompt questions in the second phase. In this respect, as an interviewer, I did have some control of the path in that I had to make 'nontrivial effort' to allow us to traverse the text. Aarseth (1997, p.4), in the context to cybertexts calls this phenomena 'ergodic composition' – using a term appropriated from physics that derives both 'work' and 'path'.

When listening to the recording I noticed that I interrupted on more occasions than I had intended and that this was also often followed by an apology:

Can you tell me a bit more about those?
Sorry, we got to Year 9 and I interrupted you, sorry.
(Facilitator)

But I became aware that my interruptions were frequently actually temporal and mechanical organisers as seen the example above. My ergodic composition was not limited to the timing either, with a few particularly emotive phrases questioned for clarification during the interview and not during the questioning period:

Sorry, what did you say? 'Because you died' did you say, what did you mean by that?
(Facilitator)

Despite my attempt to adhere the principles of NI that I have laid out in Chapter 3, the dramatic nature of the metaphor (of death as a substitute for lack of motivation) here was problematic as an interviewer in two ways, firstly it was so emotive that I felt that the need to intervene and secondly it was abstract enough that I felt it needed clarification to contextualize the next part

of the participant's story. In this respect, I believe that my interjection was both at the level of story and of narrative as the figurative device was key to the strength of the story that was told.

Apologies, we just had to stop the tape briefly but we will pick up straight from there.

Sorry, I'll repeat that question. You said that your subject choices were influenced by universities. You'd heard that universities didn't like sociology...

(Liu)

There is also some resonance here with the tension in the method that Bruner (1987) describes between the canonical and the unexpected, as I unwittingly kept the participants' interviews 'on track' – arguably at the expense of their narrative freedom.

Appendix III – Participant Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet

Study Title: A Biographical Study of the Experiences of Secondary School Pupils (11-18) in the Zeitgeist of Performativity and Accountability

Researcher: Mr Nigel A. Matthias **Ethics number:** 13653

Please read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.

What is the research about?

My name is Nigel Matthias and I am currently studying towards the degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) at the University of Southampton. My research project is designed to find out more about the experiences of pupils who have studied towards GCSE and/or A Level examinations in the last few years. It is a biographical study which means that I am interested in the unique educational experiences you have had and your feelings about what you have experienced at school.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you have just completed your education at the research school. I am particularly interested in the experiences you have had over the last few years whilst studying for your GCSE and A Level examinations. Many changes have taken place nationally about how schools are judged and the types of examinations pupils sit and I am particularly interested in how you have experienced this as an individual.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to take part you will be interviewed about your experience over the last few years in education. The interview will initially take the form of a single question where you are invited to tell 'your story' about your experiences in education. There will be further questions based on the information that you provide during the first stage. The interview will be recorded and will take about an hour in total. The interviews will then be transcribed and you will have a chance to check them to ensure their accuracy.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?

There are no direct benefits for you because you have completed your school education but by having the opportunity to reflect on this experience it may help you understand a little more about what occurred and in doing so may help you with future decisions about your education. By contributing to the study you will be adding to the knowledge-base about how we help students to prepare for examinations and how we might improve the experience for students in the future.

Are there any risks involved?

There are very few risks as the research techniques (biographical interviews) are not invasive and are conducted by a trained researcher. If you find any aspect of telling your story upsetting you will be given access to the school's counselling service.

Will my participation be confidential?

Yes. The research project is compliant with the Data Protection Act/University policy. The data will be kept on a password protected computer and your name will not be collected. The research school (Bay House School and Sixth Form) will, however, be named in the final project.

What happens if I change my mind?

You have the right to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without any consequence for your education.

What happens if something goes wrong?

In the unlikely case of concern or complaint, you should contact the school's Executive Leadership Team (ipotter@bayhouse.hants.sch.uk) or the research governance office at the University of Southampton (02380 595058, rginfo@soton.ac.uk).

Where can I get more information?

Please contact the researcher nmatthias@bayhouse.hants.sch.uk.

Appendix IV – Consent Form



|

CONSENT FORM

Study title: A Biographical Study of the Experiences of Secondary School Pupils (11-18) in the Zeitgeist of Performativity and Accountability

Researcher name: Mr Nigel Allen Matthias

Ethics reference: 13653

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet (13/02/2015 V1) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be audio-recorded and used for the purpose of this study.

I understand that my responses will be anonymised in reports of the research but that the school will remain identifiable.

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected

Data Protection

I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study.

Name of participant (print name).....

Signature of participant.....

Date.....

Appendix V – Example of Literature Narrative Analysis (LNA) Coding

to put something down. Forced everyone to write something. I put	Matthias, N Antagonists, teachers
actor and he laughed, which was horrible. It was horrible.	
He first made me decided at however old you are in Year 7 what	Matthias, N Repetition, antistrophe, <u>agon/conflict</u>
course you want to do when you're older and then when I say the one,	
he laughs and goes, that's not going to happen, you need to pick a	Matthias, N Predestination, <u>masterplots</u> , life-course
reasonable one. So that's always been a little tickle at the back of my	Matthias, N <u>Masterplot</u> , acquiescence
mind. I'll never forget it. I remember so clearly. So I've always been	Matthias, N Metaphor, symbol
a bit scared about my career, a bit scared like, what should I do? If I	Matthias, N Character archetype, self-doubt, challenge
do acting, is it risky?	Matthias, N Character and self, justification of action
Then throughout my GCSEs I realised I was good at science, I was	Matthias, N Ergodic composition
really good.	
Facilitator: Sorry, yeah, we got to the end of Year 9 didn't we?	Matthias, N Ergodic composition
Interviewee: Yeah, Year 9, so I was Year 10.	
Facilitator: So Year 10. So let's...	Matthias, N Analipsis?
Interviewee: Year 10. So in Year 10, I was - it was a bit difficult to jump to GCSEs,	Matthias, N metaphor
lots of subjects. I think too many, but I'm not going to complain now	Matthias, N Binary opposition academic (written) and vocational (performance)
have so many GCSEs, lots of homework. It was hard, a little jump. I	Matthias, N Curriculum engagement in conflict with examination requirement (binary opposition)
didn't struggle as much as I thought. I did well in all my English tests,	
all my mocks, I did well in all my maths. I didn't actually fail a single	
subject apart from the drama written side. That's what I struggled with	
because we didn't put any time into that. It was all, right, you have to	
do two performances, that's what you're focusing on. That's what we	
focused on. It wasn't till the last week of the exam till we wrote about	
it.	