Discipline, Selection and Pupil Identities in a *Fresh Start* School: a Case Study

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Abstract

This thesis looks at education reform and the experiences of staff and pupils in a co-educational, multi-ethnic, comprehensive school that implemented *Fresh Start*, one of New Labour's flagship initiatives to 'raise standards'. The study is an ethnography that draws on semi-structured interviews, observation and the collection of key government and school documents.

Particular attention is paid to issues of discipline, selection and the construction of pupil identities. I suggest that current official discourses are fixing 'problems' of indiscipline on pupils, downplaying its contextual nature. Specifically, I argue that key documents in education present discipline in a binary logic that defines pupils as either disrupt*ive* or disrupt*ed*. These positions are being reworked in school, with teachers defining as disrupt*ive* pupils perceived as having a 'bad attitude', and as disrupt*ed* those with particular cultural capital. Significantly, pupils positioned as disrupt*ive* are mainly boys of ethnic minority origins. This disadvantaging positioning is further compounded by processes of selection *within* the school. The splitting of the form under study helped to reinforce African Caribbean and Turkish pupils' positioning as disrupt*ive*. Setting, increasingly used under New Labour's 'modern comprehensive principle', also closes down the educational opportunities of some ethnic minority pupils at Greenfield Comprehensive, through the disproportionate allocation to the lower sets in Science of pupils with *English as an Additional Language*. This and other factors (such as ethnicity, gender and class) helped to shape the range of schooling identities available to pupils. I conclude that in spite of the ambivalence entailed in the process of identity formation the school is *hardening* pupils' identities into opposite positions, overlooking the commitment of pupils seen as 'problematic' and downplaying the misbehaviour of 'ideal' pupils. I suggest that a post-structuralist approach is needed to explain the fragility and complexity of pupils' schooling identities, alongside a modified version of the concept of polarisation to understand how these are being *hardened* at the school.

To my family.

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To B.runo, for trying to teach me not asking so many questions and to *enjoy the silence.*

'It's noise!', some shrieked.
'It's life!', John Cage shrugged.

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Key to transcripts

Italicised text	Emphasised speech, in the original or added.
(…)	Text edited out.
…	Pause of speech.
" "	Direct quotation.
( )	Background information, including name of speaker, body movement or posture, emotion, tone of voice, interruption.

1

Introduction

This thesis is about the construction of pupil identities in secondary schooling, paying particular attention to how issues of education policy, discipline, and selection shape the experiences of staff and pupils. These themes emerged from my ethnographic data and I explore how perceptions of pupils (according to their gender, social and cultural backgrounds) articulate with expectations of behaviour and school work, providing a framework within which pupil identities are negotiated. I also take into account the current context of education policy, which influences pupils' schooling experiences and the construction of their identities.

There is a growing body of literature on the construction of identities in school (see, for example, Connolly, 1998; Fordham, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Sewell, 1997). Most of these studies focus specifically on the formation of gender, sexual and ethnic identities to explain how certain identities become legitimate in school. Also, these ethnographies tend to study particular ethnic groups, such as those of African Caribbean and South Asian heritage. With my own study, I intend to widen the range of pupils' cultural and social backgrounds that are considered. For example, pupils of Turkish ethnic origin sometimes account for large groups in some schools but they tend to be less visible in academic research. Moreover, I also address issues that were identified by pupils themselves as being important in shaping their daily experiences at the school, such as bullying or racism.

Initially, with my research project I wished to identify a range of schooling identities that circulate in school, and to explore how certain identities are made legitimate and become available to certain groups of pupils. Besides addressing perceptions of pupils' behaviour and school work, I wanted to

understand how ethnicity, gender and social class are implicated in this process, shaping the range of available identities. I thus chose to carry out the study in a multi-ethnic, co-educational comprehensive school, as the variety of pupils' social and cultural backgrounds would enable me to explore in-depth the complex processes associated with identity formation. I decided to look at how pupils in a Year 7 form, newcomers to the school, negotiated their schooling identities. I also hoped to study a form of pupils in Year 10, whose reputations would be more familiar to staff and peers, to understand how they negotiated their identities within a context of more marked teacher expectations. However, this part of the study had to be abandoned after continued problems of access to pupils in that year group (see Methodology in Appendix I).

When negotiating access to a school, one of the possible sites was a *Fresh Start* secondary. At the time *Fresh Start* was a flagship of New Labour's initiatives to deal with so-called 'failing' schools (*i.e.* those judged to have no foreseeable prospects of markedly improving the academic performance of their pupils). Implemented from 1998, it involved the closing down of a 'failing' school, and its re-launch with a different name, a new headteacher and staff, and improved facilities.

The *Fresh Start* status of the school may have been part of the reason that I was granted access. The initiative received high-visibility in the media and the headteacher at the time explicitly signalled his interested in publicising the new school further via academic research (this is further discussed in Appendix I). In spite of the pressure I was subjected to by being encouraged to focus only on the positive aspects of the school, I saw the choice of that particular site as advantageous to my study. Firstly, the school complied with my requirements in terms of a varied social composition. Secondly, it could provide me with the chance of studying the implementation of an initiative in education policy about which there were no empirical studies at the time. And thirdly, the selection of such a site could be an excellent opportunity to study the construction of pupil identities. Both pupils in Year 7 and staff would be newcomers to the school, as the initiative requires staff redundancy before the school reopens. This could allow me to observe the construction of pupils' reputations from their entrance in secondary education, bringing into sharp relief the processes of establishing new social relations in a secondary school. However, I could not take full advantage of this, as entrance into the field was

delayed for over two months after the school year had started (I explain this in more detail in Appendix I).

Another implication of carrying out research in a *Fresh Start* school was that the focus of research widened throughout the period of fieldwork. Besides pupils' gender, ethnic and social background and perceptions of their behaviour and school work, I saw education policy as providing particular contours to the negotiation of pupil identities. An example of this was pupils' appropriation of discourses associated with different school leadership styles and ethos to position themselves as pupils. Thus, this thesis reflects a concern with education policy that was absent from my initial research project.

Some issues emerged during fieldwork that were perhaps specific to the site chosen to carry out the research study. An example of this was the prominence of issues of discipline. Whilst in some other schools priority may also be given to disciplinary issues, I think that at the school in which I carried out my own study this happened precisely because of its *Fresh Start* status. The difficulty in establishing certain routine practices (such as the composition of forms and timetables) meant that issues of control and order were given priority at the school over those directly related to attainment. This also added to the difficulty of carrying out the fieldwork. The lack of organisation at the school, and the pressure put on teachers by termly OFSTED inspections, meant that sometimes I had to prioritise the needs of teachers over those related to my own agenda. In practice, this meant for instance that I chose not to observe lessons nor to carry out interviews while the school was being visited by inspectors.

In spite of the particularities of the context under study, other processes explored in this thesis can be seen as being less specific to the site I chose to study. For instance, processes such as academic selection were taking place in very similar ways to those reported in other studies (for example, Troyna and Siraj-Blatchford, 1993, and Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). In particular, at the school under study I also found a disproportionate allocation to the lower academic groups of pupils from some ethnic minority groups (such as those receiving support for *English as an Additional Language*). Finally, although the construction of pupil identities also took specific contours in the site where the research took place, mostly the processes described in this study were common to those reported in other ethnographies (such as Connolly, 1998, and Mac an Ghaill, 1994). Examples of this were the importance of

perceptions of gender, ethnicity and social class, and the associated expectations of pupils' behaviour and academic work.

Fieldwork

The study's methodology is dealt with in detail in Appendix I[1]. Here, I present a brief summary of the fieldwork.

Using ethnography as a research strategy, I conducted fieldwork for a period of approximately one year and a half at Greenfield Comprehensive[2], a co-educational, multi-ethnic school with a roll of over 600 pupils. Over half of these were eligible to receive free-school meals and well over a third received support for *English as an Additional Language*. Fifteen per cent of pupils on roll became refugees[3] in England, originating mainly from Somalia, Turkey, Kurdistan and Albania. When I started fieldwork, in November 1999, the school had just been re-launched with a different name, a new headteacher and staff, and improved facilities by virtue of its *Fresh Start* status.

The study focused mainly on a form of pupils in Year 7 and their teachers, and much of the material presented in this thesis was collected through semi-structured interviews and direct observation[4]. Pupils were interviewed in friendship groups of two by the end of their second term in Year 7, and again individually some months after the beginning of Year 8. Their teachers and other school staff (such as headteacher and learning mentors) were also interviewed, some of them twice. Observations focused particularly on Science and Personal and Social Education (hereafter, PSE) lessons, and also included Year assemblies and meetings with parents. Fieldnotes of observations and interviews were taken, and written up in more detail soon afterwards with the help of audio-recorded tapes.

I also collected and analysed school documents on discipline and achievement, including pupils' records, incident reports, tables of achievement in Science and policy on discipline and bullying. Finally, key government documents, including Education Acts, Green and White Papers, official guidelines in education and political manifestos, were examined.

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[1] This format was chosen to comply with University requirements for word length, rather than for stylistic reasons.

[2] The school's real name, and those of all teachers and students, have been changed to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of participants.

[3] I borrowed this expression from Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000), which I prefer to the term refugee, as it better encapsulates the fragility, and contextual specificity, of the concept.

[4] See interview schedules in Appendix II, and an example of an observation sheet in Appendix III.

Outline of the thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 2 sets the scene for the remainder of the thesis, taking the reader into the daily life of pupils and staff in a *Fresh Start* school. I begin by contextualising the emergence of *Fresh Start* as part of the Labour Government's drive to 'raise standards' (DfEE, 1997) and its 'zero tolerance of underperformance' (Blair, 1996, p. 12). The focus on 'standards'[5] had been a cornerstone in the education agenda of previous governments. However, in committing itself to raise the attainment of *all* children (DfEE, 1997), New Labour attempted to legitimate the rhetoric of 'standards' by playing the social inclusion card. This is in spite of the continuing support for a quasi-market in education (Demaine, 1999; Hill, 2001), which largely limits the extent in which traditional inequalities can actually be diminished.

I also argue that the focus on 'standards' and initiatives to deal with so-called 'failing' schools is shifting the problem of underachievement to the schools themselves. The *Fresh Start* initiative, which is closely associated with the school effectiveness movement in research, is a case in point. The initiative is based on the assumption that changing the school's leadership and teaching staff can create a distinct and better school identity, and that academic 'standards' will be improved as a result. Importantly, it places the problem of 'failure' on the school's leadership, teaching practices and pupils' self-esteem, assuming as unproblematic the social context of the school and the role of wider structural inequalities in pupils' achievement. Such an approach limits the extent to which schools can actually make a difference (Thrupp, 1999) to their students' educational opportunities.

I then examine the key features of, and changes in, the *Fresh Start* initiative. The initiative had been cherished years before New Labour took office. It was implemented in schools from September 1998, and soon became surrounded with controversy. This was due to the resignation of several headteachers in *Fresh Start* schools and in the limited impact that the initiative was having in raising pupils' attainment. The increasing public scepticism surrounding the initiative led the government to allocate funding specifically to *Fresh Start* schools, to limit the applicability of the initiative and exert more control over its implementation. In spite of this revamping of *Fresh*

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[5] I use *standards* in inverted comas when referring to the government's 'standards' discourses and agenda, to stress that despite its apparent concern in raising the academic attainment of all pupils, this is not being translated into practices that actually reduce inequalities in education.

Start, the initiative was progressively abandoned, as its absence in the last White Paper (DfES, 2001) testifies. I argue that this is particularly important because it meant that no critical and reflexive debate about what went wrong with the initiative was carried out.

The focus shifts then to Greenfield Comprehensive, and I explore how the initiative was being implemented at the school level, drawing on observation and the accounts of teachers and pupils. In particular, I argue that the implementation of *Fresh Start* added in many ways to the problems of the 'failing' school it replaced. Firstly, due to the difficulty in establishing basic routines at the school. The building work continued long after the school had reopened, and there were many changes in the composition of forms and arrangements in timetables. This created a chaotic atmosphere with teaching and learning taking place in conditions that were far from ideal. Secondly, the change of leadership and teaching staff required under the initiative led to important discontinuities and divisions in relation to the school's ethos. As a result, the first headteacher resigned, and many teachers left the school within its first year. With the second headteacher, Greenfield Comprehensive came to pursue a more traditional approach to education based on strict disciplining and academic differentiation, which received substantial support at the school. Subsequently, the attainment of pupils in terms of GCSE results at Greenfield Comprehensive is reported to have improved over time (DfES, 2003). However, I suggest that this must be critically analysed. Firstly, I draw attention to the possibility that the changes that occurred in the social composition of the school could be 'artificially' contributing to that improvement. Secondly, I suggest that the school may be improving not its overall attainment but that of certain groups of pupils (particularly through the practice of setting), an aspect that is explored in detail in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 3, I account for the prominence of issues of discipline at Greenfield Comprehensive. As I became interested in the problematic of indiscipline, I decided to examine official policy and guidelines in relation to this topic (such as in Green and White Papers in education and circulars on discipline). In particular, I wished to understand how indiscipline was viewed within official documents in relation to its definitions, origins and consequences. Broadly, I argue that official discourses on indiscipline as originating in the family or cultural background of pupils prevailed in those documents. Such discourses helped in playing down the role of school in *producing* misbehaviour, for instance, through conflictive social interactions.

As a result, the problem of discipline is shifted onto pupils. I also suggest that such documents promote a binary logic that defines pupils as being either disrupt*ive* or disrupt*ed*. The former is a category composed by those pupils who persistently misbehave and the latter are the pupils whose education is disrupted by the disciplinary events taking place in the classroom. This is particularly important as indiscipline is often addressed as being in the *nature* of pupils, with any considerations of context being played down. Thus, official documents seem to open a space for the polarisation of perceptions of pupils' behaviour (as being either disrupt*ive* or disrupt*ed*).

I shift then to the school level, arguing that teachers were reworking these discourses, positioning pupils in each of the categories identified according to their perceptions of pupils' attitudes (rather than behaviour). Although this was not fully articulated, and teachers preferred to individualise disciplinary problems, they tended to position the boys (and particularly those from ethnic minority origins) as disrupt*ive*. It was against this category that teachers seemed to be defining their notion of an 'ideal' pupil (Becker, 1952). This category included pupils who sometimes misbehaved, but because of their perceived 'positive attitude' were less punished and positioned as disrupt*ed*. Thus, whilst official discourses on policy are also occasionally framed within a concern for social inclusion (for example, DfEE, 1999d), albeit unintentionally they also provide an understanding of indiscipline that disadvantages the pupils of certain gender, social and cultural backgrounds.

I also look at pupils' own understandings of indiscipline and its origins. Broadly, these stressed the role of the school in producing misbehaviour. Poor teaching practices, inconsistency in the application of disciplinary sanctions, (racialised) conflictive interactions with teachers and between pupils, and pupils' cultures were often identified as generating indiscipline. Whilst I do not wish to imply that pupils' views on this matter are of greater importance than those expressed by staff, I do think that the factors identified may be useful to help teachers reflect on their practices.

In Chapter 4, I explore issues related to selection, which I saw as important in shaping the educational experiences of pupils at Greenfield Comprehensive. This was a theme that I had not fully anticipated. Firstly, I had not planned to continue the fieldwork into pupils' Year 8, when they were set for the first time in Science. However, because the second round of interviews took place later than originally planned, I was able to collect data regarding this matter. Secondly, I was informed that the form I was studying

would be split up in the following school year. As I gathered more information on this event, I saw the process of reallocating pupils into particular form groups as a type of selection, even though based on distinct criteria than those used in setting. Issues of selection, therefore, emerged as highly significant.

I start the chapter by sketching out the debate around selection since the creation of a tripartite system in England (under the *1944 Education Act*), paying particular attention to academic differentiation in schools. I argue that in spite of New Labour's 'modern comprehensive principle' (Labour Party, 1997) being a softer and more flexible approach to selection *within* schools than that used by previous Conservative Governments, it still does not seriously engage with traditional inequalities in education that disadvantage in particular the pupils of some ethnic minorities.

The focus then shifts back to Greenfield Comprehensive, where I explore in detail processes of selection within school. In relation to setting, a practice endorsed by government guidelines, I explore how teachers were re-working official discourses on education and 'standards' to sustain their view that this was a practice that could benefit *all* children. This was in spite of their acknowledgement that it was the 'more able' that benefited the most, and of adopting practices that disadvantaged pupils of some ethnic minority origins. The use of subjective criteria to allocate pupils into set groups (such as behaviour and attitude) was identified as positioning the pupils of ethnic minority origin at risk of seeing their educational opportunities closed down. More significant, however, was the disproportionate allocation of pupils receiving support in *English as an Additional Language* to the lower sets in the form under study. Although teachers thought that this was a practice that would benefit these pupils, the fact that movement between sets was small at Greenfield Comprehensive may be preventing these pupils from taking full advantage of their educational careers.

I then use a case study on the splitting of 7B, the form under study, to illustrate how less formal and routine processes of pupils' categorisation were used as a form of selection. In this specific case they involved beliefs about misbehaviour and attainment, as well as addressing a (racialised) conflict between some pupils in the form. The main aim was that a form which was seen as 'a bad mix' (as one teacher put it) could became easier both to control in terms of discipline and to teach in the context of 'mixed-ability' grouping in some subjects. Furthermore, it also served to split certain black and Turkish pupils who had been bullying each other throughout the year. I argue that this

was an example of the school's colour-blind approach (Gillborn, 1990) to conflicts that were 'racialised'. Significantly, the process of splitting up the form also served to reinforce pupils' reputations, particularly regarding behaviour, fixing disciplinary problems at the school within particular pupils.

The construction of pupil identities, which was originally the focus of this research project, is addressed in Chapters 5 and 6. In Chapter 5, I review different theoretical approaches of some of the most influential studies in the formation of schooling identities. The first set of studies constitutes what came to be known as the differentiation-polarisation theory, which was elaborated from the ethnographies carried out by Hargreaves (1967), Lacey (1970) and Ball (1981). These authors examined the role of aspects related to the school organisation, and in particular academic differentiation, in polarising pupils' attitudes to education. Broadly, their main argument was that when pupils were differentiated into academic streams, they tended to develop school subcultures that reflected the stream they attended. Pupils in the higher streams tended thus to develop a pro-school subculture which supported the values of the school, whilst those who were allocated into the lower streams tended to distance themselves from those values and to develop an alternative, anti-school subculture. I argue that whilst the categorisation of pupils' adaptations as being pro- or anti-school is too simplistic, the concept of polarisation is useful in understanding how the school enforces differentiation on pupil identities.

I then examine the re-working of the typology proposed by Merton (1957) carried out by Woods (1979) and Sewell (1997), which positions pupils in relation to cultural goals and institutional means. Woods' (1979) work was influential because, in addition to reworking the five categories proposed in the original model, he was also concerned with understanding how movement between those categories occurs. Sewell (1997), on the other hand, used the five initial categories to describe how African Caribbean boys adapt to schooling, thus including issues of ethnicity and gender in the study of pupil identities. However, I argue that these studies' classification of pupils according to their positioning to cultural goals and institutional means, and the resulting categories, still fall short of the complexity involved in the construction of schooling identities.

Finally, I look at two other studies (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, and Connolly, 1998), which used the insights from the post-structuralist critique in the conceptualisation of identity. Both used an approach to identity which sees it

as a process of *becoming* (Hall, 1992), rather than just being a pupil. Their work is of particular importance in that they kept sight of the role of wider social structures in shaping particular identities whilst also resituating these in the local context of school. Education policy and stereotypes on gender, ethnicity and class were thus presented as shaping a range of schooling identities that pupils actively negotiate in school. I found this approach particularly useful to my study.

In Chapter 6, I use case studies of four pupils in Year 7, to provide my own account of the construction of pupil identities. Unlike most studies in the field, I chose not to group pupils according to my perceptions of similarities in their identities. My aim was not to develop a model that assigns pupils into categories. Rather, I was interested in understanding in-depth how identities are negotiated and constructed in school, and to identify a range of factors that shape both pupils' daily experiences and their identities. I focused on a small number of pupils about whom I had better and greater information. After writing about each of these pupils, I realised that it was necessary not just to present a variety of social and cultural backgrounds, gender, and schooling identities. I saw as equally important to include case studies on pupils whose experiences reflected issues often not fully dealt with at Greenfield Comprehensive, such as bullying and racism. These were issues that did not result from isolated incidents; moreover, pupils felt that the school inappropriately dealt with their concerns and they often raised them in the interviews that I carried out (which in itself illustrates the impact that they had on pupils' daily school experiences). Thus, to provide a more complete picture of pupils' experiences and how these were influencing the construction of their identities I selected four pupils for detailed consideration: their case studies are presented in Chapter 6 (Ismail, Joe, Nina and Sophie).

Common to each of the case studies is a section on discipline and school work. I present not only teachers and pupils' perceptions, as the pupil's own positioning. Broadly, I argue that the articulation between expectations of behaviour and attainment, with perceptions of ethnicity, gender and social class provided powerful discourses at Greenfield Comprehensive, helping to legitimate schooling identities based on conformity to school rules and practices, and to teachers' expectations and authority. This was particularly evident in teachers' overlooking the commitment to education of pupils seen as 'problematic' and in their downplaying the misbehaviour of pupils seen as 'ideal' (Becker, 1952). In spite of this, pupils were actively trying to negotiate

identities that were accepted at the school. Significantly, Joe and Ismail, the two boys of ethnic minority origins, were seeing their commitment to education and their efforts in school being largely overlooked. The two girls, however, were being more successful. Nina, a South Asian girl, was using a repertoire of gendered behaviours that included displays of a traditional femininity to win her teachers' approval in the classroom. Sophie, the daughter of a professional couple (which won her high status amongst teachers at Greenfield Comprehensive), seemed to be favoured by the very high expectations teachers had of her behaviour and academic work. In spite of this, she showed great ambivalence in how to define her own identity as a pupil. I conclude the chapter discussing the usefulness of previous theorising on schooling identities, drawing on examples from my own study. I argue that an approach informed by the post-structuralist critique is required to understand the ambivalence lived by pupils and the fragility of their schooling identities. I also point to the usefulness of a modified version of the concept of polarisation to explain how these were being *hardened* at the school.

In the final chapter, I draw some conclusions in relation to the themes that emerged from my fieldwork at Greenfield Comprehensive. These focus on: education reform and the rhetoric of 'standards', discipline and control, selection and racism, and the construction of pupils' identities. I conclude this thesis by suggesting some implications of my study for further research, policy and practice.

2

The *Fresh Start* Experience

The ethnographic study that I carried out at Greenfield Comprehensive was not initially designed to focus on the implementation of the *Fresh Start* initiative. However, during the course of fieldwork I became increasingly aware of the importance that this initiative had for school life and upon the experiences of both staff and pupils. Themes relating to the reopening of the school and the process of establishing a *Fresh Start* were recurrent, particularly in interviews. This informed the decision to include in this thesis a chapter that addresses the implementation of this New Labour flagship initiative, in an attempt to bridge the wider context of education policy and the school level where these policies are lived by staff and pupils. This chapter also aims to provide the reader with a detailed account of the daily lives of those teaching and learning in a *Fresh Start* school, with following chapters exploring particular aspects of schooling such as discipline, selection and the construction of pupils' identities.

In the first section, I outline the origins and development of *Fresh Start*. I look at the context in which this and other initiatives designed for the 'raising of standards' (DfEE, 1997) were created and then proceed to explore the major changes that the *Fresh Start* initiative went through. Then, I provide my own account as to how the initiative was implemented at Greenfield Comprehensive. I start with a brief description of the school that was considered 'failing' and then closed, Millhaven High. In relation to the *Fresh Start*ed school, Greenfield Comprehensive, I use data collected through participant observation to illustrate how the initiative was implemented in practice. In the third section, I present staff and pupils' perspectives on issues relating to the closing and reopening of the school. The data presented was

collected through interviews taking place in the first and second school year after Greenfield Comprehensive opened.

2.1 *The Fresh Start initiative*

2.1.1 Contextual background

When the Labour Party won the general election in 1997, Prime Minister Tony Blair made education his government's top priority. But so had previous Conservative Governments. Indeed, there is a striking resemblance in the educational policies of both Conservative and Labour Governments. Examples of these similarities are, amongst others, the surveillance of teachers' work, the creation and continuing support for a quasi-market in education and the focus on 'standards' (Demaine, 1999; Hill, 2001). Although the expressed concern with 'standards' in education was previously more closely associated with the conservative restoration (Ball, 1994), Demaine (1999) suggests that it can be threaded at least to the mid-1970s (when Old Labour was in office before eighteen years of Tory rule), having been modified by different governments. Thus, when the New Labour Government expressed its commitment to the 'raising of standards' (DfEE, 1997), it was rather the continuity with previous Tory and Labour Governments that was being announced. And in this the Labour Party was not alone: the focus on 'standards' had been a cornerstone in the manifestos of all major political parties during the general election campaign (Pyke, 1997).

Even so, with New Labour in office the focus on 'standards' was to take on a new form. With the principle 'to benefit the many, not the few' (DfEE, 1997, p. 11), the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett, emphasised that he was committed to raise the quality of education provided in *all* schools, for *all* pupils:

> We want excellence to be the norm for all pupils in all our schools. We want parents to have confidence that, wherever in the country they live, the school in their community funded from public resources will provide an excellent education for their children, whatever their needs and abilities. (DfEE, 2001c, p. 1)

This could be seen as a commitment to social justice that was absent from discourses on 'standards' of previous Conservative Governments. And, indeed, spending in the area of social inclusion increased under New Labour (Hill,

2001; Power and Gerwitz, 2001). However, it may also be argued that by playing the social inclusion card, the Labour Government was merely attempting to legitimate the rhetoric of 'standards'. As Hill (2001) suggested, Labour policies have supported a quasi-market in education, the increasing influence of private interests, selection in, and competition between, schools. The policies resulting from these principles further differentiate the educational experiences of pupils of particular social and ethnic backgrounds, thus questioning the Labour Government's commitment to engaging with the deep-seated nature of educational inequalities. This is not to say that no measures were taken to address issues of social inclusion. However, because the Labour Government chose to deal with 'standards' and not with structures (Edwards, Whitty and Power, 1999), the success of such initiatives was necessarily limited, as I will show throughout this thesis.

To achieve the ambitious goal of 'standards' for all (Blunkett, 2000) the government proposed to deal with those schools where attainment was well below the national average, including so-called 'failing' schools[6]. It was in this context that the Labour Government designed several initiatives to improve 'standards' in innovative ways. *Education Action Zones, Excellence in Cities* and *Fresh Start* for 'schools causing concern' were presented as examples of innovation that could radically tackle underachievement, particularly in inner-city schools, and transform the way we think about education. I consider these below.

Education Action Zones (EAZs) are local partnerships between schools, business and local education authorities in disadvantaged areas, both urban and rural. An EAZ may be composed of two or three secondary schools, about 15 to 20 of their feeder primary schools, and a special school. Generally it is left for the governors of the schools concerned to propose to set up an EAZ. However, if the schools are considered to be 'failing' by OFSTED (the Office for Standards in Education), the Secretary of State has the power to impose an EAZ (Cole, 1998). The zones operate through setting up an Action Forum, which is then responsible for drawing up an action plan and targets for individual schools, and to report on the progress achieved. The Forum includes representatives from the schools and the LEA, parents, and representatives from local business and community[7] (DfEE, 1997). The zones

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[6] 'Failing school' is a category used after an OFSTED inspection takes place, and applies to schools where academic results, pupils' behaviour, teaching quality or systems of management are considered especially poor.

[7] See Power and Gerwitz (2001) for a critique of the composition and functioning of Action Forums.

are funded by a combination of a public grant and private sources (which they need to raise themselves). Some authors have argued that this 'joined-up' solution to complex social problems embodies 'a general trend towards breaking down distinctions between the public and private provision of services; what matters is not who delivers the service, but whether it 'works'.' (Dickson and Power, 2001, p. 137).

The main aim of this initiative is to introduce new approaches to raising 'standards', through 'improving the quality of teaching and learning, social inclusion, family and pupil support, working with business and other organisations' (DfEE, 2001b). The initiative was implemented in the academic year 1998-1999, when 25 EAZs were set up. In the following year, in the second phase of the programme, 48 further zones were created. In September 2000, 26 small zones started within the *Excellence in Cities* programme. Examples of the measures taken to raise 'standards' within *Education Action Zones* include: addressing truancy, disaffection and wider issues of social inclusion; involving parents in the school's activities; and bringing in the expertise and funding from private companies (such as ICT business). In some cases, support assistants and advance skills subject specialist teachers have been employed to improve teaching conditions, and therefore to get better recruitment and retention of teachers (DfEE, 2001b).

An OFSTED report on the inspections of six of the EAZs implemented in phase one of the programme points out that improvement in academic attainment was small in primary schools, and was not significant in secondary schools (OFSTED, 2001a, 2001b). It was also found that most measures taken within the programme were not new, but rather served to 'enhance or intensify existing action, such as that through the national strategies for literacy and numeracy' (OFSTED, 2001b, p. 2). It should be mentioned that the inspections took place only six terms after the EAZs started to operate and therefore it was perhaps too early to expect improvement in results. Nevertheless, the findings do seem to suggest that schools within EAZs are largely building on their existing practices rather than developing new and 'imaginative' ways of raising 'standards' (DfEE, 1997). A particular aspect that seems to have been almost neglected is that of social inclusion. On this, the OFSTED report (OFSTED, 2001b) merely suggests that issues such as disaffection were being addressed only on a small-scale level and that attendance was still a problem faced by these schools. Furthermore, there is no mention of action to narrow down the achievement gap between pupils of different ethnic and social origins. Some

authors have pointed out that the initiative is not truly addressing issues of social justice, and that it might be even worsening the current situation. For instance, reading successful applications from three zones, Power and Gerwitz (2001) argued that in spite of the large representation of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds in those zones, the role of racism in social exclusion was never acknowledged. Such 'colour blind' policies (Gillborn, 1990, p. 199) that focus merely on socio-economic deprivation, whilst not truly engaging with the racialised nature of social structures, further contribute to the reproduction of stereotypes about these communities as being pathological (Power and Gerwitz, 2001).

Excellence in Cities was designed to address the educational problems faced by schools in major cities where attainments were low. The argument used for the creation of the initiative is that 'An inner city location does not justify low standards and aspirations among teachers, pupils or parents' (DfEE, 1999a, p. 2). In the document that launched the initiative *Excellence in Cities* (DfEE, 1999a), it is inner-city schools that are presented as being in need of rescue because of their poor 'standards'. Providing measures that target specifically the problems faced by schools located in such areas 'is crucial to the creation of a prosperous and inclusive society and the achievement of our National Learning Targets' (*id.*, p. 8). This anticipated that action would follow to address the specific problems of inner-city schools, and especially those experienced by pupils from ethnic minority origins and/or those living in poverty. It was thus expected that *Excellence in Cities* would be 'the black correlative' (Stanford, 2001, p. 91) of the White Paper *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997a), addressing the weaknesses of what was deemed 'a very *white* paper' (Klein, 1997, p. 2, original emphasis, quoted by Stanford, 2001, p. 91). However, that was not the case, and the document was sharply criticised in this respect. It was suggested by Stanford (2001) that the launch document makes use of 'race' signifiers (such as 'inner city' and 'problem') which direct our attention to the needs of ethnic minority pupils in an attempt to legitimate the initiative, whilst not specifically addressing the problems faced by these pupils. This rhetoric allowed the government to dismiss itself of taking action that would serve these pupils' interests. Thus, the commitment to social inclusion anticipated by the expression 'standards for all' (DfEE, 1997) does not seem to be reflected in the measures taken within the initiative.

Excellence in Cities was implemented in the school year 1999-2000, aiming to bring about 'High expectations of every individual pupil and all young

people; diversity of provision; networks of schools; extension of opportunity to bring success to every school' (DfEE, 2001d). Measures taken within the initiative include: the provision of learning mentors, setting up Learning Support Units, supplying additional support for talented and gifted students, increasing the number of Beacon and specialist schools, establishing a network of City Learning Centres and the creation of small Education Action Zones (DfEE, 1999a). Initially, *Excellence in Cities* was implemented in 25 local authorities in six large conurbations and adjoining areas facing similar problems: inner London, Birmingham, Leeds/Bradford, Liverpool/Knowsley, Manchester/Salford, and Sheffield/Rotherham. Since then, the number of LEAs involved in *Excellence in Cities* has increased, and currently there are over 60 local authorities participating (DfES, 2002d). The initiative is being expanded, geographically to include small pockets of deprivation within the new Excellence Clusters (DfEE, 2001d) and in terms of pupils' age range so that it includes those 'gifted and talented' post-16 year-olds through the *Excellence Challenge* (DfES, 2002a).

The first annual report on the programme, published in January 2001 (DfEE, 2001c), suggested that the extra funding and staff improved pupil achievement, particularly in schools with higher figures of pupils on free school meals. The report relating to 2000-2001 (DfES, 2002a) generally seems to confirm the same findings. It stressed that it was in those schools with larger numbers of disadvantaged pupils that the most progress has occurred in Key Stage 3, as well as an increase in the proportion of pupils attaining five A*-C GCSEs. However, it should be noted that the assessment of the real impact that one particular programme has on pupil achievement is a complex issue. There are currently many initiatives to tackle poor 'standards', whereby a single school may be involved simultaneously in *Excellence in Cities*, in an *Education Action Zone*, and/or having become a specialist school, and it is difficult to say which programme was more influential to achieve that change. Furthermore, the fact that so many schools benefiting from the *Excellence in Cities* initiative became specialist schools should be considered. The extra funding that these schools receive to specialise in a subject area has often meant that they are equipped with state-of-the-art facilities, and are thus becoming more attractive to the middle classes. This may be having an effect upon the social composition of schools, and in turn 'artificially' increasing their academic performance. As the information provided in the reports does not take into account whether the schools were involved in other initiatives or

became specialist schools, it does not help in drawing substantiated conclusions. Specific measures within the initiative, such as the introduction of learning mentors to provide additional pastoral care, appear to be having a positive effect on pupils' experiences. But it could also be argued that this measure is dismissing the role of social interactions between pupils and teachers in *producing* misbehaviour by partially shifting to learning mentors and Learning Support Units the responsibility of tackling disruptive behaviour with pupils (outside the classroom). This can result in fixing the 'problem' of discipline in certain groups of pupils and their communities and in dismissing the role of social interactions in the classroom in producing indiscipline.

Another of the flagship initiatives taken by the Labour Government in the drive to raise 'standards' was *Fresh Start*, which was defined 'as the statutory process of closing a school causing concern and opening a new school on the same site' (DfEE, 2001a, p. 1). Implemented in schools since September 1998, *Fresh Start* is one of the options available for schools that consistently have poor results in OFSTED inspections (or, in OFSTED terminology, 'schools causing concern'). These are schools that either have serious weaknesses or required special measures following an OFSTED inspection, or that have been identified by the LEA as having significant problems (DfEE, 2001e). The *School Standards and Framework Act 1998* (HMSO, 1998a) regulates LEA intervention in these schools. Generally, schools found to be failing an OFSTED inspection after September 1998 have to be turned around within two years, given a *Fresh Start* or closed. Although this decision is usually taken by the LEA in which area the school is located, the Secretary of State also has the power to enforce the closure of a particular school when (s)he considers that the education provided to its pupils is of insufficient quality (DfEE, 2001a).

Fresh Start consists then of the closing down of a 'failing' school (*i.e.* one judged to have no foreseeable prospects of markedly improving its academic performance), and its re-launching with a different name, a new headteacher and staff, and improved facilities. The initiative is based on the assumption that these measures can create a distinct and better school identity, and that 'standards' will be improved as a result. Importantly, it places the problem of 'failure' on the school's leadership, teaching practices and pupils' self-esteem, assuming as unproblematic the social context of the school and the role of wider structural inequalities in pupils' achievement.

Many aspects of the initiatives addressed above are in fact not new, as for instance the involvement of private interests and funding in state schools,

which was initiated by the previous Conservative Government. But more importantly, many of the measures proposed are presented as detached from the current context of education policy. I explore below how this context is constraining the extent to which such initiatives can help schools in actually making a difference (Thrupp, 1999).

> The remarkable success of five years of secondary school performance tables has confirmed what we always knew to be true – the publication of tables drives up standards. They give parents clear information about which schools are doing well and those which are doing badly. They make schools and local authorities accountable for what they are doing. (Gillian Shephard, quoted in the *Times Education Supplement*, 14 March 1997, p. 8)

The Labour Government expressed its commitment to innovation in education, as part of its drive to 'raise standards' (DfES, 2001a). However, the continuing focus on 'standards' is limiting the extent to which schools can innovate, particularly by reinforcing the importance of performance tables (or league tables). League tables are seen as providing the terms against which the 'rise in standards' can be measured. They describe the academic performance of a school population every school year, by indicating the proportion of pupils attaining a number of GCSE pass grades (such as 5 or more A*-C grades, 5 or more A*-G grades, or no passes). Thus, there is an assumption that they can be used as indicators of a school's performance over time or between different schools at a given moment. However, these tables exclude the non-measurable aspects of the curriculum. The personal and social development of pupils, which is not examined through assessment tests, is thus not valued. This encourages a vision of the education system as functioning merely to qualify pupils for the job market, downplaying the social formation of pupils as citizens (Ball, 1994).

League tables are sometimes used by parents in choosing a school for their children. With the current formula funding, schools presenting better results in league tables tend to attract higher numbers of pupils and may exercise forms of covert selection. Hence, the use of league tables in the quasi-market of education (as a result of the *1988 Education Reform Act*) is encouraging competition between schools to attract the best 'customers' (Ball, 1993; Demaine, 1999; Tomlinson, 1997). This is obviously contrary to the networking of schools to share best practice intended in initiatives such as

Education Action Zones. It can also discourage schools from implementing innovative pedagogic practices that take longer to produce visible and measurable results. Thus, while innovation is presented as being at the core of proposed initiatives, the focus on 'standards' *per se* is contributing to a more traditional approach to education, in many ways similar to that of previous Conservative Governments.

> Setting, particularly in science, maths and languages, is proving effective in many schools. We do not believe that any single model of grouping pupils should be imposed on secondary schools, but unless a school can demonstrate that it is getting better than expected results through a different approach, we do make the presumption that *setting should be the norm* in secondary schools. In some cases, it is worth considering in primary schools. (DfEE, 1997, p. 38, my emphasis)

The Labour Government has also supported an increase in the use of setting, suggesting that it contributes to improving 'standards', even though this is not supported by evidence from academic research, which shows no *overall* improvement through such methods (cf. Hallam and Toutounji, 1996; Ireson and Hallam, 2001). Although less extensive than previous forms of academic differentiation used within schools (as, for instance, streaming), setting has also proved to disadvantage pupils of particular ethnic origins, through their disproportionate allocation to the lower academic sets (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). Thus, increasing the use of setting does not raise the 'standards' of *all* pupils. Moreover, the pressure placed on schools to perform well in league tables can even widen the inequality gap in the achievements of pupils of different gender, social and ethnic origins. Research has shown that some schools allocate more resources to those pupils who are seen as likely to contribute to the school achieving the five A*-C benchmark, and that some ethnic minority pupils are particularly disadvantaged as a result (cf., for example, Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). Thus, whilst some of the initiatives addressed above may be raising the achievements in 'failing' schools, the use of setting may be contributing to increase the attainment of *certain* groups of pupils. This is further explored in Chapter 4.

> If schools are to improve continuously, it is critical that a body with good local knowledge of a school's performance can apply our principle of *intervention in inverse proportion to success*: challenging underachieving and low-attaining

schools to improve and tackling failure swiftly and decisively, but leaving successful schools free to innovate. (DfES, 2001a, p. 67, my emphasis)

Finally, with intervention being 'in inverse proportion to success' (DfES, 2001a, p. 67), some schools are seeing their possibilities to innovate further restricted. They were already constrained within the current context of pressure put on schools to perform well in terms of GCSE results and to increasingly adopt setting. But with such a principle of intervention, so-called 'failing' schools are targeted for ever-increased control and accountability. In a context of apparent autonomy of schools (Ball, 1994), the pressure placed on those considered 'failing' to perform more highly or face the threat of closure has increased surveillance over education practices and restricted the freedom that schools have to develop innovative practices locally. In spite of the government's proposed diversity for the education system, the official discourse on 'failing' schools promotes the idea that there is one best way to tackle underachievement in all 'failing' schools, and that this is easily identifiable and consensual. This is a pragmatic approach based on 'what works', rather than *for whom*. If we wish to see inequalities in education diminished, a more reflexive and critical consideration of the many factors that shape pupils' achievement is needed.

Greenfield Comprehensive, the school where I carried out this study, was involved in all of these three initiatives addressed above. Its status as a *Fresh Start* school had a strong impact in the daily life of teachers and pupils when I carried out the fieldwork. Thus, in the next sub-section, I focus in more detail on the process that led to the creation of the *Fresh Start* initiative.

2.1.2 *Fresh Start* in the making

The *Fresh Start* initiative was presented in the government's White Paper *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997) published just a couple of months after the general election of May 1997. The idea of closing a 'failing' school and opening a new one on the same site had been cherished long before the Labour Party came into office. In April 1995, in the annual conference of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, David Blunkett, the then shadow Education Secretary, had already suggested *Fresh Start* as an option for 'failing' schools:

We will look at innovative ideas for dealing with failing schools. The school identified as failing would be closed and a new one would be reopened on the

same site for a new school year. A new school, with a new governing body, new teachers and a new headteacher would be able to offer pupils a fresh chance for success. (David Blunkett, quoted in Spencer, 1995)

The initiative was backed up by Michael Barber (1996), a leading education advisor to the Labour Party and researcher on school effectiveness. Barber had played a crucial role in the closure of Hackney Downs, where he was chair of the Education Association (or 'hit squad', as it was known at the time) that took over the school. Hackney Downs was a secondary school for boys in London, which came to be run by an Education Association appointed by Gillian Shephard, the Conservative Secretary of State for Education and Employment, after the local authority recommended its closure. This was a highly controversial case and was eventually taken to the High Court, which accepted the decision of closing the school[8]. In his work *The Learning Game*, Barber (1996) argued that:

> (Hackney Downs) provides the clearest possible evidence that neither increased funding nor reducing class sizes are on their own, the solution to this country's educational problems. Unless the management is good and the teaching of high quality, even very large sums of money will change nothing. (p. 116)

The 'need' to eliminate 'failing' schools is said to be the legacy of the *Education Reform Act* 1988, which introduced a market-orientated approach to education (Tomlinson, 1997). With competition playing a crucial role, 'failure' was read as something to be eradicated. This approach has been continued by New Labour, and presents important similarities to the school effectiveness movement in educational research, even though this is not explicitly assumed[9].

The school effectiveness movement emerged in the UK in the 1970s. It was said to be a response to the pessimism generated around education, particularly after the publication of the influential *Coleman Report* (1966), which pointed to the very limited possibility of schools compensating for the social disadvantages of pupils (Angus, 1993). Researchers within this movement set themselves to statistically control pupils' backgrounds, study differences between schools, and to identify 'school matters' that make a

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[8] Cf. Barber (1996) and Tomlinson (1997) for their divergent views on the case.

[9] Curiously, it has been noted that some researchers in school effectiveness have been entering the field of politics (see, for instance, Reynolds, 1999).

difference[10] (for example, Mortimore *et al.*, 1988), often rendering these unproblematic. Within the technicist literature in this area, sophisticated methods of analysing variance between schools are being increasingly used to isolate the factors that make a school effective (Angus, 1993; Thrupp, 1999). Aspects such as the nature of school leadership, teachers' expectations, pupils' motivation, behaviour and attendance, and parental and pupil involvement, were pointed out as making a difference between schools' performance and thus seen as targets for intervention in 'failing' schools, fixing the problem of underachievement. In doing so, the emphasis on some aspects excluded others, such as the appropriateness of the curriculum, the lack of resources, or the social, political and economic context of schools (Angus, 1993). The major critique of the school effectiveness movement was precisely its neglect of a body of influential theoretical work that challenges the assumption that the school is a neutral institution, such as that carried out by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Bernstein (1971) (cf. Angus, 1993). And whilst there are a few exceptions (for example, Mortimore and Whitty, 1997), the focus is generally on individual schools, with considerations of effectiveness being divorced from their social, political and economic context (Tomlinson, 1997). Angus (1993), one of the most cited critics in this area, argued that for school effectiveness researchers:

> Family background, social class, any notion of context, are typically regarded as *'noise'* – as 'outside' background factors which must be controlled for and then stripped away so that the researcher can concentrate on the important domain of school factors (p. 341, my emphasis).

The Labour Government's approach to education is in many instances consistent with the school effectiveness movement in research, particularly in not being critical about 'what works' (and *for whom*), and in treating schools as institutions that are detachable from social context. Such downplaying of social context results in many education policies of New Labour centring the problematic of underachievement in the schools themselves. This increases control and surveillance over schools, rendering unproblematic wider structural inequalities and processes that result in their reproduction through education (cf. Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). The *Fresh Start* initiative is a case in point.

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[10] See Reynolds (1999) and Thrupp (1999), for reviews of the literature in this area.

Tomlinson (1994) had suggested that under the Tories education policy was divorced from academic research:

> The educational reforms of the 1980s and 1990s have not been notable for their grounding in research findings, and a large parliamentary majority has enabled government to push through policies whose nature and possible outcomes were unresearched. (Tomlinson, 1994, p. 2)

By then, Education Associations were set up to turn 'failing' schools into grant-maintained or else recommend their closure (Tomlinson, 1997). New Labour chose to give them a *Fresh Start* within its rhetoric of raising 'standards' for all. Whilst acknowledging more social constraints on 'failing' schools than the Conservatives did, New Labour initiatives still focus mostly on better management and teaching to solve the problem of underachievement (Thrupp, 2001). This suggests new contours in the relationship between policy making and academic research, with New Labour endorsing findings from some academic research to legitimate political decisions. The association with the school effectiveness movement in research is particularly important as this tends to remove the school from its wider social context, and firmly blame the school for not compensating for society (Bernstein, 1970). In the case of *Fresh Start* schools this can be seen in the dismissal of the 'failing' schools' management and staff, in the absence of allocation of specific funds to the initiative, and in the social context and background of pupils not being addressed.

As mentioned before, the main characteristics of the initiative that came to be regulated in 1997 were very much defined even before the Labour Party came into office. The *Fresh Start* initiative would be about strong leadership and good teaching skills, and not a funding programme to raise achievement. The underlying assumption was that if schools were failing to deliver quality education, the school governors, leadership and staff were to be held responsible. Only by replacing them could the desired improvement in 'standards' be achieved. From then on, the Labour Party hung onto this idea. In *Excellence for Everyone: Labour's crusade to raise standards* (1995), it is suggested that LEAs should identify 'failing' schools and draw plans for improvement, subject to OFSTED inspection. In the schools where all other measures for improvement had been tried and failed, closure or *Fresh Start* was to be considered. Closure would apply where alternative suitable places

for pupils were found in the area. Otherwise, *Fresh Start* should be adopted, making this the least desirable of the available options. The school would then close at the end of Summer term, to allow time to recruit new staff before its reopening at the beginning of the school year. The Labour Party's manifesto to the 1997 general election *New Labour because Britain Deserves Better* (Labour Party, 1997), with its 'zero tolerance of underperformance', reinforces this idea. It is suggested that LEAs should have new obligations, namely to demonstrate that every school in their authority is improving its 'standards'. Where this is not the case, a *Fresh Start* or closure should be considered.

In May 1997 the Labour Party won the general election, and David Blunkett became Secretary of State for Education and Employment. The government's commitment to raise 'standards' led to the creation of the *Standards and Effectiveness Unit* within the DfEE, with Michael Barber as head.

After the Labour Party took office, the proposals mentioned before were integrated into the White Paper *Excellence in Schools*, published just a couple of months after the general election (DfEE, 1997). The White Paper established education as a clear priority within the government's agenda, and emphasised in particular the raising of 'standards' for all pupils in all schools. As a measure to tackle underachievement in schools considered 'failing', the White Paper offers the *Fresh Start* option:

> A fresh start may take different forms. In some cases, the most sensible course will be closure and the transfer of the pupils to nearby successful schools. Alternatively, an LEA might be authorised to allow one school to take over the underperforming school to set it on a new path. Another option would be to close the school, and re-open on the same or a different site with a new name and new management. The change would have to be more than superficial. It would need professional leadership of the highest calibre and would need to be seen by everyone as a clean break, and an attempt to create a new and ambitious sense of purpose. The Government intends to remove some of the legal and administrative barriers and to take powers to force an LEA to close a failing school where that is the best course. (DfEE, 1997, p. 30)

In 1995, when David Blunkett presented the idea of *Fresh Start*ing a school to the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, the response was of utmost caution. Teachers were particularly concerned with securing their jobs (Spencer, 1995). But that did not deter the New Labour Government from

going ahead. When presenting *Fresh Start* in the White Paper *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997), the argument for the implementation of the initiative emphasised 'what works' in terms of raising 'standards':

> Hammersmith School was inspected in April 1994 and found to be failing. A year later, despite significant staffing and other changes including a new temporary headteacher, the school was not recovering. In March 1995 the LEA head-hunted William Atkinson as permanent head, his existing school generously releasing him at a week's notice. Over Easter holidays the school was transformed physically; the LEA arranged for contractors to work round the clock to re-equip and redecorate the school. In April 1995 it re-opened in a new environment, under radical new leadership, and with a new name symbolising rebirth (Phoenix). A uniform was introduced; tough action taken to improve behaviour and a strong focus given to improving standards of teaching and learning. Extensive consultation with teachers, parents and pupils ensured that changes were much more than cosmetic. In January 1997 OFSTED reinspected the school and found that it no longer required special measures. It is now becoming a popular school, and standards of achievement – though not yet up to national averages – are rising steadily. (DfEE, 1997, p. 30)

The emphasis is again on 'what works', a pragmatic approach that has been defended by New Labour since it took office in 1997. The case of Phoenix High School was arguably what the government wished to achieve with the initiative to tackle 'failing' schools. To a certain extent it does illustrate quite well the kind of processes that *Fresh Start* schools went through. However, generalisations about what makes a school effective cannot be drawn so simplistically, and in practice the results of *Fresh Start* schools were rather different.

Regulations to allow the implementation of *Fresh Start* were integrated in the *Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998* (HMSO, 1998a). The Act regulates the powers given to the Secretary of State and LEAs to close schools that do not meet minimum performance levels according to OFSTED. It also requires that LEAs set their own targets for improvement and submit local development plans to the Department for Education and Employment. The initiative was then implemented in September 1998, in three secondary schools. In 1999, two circulars were introduced to regulate and speed up the process of closing and reopening a school. The circular 6/99 *Schools Causing Concern* (DfEE, 1999b) gives guidance on the powers of LEAs and the

Secretary of State to intervene in a school in order to guarantee improvement, or otherwise to close it down or give it a *Fresh Start*. In circular 9/99 *Organisation of School Places* (DfEE, 1999c), guidance is given on the publishing of statutory proposals. In September 1999, eight secondary schools were given a *Fresh Start*, and during the first and second school terms of 2000, the initiative was extended to four primary schools. However, from mid-March 2000, the 'superheads'[11] of three *Fresh Start* schools resigned within one month. And another followed after some months. This was definitely a blow to the initiative.

At this time the government started proposing the setting up of *City Academies*, to be built on the experience of *Fresh Start* schools and *City Technology Colleges*, and which were not required to accept every pupil who attended the 'failing' school they replaced. In an interview to BBC's Radio 4, David Blunkett (quoted in BBC, 2000) said:

> We will be developing the city academies as an alternative where there is consistent failure, where the alternative is that the children and the community no longer have a school at all and the children have to be moved out of the area.

This was what the *Fresh Start* had aimed at, though the initiative did not seem to produce such ambitious results. Failing to acknowledge this, the government was subjected to strong criticism. The Chairman of the Local Government Association, for instance, argued that the introduction of *City Academies* served to deflect attention from the failing *Fresh Start* initiative (Eason, 2000). The government was quick to respond to these allegations, and tried to show improvement in pupils' attainment in *Fresh Start* schools following the implementation of the initiative. In late March 2000, in Parliament, the then Minister for School Standards, Estelle Morris, announced in Parliament that the *Fresh Start* initiative was indeed being successful. She argued that in the first schools in which it was implemented there had been an increase in pupils attaining five or more A*-G GCSE grades and a reduction in truancy (Hansard, 2000a). Yet, the announced closure of one of the *Fresh Start* schools induced still more scepticism towards the initiative amongst the education community. The school in question was unable to attract enough pupils, and as funding from the LEAs largely depends on pupil numbers, it

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[11] This was how headteachers of *Fresh Start* schools were labelled by the media at the time, by virtue of the task they were facing and the £70,000-plus salaries some of them were to receive.

was now struggling with a budget deficit. This called for extra funding to be made available to *Fresh Start* schools (Mansell, 2000). Initially, no government funding had been directed to *Fresh Start* schools, except for refurbishment. The costs of investment in these schools were being met by the LEAs, using existing funds (such as the *Standards Fund* and *New Deal for Schools*). It was only in May 2000 that the government announced its intention to make capital funding available for schools with *Fresh Start* status (Hansard, 2000b). And again, the announcement that three of the *Fresh Start* schools required special measures further undermined confidence in the initiative. Results in *Fresh Start* schools were sometimes worse than those in the 'failing' schools they came to replace (Dickens, 2000).

This called for a major restructuring plan, and the government announced at the end of August 2000 the allocation of funding for *Fresh Start* schools and greater control over the initiative by the Department for Education and Employment. David Blunkett also announced that nine other primary and secondary schools would have a *Fresh Start* in September, bringing the total to twenty-five, questioning rumours that there would be no further *Fresh Start* schools. New guidance on the *Fresh Start* initiative was issued in an amendment to the *Education Standards Fund Regulations 2000* (HMSO, 2000) and reiterated on a document by Stephen Crowne sent to all LEAs in September 2000. The new recommendations for the application and implementation of the *Fresh Start* initiative were: obtaining clear commitment from the LEA to the initiative; reviewing of staff and governors; and drawing a plan to raise achievement with clear strategies (which is to be agreed with the LEA, Ofsted and DfEE). A working definition of a *Fresh Start* school was also included in the document:

> A Fresh Start school is any new maintained school which is designed to replace a closing school (or schools) requiring special measures, with serious weaknesses, subject to a formal warning or (for secondary schools) achieving less that a 15% rate for GCSEs at A*-C (or equivalent). (Crowne, 2000)

The announcement that the government would ask LEAs to set a lower limit of 15 per cent of its pupils achieving five A*-C GCSE grades meant that those schools that did not achieve these results for three consecutive years would be considered for closure or *Fresh Start* (O'Leary, 2000). However, a couple of weeks later the government dismissed claims that the initiative would be so

widely implemented. Estelle Morris, then Minister for School Standards, argued that *Fresh Start* would only be used where it was most likely to be successful:

> In each case there would be very clear targets and government support will be dependent on there being a real prospect of recovery. Normally a school should close if it consistently fails to raise standards for local pupils. Fresh Start is about raising standards in the most challenging circumstances and it cannot be used to avoid local difficulties for schools that should close. (quoted in Woodward, 2000)

From then on, caution was used in relation to the implementation of the initiative. In 2001, the government published the Green Paper *Schools Building on Success* (DfEE, 2001f) with plans for future goals and initiatives in education. *Fresh Start* played a very small role amongst the measures proposed to tackle what came to be called 'schools in challenging circumstances' (p. 55). Rather than addressing what did not work in the implementation of *Fresh Start,* which seemed by then most likely to be completely abandoned in favour of the *City Academies,* the government recommended:

> Only where a critical education presence in a community is necessary for purposes of regeneration and other options are unavailable should Fresh Start be considered. (...) If a Fresh Start does not succeed within a reasonably defined period (subject to consultation, we believe that this should be three years), it will be necessary to close the school and make whatever arrangements are necessary to transfer the pupils to the nearest available successful schools. (DfEE, 2001f, p. 57)

In relation to the applicability of the initiative, there were just a few changes. *Fresh Start* was previously presented as an alternative to closure; now closure was presented as an alternative to *Fresh Start.* Also, a deadline for improvement (of three years) was set for the first time, being seen by many as more realistic. In Parliament, the government realised that the time to turn around a school in special measures had decreased from 25 months in 1997 to 17-18 months in 1999-2000 (Blunkett, 1999; Hansard, 2000c). This obviously had put a tremendous pressure on schools and their staff, who had to struggle to provide pupils with a proper *fresh start.* Allowing three years for

improvement seems a more appropriate expectation of what a school can achieve, although still raising uncertainties: the threat remains that the school will be closed if it fails further OFSTED inspections.

The cautious tone adopted in relation to *Fresh Start* also seems to suggest that the government lost faith in what once was one of its flagship educational policies. Although at times it was stressed that *Fresh Start* was not a 'quick fix' (Carvel, 2000), the idea transmitted, and certainly fuelled by the media, was that it could be some kind of a panacea that could turn around the 'worst' schools in the country. If lessons were to be learnt with *Fresh Start*, the first was precisely that changes in education cannot be brought about that easily. And the government has perhaps come to acknowledge this, even though not as explicitly as it was desirable for a critical discussion of what went wrong with *Fresh Start*.

Approaching the general election taking place in June 2001, the Labour Party published its long-awaited manifesto in May, entitled *Ambitions for Britain* (Labour Party, 2001). Education is once more Labour's top priority. *Fresh Start* is no longer mentioned.

> Schools in the toughest areas, and the teachers who work in them, need special support. We will expand the Excellence in Cities programme for urban secondary schools, with extra help for the weakest schools, learning mentors and in-school units to help manage pupil behaviour. Where LEAs cannot effectively support school improvement, alternative provision will be made. For schools facing exceptional pressures, for example high pupil turnover, we will provide additional support, including significant reductions in the size of teaching groups where appropriate. (Labour Party, 2001, p. 19)

It remains unclear what 'alternative provision' means. But *Fresh Start* seems to have fallen out of the government's agenda. And yet, the initiative seems to linger. In the DfES website, updated in July 2001, the *Fresh Start* initiative is seen as:

> *a radical and difficult option*, and should only be considered where a school shows no sign of being able to raise standards to a satisfactory level on a reasonable timescale, and *where outright closure or reorganisation is impossible*. (DfES, 2001b, my emphasis)

The very few schools encouraged to go for a *Fresh Start* from then on were issued with guidance from the DfES, and subjected to termly OFSTED inspections to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Financial support is now provided to LEAs so that the target plan is achieved, and also to the school during at least the first two years to support a 'raising attainment plan'. It was also announced that four other schools (two primary and two secondary) would implement the initiative from September 2001. But those might have been the last schools to be given a *Fresh Start.*

2.2 *Translating Fresh Start into practice*

In this section, I look at the process of turning the 'failing' school Millhaven High[12] into the *Fresh Start*ed Greenfield Comprehensive. I characterise the two schools in terms of social composition and education performance, including findings from OFSTED reports. In relation to Greenfield Comprehensive I look in more detail at the impact that its *Fresh Start* status had in the daily life of the school.

2.2.1 Millhaven High: a 'failing' school

Millhaven High was the 'failing' school that Greenfield Comprehensive came to replace. It was a co-educational comprehensive school located in the suburbs of a large English metropolitan city. The school came into existence in the early 1980s, after two schools in the borough were aggregated.

The school served a community that is largely disadvantaged. The socio-economic deprivation of the borough was reflected in the number of pupils eligible for free school meals, nearly three-quarters of the school population (OFSTED, 1997). These figures were then over four times the national average (DfEE, 1998). Almost thirty per cent of the pupils were from families that became refugees in England. There was a high turnover of pupils, with nearly one-third of the pupils having been at Millhaven High for less than one year. This was partially accounted for by the significant amount of short-stay accommodation in the area (OFSTED, 1997).

In the 1990s, Millhaven High was portrayed as one of the worst schools in the country. The school had gained a bad reputation in the national press (including *The Guardian, The Independent* and *The Times*) for low academic attainment, high levels of truancy and disruption. The school was also

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[12] This is not the school's real name. It was changed to preserve anonymity.

reported to be unpopular within the local community, filling just over half the available places, and accommodating many pupils that had been excluded from other schools. The head of Student Services at the new *Fresh Start* school, who had worked for about six months at Millhaven High just prior to its closure, stressed the implications that this had on the school:

> Not having many students was one of the problems Millhaven High always had had. They... For a number of years, they'd had very small numbers of students wanting to come here. And if that happens, you then pick up students who have additional needs more often... either they've been excluded, or they just come in to the country and need additional support in terms of *English as an Additional Language...* And that's fine, if you got the teachers to be able to support that... But quite often the school didn't get the teachers to support the students until they've been here for 6, 9, 12 months. Because of the way the funding is worked out. (Ms Clarke, head of Student Services)

The *per capita* funding formula means that less subscribed schools face additional financial difficulties in providing support for their students. According to Ball (1993), this is a situation that worsened after the *1988 Education Reform Act* (HMSO, 1988) and the Conservative Government's White Paper *Choice and Diversity* (DfE, 1992), which introduced a quasi-market in education, along with an emphasis on parents and pupils as 'consumers' (cf. also Demaine, 1999). With schools competing against each other to perform well in league tables, those that performed less well became undersubscribed and were forced to close, or to continue running in adverse conditions. This seemed to be the case at Millhaven High. Moreover, New Labour's continuing support for a market in education and consumer choice has been producing the conditions for the misrecognition of structural inequalities (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). As Apple and Whitty (1999) suggested:

> This emphasis on individual choice, seen by some rightist commentators as the very essence of democracy, facilitates a denial of the importance of structural disadvantage. It invites us to focus our attention on examples of individuals who, for example, have 'escaped' or been 'rescued' from failing schools as a result of choice policies, without paying attention to the continuing relative disadvantages of working class and black communities as a whole. (p. 18)

The focus on 'failure' and *choice* in education has deflected attention from the strengths of Millhaven High in making a difference to the education of pupils who were traditionally disadvantaged.

Indeed, in spite of the widespread negative images of the school there was also public recognition of its success in teaching children who became refugees in England, and staff were said to be committed and caring. This could be seen for instance in teachers' voluntary involvement in lunchtime and after-school clubs (the number of teachers involved in the latter is estimated by the *Times Educational Supplement*[13] to be of almost ninety per cent). These clubs played an important role in the school, and won two awards within 57 bestowed to schools in England and Wales. They helped pupils recently arrived in the country to secure their skills in English and in other subject areas, provided opportunities for high-achieving pupils to further their knowledge and skills in key subject areas (outside the 'mixed-ability' context of the classroom), and even a quiet space for those pupils who stayed in bed-and-breakfast or other short-term accommodation to do their homework.

This, however, did not translate into easily measurable results. Two years before Millhaven High was closed, the school received a damning report from OFSTED. In January, when a team of inspectors visited the school, a number of faults were found: 'standards' of achievement and learning were considered low, and the quality of teaching was thought to be unsatisfactory in a high proportion of the lessons (OFSTED, 1997). And so the school required special measures. Six months later there was another OFSTED inspection to assess the progress being made since the school implemented plans for improvement. The main findings were that satisfactory progress had not been achieved, and that major problems remained unsolved, namely low 'standards' of attainment, problems with attendance and punctuality, unsatisfactory quality of teaching. In relation to GCSE results, the inspection report indicated that in the previous year, less than ten per cent of the pupils had achieved five or more A*-C grades. This figure was less than a quarter of the national average at the time (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000). Just over fifty per cent of pupils gained five or more A*-G grades, the national average in 1996 being around 86 per cent (DfEE, 2003). In both cases, OFSTED found that these results continued a trend of declining performance. The school, however, predicted that in the on-going school year around 15 per cent of pupils could gain five or more A*-C

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[13] I do not include the full reference to protect the school's anonymity. Below, I will use the same procedure in relation to documents that could identify the school.

grades (OFSTED, 1997). The behaviour of pupils in the classroom was found to be orderly, with most pupils willing to work. However, inspectors pointed out that a minority of pupils was poorly motivated and disruptive, making it hard for other pupils to engage in their learning. In the corridors and in the dining area, disruption and noise were seen as more generalised. In relation to the management of the school, the inspectors considered that the senior management was able to establish a clear leadership and strong management through good teamwork, sharing a clear vision for the school. But some problems were detected at the level of middle management: some teachers were not committed to the improvements, and post-holders did not have the necessary skills to successfully implement the changes. The report praised in particular the good work that was being carried out by teachers and learning support teams with pupils who had *English as an Additional Language* (EAL) (over half of the school population). Nevertheless, such achievements were not considered sufficient to prevent the school failing OFSTED criteria.

Although OFSTED set targets for improvement, it was thought that the school could not break the cycle of failure that it had fallen into by itself. And so, one year later, the local council decided to close the school and give it a *fresh start*, in spite of pupils and parents' campaigning to save the school (TES, 2000). This was the ultimate declaration of the school's failure. Millhaven High was not an isolated case in the borough: around ten per cent of the local schools were declared 'failing' (BBC, 1999). But rather than investing in the school to overcome its continuous financial strain, Millhaven High was allowed to continue decaying until the flagship *Fresh Start* would rescue it, and then used as an example for other 'failing' schools.

Under official guidance to the initiative, all staff were made redundant and was asked to reapply for their jobs. The appointed head's wish to be surrounded by a team committed to his vision for the school meant that eventually only four teachers from Millhaven High were accepted to continue working in the new school. The majority of teachers were reputed to having very positive relationships with their pupils. The implementation of *Fresh Start* resulted in them being held responsible for the school's alleged failure.

2.2.2 Greenfield Comprehensive: a *fresh start*?

The school

Greenfield Comprehensive was opened on the same location as Millhaven High, and it is also a co-educational comprehensive school. In the year when it

first opened as a *Fresh Start* school it had over 600 pupils on roll, between the ages of 11 and 16 years.

The school grounds comprise three three-storey buildings. The first, most modern of these is where the entrance and the reception area are located. It also holds several other facilities: the library, the dining room, the student services, the administration and the principal's offices, the Assembly hall, the gym, the staffroom, classrooms and some teachers' offices. The other two are Victorian, redbrick buildings, and hold mainly classrooms and offices. The area enclosed by the buildings is used as a playground. There also used to be temporary classrooms serving two school departments, which were known as 'the huts'. They were removed over the Christmas vacation of the second year of the school's existence, when refurbishment work in the Victorian buildings was completed.

As already mentioned, the community served by the school is socio-economically disadvantaged. In 1999, when my study began, just over fifty per cent of the school population was entitled to free meals. These figures were almost three times the national average, which was 18.3 per cent at the time (DfEE, 2000a). Generally, in Year 7 I found roughly the same proportion of pupils eligible to free meals (over one half)[14]. It is worthwhile noting that this fraction had been 75 per cent in the previous school. As this reduction is not due to a significant departure of free-school meal beneficiaries, it follows that the new school had a considerably larger intake of pupils not entitled to free meals. This makes the case that the new school already started with a more mixed intake in terms of social background than that of the 'failing' school it replaced. The school pointed out at the time that Year 7 had a large intake of pupils with respect to the school population. My own analysis of school documents allowed me to conclude that these pupils represented roughly one third of all free meals. However, and as stressed above, this increase in the absolute number of free school meals must have been accompanied by a stronger increase of pupils not entitled to free school meals, counteracting their perception that the school was as badly disadvantaged as before.

The cultural diversity of the school was reflected in the variety of languages spoken: over forty per cent of the pupils spoke *English as an Additional Language* (EAL), and there were more than thirty different language backgrounds. It should be mentioned that the corresponding national average

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[14] In 7B, my case-study group, 12 out of the 26 pupils were entitled to receive free school meals.

at this time was eight per cent (DfEE, 2000a). Around fifteen per cent of the pupils on roll became refugees in England (roughly half of the proportion at Millhaven High, although almost similar in terms of number of pupils). They originated mainly from Somalia, Albania, Turkey, and Kurdistan. In Year 7, roughly a third of pupils had *English as an Additional Language*, in EAL stages 2 to 4[15]. In the form under study, 7B, only 6 pupils out of the total 26 spoke at home languages other than English: there were three Turkish speakers, 2 Bengali (Sylheti) speakers, and one for whom Gujerati was her mother language. They were in stages 3 and 4 of language acquisition. In terms of ethnic background, there was a larger diversity. According to the school's records and ethnic monitoring procedures, in 7B there were 10 white English pupils, 1 Irish, 4 African, 1 Caribbean, 3 Turkish/Turkish-Cypriot, 2 Greek/Greek-Cypriot, 2 Bangladeshi, 1 Indian, 1 Other Asian and 1 Mixed.

Since Greenfield Comprehensive opened, the school has been oversubscribed in all year groups. Over half of the students in Years 8-11 at Greenfield Comprehensive had been transferred from Millhaven High. However, according to school documents, a 'significant number' of pupils had been long-time non-attenders or excluded from other schools, and joined in for Years 9 and 10. Over thirty per cent of the pupils had some kind of special educational need (which was nearly the double of the national average (DfES, 2002b), and twenty of them had a Statement of Special Educational Need, which is also significantly above average for a mainstream school (OFSTED, 2000).

A building site

When the school was given a *fresh start*, the local council approved major reconstruction and refurbishment work. This work was designed to modernise the image of the school and to offer better facilities.

The building work started with Summer vacation, and the first phase was planned to be finished when the school would reopen in September 1999. This would mean that all major building and refurbishment work would be ready when pupils came back to school. However, its completion was not achieved by that time, and the school was a building site for the whole period in which I conducted my fieldwork. Even at the time I left (a year and a half after the school had been given a *fresh start*), only two-thirds of the building work had been completed.

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[15] Stages of language acquisition range from 1 to 5, from lesser to greater fluency.

For a long period, normal school days meant having building workers, scaffolding and all sorts of machinery around the school grounds with all the disruption that these created. Looking back, it seems now quite unthinkable that a school could run under such conditions, particularly during the first term. The changing rooms were not ready, and many classrooms were incomplete. Teachers would sometimes need to go and fetch chairs from other classrooms before starting a lesson. During the first two terms there were no Science labs. This was due to mistakes made in the execution of the building work, along with the lack of water, electricity, gas, and technicians. The delay in setting up the Science labs meant that for a long time pupils could not benefit from doing experiments, and their assessment had to rely solely on written rather than practical work. This had such practical implications for the teaching of Science, that the head of Science, Ms Babbra, told me that having labs came to be one of the most important moments in her experience at Greenfield Comprehensive. It was only then that they 'started working as a normal department'.

Even once in the classroom, and with the basic furniture, conditions were far from ideal. Building work going on just outside the classroom window would disturb the most quiet and attentive pupils. The sound of hammering, drills and all sort of electric equipment, along with the workers' small stereo provided the soundtrack for the lessons in the main building. The most conscientious students could be found singing distractedly to the tunes on the radio. With such background noise, listening to the teacher and following instructions was a highly demanding task. Whilst taking notes, I many times wondered how could the pupils concentrate in lessons. The audiotapes of the lessons that I recorded during this period are illustrative of the high level of noise. Teachers sometimes acknowledged that this contributed to pupils' distraction and disruption, but more often underplayed it. Occasionally, it was used as a means of discipline and control in the classroom:

> Mr Roberts (the teacher) tells the pupils that he understands that it is difficult for them to be motivated in a building that is still going under reconstruction work, with all the noise that it involves. He says that it is harder still to teach under those conditions, and that he's doing his best. He adds that he has never been absent in spite of that. And although they don't have any material, as there isn't a technician to set it up, he is trying to improvise so that they can receive a proper education. But if they don't appreciate this effort, then it's not worthwhile to do so. (Fieldnotes, Science lesson 1)

This was the only time that I witnessed the issue of noise and disruption being openly addressed to pupils. When teachers were interviewed, by the end of the school year, most confessed that they had almost forgotten what it was like to be in school in those conditions.

Other aspects also complicated the normal running of the school. Until November there was no hot water and no dining room, and packed meals had to be served instead. During most of the first two terms, there was no heating (although pupils would not often be allowed to wear their coats in the classroom). To make things worse, there was neither an efficient internal or external communication system. The use of the phone was limited to the reception desk, where the only phone in the school was located. This meant that once connected to the school's main line, there would be no way of transferring calls or locating teachers. Apart from complicating life for teachers and parents, this certainly affected my fieldwork. On most occasions, I would have to call in the school in person to locate a particular member of staff myself and arrange a future meeting. Even so, this had to be limited to school hours, or further problems to locate teachers would emerge.

Changing times

Apart from all the practical problems in the running of the school described above, there were other basic issues that went through constant change such as the organisation of the school day and the making of timetables.

Initially, the school day was organised into 8 sessions of 45 minutes each, and there was a 15-minute morning break and two lunch sittings. The school opened at 7.30 a.m. with lessons starting at 8.30 a.m. and finishing at 3.45 p.m. From the end of November, three months into its existence, the school day was reorganised into seven sessions of forty-five minutes each. The school day started at 8.45 a.m. and finished at 3.30 p.m. After Easter vacation, around eight months into the school's existence, this was again changed and the number of sessions was reduced to six, of fifty minutes each. This organisation of the school day remained the same throughout the second year.

Several changes in timetables added to the disorganised atmosphere felt by teachers and pupils alike. During the first weeks of Autumn term, it was common for pupils to be seen wondering around the corridors or entering the wrong lesson, not knowing, or pretending not to know where they should be.

This posed obvious problems of control for teachers, who would not know themselves where pupils should be at that time.

Some of the changes in timetables had to do with the changes that also occurred in the arrangement of forms. It was only in November 1999 that forms were arranged in their final version. Last minute arrangements, at the head's request, meant that the plan for the mix of pupils that was considered to be the best could not be put into practice. And so there was a feeling that in spite of the time spent with such a task, the forms' groupings were far from ideal. This was certainly felt by teachers throughout the year. Initially, some teachers commented that 7B was one of the best forms in Year 7. However, as the school year went on opinions significantly changed, and 7B came to be considered the worst form. This view was repeated later when the heads of Years 7 and 8 decided that the form should be split. When this form was transferred to Year 8, 13 of its pupils continued in 8B, whilst the remaining 6[16] were sent into other four different forms. When I interviewed the heads of Years 7 and 8 about this decision, different explanations were given. It is interesting to see how perspectives could diverge so much in such a basic issue (this will be addressed in detail in Chapter 4).

There were also some changes in subjects. This happened, for instance, in Personal and Social Education (PSE), which was one of the subjects that I observed. Initially it was not taught in forms, but in learning mentor groups in a daily session of half an hour. From the end of November it started being taught in forms by a teacher, and timetabled as a subject. And from May 2000, pupils in all Years had PSE at the same time, on the first session on Monday mornings, and it was the form tutor who delivered it.

An interrupted vision

All these changes had an enormous impact in the running of school, and more particularly in the experiences of staff and pupils. But a major one was still to come: the headteacher's decision to resign and leave the school.

Mr Williams had been appointed head-designate in January, eight months before the reopening of the school as Greenfield Comprehensive. He was described as a charismatic individual, capable of restoring the confidence of parents and turning the school around. Considering that inner-city school pupils could achieve as much as those anywhere else in the country, his vision was to provide good quality education for all pupils. He wished to make

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[16] Five of the 26 pupils in 7B left the school from their Year 7 to Year 8 (Sebastien, Sophie, Joe, Terry and Brian). Three others left within the first two terms of their Year 8 (Lucy, Sinead and Andy).

education an interesting activity for students, and to give them the power to be more active in school life through participation in school councils and discussions on the curriculum. Mr Williams also believed in diminished disciplinary procedures at the school for non-violent behaviour. His vision was based on the belief that listening to pupils' views and suggestions could help the school moving forward and ultimately to create an atmosphere of co-operation with staff.

His ideas were not seen as working in practice, and Mr Williams came to be accused of being naïve, idealistic, and of not taking decisions. A serious discipline incident made some parents question his ability to manage the school effectively, and differing views on how to deal with the pupils concerned deteriorated his communication with governors. Barely a year after being at Greenfield Comprehensive, Mr Williams felt that he no longer had the support from governors and the local community, and resigned. His vision for the *Fresh Start* school was left unaccomplished.

An OFSTED inspection just before Mr Williams left office required once more special measures from Greenfield Comprehensive (OFSTED, 2000). Again, inspectors found that the school was not delivering satisfactory 'standards' of education to its pupils. Although particular problems were improving, such as attendance, the school's progress in most of the weaknesses pointed out in the previous inspection was reported to be poor. Pupils' progress, motivation and behaviour, teachers' ability to effectively implement lesson plans, and the fulfilment of the school's mission, all were said to be unsatisfactory. The inspection report also stressed the legacy of 'dysfunctional management systems' that the school was now facing. This was allegedly due to previous problems at the level of senior and middle management, and the governors and the local education authority's inadequate exercise of their roles.

Both Mr Williams's resignation and this inspection report had a strong negative impact on teachers' morale. Many teachers at Greenfield Comprehensive decided to leave the school by the end of the academic year. A newspaper estimates the figure as being around one third of all teachers in the school. For most of those teachers who would be staying, prospects were quite gloomy. They had committed themselves to a vision that now seemed increasingly unattainable.

This was the atmosphere in the school upon the new headteacher's arrival. With a more 'pragmatic' approach to education, Mr Jones was seen as the man who could succeed in rescuing the school. Indeed, the new headteacher

came to provide the school with the structured atmosphere it once had (when it was Millhaven High), and which was lost with the implementation of *Fresh Start*.

When Mr Jones had been at Greenfield Comprehensive for almost two years, and as I became aware of the reported increase in pupils' performance in terms of GCSE results, I decided to go back to the school and interview him. I wanted to understand what had changed in the school, and how he accounted for that. Mr Jones explained his success by a combination of support from all levels (national and local government and school governors), recruiting of 'good' and committed teachers, and dissemination of good teaching practice. The report of an OFSTED inspection (OFSTED, 2002) that had just taken place at the school no longer required special measures, and is generally positive, both in relation to academic 'standards' and discipline, although pointing out aspects that need improvement (such as results in English and attendance).

However, if this was eventually achieved, it was perhaps by establishing a *fresh* identity for the school. This new identity was less based on its own specificity as a school committed to the teaching of children that became refugees in England, and more on 'traditional' and authoritarian approaches, such as the policing of teachers' work, strict discipline and increased selection within school. Mr Jones's apparent success was also at the expense of the enthusiasm that many teachers had when they joined a school with a different approach to education (this will be further explored in the next section).

2.3 *Teaching and learning in a* Fresh Start *school*

In the previous sections, I explored the contextual background and origins of the *Fresh Start* initiative, and outlined a description of the school in which I carried out my fieldwork. I now proceed to illustrate the perspectives of staff and pupils in relation to the implementation of *Fresh Start* at Greenfield Comprehensive.

I should mention that although I did not ask questions that specifically addressed the *Fresh Start* initiative, in almost every single interview with staff, and in many of those with pupils at Greenfield Comprehensive issues emerged that were related to its implementation.

2.3.1 Staff perspectives

The impact of working in a school that was being physically transformed and had a large majority of staff (and many pupils) new to the school was so great that it was very often spontaneously acknowledged. In fact, the whole process of change that Greenfield Comprehensive went through (by virtue of its status as a *Fresh Start* school) was a recurring theme in the interviews with staff.

Working with learning mentors

As illustrated before, the building work had a major impact in the running of the school. Several teachers referred to the delays in the completion of the building work as preventing the proper delivery of the subjects that they were teaching. For instance, the departments of Science and Music had to postpone all practical work for several terms, to when the labs and classrooms where fully equipped. Because of the impossibility of carrying out any practical exercises, pupils' assessment focused solely on written class work, tests and homework.

Besides being physically a building site, Greenfield Comprehensive had also to deal with the building of a cohesive team, as the school was almost entirely composed of staff that were new to the school, following the implementation of *Fresh Start* and *Excellence in Cities*. Under the *Fresh Start* initiative, all staff were made redundant and needed to reapply to their previous posts. At Greenfield Comprehensive only four teachers out of approximately forty had worked in Millhaven High, as the headteacher (Mr Williams) wished to recruit a team that was committed to his vision on education. Having also implemented the *Excellence in Cities* initiative, the school started to include learning mentors amongst the professionals providing support for pupils.

With so many members of staff getting to know each other, there was some tension in the atmosphere, which was particularly felt by learning mentors. This new profession was created under the *Excellence in Cities* initiative (DfEE, 1999a). They were to free teachers from pastoral care, enabling them to concentrate on teaching, and providing pupils with individual support to improve their learning. Learning mentors generally came from professionally diverse backgrounds, and included previous social workers and volunteers in schools. When the initiative was first implemented, there was no official training directed specifically to the functions that learning mentors were expected to perform.

At Greenfield Comprehensive there were ten learning mentors, a few being part-time and working in different hours. Although the school was only allocated funding for three learning mentors, I was told by a member of staff that the first headteacher (Mr Williams) believed that they 'were cheaper than teachers and would have a less formal relationship with pupils, so were better at delivering PSE than teachers'. Thus, initially every pupil was assigned to a learning mentor (each one of these working with up to 75 pupils). They worked with groups that were both horizontal (where a learning mentor would work with his/her tutor group of pupils in a single year group) and vertical (where a learning mentor would meet with all of his pupils across year groups). Furthermore, they were responsible for phoning pupils' parents to track down unauthorised absence from school and to discuss with pupils any personal problems. However, the lack of training meant that there were some difficulties in implementing this way of working, and particularly in delivering PSE lessons in vertical groupings. Thus, in November 1999 form tutors started delivering PSE lessons, and learning mentors were assigned to year groups, continuing with the task of tracking down absences and dealing with pupils' personal problems. In some cases, the school encouraged them to keep working with those tutees with whom they had created a particularly good relationship.

All of these changes in the way that learning mentors worked in the school meant that only few teachers accepted and understood their role. And this was a role that learning mentors had to negotiate. Being asked to co-operate with teachers in creating a better learning environment, they nevertheless found some resistance from the latter. When asked about their relationship with teachers, a learning mentor replied:

> Mixed really, it depends on the type of teacher. Yeah, some people are a bit... just narrow-minded I would say. They're not... I think the thing is with learning mentors and teachers, teachers are used to schools being their place and learning mentors are a new initiative, so they're not used to working with us. They don't know who we are and what we do. I think they're getting the idea. And also, it is a new initiative for us, so we had to grow in what we're actually doing. (Ms Cumberbatch, learning mentor)

Another learning mentor mentioned the same initial difficulty in having their role accepted by teachers, although acknowledging that with time their relationship became more co-operative in nature:

> Generally we have quite a good... interrelationship with them, because we also, on Fridays, we go to the Pub with them, and, you know, that kind of things. In fact, to me, there was a time when it seemed to be *them* and *us*, you know? But, I said, that's really gone by now, so it's more like *us*, meaning teachers, learning mentors, support staff, etc, etc... (Mr Chengeray, learning mentor, original emphasis)

After the first school year, and with the change of management, the usefulness of learning mentors was called in question. A member of staff told me that it was decided that some learning mentors were to be made redundant because the school was only funded for three, not ten. On another occasion, she told me that enough mentors had just left for other reasons so no redundancy was needed. It remains unclear whether they left because they chose to, or because they were pressed to do so.

From then, learning mentors started working only with a 'case load' of 'difficult' pupils across year groups. Arguably, it was the fact that learning mentors were removed from their responsibility of delivering lessons (PSE) that teachers came to accept them better. As one teacher told me:

> I must say I always had a lot of respect for them all, and now that they are doing the job which they were originally intended to they do a very useful job. (Mr Roberts, head of Year 7)

Getting to know the pupils

It was not just the staff that was new. Although about half of the school population had previously attended Millhaven High, they were nevertheless unknown to the staff. And those members of staff with responsibility to provide support for pupils or to set them for subjects felt that this had a great deal of significance in their taking of decisions.

The head of the Student Services at Greenfield Comprehensive, for instance, told me how she felt that not knowing the students was one of the biggest difficulties they had to deal with during their first year in the school:

(The staff) didn't know the students very well. That was one of our biggest difficulties: not *knowing* the students. Having so many new staff who didn't know the students... It was quite hard work. 'Cause you had to build relationships with the students in a very short period of time. And that... The trust, getting trust, is quite difficult. And some students aren't happy to trust you. And others are very untrusting. And building relationships with those students who are very untrusting takes more time than we had at the beginning of the year. So, now... Now that I know a lot more of the students, it's easier. (Ms Clarke, head of Student Services, original emphasis)

Ms Clarke argued that knowing the students would help in assessing the nature and level of support they needed, and the sooner that would happen, the faster they would be able to provide pupils with that support.

The Science teacher in charge of setting for this subject also suggested that not knowing the students did not help in taking decisions about sorting pupils into the different sets. She clearly indicated that this lack of information renders such decisions fragile.

Thus, both members of staff emphasise the importance of this sort of unofficial knowledge about pupils, which is based more on the result of personal interactions than on academic assessment. This knowledge seems to play a significant role in the building pupils' reputations. Teachers use it in their practices to decide who has special needs or should be in the lower sets (this will be further explored in Chapter 4). However, I would like to draw attention to the specificity of *Fresh Start* schools in relation to the construction of pupils' identities. In schools such as Greenfield Comprehensive, teachers do not know both the newcomers in Year 7 and the pupils in other year groups. Therefore, pupils tend to have greater freedom in negotiating their identities with teachers. On the other hand, many pupils had previously attended Millhaven High, knew each other and were therefore actively involved in the process of building reputations. These pupils may help in carrying previously acquired reputations into the new school. So, although teachers may not be aware, there might be some continuity in these reputations. In this way, pupils were not only building reputations with teachers, but also with their peers – some of them 'knew' them, whilst others did not.

Dealing with change

Another issue that emerged from interviews with staff was the impact that change had in the morale and the atmosphere in school. As explored in the

previous section, these changes had to do with practicalities of school life as well as major changes in the management of the school.

Initial changes occurred mainly in relation to the making of timetables and the organisation of forms and subjects, and contributed to a general sense of disorganisation and lack of structure at the school. Adjectives such as 'chaotic', 'hectic', 'out of control', were very often chosen by staff to describe the prevailing atmosphere at Greenfield Comprehensive. Only one term had gone after the school had a *Fresh Start*, and frustration was already building up. Teachers and learning mentors felt that many ideas were not being materialised, and enthusiasm was beginning to fade. This feeling of disappointment reached its peak at the moment when the headteacher resigned:

> Bad things have been the lack of structure, really. Hmm... which really culminated in the former head, Mr Williams, leaving, you know? Which was a low point for the school, really. A lot of people felt disillusioned, and... Some people were happy, actually... that he left... But in general, it really caused quite a lot of chaos. To add to the chaos which was already there, you know? So, I would say that in terms of this school, that was both... It was a turning point. It was the lowest point and in one way of looking at it was also a high point. (Mr Chengeray, learning mentor)

Generally, it was agreed that Mr Williams's decision to resign was a turning point in the life of the recently created Greenfield Comprehensive school. For many, his resignation was a statement on the practical impossibility of running the school in the light of a different vision of education. Mr Williams believed in giving to students a more participant role in school life, so as to make them responsible for their learning. An example of this approach was the pupils' setting of their own learning targets, which were periodically assessed and reviewed in meetings with a teacher, the parents and the pupil concerned. He also argued that the school ethos should reflect an optimistic atmosphere, where positive aspects were brought to the forefront and rewarded. During the first months at Greenfield Comprehensive this was reflected in the existence of very few structures for dealing with unruly behaviour.

However, many teachers felt that a stricter approach to discipline was required. In this light, they felt that Mr Williams's decision to leave Greenfield Comprehensive opened up the chance of introducing a more structured and

organised management in the school, which was broadly based on conceptions of discipline and control. With a change in the school's leadership, these issues were very prominent in interviews with staff, particularly with teachers that supported Mr Jones's management:

> Strong leadership in the school. Definitely, it's what has made the difference. And strict boundaries, so the people know exactly what's wrong. And basically the head has made a big difference. It's not so difficult to be excluded... (...) He's made a big difference. He's put down his boundaries, and *the kids have to stick very rigidly to it*. (Mr Roberts, head of Year 7, my emphasis)

> I just feel that it's getting better, it is much more positive in the school. (...) Everybody's working well together, I think the lessons are a bit more clear... Resources, what we can use, practical work, the way that we do things, I think that is getting better within the classroom. We're tracking people who have not come in. Why they did not come in, chasing students to do their homework, we didn't do that last year. And that's more tight now as well. And *the students are getting away with less*. (Ms Babbra, Science teacher, my emphasis)

Teachers pointed out that the main change introduced by the new headteacher was a stricter control of indiscipline within the school. With Mr Jones, rules were more and tighter, and so the students could 'get away with less'. And it was teachers' own positioning within approaches to discipline that divided their opinions in relation to the new school management.

The staff that were more supportive of the management of the school when Mr Williams was the headteacher felt that the initial enthusiasm with which they had come to the *Fresh Start* school had been lost after he left Greenfield Comprehensive:

> I would say that originally there was quite an exciting atmosphere, 'cause there was something new, and lots of people came, quite enthusiastic, and you know, looking to try something new. (...) In some ways it's better, but I think there's less enthusiasm than there was at the beginning of the year. So there's a little less... There's more negativity, in a sense. There's not so much co-operation. (Ms Cumberbatch, learning mentor)

> Some of the excitement is no longer here. This sort of looking forward to do new things in a new way is gone. Because... we can't do them! (Ms Miller, PSE and Maths teacher)

Although agreeing that the new management systems put in place by a new leadership would eventually help the school move forward and achieve better results for its pupils, some of the staff felt that this was not the school they had chosen to work in. And so the change of management led people to question their own commitment to the school:

> I think it's not the school I joined. It's not... It hasn't got the same ideals. I mean the ideals that it had were not realised, and I think it's changed quite a lot. (...) I'm looking for another job. But that is partly personal circumstances, so I... And I think I've... I can't see any way that I'm going to get more personal satisfaction here, you know? I want to try something a bit newer, I think. I mean, this was why I came here, and it's turned out not to be new. (Ms Miller, PSE and Maths teacher)

This had obvious implications for the school's continuity in terms of retention of staff, with about one third of staff leaving the school after the first year working at Greenfield Comprehensive. Consequently, further problems for the school and the quality of education being provided to its pupils emerged. In the second year at Greenfield Comprehensive, the Maths department happened to have only one full-time teacher, with most of the staff working there coming from teacher agencies or brought in by the headteacher. And although this was not the case in every department, it did present a major problem. In a wider scale, we can locate this problem within current nation-wide shortages of qualified teachers (Shaw, 2002), with Mathematics and Science teachers being in especially short supply (Arkin, 2002). But at the level of the school, it was teachers' awareness of the ease of securing employment elsewhere combined with the low morale and the atmosphere lived at Greenfield Comprehensive that contributed to an exodus of staff.

Under this context, those teachers who took the decision to stay in the school perceived it as a reiteration of their commitment:

> A lot of people left after the first year. And I did think about it, because it was so difficult. I think we've really got to enjoy the challenge to carry on working here when there are jobs that you can go to that would be easier, you know?, that the school is going to be easier... So, I think... Yeah, we must all be pretty committed, the people especially that stayed here for a year and a half, nearly two years now... (...) The reason that I can remember is that they could earn the

same money somewhere else, and what's the point of being under a sort of pressure that you were under here all the time, really. And not saying of course going for cover quite a lot, so it's difficult. I mean, I work in most nights and you need to be quite committed to carry on working here, I think. (laughs) (Ms Ojy, Music and English teacher)

Opinions as to why the school was experiencing such a loss of staff diverged. For those who were supportive of Mr Williams's vision, the decision to leave was the result of the frustration for not seeing their ideals achieved. But some of the staff placed the responsibility for such exodus on the school's previous management for not being able to sustain a stable atmosphere:

Initially, what the school managed to do was actually attracting a certain group of people, you know, there was a very interesting group of people in the beginning of the year. And I think it's a real shame that being lost. Because I think it's very difficult to get that mix again. So I think that's one of the biggest downfalls... But, you know, it's human resources the most important resources of a school. And I think because of mismanagement, people weren't able to do their best, and just got very frustrated, I think. (Ms Cumberbatch, learning mentor)

This was also the new headteacher's opinion. When asked if staff mobility was causing any problems to the school and whether he intended to take action in order to retain teachers, he argued that:

I think that that's probably a result of the difficulties at the start of the Fresh Start initiative. It was a very difficult first six months. Which caused some people to feel that they wish to leave the school. If that period had been managed better, then I don't believe there'd have been such staff mobility. Staff movement. We would have retained many more staff, and that would have given the school greater continuity, from Year 1 into Year 2, and hopefully then from Year 2 into Year 3. But the difficulties which were experienced in the first year seem to have worked to the school's disadvantage. And it's those difficulties which need to be reviewed in the Fresh Start initiative. Some of them could have been avoided, and some of them are a result of a new policy which lessons still are being learnt. (Mr Jones, headteacher)

Mr Jones located most of the problems that Greenfield Comprehensive went through in the previous management of the school. Here, he argued that

a good management would have prevented staff mobility. However, a teacher pointed out to me that staff departure was still an issue in the second year after the school reopened, and that the headteacher would have to take action in order to be able to retain teachers. She suggested that staff were getting dissatisfied with the number of cover hours they were asked to do, as well as with the new limit on the number of hours for teacher training that had been imposed. In her case, this was building into a sense of professional dissatisfaction that made her question her own commitment to the school.

It was not only teachers who were leaving the school. Some of the learning mentors also left the school after the first year, although in their case this was not a choice. On the last day of Summer term, the learning mentors were told that many would not continue in the school in the following academic year. The head of the student services, Ms Clarke, told me privately that this was one of the reasons for her deciding to leave the school. She informed me that learning mentors would be made redundant due to insufficient funding, and questioned the new management's ability and willingness in getting additional funds to support pupils' needs.

Losing 'clients'

Concerns with pupils' mobility also emerged in the interviews. The staff were aware that parents of pupils in Year 7 in particular had sent their children to Greenfield Comprehensive with different expectations. They were promised new facilities and a good learning environment. Instead, parents saw their children attending a building site undergoing constant change, in which good quality education was yet to be achieved. Some of the staff empathised with that disillusionment. They were particularly concerned about the school being in special measures after an OFSTED inspection, and with the impact in the recruitment of pupils. Although Greenfield Comprehensive indeed required special measures, staff fears did not materialise and the school was once again oversubscribed in the second year of existence. Mr Jones came to suggest that pupils' mobility was not a problem that Greenfield Comprehensive had to face:

> We have been admitting children to the school on quite a regular basis. Hmm... And we have considerably more interest... People are looking now to try and either *move* children... where they're not happy in their school, to this school. Or are beginning to reconsider their choice of schools for next year. So I think those are good signs. That parents are starting to hear good things about this school and wanting to send their children to this school. (...) I think particularly now

the school has got a better reputation for better behaviour. (Mr Jones, headteacher, original emphasis)

On second thought, some staff came to argue that the school was being better managed, and that this idea was being transmitted to parents. As to why eight of the 26 pupils in the form I observed left the school (within five terms since the reopening), none of the staff ventured to guess. Explanations concerning pupils' departure emerged at the level of individual pupils, but did not move beyond that (this will be further explored in Chapter 6).

These were the main issues relating to its status as a *Fresh Start* school that emerged from interviews with staff at Greenfield Comprehensive. The changes in the school at all levels - building work, school organisation and management, staff and pupils' mobility, created an atmosphere of uncertainty under which it became difficult to work, and resulted in staff questioning their own educational ideals and the means to achieve them. In the next sub-section, I explore the issues brought up by pupils, trying to voice their concerns and perspectives in relation to the process of setting up the recently created school.

2.3.2 Pupils' perspectives

Interviews with pupils, all attending a form in Year 7 at Greenfield Comprehensive, were carried out in two different phases. The first set of interviews was carried out during the Spring term of the first year of the school's existence, generally with two pupils at a time. A second set of individual interviews with the same pupils took place during the Autumn term in 2000, when they were in Year 8. Thus, the interviews reflect what was happening in the school over these two different periods of time.

Building a school

The long time that the building work took to be completed also seemed to be of significance in the experiences of pupils. In their perspectives, Greenfield Comprehensive just did not offer the kind of facilities they would normally expect to have in a school, such as a library or a canteen. Some pupils considered that for this reason, the school should have postponed its opening date:

Yeah, it was a new school... So they shouldn't have opened it until it was ready. Because we hadn't got a library and most things I just take for granted. (...) And it wasn't very good to start with... (Sophie, Year 7)

Although pupils felt that their school life was constrained due to the lack of facilities and the presence of scaffoldings and workers on site, interestingly none of them ever complained about the noise produced by the ongoing work (see section 2.2). What they thought was at stake were the promises they had been made about the new school buildings. The pupils felt that they had come to a new school where they expected to find state-of-the-art facilities, and instead found the spaces they could use limited for quite a long period of time. Whenever I was interviewing pupils, and another piece of refurbishment work had been completed or new equipment had been acquired, this would be immediately mentioned as the best thing happening in school at that moment. A school block being finished, having equipment in Arts or labs in Science were all mentioned in answers given to the question 'What do you like best in school?'. A pupil told me how she thought that having new, smart buildings contributed for a better learning atmosphere, making pupils work harder:

I like the new building... (...) The new building is smart, and makes pupils work harder... (Lucy, Year 8)

I think that this is illustrative of the importance that pupils placed on having their school running normally.

Apart from lacking proper facilities, pupils also experienced an atmosphere of instability and disorganisation in the school. They were aware of teachers' own insecurities, and of when they were not able to control them in class. Many pupils referred to the ability of the teacher in controlling misbehaviour as the main reason for liking a particular subject. For some pupils, the fact that many teachers were young and new to the school did not help in dealing with disruption, particularly in the most serious cases. An extract of an interview with two pupils in 7B illustrates this perspective:

Sebastien: Yeah, they (older pupils) don't just use their fists sometimes... They just... They come... They come with weapons sometimes... And in Millhaven High there was... there was more teachers that knew what to do, but in... hmm... Greenfield there are more new teachers and they don't know quite how to deal with it, probably because they hadn't had such... such an

experience, like when there's all the people fighting and it like gets a bit more serious with weapons... They don't know how to deal with that kind of thing... That was the case anyway for the... first half term.

Andy: I think they shouldn't... They shouldn't just have old teachers, but old teachers probably have more experience than these new teachers. 'Cause... they've seen the fights before and everything.

Sebastien: They have... They have kept some...

Andy: There are some. But most of them are new.

As I mentioned before, Millhaven High had been widely praised for the positive relationships that its staff constructed with pupils. The *Fresh Starting* of the school came to introduce the need of reconstructing those relationships from the beginning.

Taking sides

As pupils moved from the first- into the second-year after the reopening of Greenfield Comprehensive, they generally felt that this situation was slowly changing. The atmosphere was perceived as being calmer and more organised, and they thought that teachers were showing more confidence and control in classes. Pupils related this change in the atmosphere to the presence of the new headteacher and the introduction of more and stricter rules. For this reason, most of the pupils in 7B thought that Mr Jones was providing the school with what could be described as a second *Fresh Start.*

Although most of them came to support Mr Jones's leadership, generally pupils and their parents were disappointed with Mr Williams's resignation. As with teachers, they feared that this meant that the plans for the new school would not materialise any more:

Like I said, Mr Roberts (head of Year 7, and Science teacher) he talks to people, but like... He says it's in course of getting better, and they just chat as much rubbish as they did... Like, that... Really, this school is going to be better. And Mr Williams, he has left?, he would say, 'Yes, I'm going to change this school on my own'. 'Cause he's like really being into it, like to change the school around... And like my mum was really down, 'cause she thought, 'Yes, Mr Williams is the one! He will be able to turn the school around!' But... (Terry, Year 7)

When Mr Williams resigned, many pupils complained to me that they were not informed personally about his decision to leave the school, which they perceived as a lack of respect. In fact, it was only after he left the school that

pupils expressed negative opinions about Mr Williams. The impact of the media and parents may perhaps have helped in the shaping of these opinions.

With a new headteacher, pupils started feeling a difference in terms of the school management, and many came to dismiss Mr Williams's achievements:

> I don't care (about Mr Williams leaving)! Because he wasn't doing anything good anyway. He was just sitting on his bench, eating and that! (...) 'Cause he's (the new head) only been here after a few days, now. He's done *more* than Paul (Williams) has ever done. 'Cause he's going 'round... (...) and he's putting out the bad people. (Terry, Year 7, original emphasis)

As time went by, resentment towards Mr Williams grew. The media fed this, as television, radio and newspapers coverage often depicted the school as an example of how easy it is for things to go wrong in a *Fresh Start* school. In my second round of interviews, taking place when the new headteacher was leading the school, I had the following conversation with a pupil:

> Marta: What are the best and worst things about school?
>
> Nina: Having a headteacher that lied. I read in the newspaper that Mr Williams lied about being a superhead. Actually, in the last school he was at he made it rubbish. And he pretended to be good, so the government thought that he was good, so they put him in this school to make it better, but he made it worse.
>
> (Nina, Year 8)

This interview extract raises very interesting issues about the influence of media in shaping pupils' opinions towards the management of their own school. Pupils felt that staff did not provide them with sufficient information about what happened in the school at this level. At the same time, the fact that the school came to feature prominently on television, radio and on the local and national press provided pupils with particular discourses on the school. They seemed to construct their interpretations repeating the media treatment of the topic and probably conversations with their parents and peers, as the following extract further suggests:

> It's good (the school). But my mum wants me to move, 'cause we moved house. My mum likes it, but if it doesn't get better... My mum sometimes doesn't believe me. So she likes coming to the meetings to make sure what's going on. *If she reads it in the paper, then she believes it...* If the school gets worse, she will take

me. But if it stays the same, I'll stay. I prefer to stay. (Nina, Year 8, my emphasis)

Although opinions towards the school's management under both Mr Williams and Mr Jones's leadership were divided, when the new headteacher started managing the school, pupils felt that the atmosphere became more stable and organised. And this helped the headteacher in gaining the support of most pupils I interviewed:

> I get less disrupted this year, in the classes and in the corridors. The headmaster's done quite a few changes for the better. He's strict but he's fair. For the bad people, he actually gives them detentions, but he doesn't give people detentions if he doesn't have to. (Julia, Year 8).

> It's actually better. Like the school's getting a better reputation, because it's getting more strict. Like if you don't wear the right uniform and stuff, you go home. It's making it better. (Liana, Year 8)

> The new headmaster changed the school. It's better. He's more strict, with the uniform and stuff. And the other kids' attitude has changed. (Alice, Year 8)

Pupils agreed that the atmosphere was better because the rules had changed, and there were more of them to stick to. For instance, they started having more detentions applied, such as for being late, and even Saturday morning detentions for disruptive behaviour.

In this process, strictness became the dividing line, and those who opposed it preferred and still supported the former head, Mr Williams. They would sometimes complain about Mr Jones being too strict, and were particularly critical of his way of imposing discipline. Some pupils pointed out to me that he shouted too much, or that he did not really listen to them, unlike Mr Williams:

> I found it better when it was with Mr Williams. 'Cause he had a better way with children. The way he was talking to us. He was more softer, and he knew how to speak to you. Even if you had an exclusion, the way he spoke with me, made it not so difficult for me to understand. (Ismail, Year 8)

From what I observed in school during my fieldwork, Mr Jones did indeed resort to shouting quite often as a way to impose discipline. Unlike him, Mr

Williams would use softer ways of persuading pupils to behave, and this generally gained him their loyalty.

Leaving school

Independently of supporting one headteacher or the other, what many pupils really disliked was change in itself:

> They should just stick with one headteacher, because if they keep on changing it's not fair for the kids because they can't get used to one teacher. I don't mind any of the (head)teachers, I just don't like it to change. (Jamie, Year 8)

Pupils used to tell me how they had a considerable number of supply teachers in some subjects, like in English. In the first couple of years at Greenfield Comprehensive, this situation prevailed. As mentioned above, a shortage of qualified teachers meant that in one single subject pupils could have over a dozen different supply teachers within a school year. This high level of change was certainly much greater than what pupils had expected to face.

Although pupils were aware of teachers' turnover, they seldom advanced reasons for their departure. When they did suggest reasons, they rarely questioned teachers' commitment to the school:

> My English teacher is leaving as well, 'cause she needs more money. (...) I don't miss teachers from last year that left, though. I miss Mr Wilson, our English supply teacher. But I think he left not because he wanted to, but because he had to. (Nina, Year 8)

Nina explains her teacher's decision to leave in such a way that does undermine her confidence in the process of creating a successful school through a *Fresh Start*. However, with the sudden departure of the staff working in the school's administration, where pupils were not informed about their leaving, and finding new staff working at school after a mid-term break, Nina felt let down:

> I'm a bit in the muddle why some people left, like Hortense (school secretary) and stuff... I thought they enjoyed it here! (Nina, Year 8)

Pupils' mobility was also an issue at Greenfield Comprehensive. Eight pupils from 7B left the school within the first five terms. And this did not

mean that the other sixteen pupils from this form would continue attending the school unconditionally. For some pupils, remaining in Greenfield Comprehensive depended on their parents' perception of the progress achieved by the school to sustain a good atmosphere and learning conditions:

> I'm moving. I'm changing school. (...) Because my mum says it's not good here. It's not a good school. It has been fine, but I don't really like my school. (...) I don't like people smoking in the toilets, and there's not much equipment to use. (Omi, Year 8)

As mentioned before, Mr Jones did not think that there was an excessive movement of pupils. However, in the interviews I carried out, both with pupils and with staff, there was little support for his view. For instance, the head of Year 7, Mr Roberts, had told me that in terms of pupils leaving the school, 7B was quite representative of what was happening in other forms. This certainly illustrates the disappointment of pupils and their parents with the school. The fact that Greenfield Comprehensive was again oversubscribed only means that the school is still attracting new pupils, but does not necessarily reflect pupils and their parents' satisfaction with the direction that the school is taking and their intentions to continue attending it.

A *fresh* school identity

Finally, another issue to emerge from the interviews with pupils was the creation of a school identity that was distinct from that of Millhaven High. Pupils associated Millhaven High so much with failure, that some of them felt that people working or attending the previous school should leave in order for them to be able to make a *fresh start*. Therefore, they distanced themselves from what had been Millhaven High, all things associated with it being seen as causing the problems that Greenfield Comprehensive was now facing:

> Sinead: Especially when Year 11s and Year 10s are gone, I think... (Alice agrees) It's gonna be a much better school, 'cause most of them are from Millhaven High, and they don't have much strictness in their... They don't have much manners and all that... or taking our stuff... 'Cause some people have got their mobile phones nicked and everything.
>
> Alice: And they push you out of the way...
>
> Sinead: Yeah, they always think that... it's that old thing, you know?, they can just walk in a straight line and everyone moves to the side.
>
> Marta: 'Cause they're older...?

Both: Yeah!

Sinead: Like they rule the school or something... it's annoying...

(Sinead and Alice, Year 7)

It was not just a question of their peers' misbehaviour that these pupils associated with their school's failure. Adopting the *Fresh Start* discourse on 'failing' schools, Sinead believed that when staff from Millhaven High left the school, the quality of teaching became better:

> In general, all got better. The teachers have got better. They kind of like fired the old teachers, at the beginning they expelled all the Millhaven High lot. And the Year 11 has gone now. And that was all Millhaven, so they are all gone now so it's got better. 'Cause they were bad. (Sinead, Year 8)

This extract illustrates how Sinead interpreted the *Fresh Start* initiative. In her view, a *fresh start* for Greenfield Comprehensive would have to mean a *clean* start from the 'failing' school it replaced. She identified pupils' misbehaviour and insufficient teaching quality as the reasons for the failure associated with Millhaven High, and therefore she considered that only by eliminating these could the new school succeed. Ignoring wider social constraints in educational attainment and success, Sinead believed that it was up to the new teachers and pupils to make a difference and construct a new identity for the school.

In conclusion, a number of common issues emerged in the interviews with pupils and staff. Firstly, I think it is clear that both staff and pupils were affected by the high level of change that the school went through. They perceived the ongoing building work and all the changes in organisation and management as being responsible for the atmosphere of instability lived at Greenfield Comprehensive.

The resignation and subsequent replacement of the headteacher was seen by all as a turning point in the life of the recently created school. Discipline and control seemed to be the dividing line for pupils and staff, according to which they either supported Mr Williams or Mr Jones. For many people in the school, Mr Williams was seen as an idealistic figure with a softer approach to discipline, whereas Mr Jones's strict codes of behaviour were seen as having restored a more ordered teaching and learning atmosphere.

Another issue raised in the interviews was a concern with staff and pupils' turnover. In spite of the school seeing many members of staff and pupils leaving, this did not seem to be an issue for the current headteacher. Mr Jones

failed to read signs of disappointment from some staff, pupils and parents, and in the long term this may have serious consequences in school life. Current shortages of teachers increase teachers' mobility and consequently the need to recur to supply teachers. Moreover, despite the school having been oversubscribed in both school years, children and their parents were showing signs of dissatisfaction. If this continues to be the case and consequently pupils' numbers on roll decrease, the school's funding could be put at stake.

2.4 Conclusions

Fresh Start was intended to be about innovative ways of raising 'standards' (DfEE, 1997). It was meant to turn the undersubscribed 'failing' Millhaven High into a successful Greenfield Comprehensive.

Millhaven High was failing, according to OFSTED. An inspection report suggested that the school had entered a cycle of failure (OFSTED, 1997). Results at GCSE level indicated that nine per cent of pupils attained five or more A*-C grades in 1996, and thirteen per cent in 1997 (DfES, 2003). OFSTED predicted that in the following school year results would fall substantially. Ten per cent of pupils won five or more A*-C grades at GCSEs in 1998. The local council, controlled by Labour, decided to close the school, despite opposition from parents and pupils, and recognition of the good work teachers carried out with pupils in socially disadvantaged circumstances. In doing so, and as a result of *Fresh Start* requirements, the headmaster and teachers were dismissed. By replacing staff, blame was shifted on to the teachers and the school's leadership.

When Greenfield Comprehensive opened, it was striving to create a fresh school identity, with a *clean* image. But the imposed rupture with the past of the school was to be deeply felt. Staff and pupils were trapped in the discontinuity of the two schools, the 'failing' Millhaven High and the *Fresh Started* Greenfield Comprehensive. The amount of change they were subjected to at all levels, and particularly in relation to the building work, school organisation and management, had an enormous impact on their daily lives. Suffice it to say that in that first year after reopening, only five per cent of pupils attained five or more grades A*-C in GCSEs (DfES, 2003), a percentage of pupils much lower than it had ever been before at Millhaven High. The table below illustrates the performance in terms of GCSE grades throughout time of

both the 'failing' Millhaven High and the *Fresh Start*ed Greenfield Comprehensive:

School	Year	5+ A*-C GCSE	5+ A*-G GCSE
Millhaven High	1995	10%	54%
Millhaven High	1996	9%	57%
Millhaven High	1997	13%	64%
Millhaven High	1998	10%	60%
Millhaven High	1999 [17]	n/a	n/a
Greenfield Comprehensive	2000	5%	58%
Greenfield Comprehensive	2001	22%	83%
Greenfield Comprehensive	2002	23%	64%

Table 1 - Proportion of pupils attaining 5+ A*-C GCSE and 5+ A*-G GCSE grades, from 1995 to 2002. (Source: DfES, 2003).

Greenfield Comprehensive recovered, and is now doing well. In 2001 and 2002 the proportion of its pupils attaining five or more A*-C grades in GCSE exams increased to over twenty per cent (even though it was accompanied by the recent decrease in the number of pupils attaining five or more A*-G GCSEs).

Performance tables such as these are of limited value, in that they tend to obscure processes of change occurring in schools. At Greenfield Comprehensive, more control over the teaching quality, the sharing of good practice *within* school between teachers, and periodic inspections by OFSTED to identify aspects that need improvement are, according to the headteacher, making a difference in pupils' performance.

However, one of the most noticeable changes during the new school's first two years concerned its focus on issues of discipline and social control. This suggests *the same old ways* of previous governments, rather than innovation. I would also like to stress the effect of public discourses on choice and competition between schools to attract 'customers'. At Millhaven High, this directed attention to its inability to fill vacancies, whilst obscuring the well-reputed work that was being carried out by teachers of a pupil population that was largely different in terms of social and cultural background. As Stephen Ball (1994) had argued in relation to the education policy of the Tories, the pluralistic language of choice is a paradox in that it assumes a society that is homogeneous and classless. Moreover, and as the same author suggested, the emphasis on 'standards' and the market-approach to education came to transform more traditional forms of control: an apparent increased autonomy

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[17] Official data not available for this year.

of schools disguises state control of the educational system, by the imposition of goals and target-related funding. New Labour, in preparing all schools to compete in the education market, gave continuity to the imposition of standard(s) criteria against which the success of a school can be measured. And that is the GCSE benchmark, with all the social inequalities that it entails (cf. Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). In its attempt to achieve this benchmark, Greenfield Comprehensive became more like the other schools, increasing selection within school through setting, and introducing strict disciplinary mechanisms. Mr Jones, the headteacher and a former inspector, saw this as the route to success. His leadership was praised in the following way by OFSTED inspectors:

> The leadership and the management of the headteacher are good (...) The management structures and systems are *the right ones* for sustaining further improvements. (OFSTED, 2002, my emphasis)

Whether Mr Jones's approach is the 'right one', depends on who asks the question. Judging from the long period that I spent at Greenfield Comprehensive, I am somehow less optimistic about the school's success. Firstly, it remains to be understood the role of the changing social composition of the school in the improved academic performance[18]. And secondly, we need to look at who were the pupils that fared best in the reported increase in the school's academic performance. As I will show throughout the following chapters, it was arguably not many of those pupils of ethnic minority origin and whose support from teachers was praised at the 'failing' Millhaven High. Specifically, my data challenges claims that the Labour Government is benefiting 'the many, not the few' (DfEE, 1997, p. 11). Possibly, more schools benefit from the drive to raise 'standards'. However, not all pupils in those schools are benefiting equally. And that is again *the same old way*, not innovation.

As I have noted in this chapter, issues of control and discipline became prominent at Greenfield Comprehensive, and informed perceptions of the school's management and direction. In the next chapter, I will look at how discourses on discipline both in education policy and at the school level worked against some groups of pupils at Greenfield Comprehensive.

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[18] Unfortunately, I could not gather the data to study this.

3

(In)Discipline

The Labour Government's educational initiative *Fresh Start*, discussed in Chapter 2, was meant to be an official response to what were judged to be unacceptably low 'standards' of attainment in English schools. Changing the school management and teaching staff, creating a new identity for the school and offering new facilities and equipment were some of the measures implemented to bring about higher academic achievement.

At Greenfield Comprehensive, however, issues of discipline and control were much more prominent than matters related to resources, curricula innovation or pedagogy. The need to 'keep the lid on', as one teacher put it, to prevent minor situations of conflict escalating into a full-scale riot permeated the school's daily life. This chapter addresses policy on behaviour, at the government and school level, and looks at pupils and teachers' understandings of discipline to explore how these shaped social interactions in the school under study.

3.1 *Policy on discipline*

In this section, I look at official guidelines and the legal framework on discipline for schools. I start by examining measures and conceptions of indiscipline as expressed in documents such as circulars on discipline, Green and White Papers and the Labour Party's manifestos from 1997. I pay particular attention to the framing of discourses on discipline, as well as to the conceptualisation of its origins and consequences in official documents. I then describe in more detail the legal requirements that are placed on schools to

define their behaviour policies and deal with indiscipline. I conclude this section by looking at the behaviour policy and the disciplinary system put in place at Greenfield Comprehensive.

3.1.1 Official guidelines

The policy in context

The current legal framework and guidance for discipline in primary, middle and secondary schools was set in *Circular 10/99: Social Inclusion: Pupil Support* (DfEE, 1999d), published by the Department for Education and Employment (hereafter, DfEE) in July 1999. The document was issued jointly with the Social Exclusion Unit, Department of Health and the Home Office, and was contextualised in a wider policy of social inclusion, aiming at the reduction of unemployment and crime rates. More specifically in education, the concern with discipline was framed within the government's drive to improve educational 'standards'.

This approach to discipline as being related to poor achievement can be dated at least back to 1995, when the Labour Party (then in Opposition) published *Excellence for Everyone: Labour's crusade to raise standards* (Labour Party, 1995), laying out its ideas and plans for education. Poor discipline was presented as being strongly related to underachievement, and it was thus suggested that action to tackle indiscipline should accompany overall measures to improve 'standards' of attainment, as part of the whole school's policy. The Labour Party's proposed guidelines were the following:

- the need for every school to have a clear written policy on behaviour, setting out expectations, rewards and sanctions;
- the need to apply rules and sanctions in a fair and consistent manner;
- the usefulness of rewarding good students;
- pastoral care to improve pupils' attitudes to school;
- working together with parents and other partners in education[19];
- mentoring schemes to engage disaffected students;
- after school activities to raise pupils' motivation;
- giving pupils more responsibility;
- extending the work of Pupil Referral Units;

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[19] See Vincent and Tomlinson (1997) for a critical analysis of Labour's approach to engaging parents as partners in education.

• the need to intervene early to prevent minor disruption escalating into exclusion.

(Labour Party, 1995, p. 27)

Broadly, these were the same guidelines on school discipline that were later presented by the Labour Party when it came into office in 1997.

The document also focused on the need to reduce exclusion and truancy rates, which would later become one of the government's priorities in terms of pupils' social inclusion. It is argued that the rate of exclusions from school had reached unacceptably high levels under the Conservative Government, and that many pupils were not being provided with suitable alternative educational arrangements. In relation to truancy, the Labour Party (1995) proposed the development of partnership schemes with further education colleges and business, which could offer curricula tailored specifically to these pupils' needs and persuade them to keep attending school.

A particular notion of discipline permeates this document, which can be threaded throughout most subsequent official documents:

Misbehaviour doesn't begin in school, but can often be carried into school (Labour Party, 1995, p. 31).

Indiscipline is explained as being something that originates outside the school but that needs to be dealt with within. This is in spite of evidence that suggests that pupils' behaviour in school does not merely reflect how they behave at home (Rutter, 1985), and that teachers and parents' perceptions of a child's behaviour often do not match, *i.e.*, a pupil that misbehaves at school does not necessarily do so at home (Graham and Rutter, 1970). With the proposed understanding of indiscipline above, the role of the curriculum, the quality of teaching, or social interactions in schools are not addressed. And as I show throughout this section, the role of school in *producing* indiscipline has indeed only rarely been addressed in official documents in education.

When the Labour Party published its manifesto to the 1997 general election, *New Labour because Britain deserves better* (Labour Party, 1997), mention of discipline issues was scarce. Proposed measures to tackle indiscipline included the introduction of voluntary mentoring schemes to provide support for disadvantaged pupils (based on previous experiences in the United States), and the expansion of Pupil Referral Units. In this

document, discipline is addressed in the section on the role of parents, and is explained using a deficit model that encourages perceptions of parents as pathological:

> Teachers will be entitled to positive support from parents to promote attendance and sound discipline. Schools suffer from unruly and disruptive pupils. Exclusion or suspension may sometimes be necessary. We will, however, pilot new pupil referral units so that schools are protected but these pupils are not lost to education or the country. (Labour Party, 1997, p. 7)

The link in this quote between non-supportive parents, and disruptive and excluded pupils is particularly relevant. In my view, it echoes the common deficit view of working class and/or ethnic minority parents[20]. It shifts the problem of indiscipline to parents, thus portraying schools as the victims of an outside evil. It is suggested that schools do not create conditions for disruption, but are the site in which it manifests itself, and that if pupils are disruptive it is because parents are not supportive of teachers and of the value of education.

Another interesting aspect in the manifesto is the absence of a link between education and social inclusion, an argument that later came to justify the interest in reducing exclusion and truancy rates. The Labour Party's commitment to tackle social exclusion is addressed in the section on employment, where it is argued that 'The best way to tackle poverty is to help people into jobs — real jobs' (Labour Party, 1997, p. 14). What is ignored here is the role of education in determining people's opportunities in the job market. Furthermore, when the Labour Party expresses its commitment to be tough on crime and on its causes, the role of education is not mentioned. Social deprivation is understood as being related to crime, but the school is once again dismissed of playing a role in social exclusion.

After the Labour Party won the 1997 general election, it published the White Paper on education, *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997), where its plans for education in Britain for the following four years were presented. In the White Paper it is argued that good discipline can be best achieved through

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[20] Vincent and Tomlinson (1997) noted the same deficit approach in the government's use of a 'soft rhetoric' on partnership with parents: although partnership is encouraged, particularly in areas of social disadvantage, the nature and degree of parents' involvement in school is kept under control. This suggests the limited value placed on parents' contributions to school.

partnership between the school and parents, and the improvement in the quality of teaching:

> Good discipline also depends on partnership. It starts in the home and must continue into school. Most schools are well-ordered communities but it is vital, in the interests of all pupils, that standards of behaviour are improved where they are not satisfactory.
>
> Improving home/school links and the quality of teaching will make a major contribution to reducing indiscipline, but schools can also act directly to improve pupil behaviour. (DfEE, 1997, p. 55)

There is a change here in the way that the Labour Party, now in government, addresses the school's role in reducing disruption and disaffection. Indiscipline in schools is now not merely presented as resulting from the pupils' background, but also the result of inappropriate teaching. Accepting this, the government placed more responsibility on schools to take action.

Announcing the future publication of more detailed guidelines and advice on discipline, the government recommended that schools should follow an already tested behaviour management technique known as 'Assertive Discipline' (DfEE, 1997). This 'involves the whole school in a concerted effort to improve and maintain discipline through a clearly understood behaviour framework, emphasising positive encouragement as well as clear sanctions' (*id*, p. 56). The main aspects of 'Assertive Discipline' referred to in the document are:

> • clear unambiguous rules;
>
> • continuous feedback when pupils are successfully keeping to these rules; and
>
> • a recognised hierarchy of sanctions which are consistently applied when the rules are broken.
> (DfEE, 1997, p. 56)

Although the DfEE reported that the use of this strategy had positive outcomes in improving pupils' behaviour, some criticism has been made of the use of 'Assertive Discipline'. Firstly, some authors have suggested that the positive outcomes are not necessarily long lasting (Ferguson and Houghton, 1992). Secondly, academics (for example, IoE, 1997) have argued that with

this system small incidents could easily escalate into a 'ladder of actions' (p. 35) leading too readily to exclusion from school. It was also suggested that with 'Assertive Discipline', behaviour is seen as unrelated to the curriculum (the formal, informal and behaviour curriculum), and therefore the roots of disruption are not truly addressed (IoE, 1997).

Other issues related to discipline in schools were also addressed in *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997), such as bullying, truancy and exclusions from school. Bullying played a rather small part in the document. This only acknowledged the adverse effects that bullying may have on pupils' attainment, and the need to address the strategies to tackle it in the school's behaviour policy. It is suggested that when the whole school community is involved in developing strategies, bullying can be more effectively tackled. In relation to absenteeism, it was suggested that schools should work on improving attendance through systematic monitoring of truancy and early intervention in primary school and in the transition to secondary school. It may be argued, however, that the government's approach was based on imposing more control on pupils rather than working on the causes of truancy. From February 1999, 'truancy patrols' were introduced under section 16 of the Crime and Disorder Act (HMSO, 1998b). These were made up of police officers, with new powers to take truants back to school, working with education welfare officers and social services. The recent case in which a mother was taken into court and jailed because she had allowed her children to play truant (TES, 2002) also suggests that official action to tackle absenteeism is more disciplinary than preventative. In the White Paper, greater attention is paid to exclusions from school. It is noted that current rates of exclusions from school are too high, particularly amongst pupils of certain ethnic minority backgrounds and children in care. Mentioning data that suggests that many young offenders sentenced in court had previously been excluded or were persistent truants, the document stressed the need of reducing current rates of exclusion from school and of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) providing suitable education for excluded pupils. Attendance and exclusions were thus considered a priority for action at the governmental level and linked to its wider strategy 'to prevent anti-social and criminal behaviour by young people and to reduce the associated public cost' (DfEE, 1997, p. 57). The link between education and social inclusion, absent in previous documents, was used then as the major argument for what could

be otherwise unpopular measures, such as diminishing the powers of headteachers to exclude a pupil.

Special attention was also paid to exclusions from school when Circular 10/99 *Social Inclusion: Pupil Support* (DfEE, 1999d) was published in July 1999. In the circular, two entire chapters were dedicated to the use of exclusions and the need to re-integrate pupils once they were excluded. The importance given to this can be seen as resulting from the government's aim to reduce exclusions by one third by 2002 (SEU, 1998). According to this circular, the only circumstances in which the headteacher should decide to exclude a pupil should be:

• in response to serious breaches of a school's discipline policy; and

• if allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others in school.

(DfEE, 1999d, chapter 6, p. 1)

It is stressed that exclusion as a disciplinary sanction should be considered very carefully and applied only to serious offences, and therefore should not be used for:

• minor incidents such as failure to do homework or to bring dinner money;

• poor academic performance;

• lateness or truancy;

• pregnancy;

• breaching school uniform policy including hairstyle or wearing jewellery;

• punishing pupils for the behaviour of the parents, for example, by extending a fixed period exclusion until the parents agree to attend a meeting.

(DfEE, 1999d, chapter 6, p. 2)

These guidelines reflect government's concern with the too often inappropriate use of exclusions from school as a disciplinary sanction. Trying to reverse this trend, action on discipline seems now to shift to prevention. A multi-agency approach (which involves parents, pupils, LEAs and other support services) is now to be used to promote positive discipline, and early intervention to prevent disruption and disaffection. The circular also recommended that schools deal with the underlying causes of behaviour, suggesting that indiscipline could be linked to 'a pupil's problem in

understanding lessons' (DfEE, 1999d, chapter 2, p. 1). Where pupils do not understand lessons, they should be provided with additional support. Ignoring the role of teachers (as the possibility of lessons not being clear was not considered), the 'problem' of indiscipline is *fixed* on the pupils.

The circular further developed official guidance on discipline, and required that the school's governing body should have a written statement of general principles, after consultation with the headteacher and parents. Following the publication of the circular, some annexes (DfEE, 1999e) were added to reflect changes in guidelines since September 1999. These include guidance on attendance registers, the legal framework for school discipline, the law on the use of detention, procedures for excluding a pupil and school reports to the courts. The guidelines provided in the circular, which guide the current official approach to discipline, will be explored in more detail in the following sub-section. Here I will proceed by looking at the government's subsequent understandings and proposals on discipline put in place after the publication of the circular.

Besides the official guidelines and legal framework on discipline in schools, some other measures had an impact in how schools deal with discipline, particularly the initiative *Excellence in Cities* (DfEE, 1999a). As mentioned earlier, this initiative started being implemented in schools from September 1999, and this included the school where I conducted my study, Greenfield Comprehensive. Considering that 'standards' of attainment are lower than average in the cities, Tony Blair and David Blunkett (then Secretary of State for Education) stressed that specific measures needed to be taken 'for faster progress in raising standards and transforming a culture of low expectations and underachievement' (DfEE, 1999a, p. 1). Although not openly acknowledged, discipline problems were presented as being more acute in the inner cities. The implementation of measures specifically aiming to tackle indiscipline under *Excellence in Cities* is testimony to this. These were: ensuring that every school has access to a Learning Support Unit, tackling disruption and reintegrating disruptive pupils into mainstream classrooms; supporting headteachers and school teachers to bring forth a culture of high expectations; and introducing learning mentors for every pupil 'who needs one' as a means to 'tackle barriers to pupils' learning' (DfEE, 1999a, p. 3). The first reports on the initiative *Excellence in Cities* (DfEE, 2001c; DfES, 2002a) suggest that the introduction of learning mentors in schools had the biggest

impact in improving opportunities for disadvantaged pupils, by tackling issues such as persistent truancy, bullying and attitudes to learning. We should expect, it was argued, that consequently academic achievement would also improve. The setting up of Learning Support Units, which are 'in-school units designed to tackle disruption whilst reducing the need for exclusion' (DfEE, 2001c, p. 19), was also evaluated as successful. Although such improvements seem promising, it is nevertheless difficult to access the impact of *Excellence in Cities* as most schools involved were also participating in several other initiatives designed to raise academic achievement.

Before the 2001 general election, when the government published its Green Paper on education, *Schools Building on Success* (DfEE, 2001f), these measures to tackle disruption in schools had been in place for roughly a couple of years. The document stated that there was significant improvement in pupils' behaviour over recent years, although in some schools it was thought to have remained the same or even worsened:

> Over recent years pupil behaviour has improved significantly as OFSTED recognised in 1998-99. In some schools, especially those in challenging circumstances, it remains a significant problem. The Chief Inspector of Schools' 1999-2000 annual report indicates that last year there was the first small rise in behaviour problems for some time and that in some schools even good teachers are severely tested by some of *the behaviour pupils bring with them into the school*. We have recognised the importance of tackling this issue not just for the benefit of the poorly behaved pupils themselves who, left unchallenged, could become seriously disaffected but also for other pupils in their classes whose education is disrupted. (DfEE, 2001f, p. 59, my emphasis)

Interestingly, indiscipline is again presented as originating outside the school. It is suggested that pupils bring their misbehaviour to school, and that the school itself plays no part in situations of disruption. Aspects of the school organisation, the curriculum, or interactions with teachers were dismissed. There was however a new element in the arguments given to tackle indiscipline, which is the impact on other pupils' education. The emphasis was no longer on the potential being wasted when disruptive pupils are excluded, but rather that these pupils waste their peers' potential.

In the Green Paper the government argued that for the first time there was a whole programme in place to deal with indiscipline, disruption and

disaffection. Extra funds were made available 'for schools which are willing to admit pupils who have caused trouble elsewhere, additional support staff in schools and provision for those who are excluded' (DfEE, 2001f, p. 59). But although emphasising that new measures aim to tackle disruption at its early stages and thus prevent exclusions, the Department for Education and Employment concedes the need for headteachers to be able to exclude pupils. In doing so, it softened its previous guidance on exclusions.

> ...we know that there are youngsters whose behaviour is unacceptable and whose presence in the school causes major discipline and educational problems for others. We have therefore made clear that headteachers must be able permanently to exclude pupils whose behaviour is seriously disruptive to other pupils, in the interest of good discipline in the school and the learning of the majority of pupils. (DfEE, 2001f, p. 59)

This move has probably resulted from the pressure from the National Union of Teachers (NUT) in late 2000. As the *Times Educational Supplement* announced on November 2nd, the NUT required the government to 'Exclude disruptive pupils or we'll strike' (Boyland, 2000). Teachers' difficulty in dealing with perceived escalating misbehaviour was behind such demand, which was accepted by the government. Curiously, the previous discourse on indiscipline as being related to social exclusion was not used in the Green Paper. Rather, the government seemed to be reassuring schools on their power to exclude a pupil. The provision of more places in Pupil Referral Units for those excluded can also be seen as problematic. As Watkins and Wagner (2000) suggested, such units are often unsuccessful in changing pupils' behaviour, by locating the causes of indiscipline within the pupil and ignoring the wider context of the school in which it emerges. Moreover, the same authors argue, Pupil Referral Units are not being used as a short-term provision, as it was initially intended. This is depriving many youngsters of access to full-time education.

The argument of social inclusion was used once again in the Labour Party's (2001) manifesto, *Ambitions for Britain*, in addressing targets to reduce truancy and exclusion rates. The reduction of truancy and exclusion rates was now framed as part of a wider project of social inclusion, alongside the reduction of homelessness and teenage pregnancies, 16- to 18-year olds' transition to work, and neighbourhood renewal. In relation to measures to tackle indiscipline, the manifesto promised the expansion of the *Excellence in*

Cities initiative, with funding becoming available for the provision of more learning mentors and Learning Support Units.

Broadly, the same measures on discipline already in place were proposed in the latest White Paper on Education (DfES, 2001a), entitled *Schools Achieving Success*. Here, the government announced that the target of reducing 'unnecessary' (p. 26) exclusions to one third was already met in 2001, and thus no additional targets would be set. Importantly, the White Paper further extended the powers of headteachers to exclude:

> Headteachers must have the right to exclude pupils who are violent *or persistently disruptive*. Individual pupils cannot be allowed to disrupt classes, to the detriment of teachers in the school and the education of their fellow pupils (DfES, 2001a, p. 26, my emphasis).

There was a shift here not only in the guidelines on exclusions but also on the approach to discipline. If we look at previous official documents on education, we can see changes in relation to those who are conceived as the victims of indiscipline. Firstly, it was the disruptive pupils themselves who were wasting their potential, and the wider society, which had to pay for the costs of educational and social exclusion. Then, it was these pupils' peers, who could not benefit from a proper education because of the disruption of a minority. And finally, it was the teachers who were presented as suffering from it. What I find interesting is not the government's concern with teachers' welfare, but that this is the case at a time of such shortage of qualified teachers. This is acknowledged in the White Paper:

> We cannot expect to attract and retain good teachers and achieve high standards, unless schools provide a well-ordered and positive environment and teachers have the powers to tackle poor behaviour. The poor behaviour of a few children is a growing problem for teachers and creates anxiety for parents. It is an added source of pressure and a distraction from their prime focus on teaching and learning. (DfES, 2001a, p. 25)

More importantly, the documents I analysed generally seem to be opening a space for the polarisation of perceptions of pupils in relation to discipline. This results from the binary logic in which indiscipline is addressed. Pupils are presented as being in one of two opposing categories: disrupt*ive* or

disrupt*ed*[21]. In official documents on discipline, these two categories are often presented as mutually excluding, diverting attention to the fact that many pupils move between both. Importantly, this promotes a conception of indiscipline as being fixed on particular pupils (this will be explored in more detail in the end of section 3.2, and in Chapter 6).

Regulations on discipline

Throughout the period of fieldwork, from November 1999 to February 2001, the official guidelines and regulations in place were those in the circular 10/99 *Social Inclusion: Pupil Support* (DfEE, 1999d). In the circular, a set of key principles on discipline for schools to draw on were proposed, and summarised below:

- Setting good habits early
- Early intervention
- Rewarding achievements
- Supporting behaviour management
- Working with parents
- Involving pupils
- Commitment to equal opportunities
- Identifying underlying causes
- Study support

(DfEE, 1999d, chapter 2, p. 1)

The official guidance is that these principles should be applied within a multi-agency approach, that is, the school should seek the support of local agencies through the LEA's Behaviour Support Plan and of diverse professionals, such as those in social services departments, educational psychologists or health workers. It is also proposed that action should be based on early intervention and on the prevention of exclusions from school.

In the circular, attention is specifically drawn to groups that are considered to be 'at risk', including pupils with special educational needs, children in care, travellers and ethnic minority children, pregnant young girls or teenage mothers. The general advice given is that school staff should be familiar with the risk of 'disaffection' that these children may show in school so that an early response can be given. It is also recommended that exclusions

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[21] Hereafter I use an italicised form of these two expressions, to highlight that these categories are socially constructed.

from school should be monitored by ethnic origin and gender. This seems an acknowledgement of previous research showing that African Caribbean boys are at a significantly higher risk of exclusion from school than their peers (Bourne, Bridges and Searle, 1994; Gillborn, 1996; OFSTED, 1996). In spite of the profiling of pupils who are 'at risk', it is recommended that teachers should avoid stereotyping, and be aware of 'cultural differences in manner and demeanour' (DfEE, 1999d, chapter 3, p. 4).

In relation to the use of disciplinary sanctions, the circular stresses the need for schools to apply punishments in a fair and consistent manner to all pupils, and considers as inappropriate humiliating or degrading sanctions. The suggested sanctions are:

- removal from the group (in class)
- withdrawal of break or lunchtime privileges
- detention
- withholding participation in any school trips or sports events that are not an essential part of the curriculum
- withdrawal from, for example, a particular lesson or peer group
- completion of assigned work or extra written work
- carrying out a useful task in the school

(DfEE, 1999d, chapter 4, p. 6).

Bullying also receives particular attention in the circular. It is suggested that schools should have appropriate mechanisms to report and deal with bullying, which is seen as a 'pattern of behaviour, rather than an isolated incident' (DfEE, 1999d, chapter 4, p. 11). The circular advises headteachers to have clear strategies to deal with bullying in school, and that arrangements to report and investigate bullying should be known to staff, parents and pupils, through the school's prospectus or other documents.

As already mentioned, the circular devotes two entire chapters to the use of exclusions from school and to the reintegration of pupils that were excluded. The emphasis is on the severity of the sanction, which should be used by the headteacher only as a last resort.

An annex to this circular (DfEE, 1999e) explains in detail the obligations of the school's governing body and its headteacher in the implementation of the school policy on behaviour, and was updated to reflect changes in the legal framework since September 1999. The legal framework on discipline places on

the school's governing body the duty to draw a written statement of general principles, which should include:

- the ethos of the school, its values and the boundaries of acceptable behaviour;
- the school's moral code;
- positive and constructive rules of conduct; and
- the rewards and punishments to be fairly and consistently applied.
(DfEE, 1999e).

It is also recommended that the statement of general principles should be regularly revised, ideally once a year, and include consultation with the headteacher and pupils' parents. It is therefore the headteacher's responsibility to draw up the school's policy on behaviour, which should reflect the schools' statement of general principles. At this stage, however, no requirements to consult parents, pupils or the teachers themselves are made.

In terms of the policy on discipline itself, the Department for Education and Employment suggests that it should aim to:

- promote self-discipline and proper regard for authority among pupils;
- encourage good behaviour and respect for others and prevent all forms of bullying among pupils[22];
- ensure pupils' standard of behaviour is acceptable;
- regulate pupils' conduct.
(DfEE, 1999d; DfES, 2001d)

The school's policy on behaviour should make clear what is considered appropriate behaviour, and also the system of rewards and sanctions, ensuring that these are applied in a consistent and fair manner (DfEE, 1999e). The DfEE (1999d, 1999e) further suggests that discipline is best achieved when the system of sanctions is proportionate to the offence, and that whenever it is the case, pupils should be allowed to make reparation.

The daily implementation of the policy is also the responsibility of the headteacher. This is overseen by the governing body, which must make sure that the policy is effectively implemented and is in line with the statement of

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[22] Interestingly, the recommendation that the school policy on behaviour should prevent bullying was excluded from the guidelines on discipline presented in the last White Paper (DfES, 2001a).

general principles. Support and advice on specific discipline measures is also expected from the governing body.

The DfEE (1999e) recommends that the school's policy on behaviour should be publicised to the school staff, pupils and its parents, and revised at least once a year. The school must make provisions for parents who do not speak English as their first language, so that the policy is known to all the school community.

3.1.2 Discipline at Greenfield Comprehensive

The school's values and ethos

As recommended by the DfES, the values that Greenfield Comprehensive wishes to promote are set out in the school prospectus. This document states that the school aims to 'provide a broad, balanced, relevant and enjoyable quality education for all'. To achieve this, it proposes to raise pupils' motivation and self-esteem combining high academic achievement with a vocational training. More specifically, the school prospectus outlines the following aims:

• High expectations	• High achievement
• Increased motivation	• High self-esteem
• Academic achievement	• Vocational success
• Respect for others	• Respect for yourself
• Partnership between students, parents and the school	• Community education and Business links

These aims echo the government's policy on education. In particular, they reflect official discourses in relation to 'failing' schools in the cities, which propose the creation of a culture of success, an increased specialisation of schools, and the involvement of the community as well as the private sector.

In relation to discipline, the school prospectus informs parents that the highest level of attendance and commitment is expected to allow pupils to develop themselves, learn and succeed in a safe and supportive environment. In the document it is also stated that bullying, harassment and violence will not be tolerated.

The school prospectus includes only a few vague statements on discipline. It is in the document *Behaviour Policy* that information on the school values, appropriate behaviour and system of rewards and sanctions is provided in

more detail. Besides the school staff, parents and pupils are also expected to be familiar with the document.

At Greenfield Comprehensive, the school's behaviour policy largely follows the guidelines offered by the DfES. Thus, the document sets forth a general statement on discipline:

> At Greenfield Comprehensive School we believe in rewarding those who behave sensibly and appropriately as well as having consequences for those who choose to break the rules. We have fair rules and we think that everyone has a part in making sure that people keep them. The success of this policy depends on students, staff and parents/guardians working together as equal partners in establishing the behaviour we expect. (Behaviour Policy, Greenfield Comprehensive)

This can be seen as the general principle that regulates behaviour at Greenfield Comprehensive. As with government official discourses, indiscipline is fixed on pupils: individual *choice* is seen as the key for success.

The argument used for asking pupils and parents' compliance with the school's expectations and rules, which are defined by the governing body and headteacher, is based on *fairness*. The choice of values and rules is presented as unproblematic. Involvement of pupils seems to apply only to the observance of rules, rather than to their making. In spite of this, discipline is presented as the result of co-operation between the different educational partners who all supposedly aim to the same educational ideal. These values, as disclosed in the school's behaviour policy are:

- Working hard
- Wanting to be successful
- Learning
- Co-operation
- Telling the truth
- Respecting the rights and property of others
- Helping others
- Self-discipline
- Courtesy
- Punctuality and reliability
- Facing up the consequences of what we do.

The existence of such a list of values that the school wishes to promote is intended to work as the basis upon which the school rules and system of rewards and punishment are to be constructed. However, if we look carefully at some of them, it is not difficult to imagine how vague many of these values are when translated into disciplinary practices. Values such as 'wanting to be successful' or 'courtesy' are open to many different readings, and may increase the chance of conflict between teachers and pupils.

Rules on behaviour

From the list of values, the school defined general rules to regulate pupils' behaviour both outside and inside the classroom. Around the school, pupils are expected to:

- act according to the shared aims and values
- try to understand other people's point of view
- move sensibly around the school
- speak politely, calmly and appropriately to everyone
- keep the school environment clean and tidy.

(Behaviour Policy, Greenfield Comprehensive)

These rules are set out in greater detail to the students through small posters affixed around the school. These are more extensive and precise than the above:

- Avoid conflict at all times.
- Follow instructions without argument. Always be polite, helpful and co-operative.
- Wear your ID card and give your name when asked.
- Do not run in corridors or public areas, stay on the left. Only play games in the designated areas.
- Do not shout! Line up quietly outside your classroom. Do not push! Open and close doors sensibly.
- Do not drop litter anywhere! Always use the litter bins provided.

(Outside Classroom Code, Appendix 1 to Behaviour Policy, Greenfield Comprehensive)

In the classroom, pupils are expected to comply with the following discipline standards:

- arrive on time and fully equipped
- not eat or drink in the designated areas
- make it as easy as possible for everyone to learn
- listen and consider the views of others
- work co-operatively with other students and members of staff
- treat everyone, their work and the equipment with respect
- begin to take responsibility for their own work and behaviour

(Behaviour Policy, Greenfield Comprehensive)

Again, in the standard classroom code presented to students rules are more extensive. There is also an attempt of reducing subjectivity by providing clearer instructions:

- Arrive to all sessions ON TIME. Come into the classroom quietly. Take your coat off and be silent.
- Listen carefully and follow your teacher's instructions.
- You must sit where you are asked to sit and always come to lessons with the equipment you need (pen, pencil, ruler, rubber, PE kit, etc.).
- Personal electronic equipment must be switched off and in your bag.
- Put up your hand if you need to speak to your teacher. Do not call out. Always be polite!
- Treat others, their work and learning with respect.
- Look after the classroom environment: no graffiti, litter or use of equipment without permission. 'Gum in the bin — food in the bag!'
- The teacher finishes the lesson.

(Standard Classroom Code, Appendix 1 to Behaviour Policy, Greenfield Comprehensive)

If we look closely at the rules as defined in the school's behaviour policy and as advertised to pupils, it becomes clear that whilst the former focus mainly on attitudes, the latter are detailed rules of behaviour that pupils are expected to comply with. Interestingly, such differences in understandings of discipline were also made by teachers and pupils (this is explored in section 3.2).

In the school's policy on behaviour it is also stated that behavioural expectations are to be clearly explained and discussed with pupils during tutor and Personal and Social Education time. This aims to provide pupils with the opportunity to get involved in reviewing the code of conduct for the

classroom, the corridors and the restaurant. Recognising teachers' role in maintaining positive discipline, they are held responsible for:

- Creating and maintaining a secure learning environment where students can learn free from physical or emotional threat
- Setting clear and reasonable limits
- Encouraging students to trust staff by treating students fairly and with respect
- Having high expectations and giving positive feedback about effort and achievement
- Setting work which is appropriate to students' abilities
- Discussing behaviour with students
- When incidents happen encouraging students to act honestly and to give them a way of 'putting it right'
- Encouraging students to discuss concerns with staff
- Keeping students informed about progress in work, effort and behaviour.

(Behaviour Policy, Greenfield Comprehensive)

System of rewards and sanctions

In its early days, the school did not have a systematic system of rewards and sanctions. As previously mentioned, when Mr Williams was the headteacher he insisted on praising good behaviour, rather than focusing on misbehaviour. In practice, this meant for example that detentions were not initially used as a disciplinary procedure at Greenfield Comprehensive. As time went by, and also with changes in the school management, more rules and sanctions were introduced. These were to deal with the increasingly chaotic atmosphere as perceived by teachers, pupils and parents. The behaviour policy was changed twice during the first school year. By the beginning of the second school year at Greenfield Comprehensive, the system of rewarding or sanctioning pupils' behaviour was more clearly defined.

In terms of rewards, the system that the school had in place at that time was as follows:

Praise We recognise how important it is to praise students and develop their self-esteem. Staff are encouraged to contact parents/guardians to praise students. Praise for students will be publicised in regular bulletins/newsletters to parents. Staff will also highlight achievements to other significant adults, e.g. Learning Mentors, Year Heads and in Assembly.

Merits - These are awarded on a routine basis for good work, effort and behaviour. All staff can give merits. They are recorded in the student's diary. Student's merits will be displayed by the form tutor on the notice board.

Commendation certificate - These will be presented after a student gains ten merits. Certificates will be awarded by the Year Heads. Form tutors record when a student has been awarded a certificate on the notice board.

Respect certificate - These are awarded when students show particular initiative or commitment in terms of other students or staff, the school or the community. This could mean dealing with a difficult situation in a responsible manner e.g. walking away from a fight, or giving help and support to another member of the school community. It is recognition of an act which is essentially beyond the usual expectations of behaviour. A student can be given a Respect Certificate by any member of staff.

Attendance certificate - These will be awarded half termly for 90%, 100% and sound improvement. Students should keep all certificates for their Record of Achievement.

(Behaviour Policy, Greenfield Comprehensive)

Curiously, whilst reports on misbehaviour were stored with pupils' records, merits were only noted on pupils' school diaries. Pupils' records follow them throughout their educational careers and are seen by teachers; school diaries are carried by pupils, and do not have the same official status being used mainly for communication between the school and pupils' parents. This meant, for instance, that I was not able to collect such information. Such practice, which resulted in indiscipline being more public than good discipline or merit, seems somehow odd when the headteacher had told me that the school wished to promote good behaviour rather than focusing on indiscipline.

Greenfield's *Behaviour Policy* also offers guidelines for teachers' management of disruption in the classroom:

Stage 1 - The student is given a verbal warning. The teacher says that the behaviour is inappropriate, asks the student to stop and re-directs them back to the task. The teacher emphasises that they hope that the student will not <u>choose</u> to continue behaving inappropriately. If the student does settle down the teacher should recognise this and respond.

Stage 2 - The student is given a second warning. The teacher notes the student's name. The teacher could ask the student to move to another desk.

Stage 3 - If the misbehaviour continues a sanction could be applied such as a faculty detention.

Stage 4 - If the misbehaviour continues students may be asked to leave the lesson. The teacher will call on the senior member of staff who is on SWEEP. The senior member of staff will make the decision about whether or not to remove the student and take him/her to the Referral Room.

(original emphasis)

Any incident involving indiscipline should be reported in an Incident Report form by the member of staff who witnessed it, with copies given to the student/parent, Year Head and Faculty Manager. Mostly, these referred to detentions given to pupils. At Greenfield Comprehensive, the detention system includes Faculty, Year and Principal Detentions:

Faculty detentions – faculties will run their own detentions on a weekly basis. Students and parents will be informed of the detention. Faculty Managers will gather information and note which students are in detention frequently.

Year detentions - Year detentions will be held on a weekly basis and run by the Year Head. For bad behaviour in areas outside the classroom, for example corridors, playground or restaurant and for lateness. Head of Year to gather information on referrals to Year Detentions.

Principal's detention – This is a one hour's detention held on Friday afternoon when all other students have gone home. This is for anyone who has missed the Year or Faculty detention or for other very serious misconduct. If a student fails to be present at this detention held by the School Principal, the student is automatically excluded for one day the following week. SMT will gather information on students in Principal detention.

(Behaviour Policy, Greenfield Comprehensive)

There were also detailed guidelines regulating the use of the Referral Room, as follows:

1. The student stays in the Referral Room usually for two lessons.

2. If the behaviour is co-operative they can return to their lessons after two lessons.

3. The teacher running the Referral Room will inform parents using the standard letter.

4. If the student continues to be disruptive in the Referral Room this will lead to a two day exclusion.

5. Students should see the teacher who sent them to the Referral Room at the end of the school day.

6. Head of School will collect information on students in the Referral Room.

It is interesting to note how quickly exclusions from school come into play in the system of sanctions at Greenfield Comprehensive. As critics of the government's proposed 'Assertive Discipline' suggest (cf. IoE, 1997), it is easy to imagine how minor misbehaviour can escalate and lead to disproportionately serious forms of punishment. The school's policy on behaviour does not offer its own interpretation of the appropriateness of the sanction, merely referring to the official guidelines provided in Circulars 10/99 and 11/99, and amendment of 21 January 2000.

The school's policy on bullying

Besides the general school policy on behaviour, and as suggested by the DfES (2001c), Greenfield Comprehensive also produced a document on bullying, which is defined as:

> the use of physical or mental aggression with the intention of hurting another person, which results in pain and distress to the victim. Bullying is usually a campaign over a period of time against a student but it can sometimes be just one incident. (Greenfield Comprehensive Bullying Policy)

In relation to official guidelines, which mention physical, verbal and indirect forms of bullying (DfES, 2001c), the school's understanding of bullying seems somehow broader. The forms of bullying acknowledged in the document are:

> *Physical* - Pushing, kicking, hitting, taking property or any use of violence;
> *Verbal* - Name-calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, teasing, making racist, sexist or other hurtful remarks;
> *Emotional* - Excluding, tormenting, being deliberately unfriendly, taunts, graffiti;
> *Menacing* - Demanding money or possessions or to copy homework, asking other students not to speak out about bullying;
> *Sexual* - Unwanted physical contact or abusive comments.
> (Greenfield Comprehensive Bullying Policy)

Emotional bullying is given as the equivalent to indirect bullying, and the school added menacing and sexual forms of harassment.

I would like to draw attention that in spite of the school's difficulty in handling ethnic-based conflicts amongst pupils, the only form of bullying that is acknowledged as racist in nature is the verbal (the same happening in the DfES (2001c) guidelines). Less visible forms of racist harassment, which could

also be physical, emotional, menacing or even sexual, end up being overlooked.

The policy aimed to address bullying by encouraging pupils to discuss this issue, both in PSE lessons and in informal situations, with teachers and more in-depth with learning mentors. The school places the responsibility of dealing with bullying on all teaching and associate staff, and monitoring of incidents by the Year co-ordinator. Pupils being bullied are seen as in need of support, and it is proposed in the document that staff should encourage confidentiality so that incidents can be brought out into the open. Although bullies are to be encouraged to understand the reasons why they harass others, the emphasis in relation to these pupils is more based on control over their behaviour through punitive measures. And whilst the DfES guidance proposes a range of sanctions to punish pupils who bully others (from official warnings to exclusion), the school policy only mentions that serious and persistent bullying can lead to exclusion from school, proposing no other sanctions for isolated or less serious incidents. In fact, the use of exclusion to deal with bullying did not seem to be a common practice at Greenfield Comprehensive (pupils' experiences of bullying and the way in which the school deals with it are addressed in detail in Chapter 6, in pupils' case studies).

In summary, the school's approach generally followed official guidelines on discipline. At Greenfield Comprehensive, there was a written statement of general principles, a list of values and aims, a system of rewards and sanctions, and a bullying policy. However, some of the official guidelines were not in effect in the school. For instance, the school did not have a statement on equal opportunities, and curiously, when I asked the headteacher about such document, he did not to seem to be aware of this. Finally, a conception of indiscipline as being a problem of particular pupils was implicit in school documents (and in state documents), and this meant that any school-based factors in misbehaviour were too often not addressed.

3.2 *Understanding indiscipline: insiders' accounts*[23]

When looking at the government's official documents in which the legal framework and guidelines on discipline are laid out, we can see different discourses on discipline emerging. Different explanations are given for the

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[23] I borrowed this term from the ethnographic tradition (see Appendix I – Methodology), to stress that I will now move from the level of discipline policy to the level of school, looking at how teachers and pupils understood and dealt with discipline issues at Greenfield Comprehensive.

existence of disruptive behaviour and the rationale for tackling it also changes. Sometimes, indiscipline in schools is seen as merely resulting from the behaviour that pupils previously acquired at home. In other documents there is an acknowledgement that the quality of teaching and the curriculum play a part in disruption. Shifts in the applicability of particular sanctions, such as exclusion from school, also occur. This suggests that not only conceptions of discipline varied, but also the practices to deal with indiscipline, arguably reflecting public debates within the wider social context.

Looking at the data gathered over one year at Greenfield Comprehensive, I became aware that such nuances were also present in pupils and teachers' discourses on discipline. Different explanations were given in relation to the origins and consequences of disruption and the concept of discipline itself also varied. I thus examined teachers and pupils' understandings of indiscipline and its origins, to understand how such conceptions tended to position some pupils as disrupt*ive*, shaping their educational experiences.

3.2.1 The causes of indiscipline

As mentioned above, three aspects are referred by official documents as being linked to indiscipline in schools. These are the home and the 'outside' community, the quality of teaching and the curriculum. They are not seen as mutually exclusive, nor presented in a hierarchy of importance, and that is neither my concern here. What I wish to address is how pupils and teachers explain indiscipline and how these perspectives relate to what is going on outside school, at the policy level.

When analysing pupils and teachers' views, I become aware of the different rationales provided for disruptive behaviour. What I found most interesting was that teachers and pupils used different explanations to talk about disruption. Interviews with pupils suggested that school played a much more crucial role in disruptive behaviour than it was generally acknowledged by teachers.

Teachers used a variety of arguments to explain indiscipline. These could be grouped into five non-exhaustive categories: the individual, the home and the community, pupils' subcultures, the school organisation, and the inner-city location. One teacher did not necessarily use a single category to explain indiscipline. For instance, both the home and the school were sometimes seen as sites from where indiscipline emerged. My analysis here is concerned with

these different explanations of indiscipline, rather than with the positioning of certain teachers within particular discourses.

Explanations based on the individual, or on a cultural deficit model of the home were prominent. The school, its organisation, the social interactions taking place daily, or the quality of teaching were more rarely addressed. Teachers who explained misbehaviour merely at the level of the individual, conceived discipline as a choice free of any external constraints, except perhaps medical conditions or so-called special needs:

> I thought that working with 7B... the core was there with you, but there were some individuals who were outside that. Who consistently were outside of that. And those individuals would find it very hard to join that group. People like Jamie that found it very difficult to be part of the group. Peter at times, found it difficult to be part of the group, but as time moved on, he was included more and people became more understanding of his own medical difficulties. And children quite often are more understanding, if they can see a reason. If they can't... If they can see a reason, like Peter has his medication, and if he's taken his medication he's calmer, but if he hasn't... They can see that. Then they can understand that more easily, whereas with Jamie they couldn't see a reason why. Why's he doing that? Why did he behave like that? You couldn't make any sense from it. And that was harder... And Jamie therefore stayed on the edge of the group. And some of the time... when he joined in, he was really, really good. When he didn't join in, it was very difficult. There were other students like that, who *chose* to more or less join... Sophie, for example was... was someone who had the capacity to join in if she wanted to, and whenever she didn't want to she sort of sat back and didn't listen and talked to her friends. And you knew she was disengaging from what was going on. (Ms Clarke, PSE teacher, original emphasis).

It should be noted here how Ms Clarke describes differently the 'disaffection' of Jamie, Peter and Sophie. Jamie, of mixed-heritage and described by teachers as very clever and disrupt*ive*, was seen as having a *choice* not to misbehave. Peter, a white student with Tourette Syndrome, was seen as misbehaving because of his medical condition. Sophie, a white girl from a professional family from which teachers had very high expectations, was said to disengage because she got 'bored' with coursework that was too easy for her. By individualising discourses on the origins of indiscipline, teachers did not acknowledge how they differentiated pupils according to ethnicity and/or

class. The following example further supports this argument in relation to gender:

> In general terms, it's a real mixture. Really, really mixed ability. Hmm... I find that with key members of the group not here, on days that... For example, Jamie, Adam, Dimitris... If those four aren't in, or if a couple of those are in it's easy for me to settle the group down. The dynamics of them anywhere, wherever you sit them, they can't seem to control their urges to call out or to just disrupt the lesson, basically. Get up and start walking around, you know? Whatever it is that they want to do to disrupt the lesson. They seem to try it... If they're not all there, which they weren't today, ... You can actually have quite a good discussion with the group, and set things up in English... There's some great girls, great girl workers, like for example Julia, Michelle, Surhan... I mean... And Mashal. But that's not to say that some of the boys don't work very well. We have fantastic work out of Jamie today. But it's just getting him finding a way in... with his own special need, you know, his behavioural... needs. Having the time to go and talk to him by himself, rather than being a class thing. He finds that very difficult. And again all the other boys that I've mentioned, they find that very difficult. To take in ideas... I tried different ways of putting things across... Prepared work sheets, differentiated work and things like that, but... if they're not listening, then it seems like I'm going to a wall, you know. And everything will have to be explained over and over again... Which I find hard going with. I don't think you should be doing that all the time, really. (Ms Ojy, Music and English teacher)

Thus, although these teachers did not go beyond an understanding of indiscipline at the individual level, they suggested other possibilities for analysis. In these and many other interviews, persistent disruptive behaviour or more serious forms of indiscipline were seen as particularly related to gender and ethnicity. Girls were seen to misbehave only occasionally or exceptionally. But it was the behaviour of boys, especially of ethnic minority origin, that posed a real problem for the school (this is explored in 3.2.3).

Parents were also seen as having an important role in indiscipline in schools. For instance, when I asked teachers what an 'ideal' pupil (Becker, 1952) is, a couple of them replied:

> Someone who will do their best and stretch themselves. But also, someone who's got good background support. Parental support. Without that, it's very hard to have an ideal student. (Ms Akintola, Science teacher)

Basically, good attitude! And it comes entirely from parents, I think. The parents are far more influential. Although having said that, someone like Sinead, her mother is very supportive, and I don't know why she's not behaving properly. (Mr Roberts, Science teacher, head of Year 7).

These understandings of indiscipline reflect official discourses that locate the origins of indiscipline in the home, being the school merely a site where it manifests itself. Although acknowledging that parental support cannot fully explain indiscipline, these teachers suggest that the school by itself cannot deal with the roots of misbehaviour if parents are not supportive and pass on to their children a *good attitude*. Some teachers saw indiscipline as emerging from the conflict between expectations of behaviour at the home and at the school:

> Ms Miller: So what's the problem after half term? You had a whole week when you were able to do exactly as you liked, or as your parents allowed you. You come back and sometimes you forget there are times... when if a teacher asks you to do something, you do it even if it doesn't suit you. (Fieldnotes, PSE lesson 6)

This teacher assumes that the cultures where pupils live and that of the school are conflictive. The home is seen as a permissive environment that contrasts with the disciplined system that the school wishes to promote. In an interview with the same teacher that took place in a classroom where two Turkish girls were in detention, she came to express this even further. The teacher suggested that particular cultures brought additional problems for the education of pupils:

> Ms Miller: Hmm... It's very different from my last school, which was an all-girls school, and which by the time I'd left had very high academic achievement. Hmm... It's not that different from some of the other schools I've taught in other places. So... I'm used to this sort of... students. That's... that's no different. The biggest difference is that I have not taught Turkish children before. And that's been quite strange. Because their attitude towards education is very different from any of the children I've taught before.
>
> Turkish girl (in detention): Oooh!
>
> Ms Miller: Hmm... I taught mostly Afro-Caribbean children. And children from the Indian sub-continent. And their parents are often very committed. Even if

the children aren't. They're... And I found the same here. That.. at parents' evenings. That the Afro-Caribbean parents and the African parents are very supportive.

I would like to draw attention to these teachers' use of a deficit model that portrays some family and cultural backgrounds as being pathological. And although more often teachers used discourses at the level of the individual to explain indiscipline, they often encoded ethnicity. This will be further explored in the next sub-section.

Not all teachers went looking for the causes of indiscipline outside the school gates. One teacher told me how she felt that they were finding new ways of dealing with disruption, and that improvement in pupils' behaviour was being achieved. Another saw the school organisation, strong leadership and the disciplinary system itself as contributing to significant changes in pupils' behaviour:

> Marta: What kind of things contributed to improve discipline?
>
> Mr Roberts: Strong leadership in the school. Definitely, it's what has made the difference. And strict boundaries, so the people know exactly what's wrong. And basically the head has made a big difference. It's easier to be excluded... (interruption)
>
> Mr Roberts: He's made a big difference. He's put down his boundaries, and the kids have to stick very rigidly to it.
>
> (Mr Roberts, Science teacher, head of Year 7)

The impact that changes in the leadership had in school was great (see Chapter 2). The policy on discipline became clearer, and this has arguably helped pupils improve their behaviour. However, it is also interesting to note how teachers felt that under the new management they were allowed to have greater control over pupils, as the following extract suggests:

> I think that is getting better within the classroom. We're tracking people who have not come in. Why they did not come in, chasing students to do their homework, we didn't do that last year. And that's more tight now as well. And the students are getting away with less. (Ms Babbra, head of Science Year 10).

Teachers also referred to the role of pupils' subcultures in promoting indiscipline, and particularly to the pressure placed on pupils to pretend that they were not 'goodie-goodies'. Some teachers also acknowledged that they had

been through that themselves. For example, when asked about their own educational experiences as pupils:

> Well, I remember so many things, but the behaviour at this school is so much worse. Not... I mean, we had bad behaviour in my school. But not as bad as here. And I think here, there's this enormous lack of enthusiasm, they just won't do anything. I can't relate to that attitude... in some cases. So, in many cases, no. Sometimes you see kids in the classes trying not to appear to be good. And that was exactly what used to happen. If you would do your homework, you'd have at least to pretend you hadn't done it. There's this sort of peer pressure, to be disruptive and just not do the work. And that's very unhelpful. But it still exists. And it still existed when I was at school. (Mr Roberts, Science teacher, head of Year 7)

> I wasn't a particularly good girl. I was quite naughty in school. So therefore, I kind of understand when some of them want to have a bit of fun, but it's just the difference in our time, isn't it? My naughtiness was nowhere near the sort of naughtiness that we're talking about... You know?, you wouldn't dare talking to a teacher with attitude and stuff. (Ms Ojy, Music and English teacher)

What I find interesting about these quotes is that although acknowledging that pupils may not show commitment to school because of peer pressure, and having experienced it themselves, teachers do not seem concerned to address such issues.

Finally, another teacher explained indiscipline as being typical of inner cities, echoing the government's concern with the disciplinary 'problems' of inner cities noted above:

> Most of the students are very respectful. They can be... a bit boisterous, a bit loud... They're South... No, they're North (city) teenagers, so... You know, they're full of wide, varied experiences, they bring their experiences with them to school. It's a very colourful, very colourful atmosphere. (Ms Akintola, Science teacher)

This particular teacher seems to use the inner city as encoding ethnicity, which can be seen in her use of the expression 'very colourful atmosphere'. As other authors suggest (for example, Stanford, 2001), she is associating disciplinary problems with the pupils of ethnic minority origins.

It is interesting to note how teachers preferred 'within-child' or 'outside walls' (Watkins and Wagner, 2000) explanations of indiscipline, very often

ignoring the role of the school. This had been noted in previous research. Galloway, Armstrong and Tomlinson (1994), for instance, suggested that headteachers and educational psychologists are more likely than parents to use within-child explanations for indiscipline.

When pupils talked about indiscipline, it was the school that they pointed out as creating conditions in which misbehaviour emerged. I do not intend to argue that pupils' interpretations were necessarily any more or less correct or truthful than those of teachers. What I find interesting is the variety of factors they came to identify within school, factors which, because of their role in the school, teachers seemed more reluctant to acknowledge.

Like teachers, pupils saw the school's management as having an impact in behaviour. Having more and stricter rules was seen by some pupils as keeping disruption in school under control. In the second school year at Greenfield Comprehensive, new rules included Saturday detentions, being sent home for not wearing the right uniform, having a detention for not doing enough work or being late. For some pupils, this helped in changing behaviour:

> I get less disrupted this year, in the classes and in the corridors. The headmaster's done quite a few changes for the better. He's strict but he's fair. For the bad people. He actually gives them detentions, but he doesn't give people detentions if he doesn't have to. (Julia, Year 8)

Although not all pupils supported the new management approach to discipline, there was a general agreement that it had made a difference in terms of school discipline.

When talking about their own or their peers' misbehaviour, pupils seemed to justify it mainly through the poor quality of teaching. Teachers not setting enough work or not explaining what to do, uninteresting lessons, and having too many different supply teachers were amongst the reasons provided to explain indiscipline. The following quotes are illustrative of this. It is interesting to note that these accounts were provided not only by the pupils considered to be disrupt*ive*, but also by those who were generally seen as behaving appropriately.

> Sophie tells me about a teacher who asked why they weren't doing any work (six of them), but he hadn't actually set any work. She says, 'So we just sat there, for forty-five minutes, whilst he was trying to control the class'. (Fieldnotes. Sophie, Year 7)

Ahmet: Sometimes I act good, sometimes I get into fights. In English I behave bad, because of the teacher... He doesn't explain what to do, but Mr Roberts does.

Peter: Yes, generally I'm good behaved in the class. When there's nothing to do then we misbehave.

(Ahmet and Peter, Year 7)

Last year sometimes the teacher couldn't control the class and I started to talk to my friends and just chatting. But if it would calm down, I would stop talking.

(Michelle, Year 8)

On many occasions, I noted how pupils behaved very differently in different subjects. Whenever the teacher was able to keep the lesson flowing smoothly and engage pupils in their work, these were much more likely to behave. However, when they could sense that the teacher was not able to control the class, then more generalised disruption would break. So generally pupils tended to prefer stricter teachers who could control the class, and this also applied to pupils who were seen as, or considered themselves, disrupt*ive*.

If the quality of teaching seemed to have a direct impact on disruption, my analysis of the data suggested that something at a deeper level was shaping pupils' attitudes to discipline. This was their perception of teachers' fairness and consistency in the application of disciplinary sanctions. Teachers' efforts to listen to all parties involved in an incident and the application of appropriate sanctions had an enormous impact on pupils' attitudes to discipline. And it was here that their opinions and attitudes towards discipline diverged. In relation to the quality of teaching, all the pupils seemed to agree that those teachers who did not teach in an interesting way and were unable to control the class were producing the conditions in which indiscipline would breed. However, when it came to the management of situations of indiscipline and the application of sanctions, attitudes were sharply differentiated. For some pupils, teachers were just human beings with the right to make mistakes, even if this meant that someone would occasionally be treated unfairly:

Andy: No, people... some just made a joke and everyone was laughing and she only saw *me* laughing, but...

Marta: Do you think that's fair?

Andy: No, of course. She must have heard other people laughing. I think she did, but she didn't see them laughing...

Sebastien: What teacher?

Andy: The Drama teacher.

Sebastien: It's probably when they just get... When... Say it has been a bad day for them, or at the class, they were mucking around. They probably thought they had enough of it, so they just chose one person...

Andy: Yeah, they might do that. Like if it has been a bad day for them, they might just choose one person.

(Andy and Sebastien, Year 7, original emphasis)

For pupils at the other end of the spectrum, teachers' unfairness threatened their commitment to the school rules, and interactions with teachers were more conflictive in nature. These pupils complained particularly of not being heard when several pupils were involved in the same discipline incident, or for being picked on in lessons:

The worst thing in school... When the teachers tell you off for no reason, and they don't let you tell your side of the story. And they are not right all the time... (Sinead, Year 7)

Whilst teacher's mistakes could be afforded by pupils who were rarely involved in discipline incidents, the others felt strongly that they were never heard and were being discriminated against. This by itself charged interactions with teachers, and often resulted in other situations in which some pupils were disproportionately punished (this is further explored in sub-section 3.2.3).

Although focusing on teaching practices, pupils also saw indiscipline as resulting from interactions between pupils. Bullying and particular problems between pupils or groups of pupils often resulted in confrontations in the classroom, and this, in turn, led to confrontation with the teacher (see case study on Ismail, Chapter 6). Some other pupils thought that misbehaviour was not only a response to on-going conflicts, but also a way that these pupils had to gain popularity next to their friends:

And there's like a lot of... good people in our class, but they just act stupid all the time, like if they put their heads down to their work I think they'd be much better people than they are, 'cause they just show off in front of their friends. (Angela, Year 7)

Ignoring the teacher's instructions, walking about or just chatting all the time were seen as 'cool' by some pupils. However, it was outside the classroom that pressure to misbehave seemed to be more intensely felt. Particularly referred to was the pressure placed on boys to engage in fights. Pupils who could not resist this were seen as trying to keep up an image of toughness:

> Julia: It's like year 11s against year 11s, innit? It's like silly playful fighting. They think it's cool to fight, and they wanna make themselves popular, don't they?
>
> Marta: Why do you think they start to fight?
>
> Julia: It's playful, for no reason at all! (...) There's a few other boys, but they would just follow. They wouldn't start fights, but they would go along so they wouldn't get beaten up for being a chicken. People like Cetin and Moktar, Omi, Joe and Ahmet.
>
> (Julia, Year 7)

The behaviour of pupils seen as bullies was broadly explained in the same way. Intimidation was seen as an attempt to demonstrate physical superiority over smaller or younger boys by pupils pursuing popularity through an image based on 'toughness':

> Andy: Yeah, most of the big boys pick on the little people just because they are little. I think they shouldn't... 'Cause I don't think big people should pick on little people just 'cause they're little...
>
> Sebastien: It's like people thinking they're hard just for...like, for a joke, but the little person, or the victim, will... probably he's not gonna find it a joke. And the other person is like picking on the other ones and like thinking, 'Oh, I'm hard picking on someone else...'
>
> (Andy and Sebastien, Year 7)

For those boys who tried to avoid this pressure, such as Terry, 'it's either getting bullied or getting beaten up'. A couple of pupils, Terry and Adam, recounted lengthily how they were constantly being bullied in school. They told me that they couldn't fight back because the bullies had older brothers and friends in school who would come after them. As they did not have any relatives in school, they felt they had no protection and therefore could not fight back. This illustrated their criticism of the school's insufficient action in relation to bullying, in spite of the policy on bullying suggesting otherwise. Feeling that they were passive victims of bullying was a constant ordeal for

these pupils. Terry got so scared of coming to school that once he was absent for a couple of months, and before the end of the year he moved to another school (issues of bullying and ethnicity are explored in more detail in Chapter 6).

In summary, teachers referred to a wide variety of factors to explain indiscipline. They generally used a deficit model, pointing to the differences between the culture of school and that of the home and the cultural background of pupils to explain disruption. In relation to the school, some condemned the previous poor management and the existence of fewer rules to control pupils' behaviour. Teachers thought that changes at this level helped pupils in better understanding what was expected of their behaviour and to act accordingly. In relation to pupils' subcultures, teachers acknowledged the pressure to misbehave to pursue an image of 'coolness'. However, they did not generally address their own experiences with pupils, or deal in any other way with this specific issue.

On the other hand, pupils saw misbehaviour as being more directly related to the school. They acknowledged the role of pupils' subcultures within school that compelled people, and boys in particular, to engage in indiscipline, either in small disruption or in more serious fights. The management of the school was also pointed out as having made a difference in pupils' behaviour by defining boundaries of what was acceptable at school, as did poor quality of teaching, especially when teachers were not able to control the class or keep pupils engaged in lessons. Generally, pupils agreed that these factors had an impact on discipline in school, but were divided in their perceptions of teachers' fairness and consistency in the application of sanctions. Pupils generally considered disrupt*ive* had built a sort of opposition to certain teachers, based on their experiences of being disproportionately punished. They felt that there was no point in complying with a system that did not treat them fairly.

Broadly, it seemed that teachers at Greenfield Comprehensive preferred 'outside the walls thinking' (Watkins and Wagner, 2000) to account for the origins of indiscipline, allowing for a very limited teacher role in changing behaviour. Pupils generally focused on the role of the school context in producing indiscipline, addressing in their explanations several levels in which indiscipline emerged, such as the school management, the classroom and individuals. I will now proceed to look at teachers and pupils' definitions of

discipline at Greenfield Comprehensive and then to their perceptions of who the disrupt*ive* pupils are.

3.2.2 Defining discipline

I have already mentioned that issues around discipline were prominent at Greenfield Comprehensive. These would range from minor disruption in the classroom to more violent fights taking place on the school premises. Therefore, despite the absence of a direct question to teachers and pupils about the nature of discipline, this was a recurring theme. Also, questions about what an 'ideal' pupil (Becker, 1952) is or the prompt for descriptions of the pupils in the form under study generated data that allowed me to get a closer understanding of what they defined as discipline.

Pupils generally defined discipline as compliance to school rules. Not listening to the teacher, chatting in class, walking around, throwing things across the classroom, playing truant, were all seen as inappropriate behaviour in school. They all agreed that to break school rules was against the school's expectations of behaviour, even though they would not necessarily comply with those rules. Furthermore, the breaching of rules was used as a reason to justify the exclusion of certain pupils from occupying the 'ideal' pupil position, as the following example suggests:

> Marta: Who would you say are the best pupils[24] in your class?
>
> Liana: Hmm... Julia.
>
> Michelle: Yeah. And sometimes Sinead.
>
> Liana: No, not much. (They both laugh)
>
> Marta: Why did you suggest Sinead, and then said that no, she's not...?
>
> Liana: 'Cause sometimes she talks a bit too much...
>
> Michelle: Yeah...
>
> (Liana and Michelle, Year 7)

Sinead was often pointed out as a good pupil, but because she was considered to be too chatty, she was not defined as one of the 'best' pupils in class.

In an interview with two other pupils, Jamie and Ismail, they told me that they thought they had the potential to be the best pupils in class, but that

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[24] I deliberately did not specify what I meant by 'best pupil', to explore pupils' and teachers' own understandings of the concept.

they misbehaved, played truant and got involved in fights. This was used by Jamie to exclude them both from that position:

> We ain't got good behaviour... (...) If you don't behave... you don't get a chance to show how clever you are. So you have to behave and then you have to show how clever you are. (Jamie, Year 7)

With other pupils, the same kind of definition of discipline was used. When defining the best pupils, behaviour was an important criterion. Chatting, fighting, shouting at teachers, or being repeatedly absent were seen as reasons to exclude someone from the best pupil position. Therefore, for most pupils, it was compliance to rules that was the most influential criterion in defining discipline.

When teachers defined an 'ideal' pupil (Becker, 1952) in terms of discipline, they also stressed the importance of complying with the school's stated rules, such as being punctual, being quiet, listening to the teacher or bringing in the appropriate material for lessons. One teacher told me that for him, an 'ideal' pupils was:

> Someone who comes into my lesson on time, with the PE kit, not eating, not drinking, not swearing... And is prepared to do whatever I ask him to, within reason. Who's enthusiastic. (Mr McGuinness, PE teacher)

This was one definition of discipline based on the compliance with school rules. It reflects the school's policy on behaviour, and defines precise expectations of pupils' behaviour. Particularly in the first sentence, the teacher suggests clear criteria against which to define indiscipline.

However, my analysis of interviews with teachers suggested that what counts as indiscipline is something more than behaviour that is against the school rules. For teachers, it was 'attitude' that really mattered. The pupils considered the best in 7B did not always comply with rules. Occasional misbehaviour was acceptable, as long as pupils were perceived to have a *good attitude* towards teachers, the school and education in general. The following example is illustrative:

> Sebastien is the ideal pupil. He's intelligent, he's *helpful*, he's *friendly*, he's not like some little goodie-goodies. Like quite trendy, he's good at everything. He's good at sports, he's good at music. Quite clever. Not like, genius, genius! But

pretty good. He's helpful, he's popular with the other kids. He's just a very, very good kid. And... Lucy. Fantastic kid as well. Again, not the genius, but she's good at everything. Good at sports, clever, works hard, *friendly, pleasant,* popular. They've both been on trips with me. They both came on the big trip last Summer, but Lucy came on the smaller trips as well. Sebastien went on the trip last Summer. Lucy came on the trip this Autumn. Hmm... Basically, *good attitude!* (Mr Roberts, Science teacher and head of Year 7, my emphasis)

This teacher commented that Sebastien was not a 'goodie-goodie'. Sebastien himself acknowledged this. In an interview with him and another pupil, when I asked them to describe themselves as pupils, they told me:

> Sebastien: Hmm...hmm...quite hard working. I'm not perfect, I'm not saying I'm perfect... Hmm... hmm...I enjoy most lessons... I reckon it's... I reckon that going to secondary school is much more challenging than going to primary school... and you get more privileges. Hmm... I'm quite well behaved... a little bit short-tempered...
>
> Marta: Anything else...? And you, Andy?
>
> Andy: Like, I work hard and... if people don't disturb me... I don't always, like, bring my equipment, only sometimes.
>
> Sebastien: I do, but sometimes I can't be bothered to take it out of the bag. I always have it in my bag, but sometimes I just... can't be bothered to take it out.
>
> (Sebastien and Andy, Year 7)

As Sebastien himself says, he did not always comply with the rules. However, his 'good attitude' made all the difference. With Lucy, another pupil in 7B, the same happened. Many times I observed her engaging in small talk in the classroom, without being reprimanded. Sometimes this was at the expenses of her friend Nina, who used to sit with her. When I interviewed the two of them, they gave me some examples of Nina being wrongly accused:

> Nina: At first I though Ms Miller, you know, in our registration, I thought she was picking on me, 'cause whenever I wasn't talking, Lucy used to talk a lot to me and I used to get in trouble because of her...
>
> Lucy: Yeah and I used to say...
>
> Nina: She stopped now, because I told the head of Year 7, and she stopped.
>
>
> Nina: Joe took my rubber-band ball... (explains what it is) so I went after him

and then I got... And you... was watching me! I didn't know this, and then he started calling Lucy something, and she started running, she said 'come on, come on', and... I went. So I got in trouble. Lucy didn't. She always leaves me like that for some reason...

Lucy: No, no! When hmm... he said 'Nina goes for lezzies!' and at the end of the lesson, I ran up the stairs and said, 'Mr Roberts, I was running around...'. And he said, 'Yeah, Ok, I'll deal with you later.'

Nina: Did he?

Lucy: He... sometimes, when he's really upset, he just says this... 'Oh, go and see Miss so-and-so. I'll deal with you later!'

Nina: Always this happens...

Marta: Do you think it was fair? That only you...

Nina: No, I don't think that was fair... 'Cause it wasn't just me, it was Peter, it was Soph...

Lucy: Was it Sophie, or...?

Nina: No, it was Mash... No... it was loads of people running around...

Lucy: It was loads of people...

Nina: But I was picked out...

Lucy: Yeah, she was just...

Nina: 'Cause most of the time I was doing my work, she was the one...

Lucy: I was... I was the one who had been running around...

Nina: A lot...More than me. But he saw me, not you, that's why I was actually angry.

Lucy: I was running after Ehkr...

Nina: Joe. Yeah, and Ismail.

(Nina and Lucy, Year 7)

As these extracts suggest, even when Lucy misbehaved more visibly, she would get away with it quite easily.

The importance given by teachers to perceptions of pupils' attitudes placed adjectives such as 'helpful', 'friendly' and 'pleasant' at the core of definitions of discipline. Compliance to school rules was expected, but was not sufficient to describe someone as a well-behaved pupil. What Sebastien and Lucy had that was recognisably different from many of their peers was their *attitude.* They were particularly supportive of teachers. They would not only misbehave in less visible ways as, importantly, they would acquiesce to teachers' orders whenever they were reprimanded. Sebastien was well aware of the consequences of conflict with teachers:

I mean, everyone is quiet with Mr Roberts, because he has a position in the school, and everyone knows that if you get in the wrong side... they are out of the class, basically. (Sebastien, Year 7)

With him and Lucy, interactions with teachers would not escalate into situations of conflict. This helped them to get support from other teachers as well. One of them told me that she thought Sebastien could get away with more than his peers normally would:

I mean, their relation with Steven (Roberts), who is the head of the Year, probably changed over the time. 'Cause I know people like Sebastien, he developed quite a good relationship... 'Cause, you know?, people like Sebastien would want to go on a trip, and would want to go camping, and... They were interested in the same sort of things. So Sebastien, I think would probably say things to him that some of the other students couldn't *dream* of saying to the head of year! 'Cause Sebastien gets away with it, whereas you know some of the others would be quieter... (Ms Clarke, PSE teacher, original emphasis).

It should be noticed how cultural capital comes into play here. Bourdieu (1994) defines cultural capital as opportunity of access to, and a set of dispositions towards, legitimate knowledge and cultural goods. As the data I collected and this teacher suggested, Sebastien shared with Mr Roberts the same cultural interests and background, and this closeness allowed Sebastien to do things that other pupils could not even dream of.

Thus, it seemed that minor disruption in the classroom (such as pupils being involved in small talk or walking about) did not necessarily define indiscipline. Rather, it was teachers' perceptions of pupils' attitudes combined with misbehaviour that allowed the former to make judgements about the seriousness of indiscipline. Having a *good attitude* towards the school and education was what enabled teachers to define well-behaved pupils, and this encoded particular cultural capital.

Although for pupils discipline had much more to do with not breaking the rules, some also pointed out the importance of having a good attitude towards teachers.

Julia: When we had the parents' meeting a couple of weeks ago, my mum discussed with Ms Miller about the disruptiveness in the class. But nothing happened. She gets really, really angry, Ms Miller.

> Sophie: But she can't do anything. She just stands there fuming, and they just ignore her.
>
> Julia: Yeah, Jamie especially. He says some things really, really, really rude to the teachers. Then they go, 'Right, you get a detention!' And he just cracks up laughing! For no reason at all, he just starts laughing.
>
> (Julia and Sophie, Year 7)

As Julia suggests, this *bad attitude* refers not only to the fact that some pupils do not comply or care about following school rules. What really mattered to her was that Jamie was rude to their teacher, and when he was given a detention he just laughed. In doing so, he not only disobeyed school rules but also questioned the school's disciplinary system.

In short, most pupils but few teachers interviewed at Greenfield Comprehensive worked with a notion of discipline that was based on following rules, which could be clearly used to define what counts as indiscipline. Chatting all the time, shouting at teachers, walking about, and fighting, were behaviours that they would recognise as falling short of the school's expectations. Yet, my analysis of interviews with teachers suggested that perceptions of pupils' attitudes were prominent in their conceptions of discipline. This helped them in defining who was disrupt*ive* and disrupt*ed*, two mutually excluding categories that I also saw emerging in the official documents on discipline. Foucault's concept of the formative power of discourse was particularly useful in understanding this. He defines discourses as:

> practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak... Discourses are thus not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute them, and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention (Foucault, 1977, p. 49).

As I illustrate in Chapter 6, case studies of pupils at Greenfield Comprehensive showed that these categories cannot easily be used to describe particular pupils. The complex reality of discipline in the classroom cannot be merely categorised into disrupt*ive* and disrupt*ed* pupils. Most pupils would position themselves somewhere between both, and even those who could be seen as merely disrupt*ive* and disrupt*ed* were mostly doing so in specific contexts. These categories are socially constructed, presented in official discourses and appropriated and reworked at the school level. At Greenfield

Comprehensive, pupils seen as disrupt*ive* were not only those who breached the school rules, but also those who were perceived to have a 'bad attitude'. Disrupt*ed* pupils, on the other hand, were occasionally allowed to misbehave because of perceptions of their 'good attitude' towards school and teachers. This was of particular importance so far as it informed social interactions in the classroom. As suggested in the examples provided, when teachers relied on attitude to define misbehaviour, they would often overlook the misbehaviour of those pupils considered 'ideal' (Becker, 1952). This suggests that at Greenfield Comprehensive, teachers' understandings of discipline meant that they treated pupils differently according to their perceptions of attitudes of the latter.

3.2.3 The disrupt*ive* and the disrupt*ed*

After exploring teachers and pupils' understandings of discipline, I realised that there were many suggestions of relationships between their perceptions of reputedly disrupt*ive* pupils and gender, ethnicity and class. I started then trying to figure out who were the pupils that were considered as very disrupt*ive*, or 'problematic'.

During fieldwork, I gathered information on pupils' experiences of the sanctions at Greenfield Comprehensive. I examined pupils' school records, and the incident reports they had received throughout Year 7. As mentioned above, these reports were filled in whenever there was an incident of disciplinary nature both outside and inside the classroom. The information contained in these reports included the teacher's description of the incident, the name of the teacher who reported it, the time and place where it happened, and the sanction to be applied. Mostly, incident reports were related to detentions and exclusions. Occasional reports of bullying or of problems that the pupil was facing in school were also included.

In 7B, during the whole of the school year twenty-five[25] pupils received 155 incident reports relating to detentions. Amongst these, four pupils had not received any detention. These were two white girls, and two South Asian pupils, a girl and a boy. When I broke down the data by gender, class[26] and

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[25] One of the pupils' records was unavailable during the time I was allowed to collect this information. Thus, data refers to 25 out of the 26 pupils attending 7B when I conducted my study.

[26] I used free-school meals as a proxy for social class. This was due to the fact that there was no other data available that would allow me to look at class, and collecting reliable data from individual pupils was not possible.

ethnicity, some patterns began to emerge. Table 1 below illustrates the spread of detentions combining these.

	Boys		Girls		
	FSM *	No FSM	FSM	No FSM	Sub-totals
White	20 (3)	17 (3)	3 (2)	9 (6)	49 (14)
Turkish	47 (2)	--	--	--	47 (2)
Black **	50 (4)	8 (2)	--	--	58 (6)
South Asian	0 (1)	--	--	1 (2)	1 (3)
Sub-totals	117 (10)	25 (5)	3 (2)	10 (8)	155 (25)
TOTAL	142 (15)		13 (10)		155 (25)

Table 2 - Number of detentions received by pupils in 7B throughout Year 7.
(* FSM: free-school meals. ** Black refers to African and African Caribbean pupils.
Figures in brackets refer to absolute number of pupils in that category).

When examining the table, the absence of any Turkish and black girls in the form under study should be noted. Moreover, the absolute number of pupils is relatively small, particularly when ethnicity, gender and class are broken down in each cell. Nevertheless, I think some conclusions can still be drawn from the data presented.

The use of detentions was clearly gender differentiated. In 7B, boys were seven times more often in detention than girls. The fifteen boys accounted for 142 detentions, whilst ten girls had only received thirteen detentions for misbehaviour. The number of detentions received by pupils on free-school meals was also proportionately considerably higher that those who were not. This was particularly true where boys were concerned. In relation to ethnicity it can be said that Turkish and black boys received proportionately more detentions than did their peers of other ethnic origins. Two Turkish boys accounted for nearly a third of all detentions received in 7B.

I also looked at the reasons given in the incident reports for punishing pupils. Although no patterns emerged in relation to ethnicity and class, gender was again of importance. Girls were mostly put in detention for chatting persistently, whereas the reasons given for boys were generally considered more serious, such as ignoring teacher's authority, shouting at the teacher, or being engaged in fights.

Although the analysis of this data should be used carefully due to the reduced number of pupils, I think it is illustrative of what was happening in 7B in terms of discipline. Also, it provided a good measure for deciding which

examples to use when exploring perceptions of disrupt*ive* pupils, which was what I was really interested in.

When looking at pupils' interviews, I became aware that often indiscipline and gender were related. Whilst the girls were mostly described as well behaved, disruption would be attributed to boys. When talking about indiscipline, pupils seemed to consider gender differences in behaviour as natural and obvious. Boys were seen as particularly prone to getting into trouble and girls were at worst seen as chatty. The following quotes, from two interviews with four boys, depicts this:

Marta: Who are the best pupils in your class?

Cetin: No one's the best, they all are the same really. (...) Everybody who chats when the teacher says a thing...It's mainly the girls...

Marta: Why do you think it's the girls who chat more?

Cetin: It's better than going shopping... They don't fight, they chat.

Moktar: *The girls just chat and the boys fight.*

(Cetin and Moktar, Year 7, my emphasis)

Peter: The poshy... like, Sinead and Julia.

Ahmet: Sinead ain't posh. Miss, did you say who is the cleverest?

Marta: The best pupils...

Peter: Like... who is really good behaved. Although Michelle ain't really poshy...

Ahmet: Michelle, Liana, Julia... Is there any boys?... No! Never.

Marta: And why do you say they are the best pupils?

Ahmet: They just...

Peter: They always... work. It's like you just look at them... and they're all working. You never see them getting distracted, really.

Ahmet: Yeah, two minutes and they done the page.

Marta: Why is it different between boys and girls?

Peter: It's just that *they always get done with the work, they have nothing to do.* Sometimes...

Ahmet: *We are naughty. We like fights.*

(Peter and Ahmet, Year 7, my emphasis)

This idea that girls just chat and boys fight was very prevalent at the school. In interviews with pupils, it was extremely rare that talk about fights would refer to girls. Fights were generally seen as a male domain, even though they would often get involved in these unwillingly or unintentionally. When occasionally girls engaged in fights, these had different rules, which further

stressed gender differences. For the girls, fights were something in which they got involved only when trying to break them up. Thus, broadly speaking pupils appeared to assume that girls naturally get on with their work, and therefore when they talked of girls' misbehaviour they would mainly refer to chatting.

Teachers did also use gender to make distinctions between well-behaved and disrupt*ive* pupils. Girls tended to be described as 'pleasant', 'mature', 'nice' or 'lovely'. The following extracts of interviews with several teachers about one of the girls illustrate this:

> Liana, she's fine. (Ms Miller, PSE teacher, form tutor)

> Liana is fairly quiet, but I think she can be badly behaved in some lessons. But she's fine in my lesson, and I like Liana. She's very nice. (Mr Roberts, Science teacher and head of Year 7)

> Liana I teach as well. Very young...very pleasant young lady. Quite bright. Middle range ability. (Ms Akintola, Science teacher)

> Liana, yeah, she started up a very quiet... like a quiet little girl. You know, pretty and... She opened up for this year. But last year, yeah, she was good, she got involved in group work, was well able to do the work that we had... (Ms Ojy, Music teacher)

Only occasionally would girls be described as 'chatty' or 'getting into trouble'. One of those girls, Sinead, was described in the following way:

> Sinead, she's...fine! Talks much too much. Never stops talking! (Ms Miller, PSE teacher, form tutor)

> Sinead is very nice. She's quite noisy, always chewing chewing gum, but she's really nice and I like her. (Mr Roberts, Science teacher)

> Sinead... Quite bright student. I think that she didn't particularly like me as a teacher, so therefore I had problems with her the whole period, really. In terms of ability, she hasn't got a problem, if she applied herself. (Ms Ojy, Music teacher)

Her behaviour was seen as deteriorating, and eventually she left Greenfield Comprehensive. After that, I had the following conversation with the head of Year 7:

> Mr Roberts: Sinead has just left.
>
> Marta: I didn't know she left.
>
> Mr Roberts: She got into loads of trouble.
>
> Marta: But like, discipline problems?
>
> Mr Roberts: Yeah, yeah.
>
> Marta: And she left school?
>
> Mr Roberts: They put her in a very strict catholic school. I spent a lot of time talking to her last Summer, on that activities trip. And she agreed that she was going to behave, and not end up like her sister. And, she just got worse and worse this year. And ended up being excluded several times. Although I always found her really pleasant, really nice in my class, but well...
>
> (Mr Roberts, Science teacher and head of Year 7)

Teachers saw Sinead as the most misbehaved girl in 7B. In this interview with the head of Year 7, which took place near the end of the fieldwork, he told me how she left the school after getting into discipline problems. Still, she was perceived as being a 'nice' girl.

Although teachers did not describe all boys as disrupt*ive*, they would associate discipline problems with boys. More often these were described as 'difficult', 'immature', 'getting into trouble', 'out of control'. The following extracts are illustrative:

> Joe is very clever, very able, and in my lesson he's very good. But in other lessons he's very bad, I don't know why, he has a problem. (Mr Roberts, Science teacher and head of Year 7)

> Joe... He's underachieving. Like mad! He's got... Family problems. Hmm... He's imitating his father. (Ms Miller, PSE teacher and form tutor)

> Joe... I don't feel I had an awful lot of success with him. His attitude towards myself, as a teacher, learning, I found it very difficult. I had lots of detentions with him, where I sat with him, and myself and the head of music tried to do lots of work with him, but I don't feel as if we succeeded really. (Ms Ojy, Music teacher)

> Joe... he has positive and negative sides, Joe... sometimes. He could be the most mature, responsible boy and then other times he would blow up a wall, so to speak. (Ms Clarke, PSE teacher)

During his year at Greenfield Comprehensive, Joe was never excluded, despite having been in detention several times. Being 'very bad', 'problematic' or 'having an attitude' were not the kinds of expressions used to describe any of the girls, even in relation to Sinead who was said to have got into 'loads of trouble' and was excluded several times.

Gender seemed to be the major aspect associated with indiscipline. However, ethnicity seemed also to be related to it, even though this was not fully articulated. Pupils and teachers' references to disrupt*ive* pupils generally referred to the Turkish and black boys, although no direct mention of ethnicity was made. Using discourses at the level of individuals, teachers at Greenfield Comprehensive often described the boys of ethnic minority origins as being 'difficult' and disrupt*ive*. These findings generally confirm those of other studies that looked at the educational experiences of ethnic minority students, and found that these students, particularly boys, are often seen as more undisciplined that their peers (cf. Connolly, 1995, 1998; Gillborn, 1990; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Sewell, 1997; Wright, 1986, 1992).

As mentioned before, Turkish pupils in particular received a disproportionate number of detentions. Being aware of this, they seemed to confront teachers more openly about the role of their ethnicity in being punished. The following incident was in a PSE lesson in which three teachers were present, as well as a couple of pupils from another form. The lesson was constantly interrupted by pupils, and teachers struggled to control the class.

> Ms Walsh is explaining about stereotypes to some pupils. Then Ismail tells her, 'Miss, you don't like Turkish people, do you?' And Farid says loudly, 'Yeah!'. Ismail adds, 'You're racist!' She tells them to be quiet. Ms Miller intervenes, and Ismail says he was only joking. (...) Ms Walsh asks their attention. Ms Miller left for a while. She tells them about the warnings in the board, and writes down a list of names with the number of times they were seen misbehaving (Farid V, Bouzned I, Ahmet I, Moktar V, Cetin I). They complain loudly. She justifies (like, drinking, interrupting...). Ahmet says, 'We put our hands up, Miss!' She replies, 'That's right!' Then Ismail says, 'It's all Turkish!' Chakib says Moktar is not Turkish. Ismail says, 'Is that true that I is the only Turk that hasn't got his name

on the board, right?'. Ahmet says that there are two other Turks (whose names are not in the board). (Fieldnotes, PSE lesson 7)

On this occasion and other occasions, the teachers refused to engage in any conversation about racial matters with the pupils concerned. They seemed to respond to these situations as mere provocations from pupils to disrupt the lessons, rather than questioning their own disciplinary practices.

In another lesson, confrontation between Jamie (mixed heritage), Ismail (Turkish) and the teacher (white British) was also based on ethnic grounds:

> Jamie is not quiet and is reprimanded. He agrees to calm down. (...) Ismail is not quiet either and Ms Clarke tells him that she will send him to the Student Services. She tells him that today she will only give him one chance (last lesson he was sent out). He agrees and does what he is told. (...) Ms Clarke asks Ismail to take his fleece off. He says that it's not a jacket. Ms Clarke says, 'You have a school uniform...and it is very smart too.' He tells her, 'This is smarter... You just have bad taste!' She ignores him. (...) There is some noise in the classroom. Joe tells Jamie to be quiet and to let her explain. Ismail says, 'I'm sorry, Miss, but can you forgive me?' He smiles putting an innocent expression. Ms Clarke looks at Ismail, says nothing with a serious expression and continues explaining. She says that in PSE they should learn to listen, co-operating, following instructions, thinking, concentrating. Ismail says something I can't hear. She warns him that he will be timed out, he'll have a detention and she will speak with his mother. He says, 'No...Too young to die!'. She continues talking about following rules, and mentions that she already told them that in Assembly. Ismail says, 'Time out means a break, not a punishment.' Then he continues, 'I want to die. There's no point!' Ms Clarke sends him out of the lesson and writes a note. She tells Jamie he has a choice not to behave like that, otherwise he'll also be put in detention. Jamie asks, 'Miss, what's the point of choice? Just because he's Turkish'. Ismail shouts, 'That's my friend, there!' Jamie continues, 'I have a choice but he hasn't... Who's racist here?' Ismail asks her how can she be sure that he will give the note to the Student Services. Jamie is also put on detention and sent out of the lesson. He says, 'You don't have to if you don't want to'. He says he will take the chair as well, and does it. (Fieldnotes, PSE lesson 5)

These two pupils questioned this teacher's notion of discipline as a *choice*, a notion that she expressed in an interview I had with her. Interestingly, that

interview helps us in understanding how choosing not to behave was seen as problematic only in some cases.

> And Jamie therefore stayed on the edge of the group. And some of the time... when he joined in, he was really, really good. When he didn't join in, it was very difficult. There were other students like that, who *chose* to more or less join... Sophie, for example was... was someone who had the capacity to join in if she wanted to, and whenever she didn't want to she sort of sat back and didn't listen and talked to her friends. And you knew she was disengaging from what was going on. (Ms Clarke, PSE teacher, original emphasis)

Ms Clarke thought that Jamie had a choice not to misbehave, and when he did misbehave he was found 'very difficult'. Sophie, on the other hand, was only 'disengaging'.

Other pupils who felt they were disproportionately punished were boys of African Caribbean descent:

> Marta: Why don't you like her (a black teacher)?
>
> Joe: It's like... She always picks on me, and she doesn't do it on other people, like because...
>
> Omi: She's like a coconut, innit?
>
> Marta: Like a...?
>
> Omi: Coconut... like black on the outside, white in the inside. Ain't being racist...
>
> Marta: How would you think she could be black in the inside...?
>
> Omi: No... It's just a... It's the way... It's the way how she treats us. Us. Blacks.
>
> Joe: She's like... all the people in the class, like the white people. She's like... When they do something, she ignores, yeah? But when we do something, it's straight out! Or detention. It's like...
>
> Omi: It's like... you prefer... you prefer yourself... you prefer yourself white, innit? There was... Some... called me a fool, she said. 'Don't call me a fool! I just don't let it!'. But if it was one of us...(shrugs shoulders)
>
> Joe: It's just straight out.
>
> Omi: Or excluded... Or expelled.
>
> (Joe and Omi, Year 7)

These pupils complained that particularly the Turkish boys in their class would get away with more than they would. Interestingly, the Turkish boys

complained of the opposite, that is, they thought that Joe, Omi and Andy (all African Caribbean boys) could get away more easily with teachers:

> Ismail: Yeah, we don't get along with *them* (Omi, Joe and Andy)... That's it. And, in... they only give *us* detention. They get lucky. They didn't get no detention.
>
> Marta: But what did... What have they done and what have you done?
>
> Ismail: Hmm... There was an argument in class with Omi and he was speaking about *us*. To his friends... And I found it quite annoying... I said, 'Are you speaking about me?' And he said no, looking there, sat down, and then after I went up to him and said, 'What are you looking at? Why are you speaking about me?' And he said, 'No, just speaking' And then his friend called me and said, 'Leave him alone, he's only speaking!' And I just couldn't control myself, and just run to him there... and got into trouble...
>
> Marta: So, you don't think it was fair that you were put in detention?
>
> Ismail: It was kinda fair, but... at least they could have give them detention as well, 'cause I didn't... If I was a teacher in this place I would have... listened to my part of the story much better... He did listen, but I don't think... He paid more attention to them.
>
> (Ismail, Year 8)

What I find interesting in these two different accounts is that these pupils compared themselves with each other, rather than with the white pupils in 7B, who received substantially less disciplinary sanctions. In doing so, they themselves associated the category disrupt*ive* with ethnic minority pupils.

In summary, pupils generally saw gender and ethnicity as a factor in their experiences at Greenfield Comprehensive. The pupils of ethnic minority origins in particular pointed out that they received worse treatment from teachers than their peers. Teachers, on the other hand, seemed to position black and Turkish boys as disrupt*ive*, as illustrated by examples of pupils seen as having a 'bad attitude' and in the number of detentions, whilst not really engaging in 'race' discussions with pupils.

3.3 Conclusions

When I looked at the Labour Government's official statements on education, such as Green and White Papers, circulars on discipline and Labour Party manifestos, the conception of indiscipline that emerged is one based on a deficit model approach. Indiscipline is generally seen as being brought from outside into the school, and the school itself is rarely given any role in

contributing to disruption. It is therefore not surprising that only rarely is indiscipline in schools and its consequences linked to a wider policy on social inclusion.

The government's official discourses on the origins, definitions and consequences of indiscipline were reworked at the level of school. They permeated the school's policy on behaviour, whereby discipline was defined as a choice of the individual. When I tried to understand insiders' accounts of indiscipline, that is those of school staff and pupils, this was not so clear-cut. At Greenfield Comprehensive, teachers generally used explanations based on the individual or the community. At the school level, they stressed the importance of the management and pupils' subcultures. Pupils focused more extensively on the role of the school in indiscipline. The school's management, the quality of teaching, teacher's inconsistent application of sanctions or pupils' subcultures were all seen as contributing to misbehaviour.

The concept of discipline itself was understood differently by pupils and teachers at Greenfield Comprehensive. The former tended to define it as compliance with rules, whilst teachers stressed the importance of pupils' attitudes towards the school and education when defining serious misbehaviour.

Generally, the government's discourses on discipline that address the consequences of disruption contributed to establish two categories of pupils: the disrupt*ive* and the disrupt*ed*, the former being those pupils who persistently misbehave and the latter those whose education is disrupted by the disciplinary incidents taking place in the classroom. These are presented as mutually excluding categories of pupils. My analysis of data collected through interviews and observation suggested that these categories were reworked at the school level. It created positions that pupils occupied mainly because of who they were in terms of gender and ethnic origin. Firstly, because indiscipline was generally seen as a 'problem' that is gender related. Both pupils and teachers tended to attribute more serious problems of indiscipline to boys, often defining them as disrupt*ive*, whilst girls were seen as quieter or, at worst, chatty. Secondly, because ethnicity came into play, encoding cultural capital: the pupils defined as very disrupt*ive* were disproportionately of Turkish and African Caribbean descent, and these felt they were particularly discriminated against. Teachers often described them as having a 'bad attitude' and giving them more detentions. As a result, perceptions of gender differences and a deficit approach to pupils of ethnic

minorities positioned certain pupils at risk of having 'bad attitude' and being disrupt*ive*, closing down educational opportunities.

In the next chapter I will explore how this was compounded by processes of selection within the school, which further restricted the range of schooling identities available to pupils perceived as disrupt*ive*.

4

Selection and the Institutionalisation of Failure

In this chapter, I examine issues of selection in education policy and at Greenfield Comprehensive. I start by looking at the creation of a tripartite system in Britain following the *Education Act 1944* (HMSO, 1944), and at the progressive establishment of comprehensive schools. I then focus on the 'modernisation of the comprehensive principle' (Labour Party, 1997) proposed by the government, in which selection *within* schools (through setting) is being increasingly encouraged.

In the second section of this chapter, I use data collected at Greenfield Comprehensive to illustrate how discourses on selection within the school are being reworked locally. The school was largely supportive of setting, despite some teachers acknowledging that this practice prioritised high-achieving pupils with perceived 'good attitude'. Moreover, it also disadvantaged those pupils who received support in *English as an Additional Language*. These were disproportionately allocated into the lower sets where they could learn 'nice and slowly', as one teacher put it.

The final section is a case study on the reorganisation of the form under study, 7B. The splitting of pupils in the form was carried out in order to *dilute* misbehaviour and attainment. Importantly, it resulted in the targeting of some black and Turkish pupils who were involved in an on-going (racialised) conflict. I also suggest that the splitting of 7B helped in polarising pupils' schooling identities by reinforcing the negative reputations of those who were moved out of the form.

4.1 *Selection and setting in education policy*

Selection was at the heart of Conservative policy-making in education, such as in the encouragement of grammar schools and in proposals to extend the proportion of pupils selected by 'ability' (cf., for instance, DfEE, 1996a). This gave a particular flavour to the ensuing Labour Government's expression of education for 'the many, not the few' (DfEE, 1997, p. 11), which was intended as a statement of Labour's commitment to an inclusive educational system. Making it harder for schools to be selective, New Labour defends a comprehensive system that increasingly differentiates pupils by 'ability'. It called this 'modernising the comprehensive principle' (Labour Party, 1997). However, as I attempt to show in this section, setting pupils by 'ability' merely replaced crude processes of selection. Official discourses on different 'abilities' are helping 'modern' comprehensives to enforce subtle processes of selection, reproducing social inequalities in education.

4.1.1 Selection and comprehensive schooling

The *Education Act 1944* (HMSO, 1944) was pointed out by several authors as having provided the framework in which the establishment of a selective educational system in England was made possible (Lowe, 1992; Simon, 1991). Responding to the labour demands of the post-war period, it extended access to education to the social groups traditionally excluded from secondary schooling (Benn and Simon, 1972; Lowe, 1988). The Act led to a tripartite system[27] at the secondary level, made up of grammar schools, modern secondary and technical schools, where selection played a major role. This system was based on conceptions of pupils as being one of three types, as contained in the influential *Norwood Report*, summarised by the *Times Educational Supplement*:

> It is administratively impossible to offer individual curricula; school organisation must assume that individuals have enough in common to justify certain rough groupings. Three main groupings appear desirable: of pupils interested in learning for its own sake; pupils whose interests and abilities are markedly in the field of applied science or applied art; and pupils who deal more easily with concrete things than with ideas.

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[27] Several authors commented that it was really a *bipartite* system, as technical schools did not flourish until the 1960s (see, amongst others, Benn and Simon, 1972; Crook, Power and Whitty, 1999; and Lowe, 1988).

To meet the respective needs of these groupings, the committee envisages three broad types of secondary education, and consequently three types of secondary school: grammar, technical and modern. (TES, 31 July 1943, quoted in Barber, 1994, p. 55).

The *Norwood Report* was based on the assumption that individual children at an early age could be fit into one of the three types. Through the 11-plus examination, pupils were allocated to the three types of schools. The results in this exam, taken by children at the age of 11, legitimated thus the different types of schools. This was in spite of the controversy surrounding the adequacy of the examination tests being used to select pupils, and the concern with the disadvantage of pupils from working-class backgrounds through this process of selection (Ball, 1981; Lowe, 1988). Nevertheless, the tripartite system in education was presented as catering for the needs of all types of children.

Despite a proposed 'parity of esteem' between the three types of schools, grammar schools held higher status than any other, being very popular with the public and the media. Traditionally, they were perceived as 'symbols of educational advance and the guardians of cultural excellence' (Crook, Power and Whitty, 1999, p. 9). Indeed, grammar schools served to educate an elite of students, as the vast majority attended secondary moderns (Crook, Power and Whitty, 1999; Lowe, 1988).

However, this tripartite, or indeed bipartite system did not accommodate the demand for educational provision resulting from the growth of the suburbs in large English cities and some rural areas in the post-war years (Lowe, 1988). In such places, comprehensive schools could provide an economical solution (Ball, 1981; Lowe, 1988), one that was seen as the least desirable, Benn and Simon (1972) argued. Thus, the comprehensive school was defined as:

one which is intended to cater for *all* the secondary education of *all* the children in a given area, without an organisation in three sides (Circular 144, 16 June 1947, quoted in Benn and Simon, 1972, p. 45, original emphasis).

Rather than envisaging an egalitarian principle in education[28], 'which sees children as of equal worth' (Marsden, 1971, quoted in Ball, 1981, p. 9),

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[28] See Ball (1981) for a discussion (and the absence of discussion) on principles of comprehensive education.

comprehensive schools were seen by many as a pragmatic and economic solution to be used where the other three types of school were not viable.

In spite of their unpopularity in the media and within some political circles, comprehensive schools started to be 'experimented' with a few English and Welsh LEAs from the 1950s, and more markedly from the 1960s, often coexisting with local grammars that educated the 'most able' (Crook, Power and Whitty, 1999; Lowe, 1988). And although it was naively expected that comprehensive schools could contribute to decrease social differentiation (Ball, 1981), selection *within* school pervaded. Despite some diversity in the social composition of comprehensive schools, these were mainly attended by working-class pupils and those from the middle classes that had not succeeded in the 11-plus examination (Lowe, 1988). Moreover, the mixing of children from different social backgrounds in a single school was only seen as desirable as long as streaming[29] within the school provided some sort of selection, indeed widely practised in comprehensives (Benn and Simon, 1972; Crook, Power and Whitty, 1999). Thus, in the mid-1950s, the first comprehensive schools to be purpose built were separated into different blocks (with upper, middle and lower schools), which maintained selection within school and allowed for the possible division of the school in case the comprehensive 'experiment' should be abandoned. All this meant that comprehensive schools added more to the reproduction of social inequalities than perhaps had been envisaged in the making of the *Education Act 1944* (Lowe, 1988).

Comprehensive schools were pioneered by only a few LEAs until the mid-1960s. It was only in 1965 that, under a Labour Government, there was an official attempt to expand comprehensive schooling, through the non-statutory circular 10/65, which significantly was withdrawn some years later by Margaret Thatcher's Government, with circular 10/70 (Ball, 1981; Benn and Simon, 1972; Crook, Power and Whitty, 1999). And as Crook and colleagues (1999) noted, in spite of a continuation towards comprehensive schooling (with Thatcher's Government allowing for the creation of new comprehensives), some of these schools merely replaced secondary moderns, and were not 'fully' comprehensive in their pupil intakes.

When the Labour Party took office in 1974, it proposed to LEAs the expansion of the number of comprehensive schools, with circular 4/74. And

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[29] Ireson and Hallam (2001) define streaming (or tracking) in the following way: 'pupils are placed in classes on the basis of a test of their general ability. They remain in their streamed class for most subjects' (p. 10).

even in spite of the Conservatives winning the 1979 general election (putting forward an array of proposals increasing selection), and the decline of the British economy, the 1980s saw a steady expansion of comprehensive education (Crook, Power and Whitty, 1999; Simon, 1991). Public support for comprehensive schools also grew, curtailing the Tories' attempts to return to selective schooling through the traditional system of grammar and secondary modern schools (cf. Simon, 1991). This led the Conservative Secretary of State for Education at the time, Keith Terry, to comment:

> If it be so, as it is, that selection between schools is largely out, then I emphasise that there must be differentiation within schools. (Keith Terry, TES 17 February 1984, quoted in Simon, 1991, p. 500)

Thus, as the comprehensive movement was becoming progressively established, selection *within* school continued to characterise comprehensive schooling, by this time via the allocation of pupils into different academic routes (Simon, 1991). Selection *between* schools also increased in the 1980s and early 1990s, although sometimes meeting firm antagonism from the Opposition. The *1980, 1988* and *1993 Education Acts* marked a crucial return to selection in the British education system (Edwards, Whitty and Power, 1999). Measures taken within these included the Assisted Places Scheme, the creation of two new types of self-governed schools (City Technology Colleges and Grant-Maintained schools), the increase in the number of specialist secondary schools, and the introduction of grammar streams in comprehensives (Crook, Power and Whitty, 1999).

Proposals to further extend the use of selection were put forward in the White Paper *Self-government for Schools* (DfEE, 1996a), published in June 1996, based on the following argument:

> Children have different abilities, aptitudes, interests and needs. These cannot all be fully met by a single type of school, at least at secondary level. The government wants parents to be able to choose from a range of good schools of different types, matching what they want for their child with what a school offers. The choice should include schools which select by academic ability, so the most able children have the chance to achieve the best of which they are capable. (DfEE, 1996b)

This resembles the discourse used to justify the implementation of the tripartite system under the *Education Act 1944* (HMSO, 1944), namely that there are several *types* of children and that they should be allocated to different types of schools.

With the Conservative Government, arrangements regarding the selection of pupils benefited the 'most able children'. It was a concern with maximising their progress, rather than stretching the 'less able' that justified selection. Having been approved, the proposals included in the White Paper would have encouraged the creation of new grammars, and increased selection in other types of school (including those controlled by LEAs). These proposals were actually integrated in the *Education Bill 1996*. However, the Conservative Government's bid to extend selection met strong opposition both at the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and was withdrawn from the *Education Act 1997* (HMSO, 1997), published just six weeks before the general election.

4.1.2 'Modernising the comprehensive principle'

When the Labour Party took office in May 1997, it inherited a system of education where selection and competition between schools were widely prevalent. This was the legacy of the *1988 Education Reform Act*, which introduced a quasi-market in education through parental choice and formula funding (Ball, 1993). At the same time, comprehensive schooling was more established and had become more *comprehensive*. Benn and Chitty (1996), reviewing 30 years of comprehensive education, pointed out that in the mid-1990s comprehensives were attended by more high-achieving and middle-class pupils than ever before.

Within this conjuncture, the Labour Government sought to redefine education policy regarding selection, subjecting grammars to local parents' approval, and ending the Assisted Places Scheme. This did not mean, however, that selection was out of the agenda: rather, it was replaced by the language of 'choice' and 'diversity'. This is a language that is seen by many as being 'much harder to argue against than selection' (Edwards, Whitty and Power, 1999, p. 32). The growing differentiation of schools resulting from their specialisation is an example of increased variety of educational provision which conceals the current hierarchy of schools into discourses on difference (*id.*). This move towards the specialisation of schools was initiated by Conservative Governments, but continued and expanded by New Labour. In 1995, the Labour Party had already suggested that it would encourage schools to 'play to

their strengths'[30] through specialisation in a particular curriculum area, such as Science, Music or the Arts, whilst also offering all areas of the National Curriculum (Labour Party, 1995). And in the White Paper *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997), specialist schools were allowed to select up to ten per cent of their pupils by 'ability' in their area of expertise under the *School Standards and Framework Act 1998* (HMSO, 1998a). The Act also outlaws the increase in the proportion of pupils selected by 'ability' in grammar schools, and allows pupils 'banding' only for balancing the school's intake in terms of pupils' 'abilities'. Thus, whilst the Labour Government made it harder for selective schools, it also widely encouraged the expansion of specialist schools (which are partially selective). It could be argued that specialisation could help attract pupils from middle-class families to the state sector, making schools more *comprehensive* in their pupil intakes. However, as Edwards, Whitty and Power (1999) pointed out, the possibility exists that in the quasi-market of education oversubscribed schools turn down socially disadvantaged pupils.

In relation to selection *within* schools, New Labour came to 'modernise the comprehensive principle' (Labour Party, 1997). Whilst in Opposition, it proposed that streaming should be abandoned, arguing that it unnecessarily labelled pupils as failures or successes, ignoring pupils' strengths and weaknesses across different subjects. Rather, schools should set[31] pupils for different subjects, enabling them to play to their strengths (Labour Party, 1995). In the manifesto to the 1997 general election, the Labour Party defended once more that setting should be used in schools. Arguing that children do not have the same 'abilities' and speed of learning, setting was proposed as a way of maximising academic progress of both 'high-fliers' and 'slower learners' (Labour Party, 1997, p. 6). With this, the Labour Party proposed to 'modernise the comprehensive principle':

> In education, we reject both the idea of a return to the 11-plus and the monolithic comprehensive schools that take no account of children's differing abilities. Instead we favour all - in schooling which identifies the distinct abilities of individual pupils and organises them in classes to maximise their progress in individual subjects. In this way we modernise the comprehensive principle,

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[30] This same discourse was previously used by the Conservatives in the 1992 White Paper *Choice and Diversity* (Edwards, Whitty and Power, 1999).

[31] Setting can be defined as follows: 'Pupils are grouped according to their attainment in a particular subject. Setting may be imposed across a whole year group, across timetable halves, within a band or across mixed age classes. Sets may be serially ordered or there may be parallel sets' (Ireson and Hallam, 2001, p. 10).

learning from the experience of its 30 years of application. (Labour Party, 1997, p. 3)

Thus, it was with the idea of catering for children of different 'abilities' within the same school, rather than providing different schools for pupils of different 'abilities', that the Labour Party proposed what it called the 'modernisation of the comprehensive principle'. In the White Paper *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997), this was embodied in the expression 'diversity within one campus':

> The challenge for schools is to ensure that all children, whatever their talents, develop their different abilities. We believe in 'diversity within one campus', with the method of teaching and the organisation of a school playing to the strengths of every child. Mixed ability grouping has not proved capable of doing this in all schools. It requires excellent teaching and in some schools has worked well. But in too many cases it has failed both to stretch the brightest and to respond to the needs of those who have fallen behind. Setting, particularly in science, maths and languages, is proving effective in many schools. We do not believe that any single model of grouping pupils should be imposed on secondary schools, but unless a school can demonstrate that it is getting better than expected results through a different approach, we do make the presumption that setting should be the norm in secondary schools. In some cases, it is worth considering in primary schools. (DfEE, 1997, p. 38)

Although academic research does not support this (cf., for example Hallam and Toutounji, 1996; Ireson and Hallam, 2001), the government argued that grouping pupils by 'ability' sets was a more efficient strategy than teaching in 'mixed-ability'. New Labour's rhetoric of 'standards' echoes the introduction of streaming when the first comprehensives were set up in the 1960s, as an attempt to raise the profile of the schools and make them more attractive to middle-class families. Indeed, in extending the use of setting the Labour Government seems eager to attract middle-class parents to state schools. This is attempted by offering plenty of opportunities for the 'more able' pupils, rather than committing to a genuine principle of social justice. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the explicit attempt to raise the profile of state schools through *Excellence in Cities* (DfEE, 1999a) seems also testimony to this (cf. Stanford, 2001).

Since taking office, New Labour increasingly emphasised the advantages of setting. This was justified through the 'standards' rhetoric, even though often

initiatives seemed designed to stretch the 'most able'. Moreover, in spite of research that suggests that pupils of ethnic minorities tend to be disadvantaged by the practice of setting (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Troyna and Siraj-Blatchford, 1993), the Labour Government is increasingly justifying this practice with the argument that it benefits all children:

> ...we want to see all pupils stretched so that they achieve their full potential. This is as important for those with Special Educational Needs as for the most able. We want to see further increases in the extent of setting within subjects including express sets to enable those who are capable of doing so to advance beyond the levels set for their age and to take Key Stage 3 tests early. Those who are not making sufficient progress will get extra help and assistance. (DfEE, 2001f, p. 51)

In my understanding, pupils perceived as 'high-fliers' seem to be significantly targeted by New Labour's educational initiatives. In *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997), measures designed for 'gifted' pupils included: fast-tracking, to enable them to take qualifications ahead of their peers of the same age; accelerated learning, whereby these pupils would be supported to learn and progress at greater speed; encouraging the setting up of specialist schools; and partnership with independent schools. Interestingly, monitoring of the impact of grouping practices is proposed as a result of concerns with the lower achievement of boys, but no reference is made to the impact on the achievements of pupils of ethnic minorities[32]. Concern with the 'most able' pupils is again apparent in the *Green Paper Schools: building on success* (DfEE, 2001f). Amongst the proposals, the government expresses its intention to create an *Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth,* based on the model of those created by John Hopkins University in Baltimore, in the United States (Gillborn, 2002). In the Labour manifesto to the general election 2001, initiatives designed to further support 'gifted' pupils are also privileged, and include the creation of more specialist schools and City Academies[33].

Measures taken to improve the achievements of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) seem rather small in comparison. In the Green Paper *Building on Success* (DfEE, 2001f), the Labour Government expressed its

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[32] See Gillborn and Youdell (2000) for an example of an ethnographic study that analyses the impact of setting in the experiences of ethnic minority pupils.

[33] *Academies* (as they are known under the 2002 Education Act (HMSO, 2002)) are independent schools with substantial public funding, private or voluntary partners and management (such as business or the church), designed to tackle poor performance in 'radical' ways (DfEE, 2000b, p. 4).

intention to provide these pupils with extra support, namely through the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to extend their educational opportunities. The emphasis is on early assessment, the provision of a tailored curriculum to match their needs, along with high expectations. But interestingly, the approach to those classified with SEN seems to be with their potential for disruption, rather than with achievement:

> We will build on our new framework, to ensure that children's needs are identified, assessed and met effectively. Critically, we will seek to ensure that problems are spotted quickly so that, for example, children with emotional and behavioural difficulties are helped as far as possible before they significantly disrupt the education of others. (DfEE, 2001f, p. 51)

It is interesting to note how in this quote, pupils with SEN are constructed as an obstacle to the success of their 'more able' peers.

The first main education policy document issued by the Labour Government, in their second term, was the White Paper *Schools Achieving Success* (DfES, 2001a). In this document, the government seems eager to show that it is truly committed to social inclusion. Further measures are proposed to meet the needs of children with SEN, including: dissemination of best practice to schools; improvement of inspection and monitoring of LEA and school arrangements and achievements regarding these pupils; and the development of a multi-agency approach. In spite of these measures, the government's approach to the improvement of educational opportunities of children with SEN is not wrapped with the same sort of flashy innovation that characterises initiatives designed for the 'most able'.

Narrowing the achievement gap between ethnic groups is also included in the agenda, by placing new duties on schools and LEAs to promote race equality. The *Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant* is also to be linked to wider programmes to raise 'standards', such as *Excellence in Cities* (DfEE, 1999a). Other measures include the provision of support to school management and teachers to effectively meet the needs of pupils of ethnic minorities and those with EAL; monitoring these pupils' achievement at a national level; and working with parents and local communities. However, in my understanding the allocation of more responsibilities to schools and LEAs in narrowing the achievement gap between ethnic groups can only produce limited results. This is due to the wider context created by education policy, in which performance-

related tables promote competition *between* schools, and the extended use of setting encourages selection *within* schools.

Finally, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds receive special attention in the White Paper, with the government proposing to support them within initiatives aimed again at the 'gifted and talented':

> All children and young people with outstanding academic ability or with particular sporting or artistic talent should be able to achieve their potential. Too often in the past, the most able have not got the targeted support they need. There has sometimes been a reluctance to recognise their particular talents and a feeling that they will do well anyway. In the past too many of our most able children have not done as well as they should, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. We want to explore ways of making sure we do better for these pupils. (DfES, 2001a, p. 20)

Arguably, the many pupils who are socially disadvantaged and were not identified as having 'outstanding academic ability' seem to be left out of Labour's drive to raise 'standards'.

More recently, the Department for Education and Skills published the Green Paper entitled *14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards* (DfES, 2002c). This document proposes to further differentiate pupils' educational pathways, by allowing the 'most able' to get earlier qualifications and advocates later entry in GCSE exams for those pupils who have a 'slower pace'[34]. The importance of this document is that it translates academic differentiation in pupils' attendance of different classes (through setting in some subjects) into more markedly different educational pathways.

In summary, in its drive to 'raise standards', the Labour Government sought to 'modernise the comprehensive principle' to raise the achievement of 'the many, not the few'. In order to do so, it proposed 'diversity within one campus' (DfEE, 1997), offering differentiated pathways in a single school to pupils of different 'abilities'. Although previous research does not confirm that the use of setting improves overall 'standards', this practice of selection *within* school is being increasingly encouraged to sustain a comprehensive system that attracts more middle-class families than ever before (cf. Benn and Chitty, 1996).

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[34] Rather than 'less able' or 'slower learners', the Green Paper describes this group of pupils as those who progress at a 'slower pace'.

In the next section, I explore how setting was used at Greenfield Comprehensive in the form that I followed, to conclude that it disadvantaged some pupils of ethnic minorities, particularly those with support for *English as an Additional Language.*

4.2 *Setting at Greenfield Comprehensive*

In the previous section, I looked at how issues of selection among and within schools featured in educational policy. I now focus on selection *within* a comprehensive school, exploring issues around the classification and allocation of pupils into academically based groupings. It is my aim to illustrate how the issues discussed within education policy are affecting the daily lives and educational careers of pupils in a comprehensive, inner-city school. I look at setting in Science, particularly in Year 8, as this subject was the focus of classroom observation in my study[35].

4.2.1 Setting in Science

Setting in Science was not initially used in all year groups at Greenfield Comprehensive. In the school's first year after reopening, only Years 9, 10 and 11 were taught in different groupings. Science was not set in Years 7 and 8 until September 2000, when setting was introduced for pupils in Year 8.

In Year 8 there were seven registration forms, and equally seven set groups in Science. Due to practicalities in timetables, there were three forms attending Science at one time, another two at a different time and the remaining two forms at another time. In teachers' words, this meant that in Science there were three top sets, three middle sets and one bottom set, as illustrated by Figure 1, below. According to the head of Science, Ms Babbra, sets E and G were more mixed than B or C alone, in that they comprised a greater variety of students.

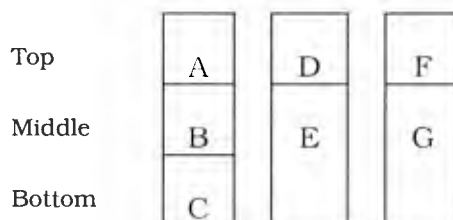|			
Top	A	D	F
Middle	B	E	G
Bottom	C		

Figure 1 Set groups in Science in Year 8 at Greenfield Comprehensive.

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[35] The rationale for the choice of these two subjects is given in detail in Appendix I – Methodology.

Quite similar ways of organising pupils into sets were used in other year groups, according to the number of existing teaching groups. In Year 11, as there were only three teaching groups pupils were allocated to sets A, B and C. In Year 10, with five teaching groups, there were one top, one middle and a bottom group, plus a top and a mixed middle-bottom group (Figure 2).
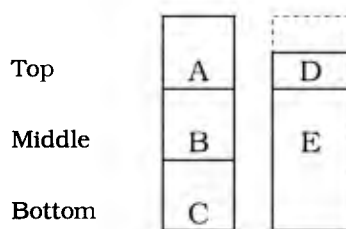
Figure 2 - Set groups in Science in Year 10 at Greenfield Comprehensive.

In relation to Year 10, Ms Babbra told me that as there were only three Science teachers, they had to timetable pupils in this way. She suggested that teaching group D was top and E was middle-bottom. However, she seemed to imply that group D did not actually have the same status as A, saying that 'there are some bright kids' in group D, but because of timetables they had to attend D, rather than A. However, only the 13 students in teaching-group A were doing double Science. Previous work on this area suggests that this might be a covert selection process, whereas the pupils considered more promising in Science, for instance, are encouraged to do double-Science rather than another subject option (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). This would mean that such pupils would attend group A, whilst the other pupils would be allocated to D. However, I was unable to explore this in any detail.

Generally, there seemed to be no relationship between teaching experience and set groups. More experienced teachers taught both higher and lower groups. However, it should be noted that by Year 11, the most experienced teacher (and head of Science) was teaching the top group, whereas the less experienced teacher taught the lower set.

The decision to allocate pupils to sets was taken jointly by the teachers of the Department of Science at Greenfield Comprehensive. A meeting was held where all teachers of the department sat together and discussed which pupils would go into which groups. The criteria used to decide the allocation of pupils to the set groups included: assessment grades of modular tests, taken after each module; assessment of practical investigations; SAT (Standard Assessment Task) results; the quantity and quality of homework; attendance

and punctuality. Criteria that are more subjective were also used to select pupils into sets, namely behaviour, motivation and attitude.

> At the end of Year 9, they have SATs exams, so that is a starting point. So when they go to Year 10 we use the SATs results to guide us. And also, after every module in Year 9, they do a test and the results from that give us an idea of modular levels and curricular levels as well. So we use those as well to help us decide which set they are going to go into. And also, in this school is things like *behaviour*... which children shouldn't be together, so we split them... A student may not be as bright but ends up in the higher set because of his behaviour... but we have to do that. (Ms Babbra, head of Science, my emphasis)

In other departments, the criteria used seemed to be similar:

> It's the Maths Department that decides... They look at the exam results, and that sort of thing. Look at the homework and all the rest of it, and look at their *attitude*. That sort of thing... (Ms Miller, Maths and Science teacher, my emphasis)

Exam results seem to be one of several criteria, in addition to pupils' behaviour, motivation and attitudes, which are highly dependent on teachers' interpretations. In practice, this meant that pupils with similar exam results would be allocated into different sets according to teachers' perceptions of their attitudes to school and education.

At Greenfield Comprehensive, I was told that the school used a 'broad' setting system, rather than a formal one. This allowed for pupils being entered into different set groups in different subjects, as well as being moved between set groups throughout the school year.

The pupils were set for the first time in September 1999, and then reallocated into academic groupings in January 2000. This was due to the school reopening with new staff and many new pupils, and teachers feeling that they needed to know the pupils better before taking such decisions.

> Getting to know the students takes a long time, I think. Since it's a new school, I've only been here since September, it would have been brilliant to have a look, see how they do and set them again in only after about one month or two months. But because it's taken that long to actually get to know them I think it's just taken that bit longer just to sort them out... (Ms Babbra, head of Science)

But despite the school's policy allowing movement between sets, the head of Science told me that in practice they tried to keep movement between sets 'as small as possible'. Unless pupils were identified as being in the 'wrong' set within the first two or three weeks, they would only be moved at the end of each term. This was because pupils in different sets did curriculum modules in a different order, so moving them in the middle of the term would prevent them from completing work in parts of the module. Thus, as one teacher put it, there was not 'a fantastic amount of movement' between sets. This meant that decisions about the allocation of pupils into sets were of great importance for pupils' future educational careers.

In case pupils were indeed moved, they were told about the reasons that led to such decision, which could be:

> For example... Not being able to cope with the classwork. Not doing any homework because of lack of understanding. We do consider behaviour sometimes. When behaviour is an issue, then the student will be warned, 'You might be moved down to the lower set, because you're causing distractions to others within the group as well and it's not fair'. And that normally it scares them to think, 'Oh, I don't want to be moved down', and then their behaviour *improves*. Sometimes. But behaviour is considered as well as ability. (Ms Babbra, head of Science, original emphasis)

As this quotation suggests, movement between groups was perceived as being mostly downward. During the interview, I gave no suggestion as to what direction of movement I referred to. This teacher's interpretation was that I had referred to downward movement, arguably because in practice only very seldom would the pupils allocated into a lower set be moved into higher sets. This was explained in the following way:

> It usually is more successful when you get students moving from a higher group to a lower group. Because they get complacent. They go into the higher group and think, 'Oh, I'm brainy, I'm doing OK, I'm gonna stay here and I can coast, I don't have to work very hard'. And then when they're put down to the lower group, suddenly they start working because they want to move up to the higher group with their friends. So we get that... That works very well within the groupings. But maybe in the lowest groups is not so good, because they don't have students in the groups who can help them, more *able* students who can help them with their work, who push them a little bit further. (Ms Babbra, head of Science, original emphasis)

What is interesting is that the school was self-consciously trying to build a culture of high expectations from all pupils. However, in practice this contrasted sharply with the low expectations that teachers seemed to have from pupils in the lower groups. Also, it is clear that setting was seen as a discipline and motivational device. And although acknowledging that setting is disadvantaging the pupils in the lowest groups, teachers seemed to think of setting as a successful practice. This will be further explored below.

4.2.2 Teachers' attitudes to setting

At Greenfield Comprehensive, I was told that 'the school doesn't agree with setting in general'. However, this perceived ethos was not to be found in practice: the teachers I interviewed were all considerably supportive of setting. Teachers' attitudes to setting were related to the perceived success that this practice had in dealing with the wide 'range of students in each group', as a Science teacher told me. This resonates Labour Government discourses on comprehensive schools as having to deal with a range of 'abilities', thus encouraging setting to provide 'diversity within one campus' (DfEE, 1997, p. 38).

When I recently interviewed the school's headteacher and asked him about the use of setting, he seemed to endorse the government proposals by intending to extend setting to Year 7.

> Marta: The government seems to be using a lot of setting (...). What do you think about that?
>
> Mr Jones: It certainly... The movement towards setting is very established now both through... at... the numeracy strategy and through the literacy strategy. And it is certainly a feature of the way in which our local primary schools are working... that they all are now grouping children by attainment, for their reading and writing, for their Mathematics, and also for their Science. And this is something which parents are now expecting secondary schools to continue. And so, as we have come to terms with the literacy strategy and the numeracy strategy we've almost inevitably had to follow the pathway of grouping children by attainment. Parents *expect* the secondary school to have these groupings by attainment. So that is something which... err.... we have had to follow closely, and we have just moved in terms of Mathematics to that approach with our Year 7s and we will be introducing that... hmmm... from September for our new entry. Which will reflect the practice of the literacy

strat... of the numeracy strategy in the primary schools. (Mr Jones, headteacher, original emphasis)

Mr Jones points out that parents expect schools to use setting, a practice which has been widely encouraged by the Labour Government. As more schools (including primaries) use setting, the 'need' to differentiate between pupils' perceived 'abilities' is being reinforced. The use of setting in the secondary school is, according to Mr Jones, inevitable to deal with the range of 'abilities' produced by primary schools. Thus, the more setting is used, the more it is perceived as a necessary practice by schools, and the more it adds to the academic differentiation of pupils.

Generally, teachers at Greenfield Comprehensive thought that setting was particularly helpful in highly structured 'academic' subjects such as Maths and Science. This resulted in the introduction of setting in Year 8. Another teacher told me how he would like to have setting in Year 7, because in this year group 'it's almost impossible to teach with such a wide range of ability'. As Mr Jones told me more recently, setting is now in place also in Year 7.

Setting received substantial support particularly from teachers of subjects that were set, such as Science and Maths, who agreed both with the principle of setting and with its use in practice. It was the teachers who taught subjects that were not set that mostly disagreed with setting. Some were critical about how setting was practised, as one teacher told me:

> Marta: Do you think that Year 7 would benefit if they were split into different sets?
>
> Ms Clarke (PSE teacher): Sets as in ability sets?
>
> Marta: Hmm, hmm...(I nod)
>
> Ms Clarke: Possibly, because it was a very, very big range of abilities within each class. And I've worked in schools where they fast-tracked a group or two groups and the rest would be mixed ability. And although in principle I'm not really in favour of... setting, I'm not sure that the... I think we have to look at what is the best *for the students*. Not what the teachers prefer! As a teacher I have a strong moral idea that... equality of access and equality of opportunity, and I don't... I've worked in systems where students who were in the lower groups have not had the same quality of teaching, or the same access, or the same materials they had... they've been second classed. So, whenever anybody says setting, it reminds me, it sort of touches that nerve inside of me that thinks of inequality. And it shouldn't have to. It shouldn't have to be like that. You should be able to manage a situation, to ensure more equality,

> rather then less equality. I think with lot of teachers who feel the same as I do, it's just that it touches that nerve of inequality... Setting will do nothing... (Ms Clarke, PSE teacher, original emphasis).

This teacher seemed to disagree with setting, pointing out that schools tend to offer different provisions to pupils attending different sets. The teachers of other subjects (such as Music, or Physical Education) whom I interviewed also disagreed with setting. Generally, however, it was accepted that teachers of highly structured 'academic' subjects (such as Maths or Science) preferred teaching in 'ability' groupings, as the same teacher notes:

> From *my own* perspective, PSE (Personal and Social Education), I would prefer that to be taught in a totally mixed group. I wouldn't want setting for PSE particularly. I think it's better to work with students with a whole range of abilities, interests, needs, aspirations. Because we're talking about things that are personal, that are not to do with academic development. It has to do with emotional development, and social development. So I'd rather that be in a mixed group. But I consider that some staff might prefer to teach academic concepts in a group which has a smaller range of ability. (Ms Clarke, PSE teacher, original emphasis)

There was a strong belief among staff that it was easier for teachers to teach in set groups. Rather than spending more time with some pupils who took more time to do the class work and trying to keep those students who had finished their exercises engaged, many teachers preferred to have a smaller mix of pupils at each time:

> I know a lot of people are against setting, but I think it's just easier for us, if there is just one teacher in there, then to have kids all working at the same pace, or roughly the same pace. Then it just makes things, makes your job so much easier. You haven't got someone here who's sort of ten pages ahead, or someone over there who's still on the first question. And sort of trying to juggle between them. So, you know? It does... I prefer it. (Ms Coleman, Science teacher)

Teachers thought that setting was not only advantageous for their teaching but also for their own pupils. The notion of 'ability' was central in their rationale on setting. Problematic as it is, the concept of 'ability' was sometimes explicitly used:

> In Year 8, they've got three sets, so it's top, middle, bottom. I think the top set will probably benefit from it the most, because sort of *they're with the peers that have roughly the same... sort of intellect.* So they can travel along quite fast. They haven't got to wait for like half a class to catch up, or have to wait for extension work to be handed out, because the teacher is dealing with someone who needs help. (Ms Coleman, Science teacher, my emphasis)

What this teacher seems to be suggesting is that it is not attainment that defines which pupils should be in the higher sets, but 'intellect' or 'ability'. What is particularly striking is the certainty that some teachers have about the different 'abilities' of their students (and their relative stability).

> Well, I teach set 1 and set 2. And I'm able to do GCSEs work with *all* but one student in set 1, who can't really cope with it. I'm able to take set 1 students off down tangents from the work. I don't have to follow the syllabus to the exact level. I can take it higher, I can take it to the side... And if I had complete mixed ability, you can't do that to that kind of degree. And then also, I think you're able to decide how you're going to stretch the students and do it more effectively. If you've got so many different students, you've only got 50 minutes to stretch everybody. So if everyone is near enough the same level, you are going to have a better chance. For Science, not for all subjects, a better chance of stretching that entire cohort of students, rather than trying and then missing it for most of them. I think if it's mixed ability in Science, you tend to stretch the middle bit. And the lower and the upper ends, you know... Unless you're very skilled, and you've got lots of time, which we don't have. We have 50 minutes and we have to change. Unless you have those things, it's very difficult to teach mixed ability in Science. Especially when it comes to GCSEs. It's nearly impossible for GCSEs. (Ms Akintola, Science teacher, original emphasis)

Some teachers alleged that the pressure they felt in delivering the curriculum and preparing pupils for their GCSE exams was the reason they thought setting worked better for their students. As mentioned previously, performance-related tables are placing additional pressure on schools to do well at GCSE level. At Greenfield Comprehensive, the wide range of 'abilities' meant that teachers felt they had to use setting to achieve the current A*-C benchmark, and thus favoured the 'most able' pupils.

Most interviewed teachers saw setting as necessary in order to promote the academic success of *some* pupils. They acknowledged that it was the 'brightest pupils' who really took the best advantage from setting (and thus

improved the position of the school in league tables). The following quote is illustrative of their prioritising the needs of high-achieving pupils:

> Ms Miller: Well, because I think by Year 8 the ability range is too wide. We've got people who really can handle quite hard work, that can handle quite complex work. And we've got people who can barely read. And it's not fair on either of them. I mean I think it's better if they are split up for... Maths, for example.
>
> Marta: It's set?
>
> Ms Miller: It's... the top people on either side (each half of the timetable) are taken out. And then it's mixed ability underneath. So it's not very rigidly set. But it's certainly meant that *the more able ones* have been able to get on a lot faster. They're much easier to steer in the right direction all the time, so I think it's better.
>
> (Ms Miller, Science and Maths teacher, my emphasis)

Both Ms Miller and Ms Coleman thought that teaching in a 'mixed-ability' context disadvantaged 'the more able' pupils, because of their faster pace.

Some other teachers thought that setting worked by diluting the disruptive behaviour of some pupils, which they saw as holding back those 'with higher ability':

> Personally, I don't agree with setting, but I think that they (the other teachers at school) probably do. Yeah, because of the disruption that experiences every form group, maybe it's good for... *all* the different abilities to have some time... in some subjects... I think they're set only in Maths and Science... Maybe it's a good idea, but as I say, personally I don't agree with setting. I do think it's... If you can make it work, it's better to have mixed ability groupings. But if it's *holding the brightest ones back* all the time, then it's not fair, is it? So therefore, yeah. (Ms Ojy, Music and English teacher, second emphasis added).

> Marta: And do you think that generally, pupils in Year 8 benefit from being set for some subjects?
>
> Mr McGuinness (PE teacher): Being set... I don't actually witness it, 'cause I teach them in form groups...
>
> Marta: Yeah, but do you think...
>
> Mr McGuinness: I think it probably could do, yeah. 'Cause there are a certain core of year 8 students who, it's not through lack of ability, it's through their lack of discipline, self-control... that disrupt lessons. So if you have the... if you set them, *the ones with higher ability* will probably be more focused in

lessons, so they're not messing up...
(Mr McGuinness, PE teacher, my emphasis).

What these teachers suggested is that some pupils' disruptive behaviour disturbs the success of the 'brightest' pupils. The assumption was that behaviour goes hand in hand with academic achievement. What they did not acknowledge, for instance, is that many pupils considered disrupt*ive* in 7B were also described as intelligent, bright or able. Some of these were also in the top sets.

In summary, despite the statements that the school was generally not supportive of setting, actually all the teachers interviewed agreed with setting in certain 'academic' subjects, such as Science or Maths. A few suggested that this made their job easier. Most thought that it improved their pupils' achievement in those subjects. This was either because they though that having pupils with the same 'ability' allowed them to move faster in terms of the curriculum, or that it was an easier way to control discipline. However, it was not with every pupil's success that most teachers were concerned. It was the 'brightest' pupils who they saw as benefiting mostly from setting, and they felt that these were the youngsters who should not be held back.

4.2.3 Setting pupils for failure?

In the previous sub-section, I suggested that it was the 'more able' pupils who teachers saw as benefiting the most from setting. However, if one looks at their views closely, it becomes clear that what they actually mean by 'able' in the context of setting is not merely being academically successful or 'intelligent'. Some teachers do work with the assumption that pupils in the top set have roughly the same 'sort of intellect' or 'ability'. But some also imply that setting is about discipline, their assumption being that if the 'more able' pupils are moved to the top set, they will not be disrupted by the undisciplined pupils. 'Ability' and good behaviour are seen as going hand in hand, the absence of one jeopardising allocation to the higher sets. According to this view, generally misbehaved students should not be in the top sets, although some pupils perceived as 'not so able' were eventually allocated to those sets because of their behaviour. In a quote I previously used, the head of Science acknowledged precisely this. It is worth looking at it again:

> And also, in this school is things like behaviour... which children shouldn't be together, so we split them... A student may not be as bright but ends up in the higher set because of his behaviour... but we have to do that. (Ms Babbra, head of Science).

What I am suggesting here is that setting is not only about academic achievement. Teachers thought of the top set as a position occupied by those who they think of as 'ideal' pupils (Becker, 1952). These are not only 'able', but generally comply with school rules and have what they perceive as a positive *attitude* to education. The matter of attitude is particularly important. As illustrated in Chapter 3, pupils from some ethnic minorities and particularly boys were at a significant risk of being perceived as having the 'wrong attitude'.

Nevertheless, setting depended on other factors besides 'ability', attitude and behaviour. At Greenfield Comprehensive, there seemed to be some association between set groups and pupils categorised as having Special Educational Needs (SEN). In Year 8, from those who had attended the form under study, 14 pupils were in the lower sets in Science and eight had SEN. Amongst the 12 pupils in the top set, only four had SEN.

More apparent though was the disproportionate allocation to the lower sets of pupils who received support in *English as an Additional Language* (EAL). A teacher who noted this thought it was a practice that benefited these pupils:

> I think the bottom set has mainly got more of the language difficulties in there. Kids that have difficulties with English. So they'll benefit, because *they're going nice and slowly,* and *do really easy stuff. Just to sort of warm them up into it.* (Ms Coleman, Science teacher, my emphasis)

In the form under study, whilst amongst the lower sets ten of the 14 pupils had EAL, in the top set only one of the 12 pupils received EAL support, as illustrated by Figure 3. This confirms previous research findings that suggest that pupils of ethnic minorities who receive support in *English as an Additional Language* are disproportionately allocated to less prestigious academic routes in the school (cf. Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Troyna and Siraj-Blatchford, 1993; Wright, 1992). These studies suggested that when allocating pupils with EAL to the lower sets, teachers are associating language acquisition with learning difficulties. Thus, EAL acts as a 'screening device'

(Troyna and Siraj-Blatchford, 1993, p. 4) to establish which pupils have the 'ability' to be allocated to the different sets, differentiating pupils' educational careers.
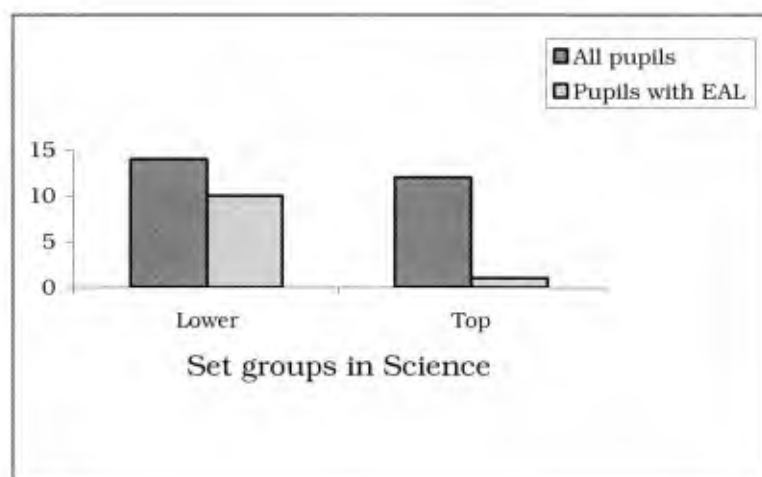
Figure 3 · Pupils with EAL and set groups in Science.

This was apparent at Greenfield Comprehensive. Teachers seemed to see as 'natural' that such pupils were in the lower sets because they had missed out in their learning due to some difficulties in English, which was not their mother tongue. However, this did not seem the case. Some of pupils with EAL were described by some teachers as 'intelligent', 'very bright', 'well motivated', and 'very quiet'. Some comply fully with teachers' expectations of pupils in the higher sets. I would like to explore in more detail the case of Cetin, a Turkish pupil. The head of Science in Year 7 thought that Cetin had been allocated to the top set in Science in his Year 8, and described him as a 'very good scientist' and a 'very nice kid'. Other teachers described him as 'quite quiet', or 'very bright':

> Cetin, I teach also. He's a very well motivated student, actually. I can see him going on and progressing on, going off to University. Very motivated. He's really pushing himself, and for someone that young, 'cause he's only 12 I think, he's actually doing very well. (Ms Akintola, Science teacher in Year 8)

> Cetin... He's a bright kid. When it comes into discussing in the class... He had very good answers to lots of things. For Music, yeah, he tried. He tried last year. Yeah, good, he tried. (Ms Ojy, Music teacher in Year 7)

> Cetin is... he's very bright! (Ms Miller, Maths teacher and form tutor in Year 7 and 8).

> I teach him, and he's doing very well. And his English is a massive problem. But he's actually quite clever. (Mr Roberts, Science teacher Year 7)

As Mr Roberts acknowledged, Cetin's problem was his English. And in spite of the very high expectations teachers had of his work, including the Science teacher, he was allocated to a lower set for Science. It would appear that setting is holding back pupils like Cetin. Arguably, it might be the case that pupils like him did not receive adequate language support to catch up with their peers in the subjects that they were learning[36].

Pupils with EAL are not receiving all the attention they deserve. With the pressure put on schools by the government's 'standards' rhetoric, a disproportionate emphasis is put on retaining good pupils, rather than on raising the achievement of the many. For many teachers, the over-representation of pupils with EAL in the lower settings seems only 'natural' and advantageous for the pupils themselves. The real concern at Greenfield Comprehensive was with the 'bright' pupils who were being held back, and with those moving to other schools. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, in the form under study, seven pupils left the school whilst I conducted research there. All of them were in the top set in Science.

In summary, at Greenfield Comprehensive most teachers thought of setting as a very positive practice, suggesting that it benefited the 'most able' pupils, who otherwise would be 'held back'. Decisions about setting were largely based on subjective criteria, such as attitude and motivation. Therefore, groupings based on 'ability' separated pupils that were considered disrupt*ive* from those seen as disrupt*ed*. More importantly, the pupils that I followed throughout Year 7 and part of Year 8 seemed to be allocated to different sets in Science because of their mother tongue not being English. Although this was not an official criterion used by the school, in practice teachers seemed to think that placing pupils with EAL in the lower sets would actually help them. At the institutional level, however, this practice is failing pupils of some ethnic minorities, by not allowing them to progress at the same rate as their peers. With over forty per cent of pupils having EAL at Greenfield Comprehensive, setting may thus be benefiting the few, not the many.

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[36] As a Portuguese national who learnt English as a foreign language, I would be probably assessed as having some stage of EAL. Nevertheless, I was certified with a Master's degree and allowed to enter and attend a PhD at a renowned English University. Pupils such as Cetin, however, were seeing their academic progress being limited by their having EAL and may see their educational futures jeopardised.

4.3 *Splitting as a process of selection*

Whilst setting is increasingly commonplace under New Labour's 'modern comprehensive principle' (Labour Party, 1997), other processes of selection are more exceptional in schools. An example of this happening at Greenfield Comprehensive was the reorganisation of forms from the first into its second school year. 7B, the form upon which I focused my study, was split up in Year 8. Of the 26 pupils that initially composed 7B, 16 were 'selected' to move together to 8B. The remaining eight pupils were allocated to other Year 8 forms[37]. This event caught my attention, nonetheless because when I was myself a Year 7 pupil, my form was also split up after a year of continuous disruption. In order to contain indiscipline, teachers decided that my peers and I were to be moved in small groups of four or five forms in Year 8. At Greenfield Comprehensive, the selective aspect of splitting the form was exacerbated because the majority of pupils were allowed to continue attending 7/8B. Only eight pupils were 'excluded' from the form. The heads of Years 7 (Mr Roberts) and 8 (Ms Bells) were responsible for deciding which pupils would be moved.

Pupils were informed in July 2000 that not all of them would be attending the same form in the following school year. Parents were sent a letter about the decision of splitting the form, and given the opportunity to express their wish of moving their children to a particular form in case they had a close friend there. Nevertheless, the school would have the final word on this. From those attending 7B, only one girl was actually allowed to move to the same form as her friend.

Pupils were only to find out which forms they would attend when the new school year began:

> Marta: When were the pupils informed about the decision of splitting them up?
>
> Ms Bells: Hmm... We told them a week... No, two weeks before the end of term. And wrote a letter to their parents. That if they wanted them to be with a particular person, we would not guarantee it, but we would think about it. So they knew two weeks before the end of term they were gonna be split up. But they weren't... Oh, you can't tell them before the end of term what groups they're gonna be in. That it's just such a *bad* thing to do for their education. They just go mental! So they knew in the first day (of the new school year) where they were, but they knew that they were split up two weeks before

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[37] Two pupils, Brian and Terry, had already left the school by then.

> the... (end of the previous school year).
> (Ms Bells, head of Year 8, original emphasis)

Considering that the school year was just finishing when pupils were told about the decision, it seems that Ms Bells was particularly worried about containing pupils' eventual opposition. This once more illustrates how issues of discipline and control were prioritised at the school.

To teachers, on the other hand, the decision of splitting 7B came as no surprise. In conversation with 7B's form tutor, who in the beginning of the year had said that 7B was the 'best' form in that year group, I was told that the form was finally 'a bad mix':

> We've got... a serious imbalance. We've got a few very bright ones, we've got... some with very serious educational needs. And we've got a lot of serious behaviour problems. Far more than any of the other classes. (Ms Miller, form tutor, Science and Maths teacher)

Ms Miller thought that such imbalance had happened because the pupils 'were put together in a hurry, without consultation from the people who knew about them.' This quote stresses the importance given by teachers to having informal knowledge on pupils in order to select and allocate them to groups, academic or otherwise. I thus decided to use the splitting of 7B as a case study, to explore further school processes of selection at Greenfield Comprehensive. In my view, it illustrates the idea of what a 'modern' comprehensive would look like: a school with a socially mixed intake which is reflected in form groups, but that nevertheless differentiates pupils' pathways through their allocation into hierarchical academic sets.

4.3.1 Diluting behaviour and attainment

When I contacted the head of Year 7, Mr Roberts, in order to explore the decision of splitting 7B, I expected my inquiry to develop in a quite straightforward way. As I continued questioning about the issue, it became clear that different rationales were used to explain what looked like a simple matter. Mr Roberts told me that the decision was taken:

> Because that class happens to have a high concentration of difficult kids. And they'll all be moved to different places, so... they can't cause trouble together. (Mr Roberts, head of Year 7, Science teacher)

Splitting the form was seen by the head of Year 7 as a way of keeping control over pupils' behaviour. If too many pupils were misbehaving in one single class, it was thought that the best way of improving their behaviour was to split them up into several forms so that a teacher could use a higher amount of surveillance. In doing so, the school was *diluting* misbehaviour.

The head of Year 8, who was the other member of staff involved in making the decision, also pointed out that control over pupils' behaviour was a reason why some pupils were moved out of the form:

> Marta: How did you decide which forms the pupils would go to, I mean... Which pupils went to which forms?
>
> Ms Bells: It was... a lot of...
>
> Marta: I have a list of 7B here...
>
> Ms Bells: Oh, I see... Well, it was mostly... it was purely arbitrary. It was where we needed somebody, because like... Also, people like Omi, who is very, very low... He's got lots of emotional problems. He's quite an *at risk* child. We did not want him with a lot of these kids. He needs to be somewhere where he can be looked after more. And he had loads and loads of problems last year, because of that. He got himself into so much trouble. It was unbelievable! And there were some quite few... distressing incidents with him. When he did distressing things. Don't really want to say what... But quite distressing things to himself. And so he needed to be really away from some of these kids. So, I moved him where I thought he would be... a bit more... comfortable... for *him*! He's now in C, which... I've not had one thing about him. And he seems really happy. So kinda of something... You just pick kids and just thought you can't leave him with those kids. They just can't work with those kids. Or they find those kids very intimidating. And then we'd look for where we can put them in a mix in another form. So I suppose a lot of it was personal stuff, I suppose. And some of them should be doing loads better then they were. And we're just getting him with a mix of kids that you'd just knew they'd never, ever do well. And if we took them out, we then could concentrate on the other kids kind of issue... Ismail got moved out. Big troublemaker. But if he has support, he can do really well. So we put him in one of the groups where we knew we could put support. Not for his work, 'cause he's a bright boy, but if he can have, like... He's always got a mentor that's keeping an eye on him. He's also keeping an eye on a couple of other kids in there. So I suppose we did pick... pick people. (laughs)
>
> (Ms Bells, head of Year 8, RE teacher, original emphasis)

Thus, splitting up the form not only helped teachers to control a smaller number of misbehaved pupils in one classroom, but it was seen as a way of protecting pupils 'at risk' from those that teachers perceived as having a negative impact on their learning and behaviour.

I contacted again the head of Year 7 by e-mail to explore further this process of selecting pupils and moving them to different forms. Also by e-mail[38], he replied with the following:

> The decision to split up 7B was taken jointly by me and the new head of Year 8, Ms Bells. Three black boys, Joe, Omi and Andy had fought all year with Turkish boys Ismail and Ahmet, so we sent them all to different classes (leaving Joe in 7B). We moved Sophie to 7D where one of her friends is. Both Joe and Sophie left the school anyway, as did Sebastien whose family moved away. (Mr Roberts, head of Year 7, Science teacher).

During the previous school year, as already noted, I had received complaints from the boys named above about the on-going conflict that existed between them. What I find interesting though, is how in Mr Roberts's words ethnicity featured via the conflict, not in itself. Thus, splitting up the form under study became a clear targeted practice towards black and Turkish pupils. Trying to follow up on this, some months later I interviewed him again, and asked about the reasons and criteria used to move some pupils out of 7B:

> Marta: Why were pupils in 7B split into different forms?
>
> Mr Roberts: There was a big problem with... There were 3 Turkish boys and 3 black boys, and they just used to fight. And I moved them all to different classes. Now, some of them actually left the school. So that wasn't strictly as necessary as it might have been, but... I felt that that class was very much not working. It was the worst class in Year 7. And a lot of people didn't get their work done. I *had* to split them up.
>
> Marta: And this was mainly because of the conflict between these...?
>
> Mr Roberts: Yes! That was the biggest problem in the class. But then there were some other kids that weren't black or Turkish, who were just disruptive.
>
> Marta: And they stayed...?
>
> Mr Roberts: Well, we just moved them all around, so we just left a small number of disruptive ones in that one class.
>
> (Mr Roberts, head of Year 7, Science teacher, original emphasis)

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[38] Because of the building work and changes in timetables, it was difficult to arrange interviews at short notice. Therefore, Mr Roberts encouraged my using the e-mail.

Again, it is interesting to note how ethnicity seems to play a key role here – albeit one that is not fully articulated. For instance, in relation to the decision of splitting up 7B, and although Mr Roberts acknowledged that problems of discipline were not exclusively related to the black and Turkish boys, it was mainly these students that he perceived as having to be moved from 7B. And this was perhaps because it was with them that the most serious discipline problems were associated. Many other ethnographies have documented how teachers tend to associate discipline problems with pupils from certain ethnic minorities (cf., for example, Connolly, 1995, 1998; Gillborn, 1990; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Wright, 1986, 1992). As I explored in the previous chapter, this also seemed the case at Greenfield Comprehensive.

The splitting up of 7B also highlighted several general issues in the school. At Greenfield Comprehensive, tensions between black and Turkish pupils were not a small-scale issue as one can derive from Mr Roberts's words. Serious fights between pupils that were informed by ethnicity did happen in the school at large and even in the wider community. Such fights did not generally take place because of ethnicity, but became racialised. For instance, a minor fight between two pupils of different ethnic origins ended up in a more serious fight, with their friends positioning themselves to opposite sides according to their ethnicity. However, rather than dealing with these issues, the school adopted a superficial approach to the problem, simply moving pupils to different forms. In doing this, splitting became a clear targeted practice towards black and Turkish boys in that form.

The head of Year 8, Ms Bells, also suggested that the splitting of the form not only intended to dilute misbehaviour but also 'ability'. I think it is worth quoting a large extract of that interview:

> Marta: Who took then the decision to split 7B?
>
> Ms Bells: It was between me and Steven... Roberts, who was the current head of Year 7. And did he tell you how they came to be in that group anyway?
>
> Marta: No...
>
> Ms Bells: No. Hmm... Originally, the first principal had wanted eight tutor groups. So Steve (Mr Roberts) spent months going through... You know, when they come from Primary school, they have a band. So they're band 1, 2, 3 or 4. And because the school is comprehensive, and we wanted it to be mixed ability, 'cause that's why we teach in comprehensive schools! (laughs) He went really carefully through, making sure that all the classes were

beautifully mixed ability and had enough from each band... And it took, like, hours to do this... I mean hours now was... And our lovely headmaster said, 'No, I want 7, now!... And I want the lists tomorrow!' And so Steven like panicked! And just pushed kids into groups and *knew* that they were not mixed ability groups. Knew that some of the groups had higher bands and some of the groups had lower bands. And it was *really* obvious as soon as the school started. Because A, 7A had loads of higher band kids... and you could tell. 7B had a lot more lower band kids. And a lot of kids with EBD (Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties). And it was just... I used to teach them... and they were just terrific! They were totally... they were just terrible, they're mad. The mix of kids in there was just *so bad*. And it also happened in E. E was terrible as well, and so was C. So at the end of the year, we had to do something about it, because people were leaving, left, right and centre. And just from those three tutor groups! We were like... If this carries on for another year, we'll have no kids. So we went through them and tried to remake the mixed ability. Tried to remix them so you've got some highs and middles and low kids. And you've got a range of special needs across the board. And that... Actually, Mandy, the head of Special Needs itself said to us, 'I can't... I can't work with the kids, because they're all in different groups, or they are in the wrong group... so they always spend about, blah, blah, blah...' So we tried to sort of... I think A, now has got a little core of Turkish kids, so that the Turkish mentor can get to mentor those 3 or 4 boys who can hardly speak English. I mean, there... with a couple of Turkish boys who are very confident and can... So we could do that sort of thing as well. (...)

Marta: And... Which were the criteria used to split 7B?

Ms Bells: That it wasn't a mixed ability form and it needed to be. To match...

Marta: So it was just in terms of ability... not to split some of them...?

Ms Bells: So that we had a pure comprehensive mix...

Marta: So 7B now is split across Year 8... Some of them are in different forms...

Ms Bells: Yeah, some of them have gone so that the mix in the other forms are right. If you see what I mean...

(Ms Bells, head of Year 8, RE teacher, original emphasis)

In this interview, ethnicity was now only mentioned as a criterion insofar as some Turkish pupils were moved into the some form so that they could receive adequate language support. 'Ability' was seen by Ms Bells as the main reason for rearranging the forms in Year 7. Similarly to setting, 'ability' was used to explain the selection and allocation of pupils into different groupings. However, and unlike in set groups, she suggested that the registration forms were used to mix pupils of different 'abilities'. Indeed, it seemed to be through

mixing of pupils of different 'abilities' and behaviour in form groups that teachers at Greenfield Comprehensive saw the achievement of the 'comprehensive principle'. This resulted in teachers' perceived need to split the 'mad' groupings, which again suggests how issues of control were so prominent at Greenfield Comprehensive. On the other hand, in the teaching of subjects seen as highly 'academic', such as Science or Maths, diversity of pupils was minimised, with the school concentrating in set groups similar 'abilities' (linked to behaviour and attitudes).

When I looked at the pupils who were moved, gender seemed to be somehow implicated in the dilution of attainment. Of the seven pupils actually moved out of 8B, six of them were in the lower set (at least in Science), and all were boys. The only girl in the top set, as Mr Roberts told me, was moved in order to be in the same form as her friend. Perceptions of 'ability' seemed then to be an important issue in the process of splitting 7B, and these were also related to gender.

In summary, at Greenfield Comprehensive, the splitting of pupils into different forms was carried out to have the proper mix of pupils in terms of behaviour, 'ability' and friendship. It also served to deal with (racialised) conflicts in the classroom, which helped fixing disciplinary problems on the black and Turkish pupils involved.

I discussed the splitting of 7B not only with the heads of Years 7 and 8 and 7B's form tutor, but with several other teachers as well. With this, I wanted to figure out how teachers perceived the result of this process. I realised that when they talked about the (positive) outcomes of splitting up 7/8B, they had primarily in mind how well it had worked for 8B, rather than for the individuals who had been moved out of that form. I will now examine teachers' perceptions of the outcomes of changing the composition of 7B, and the rationales used to justify such perceptions.

For some teachers, removing particular pupils from the form made them perceive it as being easier to teach:

> Mr Roberts: There's been loads of trouble with the... moving kids, but I think that was definitely beneficial, 7B is much better now than it was...
> Marta: In what ways?
> Mr Roberts: They're easier to teach. Maybe Paula Miller can answer that question better, 'cause she's their form tutor. But basically they're much better than they were.

(Mr Roberts, head of Year 7, Science teacher)

When I enquired of Ms Miller about this, she told me that the fact that she did not have to teach some of the pupils who were in 7B made her job easier:

> It certainly worked better to get rid of one or two people, like Ismail and Ahmet. They were very, very bad, and they made so much trouble. And the people who we got in their place who are troublesome, are... they don't work together the way that Ismail and Ahmet did. So they're not as hard work. And I think most of the teachers who teach them as a class, are happy with them this year, so I think that's better. (Ms Miller, form tutor and Maths teacher)

These two teachers liked to teach 7B, but thought that some pupils were too disrupt*ive* to be in that class. 'Getting rid' of them was seen as the best solution for the class and their teachers. Any consequences for the 'moved' pupils seemed less clear or even an afterthought:

> Marta: How do you think Ismail and Ahmet are getting along?
> Ms Miller: Hmm... They're still in quite a lot of trouble, as far as I can gather. Ahmet keeps on coming in and being a nuisance. And I've taught Ismail a couple of times this term and he's just about managed to keep out of trouble. But I think... so I think they're separated, and I think that's helped them.
> (Ms Miller, form tutor, Science and Maths teacher)

All the other teachers that I interviewed also agreed that the outcomes of splitting up the form were very positive.

> Marta: Do you think that 7B benefited from being split into different forms?
> Mr McGuinness: Oh, definitely, yeah.
> Marta: Yeah? In what way?
> Mr McGuinness: Hmm... they've been separated from some of their colleagues, their friends (inaudible)... who are definitely a negative influence in terms of getting academic work done, or organisation. Specially take Omi, Omitola, take him and Joe when they used to be together. But Joe has now left. It was terrible. It was like... 'Cause Joe is nearly 6 foot now, I think, and Omi is about 4 foot 4... So, it's a bit of a nice combination when they were together, it was an absolute nightmare in terms of getting things done, 'cause they always mess about...
> (Mr McGuinness, PE teacher)

Ms Ojy: Oh, yeah. Oh God, it was even worse last year, wasn't it? My God! I forgot about all of them! Most of the people that you mentioned.... Omi is still here, but most of the other people have left the school, haven't they? They've gone elsewhere... Yeah, 7B last year was... Oh my God, I remember now, I used to dread it!

Marta: But let's take Omi, Ismail and Ahmet... Do you think it was better that they moved to different forms?

Ms Ojy: Yes, yes. And I still think that if there's better groups in the year, maybe these ones (Omi, Joe, Ahmet and Ismail) should be split up into different form groups. Where there's more support from other brighter pupils, really. You know, for doing group work. Actually, this group (8B) was better than it was last year.

(Ms Ojy, Music and English teacher)

The splitting of 7B illustrates how schools select and organise pupils not only vertically but also horizontally, according to perceptions of 'ability', behaviour and attitudes. With splitting, teachers pursued a high mix of pupils in terms of perceived 'ability' and behaviour, horizontally across forms in a year group. This helped them to have better control over discipline, by dispersing across different forms those who they considered disrupt*ive*, and better academic work in class, by mixing different 'abilities' in each form. However, this balanced intake was only seen as possible and desirable as long as pupils were assigned to set groups for specific subjects (those seen as highly 'academic'). Through setting, pupils were organised vertically according to their perceived 'ability' and attitude. These criteria served to create hierarchies of pupils, according to how closely they met the 'ideal pupil' position. The intended result of this practice was to concentrate in one classroom the highest number of pupils with the same characteristics in terms of 'ability' and behaviour. Interestingly, there was a tension between the privileging of high-achieving pupils (through setting) and the need to dilute those seen as low 'ability' and disrupt*ive* (through splitting). Nevertheless, both processes served to reinforce expectations of pupils, as I illustrate throughout the next sub-section.

4.3.2 Reinforcing pupils' reputations

I interviewed pupils who were formerly in 7B for a second time when they were attending Year 8, more precisely at the beginning of the second term in the school year 2000-01. At that time, five of the 26 pupils from 7B had left the

school. I managed to interview 17 pupils amongst those who stayed, and asked them questions relating to the process of splitting up their form.

Some pupils were not too certain about the reasons why they were split up. Those who indicated a reason generally pointed out disruption in the classroom and conflict between particular pupils.

The pupils who stayed in 8B thought that their peers had been moved out because they distracted them from their learning, and their behaviour had a knock-on effect on most of the pupils in class. One of such pupils told me:

> Because some people were just mucking around and then the whole class would go silly and just muck around as well. So they needed to calm it down and separate them all into the classes where the people worked hard. (Michelle, pupil in 8B)

Michelle suggested that the pupils she saw as disruptive would behave differently if moved out of the form. Having more people 'who worked hard' in a single class would act in itself as a deterrent to misbehaviour. As I mentioned before, this was an argument that received considerable support amongst teachers.

Some other pupils' views offered a deeper insight into issues of control and order at Greenfield Comprehensive, as illustrated below:

> I think because people had bad behaviour and they kinda spread them out, so they wouldn't be in one big group. So the teachers wouldn't have so much hassle. There would be one bad person in each classroom. (Sinead, pupil in 8B)

> I think they put most of the disruptive classes in together, so... The good classes and the disruptive classes, so that they could be controlled by bigger and better teachers. I think that in the most disruptive classes, the pupils were put together so that they could be controlled more. You'd have more teachers in just one lesson. (Julia, pupil in 8B)

As suggested by the two pupils quoted above, the splitting of 7B was a school practice that intended to enforce control and thus deal with the behaviour of students perceived as disrupt*ive*. However, they interpreted this practice in opposing ways. Whilst Sinead suggested that those considered disruptive were spread out through the forms in Year 8, Julia thought that they had been put all together in one single form. From what I gathered, the teachers who took

the decision had in mind a higher mix of pupils, rather than concentrating in one class those perceived to have poor behaviour. Nevertheless, what I would like to stress here is these and other pupils' acknowledgement of the importance of issues of control and order, and their awareness of teachers' difficulty in dealing with these in the daily life of the school.

Some of those who were moved out from 8B argued that they did not know the reasons. In contrast, a couple of other pupils pointed to their own behaviour as a justification for splitting the form:

> I thought it was because I was naughty. (Peter, pupil in 8E)

> Because my friends... We weren't behaving ourselves in my class. Me and a boy called Ahmet. (Ismail, pupil in 8D)

It is interesting to note how different groups of pupils (those who stayed and those who left 8B) perceived the reasons that led to the decision of splitting their form. I think that these different perceptions were linked to a wider process of categorisation, which helped the differentiation of the schooling identities of the two groups of pupils. The pupils who stayed in 8B positioned themselves as being disrupt*ed* by the pupils who were moved out, treating their own behaviour as unproblematic, whereas those pupils who moved out saw their categorisation as disrupt*ive* further enforced. This was not only the result of the practice of splitting, but also of the apparent lack of discussion between teachers and pupils about its motives. Whilst teachers pointed out that the splitting of 7B took place because of a variety of reasons, the pupils themselves saw disruption as the criterion used to allow or not pupils to attend 8B. My aim in discussing the splitting of 7/8B is not to pass judgement on whether it was necessary; rather, I want to emphasise the consequences of the decision, especially in view of the resulting polarisation of pupils' perceptions of their own behaviour.

Only a few pupils indirectly pointed to the existing conflict between some black and Turkish pupils as a possible reason for the splitting of 7B. When asked about the reasons for 7B having been split up, these pupils replied:

> I don't know... Maybe because people didn't get on with each other. (Jamie, pupil in 8B)

> I think it's because people weren't working and were distracting others, but I'm not sure. Like Omi and Ismail they always used to fight and bully people. (Mashal, pupil in 8B)

> Bad people caused problems. Ahmet and Ismail were always in detention, and there were fights with Joe, who left, and Omi. (Moktar, pupil in 8B)

Pupils did not openly acknowledge the role of ethnicity in the conflict between these pupils. However, the fact that it was pointed out to me by the head of Year 7 and that it seems to have been addressed with pupils as being a matter of particular individuals suggests once again a significant difference in how events and motivations were seen by teachers and pupils.

In practice, the pupils who stayed in 8B generally welcomed change in the composition of forms, although some would have preferred that one or two of their friends had stayed in the form. Nevertheless, they felt that the fact that some pupils were moved out helped to have a less disruptive atmosphere and consequently to get on better with their work. This is depicted by the following quotes:

> It's better now. Because of some kids who used to annoy the class, like Ismail, who used to shout and make problems in the class. It's better than last year. I get on a bit more. (Adam, pupil in 8B)

> I think it's better. The new people are kind of the same, but the naughty people are gone. (Mashal, pupil in 8B)

> Yes (it is better that 7B was split up). Because some people get to work more. And get clever. (...) (The form is) better than last year. Some of the people just decided they are not going to muck around, 'cause they know they're gonna get in trouble with the teacher. But some people they do it, and mess in all the classes... Not as much as last year, though. (Michelle, pupil in 8B)

They thought that the absence of a few of their 'naughty' peers was not only better in itself, contributing to a better learning atmosphere, but also because it made other pupils who remained behave better. One of such pupils felt that he himself was behaving better because of this:

> Marta: Do you think it is better this way (with 7B having been split up)?
> Moktar: Yes, I get on with my work better.

Marta: And how do you like your new form?

Moktar: Not bad... I don't get so many detentions.

(Moktar, pupil in 8B)

The quotations above suggest again how the process of splitting 7B helped fix on a group of 'naughty' pupils the disciplinary problems in the form. As such, they saw the problem of discipline as having been moved out of the form.

It was the pupils who were moved out that were less happy about the change. They mostly complained about not having friends in the new forms to which they were moved. One of the pupils who was moved out told me how he felt excluded in the new form:

Marta: And how do you like your new form?

Ismail: They're aggressive to me. Some of them are. Some of them are not bad.

Marta: What do they do, do they bully you?

Ismail: No, they don't bully me. They just leave me out of the conversation. I don't know why.

(Ismail, pupil in 8D)

Teachers tended to downplay pupils' reactions, reducing them to a matter of disliking change.

Marta: Do you think they're happy about (7B having been split)?

Ms Bells: No, no! Of course not! Kids never are, because they're comfortable. But that's part of the reason why you need to split them up. You can't let them get comfortable in their ways of being bad within class, or with their friendships that are bad within the class. In a way, that's a good enough reason I think to split them up. They need not to be with those people that make them act like that. Definitely!

(Ms Bells, head of Year 8)

In some cases, teachers seemed totally unaware of pupils' reactions to being moved out to another form. This happened with Omi, about whom Ms Bells had spoken particularly when I interviewed her. She suggested that he had many problems during the previous year, and referred to him as a vulnerable person under the influence of other friends, which was making him get into trouble. Ms Bells believed that moving him out of 7B helped to improve his

behaviour, and added, 'he seems really happy'. When I interviewed Omi, a somehow different picture emerged:

> Marta: Is school different in any way from last year?
>
> Omi: Yes, they changed the rules. (...) Many classes and teachers have also changed.
>
> Marta: Do you like it better or worse?
>
> Omi: I don't think it's better...
>
> Marta: Why is that?
>
> Omi: I don't like the teachers that I have right now. I want to change my class. I'm in 8C. I don't like the people there, I preferred last year.
>
> Marta: Do you think you have changed since last year?
>
> Omi: Yeah.
>
> Marta: In what way?
>
> Omi: I became... Even the teachers are saying I'm behaving better in class. Because I'm lonely. Last year I was hanging around with my friends, like Joe.
>
> Marta: Do you think it is better (that the form was split up)?
>
> Omi: No. I'm going back to 8B. I'm not happy. But they don't listen...
>
> Marta: You don't like your new form...?
>
> Omi: No. I just don't like the people...
>
> (Omi, pupil in 8C)

Although Omi told me that he was unhappy after having been moved out, teachers failed to acknowledge this. Allowing pupils to be in certain forms because they had friends there was a privilege held only by a few of the pupils. Certainly, not by those considered disrupt*ive* or 'at risk'.

To summarise, pupils from 7B were not too sure about why they had been split up. Some saw issues of discipline and control as playing an important role, whilst others pointed out to a particular conflict between pupils of different ethnic origins. The pupils who were allowed to stay in 8B were the happiest with the change, arguing that there was now a better learning atmosphere. Significantly, the process of splitting 7B helped reinforce pupils' identities in terms of behaviour, fixing on certain pupils the problems of discipline in the form. On the one hand, those who stayed in 7/8B saw their misbehaviour being downplayed. On the other, the negative reputations of pupils who were moved out of the form were further reinforced.

4.4 *Conclusions*

Processes of selection in education underwent significant transformation since the *Education Act 1944*, which is said to have established the basis for a selective educational system in England (Barber, 1994; Lowe, 1992; Simon, 1991).

Nowadays, rather than crude forms of selection, such as the expansion of grammar schools, or streaming within schools, the Labour Government has been encouraging a supposedly softer and more flexible approach: setting pupils for particular subjects within a comprehensive school system. This has generally been referred to as the 'modern comprehensive principle' (Labour Party, 1997). However, and as I illustrated throughout this chapter, this approach has not truly addressed inequalities in education. Setting pupils from an early age is not likely to reduce the achievement gap between different groups of pupils, limiting instead some pupils' opportunities at a later age.

In relation to setting, I argued that, at the school under study, teachers' practices disadvantaged pupils of some ethnic origins. This was through the disproportionate allocation to the lower academic sets in Science of those receiving support for *English as an Additional Language*. Moreover, decisions on the allocation of pupils into set groups were to a significant extent based on subjective criteria such as perceptions of attitudes and behaviour. These were seen at least as equally important as academic attainment, being teachers' interpretation of pupils' attitudes that decided future educational pathways. As I had argued in Chapter 3, such criteria positioned pupils of certain ethnic origins at risk of being seen as disrupt*ive* or as having a 'bad attitude', closing down educational opportunities.

'Ability', in this way, was inextricably bound up with notions of behaviour. The case of splitting 7/8B is particularly revealing. Teachers' accounts offer a variety of reasons, including the original failure to establish a good 'mixed ability' and issues around a conflict between black and Turkish pupils. An underlying theme (which became more prominent as the fieldwork progressed) focused on control and discipline *per se*. This was also the major factor identified by pupils.

In relation to the rearrangements of forms in Year 7, it is interesting to note that, although teachers unanimously agreed that the change had been a success, pupils were less certain. Some said their behaviour had improved but others (especially those moved to different forms) felt isolated and ignored.

Their negative reputations had been reinforced and they had a strong sense that the school's interests lay elsewhere.

In the next two chapters, I will explore further the complex series of factors affecting pupils' growing sense of themselves *as pupils*. In Chapter 5, I will look at several possibilities in theorising the formation of schooling identities, and in Chapter 6, I will use four case studies to illustrate the complexity of identity construction in contemporary comprehensive schools.

5

Theorising Pupil Identities

In this chapter, the focus of study shifts onto pupils. I begin by looking at ethnographic studies within the Sociology of Education that explored pupils' adaptations to schooling and the formation of identities, as informed by social class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. My aim is to sketch out the different theoretical approaches that influenced other ethnographies in this field.

Early studies on pupils' adaptations to schooling tended to look at the effects of school organisation in shaping their attitudes and behaviours in school. Within these, some were also concerned in exploring the role of wider social structures, in particular social class. In the late 1960s, a research programme within the Sociology of Education focused on academic differentiation in schools and elaborated what is sometimes referred to as differentiation-polarisation theory (cf. Hammersley, 1985). Three studies are generally seen as constituting the basis for this theoretical understanding of pupils' adaptations to school. These are the ethnographies of Hargreaves (1967), Lacey (1970) and Ball (1981), which I look at in the first section.

Another classic way in which pupils' adaptations were analysed was through the reworking of Merton's typology (1957), which positions pupils into categories relating to institutional goals and means. Woods's (1979) was perhaps one of the most influential works in the Sociology of Education using this approach, in that he added complexity and movement to the model. I focus then in more detail on Sewell's work (1997). His is a contemporary example of the reworking of Merton's typology to account for the formation of ethnic, gender and sexual identities, whilst drawing on a wider range of theoretical perspectives. This is explored in the second section.

Finally, I shift to the conceptualisation of identity and difference that some designate by differentialism. The theoretical accounts of this approach 'have been important in moving beyond social reproduction models that assume that individuals are unitary racialized subjects occupying predictable power positions' (Mac an Ghaill, 1999, p. 45). Drawing on insights from the post-structuralist critique, critical cultural studies, feminism and psychoanalysis, this approach conceives identity as being fluid, flexible, always incomplete and constantly negotiated (cf. Hall, 1992). I look particularly at two ethnographic studies (Mac an Ghaill, 1994 and Connolly, 1998) that explored the construction of ethnic, gender and sexual identities in contemporary schooling. These studies grounded the differentialist approach whilst also exploring the role of school as an institution that maintains power relations, thus circumscribing how pupils construct their identities (cf. Mac an Ghaill, 1999).

I conclude the chapter by considering the usefulness of previous theorising in this area to explore the complex processes associated with identity formation in contemporary schooling. These processes will be explored in detail in the next chapter, through the case studies of four pupils at Greenfield Comprehensive.

5.1 *Differentiation-polarisation theory*

Many authors have conducted studies on the effects of school organisation on pupils' attitudes and behaviour. The early exploratory studies of Hargreaves (1967), Lacey (1970) and Ball (1981) in this area can be seen as part of a research programme in the Sociology of Education that elaborated the ideas referred to as differentiation-polarisation theory, and which Hammersley (1985)[39] summarised as follows:

> This theory claims that if pupils are differentiated according to an academic-behavioural standard, for example by being streamed or banded, their attitudes to that standard will become polarized. In particular, those given the lowest rankings will reject it and the values it embodies. (p. 247)

All the three studies mentioned shared this idea. The studies of Colin Lacey (1970) and David Hargreaves (1967) emerged from a common research project

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[39] In this paper, Hammersley (1985) brings together these three studies attempting to theorise the descriptive insights brought by the authors.

at the Department of Anthropology and Sociology of the University of Manchester. Ball's study (1981) drew on these in significant ways. I now briefly address separately the contributions of each one of the authors to the differentiation-polarisation theory.

5.1.1 Hargreaves: differentiation in a Secondary Modern

Hargreaves (1967) conducted his study at Lumley Secondary Modern School, a school for boys in an industrial area of the North of England. He studied four streamed groups in Year 4 (now equivalent to Year 10), 4A being the highest stream and 4D the lowest. The choice of this year group was justified by arguing that this is the point in pupils' school careers where differentiation and polarisation are more visible. Broadly, Hargreaves concluded that pupils in different streams develop different attitudes towards school and teachers, as a result of factors related to the school organisation and their home background. In particular, he argued that academic differentiation, through the allocation of pupils into different streams and arrangements in timetables, contributed to the differentiation of their school subcultures. Pupils' friendships, attendance at school clubs, and general values reflected the stream they attended. At Lumley, pupils in the higher streams tended to hang around with other pupils of the same stream and showed support for teachers' authority and school rules. Pupils in the lower streams, on the other hand, were less engaged in the school's extra-curricular activities, and valued behaviours, styles, and attitudes that opposed those of the boys in the higher stream. Hargreaves argued thus that the system of academic differentiation at Lumley Secondary contributed to the polarisation of pupils' subcultures. Most pupils were either in the 'academic' subculture or in the 'deliquescent' one[40], and had polarised attitudes towards school (the former being seen as pro-school and the latter as anti-school). For the 'deliquescent' pupils, the rejection of the 'academic' subculture that deprived them of status in those terms was replaced with an alternative culture that valued leaving the school to become workers, which could redefine their roles as adults. This allowed them to engage more openly in activities that they valued, such as smoking and drinking. The 'academic' boys, on the contrary, derived their status from their academic success. Hence, they enjoyed the rewards of conforming to

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[40] Hargreaves (1967) also found pupils who did not conform to these subcultures, namely 'academic' pupils in the lower streams and 'deliquescent' pupils in the higher stream. However, he argued that these were mostly exceptions.

school and teachers' values in things such as being appointed as prefects or selected to school trips and holidays.

Home factors facilitated pupils' adherence to the values of one of these subcultures. Hargreaves saw the school culture as the embodiment of middle-class values, which helped the 'academic' boys in developing attitudes perceived as positive. Teachers, who represented those middle-class values and were generally supportive of the streaming system, also played a role in the polarisation of pupils' subcultures. Firstly, they tended to have different expectations of pupils according to the stream they attended. This involved not only high expectations of pupils in the higher stream in terms of academic work, but also of their behaviour and attitudes. Consequently, the higher stream did not necessarily comprise the most 'intelligent' pupils, but did include those with values that were more 'academic'. Secondly, the polarised attitudes of pupils in the higher and lower streams served to crystallise their initial expectations and thus to reinforce differences between them. Thus, different teacher's expectations of pupils according to the stream they attended and the ensuing polarisation in pupils' subcultures were translated into different academic trajectories. Hargreaves supported the view that 'the streaming system is self-validating in that it to some extent manufactures the differences on which is justified by teachers' (Blishen, 1963, quoted by Hargreaves, 1967, p. 190).

Hargreaves's (1967) study was important in that it explored the relationship between the formal organisation of the school, in particular academic differentiation through streaming, and pupils' attitudes to the values that the school promotes. However, as Hammersley (1985) suggested, the choice of Lumley Secondary Modern did not allow arguing that polarisation and anti-school attitudes emerged only in the school, rather than before. This is because the school population was mainly composed of pupils who had been previously labelled as failures.

5.1.2 Lacey: the emergence of polarisation in a Grammar school

Lacey's (1970) study was thus particularly insightful, in that he studied a selective grammar school, and therefore was able to build on Hargreaves's findings. The boys attending this high status and very selective grammar school, Lacey (1970) argued, 'used to play the 'best pupil' role in their juniors schools and thought of themselves as grammar school pupils' (p. xv). Besides,

Lacey also studied in detail an express form comprised of those considered the best pupils in the school.

At Hightown Grammar, organisational factors relating to academic differentiation, through the allocation of pupils into different streams that restricted the possibilities of interactions with pupils in other streams, resulted in the polarisation of pupils' attitudes. Those pupils with better chances to succeed were more likely to adhere to the system of school values which promoted academic achievement and 'good behaviour', these being seen as characteristic of middle-class values.

Lacey's study was also concerned with documenting how streaming reinforced differences in social class background. In particular, he showed that middle-class families tended to possess the cultural resources to intervene in school decisions about their children's educational careers. This was achieved by parents' successful manipulation of the school's pedagogic ideologies. Although Lacey's study generally supported the association of social class background with school success, he also explored negative cases. He used the examples of a working-class and a middle-class boy, whose progress in school contradicted his expectations, namely that the middle-class boy would be more successful. He used these examples to show the relative autonomy of the system of social relations of the school in relation to wider forces (in this case, social class).

Having studied the forms under study for almost four years, Lacey (1970) suggested that the development of an anti-group subculture was visible from the second year, and more marked in pupils' third and fourth years at Hightown Grammar[41]. By the fourth year, elements of this anti-group subculture included 'hair styles, dress, interest in records and 'pop' stars, and activities such as dancing and frequenting coffee bars' (Lacey, 1970, p. 119). Lacey also argued that pupils who rejected the school system of values did not necessarily replace it with an anti-group subculture. Some pupils were merely isolated. Even those who embraced that subculture did not necessarily contest the school values system on every occasion, as those who adhered to these values were sometimes seen misbehaving. Lacey argued that this was an attempt of pupils to keeping their popularity, which was generally lost when in their peers' eyes they were seen as being in the extreme of each of the

[41] In this respect, Hammersley (1985) argued that there is the possibility that polarisation is a process that is initiated when pupils are 12 or 13 years old, when peer pressure starts building.

subcultures, anti-school or pro-school. In spite of this, teachers' practices in the classrooms pressured pupils to conform to expectations of their behaviour:

> If a pupil with a good reputation misbehaves in an insulting or unruly manner, the impact on the teacher is very great indeed. For it calls into question a whole fabric of assumptions about the class which has served as a basis for action over perhaps a long period of time. (Lacey, 1970, p. 179)

This meant that the misbehaviour of pupils with a good reputation in school was sometimes overlooked. Consequently, teachers reinforced polarisation in pupils' attitudes and behaviour. Usually, this was by associating academic performance with behaviour, an assumption which the idea of differentiation-polarisation relies on. About this, Lacey (1970) argued:

> *Teachers well disposed towards a well behaved boy* tend to encourage, praise and even raise marks as a reward for trying hard ('halo' effect).
> *Teachers ill disposed towards a badly behaved boy* tend to criticise, punish and reduce marks as a further method of punishment. (p. 82)

Lacey tested these assumptions at Hightown Grammar, and concluded that:

> no individual with a 'bad' behaviour[42] grade got a 'good' performance grade, while four out of 90 boys got a 'good' behaviour grade and were bad performers (p. 85).

This association between academic achievement and behaviour is discussed in more detail in the conclusions to this chapter.

In summary, Lacey's (1970) study further elaborated Hargreaves's (1967) findings, suggesting that differentiation-polarisation also exists in contexts where pupils were previously well disposed towards the system of values of the school. This was a process happening at Hightown Grammar as pupils moved through school from the end of their first year. Generally, the resulting polarised subcultures reflected social class differences, with anti-school subcultures falling behind academically, and reworking elements and styles generally associated with the working class. The model proposed by Lacey (1970) is illustrated by the following figure:

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[42] Which he defined as 'general classroom behaviour and attitudes; politeness; attention; helpfulness; time spent in school societies and sports' (Lacey, 1970, p. 57).
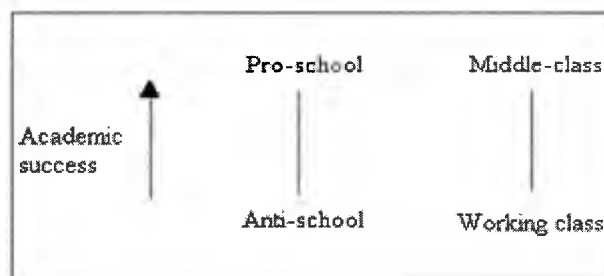
Figure 4 Class differentiation and the pro- and anti-school subcultures.
(Reproduced from Lacey, 1970, p. 187)

5.1.3 Ball: polarisation in a Comprehensive School

Stephen Ball's (1981) study of Beachside Comprehensive, although not aiming to replicate Hargreaves's (1967) and Lacey's (1970) studies, drew on them in significant ways. Ball was generally interested in understanding how the organisation of school influences the experiences of pupils. Beachside Comprehensive had recently abandoned streaming and adopted banding[43], and changed to mixed-ability teaching[44] whilst he conducted fieldwork. This allowed him drawing on the findings of the two previous studies, particularly by showing that the subcultures of pupils learning in a mixed-ability context were less polarised than in a context where academic differentiation was more obvious.

Ball studied two forms in Year 2 (currently Year 8), one in band 1 (higher) and the other in band 2 (lower). These were not similar in terms of social class intake, the form in band 1 having more pupils from middle-class homes than the form in band 2. Paying particular attention to the role of social class, Ball argued that with the school system of banding, differentiation-polarisation was at work, and increased existing social inequalities. The change to a mixed-ability system, on the other hand, reduced the polarised attitudes and behaviour of pupils. In terms of social inequalities in academic attainment, however, he concluded that these were not markedly reduced in the mixed-ability context and that pupils from lower social backgrounds were still particularly disadvantaged at school.

Ball's conceptualisation of differentiation-polarisation theory makes explicit reference to labelling theory in explaining how academic differentiation

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[43] Ireson and Hallam (2001) describe this teaching practice as follows: 'Pupils are placed in two, three or four bands on the basis of a test of their general ability. Each band contains a number of classes and pupils may be regrouped within the band for some subjects' (p. 10).

[44] In 'mixed-ability' teaching 'There is no attempt to group together pupils of similar ability. Pupils may be grouped in such a way as to achieve a range of abilities within the class. Other factors, such as social relationships, gender or ethnic composition, may form the basis for grouping' (Ireson and Hallam, 2001, p. 10).

produced polarised pupils' subcultures. Ball paid great attention to the role of teachers' perceptions and expectations of pupils in the two forms in shaping social interactions in the classroom. Pupils in band 1 form were seen as 'the fast ones', easy to teach, motivated, co-operative, and lessons with these focused mainly on the subject being taught. Band 2 form, on the other hand, had a very low status at the school, with pupils being described as slow, difficult to control and uninterested. A significant amount of time in lessons with band 2 was spent in punishing pupils or in teachers reasserting their authority. Ball (1981) went on to argue that:

> I am not suggesting that the 'label' of being band 2 in itself creates a 'deviant' identity which is the cause of the 'deviant' acts described previously. But the label of being band 2 imposes certain limitations upon the sort of social identity that may be negotiated by the band 2 pupil. When persons are subjected to a process of categorization, they are subject also to the imputations of various social identities by virtue of their membership of that category. In this case, it is an identity that involves a status-evaluation and allocation to an inferior position in the status-hierarchy of the school. (pp. 36-37)

Showing how teachers had clear expectations of band identities, Ball suggested then that in the context of the classroom, confirmation of such expectations was sought, whilst contradictions were overlooked. Therefore, the labels provided:

> a framework within which the pupil must negotiate his social identity in the school. Thus the band to which he is allocated is an important constraint upon the range of possible social identities available to him. (*id.*, p. 38)

The images that teachers held of band 2 form meant that identities such as 'brilliant pupil' would not generally be available to these pupils. However, there was some room for negotiation, at least for some pupils, particularly at the early stages of their banded schooling. This was so because, as Ball argued, differentiation and especially polarisation occurs progressively throughout secondary school. For instance, he did not find such accentuated differences between forms by the beginning of Year 1 (now Year 7), even though pupils had been allocated into bands on the basis of tests conducted by their primary schools. It was towards the end of that year, and throughout Year 2 that teachers' perceptions of, and pupils' behaviour and attitudes in the different

bands, were polarised. Ball also argued that teachers showed a differentiated treatment of the two forms, and their perceived lack of enthusiasm for band 2 form was reflected in their teaching styles and discipline management techniques. With such differentiated practices, teachers actually reinforced the existing differences in the forms from Year 1 to Year 2. Differences in pupils' pro- and anti-school subcultures became then more visible, not only in behaviour but also in attitudes to school work and teachers and in pupils' involvement in extra-curricular activities.

Elements from the differentiation polarisation theory in education were reworked and used in a number of studies on pupils' adaptations to school. The combination of the axes pro- and anti-education, and pro- and anti-school, and the resulting categories of pupils' adaptations permeates some research work in this area, even if not so neatly exposed (for example, Fuller, 1980; Mac an Ghaill, 1988). Some other authors implicitly used these within a typology that explores the acceptance or rejection of educational goals and institutional means. This will be explored in the next section.

5.2 *The reworking of Merton's typology*

Merton (1957) developed a typology of individual adaptation that was subsequently applied to the field of education, and has remained of interest to contemporary researchers. He used a functionalist approach to explore 'how the social and cultural structure generates pressure for socially deviant behaviour upon people variously located in that structure' (Merton, 1957, pp. 175-6). He was mainly concerned with understanding how such structures generate deviance, but also addressed how they lead to conformity. Merton argued that both deviance and conformity can be either functional or dysfunctional, preserving social stability or leading to social change.

The typology of adaptations he proposed is based on two elements of the cultural and social structure:

> The first consists of culturally defined goals, purposes and interests, held out as legitimate objectives for all or for diversely located members of society. (...)
>
> A second element of the cultural structure defines, regulates and controls the acceptable modes of reaching out for these goals. (Merton, 1957, pp. 186 and 187)

Merton's typology was thus devised to look at how individuals adapt to the goals and institutional norms that are imposed by social and cultural

structures. The proposed five types of adaptation are: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion, as the figure below illustrates:

Modes of Adaptation	Culture Goals	Institutionalized Means
I. *Conformity*	+	+
II. *Innovation*	+	−
III. *Ritualism*	−	+
IV. *Retreatism*	−	−
V. *Rebellion*	±	±

Figure 5 - Typology of modes of individual adaptation.
(reproduced from Merton, 1957, p. 194)

Merton's own understanding of each of the five types of adaptation proposed is summarised below:

1. *Conformity*: the most common type, as society tends to be stable. It refers to the acceptance of socially shared goals and the means to achieve them.

2. *Innovation*: the cultural emphasis on the goals is accepted, but the institutional means to achieve them is not. This occurs mostly when the possibility of achieving the goals is limited through the inequalities of the social structure, which do not grant all people with equal success in the use of the institutional means. Alternative, unofficial means are then sought to achieve the socially shared goals.

3. *Ritualism*: the cultural goals are either dismissed or played down, but there is still commitment to the institutional norms, through routinised action. As the behaviour resulting from this adaptation is permitted by the institution, it is generally not thought of as problematic.

4. *Retreatism*: this is the least common type of adaptation found by Merton. It entails rejection of both the cultural goals and the institutional means. Often, both the goals and means were previously accepted, but the individual's failed attempts at institutional success leads to dropping out. It is mostly manifest in the individual's withdrawal and quietness, and it is more a private than a collective type of adaptation.

5. *Rebellion*: there is rejection of both the cultural goals and the institutional means, but there is an attempt to replace them and modify the social structure. It often results from the perceived barriers to socially shared forms of success, and aims to create other goals and means which are perceived as more rewarding. (Merton, 1957, pp. 195-211).

Rather than seeing these as fixed categories, Merton argued that they are contextual types, and that a person's mode of adaptation might therefore change in different social spheres and situations. Therefore, the categories should not be seen as 'boxes' into which people can be assigned, but as tools that help us in understanding a range of pupils' adaptations.

There are some similarities between this proposed model with that in the differentiation-polarisation theory: the cultural goals can be read as acceptance or rejection of the value of education, and the institutionalised means as relating to pupils' positioning in relation to school rules (being pro- or anti-school). Rebellion emerges as a category of its own, characterised by ambivalence towards both (rather than the replacement of the school's goals by an alternative sub-culture, as suggested by Lacey in 1970).

5.2.1 Woods: a divided school

A well-known adaptation of Merton's typology to the field of education was carried out by Peter Woods (1979). Combining the original five-type model with the works of Goffman (1968) and Wakeford (1969). Woods's reworked model is more complex. The main categories he used are: conformity, retreatism, colonisation, intransigence and rebellion. These were further divided into subcategories, as illustrated in the following figure:

GOALS

MEANS	Indifference	Indulgence	Identification	Rejection without Replacement	Ambivalence	Rejection with Replacement
Indifference	Retreatism			Retreatism		
Indulgence		Ingratiation	Ingratiation			
Identification	Ritualism	COMPLIANCE	Compliance			
Rejection without Replacement	Retreatism			Retreatism		
Ambivalence	*Colonizatio*n				OPPORTUNISM	
Rejection with Replacement	*Intransigence*					Rebellion

(Key – Capitals: typical of early years; Italics: typical of later years; Arrows: some typical movements).

Figure 6 – Revised typology of modes of adaptation in the state secondary system.
(Reproduced from Woods, 1979, p. 78)

As the figure illustrates, Woods was concerned not only in constructing categories of modes of adaptations, but also to understand how movement between those categories occurs. Importantly, his model acknowledges that rather than accepting or rejecting institutional goals and means, a pupil might be simply indifferent or ambivalent towards those, or replace them with alternative ones. I now summarise how Woods (1979, pp. 71-77) conceived of the different modes of adaptation.

'Conformity' results from a positive attitude towards goals and means. Pupils in this category can be positioned in several sub-categories: ingratiation (pupils who generally act alone, and try to benefit from the system by ingratiating themselves with those in power); optimistic compliance (where the goals are only vaguely perceived but the pupil strongly identifies with them); instrumental compliance (conformity derives from the benefits that identifying with the goals and means might bring for the future); ritualism (where a pupil conforms to goals and means even though (s)he might not consider them very important); and opportunism (a reaction to the optimism of the first year in secondary school, and which is broadly a 'trying out' phase).

'Retreatism' is a general indifference or rejection (without replacement) of the institutional goals and means, being more common in the middle and later years of secondary schooling. As there is no replacement of goals, schooling for pupils within this mode tends to be spent finding ways of passing time and of withdrawing from the official activities of the school (listening to music or group smoking).

'Colonisation' is the mode resulting from the combination of indifference to goals and ambivalence about the means, being perhaps the most common mode of adaptation in schools, particularly in middle and later years. Partial acceptance of the official programme of the school is combined with 'working the system', such as taking turns to do homework, volunteering to some activities thus avoiding other more unpleasant. The school generally aids colonisation by defining new goals for pupils within this mode, for instance in emphasising the social aims of the curriculum for pupils in lower streams.

Pupils within the mode 'intransigence' tend to be indifferent about the institutional goals and reject the means. Often, they are part of a school sub-cultural group, displaying particular dress and hairstyles, and generally show antagonism to the school rules and rituals. This is seen as a transitory mode of adaptation, leading to 'colonisation' or 'rebellion'.

'Rebellion' involves rejection and replacement of both goals and means, and it is more common in later years of schooling. When replacement is linked with future work (for example, girls wishing to become hairdressers), much of pupils' time in school can be spend practising related activities, and even displaying a conformist attitude to the subjects that may help the materialisation of their work interests. As long as the alternative goals and means can be accommodated within the school, this mode tends to pose a lesser threat to the institution.

Exploring pupils' movements between categories, Woods argued that particular forms of adaptation prevail in certain year groups. In the early years of secondary education, the focus of my research project, he suggested that 'optimistic compliance' and 'opportunism' are the main modes of adaptation, located within 'conformity'. According to Woods, pupils entering a secondary school for the first time are generally optimistic about, and positively identify with, the school, and therefore tend to comply with goals and means ('optimistic compliance'). From their second year, pupils are more likely to go through a phase of 'trying out', starting to experiment with other types of adaptation, whilst still conforming to the basic demands of school ('opportunism'). Thus, modes within conformity would characterise most of pupils' adaptations in their early school years.

Woods was also influenced by the works of Hargreaves (1967) and Lacey (1970), namely by the differentiation-polarisation theory. He argued that ultimately, all modes of adaptation converge either to 'conformity' or 'dissonance' (Woods, 1979, p. 78). But significantly, Woods argued that his is not a bi-polar model, in that pupils in the examination stream may become 'dissonant', and vice-versa. This is due to 'secondary adjustments', a concept proposed by Goffman (1968) in his work on total institutions. This form of adjustment refers to when pupils reject and stand apart from the role that the institution prescribed them (unlike 'primary' adjustments, where pupils try to fit in the roles and expectations).

Woods's work was important in that he brought complexity and movement to a model that merely places pupils into static 'boxes'. However, it still falls short of the complexity of current schooling identities. In particular, pupils' attitudes to the institutional goals and means are not so simplistic as it is assumed in Woods's model. As I will show in the next chapter, many pupils in Year 7 at Greenfield Comprehensive were generally well disposed towards the goals of education and the means to achieve it. Importantly, varied social

factors (such as ethnicity, gender and social class) constrained the range of categories made available to them.

5.2.2 Sewell: black masculinities

More recently, other authors have reworked Merton's model. Sewell (1997), for instance, used the typology to explore pupils' adaptations to school, trying to account for the role of ethnicity and gender in the construction of pupil identities. It is thus on his work that I will focus more fully[45].

Sewell's ethnographic study was carried out in Township school, a comprehensive school for boys situated in one of the richest areas of England. The school was attended by a working-class population and had the characteristics of a tough inner-city school. Despite having a similar pattern of achievement and better attendance than their white peers, the African-Caribbean boys at Township were over-represented amongst the excluded pupils. Importantly, they were also seen as the cause for the schools' standards being 'well below the national average' (Sewell, 1997, p. 29) in terms of GCSE results.

Sewell used the same categories in Merton's typology (1957), although attempting to use them in a less structured fashion. The categories did not merely reflect how pupils were seen to adapt to school's goals and means, but intended to illustrate how the pupils were positioned by others (teachers and peers) and positioned themselves in relation to those. Also, he explored how ethnicity and gender shaped pupils' adaptations. He thus used four categories[46] to describe how African-Caribbean boys were positioned and positioned themselves within the context of school.

The 'conformists' were the largest pupils' category (41%) amongst African Caribbean boys at Township School. Sewell suggested that 'conformist' pupils lived the tension emerging from the contradictions between the values promoted by the school and their 'fictive kinship', which refers to a system of imagined, shared values between all African Americans, regardless of social class, gender, and sexuality (Fordham, 1988, p. 56). Thus, Sewell argued that 'conformist' pupils tried to break from the collective, particularly from their black peers who they considered 'bad people', and pursued academic success as an individualistic stance. They did not necessarily reject the behaviours

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[45] In his 1997 book, Sewell overemphasised some aspects of pupils' adaptations, namely 'rebel' pupils' phallocentric responses (cf. Sewell, 1998). I will thus take into account in my discussion how he later presented that typology (cf. Sewell and Majors, 2001).

[46] Sewell did not find students that could be positioned as 'ritualists'.

and attitudes of non-conformist pupils. Rather, they worked at a compromise to comply with school rules and to keep their friends. However, this was often limited by negative teachers' expectations, which positioned these pupils within 'an African-Caribbean challenge to school authority' (Gillborn, 1990). Their individualistic stance was also challenged by their peers, particular by 'rebels', who used sexuality to charge them for their commitment to school values and goals. This was evident in examples of name-calling, whereby conformist pupils were called 'pussy' because of their engaging to school work.

The second largest category was that of the 'innovators' (35%), who accepted the goals of schooling but rejected its means. Arguing that the origins of their pro-education values came mostly from parents, Sewell suggested that these pupils could not cope with the schooling process. They believed that education had an instrumental value, but felt that school did not work for them. In relation to the 'conformists', the 'innovators' were less successful in avoiding conflict with teachers because they replaced it by an 'ideology of phallocentric supermen' (Sewell, 1997, p. 79). This ideology was based on the development of a black male anti-school subculture, characterised by aggressiveness and opposition to school norms (such as in the replacement of the school uniform with baseball hats and hoods). Sewell argued that this was a reaction to schooling and particularly to what they perceived as being an irrelevant curriculum, poor teaching, and racist and exclusionary practices that did not allow them to achieve as well as their white peers.

Pupils in the 'retreatist' category were the smallest in numbers (6%). They rejected the goals and means of school. Nevertheless, these pupils often accommodated negative teachers' expectations, and did not create an alternative culture of resistance. These students were particularly successful in going unnoticed, and therefore in avoiding conflict with teachers. They resisted school through subversion. Work and school rules were not openly contested or rejected by the 'retreatists'; rather, they pretended to be committed to school. This was seen in examples of pupils avoiding work walking down the corridors, pretending to be on an errand for a teacher. Sewell argues that this category was mostly open to African-Caribbean pupils who were considered to have Special Educational Needs or were seen as unthreatening, which were very few of those studied.

The 'rebels' (18%) developed an anti-school culture that replaced a school culture which did not accommodate their expectations. Sewell (1997) subdivided this category in two: the 'hedonists' and the 'black nationalists'. He

explained the responses of 'hedonists' as an internalised oppression resulting from the sexualised way in which black males are marginalized from society (hooks, 1992). Thus, the 'hedonists' were seen to claim the power they did not have through an exaggerated phallocentricity (Sewell and Majors, 2001). These students tended to stereotype black males as being hypersexual, and to act similarly, therefore reproducing the same stereotypes that they were meant to be contesting. Other forms of 'rebellion' were found at Township, namely what Sewell (1997) originally called 'black nationalists'. These were students who contested school on a political level. They were particularly critical about the usefulness of school knowledge and the instrumental value of education. Sewell used the example of a boy who found an alternative source of income working as a barber, looking at the black community for the knowledge and guidance necessary to achieve success. He argued that this was not an individual stance, being rather rooted in the pursuit of knowledge as a collective action.

Sewell's work (1997) is an attempt to use some elements from post-structuralism, but still rooted in a traditional approach to the understanding of pupils' identities, as the use of the typology he reworked suggests. In fact, his analysis moves uneasily between several types of approach. As Mirza (1999) argued, Sewell shifted from focusing on institutional racism and teachers' attitudes (where these are seen as surviving their daily lives by blaming pupils and their backgrounds for the failings of the school), to an approach that sees students as active agents consciously choosing their identities, finally ending up celebrating aspects of the black culture (such as an exaggerated phallocentrism) that he had attempted to deconstruct throughout the book. Furthermore, his excessive focus on the 'rebels' helps in reproducing the very same negative stereotypes on black youth that he had proposed to contest.

Some authors have brought new and more complex ways of looking at the same subject, and these will be addressed below.

5.3 *Drawing on post-structuralism*

In this section, I look at the research work carried out by Mac an Ghaill (1994) and Connolly (1998). These two pieces of research illustrate the complexity of identity formation in contemporary schooling. In particular, the authors argued that the school makes available a limited range of schooling identities,

with pupils improvising within these. They explored how pupils' gender, sexual and ethnic identities are shaped in articulation with their learner identities. Whilst much of previous work tended to look at pupils' adaptations in terms of their attitudes and behaviours towards school rules and values, research on schooling identities offers a wider focus on the process of becoming a gendered, sexualised and racialised subject within the school as an institution that compels differentiation on its pupils.

5.3.1 Mac an Ghaill: the making of men

Máirtín Mac an Ghaill's (1994) ethnographic study *The Making of Men* was an important contribution to the understanding of pupils' adaptations to schooling, and of schools as privileged sites for the social construction and regulation of gender and sexual identities. His main study on teachers' and students' heterosexual male identities and on young women's experiences and views of masculinities was conducted over the period of three years in a state secondary school, Parnell School. This was a Midlands inner-city school composed by pupils who came mainly from a working-class background.

The focus of *The Making of Men* was 'the interplay between schooling, masculinities and sexualities' (p. 3), his main argument being that:

> schools alongside other institutions attempt to administer, regulate and reify unstable sex/gender categories. Most particularly, this administration, regulation and reification of sex/gender boundaries is institutionalised through the interrelated material, social and discursive practices of staffroom, classroom and playground microcultures. (p. 9)

In particular, Mac an Ghaill looked at the conditions under which schools construct relations of gender/sex domination and subordination within and across school micro-cultures. To achieve this purpose, he drew on Connell's concept of *hegemonic masculinity*[47], which 'is characterised by heterosexuality, power, authority, aggression and technical competence' (Connell, 1987, p. 12), and explored the conditions under which such masculinity is actively constructed and reconstructed and becomes ascendant in contemporary schooling. Mac an Ghaill saw the shaping of gender/sex identities as a dynamic process, which is continuously constructed and regulated both externally and internally, by teachers and the pupils themselves.

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[47] This was reworked from Gramsci's (1971) concept of *hegemony*.

To study the construction of masculinities in school, Mac an Ghaill analysed teachers and pupils' perspectives on schooling. In relation to teachers, he explored their ideologies within debates on educational policy and school management. Most of the teaching staff at Parnell School was strongly supportive of the *Educational Reform Act 1988*, an enterprise culture in school and vocationalism in the curriculum. Mac an Ghaill argued that ideological changes in education were leading to the remasculinisation of the teaching profession, privileging rationality, technical competence, competition and control. At Parnell School, this was reflected in the allocation of high-achieving (white) male pupils to the high-status routes of technological and commercial areas, shaping middle-class versions of heterosexual masculinity based on academic individualism, competition and careerism. Conversely, the pupils in the lowest sets were allocated to low-status and practical areas that reflected the traditional masculinity of manual work. Thus, Mac an Ghaill (1994) saw academic differentiation as a crucial element in the construction of different masculinities. This was an aspect that became increasingly significant in his research project, and that had been previously explored by Connell (1989), who had argued that:

> the differentiation of masculinities occurs in relation to a school curriculum which organises knowledge hierarchically and sorts students into an academic hierarchy. By institutionalising academic failure via competitive grading and streaming, the school forces differentiation on the boys. But masculinity is organised on the macro scale – around social power. Social power in terms of access to higher education, entry to professions, command of communication, is being delivered to the boys who are academic 'successes'. The reaction of the 'failed' is likely to be a claim to other sources of power, even other definitions of masculinity. Sporting prowess, physical aggression, sexual conquest may do. (p. 295)

At Parnell School, Mac an Ghaill found that academic differentiation and the accompanying specificity of teacher-pupil social interactions in each route ('academic' or 'non-academic') were decisive in producing different versions of masculinity. This idea draws on Lacey's (1970) work on differentiation-polarisation. However, Mac an Ghaill argued that at his school the relationship between position in the academic hierarchy and the formation of masculinities was much more complex than both Lacey and Connell had described. Firstly, he argued that the boys he studied did not always perceive their schooling as

'failure'. Secondly, he saw the introduction of a vocationalist curriculum at Parnell School as resulting in the redefinition of 'success' and 'failure' and of the masculinities available to pupils.

To look at formation of pupil identities, Mac an Ghaill developed a typology that placed pupils' peer groups around four main categories, according to how they positioned themselves in relation to school values and rules. Inherent to each one of these categories was a different way of perceiving schooling and its relation to the construction of gender/sexual identities.

The 'Macho Lads' were working-class pupils located in the bottom sets at Parnell School, and their negative responses to schooling began crystallising during Year 9, when they were around 13 years old. They were united in their critical view of teachers' authority and rejection of school work, and were the most visible anti-school subculture. It was a subculture based on traditional macho sexual identities, and their stance was seen by Mac an Ghaill as an open challenge to the mental nature of school work that they perceived as feminine, and from which they wanted to distance themselves. Their social practices included 'looking after your mates', 'acting tough', 'having a laugh', 'looking smart' and 'having a good time' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p. 56). Mac an Ghaill saw the emerging masculinities as resulting from interactions with teachers and authority, mediated by their academic positioning by the school. It was against the way in which they were positioned as infantile and alienated that the 'Macho Lads' constructed masculinities based on conflict with authority. Teachers assumed the main function of policing their displays of working-class masculinities (Walkerdine, 1990), with the school's management creating new regulations in order to control them (such as banning clothing styles seen as anti-school). This accentuated the already conflictive relationships with teachers, and reinforced their developing masculinities based on 'collective strategies of counter-interrogation, contestation and survival' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p. 58).

The 'Academic Achievers' were positive towards the academic curriculum, and believed that school qualifications would help them to achieve social mobility. This did not mean that their responses were simply positive to school. Indeed, they were critical of teacher practices, such as infantilism or inconsistency in the application of disciplinary procedures. Nevertheless, they were provided with considerably more social and material resources, which resulted from teachers' high expectations and their being allocated in the top stream. Mac an Ghaill (1994) suggested that this enabled this group of boys to

develop an 'institutionally confident student masculinity' (p. 60) which deserved teachers' respect. By Year 10, they became considerably involved in Arts and Drama, subjects traditionally taken by girls, which led them to be seen as 'effeminate' both by teachers and their peers. This was a positioning that was subverted, with the 'Academic Achievers' improvising a masculinity that was developed both against femininity and other masculinities. It was a masculinity based on intellectuality and expertise, opposed to feminine emotionality, but also opposed to the physicality of the 'Macho Lads'.[48] Their masculinity further articulated with social class, in that they distanced themselves from their middle-class successful peers, who they considered snobs but whose self-confidence in relation to knowledge they desired. They also dissociated from the 'Macho Lads' on the basis of class, by accepting traditional divisions of labour (mental and manual, identifying with the former).

The 'New Enterprisers' developed a masculinity that, according to Mac an Ghaill (1994) resulted from their enrolment in the high-status technological and commercial subject areas of the vocational curriculum introduced at Parnell School. They developed school masculinities mainly based on rationality and careerism, which could be seen in their involvement in mini-enterprise schemes and the valorisation of curriculum reforms that promoted high-status business and technological education, which would better prepare them for a competitive labour market. They accepted teachers' authority, although being critical in how they dealt with the 'Macho Lads', worrying that the school's reputation could be damaged.

The 'Real Englishmen' were the only middle-class peer group and, contrasting to the other school subcultures, they were all white. Like the 'Macho Lads', who they nevertheless despised for their physicality, this group rejected teachers' authority. They positioned themselves as a cultural elite, and thus conflict with teachers assumed particular contours, with teachers finding it more difficult to respond to their verbally sophisticated arguments than to the more open challenges of the 'Macho Lads'. Their masculinity was based on the values of 'honesty, being different, individuality and autonomy, which they claimed were absent from middle-class culture' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p. 66). These values produced ambivalence in how they saw the 'Macho Lads': these were both admired for being an embodiment of 'proletarian

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[48] Nevertheless, the 'Academic Achievers' operated in a way that perpetuated traditional gender categories (Mac an Ghaill, 1994), with females being seen as essentially restricted to the level of the emotional.

authenticity' (p. 66) and despised for their aggressiveness which was directed towards themselves. Their publicly displaying 'effortless achievement' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p. 67) also distanced them from the working-class 'Academic Achievers' and 'New Enterprisers', who were seen as working hard. Positioning themselves as a cultural elite, they acted in ways to suggest they possessed 'natural' intellectual talent.

Mac an Ghaill (1994) argued that this typology is to be used as a heuristic device, to help us in analysing the variety and complexity of pupils' identities, and should not be seen as 'fixed unitary categories' (p. 54). However, as Youdell and Gillborn (1996) pointed out, the use of categories in Mac an Ghaill's study sits uncomfortably with his post-structuralist approach. The categories presented account for a range of identities, but importantly omit 'ordinary' students. In spite of this, Mac an Ghaill did not use these categories as being universal, and significantly categories emerged from fieldwork rather than being imposed on the data collected. They reflected how particular peer groups at Parnell School developed their masculinities in relation to a differentiating curriculum.

Despite such a range of pupils' perspectives on schooling, Mac an Ghaill found important common cultural elements, namely, compulsory heterosexuality, misogyny and homophobia. He argued that it was the practices of the pupils' sub-cultures themselves that served to police compliance to these cultural elements. The ethnographic data supports the argument that these cultural elements were pervasive in pupils' discourses and regulated their actions, notwithstanding the ambivalence they carried.

Mac an Ghaill also looked at the interplay of masculinities and ethnicities, suggesting that it provided further conditions for the shaping of diverse gender/sexual identities. At Parnell School, black pupils' sub-cultural resistance through displays of masculinity was seen as intending to contest both the degendered and deracialised discourses of the school. Mac an Ghaill exemplified this with black pupils using sexuality to dismiss the success of their high-achieving peers:

> The Black Macho Lads were particularly vindictive to African-Caribbean academic students who overtly distanced themselves from their anti-school strategies. In response, the Black Macho Lads labelled them as 'batty men' (a homophobic comment). As Mercer and Julien (1988: 112) point out, a further contradiction in subordinated Black masculinities occurs, 'when Black men

subjectively internalise and incorporate aspects of the dominant definitions of masculinity in order to contest the conditions of dependency and powerlessness which racism and racial oppression enforce'. (pp. 87-88)

Conceiving of racism as a contingent variable, Mac an Ghaill highlighted the complexity and the unpredictable nature of inter-ethnic relations operating within the context of school. In particular, he contested that white racism is a homogeneous social phenomenon, illustrating a variety of white pupils' responses to issues of 'race'. Thus, whilst the 'Academic Achievers' and the 'New Enterprisers' adopted a liberal approach, the white Macho Lads tended to embrace a proletarian view that blamed black people for mass unemployment. Mac an Ghaill also illustrated the historical contingency of inter-ethnic relations and the specificity of generational discourses, as the following dialogue with two white Macho Lads illustrates:

John: I used to be a right little Nazi.

M.M.: How come?

John: Probably my dad the most. He just hates blacks and Asians. He always has. My mom is always telling him not to be so bad.

M.M.: So how did you change?

John: I don't know. You hang around with them all the time. Like the ones in our gang, they'd do anything for you. I mean we just stick together. We always get into trouble together. Like the teachers always pick on us, so we stick together more.

M.M.: What about the black and Asian kids you don't hang around with?

John: Well, they're all the same as the white pricks, sucking up to the teachers. You couldn't trust one of them. Our Asian mates say themselves that the Asians are the worst, the slyest. But they go their way and we go ours, en it?

Mark: Some of the bad nutters here are the Asian kids. But really they're just as bad as the white kids in the bottom classes and the blacks. They just stand around threatening people, especially the little kids. They have to be tough all the time causing trouble, you know. But probably a main difference here is that there's always been more Asians in the top classes. So you hang around with them more. We've got more in common, to talk about and that. The bright ones have more in common. It's not really about colour. Like we're all friends in the top set and hang round together. (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, pp. 83-84)

As the dialogue suggests, ethnicity is not necessarily the prevalent aspect in the process of identification between pupils in contemporary schooling. At Parnell School, discourses on 'race' articulated with, and cut across, those on masculinities.

The large scope of Mac an Ghaill's study sacrificed a deeper analysis of how discourses on ethnicity serve to regulate male sexual identities. Nevertheless, I consider that his analysis of schooling masculinities, as being improvised and constantly negotiated, is very useful to our understanding of how contemporary identities are constructed in school. Mac an Ghaill dealt with, rather than ignored, the fragility of schooling identities, supporting Hall's (1992) contention that identity is *becoming*, rather than being. Although the range of masculinities he presented was limited, he acknowledged that they were not the only ones circulating at Parnell School. And arguably, those of pupils from ethnic minority origins were sacrificed in the study. Importantly, the next study I look at (Connolly, 1998), took this into consideration.

5.3.2 Connolly: race and gender relations in a primary school

Paul Connolly's (1998) study with five- and six-year olds in this area is particularly important precisely because it included the perspectives of younger children, and successfully presents them as competent social actors who appropriated and reworked wider discourses on 'race' in the construction of their gender identities. The ethnographic study was conducted with three forms in Reception/Year 1 at East Avenue, an inner-city, multi-ethnic primary school, and broadly it attempted to:

> understand the nature of racism in young children's lives and the particular ways in which it comes to influence their gender identities. Moreover, it is concerned with identifying the particular social processes and practices that lie behind the production and reproduction of racist discourses among the children. (Connolly, 1998, p. 7)

To study this, Connolly drew on four sociological concepts, namely *discourse* (Foucault, 1977), *habitus, capital* and *field* (Bourdieu, 1977). Connolly used Foucault's notion of *discourse* as:

> representing the social construction of language and knowledge, organising the ways in which we think about the world and what we come to regard as appropriate, valid and true. (Connolly, 1998, p. 11)

He was particularly interested in looking at the *formative power* of discourses on 'race' in the school and beyond in shaping the way in which children understand the social world, interact with others, and construct their sense of identity. Acknowledging the multiplicity of discourses, Connolly takes into account how 'race', gender and sexuality articulate, each one's importance varying with the specific context. It was in trying to account for agency in children's lives that he used Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, which is a set of durable predispositions acquired with lived experience that helps us in making sense of, and acting on, the social world (Bourdieu, 1977) This concept stresses the possibility of choice, within a limited extent. Connolly argued that discourses of 'race' provide us with those predispositions according to which we read the social world as being divided into discrete racial and ethnic groups, and act accordingly. Within our *habitus*, we strive for acquiring or maintaining particular forms of capital. Bourdieu distinguished four forms of *capital*: economic (in a Marxist sense), cultural ('legitimate' knowledge), social (network of influences) and symbolic (resulting from any of the previous three, legitimised by others) (Bourdieu, 1986). Forms of capital vary across fields. A *field* is a social arena within which struggles for capital take place, the boundaries of which can be loose, with those with capital trying to cross boundaries (*id.*) Connolly's own work looked at discourses on 'race' in the fields of national politics, the local community, the school as an institution and of the masculine and feminine peer-group relations.

In order to illustrate how children constructed their identities, Connolly grouped them according to their ethnicity and gender. Thus, he presented separate analyses for black boys, South Asian boys, black girls and South Asian girls. Arguably, these are distinctions that our own *habitus* predisposes us to identify. However, rather than making each of this group correspond to a type of response to school (as Mac an Ghaill, 1988, can be read as presenting) for each of these groups Connolly presented a range of identities being constructed. This is what I now look at.

In relation to the black boys, Connolly found at East Avenue the over-punishment reported in relation to older pupils (for example, Gillborn, 1990; Mac an Ghaill, 1988). This group of pupils was generally seen by teachers as presenting more disciplinary problems than any other, a perception not only openly reproduced, but also through the personalised discourses on black boys that directed attention to their behaviour. By describing more often these

pupils as disruptive or aggressive, although no direct mention to 'race' was made, teachers helped in constructing black pupils as being prone to disciplinary problems. This often resulted in confrontation with teachers, thus reinforcing black boys' reputation in school as being troublesome and bad, and quintessentially masculine. Within this racialised context, and in terms of their gender identities, it was in the field of masculine peer-group relations that they seemed to be more visibly negotiated, with black boys struggling for forms of capital associated with masculinity. Traditional masculinities based on competence co-existed along locally reworked gender identities that drew on popular culture. A street-wise physicality and possession of adult knowledge (talking about girls and sex, being up-to-date in pop music, or competently cussing) were associated with masculinity and thus forms of cultural capital that the black boys were struggling for. Connolly argued that notions of visibility and territory were crucial to understand the field of peer-group relations. It was within their visibility as a group and their territorial conflict with white boys (over the white girls with whom they played) that the 'Bad Boys' constructed their masculinities. This was in sharp contrast to some of the other (high-achieving) black boys, who avoided the more public spaces where they would be more visible. Connolly also used a case study of a black boy who associated with white peers (the only in his form) to illustrate the construction of a variety of masculinities amongst this group.

Connolly contested a somewhat generalised idea that South Asian pupils' sub-cultures are invisible in school. In relation to boys, he suggested that teachers' discourses on these pupils helped in constructing South Asian boys as effeminate: being small, conformist and hard working were crucial images in the social construction of their femininity. At East Avenue, Connolly suggested that this resulted in South Asian pupils often being verbally and physically attacked by their black and white male peers. The responses found amongst the South Asian boys varied: some withdrew to more private spaces where they could engage in alternative leisure activities, whereas others tried to negotiate a space within the public sphere of the playground risking racial and sexual harassment. Nonetheless, Connolly suggested that these pupils tended to adopt a role traditionally given to girls (working hard and being helpful to teachers), and it was against this role that some of the other boys (such as the black 'Bad Boys') developed their sense of masculinity. It could be added that these South Asian boys were also probably carving out their gender

identities in opposition to the visibility and aggressiveness of the 'Bad Boys' masculinities.

Connolly argued that teachers reinforced gender differences in their teaching practices, by directing the two genders to different school areas (such as Science and Computing for the boys, and Drawing and Creative Writing for the girls) and subjecting the girls to less disciplinary procedures than their male peers. Relatively to black girls, wider discourses on 'race' stressed physicality, with their involvement in sports, dance and music being praised and encouraged. In the field of feminine peer-group relations, this capital invested them with status. However, the reputation that preceded them as black girls, as being disruptive, limited their success. Some of the girls successfully transferred to the field of masculine peer-group relations. This was a stance that, as Connolly suggested, had to be constantly negotiated and limited to contexts where black girls were seen as girl-friends (as 'one of the boys', such as in playing football), rather than girlfriends (as a sexualised object). Some other girls struggled to compete in the field of feminine peer-relations, attempting to gain power through discourses on boyfriends (and related themes of intimacy, love and marriage) and in very public games such as kiss-chase. However, wider discourses on 'race' generally provided the boundaries within which this process took place, keeping most girls at the periphery of the field. Connolly also used a case study to illustrate how social class sometimes cut across such boundaries. Teachers' positive perceptions of a black girl of an advantaged social background, combined with academic success, helped her in gaining status amongst the girls. These were however conditions to success that existed less generally at East Avenue.

Young girls of South Asian heritage have received very little attention in academic research, particularly in education. This can perhaps be understood in the light of their academic achievement and behaviour being perceived by teachers as the closest to that of the 'ideal' pupil (Becker, 1952) and therefore rendered unproblematic. Being seen by teachers as quiet and motivated, they represent what is quintessentially feminine. However, Connolly (1998) argued that this was significantly reworked in pupils' discourses, with South Asian girls being constructed as 'alien', and ultimately the 'Sexual Other', as previous research had suggested (cf. Brah and Minhas, 1985; Wright, 1992). At East Avenue, South Asian girls were generally marginalised from the field of feminine peer relations. Name-calling, exclusion from kiss-chase games and from conversations about boyfriends often characterised their experiences at

school. Amongst some of the girls, Connolly found strategies of avoidance through the withdrawal from the larger field of feminine peer-group relations. These girls tended to create their own games, and entertain themselves away from the public gaze. For the girls who possessed the cultural capital, for instance being fashionable and having make-up, acceptance from other children was facilitated. Generally, however, South Asian girls were confined to the margins of the field of feminine peer-group relations.

Summarising, in his presentation of the construction of gender identities, Connolly (1998) illustrated the formative power of discourses on 'race' in creating a range of femininities and masculinities. He illustrated how ethnicity and gender are not only constraining, but can be positively used by pupils in constructing their schooling identities. Despite this, Connolly also explored the boundaries resulting from those same discourses in narrowing down the range of available pupil identities.

Both studies (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, and Connolly, 1998) drew on the post-structuralist critique in useful ways. Although illustrating the construction of identity as an unfinished process, and stressing the particularities of some pupils' schooling identities, they did not lose sight of wider social constraints. Mac an Ghaill illustrated the influence of the *Education Reform Act 1988* in producing a range of masculinities, whilst Connolly looked at how wider discourses on 'race' articulated with gender identities. For the study of pupil identities at Greenfield Comprehensive, I found the combination of their approaches very useful.

5.4 *Conclusions*

In this chapter, I looked at a range of ethnographic studies and the way in which they theorised pupils' adaptations and the formation of schooling identities. I would now like to draw attention to the helpfulness of these approaches in conceptualising how contemporary schooling identities are being formed. This will be accomplished by drawing on my own study of pupil identities at Greenfield Comprehensive, which will be explored in detail in the next chapter.

In relation to differentiation-polarisation theory, particularly in the works of Hargreaves (1967) and Lacey (1970), the construction of positions such as anti- or pro-school now appears rather simplistic. As I will show in the next chapter, in the early years of secondary schooling pupils at Greenfield

Comprehensive did not seem to be totally rejecting the value of school or of education. Most could not be unambiguously positioned as being pro- or anti-education, or pro- and anti-school. Firstly, because the theory assumed that pupils who produce good work tend to behave well (Lacey, 1970), and this was not strictly the case. Secondly, the fact that pupils behaved so differently with different teachers is also not accounted for by the theory. Thus, the use of a bi-polar model neither appropriately addresses the complexity of pupils' adaptations (by defining them as either for or against school), nor can it account for the complexity of contemporary identities that are being forged in school (informed by class, ethnicity and gender). The work of Ball (1981), accounting for the labelling theory, was more helpful in that he acknowledged how pupils negotiated their schooling identities within a limited range of options deriving from their positioning in different academic bands. I would also like to retain the more general idea that academic differentiation produces polarisation, whilst rejecting the categorisation of pupils as being either pro- or anti- education, or pro- or anti-school. Throughout Year 7, I sensed that pupils' identities were becoming more markedly differentiated, and the nature of their interactions with teachers seemed to be associated with this. Although in Year 7 pupils were not set for any subject, during that year their reputations became more known to and shared by teachers, and this reinforced particular identities. Thus, the concept of polarisation seems to me quite useful, as it retains a sense of the structuring of pupils' identities whilst not hindering an understanding of pupils as active agents negotiating their own identities (this will be further explored in the next chapter).

Pupils' identities at Greenfield Comprehensive could neither be adequately explained by the re-working of Merton's (1957) model. For instance, Woods (1979) claimed that pupils entering secondary school tend to have modes of adaptation characterised by optimism. As I illustrated in Chapter 2, the chaotic conditions in which Greenfield Comprehensive was reopened seem to have quickly eroded such optimism. Pupils' positioning in the school was much more complex than the modes of adaptation proposed by Woods suggested, even though they did seem to be 'trying out' different modes of adaptation. Nevertheless, the contingent impact of ethnicity, gender and social class in shaping pupils' identities seemed to be producing a wider range of schooling identities than that proposed by the model. Even the more recent work of Sewell (1997) falls short of the complexity that the identity work at Greenfield Comprehensive seemed to entail, as it will be seen in the case

studies presented in Chapter 6. Firstly, it is difficult to fit pupils into the existing categories, which are based on their positioning in relation to institutional goals and means. Pupils' identities in the form under study seemed to be much more complex and ambivalent than this conceptualising allows. Secondly, even though it might be argued that this typology works better with older pupils (perhaps when their responses to schooling become more polarised), I still think that this is a limited tool to understand the *formation* of identities. The use of categories provides us with static snapshots of pupils' adaptations and identities, not allowing to understand appropriately the complexity of social processes taking place in the construction of identities.

Much more valuable approaches for my study were those offered by Mac an Ghaill (1994) and Connolly (1998). Firstly, I would like to draw attention to the way in which identity was conceptualised in these studies. Mac an Ghaill and Connolly worked with a post-structuralist notion of identity, which sees it as being fluid, fragmented and carrying ambivalence. They emphasised that the formation of identity is a process never fully achieved, being always in need of being confirmed, and of integrating new elements (cf. Hall, 1992). In relation to sexual identity, Mac an Ghaill illustrated that pupils are not simply born with it, but that identity work is constantly being carried out, through heterosexuality and/or homosexuality. Nevertheless, the fact that heterosexuality is hegemonic means that pupils feel in need to project a stable, unified heterosexual identity in their interactions, particularly with peers. In providing definitions of what is 'appropriate behaviour' for a girl or for a boy, social norms and values constrain the way pupils construct and regulate their sexual identities. In relation to this, Mac an Ghaill noted that 'dominant systems of representation and typification, as Barratt suggests, function to maintain wider power relations' (p. 162). Thus, Mac an Ghaill emphasised that the construction of pupils' identities is shaped in relation to wider social systems of representation. Such an approach enabled him to analyse the way in which a variety of male sexual/gender identities are produced without losing sight of the wider social context in which such representations are made and remade. As Connolly has well illustrated, identity work is further compounded by 'race' and ethnicity. His study showed pupils from an early age negotiating ethnic and gender identities within wider discourses on 'race'.

Moreover, both authors used interesting ways in which to articulate the macro- with the micro-level. Mac an Ghaill did so in relation to educational

policy, namely with the *Educational Reform Act 1988*, illustrating the resulting range of masculinities. Connolly focused on how discourses on 'race' were formed and reworked at the national and local levels, shaping the gender identities of the pupils he studied. This approach helps us to move beyond a conception of policy in education and wider social discourses as being something 'imposed from above' with which teachers and pupils passively comply. Rather, the authors emphasised that discourses produce particular ideologies, perspectives of education and of the social world, which are reworked at the level of school. Wider discourses on education, 'race', gender and class provide a lens through which teachers interpret their practices. And it is through teachers' positioning in relation to these discourses that they seem to interpret and develop their perspectives on what an 'ideal pupil' (Becker, 1952) is, making available a range of positions to the pupils themselves. These come to negotiate their identities through reference to how they are perceived, and perceive themselves, in terms of behaviour, achievement, gender, ethnicity and class (amongst others).

In the next chapter, I will present four case studies of pupils in Year 7 and 8 at Greenfield Comprehensive School, who I interviewed and observed during the course of my fieldwork. My aim is to illustrate how pupils' identities are being constructed in a school that was considered 'failing' and closed, then opened a'fresh', and is thus trying to build an identity of its own. The pupils in question are Ismail, Joe, Nina and Sophie. Ismail is a Turkish pupil for whom teachers had very low expectations, and who received a disproportionate amount of detentions. Seen as a 'troublemaker', in Year 8 he was moved out of form B and was allocated into the lower set in Science. Joe is an African Caribbean boy, who was once described by a teacher as 'the cleverest pupil in Year 7'. Nevertheless, teachers had very low expectations of his behaviour, and came to blame him and similarly viewed peers, for the problems of the school. Nina is a South Asian girl of whom teachers generally had very good expectations in terms of academic work. Her behaviour was not perceived as being so positive, and she was sometimes unfairly punished. Sophie is white and one of the very few 'posh' pupils at Greenfield Comprehensive. Being aware of her social background, teachers perceived her as a 'bright spark' in 7B, often overlooking her misbehaviour. These pupils were chosen to illustrate not only a range of pupils' adaptations, but also to explore how particular issues within their social interactions were informed by ethnicity, gender and class in the construction of their schooling identities.

6

Pupils' Case Studies

In this chapter, I use four case studies to explore the shaping of pupil identities in Year 7 and 8 at Greenfield Comprehensive. The construction of their identities *as pupils* took place within a context of perceived disciplinary chaos, negative expectations and disproportionate punishing of some ethnic minority pupils, and marked institutional practices of differentiation (in relation to discipline and achievement).

Although these pupils represent the diversity of the school in terms of ethnic origin, gender and social origins, they were not chosen exclusively according to these criteria. Whilst trying to retain a diversity of social locations, I was mainly interested in exploring issues that emerged in interviews with these pupils. For instance, bullying and fighting were examples of elements in the social practices of these pupils that articulated with their schooling identities, and in a context of ethnic and gender differentiation provided them with ways in which to form their identities. The salience of these emerging issues became therefore crucial in the selection of case studies. Whilst they illustrate what was happening more generally in school, they are not necessarily representative of the experiences of pupils of the same gender, and with the same ethnic and social background. My aim is to illustrate how the school dealt with those issues, and how they acted upon the shaping of pupils' identities. Throughout this chapter, I also address the usefulness of previous research in this area to the theorising of pupils' identities, reviewed in the previous chapter.

The first case study is considerably lengthy, as it will set the parameters for the following cases. All cases are divided into three sections. The first two sections are common to all case studies, and relate to discipline and school

work. I illustrate how each pupil was positioned by teachers and peers, and positioned him/herself in terms of behaviour and school work, highlighting the tensions and contradictions entailed in this process. The final section in each case study emerged more directly from the data. In interviews with pupils some aspects seemed to become more relevant. It is not my intention to suggest that these were the main aspects in pupils' lives at school, or the only ones. My own identity as a young adult researcher, female, white, immigrant, and so on, might have influenced pupils to engage in conversations with me on certain subjects, in detriment to others that remained unknown to me. The data presented here should then be read keeping in mind how I presented myself as a student researcher wanting to know about pupils' school lives and listening to the particular problems in school that they chose to discuss with me.

6.1 *Ismail*

Ismail defined his ethnic origin as Turkish Cypriot, and he became a refugee in the UK. He was born in Cyprus, and his parents came from Turkey. His father was his guardian and did not speak English fluently. When he came to school on official meeting days with parents, he was provided with an interpreter. Ismail himself received support in *English as an Additional Language*, and in Year 7 he was in stage 3 of fluency[49].

Ismail has one older brother, who attended Year 10 at Greenfield Comprehensive. He and his family lived outside the catchment area of the school. He was entitled to free school meals, which were paid by the Asylum Seekers Unit.

In Key Stage 2, Ismail had a grade 4 in Science. During Year 7, he had the following results in the assessment tests in that subject: 4 and 5 out of ten, and 52% in the final test. In Year 8, he was allocated to the lower set in Science (2 of 2), and he was moved out to form 8D[50]. According to the school, he is not a pupil with Special Educational Needs.

During Year 7, Ismail was given thirty detentions. Mostly, these were given for relatively general reasons, such as 'poor behaviour' and 'being rude'. In some circumstances, examples that are more concrete were recorded, such as 'continued to talk after warned', 'didn't take jacket and hand out drink' or

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[49] Stages range from 1 to 5, from lesser to greater fluency.
[50] In Chapter 4, I addressed in detail the process of splitting 7B, the form under study.

'refused to work'. However, reasons that are more serious were also offered for putting him on detention. For instance, involvement in fights and incidents in which Ismail was found in possession of a knife were reported. He was excluded from school three times in Year 7. Once this was because of 'disrupting a lesson'; he was then sent to the referral room and was 'unable to behave appropriately and continued to be disruptive' (two days' exclusion). Another time he was excluded for two days because he 'was in possession of a knife and also used aggressive behaviour towards another student'. A third time he had a one-day exclusion because 'he didn't attend the Principal's detention'. This detention had been given because he was 'late, talkative, threatened to beat up another pupil because of his seat, and little work'.

6.1.1 Discipline

Generally, teachers at Greenfield Comprehensive had low expectations of Ismail's behaviour, which deteriorated throughout the period in which I conducted fieldwork. A few months after coming to the school, the head of Year 7 described Ismail as a 'friendly and funny person'. Soon, descriptions of his behaviour became markedly negative, with him and his friend Ahmet being seen as 'out of control':

> Ahmet... He's... completely out of control, I think. Including out of school. Hmm... He's been in a lot of trouble. He gangs around with a lot of older boys. And I think this is the same for (Ismail). (Ms Miller, form tutor and PSE teacher)

Poor expectations of Ismail's behaviour were generalised at Greenfield Comprehensive, with many teachers considering him a 'troublemaker', and as a pupil who should be taught aside so as not disturb lessons:

> After the lesson is finished, the PSE teacher (Ms Clarke) tells me that Peter has behavioural problems because he has Tourette Syndrome. She also says that both Jamie and Ismail are completely disaffected. She describes them as 'lost causes', and tells me that they should be taught aside together to let the others work. (Fieldnotes, PSE lesson 5)

By the end of May in Ismail's Year 7, there was an incident report following his disrupting of a lesson, in which the head of Year 7 (Mr Roberts) wrote to the form tutor saying, 'Please, speak to him. He's heading for big trouble.' As the school year came to a close, Mr Roberts told me that Ismail would probably

not stay much longer at Greenfield Comprehensive because of his bad behaviour:

> Ismail... goes round causing fights. Very weak student, needs to have a... little discipline. He'll probably get kicked out of the school if he carries on. (Mr Roberts, head of Year 7 and Science teacher)

Teachers' poor view of Ismail's behaviour was reflected in the number of detentions he received. Throughout Year 7 he was put in detention thirty times, which was around a fifth of all detentions received by the pupils in his form.

Pupils also had low expectations of Ismail's behaviour. They said that he was always getting in trouble, received many detentions, shouted in class and was rude to the teachers. Whilst some other pupils misbehaved only in some lessons, Ismail's behaviour was seen as being generally bad.

Ismail himself acknowledged that he misbehaved and played truant. It was this that made him exclude himself from the position of 'best pupil'. However, he did not simply position himself as disrupt*ive*, pointing out that his misbehaviour was situational, sometimes resulting from his not having the same pace of learning in particular subjects:

> Ismail: (...) I do see that my behaviour is good in the lessons, but it's just my mouth... I can't control it when I have to.
>
> Marta: And in which kind of lessons does that happen more?
>
> Ismail: Hmm... Science... I would say in Science... like, the teacher passed some subject long way and I'm sitting in that subject trying to catch up...

In Year 8, the form attended by Ismail (7B) was split. Both him and Ahmet were moved out, and allocated to different forms. Their form tutor, who had particularly low expectations from Ahmet and Ismail, saw their being moved out of 7/8B as beneficial for teachers and the other pupils:

> Marta: And do you think it worked better to split 7B?
>
> Teacher: It certainly worked better to get rid of one or two people, like Ismail and Ahmet. They were very, very bad, and they made so much trouble. And the people who we got in their place who are troublesome, are... They don't work together the way that Ismail and Ahmet did. So they're not as hard work. And I think most of the teachers who teach them as a class are happy with them

this year, so I think that's better. (Ms Miller, form tutor and PSE teacher)

Most pupils also saw Ismail's moving out of 7B as being beneficial for the class. Several of them thought that Ismail was causing most of the trouble in 7B, and some told me that he was distracting them from doing their work:

> Marta: Are there any things that you would like to discuss with your teachers and you feel that you can't?
>
> Nina: Yeah, to get Ismail out of our classroom. And Jamie...
>
> Lucy: All the bad people.
>
> Nina: Not all the bad people. I like some of the bad people. It's just Jamie and Ismail.

> Alice: Our class would be all right if we'd just kick out Ismail and Jamie, because they...
>
> Sinead: Even Joe, sometimes...
>
> Alice: Yeah, well... Yeah. And like Ahmet...
>
> Sinead: Ahmet, he's just...
>
> Alice: He's annoying.
>
> Sinead: He's probably not even in our class, he doesn't turn up half the time.
>
> Alice: But I think our class would be much better if we'd got rid of them, 'cause they are the ones that cause all the hassle, argue with teachers and everything... and distract us from work.

Ismail and Ahmet were not the only pupils who were moved out of 7B. Nevertheless, Ismail thought that it was because of his friend's and his own behaviour that such measure had been taken:

> Marta: Do you know why that happened (the splitting of 7B)?
>
> Ismail: Because my friends... we weren't behaving ourselves in my class. Me and a boy called Ahmet.

In Year 8, perceptions of Ismail's behaviour started improving. Pupils in 8B thought that their form was working better, and that Ismail himself had changed his behaviour in school. Teachers also shared this view:

> Ismail just really calmed down. He's much better than he was before. (Mr Roberts, head of Year 7 and Science teacher)

Ismail also told me that he thought his behaviour was improving:

> Marta: Do you think that you have changed since last year?
>
> Ismail: Yeah.
>
> Marta: In what way?
>
> Ismail: Like, I think I'm doing better this year. Like I haven't got as much exclusions as last year. Because the school was better then... But if the school was like that again, I know I wouldn't be bad no more. (He gets confused). I don't know. I've grown up...
>
> Marta: What do you mean by growing up?
>
> Ismail: I don't know, I've got a bit more of sense...

Their previous form tutor, Ms Miller, thought that separating Ismail from Ahmet was the reason for the improved behaviour of the former:

> Marta: How do you think Ismail and Ahmet are getting along (in their new forms)?
>
> Teacher: Hmm... They're still in quite a lot of trouble, as far as I can gather. Ahmet keeps on coming in (the classroom) and being a nuisance. And I've taught Ismail a couple of times this term and he's just about managed to keep out of trouble. But I think... so I think they're separated, and I think that's helped them. (Ms Miller, form tutor and PSE teacher)

In fact, in Year 8 Ismail stopped hanging around with Ahmet. However, this was not only because they were in separate forms. He also had distanced himself from Ahmet in order to avoid further problems with teachers:

> Marta: Who are your best friends in school?
>
> Ismail: Moktar (who was also in 7B).
>
> Marta: Why do you hang around together?
>
> Ismail: I don't really hang around, but because I don't get a chance to speak to him really. And when I look for him I can't find him. 'Cause he likes the same things that I do, and we watch the same programmes and stuff like that. Like Art.
>
> Marta: Was he also your best friend last year?
>
> Ismail: Yeah... And I had Ahmet. He was my best friend last year, but I can't speak with him anymore, 'cause he moved. And my brother told me not to speak to him 'cause he makes me look to the teachers as if I'm a naughty boy. I don't think that, but my brother does.

Ismail thought that by distancing himself from Ahmet he could pursue a different schooling identity. Teachers, however, were more reluctant to see his attitude as displaying commitment to school, and saw his improvement as resulting merely from their isolating him from his friends.

As with most pupils who were moved out of 7B, Ismail did not feel too happy about being in a new form, and told me that he was feeling excluded by his new classmates. A term after he started attending his new form, Ismail had not made any friends there. He was still seeing a friend from 7B who was now in 8B, but did not hang around with Ahmet anymore. This further supports his suggestion that his decision to stop hanging around with Ahmet was more than the result of splitting up 7B. In spite of teachers thinking of Ismail as being uncaring about his behaviour, the extracts above suggest that his improved behaviour was also the result of being conscious that his friendship with Ahmet affected teachers' expectations. Although he disagreed with his brother on this point, he was willing enough to commit himself to school as to sacrifice his friendship with Ahmet.

In summary, teachers and pupils' expectations from Ismail's behaviour in Year 7 were very low, and the head of Year thought that if he continued misbehaving he would be 'kicked out of the school'. Ismail saw his behaviour as being contextual, worsening in lessons where he could not keep the same pace of learning as his peers. His behaviour improved in Year 8, which was acknowledged by teachers and pupils, and this was explained by him as a consequence of having been moved out of his previous form and separated from his friend, Ahmet. However, as I illustrated above, it can be said that Ismail more actively committed himself to school than it was generally understood.

6.1.2 School work

Ismail had a positive attitude to learning, although his behaviour would lead many teachers not to recognise or to acknowledge it. He did participate in Science lessons, asking and answering questions, and showed interest in the subject. However, the Science teacher felt that he was not making the most of his 'potential', and disrupted other pupils' education:

> Marta: What do you think of 7B in terms of academic achievement?
> Mr Roberts: It's very mixed. You have kids in that class who are very clever, and

kids in that class that are *not* very clever at all. You have kids that work hard, and then kids who don't work hard. I mean, you know what's the people like. Lucy will always do her best, and Sebastien and people like that. Very good kids. And then you've got people like Ismail, and Joe and Omi... that just... and Jamie. That just don't give their potential at all. And they're just wasting their time, and they're wasting everybody else's time. (original emphasis)

Categorising pupils according to either school work or behaviour, Mr Roberts positioned Ismail as being disrupt*ive*. This perception of Ismail based on behaviour was partially independent of teachers' perceptions of his work. Generally, they did think that Ismail was 'capable' of achieving. However, his indiscipline was seen as interfering with his work:

And some of them should be doing loads better then they were. (...) And if we took them out, we then could concentrate on the other kids kind of issue... Ismail got moved out. Big troublemaker. But if he has support, he can do really well. So we put him in one of the groups where we knew we could put support. Not for his work, 'cause he's a bright boy, but if he can have, like... He's always got a mentor that's keeping an eye on him. (Ms Bells, head of Year 8)

Teachers thought that Ismail needed support for his misbehaviour in order to achieve well. Moving him out of 7B was seen as one way in which to attain that, not only by improving his behaviour but also by providing him with more support from 'brighter' pupils:

Marta: But let's take Omi, Ismail and Ahmet... Do you think it was better that they moved to different forms?

Teacher: Yes, yes. And I still think that if there's better groups in the year, maybe these ones should be split up into different form groups. Where there's more support from other brighter pupils, really. You know, for doing group work. Actually, this group (8B) was better than it was last year. (Ms Ojy, Music and English teacher)

A teacher who was teaching Ismail in Year 8 felt that both his behaviour and work improved, and that this was the result of being in a new form:

Teacher: I don't really know much about Ismail. I teach him Science. He's good at Art, and from what I heard, I didn't have him last year, I've only had him this year... From what I've been told, he settled down a lot this year. I think

this year, he's only just sort of had one bad lesson.... Where he wouldn't settle, he was shouting out, sort of basically being disruptive, and not caring at all about the fact that he was getting into trouble. Then in the end I just sent him to the referral room. And he was just totally uncaring! The fact that he just had enough... I think it was the last lesson on a Wednesday. So he had had a long day, and after lunch they are different children. If you have them in the morning, to have them in the afternoon, it's like they've gone through a personality change.

Marta: But this was in a Science lesson?

Teacher: This was in a Science lesson. Hmm... Yeah, and he really has been trying, and his work has improved. He's really sort of trying to pull himself up. Sort of personality wise, I don't really have an awful lot to do with him. Although he seems mature enough, gets on fairly well with the others in the class. I don't think... the Science class... there's not many of his friends in there. I don't think there's any of his friends. And none of his form. So, there's not sort of... like, the peers that are in here with him aren't directly connected to him. So he sort of tends to sit down and get on with it. Most of the time. You know, he participates... they all participate in the lesson: Omi, Shahid and Ismail. They all put their hands up, ask questions, you know? They're not withdrawn at all. They do contribute. (Ms Coleman, Year 8 Science teacher)

This teacher saw Ismail's work and behaviour improving because he did not have his friends in his form, which suggests once again how important issues of control and discipline at Greenfield Comprehensive were. Also, and as in relation to his behaviour, it is interesting to note teachers' reluctance in seeing Ismail's improved school work as resulting from his own effort.

Pupils very rarely referred to Ismail to talk about school work. Generally, it was when we discussed issues of discipline that his name would come up. When they did, they did not seem to have positive expectations, as the two following extracts illustrate:

Marta: So, first I would like to ask you how do you like your class and your school?

Nina: I like my... school. But some people in the class don't have work done and everything... like Ismail and stuff...

Lucy: Ismail and Joe...

Nina: Not Joe that much.

Lucy: No, only when Ismail starts it...

Ahmet: Yeah, two minutes and they (the girls) done the page.

Peter: Ismail takes like...

Ahmet: Two hours!

In spite of teachers and pupils having quite low expectations from Ismail, he could not easily be seen as having an anti-school stance. The data I gathered about Ismail suggested that he did value both the school and education in general. For instance, he told me what he liked most about school was Wednesdays, because he really liked the subjects he had on that day (which were PE, Technology, Science and English):

Marta: How is school going this year?

Ismail: It's good. Not bad. I don't know... I like PE; I like Wednesdays especially, because of the subjects. Nothing else really... (...)

Marta: And what are the best and worst things about school? (...)

Ismail: The best... I don't know... Good things...? I said to you...

Marta: Just the subjects?

Ismail: Yeah.

Other pupils who were thought of as less 'problematic', such as Adam, told me that they liked to come to school to meet their friends. Ismail generally enjoyed school and most subjects. He told me that his class was a bit noisy, preferring Mr Roberts's Science lessons, because everyone was quieter. He was also very interested in Science because he enjoyed doing experiments and learning about his own body. His other favourite subjects were Art, Media and Drama, and he liked some sports in PE, such as Basketball, which he used to play in a club. He told me he liked these subjects because he felt they were something he could be good at. He was seen as particularly skilled in Music, where he had grade 8 in assessment 1. The head of Year 7, Mr Roberts acknowledged that Ismail had strengths in Music and Drama, and in doing Science experiments.

In spite of Ismail valuing school work (at least in some subjects), he did not seem to think that he would eventually succeed. The following fieldnotes, taken at the end of Year 7 in a PSE lesson, are illustrative:

The teacher says that every Monday, as a rule, they'll have Assembly, but that now the halls are being used for GCSEs, and that's the first thing she wants to

talk about before anything else. She asks Ismail to pay attention (he is talking), because this is going to affect him. She explains, 'GCSEs, as far as you're concerned, are the most important thing that will happen to you in this school, in a way. Because GCSEs measure your... measure... your *success* to the outside world. Now... You can do all sorts of brilliant things in this school, and most of you are already doing it. But at the end of the day, when you start filling in forms for further education, for jobs, for everything else, the first question they are going to want to know is which GCSEs you've got.' Ismail makes a comment that I cannot hear, and she tells him not to be silly. She continues saying, 'Another thing... is going to be incredibly important. These people going to the hall this afternoon... That's their first really major exam. One of the most important. Because if you don't get a good grade in English, you're ruled out of so many jobs I can't possibly list them. Incredible number of jobs. It also means that you cannot go to University.' At this point Omi, Andy, Joe and Ismail burst out laughing very loudly. (Fieldnotes, PSE lesson 6, original emphasis)

Although Ismail's comments were not clear to me, his derisive laugh whenever the University topic was mentioned suggests that his attitudes to school and education were more ambivalent than it could perhaps be anticipated. He did enjoy subjects in the area of Arts, and was aware that he was particularly skilled in some of these. However, he also seemed to question whether this would enable him to succeed in higher education or in the job market.

In summary, Ismail's work was seen as average in Year 7, but improved in Year 8. This was explained by teachers as a repercussion of splitting 7B. And in spite of Ismail's behaviour suggesting to teachers an anti-school stance, I tried to illustrate how he valued school, although placing a limited confidence on the value and possibility of going on to higher education. His stance could not be categorically described as anti- or pro-school, as proposed by the authors of the differentiation-polarisation theory (in particular, Hargreaves, 1967, and Lacey, 1970). Ismail's schooling identity could neither be described as rebellion (Merton, 1957), in that he was still attempting to achieve success in the school's own terms in relation to achievement and discipline. Rather, I suggest below that by virtue of his ethnicity, Ismail's social interactions and experiences at school limited the boundaries in which a positive schooling identity could be negotiated.

6.1.3 Emerging issues: fighting, bullying and ethnicity

At Greenfield Comprehensive, Ismail was building a reputation based on his physicality, and he was known for frequently getting involved in fights and bullying other pupils. Most of the fights in which Ismail got involved were considered playful by other pupils. Julia for instance told me that if someone teased Ismail he often got involved in fights just to prove that he was 'hard' and to be popular:

> Marta: It seems that there are a lot of fights going on. Can you tell me about that?
>
> Julia: (...) It's like silly playful fighting. They think it's cool to fight, and they wanna make themselves popular. Don't they?
>
> Marta: Why do you think they start to fight?
>
> Julia: It's playful, for no reason at all!

However, and as I mentioned in Chapter 3, there were also more serious on-going fights between Ismail (Turkish Cypriot), Ahmet (Turkish) and Jamie (mixed race) against Omi and Joe (both African Caribbean). This issue often surfaced in interviews, and it was seen by both parties as being more than playful fighting. Several pupils told me how small fights were becoming more serious with them requesting their older brothers to intervene, a practice that happened often at Greenfield Comprehensive. Younger boys got the help of their older brothers to fight someone, and small conflicts sometimes escalated into fights that were more serious and violent.

Two white pupils in 7B, Terry and Adam, told me several times that they were being bullied by Ismail and his older brother. As neither of them had anyone older in the school to protect them, they felt especially vulnerable:

> I can't do anything, 'cause I haven't got anybody older... (Terry, pupil in 7B)

This was seen as being particularly important, as Terry and Adam believed that the school did not do enough to deal with violence or to support them. The following extracts are illustrative:

> Adam: Like even Ismail, one day, he had a knife in his hand and he was walking around with this knife in his hand... And the Turkish... And the teacher don't do anything... It's just horrible, like...

Marta: Do you think that your teachers take your concerns and problems seriously?

Terry: I told Mr Roberts! (about being bullied)

Adam: I told...

Marta: Did you?

Terry: I've told... and he just.... Like I said, Mr Roberts he talks to people, but like... he says it's in course of getting better, and then just chat as much rubbish as they did...

For these two pupils, the school was not active in solving their problems and did not take sufficient measures to protect them. Thus, Adam suggested that they could only get support from outside the school:

Adam: I like this school! I would stay here if there wasn't like all these Turkish waiting outside, and if you had someone like at least the Police or big strong people waiting outside and that, in the street, to look after you and make sure you got away from this area... 'Cause this is like quite a bad area...Got away from all the... And get on your way home safe, 'cause I feel... Once here, I don't really like it. (...) If I get a good job, that my dad's trying get me and all that... Like, quite a few hundred a week, and all that, I'd hire a bouncer to come and meet way out... Coming, like, at the end of the day meet me... come, like quarter past three, and I'd wait here and like with a cup of tea and I'd come down and he could walk with me, 'cause I don't feel safe, like, on my own. 'Cause he's got experience on how to deal with kids, like, 'cause he does all these classes that everyone goes, like with knives and that. And he can just grab them and do all these things...

Terry: To be in this school you need at least five knuckle-dusters, a bullet-proof vest and all... whatever you can get in your hands just to walk in the school.

Although aspects of Terry and Adam's speech may be exaggerated, there is no doubting the fact that they genuinely felt unsafe in the school. Furthermore, this particular case of bullying crystallised ethnic stereotyping, with Terry and Adam being scared of everything Turkish. The following quote, although lengthy is illustrative:

Marta: So... the first question I would like to ask you is how do you like your school and your class?

Adam: Well...

Marta: First about the school...

Adam: Well, the school... Ok... a little bit. But sometimes I don't really like it

'cause there's people barging you out of the way and... and there's some kids annoying you and stuff. And, like, people that you don't like 'em and they just star' up and things... And in the class... Well, in my class is a couple of kids that cause trouble and all that all the time... Just hitting you 'round in the head and stuff...

Marta: Apart from that do you like the school?

Adam: Yeah, I like... I like it apart from like all... all that happening, bullying and stuff.

Marta: What about you, Terry?

Terry: Actually, I hate the school.

Marta: You hate it?

Terry: I hate it.

Marta: Why do you...?

Terry: Because there's a lot of bullying, there's everything... Like, 'cause you can't really say anything 'cause, like, half the school is Turkish and if you mess with one of them they all come after you, like... It's really horrible that. 'Cause you can't do anything. You can't, like... 'Cause if you have a fight with one of them, like after school, say like if you have a fight with one of them they all come after you... So you can't do anything. You have to just stand and get bullied... 'Cause like a Turkish come after you and they hit you and you just have to stand and take it 'cause you can't say...

Adam: 'Cause they get bigger and more... And then kids from outside school... *They got all knives, and guns* and... But there are *some* Turkish kids that, like, always start reeling and that kind of thing... They just come over and like... I hit one of them before and *aaall* of them come started at me and jumped me, and... (...)

Terry: When Turkish don't say anything, they're on their own. But when they are in a group, they think they're hard. That... I was saying that... I could beat like... I could beat them up one by one... I could beat them up one by one! But like, when there's a group, it's like a million of...

Adam: And they've got all weapons!...

Terry: You can tell they have weapons, the way they walk and the way that they put their hands in their pockets.

Adam: And in their bags, and they've got all these kids that wait outside... (original emphasis)

This extract of a dialogue with Terry and Adam illustrates the negative perceptions about Turkish pupils that circulated within the school. In particular, it suggests that the threat of bullying was racialised in these pupils' eyes. The issue was about 'all these Turkish' (in Adam's words).

The fact that Ismail was bullying other pupils and was involved in fights was acknowledged by the school. There were at least four incident reports filled in for fighting, some of which led to detentions. However, and although the school apparently had a tough attitude to fights and bullying, measures taken to solve conflicts between pupils did not address the roots of these problems, particularly the tension that existed in school between different ethnic groups. Some of those conflicts mirrored others happening in and outside the school, and were informed by ethnicity (with students fighting in opposite poles according to their being black or Turkish). However, and as I argued in Chapter 4, the school just decided to split up the pupils concerned from 7B in Year 8. The underlying causes of such conflict were not truly addressed. Teachers seemed intent on behaving as if the conflicts were between individuals in isolation: as if they refused to acknowledge the wider racialised aspect of the conflict. For instance, in a meeting with parents, in which Ismail's father, brother, himself and an interpreter participated, the head of Year 7 suggested to Ismail that he merely ignored verbal abuse from Joe and Omi. The fieldnotes I took at the time are reproduced below:

> The teacher (Mr Roberts) says that Ismail has problems in school for getting involved in fights. He says they will set the target in relation to that. Mr Roberts writes down, Target 1: No fights. Ismail complains that both Omi and Joe are always bullying him verbally. Mr Roberts tells him that he has to ignore it and that on such circumstances he has to tell the teacher of what is happening. Mr Roberts says (while he writes), 'Action: if someone annoys you, you will calm yourself and call the teacher. Outcomes: no fights'.
>
> Ismail's father is upset. Mr Roberts and Ismail's older brother tell him that it is not Ismail who is initiating the fights, which are mainly verbal fights. Mr Roberts insists that on no occasion should he reply by fighting, because the situation in school could be out of control. He adds, 'You call your big brother, he calls a bigger one, one brings a knife, the other a gun...'. His father is upset with this. Ismail's brother says that on three occasions he was assaulted with a knife in the school gate by another pupil in Year 10, in which he ripped off his clothes. The father is very worried that the same might happen to Ismail. Mr Roberts says that anyone found with a knife will be immediately sent to the

police[51]. Ismail's brother suggests that they search the pupils. Mr Roberts says that it is against the law.

The extract above illustrates how the school showed some commitment to deal with bullying, but ended up not taking specific actions. Pupils were advised to ignore abuse and report it to the teachers. However, as several pupils told me, the teachers generally overlooked it, which goes against official advice about handling bullying, both at the national and school level. In some other cases, it seemed that the school just did not handle cases of bullying appropriately. For example:

> It's the end of the Science lesson. Everyone is standing up, and Mr Roberts writes. Then he says that before they go he wants to see Terry, Adam and Cetin. Apparently, Adam was hurt accidentally by Cetin, who was trying to hit Terry. Mr Roberts asks them whether it was a joke, or they should take it seriously. In the latter case, that they thought it was not an accident, they should say so and Cetin could be 'arrested for assault'. They are not clear about it, as if they don't want to say anything there. Mr Roberts treats it as if it was really a joke and drops the case. (Fieldnotes, Science lesson 18)

The way in which Mr Roberts treated the case, as being either 'a joke' or a situation in which Cetin could be 'arrested for assault' did not help pupils to come forward. This was not just a one-off event: it was a situation that had been going on for many months. However, Mr Roberts did not attempt to see the pupils separately and encourage them to confide in him. Rather, he saw them together and the situation seemed to make it highly likely that no further details would be forthcoming. Finally, his decision to treat the occasion as being 'a joke' reflected how many such incidents were dealt with in the school. Such cases were mostly ignored until they took so serious proportions that some action became unavoidable. Insufficient handling of these cases of bullying resulted in some pupils leaving the school precisely because of that.

Bullying is a highly sensitive subject that students are sometimes unwilling to discuss openly. The readiness of pupils to discuss this matter with me is a reflection of the trust we had developed during my fieldwork, but

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[51] Mr Roberts's attempts at reassuring Ismail's father seemed to me slightly exaggerated. I gathered information that Ismail himself was found a couple of times in possession of a knife. In the first time only a report was filled in, and in the second time he was excluded for two days as he 'was in possession of a knife and was aggressive towards another student'. However, I never heard of the police being brought in except if someone actually tried to use a knife to attack someone else.

also a measure of the scale of bullying in the school. For instance, Ismail acknowledged to me that he bullied other pupils, and went on explaining to me why he did it. This was in an interview with his friend Jamie:

Marta: And do you think that there is a lot of bullying in this school?

Ismail: I'm a bully.

Marta: You're a bully?

Ismail: Yeah.

Marta: Who do you bully? And why do you bully?

Ismail: Hmmm... Don't know... I think I don't like it when I get these... They... they are past me, and I don't like that. I don't like bullying... it's that when they pass me it gets on my nerves... And just (inaudible).

Marta: Sorry?

Ismail: And I just say that I wanna be above the school!

Marta: And why don't you behave?

Jamie: I don't like good behaviour.

Marta: You don't like to... And you, Ismail, what do you think?

Ismail: Hmm... I've been (inaudible) because of my religion a lot of times...

Marta: Sorry, 'I've been...'?

Ismail: I've been disturbed a lot of times in this country when I came from Turkey... They used to call me Turkey, and all this... Curse me all the time. I just didn't like it and... Hmm... And when I got bigger, I took my revenge on... out of all of them...

Marta: On the teachers?

Ismail: No... Not on the teachers. On the boys that used to curse me I took my revenge, and... then I became a bully.

For Ismail, bullying other pupils resulted from the anger he felt about being bullied himself because of his ethnicity. The school did not seem to take interest in why Ismail was bullying other pupils and help him deal with his own sense of being abused because of his ethnicity. In his case bullying influenced the construction of his schooling identity, with Ismail's positioning in school as a bully being reinforced by his Turkish ethnicity. Furthermore, the on-going conflict with some of his classmates had negative repercussions in his discipline in the classroom, as Ismail's learning mentor acknowledged:

Ismail, he's another one. He's like Omi. In fact, Ismail and Ahmet, and Omi and Joe are like enemies. So they... they often get into trouble. And their trouble is

often related to each other, when they had a fight with each other. You know? So... Ismail is a... He's a nice boy. He's very cheerful, he's charismatic. But he's also got a very terrible temper. You know? And that gets him into trouble. (Mr Chengeray, learning mentor)

The following example, from a PSE lesson is illustrative of how such tensions were reflected in lessons and ended up with someone being put in detention because of this on-going conflict:

> Ismail: There was an argument in class with Omi and he was speaking about us. To his friends... And I found it quite annoying! I said, 'Are you speaking about me?' And he said, 'No', looking there, sat down, and then after I went up to him and said 'What are you looking at? Why are you speaking about me?' And he said, 'No, just speaking!' And then his friend called me and said, 'Leave him alone, he's only speaking!' And I just couldn't control myself, and just run to him there... and got in trouble...
>
> Marta: So, you don't think it was fair that you were... in detention?
>
> Ismail: It was kinda fair, but... at least they could have given them detention as well, 'cause I didn't... If I was a teacher in this place, I would have... listened to my part of the story much better... He did listen, but I don't think... he paid more attention to them.

The on-going fights (informed by ethnicity) with other pupils in his form had a strong impact in the way Ismail was shaping his schooling identity, in that conflict with other pupils served to reinforce his reputation as disrupt*ive*. Both the fights and their impact on lessons did not seem to be seriously addressed by the school. As already noted, splitting up these pupils in Year 8 was perhaps more an attempt to gain control over pupils than to explore the causes and consequences of the conflict.

Although issues of ethnicity and racism were very important to pupils and often featured in their accounts of trouble between peers, the school failed to address this dimension. The following examples illustrate how Turkish pupils felt particularly discriminated against and/or attempted to confront teachers with these issues:

> Ismail is not quiet and Ms Clarke tells him that she will send him to the Student Services. She tells him that today she will only give him one chance (last lesson he was sent out). He agrees and does what he is told. (...) Ms Clarke asks Ismail to take his fleece off. He says that it's not a jacket. Ms Clarke says, 'You have a

school uniform...and it is very smart too.' He tells her, 'This is smarter... You just have bad taste!' She ignores him. (...) There is some noise in the classroom. Joe tells Jamie to be quiet and to let her explain. Ismail says, 'I'm sorry, Miss, but can you forgive me?' He smiles putting an innocent expression. Ms Clarke looks at Ismail, says nothing with a serious expression and continues explaining. She says that in PSE they should learn to listen, co-operating, following instructions, thinking, concentrating. Ismail says something I can't hear. She warns him that he will be timed out, he'll have a detention and she will speak with his mother. He says, 'No...Too young to die!'. She continues talking about following rules, and mentions that she already told them that in Assembly. Ismail says, 'Time out means a break, not a punishment.' Then he continues, 'I want to die. There's no point!' Ms Clarke sends him out of the lesson and writes a note. She tells Jamie he has a choice not to behave like that, otherwise he'll also be put in detention. Jamie asks, 'Miss, what's the point of choice? Just because he's Turkish'. Ismail shouts, 'That's my friend, there!' Jamie continues, 'I have a choice but he hasn't... Who's racist here?' Ismail asks her how can she be sure that he will give the note to the Student Services. Jamie is also put on detention and sent out of the lesson. He says, 'You don't have to if you don't want to'. He says he will take the chair as well, and does it. (Fieldnotes, PSE lesson 5)

Jamie questioned how Ms Clarke treated Ismail, and did so on the basis of ethnicity, suggesting that he was treated unfairly because he was Turkish. Ms Clarke ignored Jamie's comments, and when her actions were described as being racist she sent Jamie out of the lesson as well. In other lessons, I witnessed some situations in which racism and ethnicity were foregrounded in interactions with teachers, with pupils questioning in particular teachers' practices towards pupils of Turkish origin:

Ismail hits Moktar, who is sitting next to him. It's not serious, though. Moktar laughs all the time and Ismail says, 'He calls me Turkish something... I don't even want to say what!' Ms Miller gets annoyed with Ismail, who has been quite noisy since he came into the room, and asks him to leave. He doesn't take her seriously at first. She insists, and he gets up. He tells her, 'Miss, it's because I'm...?' She replies, 'Shush... Because you're a big mouth. Not because of your colour... because of your behaviour.' She tells him to sit at the front, and he does so. (...) Ms Miller tells Ismail to be quiet. He replies, 'Why? All of them are talking!' (In this moment, he is probably one of the quietest pupils). (Fieldnotes, PSE lesson 8)

These events took place in PSE lessons, not with one, but with several different teachers[52]. They illustrate how the school attempted to silence, or simply ignore, issues of ethnicity and racism, with Turkish pupils feeling particularly disadvantaged.

Issues around ethnicity also surfaced in my interviews with teachers. Rather than being about issues of discrimination and conflict between groups of pupils, ethnicity emerged by linking particular behaviours and values with pupils of certain ethnic origins. There was a conversation with 7B's form tutor, Ms Miller, already quoted in Chapter 3, in which she suggested that she had low expectations of Turkish pupils. I reproduce part of that extract here again:

> Ms Miller: The biggest difference is that I have not taught Turkish children before. And that's been quite strange. Because their attitude towards education is very different from any of the children I've taught before.
>
> Turkish girl (in detention): Oooh!
>
> Ms Miller: Hmm... I taught mostly Afro-Caribbean children. And children from the Indian sub-continent. And their parents are often very committed. Even if the children aren't. They're... And I found the same here. That.. at parents' evenings. That the Afro-Caribbean parents and the African parents are very supportive.

Ms Miller used ethnicity to make sense of how she saw pupils acting in the classroom. For her, pupils' attitudes to education and school were strongly influenced by their cultural backgrounds, with Turkish pupils in particular being seen as less supportive of education than their African Caribbean and Indian peers. She also seemed to treat African Caribbean pupils differently than Turkish pupils in 7B, having higher expectations of, and giving fewer reprimands to, the former.

There was also another time when ethnicity was brought up by a teacher I interviewed. This was with Mr McGuinness, a PE teacher, when I asked him to make a brief comment on each of the pupils in 7B. Describing Ismail and Ahmet on the basis of their ethnicity and gender, he also seemed to associate Turkish pupils with particular attitudes and behaviours:

> Teacher: Ismail is like a small Turkish man. I think he's a very traditional Turkish man... and if he stays like that he'll be a very traditional Turkish

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[52] See also extract of PSE lesson 7 in Chapter 3, section 3.2.3.

man...

Marta: In what sense?

Teacher: It's kind of... very forceful, very kind of dominant, especially of the girls... He dismisses girls quite easily. (...)

Teacher: Ahmet... he's a character. A small Turkish boy. Him and Moktar... when they're together, that's when Moktar talks. If it's not him, he will not talk... Ahmet, he's just like a naughty schoolboy. (Mr McGuinness, PE teacher)

Generally teachers tended to address issues around ethnicity in a superficial manner, which contributed to reinforce common stereotypes about different ethnicities rather than questioning how ethnicity shaped interactions both between pupils and with teachers.

In conclusion, Ismail was a Turkish Cypriot boy about whom teachers had very low expectations, particularly in relation to behaviour. He more actively sought to commit to school than it was generally understood. As I pointed out, Ismail's experience of fighting and bullying, as both victim and perpetrator, was not properly addressed by the school, which failed to locate it in the wider field of conflictive ethnic relations in the local community. Whilst not treating interactions between pupils as racialised, some teachers did seem to associate particular behaviours and attitudes with certain ethnic groups – particularly Turkish and African Caribbean. Thus, although Ismail was actively trying to pursue a schooling identity that was accepted at Greenfield Comprehensive, he was being limited by the negative expectations teachers had from him.

6.2 *Joe*

Joe is a boy of African Caribbean and French descent. He lived not very far from the school, and was entitled to free school meals. Joe left Greenfield Comprehensive after finishing Year 7. The school was not informed of his departure; his record stated that 'Mother didn't bring him back'.

I could not gather information about his achievement in Key Stage 2. In Year 7, he had the following results in Science: 7 in both assessments 1 and 2 (out of ten), and 80% in the final test. Based on his results in this subject, we could predict that having been at Greenfield Comprehensive in Year 8, he would be allocated to the top set. He was not considered by the school as having Special Educational Needs.

Throughout Year 7, Joe was given 16 detentions. Many were for 'being rude', 'problematic' or 'not following instructions'. He was never excluded from the school.

6.2.1 Discipline

Teachers' expectations of Joe's behaviour were quite low at Greenfield Comprehensive. As I mentioned before, Joe received 16 detentions throughout Year 7, and mostly these were given because of his refusal to accept teachers' authority. Teachers acknowledged that Joe did not misbehave all the time, and that he could be very good in terms of behaviour:

> Joe... he has positive and negative sides, Joe... sometimes. He could be the most mature, responsible boy and then other times he would blow up a wall, so to speak. (Ms Clarke, PSE teacher)

> Joe is very clever, very able, and in my lesson he's very good. But in other lessons he's very bad, I don't know why, he has a problem. (Mr Roberts, Science teacher and head of Year 7)

In spite of this, expectations of Joe's behaviour seem to have deteriorated throughout the school year, as I will illustrate further below.

Although there were some incident reports remarking that Joe was also involved in fights, these did not happen often. Even in relation to the on-going conflict with Ismail and Ahmet, mentioned in the previous case study, Joe seemed to try to behave in a non-violent way. For instance, once he was asked to write down a summary of one such incident, and I quote:

> I was going to sit down and Ismail came and took my chair even though there was a chair next to me. So I decided to take my chair back after that I gave him the chair then he decided to go and punch me and I ain't letting it flow so I decided respond to it non-physically but a verbal manner. (Joe) [53]

The extract above suggests Joe's commitment not to be violent, although the school seemed to overlook his effort. After this incident with Ismail, a learning mentor at Greenfield Comprehensive contacted Joe's mother to discuss what had happened. This conversation was mentioned in an incident report, where the learning mentor wrote:

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[53] I could not find Ismail's written version of the event.

Spoke to Joe's mother on the phone, following the incidents above. She said Joe has been having problems at home since May, and that his behaviour at home is also disruptive. She asks that staff shouldn't announce their knowledge of these troubles at home to Joe. Finally, she asks that Joe gets more differentiated work, so that he is stretched more.

This conversation with Joe's mother seemed to reinforce staff perceptions of Joe's misbehaviour as resulting solely from his home environment. This resulted in a 'colour-blind' approach (Gillborn, 1990) to the on-going conflict between Joe and Omi, on the one hand, and Ismail, Ahmet and Jamie, on the other. Staff often located the 'problem' in the individuals themselves and/or in their family environment. This seemed to happen particularly with pupils of ethnic minority origins. For instance, when I interviewed 7B's form tutor, Ms Miller, later in that school year and asked her about Joe, she told me:

Joe... He's underachieving. Like mad! He's got... Family problems. Hmm... He's imitating his father. (Ms Miller, form tutor)

These accounts, however unintentionally, portray Joe's family as pathological by stressing the negative consequences of Joe's father in his misbehaviour. Although Joe's family circumstances might have accentuated his misbehaviour, the school responded as if it was the only issue ignoring, for instance, the impact of the conflict with Ismail and Ahmet in contributing to misbehaviour in lessons. Furthermore, teachers tended to downplay Joe's and his family's positive attitude to education. His mother's commitment and participation in Joe's education throughout the year hardly received the same attention as the supposedly negative influence of his father. This seems to reflect the poor expectations from families of ethnic minority origins that existed at Greenfield Comprehensive.

Not all staff explained Joe's behaviour as originating in the family. Two of the learning mentors who worked with him, and interestingly both black, had different views. Ms Cumberbatch suggested that perhaps Joe got bored of lessons because he found them too easy:

Joe I know a bit, and I think Joe's probably very gifted as well. (...) I think sometimes he might genuinely be bored in lessons, you know?, it kinda... or he might just 've got into being a bit naughty and going into the bad boy thing and

then certain teachers expect that in the lessons...and then it's set up. I don't know! But... I think he's probably very, you know?, he's got a lot to offer... I don't know. 'Cause I barely met him, you know?... I haven't seen him very much in lessons, so... but when I've seen him, I've seen him in situations where he've sent out, and be outside by the door... When I talk to him, he might seem quite reasonable, but obviously he's been having problems in the classroom... (...) He's really a nice boy! (Ms Cumberbatch, learning mentor)

Ms Cumberbatch explained Joe's getting into trouble with teachers because of his getting bored in lessons and some teachers' poor expectations from his behaviour. Another learning mentor, Mr Chengeray, pointed out Joe's dislike for authority:

Joe... Joe is like Omi's best man. And they're always together. Joe is... he gets into trouble, but he's not really unpleasant. He's got... he has a bit of an attitude when it comes to authority, when people tell him what to do. He doesn't actually say I'm not going to do it, but you can see it by his face. He resents being told what to do, you know? Hmm... He... Yeah, I'd just say that he's basically... calmed down a bit, kind of. (Mr Chengeray, learning mentor)

In some lessons, I witnessed Joe confronting teachers about expectations to conform to their authority. This happened only in the PSE lessons I observed. As Mr Roberts mentioned, in Science he behaved well. The most frequent display of intolerance to petty authority was when he was asked to put his hood down:

Joe puts his hood up. Ms Miller tells him to put it down. He doesn't. (...) Joe doesn't do any work. The teacher asks him to get his homework diary out, but he doesn't. Apparently, he has no pencil, and she gives him one. (...) Without being asked, Joe reads aloud from a book, with his hood up. Ms Miller asks him to sit down and to put his hood down, and he sits on his chair but doesn't put it down. (Fieldnotes, PSE lesson 9)

Such small-scale conflict with Joe was very common in Ms Miller's PSE lessons, even though she would not generally put him in detention. The following example from a lesson, in which exceptionally the vice-principal intervened, is illustrative of how such conflicts developed:

Joe went outside, chasing Jamie for his Pokemon cards. He drops some, and Omi takes them. He gives them to Ms Miller. When Joe comes back, he shouts at Ms Miller saying, 'Miss, give me my Pokemon cards!' She doesn't understand at first that the cards were his, but agrees to give them back to him. Jamie comes in, and Ms Miller asks Joe whether he was chasing Jamie. Joe confirms it. Jamie asks Joe whether he got a detention. Joe replies, 'Why? Did you?' Jamie didn't. (...) Joe is always turned, talking to Omi and Jamie (who is now doing the exercise in the sheet). Ms Miller approaches them. Then she tells Joe that his shoes are not appropriate for the uniform (white trainers). (...) The teacher shouts at Joe and asks him to sit down. He doesn't look at her. (...) Joe slaps Omi, jokingly, and Omi falls down to the floor. Ms Miller shouts at Joe, and he says it was an accident. She asks him to go with her, but he doesn't. Omi gets up, pretending he's crying. She tells him not to exaggerate. He stops pretending. She continues asking Joe to go with her. He doesn't go, and she asks for his diary, but he also doesn't give it to her. She gives up. Then Joe sits down and talks to Omi and they both laugh. She says she'll fill in an incident report. Joe shouts at her, and then walks around the classroom. Then he sits down, leaning on the chair. Ismail and Moktar are standing, and rehearse fight motions. The vice-principal comes in and tells Joe, 'Get it right!' He replies 'What?' The vice-principal says, 'Your behaviour!' He asks for their attention, and the bell goes off. They all start speaking. He tells them that when somebody is talking to them, they should stop speaking. Ahmet asks, 'What about when your friends speak?' He starts trying to talk again, 'When these people... There are still girls talking, moving their heads...' Then he asks Joe to take his things (coat, bag...) and go with him. They come back after a little while, and Joe looks upset. (Fieldnotes, PSE lesson 8)

In this example, we can see how conflict with Ms Miller started from minor things and escalated with Joe refusing to comply with most of her instructions. Nevertheless, as I mentioned before, Ms Miller generally did not punish Joe regarding this kind of behaviour.

When I observed other lessons with different teachers, Joe's behaviour seemed substantially better. In Science he behaved very well, and even in PSE (with different teachers) he did not confront teacher's authority and sometimes he even supported it by asking his peers to be quiet so that the teacher could explain the lesson.

In interviews, pupils supported that Joe was not consistently misbehaved. They thought that he 'sometimes' misbehaved, seeing his misbehaviour happening in particular lessons:

I reckon that... me and Adam we act the same, but like it's different because like Joe, he would act OK in this lesson and then he would go off and he'd chat and would be naughty and he'd swear... (Terry)

Joe thought of himself as being able to behave well or not, depending on the lesson. He told me that he behaved better with stricter teachers. Significantly, he associated teachers' fairness and respect with his own behaviour:

Marta: Do any of you get into trouble a lot? Why is that? (...)

Joe: I get detention when I get rude. Or when I chat back. And they only give detention to me, just like that. I got my mum to come into school about that. (...) They (the teachers) only listen to one side of the story, and that's it. They listen to their side (Ismail, Ahmet and Jamie's) and ours (his and Omi's) doesn't matter.

As this extract suggests, and as I will further explore in sub-section 6.2.3, Joe reacted against the lack of respect he felt he received from some of his teachers. Teachers, on the other hand, saw this as evidence of Joe's refusal to accept their authority and thus small indiscipline incidents often escalated.

Joe was not involved in violent incidents or was ever found guilty of a serious offence that would lead him to be excluded from school. In spite of this, expectations of his behaviour were poor at Greenfield Comprehensive and deteriorated markedly throughout his Year 7. When I interviewed the head of Year 8, after Joe left the school, she used him as a scapegoat for the disciplinary problems of the school:

Marta: Do you know why some of the pupils in 7B left the school? Like Joe and...

Ms Bells: Hmm... Joe is interesting! Joe's mum... Hmm... (hesitates and laughs)... Joe's mother thinks that Joe is a complete innocent. And therefore, everything that happens was because of other people. But in fact, Joe himself was the leader for most of the school's problems. So... he's gone. That would be very interesting to know how's he doing now, because I think in another school he'd be kicked out within two weeks. For some of the things that he did in this school. (...) We never heard anything from Joe's mum. She just didn't bring him back. God knows where he is! (laughs) I don't know. (Ms Bells, head of Year 8)

Ms Bells's accusations that Joe was the 'leader for most of the school's problems' are considerably serious, although I do not know precisely what she thought of when stating this. Other teachers who did not think of Joe so negatively also had low expectations from him. For instance, the head of Year 7 (Mr Roberts) thought that he should be 'kicked out of school'. Within this picture, it was unsurprising that teachers saw his leaving Greenfield Comprehensive as positive.

6.2.2 School work

In terms of academic work, Joe had good results in Science. He showed interest, participating actively in the lessons and the teacher often relied on him to get correct answers to the questions posed in class. The Science teacher had very high expectations of Joe's work, as the following quote shows. This was in a meeting with Joe and his mother, where they were discussing his strengths:

> Mr Roberts asks Joe what his strengths are, adds that he is very clever, and says, 'Shall we put that? Everyone agrees that you're one of the cleverest pupils in Year 7.' (Mr Roberts, Science teacher and head of Year 7).

Teachers of other subjects also had high expectations of Joe's work. Some suggested that he was a 'mature' and 'able' boy, who could support other students who achieved less well. In a lesson I observed, another teacher commented that academic work was not a problem for Joe, even though she thought he lacked some other qualities to be a good pupil:

> There is a different teacher for the Science lesson today. She tells Nina to continue working hard (Nina has been doing nothing but talking to her neighbours). She praises her saying that she is a sensible person, as is Omi. Joe asks, 'Like me, Miss?'. She says, 'The word 'sensible' doesn't really describe you, but I know you can work hard sometimes'. Joe looks surprised. (Fieldnotes, Science lesson 5)

Joe also participated regularly in PSE lessons, and his contributions showed a wider commitment to learning than that strictly within the school subjects:

There is a police officer in class today, talking about her job. She says that she will ask a difficult question and the pupil who guesses the answer can try the handcuffs (because all of them want to try them on). She asks, 'Who is the commissioner for the Metropolitan Police?'. Joe answers, 'Sir Paul Condon'[54]. She replies, 'Excellent, well done!'. Some pupils make comments on him replying correctly. He does an offensive gesture to Cetin, and says, 'If you would watch the news more often you would know the answer'. (Fieldnotes, PSE lesson 3)

Pupils in 7B also thought that Joe was very good in terms of academic work. When he was not positioned as the best pupil in 7B this was because of his behaviour:

Marta: So, going back... who do you think is the best pupil in the class?

Jamie: In the class or in my year?

Marta: In your class, in 7B...

Jamie: The head of Year says that... that it's out of me and Sebastien. But I think it's out of Sebastien and Joe...

Marta: Why do you think Sebastien is a good pupil?

Jamie: Because he gets high marks and... he's not very naughty. I think... I think Joe is cleverer...

Joe felt confident about his academic work, although he was not quick to admit it even in spaces that were more private. He also did not position himself as the best pupil in 7B. Defining a 'good pupil' as being someone who has good behaviour, Joe positioned 'the girls' as the best pupils in his form. He chose Julia in particular pointing out that she was quiet besides working hard. In spite of this, Joe was aware of the quality of the work he produced and of his academic skills. For instance, after a Science lesson in which pupils had differentiated work he argued that he, Omi and Jamie should be taught in a more advanced group. This was because they 'found it easy', whilst he thought that 'everyone else was getting stuck' in the less advanced work.

In terms of academic work there seemed to be a consensus that Joe was a very good pupil, interested, and someone who could help those who achieved less well. He was positioned as being one of the best pupils, not only in 7B but also in Year 7 in general. However, initially some teachers did not seem to hold

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[54] This was at a time when there was extensive media coverage of the reopening of the inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence (in 2000).

such high expectations about the quality of his work, as I observed in a Science lesson in his first term in the school:

> Mr Roberts is teaching about experiments to test conduction. He explains and writes on the board. He asks a question to Alice, who doesn't reply correctly. Then Joe answers. Omi comes in late and brings a note to Mr Roberts. After reading it, the teacher says, 'Distress?!' and smiles (sarcastically). He tells Omi to copy what they have done in the lesson from someone else's book. Omi sits next to Joe and talks to him. Mr Roberts moves in the classroom and stops by Joe and Omi's desk. Omi has just put his spectacles on. Mr Roberts says, 'You're very intellectual like that, Omi. It makes you look ten times cleverer.' He starts distributing the exercise books, and tells Omi, 'Oh, you're copying it from Joe, are you?' (ironic tone). He finishes distributing the books and asks a question to Terry, Brian, and then Lucy. As none of them responds correctly he turns to Joe, who gives the right answer. (Fieldnotes, Science lesson 2)

Although it is unclear what led Mr Roberts to comment on Omi choosing Joe as the person from whom to copy the lesson, it seems nonetheless that he did not consider it the appropriate choice. This was in spite of Joe replying correctly to questions that some of those considered being amongst the best students in class (such as Lucy and Brian) failed to. With the written assessment tests in Science, Joe seems to have raised the teacher's expectations, and was finally considered as 'one of the cleverest pupils in Year 7'. However, and as I mentioned previously, Joe's behaviour was subject to a large amount of criticism from teachers. Thus, in spite of his acknowledgement of Joe's academic success, Mr Roberts thought that because of his behaviour Joe did not deserve a place at Greenfield Comprehensive:

> Marta: What do you think of 7B in terms of academic achievement?
> Mr Roberts: It's very mixed. You have kids in that class who are very clever, and kids in that class that are *not* very clever at all. You have kids that work hard, and then kids who don't work hard. I mean, you know what's the people like. Lucy will always do her best, and Sebastien and people like that. Very good kids. And then you've got people like Ismail, and Joe and Omi...that just... and Jamie. That just don't give their potential at all. And they're just wasting their time, and they're wasting everybody else's time. (...) (Pupils in 7B) They're nice! I really like them. They're my favourite class to teach. Hmm... But that's because... I like them, and I'm the head of year. Hmm... We've lost far too many people. We've lost Brian, we've lost Jason, we may lose two or

three other from that class. Really good kids, who sort 've been... basically had a really bad time, because of Jamie, and Ismail, and Ahmet and Joe causing huge trouble in that class. And I'm very angry with those boys. Hmm... I would have them virtually kicked out of school. Because they've spoiled the education of other people. And... I'm quite cross about that, you know, a lot of work hasn't been done. One teacher was driven out of the school, she left the school. And she taught them and I'm sure she taught worse classes than them, because she left in sort of October. But they couldn't have helped, they must have been very badly behaved as well, so... I'm quite annoyed. As a class, it really hasn't worked. (pause) Their form tutor, Paula Miller, has had a really hard time. (Mr Roberts, Science teacher and head of Year 7, original emphasis)

For Mr Roberts, the fact that some teachers and pupils were leaving Greenfield Comprehensive justified that pupils like Joe, Ismail, Jamie and Ahmet should be driven away. This was because of their behaviour. Many other studies suggested that teachers have low expectations of African Caribbean boys, particularly in relation to behaviour (cf. Connolly, 1995, 1998; Gillborn, 1990; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Sewell, 1997; Wright, 1986, 1992). What I would like to stress here is that the way in which Mr Roberts and many other teachers associated academic achievement with discipline helped re-construct Joe's academic success as *failure*.

This association, between achievement and discipline, was more closely interwoven in teachers' views than I observed in pupils' practices. There were quite a few pupils in 7B whose work was praised by teachers, but who were seen as misbehaving, and thus re-positioned as failures. Their ability to negotiate a legitimate schooling identity at school was thus limited. Arguably, this had to do with the image and identity of the school that some teachers wanted to create, and that was one of 'standards' and order. The pupils who felt out of these criteria, although they could generally contribute to raise the profile of Greenfield Comprehensive in terms of exam results, did not fit into the school model which they tried to implement. This seemed to be Joe's case.

The differentiation-polarisation theory, by postulating that pupils who achieve well academically tend to behave well (Lacey, 1970), is not very helpful to understand the identities that pupils like Joe were constructing. Joe achieved highly and teachers had good expectations of his academic work. It is thus unlikely that he did not support the school because he was denied academic success. Rather, his misbehaviour could be seen as contesting the

'colour-blind' approach of the school that resulted in his schooling identity being deemed illegitimate, as I will explore more fully below.

6.2.3 Racism as the emerging issue

An important issue that emerged from the examination of data about Joe, both in observation and interviews with other pupils, was that related to racism[55]. During a couple of months, 7B had a long-term supply teacher in English, Mr Evans, after their teacher left due to illness. This was a supply teacher from an agency, and with whom the school eventually ended the contract. Even though it may be argued that Mr Evans did not reflect the characteristics of other members of staff[56], I will use the events that happened with him to illustrate how the school failed to address issues of racism.

Mr Evans was a teacher that generally did not seem to be liked by pupils. His lessons were said to be very disruptive, and pupils complained that he did not teach adequately, not explaining the subject clearly enough, and not treating them with respect. Importantly, pupils who voiced their complaints to me were not only those with whom the teacher had conflictive interactions.

I first became aware that Joe's interactions with the English teacher were 'problematic' in another lesson, when he briefly discussed it with Mr Roberts:

> At the end of the lesson, Mr Roberts tells Joe that he is flattered and honoured that he is intelligent and works hard in the Science lessons, but that he should do the same in English lessons. Joe feels that the teacher does not treat him correctly. Mr Roberts says he knows what the problem is, and that they will discuss that in the parents' meeting next day[57]. (Fieldnotes, Science lesson 15)

In the next day, I observed some meetings with parents, amongst which that of Joe and his mother.

> Mr Roberts says that he had lots of students to see on that day but that he had to choose 12, and so he chose those that are more important. (...) He tells Joe that he could do really well in school: he is a good student, enthusiastic in Science, but that there are problems with his behaviour (particularly in English, where they are having a long-term supply teacher). Mr Roberts says, 'The fact is

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[55] Joe never raised directly this issue with me, which could have been due to me being white. In spite of that, Omi (also black) brought up the issue in the interview I carried out with him and Joe.
[56] Although Joe told me about some other situations with another teacher at Greenfield Comprehensive who he thought was picking on him.
[57] It is possible that Mr Roberts decided not to discuss the issue more fully in this lesson because of my being next to his desk, and this was before I asked him permission to attend the following meeting.

that it is *your* life, *your* qualifications!' Joe's mother says that these problems are making him lose respect for all other things in school, and that he is developing an attitude sort of, 'I don't care'. About the English teacher, she says that whenever Joe says something, he replies that Joe is tough. Mr Roberts says that Joe can't use that or other kind of excuses, 'Oh, I didn't hear the instructions so I sit at the back and do nothing.' Mr Roberts says, 'There is absolutely no problems with capability': he is clever, good in sports (basketball), he has good personality, the teachers like him, and 'it's really a talent being wasted'. He adds, 'You're not doing it for me. The effort that you have to do is to help you to go through school, college or whatever you want to do'. They set as targets to work harder and to show respect. Mr Roberts tells him, 'You want to say to yourself that this subject is important for you, whatever subject it is. And English is the main target'. (head of Year 7's meeting with Joe and his mother, original emphasis)

As we can see from my fieldnotes, what Mr Roberts did was shifting the attention from Mr Evans to Joe, dismissing the role of the former in Joe's misbehaviour. I do not mean to suggest that Mr Roberts did not want to help Joe avoid getting in trouble in school. However, in spite of Mr Roberts's acknowledgement that Joe's behaviour was only bad in some subjects, he did not give Joe the credibility to discuss his own point of view. His approach was not to allow Mr Evans's actions to be questioned, whilst asking pupils to show a respectful attitude towards him. By doing this, I think Mr Roberts accentuated Joe's antagonism to teachers' authority.

Other pupils complained to me about Mr Roberts' disrespectful attitude. For instance, Ismail told me about an occasion that he was physically hurt by Mr Evans, and consequently was even sent out of the lesson:

> Marta: Do you have any specific example that happened (of teachers treating pupils unfairly)?
>
> Ismail: Like, yeah, our old... not our first... But the one after that, that was Mr Evans, he used to shout at us, he dragged me by my arm... He threw... He done that to me (shows me a scar in his arm), and he pushed me out and then... And after, when I come in, I see a mark right on his front, he's got big nails, and I had no nails 'cause I just cut them the other day, and I saw a mark right of his nails, I said 'I haven't got nails!' Everyone knew that I didn't have nails, yeah? And after that I didn't know... And the teachers are not going to detention, 'cause I had a red card and I was out... of the lesson.

Even Terry (who was being bullied by, and did not like, Ismail) told me how he thought that the way in which Ismail was treated was inappropriate:

> Terry: Yeah, but this time, there was Ismail... He is naughty but I don't think he deserved like getting grabbed... He's grabbed down the collar, and he twisted it down... so like that...and he grabbed it... Do you remember in English?
>
> Adam: Yeah, yeah.
>
> Terry: And he basically threw him on the floor. I don't think that's fair. I think he should say, 'Can you leave, please?' or something.
>
> Marta: This was with Mr Evans?
>
> Terry: Yeah, Mr Evans.
>
> Adam: Yeah.
>
> Terry: That's what it was. Because like... Maybe if he asked him a few times, yeah?, and he ignored it, he can go and get something like... He can get...like...
>
> Adam: 'Cause he just pulled him and took his fingers and started throwing him around and cursing and stuff... (...)
>
> Terry: You could get done for like hit... for like grabbing Ismail, 'cause that's... I can't remember how it's called, but it's... it's illegal or something...

Other pupils, such as Sinead and Alice, also mentioned other incidents happening with Mr Evans in which he did not treat pupils in a way that they thought was respectful. Sinead was genuinely concerned with the way Mr Evans treated Joe. In a meeting with her mother and the head of Year 7, she brought up this issue to Mr Roberts's attention:

> They talk about English lessons. Sinead says, 'Everyone is horrible to the teacher'. (...) They talk once more about Mr Evans, the English teacher. Sinead says he gives them work that he doesn't explain, and that everyone is rude to him as a result. Mr Roberts suggests that she can help the others change their attitude towards the teacher. (...) Then she talks about a comment the English teacher made to Joe about his haircut. Mr Roberts replies, 'That's a bit racist. You can't change it.' (Fieldnotes, head of Year 7's meeting with Sinead and her mother)

In my opinion, this final quote encapsulates the way in which Greenfield Comprehensive dealt with racism, that is, an issue not to be addressed. I do not have information regarding what action the school took in relation to Mr Evans. I once asked Mr Roberts about him, and he replied that he was not

coming back, somehow implying that the school regretted having had him as a teacher. However, I think that the information I gathered regarding how the incidents were discussed with pupils is illustrative. Mr Roberts somehow reproached the English teacher's behaviour. However, he seemed to feel that he could not change it, and therefore it was up to the pupils to adjust. They should show respect to him regardless of the respect they were given. It was the pupils' attitudes that needed to change; and for these, respect had to be earned. Such handling of these incidents had two results: firstly, it treated situations of discrimination and disrespectful treatment by teachers as unproblematic. Secondly, it gave pupils who were not treated as they deserved a sense of growing discontent with the school.

In summary, during Year 7 Joe came to be considered as 'one of the cleverest pupils' in that year group and his academic results were generally very good. He showed commitment to learning, both within the school subjects and more widely. In class, teachers often relied on him to get correct answers to their questions. However, teachers at Greenfield Comprehensive had generally poor expectations of his behaviour. This was in spite of Joe not having been involved in serious offences and of his behaviour not being consistently bad. Teachers and pupils suggested that his misbehaviour happened with particular teachers. The school did not explore the reasons for Joe's misbehaviour with certain teachers, besides not addressing with pupils the racist treatment some of them were subjected to when taught by a long-term supply teacher in English. Dismissing the teacher's behaviour as being unchangeable, pupils were instead asked to change their own attitudes towards that teacher. Arguably, this added to some pupils' feeling of discontent with the school for not being treated with the same respect that was asked from them. This was compounded by many teachers locating the misbehaviour of some ethnic minority pupils within individuals and/or their families. A 'colour-blind' approach at Greenfield Comprehensive resulted in ethnicity being dismissed of having an impact on pupils' experiences and on the construction of their schooling identities. In Joe's case, interactions with teachers that became negative by virtue of his ethnicity constrained his ability to construct a schooling identity that was accepted by the school. In particular, the conflictive relationship that developed between him and Mr Evans was treated by the school as due to Joe being 'troublesome' and occasionally confrontational. Shifting the problem to Joe limited the range of schooling identities that he could pursue and reinforced his reputation as

disrupt*ive*. This limited his ability to pursue a positive identity in terms of behaviour at Greenfield Comprehensive.

Joe ended up leaving the school. According to his best friend Omi, this was because he was bullied by Ismail and his brother. This was another issue that was not properly handled, as I suggested in the case study on Ismail. The school failed to address the problems that Joe faced at Greenfield (racism and bullying), and in spite of his academic work being of high quality, no interest was shown in keeping a pupil like him.

His stance could not be described in my opinion as anti-school, or as a rejection of the school's institutional means (Merton, 1957). Joe's contesting some of his teachers' authority grew out of, and was informed by, his insight into the wider discrimination against African Caribbean people.

6.3 *Nina*

Nina was born in South Africa, and so were her parents. Her mother's parents were of Indian origin, and she told me she was not sure about her father's background, with whom she did not have contact. Nina considered herself English and South African. She was Hindu and spoke Gujerati as her first language. In her school record it was stated that she had *English as an Additional Language* in stage 4[58], and her ethnicity was described as 'South Asian'. She lived in the school area, with her mother as guardian. Nina was not eligible for free school meals, and according to the school, she did not have Special Educational Needs.

Nina had a grade 4 in Science at Key Stage 2. In Year 7, she had 5 (out of 10) in Assessment tests 1 and 2, and 94% in the final test in Science (the highest result of all pupils in 7B). In Year 8, she remained in 8B and was in the top set in Science, being the only person from her form who had EAL in that group. She had only one detention throughout Year 7, which was given for failure to complete homework.

6.3.1 Discipline

Teachers' expectations of Nina's behaviour were generally positive, although sometimes she was said to misbehave. The head of Year 7 described her in the following way:

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[58] Denoting a good level of fluency.

Nina, I think is very funny. I like her. But she can mess about sometimes. (Mr Roberts, head of Year 7 and Science teacher)

Her form tutor, Ms Miller, did not seem to think that Nina was as positive a girl as other teachers considered her to be. She told me that she thought that this was due to the education she received at home:

Nina... She's... I met her parents for the first time, and I can now see why she behaves like she is. She's very repressed. (Ms Miller, form tutor and PSE teacher)

Although it is not clear precisely what Ms Miller meant, she suggested that Nina did not behave appropriately, and that this would be in response to her home atmosphere, which she considered too repressive. Again, ethnic minority pupils' misbehaviour was explained as originating in their families. Teachers at Greenfield Comprehensive hardly ever used a negative view of white pupils' families. Interestingly, there seems to be a tension in the way she sees the family as shaping pupils' behaviour and attitudes to school. Ms Miller had claimed that Turkish pupils misbehave and are not motivated because their families are not supportive of education (cf. sub-section 3.2.1 in Chapter 3). In Nina's case, the teacher suggests that this pupil's misbehaviour is due to her family being too strict. Both explanations serve to reinforce a deficit approach to the families of ethnic minority origins, either for not being supportive, or for being repressive.

Nina, on the other hand, felt that she was not treated fairly by Ms Miller:

Nina: At first I thought Ms Miller, you know, in our registration, I thought she was picking on me, 'cause whenever I wasn't talking, Lucy used to talk a lot to me and I used to get in trouble because of her...

Lucy: Yeah, and I used to say...

Nina: She stopped now, because I told the head of Year 7, and she stopped.

Nina's classmates thought of her as a 'good' and 'sensible' pupil. Some pupils in 7B (Angela, Dimitris and Mashal) considered her as one of the best pupils in class. Moreover, as her best friend, Lucy, acknowledged, Nina was sometimes unfairly accused of offences she did not commit, or was not the only one responsible for:

Marta: So does any of you get in trouble a lot? I mean...

Nina: Yeah, I got sent to the head of the...Mr Roberts's office...

Marta: Yeah?

Lucy: Mr Roberts...

Nina: Because... Joe took my rubber-band ball... (explains what it is) so I went after him and then I got... And you... was watching me! I didn't know this, and then he started calling Lucy something, and she started running, she said 'come on, come on', and... I went. So I got in trouble. Lucy didn't. She always leaves me like that for some reason...

Lucy: No, no! When hmm... he said 'Nina goes for lezzies!' and at the end of the lesson, I ran up the stairs and said, 'Mr Roberts, I was running around...'. And he said, 'Yeah, Ok, I'll deal with you later.'

Nina: Did he?

Lucy: He... sometimes, when he's really upset, he just says this... 'Oh, go and see Miss so-and-so. I'll deal with you later!'

Nina: Always this happens...

Marta: Do you think it was fair? That only you...

Nina: No, I don't think that was fair... 'Cause it wasn't just me, it was Peter, it was Soph...

Lucy: Was it Sophie, or...?

Nina: No, it was Mash... No... it was loads of people running around...

Lucy: It was loads of people...

Nina: But I was picked out...

Lucy: Yeah, she was just...

Nina: 'Cause most of the time I was doing my work, she was the one...

Lucy: I was... I was the one who had been running around...

Nina: A lot...More than me. But he saw me, not you, that's why I was actually angry.

Lucy acknowledged that there were situations in which Nina had been wrongly accused of misbehaving because of her own behaviour. However, as she also stressed, teachers did not seem very interested about this, even when she tried to repair the situation.

Nina generally behaved well, although sometimes she talked to her friends sitting next to her. This was generally done quietly enough so that the teacher would not notice. She also enjoyed positive interactions with teachers. This probably helped that, when given orders, Nina would accept what she was told, as the following example illustrates:

Nina complains that she didn't get a mark for question number 5. The teacher, Mr Roberts, says he will check that at the end of the lesson, and Nina doesn't

say anything else. (...) After a while, Sinead says, 'Sir, Nina got 16 ticks, not 14!' Nina doesn't say anything. The teacher continues with the lesson. (Fieldnotes, Science lesson 15)

Although Nina was sometimes wrongly accused of misbehaving, she was careful in how she dealt with teachers in that kind of situation. The following event is illustrative:

> Lucy and Nina come in. Nina brings her schoolbook in her hand. The teacher reprimands them, and Lucy says they went to pick up the book. The teacher says she's going to put Nina in detention, as she came to the lesson twenty minutes late (Nina had been in at the beginning but the teacher didn't see her). Nina replies, 'I don't see the point of detention'. They say they had problems with the lockers. Joe teases them. The teacher says that if Nina finishes her work on time, she will forget about the detention. (Fieldnotes, Science lesson 5, with a different teacher)

Rather than questioning the teacher about the fairness of the sanction, since Lucy was not threatened with detention and was late as well, Nina questioned the usefulness of the sanction for her behaviour. Thus, Lucy was able to get away with it. However, by doing so, Nina failed to draw the teacher's attention to the fact that only some pupils were being punished more for an offence also committed by others. Interestingly, after this event in the lesson Nina did not comply with the teacher's demands of being quiet so that the teacher would 'forget' about the detention:

> During the rest of the lesson, Nina, Sinead and Joe talk all the time. Occasionally, Lucy joins in. After a while, the teacher (Ms Rose, replacing Mr Roberts) approaches them and they all pretend to be quiet. She tells Nina to continue working hard (Nina has been doing nothing but talking to the pupils sitting next to her). The teacher praises her saying that she is a sensible person. (Fieldnotes, Science lesson 5)

Without actually complying with the teacher's request, Nina pretended she was behaving in lesson and managed to be excused of the detention.

Generally, Nina behaved in a way that allowed her to break minor rules, such as talking to her friends. However, when the teacher noticed that the rules were being broken, she tended to be reprimanded, rather than the pupil who she was talking with. Trying to protect her friends in such situations,

Nina would not accuse them of being involved in the same offence. This helped to keep the status quo, as teachers were only seldom confronted with their unfairness.

When I asked Nina to describe herself as a pupil, she told me that she was 'good' but that she also liked to chat. Exploring that, she told me about her and Lucy:

> Nina: We're not angels, we're not devils...
>
> Lucy: We're not angels, we're not devils, yeah!
>
> Nina: Yeah, well I'm loud, she's not that loud... but when she's with me, she's really loud. But myself I'm louder, 'cause I get bored... and you get very bored...
>
> Lucy: I just do my work, I can't be bothered.
>
> Nina: I do my work, but... as well as I mess about. But I always finish...
>
> Lucy: I always finish my work.
>
> Nina: Right...
>
> Lucy: Occasionally... not occasionally... sometimes, we talk... a lot. And we get in trouble...
>
> Nina: We always talk a lot! (Laughs) No, we never get in trouble though, 'cause we... as soon as the teacher comes...
>
> Lucy: 'Oh, how do you do this, how do you do this?' We help each other a lot.
>
> Nina: Yeah, we're always backing each other all over the place!

Supporting each other, Nina and Lucy managed not to get into trouble. Each of them received only one detention throughout Year 7, and it was for not completing homework, rather than for talking or being noisy. Interestingly, when I interviewed Nina in Year 8, she mentioned that 'last year I used to get a lot of detentions'. However, these were not registered in her school record, and as the dialogue above illustrates, Nina suggested that they 'never get into trouble'.

This did not mean that she distanced herself from the pupils who misbehaved. When I asked her whether she knew why 7B was split up, she replied:

> Yeah, because people didn't get along with each other much, and we were just really loud and naughty. (Nina, Year 8)

Unlike other pupils, who referred to those who misbehaved as 'they', Nina included herself in that category. Nevertheless, it was not strictly by virtue of

her behaviour that she excluded herself from the category of best pupil in 7B. When both she and Lucy chose Julia as the best pupil in their form, they justified their choice in the following way:

> Lucy: 'Cause she isn't absent too much, she never...
>
> Nina: She's always getting merits. Always... getting merits...
>
> Lucy: And she's our friend! I didn't use to like her, but...
>
> Nina: She always does extra stuff, makes her homework... extra this, extra that...
>
> Lucy: We don't...
>
> Nina: We don't care about our uniform. Unless Ms Miller comes, then we have to cover up 'cause we ain't got... we have got a uniform, but you know? (laughs)
>
> Lucy: We can't be bothered to have... like shoes... only black... We try and look for it, but...
>
> Nina: I mean, our way... I can't get plain black shoes... 'cause I need them for... My mum says... I've only got, like, a pair of trainers... (...)
>
> Lucy: We can't base everything on school. You have to have something for the weekends!
>
> Nina: Yeah, I need to think of my weekend as well, 'cause...
>
> Lucy: I just bring these to school. (points at trainers, grey and black) I can't be bothered! Sorry about that.
>
> Nina: My mum can't afford to get two pairs of shoes or trainers for me.

Although Nina mentions that financially her mother cannot afford to have several pairs of shoes or trainers, she considers that school should not dictate what she wears and thus she does not wear plain black shoes. Thus, they both excluded themselves from being the 'best pupils' in the form because of their attitude to some of the school rules, such as not wearing the uniform.

In summary, Nina enjoyed quite a good reputation in the school. Although she was sometimes treated unfairly by her teachers, she generally dealt with those events in such a way as not to disadvantage her friends and not to get in conflict with teachers. Her not confronting teachers about being sometimes over-punished helped her being seen as having a 'very positive attitude to school' and in not being positioned as disrup*tive*. This allowed her to negotiate a schooling identity that was generally accepted by teachers.

6.3.2 School work

Nina was one of the most engaged pupils in 7B. She often raised her hand to reply to the questions being asked, and given permission she usually replied

correctly. Although teachers pointed out that Nina sometimes misbehaved, she matched their high academic expectations and was considered a 'bright' and 'conscientious' student. She was seen as having a 'very positive' attitude to school and as being 'very into working and learning'. For instance, the head of Year 7 told me about her:

> Very good work, good effort, good attitude... Fantastic girl! (Mr Roberts, head of Year 7 and Science teacher)

Nina did not see herself as so committed to school, and thought that particularly in Year 8 she started engaging more in school work:

> Marta: Do you think that you have changed since last year? In what way?
>
> Nina: I've matured more. I'm not into running about as much as I used to. Last year I used to get a lot of detentions, and now I act better, and I get good grades. I'm working better. I don't know... but last year I wasn't much into work.

Nevertheless, throughout Year 7 she did seem to take her school work seriously. Although unlike some pupils she did not often do extra work, Nina told me that she would always finish with her work before chatting to her friends in class, which she would do because having finished, she was getting 'very bored'. Thus, in relation to academic work, she distanced herself from other pupils who showed less commitment:

> Marta: So, first I would like to ask you how do you like your class and your school?
>
> Nina: I like my... school. But some people in the class don't have work done and everything... like Ismail and stuff...

Thus, although Nina did not necessarily comply with all disciplinary rules, she positively identified with, and showed commitment to, school work.

Nina generally valued those subjects whose teachers made lessons interesting. For instance, she told me that PSE was a boring subject, because they did the same sort of activities every week, and played games that she did not consider of any interest (such as ordering themselves according to age, or height). Science, on the contrary, was a subject that she really liked:

Nina: 'Cause Mr Roberts is quite... really, really good teacher, 'cause... all the Year 7s, right, I ask them if they do any like... homework, like building or anything, and they said, 'No, we only write and listen'... Our teacher, although he might be a little bit... we don't like him and everything, we still like...

Lucy: We still do...

Nina: The work... Because he lets us experiment, he shows us how to do things... (...)

Lucy: He lets us... we do... we have got...we do get homework from him, but fun homework... it's not, like, boring, write up, like, 12 pages or something, of work... (...)

Nina: Mr Roberts is one of the best Science teachers, 'cause Mr Howard doesn't let them experiment.

Although Nina told me that in Science she behaved 'dead good', because the teacher was the head of Year 7, and that was why she somehow did not like him, she did enjoy the way Mr Roberts taught.

Nina enjoyed attending Greenfield Comprehensive, and thought that the school was getting better and more organised. Confronted with the possibility of her mother making her change school, Nina stressed that she preferred to stay. She disliked the previous headteacher, arguing that he had not managed the school properly. Instead, she preferred Mr Jones, the headteacher at the time, although pointing out that he was a bit strict.

In summary, generally teachers had a positive view about Nina, considering her an intelligent girl with a sense of humour, although sometimes misbehaving. Mostly, they thought of her as being 'very into learning'. She did score highly on the final Science test (she had 94%, which was the highest result in 7B), although throughout most of Year 7 her grades in Science were average (she had two grades 5, out of 10). Being perceived as having a 'positive attitude' to school, with teachers describing her as 'conscientious' and 'getting on with work', probably helped her to secure a position in the top set in Science. Importantly, it also encouraged her to pursue a schooling identity that was accepted at Greenfield Comprehensive, in spite of her form tutor's poor expectations from her and her family.

6.3.3 Emerging issues: gender and ethnicity

The issues that emerged from analysing the data I gathered on Nina mostly related to the way in which she used her gender and ethnicity to gain control

of situations. This was an on-going and policed process, in which she constantly negotiated her identities, particularly next to her peers.

From observing her in school, I noticed that Nina used displays of what might be termed as traditional femininity that none of the other pupils in class did. She did this primarily through clothing (often wearing skirts and polishing her nails), dancing, and generally by paying a lot of attention to her looks. This was also noticed by her learning mentor, Mr Chengeray:

> Nina... she's very friendly. She's a bit...hmm... She's into her looks, actually. So she goes painting the nails, and looking in mirrors and brushing her hair, and...you know?, those kinds of things... (Mr Chengeray, learning mentor).

Such displays of femininity often seemed to be used to attract her male peers' attention:

> Nina gets up and goes to talk to the boys in the last row, Omi and Sebastien. When she passes by Joe's desk, he comments about her wearing a skirt. She replies 'Wait until you see me in a hot day!' (Fieldnotes, PSE lesson 6)

This contrasts with research that suggests that South Asian girls present themselves as desexualised (for instance, Benjamin, 2001; Connolly, 1998; Wright, 1992).

Many of the boys in Nina's form saw her constructing a traditional femininity, which was based on physical appearance and posture and on displays of emotion through the tone of voice and crying. For instance, in the last Science lesson before Christmas, where pupils played an impersonation game, Omi imitated Nina by using a very female-ish posture and a high-pitched voice. She was promptly identified by her classmates. Indeed, such posture and voice did not generally go unnoticed, both by her peers and by staff:

> ...she's generally a very nice girl, Nina. She can be... she can be a bit hyper, actually. And, she gets... she takes things so seriously! If something happens, she'd be weeping, and... as if 'the world is gonna end'! (uses a dramatic voice), you know?, that kind of thing (laughs). But she's all right! (Mr Chengeray, learning mentor).

Far from unconscious, Nina seemed to use this posture to obtain what she wanted, as she suggested to me herself:

> Yeah, I cry to get everyone upset but...(laughs) 'Cause I went to Drama school, and whenever I cry, right?, they all go crying round me saying' (imitates crying) 'I'm sorry', and I say, 'Thank you!' and I walk away... (laughs)

As the extract above depicts, Nina used the way in which she presented herself to others, largely based on her gender, to manipulate situations in her favour. Skeggs (1997, p. 116), for instance, had also found in her study girls 'doing' femininity whenever they felt it was useful.

Nina also seemed to be using her femininity according to how she thought she could become popular amongst the boys. She felt that being a girl entailed sacrificing some aspects of her identity in order to keep a good relationship with the boys:

> Marta: Which are your favourite subjects? (...)
> Nina: I don't know...Actually it would probably be PE or Drama actually. (...)
> Lucy: Yeah, PE because I love...
> Nina: 'Cause you get to run about, act freely... But sometimes you can't... be on the top of the boys 'cause they'll get mad, but...

Nina thought that, to be accepted by her male friends, she should not be too good in sports. The shaping of her femininity could thus be seen as being formed within the boundaries imposed by her peers.

Despite that, Nina occasionally contested the traditional femininity she displayed. It was particularly outside the classroom that she used a repertoire of gendered behaviours that included those used by boys:

> And he was having a bitch fight, which is... a girls' fight, like... And I don't do it that way, I do it like a boy, I punch him, and kick'im...

Other behaviours that were generally associated with boys and that she referred to included swearing. Her male peers, however, policed her attempts in re-positioning herself, precisely because of her displays of femininity. Peter, a boy in 7B, suggested that Nina 'thinks she's a hard', and Ahmet immediately contrasted her with Sinead, who *he* thought '*is* a hard'. Nina's use of a traditional femininity thus limited the possibility of being positioned as 'hard',

something that was not denied to Sinead. Resorting to traditional ways in which to present herself as a girl to her own advantage (particularly in the classroom) meant that Nina constantly needed to negotiate the range of identities that were available to her.

Thus, Nina used a repertoire of gendered behaviours that included those used by boys. However, she frequently displayed a traditional femininity next to her teachers (for instance, not being confrontational) and peers (using her looks and displaying her emotions). The policing of her gendered identity (particularly by her male peers) limited her success in gaining status next to these. It also made it difficult for her to negotiate an identity that was based on both traditional male and female behaviours.

Nina used a traditional femininity in the classroom, and she seemed to be advantaged from teachers' generally good expectations from South Asian pupils (cf. Brah and Minhas, 1985; Connolly, 1998; Gillborn, 1990; Mac an Ghaill, 1988). Thus, although teachers like Ms Miller thought her family was 'too repressive', Nina seemed to manipulate that to construct an identity that was accepted at Greenfield Comprehensive, that is, based on conformity to teachers' authority. However, in doing so she legitimised traditional gender divisions and the hegemony of masculinities (cf. Holland *et al.*, 1998, and also Reay, 2001).

The policing of her ethnic identity by her peers was also apparent. Omi, in spite of getting on very well with Nina, disliked the way in which she played with her own ethnicity. In an interview where he complained that there were no black girls in his form, he described Nina as 'half-caste', telling me that she 'acts white':

> Omi: There's no black girls, there's this Indian girl, man! You're surrounded... you're surrounded by white people! I ain't being racist or anything, but I think we should have black people so we can feel like... like...
>
> Joe: Comfortable.
>
> Omi: Yeah! There's only the half... There's only one half-caste girl and she prefers herself white. She acts white.
>
> Marta: Who acts white...? Who is she?
>
> Omi: Nina.
>
> Marta: How would you say... Sorry, what do you mean by acting white?
>
> Omi: She goes... she goes... 1 ask, 'Nina, what do you prefer yourself? White or black?'... And she goes, 'White, of course!'...

Omi defined Nina's ethnicity by her skin colour, trying to control the way in which she was supposed to describe herself. Rather than 'acting white', I saw this as illustrating Nina's uncertainty regarding how to position herself in terms of ethnicity. I think the extract below depicts this:

> Marta: I am living in England, but I have Portuguese background. How would you describe your own background?
>
> Nina: Hmm... English and South African. My mum is South African. My dad is South African as well. But their parents, my mum's, my grandma was born in India, and my granddad was born in South Africa. So, I'm not sure...

In Nina's school record her ethnicity was registered as Indian, her first language was Gujerati and her religion was Hindu. However, Nina felt somehow ambivalent in relation to being positioned as Indian. Her parents and her own staying in South Africa, and her coming to England were also important to her. Although it is not clear in her exchange with Omi why she refused to be categorised as 'black', she nevertheless did seem to contest such simplistic positioning.

Interestingly, although Nina seemed to be generally operating within a less essentialist view of ethnicity in relation to herself, ethnicity was used by her to make sense of her experiences and to establish the boundaries of what she identified with:

> Lucy: Oh, I don't like Mr Howard...
>
> Nina: No, he's too Irish...
>
> Lucy: Sorry?
>
> Nina: Not Irish, we're not like that, we're not racist.
>
> Lucy: We're not racist...
>
> Nina: We just like... he's too... not 'cause of the Irish...I don't think that...
>
> Lucy: No...
>
> Nina: It's just that he's a bit... I don't know, he's so boring.

It is interesting to note how Nina tried to contest the position she was assigned by others in terms of ethnicity, whilst simultaneously using ethnicity to position others. This suggests that the role of ethnicity in contemporary identities is more complex than most treatments allow for, and highlights the temporary and unpredictable nature of identification based on ethnicity (cf. Mac an Ghaill, 1999).

Summarising, Nina seemed to be using her positioning in school as a pupil and as a South Asian girl to construct her schooling identity in quite complex ways. Although generally conforming to teachers and pupils' expectations, she also showed an ability to manipulate some situations in her favour, using her gender and ethnicity. Whilst in the classroom, she tended to display a traditional femininity. She did not contest the unfair treatment she occasionally had from teachers or their authority, besides paying much attention to her physical appearance and posture. This was used to her own advantage, both not to get in trouble with teachers and to try to be popular amongst boys. It was outside the classroom that she used a repertoire of gendered behaviours that included those used by boys, although her popularity next to these was limited by the femininity she displayed. In relation to ethnicity, she contested her peers' categorisation as black and showed ambivalence as to how to define herself due to her family's varied backgrounds and experiences.

Most of previous work on pupils' adaptations and identities, reviewed in the previous chapter, is limited in helping to understand how Nina was developing her schooling identity. The differentiation-polarisation theory, according to which Nina would probably be described as being pro-school, does not help explaining how she used her gender to develop an identity that was accepted at Greenfield Comprehensive. The same applies to the re-working of Merton's (1957) model, as this would merely position Nina according to her acceptance of both the cultural goals of the school and its institutional means[59]. On the other hand, insights from post-structuralist theorising can be very useful, particularly where gender and ethnicity were addressed (cf., for instance, Connell, 1987; Connolly, 1995, 1998; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Walkerdine, 1990). Conceiving of identity work as being on-going and always incomplete, post-structuralist accounts shift our attention to the process of the formation and negotiation of identity. This helps to conceptualise how Nina used and negotiated gender in creative ways to develop an identity that was seen as legitimate at the school.

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[59] Even in Sewell's (1997) work, it was only by resorting to post-structuralism and cultural studies that he explained how gender articulated with the formation of schooling identities.

6.4 *Sophie*

Sophie is the younger daughter of an Anglican, divorced couple. She has two brothers, over 10 years older than her. Her family was described in school as being 'very posh' and they lived in a wealthy area of the borough. Curiously, and unlike any other pupil record I looked at, her parents' professional background was mentioned: her mother was a director and lecturer, and her father worked in design.

In relation to ethnicity, in her school record she was described as 'white', her mother having added 'English'. There was a note also written by her mother, which added, 'Sorry – but to be <u>really</u> politically (correct), why is it not possible to subdivide 'white' into categories – (especially as BRITISH is no longer fashionable)'. In the transfer report from primary school, Sophie's ethnicity was recorded as British.

Her previous achievement in Science, at Key Stage 2, was relatively high (grade 4/5). In assessments 1 and 2 in Science she had 7 and 6 respectively, out of ten. She did not take the final Science test. As predicted by her grades, had she continued attending Greenfield Comprehensive, she would have been allocated to the higher Science set in Year 8.

In terms of discipline, she had only one recorded detention, which was given for 'talking after repeatedly being asked to stop'. By the end of the Spring term there was another incident report filled in by the head of Year 7, stating that she was 'generally unhappy with class', and that her mother had been contacted regarding that issue.

Her transfer report from primary to secondary school suggests that Sophie's primary teachers also had very high expectations from her. Attendance and punctuality were said to be excellent. In the report, she is described as follows:

> Strengths: Natural writer and storyteller, extensive vocabulary. A good conversationalist – wide general knowledge. Theatre work, drama involvement.
>
> Suggestions: place with likeminded pupil early on for easy setting.

6.4.1 Discipline

As already noted, officially Sophie only received one detention throughout Year 7. This was for continuing talking after the teacher asked her to stop. Sophie

thought of herself as being fairly well behaved. She acknowledged that she talked in lessons, but she told me that she 'knew where to stop'. When I asked her and her friend Julia to describe themselves as pupils, they told me:

> Sophie: Sometimes I'm quiet. (They both laugh)
>
> Julia: But she gets hyper sometimes!
>
> Sophie: Yeah. But we don't do things just...
>
> Julia: We listen in class, we participate...
>
> Sophie: We know where to stop, we don't always, but we know where to stop, whereas most of the others don't know where to stop.
>
> Julia: We know when our talking got too far, don't we?
>
> Sophie: Yeah.
>
> Julia: Like, the teacher gives us a warning, and so we stop then. We don't carry on doing it.
>
> Sophie: Yeah.
>
> Julia: We don't, like, shout, like, at the teachers, like...
>
> Sophie: And some of the boys, like, push the teachers before getting out of their way... And sometimes when the class has been really bad, we go to the teacher and apologise at the end... for the class.

Both girls distanced themselves from other pupils in 7B, mainly boys, who they thought were 'really disruptive'. However, Sophie seemed a bit uncertain how to position herself in terms of behaviour. She did not think she was 'really bad', although acknowledging that she also misbehaved. Such uncertainty was expressed in her hesitation in choosing between *we and them* when referring to pupils thought of as disrupt*ive*:

> Marta: Do you behave differently in some subjects? Why do you think it's that?
>
> Sophie: Yes. In English... *We* behave different because...
>
> Julia: I think it's because the teachers let *them*!
>
> Sophie: Yeah, the teachers let *them*...
>
> Julia: The teachers let *them* run wild, don't they?
>
> Sophie: Yeah...
>
> (my emphasis)

The quote above illustrates Sophie's uncertainty in relation to how to position herself in terms of behaviour. She found it difficult to find a category that would encapsulate who she was in terms of behaviour. She seemed to have appropriated official and teachers' discourses on discipline that portray pupils

as being either disrupt*ive* or disrupt*ed*[60], feeling the need to define herself as one of the two categories. This was an on-going process, with other pupils and teachers helping her to define who she was. In the situation of the interview, it was Julia's own positioning that helped her in excluding herself from the category of disrupt*ive* pupil. She tried to distance herself from what was a disadvantaging position (not only on its own terms, but also in conflict with teachers' expectations), and thus referred to those who were 'disruptive' as *them*.

Sophie suggested that teachers helped this process of polarisation of pupils' attitudes, by treating pupils differently according to their expectations of behaviour, as suggested in the quote reproduced below:

> Marta: Thinking about the school as a whole, do you think teachers treat everyone fairly?... Give some examples.
>
> Sophie: Yes, but all the other kids they don't know how to react.
>
> Julia: Not really... We don't... In a way, it's good, because they don't like to single you out. So the bad people... get mixed with the girls, and all. We get mixed in our class. I think they treat us fairly.
>
> Sophie: Yes, they treat us fairly... Let's say if you have a question and you, like, you put your hands up... They would eventually ask you. (...) Even with the really disruptive ones, they still treat them fairly.
>
> Julia: And if some people...
>
> Sophie: They're a bit forgetful (both laugh), 'cause they say I'll give you detention and they forget! What's the point?
>
> Julia: (...) The bad people get detention, but the good people get a merit! Not all the time, but...
>
> Sophie: If one person acts bad... *If you don't act like they think you should, then they'll say, 'Why aren't you acting like you should, because you're not like the others, you're not stupid or anything'*. Not that the others are stupid! (laughs)
>
> Julia: No, but sometimes you can get in trouble for... like somebody is throwing a chair across the class, and you open your mouth and you get in trouble just for that. And when you say you were just talking, they won't do anything about it... (my emphasis)

What this extract seems to suggest is that teachers expected Sophie to do well, because she was 'not like the others'. When she did misbehave, going against their expectations, she was reminded that she was supposed to act differently from disrupt*ive* pupils. In this process, whereby disrupt*ive* pupils were seen as

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[60] See Chapter 3, where I explained this in more detail.

merely conforming to their teachers' low expectations and the other pupils were reminded that they were not expected to misbehave, polarisation of behaviours was enforced upon pupils (cf. Lacey, 1970). Arguably, it was Sophie's socially advantaged background that contributed to her being positioned in such a way. Other studies documented how the pupils who were perceived by teachers as 'ideal' (Becker, 1952) – generally from a middle-class background – were more likely to be advantaged in the classroom (Sharp and Green, 1975).

In the extract above, Julia mentioned that sometimes they got into trouble for minor misbehaviour. What she did not say, however, is that she never had a detention, and Sophie only received one. Thus, even though sometimes they were warned to be quiet in lesson, they were generally not punished for misbehaving. For example:

> Sinead and Sophie are talking quite loudly. After a while, Mr Roberts tells them, 'Are you going to be long or are you going to continue to make noise for the whole lesson?'. He continues with the lesson. (Fieldnotes, Science lesson 7)

Generally, teachers had very high expectations of Sophie's behaviour and thought of her as a pupil who did not cause, or get into, trouble. As her form tutor Ms Miller described her, 'She's fine!'. I only witnessed one time when Sophie was asked by the Science teacher, who was also the head of Year 7, to stay after the lesson. The fieldnotes I took are reproduced below:

> The Science lesson was very noisy, and Mr Roberts asks the following pupils to stay: Sinead, Sophie, Liana, Andy, Dimitris, Yousef, Jamie, Lucy, Omi, Adam, Ismail, Ahmet, Joe, Cetin and Peter. Then he gives some of the others permission to leave. To those who were asked to stay, he says that he's getting fed up with the noise, particularly with Sinead, Sophie, Joe and Omi. He asks whether it is like that in the other lessons. 'It's a lot of effort and I'm the head of the Year.' He says that he supposes that with other teachers, and particularly with supply ones, it must be much harder. He concludes by saying, 'If you disrupt other people's education, I'll have to have you referred.' (Fieldnotes, Science lesson 16)

In no other circumstances did I witness Sophie being reprimanded so harshly, even though this was a collective reprimand intended to work as a warning.

Three weeks after this incident, the head of Year 7 and Sophie's mother discussed her being unhappy at school. When later I interviewed the head of Year 7 (Mr Roberts), he told me that she was a 'very nice girl, but she's had an unhappy time here'. Arguably, Mr Roberts's perceptions of Sophie's behaviour were contextualised in her not enjoying being at Greenfield Comprehensive.

Pupils did not think that Sophie was so well behaved as teachers did. A couple of her classmates told me:

> Sinead: But then there is this girl, Sophie, she thinks she is... hmm... She's a bit bitchy...
>
> Alice: Yeah, and she is so chatty in class, she's actually got detentions for chatting... And the teachers just tell her to be, can you be quiet?, and she just carries on chatting, and laughing...

I mentioned before that Sophie only received one detention throughout Year 7. And even though her peers thought that she had been punished more often than that, Sinead and Alice complained that Sophie received special treatment by teachers:

> Sinead: The thing with Mr. Roberts is... 'Cause... In Science lessons, 'cause... Well, Mr Roberts... Sophie gets the homework from me... Say, the day we have Science, the teacher... He says... He goes around the line, and this was in front of us, if Sophie hasn't done the homework...
>
> Alice: He says, 'Fine.'
>
> Sinead: Yeah...
>
> Alice: And if he comes to me, he will shout at me.
>
> Sinead: Yeah.

These two pupils suggested that Sophie got away with things for which other pupils in 7B were reprimanded. Thus, it seems that teachers further polarised pupils' behaviour by sometimes overlooking misbehaviour by pupils who were perceived as non-disrupt*ive* in the classroom.

Summarising, although Sophie was not a pupil who misbehaved seriously, she did engage in talking or laughing, sometimes quite loudly, disturbing the lesson. However, teachers' treated her favourably, and she never got into serious trouble. Only one time was she actually given a detention. Teachers seemed to be reinforcing polarisation of behaviours in the classroom by making clear the different expectations they had from pupils considered

disrupt*ive* and non-disrupt*ive*. Some pupils showed awareness of such differential treatment, which they considered unfair.

The tension between Sophie's actual behaviour (sometimes misbehaving) and how teachers (who had very high expectations from her) perceived it was reflected in her own uncertainty about who she thought she was as a pupil. Referring to pupils seen as disrupt*ive* as both *we* and *them* was perhaps the most obvious expression of this.

6.4.2 School work

Sophie was a pupil who generally got good grades. In Science, the results she had in assessments 1 and 2 (which were, respectively, 7 and 6 out of 10) predicted that she would be in the top set in Year 8, had she not left the school that Summer. Sophie usually replied correctly to questions in class, although she did not often volunteer to participate. Nevertheless, she tried to show she was interested and motivated. When asked to describe themselves as pupils, Sophie and Julia told me:

> Julia: We don't always work hard. But...
>
> Sophie: But we usually work, we don't just sit there...
>
> Julia: And we like to get our homework in on time, don't we?
>
> Sophie: Yeah, we usually do our homework...
>
> Julia: And if one person hasn't done their homework... If I hadn't done my homework and Sophie had, I would go to her and ask her to copy it.
>
> Sophie: Yeah, or to ring people up and say, 'What was the homework?'... Like, people always ring me and ask...

Although Sophie not always complied with the school discipline or work requirements, she tried to show her commitment. In terms of discipline, this was seen for instance in her going and apologising for the class at the end of a lesson. In terms of school work, she usually made sure that the work required was presented on time.

In Year 7, her favourite subjects were Success Maker, Media, Drama and German. Interestingly, none of them seemed to motivate her particularly:

> Marta: Which are your favourite subjects? And why?
>
> Julia: Success maker. 'Cause that's with the computers. It involves really all the subjects as well, don't it? Like English, Maths... That's it.
>
> Sophie: (nodding) Hum-hum. And I like Media...

> Julia: Yeah, Media is good ...
>
> Sophie: And Drama is ok. It depends on what you're doing, but it's usually ok...
> And German is ok.

Unlike Ismail, who was seen as a 'lost cause' but liked school because of the subjects he was doing, Sophie did not seem to take so much interest about the subjects she was studying. Issues about discipline and control in the classroom seemed to dictate some of her preferences. For instance, she did not like English lessons much. 7B had many different supply teachers throughout the school year, and she felt that because of that pupils were just 'too disruptive'. In contrast, she liked the Science teacher because his lessons were more quiet and controlled:

> Marta: Are there any teachers who you especially like or dislike...? Why?
>
> Julia: I like Paula Miller. She's kind. I like Mr Roberts.
>
> Sophie: Yes, Mr Roberts.
>
> Julia: Because Ms Miller is kind, and she's gentle with us.
>
> Sophie: Yeah... Too gentle! (laughs) Mr Roberts is probably the only teacher that can control the class.
>
> Julia: I think it's 'cause the boys are scared of him because he's like the Year co-ordinator.
>
> Sophie: Yeah, 'cause they know they... He will get them in trouble. The other teachers they say they'll put them in detention, but they know they won't...

It is interesting to note that even in the lessons where discipline was stricter, Sophie received better treatment than other pupils, as Sinead and Alice had pointed out. This was probably in virtue of teachers' expectations of Sophie being so high, as the following quote depicts:

> Sophie, she was great. Another one of those bright sparks who found everything very easy in Music. So therefore you would have to really concentrate on getting some extension work, otherwise she would get bored. Yeah, she was very bright. (Ms Ojy, Music teacher)

Sophie was perceived as being so 'bright' and 'able' that she was excused of misbehaviour that her peers would not get away with. This was because teachers 'understood' that she got bored after finishing her class work. Another quote illustrates this:

> There were other students like that, who *chose* to more or less join... Sophie, for example was... was someone who had the capacity to join in if she wanted to, and whenever she didn't want to she sort of sat back and didn't listen and talked to her friends. And you knew she was disengaging from what was going on. (...) Sophie chose when she wanted to join in and when she didn't. (Ms Clarke, PSE teacher, original emphasis)

In Sophie's case, talking in lessons was mostly excused by teachers because they assumed that she was getting bored and therefore disengaged.

One further example of a Science lesson illustrates how sometimes the course of a lesson was changed so that particular pupils were motivated to participate:

> Mr Roberts asks who wants to play first a game with sticks. Many pupils (boys) volunteer. Mr Roberts explains the rules and they start playing the game. Omi plays against Sebastien and wins. Then Mr Roberts says, 'Sophie is the next person to play because she thinks it's stupid.' Lucy says, 'But it's stupid!...' Mr Roberts replies, 'If you're going to be rude then we aren't playing!' (...) The only four girls in class today sit together and do not participate in, or engage with the games. Mr Roberts tries to motivate them. Sophie wins 'the hangman' with the word 'electron', and the teacher says she deserves a note of merit for that. (Fieldnotes, Science lesson 10)

Overlooking misbehaviour or adjusting part of a lesson to motivate certain pupils, as in the situation described above, was a privilege only given to a few within the classroom, and Sophie seemed to be one of them.

6.4.3 Social class as an emerging issue

When Year 7 ended, Sophie did not enrol again at Greenfield Comprehensive. The school was informed about her mother's decision of moving Sophie to another secondary school. Her closest friends, Julia, Michelle, Sinead and Liana had talked with Sophie about her leaving the school, and when I interviewed them again in Year 8, they told me why they thought she left. All of them suggested that disappointment with Greenfield Comprehensive was amongst the reasons that led to Sophie's departure. Julia pointed out that it was the lack of discipline in school that made her move out:

> She went to another school because her parents didn't think she was learning much, because of the fighting and disruptiveness in our class last year. (Julia)

The other three girls went further, suggesting that Greenfield Comprehensive was seemingly not an appropriate school for Sophie:

> I think she wanted to go to a better school, 'cause she wasn't getting anywhere in this one... For me this is fine, but she didn't like it. (Liana)

> Sophie left 'cause she didn't like this school, and her mum didn't like the school either and she just wanted her daughter to get a good education. (Michelle)

> I'm not sure why Sophie left. She went to (name of school)... I think she wanted to go to a proper state school. (Sinead)

According to her friends' views, Greenfield Comprehensive was not a good school for Sophie. She moved out to a 'better', 'proper state school', where she could get a 'good education'. Interestingly, these girls did not seem to think that Greenfield Comprehensive was an inappropriate school for them. But their explanations raised this issue: secondary schools such as Greenfield are seen as being appropriate only for some people. Apparently, Sophie was not one of them, though it is unclear what exactly these pupils had in mind.

When I interviewed the head of Year 8, Ms Bells, she hinted that social class was the hidden criterion that determined whether the school was 'appropriate' for certain pupils. Ms Bells told me that Sophie moved out because she was 'too posh' for the school. Social class was used as the key definer for fitting in a comprehensive school like Greenfield. Whilst some pupils were considered 'lucky' to attend it, it was 'no surprise' that some others left. Although the quote below is lengthy, it clearly illustrates how Ms Bells related pupils' exodus from Greenfield Comprehensive to social class:

> Marta: Do you know why some of the pupils in 7B left the school? Like Joe and...
>
> Ms Bells: Hmm... Joe is interesting! Joe's mum... hmm... (hesitates and laughs)... Joe's mother thinks that Joe is a complete innocent. And therefore, everything that happens was because of other people. But in fact, Joe himself was the leader for most of the school's problems. So... he's gone. That would be very interesting to know how's he doing now, because I think in another school he'd be kicked out within two weeks. For some of the things that he did in this school. Hmm... Sebastien's mother... I was very surprised she sent him here. Because she's incredibly upper class. It's obviously not a school

you would send your kids to if you're upper class. He's gone, I think, to one of the poshest schools in London. A posh, posh boys school. And so did Sophie. Very posh. No surprise they didn't want to be in a comprehensive. They were caught by the headmaster. He took them in. It's sad, but... you don't tend to find kids like that in a comprehensive school. They just can't accept that they have to be with other people. And that's why they just couldn't cope with... I don't know, other races, other people, other classes, other ways of working... Really, obviously couldn't cope.

Marta: So those were the three pupils who left 7B?

Ms Bells: Yeah. I think that's it. Yeah. Sebastien, Sophie and Joe, yeah. Oh, we knew about Sebastien and Sophie, but we never heard anything from Joe's mum. She just didn't bring him back. God knows where he is! (laughs) I don't know. *(Ms Bells, head of Year 8)*

In Ms Bells's understanding, Joe was 'lucky' to have been at Greenfield Comprehensive for a whole school year. Had he attended another school instead, she reckoned he would have probably been excluded after a couple of weeks. In relation to Sophie and Sebastien, however, perceptions were reversed. It was 'surprising' that their parents had decided to send them to Greenfield Comprehensive, which is 'obviously not a school you would send your kids to if you're upper class'. Here, the school was seen as 'lucky' to have them on roll, rather than the reverse. Thus, Ms Bells thought that it was understandable that these pupils left, suggesting that Greenfield Comprehensive is only 'appropriate' for the pupils of less favoured social backgrounds.

Also interesting is her comment on the reasons that she thinks led Sophie and Sebastien being moved to other schools: the fact that at Greenfield Comprehensive pupils 'have to be with other people (...) other races, other classes, other ways of working'. The data I gathered through observation and interviews suggests that Sophie and Sebastien did not find it difficult to be with other pupils. Both of them had amongst their closest friends pupils of different ethnic and social backgrounds, with different ways of seeing school and working. By shifting the problem onto the school's social composition, Ms Bells also did not address parents and pupils' dissatisfaction with the promises the school made but failed to deliver. For instance, besides condemning the lack of discipline, Sophie also felt that the school was not what she thought it would be in terms of facilities (such as a library, which

was not open for many months) and activities. When asked about how they liked school, Julia and Sophie told me:

> Julia: The restaurant is good.
>
> Sophie: We should have the library and have more facilities.
>
> Julia: There's lots of after school clubs. But we could have different things...
>
> Sophie: Yeah, things like Gymnastics and Drama...(...)
>
> Julia: It was a new school...
>
> Sophie: Yeah, it was a new school... So they shouldn't have opened it until it was ready. Because we hadn't got a library and most things I just take for granted. (...) And it wasn't very good to start with...

Rather than expecting to be with pupils like her in terms of background, what Sophie seemed to have taken for granted was that she would find in Greenfield Comprehensive the facilities to which she was used. As I argued on Chapter 2, the number of pupils leaving to other schools suggests that many families perhaps felt disappointed with Greenfield Comprehensive. However, only some had the possibility of *choosing* which schools to send their children to and cope with the additional costs it entailed. For Sophie, going to a 'posh' school was a possibility that finally materialised.

In summary, Sophie was a high achieving pupil who engaged in minor misbehaviour such as laughing and talking in class. High teachers' expectations from her generally meant that her misbehaviour was of no consequence, merely being seen as a sign that she was bored in lesson. Her status as the daughter of a professional family seems to have reinforced such high expectations. Previous work on the differentiation-polarisation theory seems helpful here, even though Sophie was not subjected to formal measures of academic differentiation throughout her stay at Greenfield Comprehensive in Year 7. From my observation, however, the polarisation of pupils seemed to be happening at Greenfield Comprehensive partially regardless of this. By the end of Year 7, and even before pupils were set into some academic subjects, teachers seemed to have very clear expectations of pupils' academic work and behaviour. Pupils who were generally perceived as having a positive attitude to school, such as Sophie, were often encouraged to develop a schooling identity that was accepted at Greenfield Comprehensive. This entailed teachers overlooking pupils' misbehaviour, and constantly reminding what was expected from them. Arguably, in doing so, teachers were determining not who

should be allocated to the different academic sets, but rather who were the pupils that could help Greenfield Comprehensive build a *fresh* identity. I argue so because pupils who were high-achievers and were perceived to have a negative attitude to education were not seen as deserving a place at school. Moreover, those who were low-achievers but were not thought of as presenting a disciplinary problem to the school were also seen as fitting within a comprehensive school like Greenfield.

Sophie found it sometimes difficult to articulate teachers' expectations from her with how she perceived her own behaviour. On the one hand, her closest friends and teachers helped her to identify with non-disrupt*ive* or disrupt*ed* pupils. On the other, Sophie acknowledged that she could also be disrupt*ive*, showing uncertainty and ambivalence about how to position herself. The tension she experienced seemed to be an on-going process that Sophie was still attempting to come to terms with. Arguably, her socially advantaged background (which influenced teachers and pupils' expectations of her) was helping her in constructing a schooling identity that was accepted at Greenfield Comprehensive.

6.5 *Conclusions*

Throughout this chapter, I tried to illustrate how pupils in Year 7 at Greenfield Comprehensive were constructing a range of schooling identities. Official discourses on discipline and 'standards', 'colour-blind' policies at the school, teachers' expectations, and the school's endeavour to construct a *fresh* identity, were shaping the formation of pupil identities. These articulated with wider discourses on ethnicity, gender and social class.

I had explored how current discourses on discipline tend to construct pupils in a binary of opposites, that is, as disrupt*ive* or disrupt*ed* (cf. Chapter 3 where I discuss this in more detail). At Greenfield, I observed teachers reworking these discourses, overplaying the indiscipline of disrupt*ive* pupils and downplaying the misbehaviour of disrupt*ed* pupils. This, and teachers' differentiated expectations of pupils according to ethnicity, gender and social class, helped polarise pupils' identities in the form under study. More specifically, I illustrated how perceptions of Ismail and Joe's misbehaviour were overplayed, with teachers ignoring these pupils' efforts to construct identities that were accepted at the school. On the other hand, the misbehaviour of pupils like Sophie tended to be ignored (or, in her case,

recontextualised as her 'unhappiness at the school'), encouraging her to shape an identity that was perceived as 'appropriate'. Thus, in spite of pupils' uncertainties and ambivalence in positioning themselves as *pupils*, teachers acted in ways that were *hardening* their fragile identities. In doing so, they contributed to the polarisation of pupils' behaviour according to the categories created by discourses on discipline, reinforcing the differences between pupils positioned in those categories throughout Years 7 and 8. Here, the work of the authors of the differentiation-polarisation theory was helpful, particularly when taking into account the labelling theory. For instance, Lacey (1970) showed how teachers' practices operated to press pupils to conform to their initial expectations, reinforcing these. Importantly, Ball (1981) suggested that teachers' expectations were not determinant, but provided the framework within which certain identities could be negotiated.

This process of identity formation was further compounded by the operation of ethnicity, gender and social class. The post-structuralist theorising was particularly helpful in contributing to the 'acknowledgement of the *plural* sources of oppression, unhappiness and antagonism in contemporary capitalist societies' (Mercer, 1990, p. 44, original emphasis). Aspects resulting from education policy and the school's organisation, ethnicity, gender and social class were all operating by constraining and producing a range of schooling identities. Those presented in this chapter were not the only ones. I tried to stress the different factors present in the shaping of identities at Greenfield Comprehensive, but by no means do I wish to contend that other factors (such as age, sexuality, school subcultures) were not present. I tried to retain in my analysis an emphasis on difference, taking into account stable forms of oppression (cf. Skeggs, 1991).

At Greenfield, as more widely in education policy, a 'colour-blind' approach was contributing to some pupils' growing discontentment because of their perceptions that the school's interests lay elsewhere. Indeed, the school seemed more intent in establishing an atmosphere of discipline and order than in addressing the roots of disciplinary problems. This was seen not only in relation to bullying and on-going conflicts between pupils, but also in teachers failing to question why some pupils misbehaved more often with teachers from whom they received racial abuse. Thus, pupils like Joe and Ismail were seeing the negotiation of their schooling identities constrained by their ethnicity. Other pupils, such as Nina, found ways that were more successful in the negotiation of schooling identities. In spite of sometimes being wrongly

accused of misbehaving, Nina managed to use her gender and ethnicity to manipulate situations in her favour. This was put into practice particularly by playing on a traditional femininity in the classroom, not questioning her teachers' unfair treatment. Finally, Sophie, a pupil from a professional background, used her social advantage to her benefit, reinforced by teachers positioning her as disrupt*ed* by her peers' misbehaviour. This happened in spite of her ambivalence towards such positioning. The work of Mac an Ghaill (1994) and Connolly (1998), informed by post-structuralism, has showed how pupils' gender and ethnicity shaped their schooling identities. In particular, they stressed that these are not necessarily constraining factors, but that some pupils do find creative ways in which to negotiate their identities. This seemed to be the case at Greenfield Comprehensive, illustrated specifically in the case studies on Nina and Sophie.

The current rhetoric of 'standards' and its impact in the shaping of pupil identities was also at work at Greenfield Comprehensive, although in a more complex manner. As I tried to show throughout this thesis, the school was battling to overcome its label as a 'failing school'. Officially, this would be translated in passing the 15% A-C benchmark (cf. Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). These authors documented how teachers helped reproduce existing educational inequalities in the A-C economy. In particular, they argued that in the current context of education policy schools are favouring the pupils seen as capitalising in GCSE results, which largely include those pupils seen as having a 'good attitude'. At Greenfield Comprehensive, the pressure exerted by education policy to differentiate between pupils also seemed to be felt, although taking specific contours. This was arguably because issues of discipline and control were very prominent in constructing a new identity for the *fresh start*ed school. Thus, the perceived need to establish an ordered atmosphere was of great significance in dictating which pupils deserved a place at Greenfield Comprehensive. Pupils thought of as being 'appropriate' to the school were not those who were only high-achievers (such as Joe). Rather, it was pupils like Sophie and Nina, who were also seen as having a 'good attitude', whom the school tried to keep. At Greenfield Comprehensive, an 'ideal' pupil (Becker, 1952) was generally seen as someone who had good parental support, worked hard and had a 'good attitude'. Importantly, some teachers' lower expectations from pupils of African Caribbean and Turkish origins and their families, and the dismissal of ethnic-based conflictive interactions constrained pupils like Joe and Ismail in constructing schooling

identities that were accepted as legitimate. Rather, teachers' expectations of, and interactions with, these pupils reinforced their labelling as disrupt*ive* and as having a 'bad attitude', despite their attempts to negotiate a schooling identity recognised as positive. It was in this context that Joe's academic success was reconstructed as *failure* at the school.

As I tried to illustrate through the case studies of four pupils, the construction of schooling identities is highly complex. The identities that the school was imposing on pupils were not fluid. Often, pupils were offered positions in a binary logic (such as well/badly behaved; able/less able; native speaker/pupil with *English as an Additional Language*). However, complexity and fragility seemed to characterise the 'several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities' (Hall, 1992, p. 277) of the pupils in this study. They were boys and girls of different ethnic and class origins, constructing varied schooling identities and reworking wider discourses in education policy (such as those relating to discipline and 'standards'). I tried to illustrate how this variety of factors acted on the shaping of identities. Finally, as Hall (*id.*) also suggested, identity is 'becoming', rather than 'being'. Identity work is a process that is always incomplete, and entails constant negotiation. Within this process, the four pupils in the study lived the ambivalence and contradictions that resulted from their own positioning and that of others (such as teachers and peers). Teachers, on the other hand, seemed to be *hardening* the fragile identities that the pupils were actively and creatively constructing.

7

Conclusions

The ethnographic study I conducted with staff and pupils in Year 7 at Greenfield Comprehensive took me into some unanticipated directions. Initially, I had planned to study how perceptions of pupils' discipline and attainment, as well as of their ethnicity, gender and social class were shaping the construction of schooling identities. The specific context of the school, a 'failing' school being given a *fresh start*, provided the framework in which their identities were being reworked around broader discourses on education policy. In particular, official discourses on academic 'standards' and discipline seemed to be providing teachers and pupils with definitions of an 'ideal' pupil (Becker, 1952). Thus, the focus of this study was widened to include the influence of official discourses in education in the daily life of Greenfield Comprehensive, and in particular in shaping the range of available identities.

In this chapter, I bring together the main issues that emerged from interviews, observations and the analysis of documents, that were explored throughout this thesis. My aim is to draw some conclusions in relation to each main theme, and to illustrate how they articulated with each other and shaped the construction of pupil identities. The chapter is divided into four main themes, which correspond loosely to each of the empirical chapters. I attempt to highlight how education reform, discipline and control, selection and ethnicity were prominent aspects at Greenfield, and especially in shaping the range of schooling identities available to pupils.

7.1 *Education reform and the rhetoric of 'standards'*

As mentioned above, the school chosen for my fieldwork took me into unanticipated areas of interest. Greenfield was a *Fresh Start* school, a flagship of the Labour Government initiatives to 'raise standards'. The impact of the initiative in teachers and pupils' schooling experiences at Greenfield Comprehensive was great, and led me to explore how it was being implemented locally.

As explored in Chapter 2, the implementation of the *Fresh Start* initiative was part of the Labour Government's stated commitment to turn around 'failing' schools. The initiative was implemented in schools from 1998, and co-existed with *Education Action Zones* and *Excellence in Cities*, also directed at schools where academic attainments were below the national average. Whilst the two latter initiatives relied on the provision of additional support to schools (financial and professional, private and public), initially *Fresh Start* was based on a different assumption altogether: that no additional funds would be able to make successful a school where management and leadership were considered poor. In this sense, *Fresh Start* can then be seen as the inheritance of the school effectiveness movement, and the materialisation of Michael Barber's (1996) study on Hackney Downs, in which he argued that a strong leadership and management were more effective in guaranteeing success than the provision of additional funds. Besides the ensuing staff redundancy, *Fresh Start* made school management teams and teachers more accountable, and relied on their power to establish a new identity for the reopened school along with cosmetic changes in the school's name and buildings. Such accountability was not only to the state, but also to the wider public through the high visibility given to this initiative and the close surveillance it was subjected to in the media.

Innovation was initially at the core of the proposed initiative. The Labour Government seemed to be committed to showing that changes in education would not be superficial, but would transform the way in which we think of education. Involving business as partners, closing down and reopening schools with no currently foreseen possibilities of success were seen as examples of innovation that could radically tackle underachievement, particularly in inner-city schools. However, the resignation of several 'superheads', the taking back into special measures of three *Fresh Start* schools, the closure of a fourth in 2000, and the media speculation of its

limited impact (in terms of GCSE results) seems to have challenged the purpose and strength of the initiative. This resulted in the narrowing down of the situations in which *Fresh Start* was to be implemented, and the recourse to more traditional approaches to deal with failing schools, namely through a closer surveillance of schools' plans for recovery by the government. With the ascendance of *City Academies* (which largely build upon *City Technology Colleges* of the previous Conservative Government), attention was increasingly deflected from *Fresh Start*, with the government reluctant to acknowledge that it had failed to deliver significant results. At the time of writing, *Fresh Start* looks like an abandoned experiment, from which lessons are still to be learned.

Even though this was soon to change, it was in an initial context of accountability, innovation and some optimism that teachers and pupils entered Greenfield Comprehensive in September 1999. The school that Greenfield Comprehensive had come to replace, Millhaven High, was considered a 'failing' school and was closed down by the local council. This followed several OFSTED inspection reports that, although acknowledging the success of the school in teaching refugee children (almost a third of the school population, with nearly a half of all pupils having *English as an Additional Language*), saw in the school an irreversible declining trend in academic results. Although staff commitment and caring attitude was praised, OFSTED inspectors also found that there were problems at the level of middle management and that some staff lacked the necessary skills to make the school move forward. The strengths of Millhaven High did not translate into easily measured results, and did not fit in the rhetoric of 'standards', or the logic of an A-C economy (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). And even though no problems with leadership were found at Millhaven High, Greenfield Comprehensive opened with a new headteacher and an almost entirely new teaching body.

The school opened in September 1999, not yet fully ready. Timetables were not finalised, and later several changes were made to these and to the composition of forms. Additionally, many facilities were not complete (such as the library, canteen and an internal communication system), and the school remained a building site for the whole period of fieldwork, more than a year after it had opened. This had obvious implications for the running of the school, such as pupils not knowing, or pretending not to know, where to go for their lessons, the difficulty in contacting teachers inside the school, and the

disruption to lessons caused by the noise resulting from the building work. It also created a generalised perception of a chaotic atmosphere, which contrasted sharply with the promises that pupils and their parents had been made concerning a new school with excellent facilities, further compounded by the headteacher's resignation and the uncertainty about the direction to be taken by the school after that.

Mr Williams, the first appointed headteacher, was thought by many as being too idealistic and unable to deliver results. The resulting lack of support at the school, and particularly from the school governors, was attributed as the reason for his resignation. He was replaced by Mr Jones, who came to establish a more structured atmosphere. His pragmatism was strongly supported by those who saw the school's progress as involving more disciplining and control, at the expense of innovation. Amongst pupils, the appropriation or rejection of the school's emerging discourse on discipline reflected who supported or not the change in leadership. Those who had been more subjected to the school's disciplinary procedures were particularly supportive of Mr Williams, from whom they thought they received more respect, even in disciplinary situations. These were generally pupils who saw continuity in the transition from Millhaven High to Greenfield Comprehensive. But most preferred Mr Jones's strictness, as they thought that this would help the school in creating a distinct and better public identity. Interestingly, these pupils seemed to appropriate media discourses on the school in explaining Mr Williams's departure from the school. Arguably, this resulted from the lack of information provided by the school itself by not allowing pupils to confront differing interpretations.

These two differing approaches to the school management also divided teachers, and contributed to some of them leaving the school feeling that the vision and mission they wished to achieve was unattainable. As I mentioned before, it is estimated that a third of the school staff left the school after the first year, some of them precisely because they were not supportive of Mr Williams's vision. However, Mr Jones and the staff who supported him preferred to emphasise the failure of the previous management in not being able to sustain a stable work atmosphere, than to acknowledge that different visions of education were at the core of divisions amongst staff. The pupils' exodus from school, on the other hand, was explained at the individual level, with most staff at Greenfield Comprehensive not reading signs of disappointment with the school from parents. It was within this context that

most of those teachers who stayed saw their commitment to school reiterated. They were staying because they supported Mr Jones's approach, which stressed discipline and control, and this helped legitimise his power in managing the school and create the desired stability in atmosphere at Greenfield Comprehensive. Indeed, issues of discipline and control seemed to be prioritised by the school over the raising of academic 'standards' (this will be developed in the next section).

It is difficult to assess precisely the impact that the *Fresh Start* initiative had at Greenfield Comprehensive, particularly as the school was involved in other initiatives, such as *Excellence in Cities* and *Education Action Zones*. However, it seems clear that the implementation of *Fresh Start* added in some ways to the problems that the school was already facing. These related mainly to the transition from Millhaven High to Greenfield Comprehensive. Firstly, the Summer vacation proved insufficient to conclude the initial phase of building work and therefore Greenfield could not offer the basic facilities expected in any secondary school. And secondly, the implementation of a controversial leadership, which was not thought of as being a problem by OFSTED inspectors at Millhaven High, brought along divisions and a lack of commitment by some teachers to the school. This had been precisely one of the strongest aspects of the 'failing' school, along with the reported success of staff in the teaching of children with *English as an Additional Language*. With the implementation of *Fresh Start*, and within a context of increasing focus on academic 'standards', Greenfield Comprehensive favoured less innovative ways of tackling poor achievement than Millhaven High perhaps had.

An evaluation of the *Fresh Start* initiative can also be carried out in relation to the attainment of its goal of raising 'standards'. Indeed, in spite of a significant decline in pupils' results at GCSE level in the year after the school reopened, more recently these were notably improved (cf. Table 1, in Chapter 2). Nevertheless, a critical analysis of these results is needed. Firstly, because changes in the social composition of the school may obscure the impact of the *Fresh Start* initiative itself in raising the 'standards' of its pupils. Proportionately, Millhaven High was attended by more pupils on free-school meals[61] than Greenfield Comprehensive (around three-quarters and half of the school population, respectively). It might be the case that the high visibility of the flagship initiative, and the reopening of the school with new staff and

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[61] Which I use here as a proxy for poverty, as I could not collect other data that would allow me to make inferences on social class.

facilities contributed to attracting pupils from more advantaged backgrounds. Filling in the places that were often vacant at the 'failing' Millhaven High, pupils of more advantaged backgrounds may be 'artificially' contributing to raising the academic performance of the school. Thus, it is not clear whether the raising of 'standards' can be ascribed to an overall improvement or to certain groups of pupils. As this trend was reported after the period of data collection, I did not have the chance to explore the matter any further. In spite of this, we should bear in mind these differences in the social composition of the school when explaining its trends in academic performance, as research previously showed the association between the two (cf., for example, Gillborn and Mirza, 2000). Secondly, the data collected at Greenfield Comprehensive further points to the need to critically analyse performance tables results. I argued that pupils of some ethnic origins are faring less well in education reform that proposes increased use of setting. At the school under study, this happened particularly with the disproportionate allocation to lower academic sets of pupils who received support in *English as an Additional Language* (further explored in section 7.3).

In conclusion, my own analysis of what was happening at Greenfield Comprehensive suggested that it was the traditionally-oriented ways of raising 'standards', rather than the innovative aspect of the initiative, that had a significant impact in the attainments of (some) pupils. The current rhetoric of 'standards', focusing on the school's overall attainment in performance-related tables, is concealing the complex processes that disadvantage pupils of some backgrounds. This context was further compounded by the prominence of issues of discipline and order at Greenfield Comprehensive, as I review in the next section.

7.2 Back to discipline and control

Although the implementation of the *Fresh Start* initiative anticipated the prominence of issues relating to the raising of 'standards' (such as resources or curricular innovation), discipline and control came to feature highly in the life of Greenfield Comprehensive (as explored especially in Chapter 3). It was within this context that I decided to look at wider discourses on discipline at the government level, and at how these were being reworked locally by the school's teachers and pupils.

Labour Government discourses on discipline are occasionally framed within a wider concerted action towards social inclusion, as for instance in the White Paper on education, *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997). In this document, it was suggested that exclusions from school and absenteeism are associated with crime amongst youngsters, and that policy on discipline should therefore prevent the costs associated with social exclusion. Previous documents issued by the Labour Party did not use this sort of discourse on discipline (e.g. Labour Party, 1995, 1997). Rather, discipline problems were merely presented as being related to poor academic attainment. Importantly, the role of school in contributing to indiscipline was not addressed. Misbehaviour was seen as originating at home, carried to the school and suffered by teachers. The role of factors related to the school organisation, curriculum, teaching quality and social interactions in schools was left unacknowledged. *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997) came then to present a new discourse on discipline, addressing its wider social implications and also acknowledging that the quality of teaching does make a difference in pupils' behaviour. In spite of this, it was not a new discourse being consistently initiated. The publication of Circular 10/99, which provided the official national guidelines on discipline, gave contradictory views on the role of school in shaping pupils' behaviour. For example, it was suggested that pupils can become undisciplined as a result of 'a problem in understanding lessons' (DfEE, 1999d, chapter 2), in which case additional support should be provided. This, however, places the 'problem' of discipline only on pupils. In doing so, it leaves out any consideration on the possibility that misbehaviour can result from poor teaching and classroom management practices. Teachers are not presented as playing a role in promoting discipline in the classroom, and the 'problem' is placed on the pupils instead. These discourses on discipline articulated with discourses on education in the inner cities. In the document that presented the initiative *Excellence in Cities* (DfEE, 1999a), aiming to raise attainment in urban areas, the layout of measures to deal with indiscipline that are specific to the participating schools was testimony to this. Problems of discipline were presented as more acute in the cities, and measures were directed to these pupils. The construction of indiscipline that results from official documents just before and after the Labour Party came into office for the first term is that it is a 'problem' of inner-city pupils in particular, and one that emerges from factors such as their homes and cultures, or their individual deficits.

These discourses on the origins of indiscipline were largely appropriated and reworked by teachers at Greenfield Comprehensive, and expressed in their views and social interactions with pupils. As I argued in Chapter 3, teachers used a variety of discourses to explain indiscipline, which focused on the individual, the home, pupils' subcultures, geographical location[62] and the school management. External factors to the school were particularly used to make sense of the behaviour of pupils seen as undisciplined. These were, however, reworked within the specific context of the school and of particular individuals. Teachers referred to wider discourses on 'race', gender and class to differentiate the indiscipline of pupils. Thus, whilst the misbehaviour of a successful white girl from a socially advantaged background tended to be explained as 'disengagement' because of her 'ability', a high-achieving African Caribbean boy's misbehaviour was seen as reflecting his home atmosphere, and the misbehaviour of a Turkish boy was located within discourses on 'race' that portrayed families in this ethnic group as not being supportive of education. Discourses on the origins of indiscipline were multiple and contradictory. The same teacher would refer to different sorts of arguments to explain the behaviours of two undisciplined pupils. More importantly, the discourses used to explain the misbehaviour of a pupil were not always made available to other pupils. For instance, teachers only rarely addressed the home circumstances of white pupils to explain indiscipline or low achievement. The case of Angela, a white girl who was facing problems at home[63] is illustrative. She was often absent, in lessons she always sat on her own, no pupils in 7B chose her as a friend and she preferred to associate with pupils in older year groups. The problems she faced at home were known at the school (I myself learned about them by looking at her school record). However, when talking about her teachers never mentioned the impact that her family life could be having on her school behaviour and achievement. Conversely, this was a prominent argument in relation to ethnic minority pupils in the form under study, most of whom were not known to be experiencing any kind of family problems. In the eyes of teachers, ethnic minority pupils were, for instance, repressed at home (for example, Nina), or disruptive because they were imitating their fathers (like Joe). I would argue that official discourses on the origins of indiscipline, largely reworked by

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[62] This encoded ethnicity, with teachers defining the specificity of inner-city schools as a matter of ethnic diversity (cf. also Stanford, 2001).

[63] A close member of the family was the victim of a violent incident, and they were subsequently re-housed.

teachers, are particularly disadvantaging pupils of ethnic minority backgrounds, whose homes, cultures and subcultures are seen as more 'problematic' in school.

Pupils, on the other hand, looked at the school for explanations of misbehaviour. In relation to teachers, they saw discipline as emerging from poor quality of teaching and inconsistency in discipline procedures. They also pointed to conflictive interactions between pupils, which they thought were inappropriately dealt with by the school staff, and to the role of some school subcultures that promoted behaviours based on misbehaving and fighting. Unlike teachers, pupils did not seem to construct their views on the origins of indiscipline referring to 'outside the walls thinking' (Watkins and Wagner, 2000).

Throughout the official documents on discipline analysed in Chapter 3, and particularly those addressing exclusions from school, it is also possible to see how discourses construct pupils in a binary logic: pupils are presented as being either disrupt*ive* or disrupt*ed*. One can infer definitions of disrupt*ive* pupils from official discourses, for instance, in relation to those whose behaviour is seen as deserving exclusion from school. These were those who seriously breach the school's policy on discipline or who present a danger of harming the education or welfare of others (DfEE, 1999d); lately, this category has been extended to refer to pupils who are 'violent or persistently disruptive' (DfES, 2001a, p. 26). The category of disrupt*ed*, that is, those who suffer the result of disruption, changes more considerably across different documents. These were the disrupt*ive* pupils themselves, because they are becoming socially disaffected (DfEE, 2001f); their peers, who cannot fully develop their potential (DfEE, 2001f; DfES, 2001a); teachers, who suffer from an unruly working atmosphere (DfEE, 2001f; DfES, 2001a); society at large, because of the social cost associated with criminal behaviour (DfEE, 1997), and as an indirect result of the inability to retain qualified teachers in school (DfES, 2001a). More generally though, these discourses on discipline create a binary logic between disrupt*ive* and disrupt*ed* pupils. In doing so, indiscipline is not presented as situational, or as a continuum of behaviours, but as a property of pupils. This is an approach that, rather than seeing indiscipline as a matter of degree (some pupils misbehaving more often than others), presents it as being a matter of *nature*, fixing it within pupils. As I illustrated particularly in Chapter 6, these categories do not match what goes on in real classrooms. Disrupt*ive* pupils are not always disruptive, as those who tend to behave well

are not necessarily disrupt*ed* or behave well on all occasions. In a given classroom situation it may only be possible to position a couple of pupils at each extreme end of a behaviour continuum, but most pupils would be in the middle. Using a binary logic which positions pupils as being either disrupt*ive* or disrupt*ed* obscures the situational dimension of indiscipline, not acknowledging the processes, school based and others, that promote it.

This was a popular approach to discipline, particularly amongst teachers. It is of particular importance insofar as it articulated with their perceptions of pupils' attitudes. As long as pupils' attitude was perceived as the 'right' one they need not be 'goodie-goodies'. Teachers' reworking of discourses on discipline not only helped them define pupils' nature as disrupt*ive* and disrupt*ed* according to perceptions of 'attitude', but also subsequently shaped social interactions with pupils, reinforcing differences between those positioned in the two categories. The misbehaviour of pupils falling into the category of disrupt*ed*, which were those seen as having a positive 'attitude', was more likely to go unnoticed by teachers. In the form I studied at Greenfield Comprehensive, these were more likely girls, and mainly white. When I tried to examine in teachers' and pupils' discourses whom they referred to when they spoke of disrupt*ive* pupils, a similar picture emerged. Gender was clearly used to make statements on behaviour. The girls were seen as obedient, hard working and at most 'chatty'. The data gathered on detentions in the form under study confirmed that boys were much more likely to receive disciplinary sanctions (seven times more than girls). It also suggested that ethnic minority boys, particularly those from a Turkish background, accounted for most of the detentions (two of the three boys of Turkish origin in 7B accounted for almost a third of all detentions). Despite this, the association of ethnicity with behaviour was less visible in pupils' and teachers' discourses. This was because associations of indiscipline were made at the level of individuals, with Turkish and black boys being often mentioned when teachers or pupils talked about it. Often framed in discourses of discipline as a *choice*, these discussions of misbehaviour at the level of individuals masked how ethnicity and gender influenced the range of schooling identities available for these pupils.

Thus, discourses on discipline at the policy level seem to be producing a definition of indiscipline that ultimately disadvantages the pupils of ethnic minorities. A deficit approach to pupils' families and cultures, associated with teachers' understanding of discipline as a matter of 'attitude' compounded a

picture in which Turkish and black boys were seen as a disciplinary 'problem'. Some teachers at Greenfield Comprehensive even wanted to see some of them 'kicked out' of school. And in spite of looking outside the school for the origins of indiscipline, teachers never acknowledged its social costs, neither at the level of individuals nor more widely.

7.3 *Selection, ethnicity and racism*

Throughout the last 60 years, since access to secondary education was formally democratised in England, many changes have occurred in relation to policy on selection. Paradoxically, the same *Education Act 1944* (HMSO, 1944) that offered the possibility of mass education led to a tripartite system in secondary schools and provided the framework in which the establishment of a selective educational system in England was made possible (Lowe, 1992; Simon, 1991). In the 1960s and 1970s, concerns with inequalities in the education of pupils attending the different types of school (grammar, secondary modern and technical schools) came to fuel the debate on, and the creation of, a comprehensive system for English secondary schools. However, under Tory rule, the 1980s saw a return to policies that favoured selection and widened social inequalities in education (Edwards, Whitty and Power, 1999). Grammar schools were expanded, and streaming was encouraged as a means to cater for the children of all 'abilities' (Crook, Power and Whitty, 1999). As I have argued, these policies were designed to cater in particular for the needs of the 'most able children' (DfEE, 1996a). In spite of this, the Conservative Government met fierce opposition at the House of Commons when it attempted to further extend the powers of schools to select by 'ability', and these proposals were withdrawn from the *Education Act 1997* (HMSO, 1997).

Amongst the opponents of such extensive use of selection was the Labour Party, which came into office just a few months after the *Education Act 1997* was published. In its first term, the Labour Party proclaimed the need to 'modernise the comprehensive principle': rather than selecting pupils of different 'abilities' to different types of schools, the policies implemented under the Labour Party promoted selection *within* school, especially by setting. It was suggested that pupils have different strengths in different subjects, and that therefore they should be encouraged to play to their strengths by being placed in more advanced classes for those subjects. 'Diversity within one campus' (DfEE, 1997, p. 38) was Labour's motto regarding selection. This meant that

each school should cater for the pupils of all 'abilities'. It was argued that setting by 'ability' improved pupils' achievement in comparison to 'mixed-ability' learning, in spite of research not supporting this (for example, Hallam and Toutounji, 1996; Ireson and Hallam, 2001). The publication of the Green Paper *14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards* (DfES, 2002c) further promoted academic differentiation of pupils' educational pathways by allowing the more 'able' pupils to gain qualifications earlier than their less 'able' peers. These measures on selection within school are articulated with the current rhetoric of 'standards', in that it is argued that they will help to raise *all* pupils' attainment.

At Greenfield Comprehensive, wider discourses on selection were appropriated and reworked by teachers. These were particularly supportive of the practice of setting, which they saw as helpful for their teaching (by having to deal with a smaller range of 'abilities' in one class) and for their pupils. Interestingly, although almost all the teachers I interviewed agreed with setting to some extent, many thought Greenfield Comprehensive was a school that followed an ethos where setting was not popular. This view was not supported by that the data I collected. Since re-opening, the school expanded the use of setting, with Mathematics being set from Year 7 in 2002. Science, the subject which lessons I observed, was set from Year 8. According to the headteacher, Mr Jones, the expansion of setting was a necessary response to the practices of the feeder primary schools (which differentiated pupils academically through banding) and to parents' expectations (arguably fed by official and media discourses). The fact that pupils entered secondary schools with a range of skills by virtue of their differentiated primary education meant that staff at the secondary school felt that to deal with such diversity they also had to set them. Thus, setting became a self-validating system, (re)producing the diversity of academic skills with which it attempts to deal (Blishen, 1963, quoted in Hargreaves, 1967). At Greenfield Comprehensive, this seemed to be happening mainly through the influence of teachers' expectations in the academic opportunities opened up to pupils. Teachers had clearly defined expectations of pupils in different sets. They saw the highest sets as comprising those who corresponded to their notions of an 'ideal' pupil (Becker, 1952). These were pupils who not only had high academic attainment, but also behaved well and especially had a 'good attitude' to school. Working with the assumption that attainment and behaviour go hand-in-hand, many teachers thought that the process of setting would automatically allocate

disrupt*ive* pupils in the lower sets, allowing the 'brighter' pupils to learn undisrupt*ed*. This suggests that they also saw setting as a means of control over behaviour. In spite of teachers' perceptions, this did not always happen in 7/8B. A few pupils who were perceived as very 'problematic' and with a 'bad attitude' but who also had very good academic results managed to be allocated to the top sets. However, with behaviour and attitude being two of the criteria in the allocation to academic sets, pupils with average results would probably be placed in lower sets.

Teachers' discourses on setting initially suggested that they thought that setting advantaged *all* pupils. They argued that pupils of 'lower ability' could better follow the curriculum, at their own pace, if placed in a lower set. On the other hand, pupils considered 'bright' could be stretched more in the top set, and would not be disrupt*ed* by those who misbehaved. However, when I interviewed teachers it became apparent that it was with the 'brighter' or 'more able' pupils that they were concerned when talking about setting. Many thought that setting worked better for the more 'able', which suggests that this is a practice that privileges those who are traditionally more advantaged anyway. Arguably, the idea that the school educated some outstanding pupils (some of these seen as too 'posh' to be in a comprehensive school) was more satisfactory for teachers than the idea that it was successful in raising the aspirations of a local community where educational attainment was traditionally low. This entailed ignoring the social fragmentation that was becoming more visible not only in economic terms but also in relation to ethnicity (expressed in conflicts between black and Turkish youths, both inside and outside the school). Related to this is, in my view, the wider rhetoric of 'standards' and the pressure it has been placing on schools to do well in performance-related tables. As Ball (1994) argued in relation to the Conservative Government, the emphasis on raising 'standards' of attainment disguises state control in a context of apparently increased autonomy of schools. This has not changed under the Labour Government and its 'modern comprehensive principle'. Schools are working within an apparently increased autonomy in relation to how they achieve academic 'standards', yet their responsibilities to do well and diminish the gap between the achievements of ethnic groups were increased under the last published White Paper, *Schools Achieving Success* (DfES, 2001a). And thus, whilst Government policies to raise academic 'standards' have benefited less the pupils of ethnic minorities (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000), LEAs and schools are held responsible to reduce

the inequality gap. Ultimately a favourable position in league tables is the dominant criterion of success and subsequently allows them to retain funding to continue doing well. Thus, many schools prefer to allocate more resources into those seen as capable of achieving high GCSE exam results (cf. Gillborn and Youdell, 2000), at the expense of improved 'standards' for *all.*

At Greenfield Comprehensive, the process of academic selection through setting resulted in some pupils being given fewer opportunities for academic success, sometimes independently of their previous attainment at primary school in Key Stage 2. This suggests that the school did not merely reproduce the academic differentiation that resulted from education in the feeder primary schools, but also added to it. In my view, this added academic differentiation was a result of the articulation between discourses on setting, 'ability', and discipline with those on ethnicity. As I argued in Chapter 4, it was the criteria (expressed both formally and informally) used to decide on the allocation of pupils into the different sets that resulted in practices that disadvantaged pupils from certain ethnic backgrounds. These pupils were mainly disadvantaged by some teachers' poor expectations and the use of *English as an Additional Language* as a criterion to allocate them to the lower sets. Teachers generally thought that they were helping pupils, by allowing them to follow the curriculum 'nice and slowly, and do really easy stuff' (Ms Coleman, Science teacher). Some of these pupils were described as 'bright', or 'a good scientist'. However, the school was 'cooling out' (Ball, 1981, p. 135) these pupils. With movement between sets at the school being small, they were thus striving for a limited academic success.

This process of academic selection *within* school, through setting, can be seen as a process of vertical selection, whereby pupils are categorised and hierarchically positioned through the allocation to different sets. The top set is composed of pupils whom teachers perceive as being close to the 'ideal' pupil position, and the lower set represents pupils seen as inferior in academic skills and discipline. This is a process of selection that is endorsed by the government official guidelines, and which is commonplace in English schools nowadays. However, selection also occurred in a less structured and official fashion, as I illustrated with a case study on the splitting up of 7/8B in Chapter 4. This is an example of what I called horizontal selection. Through setting the school composes groupings that are seen as hierarchical in terms of academic skills. Through the making and re-composing of forms, the school tries to mix pupils of different 'abilities' and behaviours, so that the forms in a

year group are broadly similar in those terms. Selection is thus horizontal across a year group. Each form also comprises a vertical and hierarchical categorisation of 'good' and 'bad' pupils, although less formally than in academic sets. However, with the splitting of 7/8B pupils' categorisations served to *dilute* those with the same perceived characteristics (in terms of achievement and behaviour) across the forms, rather than concentrating them in a few groupings. This is a process used for the teaching and learning of subjects in 'mixed ability'. Splitting up forms worked as a kind of selection insofar as it reinforced pupils' categorisations based on unofficial knowledge on pupils, particularly regarding behaviour. Behaviour was the main criterion used to decide which pupils should not be allowed to move with their peers to 8B. This, however, was not used in a straightforward manner: 'ability' and ethnicity also encoded behaviour, as I review below.

'Ability' permeated some teachers' discourses on the reasons to split up 7B. It was argued that previous (unofficial) information on the pupils was insufficient, and that this resulted in the form being a 'bad mix'. Splitting up forms was seen as an attempt to re-do the mix, so that each form would comprise a diversity of 'abilities'. This was how teachers saw their achievement of the 'modern comprehensive principle': they mixed pupils of different 'abilities' in each form, teaching them separately in the more 'academic' subjects. However, and as I pointed out before, 'ability' in this context encoded behaviour: generally, pupils who were moved out of 7/8B were in lower sets, and importantly they were seen as presenting serious disciplinary problems in the school. Perceptions of 'ability' were articulated with those on behaviour, with the splitting of 7/8B serving to dilute these across forms.

The splitting of 7B was also informed by ethnicity, or more precisely, by ethnic-based conflicts in the form. As I have mentioned, throughout Year 7 there were conflicts and fights between some pupils, which were in many instances racialised. In 7B, the form under study, there were fights between some black and Turkish boys, with Joe and Ismail in particular complaining about each other's acts of bullying. These events did not happen in isolation: there had been serious fights at school between pupils of these two ethnic groups, and these were also happening in the wider local community (not only involving pupils). In spite of this, the school did not address the racial nature of the conflict, and prioritised issues of discipline and control. Addressing the symptoms of the problem, that is, the misbehaviour that resulted from the conflict, the school adopted a short-term and individualised approach that

entailed splitting up the pupils concerned in Year 8. This was too late and too little for Joe, who left the school after continuing bullying by Ismail and his older brother. The splitting up of 7B also served to deal with other cases of bullying. For instance, Terry and Adam (two white pupils) complained about being bullied by some Turkish boys, including Ismail, who was removed from the form. Thinking that the school did not take adequate measures to protect them, Terry and Adam felt extremely vulnerable at school and came to crystallise ethnic stereotypes by seeing 'all these Turkish' (in Adam's words) as a threat to their security in the school. Terry also left the school during his third term at Greenfield Comprehensive. From the information I collected, it did seem that the school favoured advice to ignore these situations over engaging into the deeper origins of conflict, and thus postponed action until when it seemed unavoidable. Furthermore, and contrary to national and the school's policy on bullying, some teachers did not contribute to bring about an atmosphere in which pupils would feel comfortable to report bullying incidents, for instance by questioning pupils in public.

The school's attempts at silencing issues related to ethnicity and racism were further illustrated by the example I used in Chapter 6 in the case study on Joe, an African Caribbean pupil, which also involved a long-term supply teacher at Greenfield Comprehensive. This was an English teacher who racially harassed some pupils of ethnic minority origins in 7B. I did not observe his lessons, but was told about the incidents by some of the pupils concerned, by some of their peers (even those who strongly disliked the pupils in question), and witnessed situations in which the head of Year 7 discussed those with some pupils and their parents. Despite the official condemnation of racial harassment, and the departure of the teacher concerned, the school's approach to the racialised nature of the events was that 'That's a bit racist. You can't change it' (Mr Roberts, head of Year 7). The message sent to pupils was of racism as being fixed and unchangeable, which was further compounded by Mr Roberts's suggestions that pupils should be more supportive of their English teacher. In spite of many teachers' genuine concern for their pupils, these were short-term approaches used to deal with deep-seated problems, which required concerted action throughout time to allow any real impact to flourish.

The splitting up of 7/8B also had an impact on the experiences of pupils of ethnic minority origins, particularly influencing the way in which they saw themselves as pupils. When entering secondary education, pupils are not told

why they are placed in a certain form and thus may see their allocation to form groups as random. However, when forms were re-organised from a school year to the next at Greenfield, which is less common, pupils questioned why such decisions were made. In 7/8B, pupils generally saw the process of splitting up their form as a means of control over discipline issues in the classroom, whereby some pupils were moved out because they were disrupt*ive*. I argue that this contributed to *harden* pupils' identities: discourses on splitting the form helped those who were moved out seeing their label as disrupt*ive* further reinforced (particularly pupils of ethnic minority origins), whilst those who stayed were generally constructed as the disrupt*ed*. Below, I consider my own study on the construction of pupils' identities.

7.4 *Hardening fragile identities*

Pupils' schooling identities are fragile. At Greenfield Comprehensive, pupils in Year 7 were experimenting with different ways of being in school and reworking wider discourses on discipline and attainment, as well as on ethnicity, gender and class, to define themselves as pupils. The construction of their identities was not instant. Rather, it was a process always incomplete, in need of being confirmed and reworked to include new elements within the context pupils lived in. For instance, in Chapter 2, I illustrated how the change of headteacher provided a framework in which pupils reasserted their schooling identities, positioning themselves according to the school's discourses on discipline and control associated with the two management teams. At Greenfield, those who were more severely punished and seen as disrupt*ive* generally identified with the management of the first headteacher, who they saw as having a more consistent and fair approach to discipline. Other pupils, mostly those perceived as disrupt*ed* tended to present themselves as 'victims' of a chaotic learning atmosphere, identifying with the second headteacher's approach, which was based on discipline and control. Sporadic events such as these had an impact on how pupils saw themselves in school.

However, there were deeper social structures that shaped more markedly the formation of pupils' identities. Throughout this thesis (and particularly in Chapter 6), I illustrated how the construction of schooling identities was being shaped by pupils' positioning in relation to discipline and attainment, but also articulated with ethnicity, gender and social class. In particular, teachers

perceptions of pupils' behaviour and commitment to school work seemed to be rooted in wider discourses on ethnicity, gender and social class which influenced the range of schooling identities made available to pupils. In the case study of Ismail, a Turkish-Cypriot boy of whom teachers had low expectations in terms of behaviour and school work, I suggested that his attempts to change his behaviour were overlooked, in a context of poor expectations from pupils of some ethnic minority origins. Although Ismail separated from his best friend to gain teachers' approval, these were reluctant to acknowledge his commitment to school and to see his improving behaviour as being voluntary and intentional. By suggesting that Ismail's change had resulted from the process of splitting up 7/8B, teachers played down and did not encourage his commitment to school, limiting his success in constructing a schooling identity that was accepted at the school.

Whilst in Ismail's case teachers seemed to associate expectations of behaviour with those of academic work, the case study of Joe (a boy of African Caribbean origin) illustrated the problematic nature of this association. Despite considering him a very clever pupil, teachers saw his behaviour as very problematic and deserving exclusion from school. Joe was committed enough to school to engage in academic tasks and produce work of outstanding quality. However, he did not seem always prepared to show the same commitment in terms of behaviour, mainly opposing what he saw as petty authority. Initially this happened in lessons with a teacher from whom he received racial abuse. Joe's misbehaviour progressively became more generalised while Greenfield Comprehensive failed to address issues around ethnicity and racism. Although the school's discipline policy stressed respect for others, pupils were often denied that very same respect from a few teachers. Other problems such as bullying were also not seen as being seriously addressed. Within this framework, pupils like Joe felt that the school's interests lay elsewhere and they were not willing to show teachers the respect that they were denied. Arguably, it was the prominence of issues of discipline and control at Greenfield Comprehensive that resulted in Joe's misbehaviour being so harshly condemned. With some teachers eventually using him as a scapegoat for the school's disciplinary problems, they contributed to his developing a schooling identity that was not perceived as appropriate or desirable to circulate in the school, even though he was not disruptive with all teachers. Possibly, showing respect for pupils and their

views and being consistent in the application of disciplinary procedures could have won the commitment to school in terms of behaviour of pupils like Joe.

The case study of Nina, an English and South African girl (as she defined herself) from South Asian origins, further illustrated how the construction of identity is a process being permanently reworked. I argued that whilst Nina, a high-achieving pupil, was successfully using her gender and ethnicity to manipulate situations in her favour, identity work was an on-going process of negotiation. Nina displayed a traditional femininity based on paying great attention to her looks and on conformity to teachers' authority, particularly in the classroom. Next to her peers she was generally seen as hyperfeminine and 'acting white', even though outside the classroom she tried to contest this. Such negotiation was constrained by her peers' policing her ethnic and gender identity. Thus, in spite of using a repertoire of gendered behaviours, Nina was negotiating a schooling identity within a limited range of available positions. For instance, she consciously felt the need to show that she was not too good in sports so that she would not 'upset' her male peers. With teachers, displays of a traditional femininity proved more successful, as Nina managed to avoid conflict by not challenging the sometimes unfair punishment of her behaviour. In doing so, she was actively trying to construct a legitimate schooling identity.

With pupils' case studies, I also illustrated how the process of identity formation creates tensions, ambivalence and ambiguity in how pupils perceive themselves. This was particularly evident in the case study of Sophie, the daughter of a professional couple. Greenfield Comprehensive was a school attended by pupils who were mainly from working class backgrounds. Sophie's social status was highly regarded amongst some teachers, and was registered in her school record (which did not happen with any of her peers in 7B). Teachers had very high expectations from her, and explained her misbehaviour as disengagement by her being too 'able' to follow the same pace as her peers. Thus, teachers tended to overlook her misbehaviour even though Sophie herself acknowledged that she sometimes misbehaved. Her peers suggested that she often got away with not complying with teachers' instructions or handing in homework. Interestingly, in spite of teachers policing her behaviour and pressing her to conform to their high expectations, Sophie showed great ambivalence in how to define herself. On the one hand, she did not think she was well behaved because she often engaged in small talk during lessons. On the other hand, some of her teachers and peers were enforcing a positive schooling identity, positioning her as a disrupt*ed* pupil.

This was illustrated in Sophie's saying that teachers reminded her in lessons that she was 'not like the others' and therefore should not misbehave. There was a tension between teachers' expectations of her and how Sophie defined herself as a pupil, this being verbally expressed with her indecision regarding the use of *we* and *they* when talking about disrupt*ive* pupils. Wider discourses that present indiscipline in a binary logic, which create the categories of disrupt*ive* or disrupt*ed* pupils, seemed to be producing such ambiguity. Despite this, teachers' high expectations of her were reinforcing the construction of a legitimate schooling identity.

In my view, these case studies illustrated the strength of the post-structuralist critique in explaining the formation of schooling identities. Conceiving identities as multiple, contextual, fragile, permeated by tensions and ambivalence, and being continuously negotiated and reworked to integrate new elements, the post-structuralist critique has helped us retain the complexity of identities circulating in contemporary schools. In particular, previous research on this area (for instance, Connolly, 1998, and Mac an Ghaill, 1994) has been useful to understand how ethnicity, gender and social class provide a framework in which pupil identities are negotiated. My own study illustrates how perceptions of school work and discipline are sometimes contradictory, and not always the more important aspects in the shaping of schooling identities. Pupils' ethnicity, gender and social class gave particular contours to this process by making available a (limited) range of identities for pupils to negotiate.

I think that it is also helpful to retain a modified version of the concept of polarisation as developed by Hargreaves (1967), Lacey (1970) and Ball (1981). Whilst pupil identities at Greenfield Comprehensive were complex and could only conditionally be ascribed to categories (related to pro- or anti-school attitudes, or to institutional goals and means as in the re-working of Merton's typology (1957)), it seemed that polarisation was at work in shaping pupils' schooling identities. Teachers' expectations of behaviour and the academic differentiation resulting from aspects of the school organisation (such as setting and splitting) were *hardening* pupils' fragile identities into opposite positions (as either disrupt*ive* or disrupt*ed*). The ambivalence felt by pupils who lived in the tension between their own schooling identities and how they were differently positioned by teachers (such as Ismail and Sophie), was being 'solved' by the school by pressing pupils to conform to expectations and thus polarising their identities into opposite positions. Arguably, Greenfield

Comprehensive favoured the identities of pupils perceived as disrupt*ed*, which they saw as those who could achieve the project of change entailed in the school's involvement in the *Fresh Start* initiative.

7.5 *Implications*

7.5.1 Suggestions for further research

In some ways, the issues explored in this thesis were not wholly predicted when the research project began, such as the role of policy in education in shaping the experiences and schooling identities of pupils. Many others issues, however, were left unexplored. This had mainly to do with the time limits imposed by a research project within doctoral studies.

One of the most interesting aspects that I neglected was the study of the changing social composition of the school in its overall performance. As I mentioned before, around 75 per cent of pupils attending Millhaven High were eligible to receive free-school meals, and around 50 per cent at Greenfield Comprehensive. This questions the extent to which the renamed and relaunched school is making a difference in terms of pupils' attainment. It could be the case that it is the higher attainment resulting directly from the changing social composition of the school that is improving the overall performance of the school. To study this we could compare the academic results (for instance in GCSE results) of pupils on free-school meals at Millhaven High and at Greenfield Comprehensive, perhaps a few years after its reopening to allow time for the implemented initiatives and policies to have had an impact. Unfortunately, such a study would require a longer timescale than is feasible for a project such as this one. Whilst it could provide with a clearer picture of what was happening at Greenfield, more broadly it could contribute to bringing social class back to the agenda. As Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (1997) suggested, there has been a decentring of social class at a time in which it plays a major role in shaping pupils' education opportunities.

It could also be very interesting to do a follow-up study with the same pupils at the end of secondary education to explore how their schooling careers shaped the educational opportunities that were open to them. Particularly, one could look at how the allocation to the lower academic groupings of pupils who receive support in *English as an Additional Language* influenced these pupils' academic trajectories. This study would have a similar

design to the qualitative research I carried out for this thesis. The effects of learning in 'mixed ability' and in 'ability' sets could also be explored, by looking at pupils' results throughout their education in subjects that are set and in those that are not. Although pupils' attainments may differ in different subject areas, such a study could provide a broader picture of each pupil's attainments, and show in particular whether some pupils do consistently better in subjects that are set or not. This study would involve mixed-methods, but with a greater quantitative element than the present one.

In relation to the wider context of the school, I would like to have explored the origins and contours of the racialised conflicts taking place in the local community. These were especially highlighted between black and Turkish people, and as I mentioned before, they were being replayed at Greenfield Comprehensive. Interviewing key members of these communities and others, such as social and youth workers, members of local associations and even residents in the area could have helped to unravel the origins of the conflict, and to understand its impact on the school. Questioning school staff and pupils more directly about this could have also brought a deeper understanding about how broader issues around ethnicity were being reworked at the school.

Finally, although *Fresh Start* has been dropped, policy in education continues to work on the idea that changing school identities is not only possible but also a fairly quick way of improving 'standards'. Examples of this are City Academies, and the increase in the number of specialist schools. This thesis highlights numerous problems with such an approach: it would be interesting to compare the situation in these new policies with the issues that arose at Greenfield Comprehensive.

7.5.2 Implications for education policy and practice

This was a research project largely built on teachers and pupils' views and on policy documents. As such, the thesis highlights some of the problems that were found by those who experience the implementation of education policy directly. Thus, I would like to reflect here on the implications of my study for policy and practice.

Firstly, I would like to draw attention to the implementation of the *Fresh Start* initiative, which is largely based on the school effectiveness movement. As such, a major weakness of the initiative is that it overlooks the social disadvantages of pupils in many of the 'failing' schools it replaced. To tackle

poor achievement in schools, education policy cannot merely entail a change of school staff and building work. The school population served by Greenfield High was largely disadvantaged, despite less so than the former 'failing' school. It was also a population with many pupils for whom *English was an Additional Language* (EAL). Education policy needs to address fundamental matters in relation to attainment, such as those related to resources, curricular innovation and pedagogy, and to design measures to raise in particular the attainments of pupils who are traditionally disadvantaged. There was quality work being carried out at Millhaven High with refugee children, which seems to have been lost in the transition to the *Fresh Start*ed school, in favour of approaches to raise 'standards' that benefit only some pupils (such as setting). This suggests that the implementation of educational initiatives must take into account the particularities of each school so that its strengths are not lost at the expense of the 'standards' rhetoric. At the school level, it calls for the monitoring of the differential achievements of pupils following the implementation of initiatives such as *Fresh Start*. An evaluation of any initiative that does not question *whose* achievements have been raised is necessarily weakened. The government also needs to be made more accountable for bridging the inequality gap than it currently is, by having displaced to LEAs and schools the responsibility to do so. Only then can the rhetoric of 'standards for all' be closer to the reality of contemporary schools. With current education reform, traditional inequalities persist. To raise their 'standards', schools seem to be favouring practices endorsed by the government that disadvantage those children whose attainments were traditionally low anyway. At Greenfield Comprehensive, academic differentiation and selection were disadvantaging in particular pupils with support in EAL, who formed a significant part of the school population. By pressing schools to do well in performance-related tables, innovative ways of raising attainment (which may take longer to flourish) are being abandoned. Importantly, this may be producing a higher level of pupils' disengagement with education, and favouring the construction of schooling identities that the school does not accept as legitimate.

I would also like to draw attention to the concept of indiscipline that emerges from policy documents. Indiscipline is more fluid than official discourses allow. Pupils do not merely slip into disrupt*ive* or disrupt*ed* bodies. Being an important aspect of pupils' identities, discipline is negotiated daily in classrooms through interactions with both teachers and peers. It might to

some extent reflect particular problems that pupils are facing at home, but more often seems to result from processes taking place at the school. This contextualisation of indiscipline is especially important because it offers a way forward, especially in helping teachers to think critically about their disciplinary practices and expectations of pupils. As illustrated in Chapter 6, teachers often used their expectations of pupils to explain indiscipline, denying some the opportunity to negotiate positive interactions in school. Teachers need to critically examine their practices in the classroom that produce the conditions in which pupils misbehave. Examples identified in this thesis are: unclear lessons, presumably irrelevant tasks, pupils' difficulty in understanding tasks, inconsistent application of sanctions, and conflictive interactions with or between pupils. These examples are by no means exhaustive. Rather, they point to the need for teachers to engage with, and listen to, pupils' views to understand the contextual dimension of indiscipline.

Finally, an issue that was evident at Greenfield Comprehensive and that might be useful for schools to consider relates to racism and bullying. Pupils suffer greatly from bullying and racist harassment, and schools need to be more active in dealing with such issues. Pupils need to be reassured of the school's commitment to promote respect and provide a learning atmosphere free of fear. Whilst this was part of the school's policy at Greenfield Comprehensive, its practices suggested otherwise. In relation to bullying, schools need to provide conditions in which pupils feel comfortable to report events and have their views accounted for. Schools also need to address with pupils who bully others the reasons for their behaviour, within a long-term approach. This needs to be carried out in an atmosphere where racism is not silenced, but discussed and dealt with by the school community.

Qualitative studies of inequality in school have sometimes been accused of 'blaming' teachers and being too negative (for example, Foster, Gomm, and Hammersley, 1996). Like some previous ethnographic studies, my research has highlighted numerous ways in which students were denied equal opportunities. However, it would be too simplistic to see this as a uniformly negative study. I have shown how policy influences the daily reality in schools and how pupils are engaged in complex and changing processes of identity formation. These findings suggest that there are many positive ways forward, especially for schools and teachers who are prepared to challenge the comfortable, but dangerous, stereotypes that circulate in relation to social class, 'race' and gender.

Appendices

Appendix I - Methodology

This thesis explored the implementation of education policy and the construction of pupils' schooling identities in relation to discipline and achievement. Particularly, I looked at how discourses in discipline and the rhetoric of 'standards' articulated with ethnicity, gender and class influencing the range of schooling identities available to pupils in a *Fresh Start* school. This was an ethnographic case study of a co-educational, multi-ethnic comprehensive school that served a population that was socially and economically disadvantaged.

In this appendix, I explain in detail how I carried out my ethnographic study at Greenfield Comprehensive School. In the first section, I explore some issues relating to the use of ethnography. I start by looking briefly at the origins of this research strategy, both in anthropology and sociology. I then draw on Atkinson and Hammersley's (1994) working concept of ethnography to explore how it was used in my own study. I proceed describing in more detail the conduct of the fieldwork, addressing issues such as theoretical sampling, negotiating access, researcher's role and identity. I conclude the first section by explaining how I dealt with ethical and political issues before, during and after fieldwork. In the second section, I discuss the methods of data collection in my research project. Participant observation, semi-structured interviews and the collection of documents were used to generate data on teachers and pupils' experiences of schooling, trying to understand how education policies are reworked at the local level of school, and how schooling identities are constructed through reference to ethnicity, gender and social class. I also describe the procedures that I employed to analyse the data

gathered. Finally, I look at the limitations of my own ethnographic study and conclude with some remarks regarding the methodology used in this study.

Ethnography

In this section, I start by briefly looking at the historical origins of ethnography in anthropology and sociology. I then proceed to illustrate my own ethnographic study, looking into more detail at the implications of the choice of ethnography as a research strategy on issues such as access, field role and identity, and its impact on the data collected. I conclude the section by addressing how I dealt with issues of ethics and power in this research project.

A brief historical account

Ethnography became quite a popular research strategy within the sociology of education in the UK, particularly from the 1970s (Gordon, Holland and Lahelma, 2001). This was partly due to the re-emerging criticism from some researchers espousing a naturalistic approach to the social sciences, who questioned the usefulness of the quantitative strategies and methods inspired in the natural sciences to study social interaction (cf. Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). For researchers within a naturalist stance, ethnography was seen as a research strategy that was better capable of comprehending the complexities of the social world, by getting closer to the participants in research and trying to grasp the meanings that these construct in their daily experiences.

Ethnography is commonly associated with *participant observation*, stemming from its roots in social and cultural anthropology[64]. It was mainly from the beginning of the twentieth century that ethnography became professionalised, and anthropologists started travelling to distant lands in order to know and understand 'exotic' cultures such as those of African and Native American tribes. Although their work came to involve participating in the lives of 'natives' in order to get closer access to these cultures, this was not always the case. Much of the research work carried out in social and cultural anthropology during the first two decades of the twentieth century was influenced by what Wax and Cassell (1979) called the *veranda model*. Within

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[64] Although there are accounts of the use of a rudimental form of ethnography as far back as to the times of the ancient Greeks, it is generally accepted that it was in the late nineteenth to the beginnings of the twentieth century that it started taking shape as a research strategy (Fielding, 1993; Van Maanen, 1988). Some other authors argue that this process started in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with the travels of the explorers, remaining largely Eurocentric, colonialist and Christian in mentality up until the twentieth century (Vidich and Lyman, 1994).

this model, anthropologists elicited verbal statements from the 'natives' for hours in a row, whilst comfortably sitting on their veranda chairs. Obvious ethical questions were posed by the use of this model, in that participants were treated as 'primitive', inferior beings in relation to the wealthier researcher. But the knowledge that this model produced was also met with a strong criticism, by virtue of the rather limited contact that existed between researcher and the local people. This meant that people's daily lives were largely ignored, as anthropologists relied almost exclusively on what people said they did, rather than observing also what they actually did (Burgess, 1984).

A breakthrough in the use of ethnography in anthropology was the publishing of Malinowski's (1922) influential report, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. His work in the Trobriand Islands contrasted sharply with the anthropological work carried out until then, by postulating that researchers should renounce their privileged position (as wealthy Westerners in a 'primitive' society), and mingle with the people they were to study in order to get first-hand accounts. Wax and Cassell (1979) called this research posture the *noblesse oblige* model[65], and it corresponds closely to what later became known as *participant observation*. The researcher was expected to go and live in another setting, trying to learn the culture and the routines of the people (s)he wished to study, through direct contact and participation in their daily activities. This emphasis on getting first-hand accounts is generally seen as a benchmark for the beginning of modern ethnography (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994).

From the 1920s, ethnography also started being used in the field of sociology, and was particularly associated with the Chicago School. As Burgess (1984) put it, 'Anthropology has now come home' (p. 14). The two *Middletown* studies carried out by Robert and Helen Lynd in 1929 and 1937 are generally pointed out as the first sociological studies using participant observation (Dennis, 1993; Vidich and Lyman, 1994). These researchers approached the study of life in a Christian community in industrial America in a similar way to that in which anthropologists studied the cultures of the 'primitive others'.

The application of ethnography to the subject area of sociology was based on the assumption that modern societies are composed of 'natural areas', with

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[65] Meaning that to get closer to the lives of participants of research, the anthropologist should renounce the commodities derived from his/her wealthy status, and live as the people being studied.

their own symbolic world and social organisation (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992). It was argued that such subcultural groups could be seen as 'strange' to the researcher, in a very similar way to those 'strange' and 'exotic' cultures that the early anthropologists were studying (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

The descendants of the first generation of Chicago School sociologists, such as Robert Park, W. I. Thomas and Ernest Burgess, employed the same sort of methods used by ethnographers in anthropology to study cultures that, though not being located in a distant place, were unfamiliar to the researcher (Burgess, 1984). In the 1920s and 1930s, the main research methods used by the Chicago school of sociology for the collection of information on unfamiliar subcultures were then qualitative, with participant observation and unstructured interviews being very often used. However, these studies also resorted to a mix of other methods, such as life history, collection of historical archives, newspaper files (Adler and Adler, 1987), and even surveys and statistical data (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992).

Two strands of ethnography co-existed at the Chicago school by this time: the *community studies*, which were more structured and largely influenced by the *veranda model* in anthropology; and the studies on *deviant subcultures* in which sociologists aimed to go beyond a detached approach, hanging around to try and capture people's lives from their own perspectives (Adler and Adler, 1987; Van Maanen, 1988). In spite of their concern to enter the 'natural' settings in which action takes place, it should be mentioned that this first generation of Chicago sociologists was still trying to draw sociocultural laws from the cases observed (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994).

By the 1940s and 1950s, at a time when the influence of the Chicago school of sociology was in decline, quantitative methods came to dominate much of the work produced within the field of sociology, particularly the opinion polls and survey methods (Adler and Adler, 1987; Vidich and Lyman, 1994). This was particularly the case in the United States, where a massive amount of research surveys on the lives of soldiers was commissioned by the armed forces (Fontana and Frey, 1994). Nevertheless, such a conjuncture worked as a drive to the development of fieldwork and ethnography, generating a new wave of empirical studies. Vidich and Lyman (1994, 2000) suggest that it was around this time that the term *participant observation* was coined, through the work of William Foote Whyte (1943)[66]. To produce the report *Street*

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[66] Other authors locate the first use of this term rather earlier in time, namely in the work of E. C. Lindeman, in 1924 (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992).

Corner Society, Whyte went to live in an Italian neighbourhood in Boston, and to a large extent he tried to become one of the Cornerville boys he was studying, and thus a participant observer. In spite of this, and as the same authors suggest, it should be stressed that Whyte's theoretical approach to the methodology of participant observation he developed in his study remained implicit.

The early theorising of ethnography can be attributed to the influential work within symbolic interactionism of authors such as Becker, Blumer, Gear, Hughes, and Strauss, who postulated that social life should be understood by looking at the creation of meanings through social interaction. This generation of Chicago sociologists tried to balance involvement with detachment from participants, as a means of getting insider but objective accounts. 'Going native', that is, being so deeply immersed in the field to the extent of becoming one of its members, at least in affective terms, was seen as a major threat to the quality of data in ethnographic studies (Adler and Adler, 1987). But in spite of considering the viability of objective and neutral accounts, their work questioned the appropriateness of the methods of data collection based on the natural sciences. Symbolic interactionists generally conceived ethnography as a theory-specific method (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992) that enabled the researcher to enter the symbolic world of social actors, and to grasp the interpretations that people made of their actions and experiences. I think that it was precisely the closeness of symbolic interactionism (theory) and ethnography (method) that gave this research strategy the importance it has today.

By stating this, I do not wish to obscure the diversity that has characterised the uses and conceptions of ethnography, which still persists nowadays. As Atkinson and colleagues (2001) pointed out, different methods and theoretical perspectives on ethnography have always co-existed and therefore it would be misleading to attribute to one single approach or theory the monopoly of its use and conceptualisation. Other approaches, such as ethnomethodology, semiotics, cultural studies, critical theory, feminism and post-structuralism, also contributed to the theorising of ethnography (cf. Gordon, Holland and Lahelma, 2001). Their critical insights have been particularly important in rethinking the contemporary use and products of ethnography, namely by addressing relations of power in research relationships with participants, questioning the political commitments of the

researcher or looking at ethnographies as textual accounts that construct themselves the realities observed through fieldwork.

Doing ethnography

The expansion of the use of ethnography to a wider scope of social sciences, such as cultural studies, educational research[67] or organisational studies contributed to the diversity of its uses and understandings. Hence, whilst some researchers may see it as a quasi-paradigm, a set of beliefs relating to a way of understanding and knowing the social world, others conceive it as a mere research technique to be used as any other, and within any paradigm (cf. Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

I locate my own ethnography within a constructivist or interpretative paradigm that postulates the understanding of social experiences through the accounts of those who live them. Being largely influenced by the legacy of symbolic interactionism, I see the use of ethnography as being particularly suited to the focus of my research project, namely the study of social interactions in school and the construction of shared meanings. Moreover, by exploring how wider discourses in education policy are reworked at the level of school, my approach can also be positioned in a 'recent tendency within the social sciences to resituate the local within the larger contexts of regional (and) national (...) events' (Chambers, 2000).

I also attempted to integrate elements of the post-structuralist critique of the use of ethnography. Namely, I tried to balance power relations with the participants in the research and to be reflexive on how my own identity influenced the collection of data. I also tried to render my data as open as possible to other accounts of my interpretations of the social processes being explored, particularly by presenting and contextualising verbatim quotes of pupils' and teachers' accounts whenever possible.

As a research strategy, I embrace Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995) conception of ethnography:

> as referring primarily to a particular method or set of methods. In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens,

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[67] See Gordon, Holland and Lahelma (2001) for an up-to-date account of ethnographic studies in educational research within several theoretical perspectives.

listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research. (p. 1)

This is a fairly consensual definition for a term that is somehow controversial. Acknowledging this, Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) offered a working definition of ethnography that I will use as a device to illustrate the conceptualisation of this research strategy in my own study. According to these authors, ethnography is mainly characterised by:

- a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them
- a tendency to work primarily with 'unstructured' data, that is, data that have not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories
- investigation of a small number of cases, perhaps just one case, in detail
- analysis of data involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994, p. 248).

There is then a certain tendency to use ethnography for exploratory purposes rather than confirmatory ones. This does not mean that ethnography is always exploratory, but that it is a method particularly suited for discovery (Fielding, 1993). Researchers using ethnography tend to use fieldwork as a means of gaining insight into a cultural and social context, rather than testing out pre-conceived hypotheses about that reality. This is based on the assumption that the large amount of time generally spent in the field and the direct contact with participants of research provide the researcher with a better understanding of the reality being studied. In my case, I initially intended to look at the construction of pupils' schooling identities, through reference to ethnicity, gender and social class. The complexity of the processes in which I was interested and the kind of research questions that I wished to explore made me see ethnography as an appropriate research strategy to use in my study. However, if generally it is the research questions that determine the methods used to collect data, in my case this was not so straightforward. During my first degree I had become quite interested in ethnography as a way of studying social interaction when doing a module on social and cultural anthropology. Later, two research projects that I carried out as a student, and

which relied on a qualitative analysis of quantitative data, also fuelled the interest in this strategy. The first was a study of academic achievement amongst ethnic minority pupils in a Portuguese secondary school. The second was an analysis of official figures on school exclusions in England. The results of these studies made me aware of the need to look at people's own perspectives of their experiences and to observe social interaction as it unfolds, in order to better understand the topic of research. Thus, my interest in ethnography as a research strategy and the field of study were very closely interwoven.

The tendency to use ethnography for exploratory purposes does not imply that the researcher enters the field without any ideas about the problems (s)he wishes to research. Even theorisers of grounded theory, who postulate the building of theory from the data collected, such as Glaser and Strauss (1967) have acknowledged that ethnography starts at the moment of literature review (cf. Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). It is generally then that particular areas of interest emerge, often for having been somehow neglected in previous works. Knowing what studies have been done and what conclusions were reached within the field one intends to study can be helpful in focusing the research. Similarly, once in the field, it helps the researcher to focus his or her attention on the issues that are related to the problems under study. The immensity of processes taking place simultaneously within a given context is such, that taking notes of everything happening is not possible. Looking only at certain aspects of interaction helps then in making good use of the time and resources available. In my study, I also drew on a review of the literature to focus my research interests. Initially, I reviewed the literature on social theory. Starting with theories that focus on the individual (e.g. existentialism) or mainly stress the role of wider social constraints (structuralism), I then looked at symbolic interactionism and post-structuralism as attempts to move beyond the dichotomy individual-society. I proceeded to look at more length at studies that explored the impact of ethnicity, gender and social class in the daily experiences of pupils, particularly in English secondary schools. I became mainly interested in the areas of academic achievement and discipline, interaction with teachers, pupils' subcultures and schooling identities. Besides helping me in identifying areas of interest for study, the literature review was useful to formulate 'foreshadowed problems' (Malinowski, 1922), or what is more commonly called research problems. Rather than determining what will be studied (as hypotheses within a positivist approach generally do), research

problems are commonly used as guidelines for the collection of data. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) point out:

> in ethnographic research the development of research problems is rarely completed before fieldwork begins; indeed, the collection of primary data often plays a key role in the process of development. (p. 37)

Hence, after reading the literature and becoming aware of some areas that I wished to explore, I formulated the following research questions:

1. What range of schooling identities circulates within school?
How do pupils perceive themselves as pupils?
How is commitment to ethnic/gender/class identity implicated in this process?
2. Which schooling identities do teachers perceive as most legitimate?
What are teachers' conceptions of the 'ideal pupil'?
Which images do they hold about different groups of pupils (by ethnicity, gender and class)?
3. Which identities are available to different groups of pupils?
How do academic achievement and behaviour influence pupils' positioning in school?
How do social markers diminish the range of schooling identities available?
How do friendships and youth sub-cultures influence the process of positioning?

Although these questions largely influenced the design of my study, during the period of fieldwork other questions emerged, making the scope of the research project considerably broader. This was due to the fact that the school in which I was conducting my study was involved in the *Fresh Start* initiative. The impact that this initiative had in people's daily experiences was so great, that not to acknowledge and explore it would only leave the study more incomplete, if not misleading altogether. Questions about the implementation of the *Fresh Start* initiative were then included in later interviews with teachers, as I developed a growing interest on the impact of education policy at the local level. The flexibility that usually characterises the use of ethnography, and which is a strength as a method of discovery, allowed then for a constant reformulation of questions and planning of the study as participants and data suggested new directions.

Another way of attempting to gain new insights into social phenomena is through the collection of unstructured data. Methods for collecting data within

an ethnographic research strategy generally include semi- or unstructured interviews, direct observation and the collection of documents (Burgess, 1984; Fielding, 1993). Nowadays the range of methods used to collect data are more varied, and may include the collection of visual information or life history materials (Atkinson *et al.*, 2001), or even an analysis of quantitative data. Nevertheless, the emphasis is on qualitative methods, as their nature is more suitable for getting new insights into complex phenomena. In my study, the methods used were participant observation, semi-structured interviews and the collection of school documents. Fieldnotes of observation of classes, assemblies and meetings with parents were written down in an unstructured fashion (cf. Appendix III for an example of an observation sheet). I thus tried to collect as much information as possible about what pupils and teachers do in school, and gathered a considerable amount of data. The use of semi-structured interviews, with open-ended questions, allowed me to collect very rich descriptions of the participants' experiences in school (these issues will be further explored in the section on methods of data collection).

As Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) point out, generally ethnography tends to be used for studying one case in great detail. However, I would like to distinguish here ethnography from case study, two terms that sometimes are used interchangeably in the literature. Ethnography tends to be a case study in what concerns the object of study (Stake, 1994). The sort of complex issues that are generally addressed by using ethnography as a research strategy require depth over breadth of data. Hence, the study of one single case allows for a larger amount of time to be spent collecting information of great detail (Yin, 1994). Thus the choice to study a single case. However, I think of a case study as being similar to ethnography only in relation to the object of research. As previously mentioned, I conceive ethnography as being embedded in certain approaches to social sciences that favour the use of qualitative methods of data collection (although not exclusively so). Case studies on the other hand, can rely on whatever methods of data collection to describe the case in great detail. Furthermore, ethnography and case study are also different in that the latter does not imply the presence of the researcher in the field. This is considerably against the principles of ethnography as a research strategy, which aims to get first-hand accounts as they occur in 'natural' settings.

Having distinguished ethnography from case study, a common issue emerges though, which is about the possibility of generalisation from one case

to others. It may be argued that using a single case study puts generalisation at risk. This criticism stems particularly from a positivistic stance that thinks of generalisation in terms of statistical probabilities (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). With my study, I rather aim to use the case to illustrate the operation of wider social processes that may be happening somewhere else. Therefore, my aim is to allow for theoretical generalisation or logical inferences. As Mitchell (1983) suggests:

> A case study is essentially heuristic; it reflects in the events portrayed features which may be construed as a manifestation of some general abstract principle. (p. 192)

The fact that my ethnography was carried out in a *Fresh Start* school does not automatically exclude the chance of generalising some findings to other types of secondary schools. For instance, the processes that led to the disadvantage of some pupils of ethnic minorities documented in Greenfield Comprehensive have been reported by researchers in other schools (for instance, Connolly, 1995, 1998; Gillborn, 1990; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Mirza, 1992). By exploring in detail the characteristics and atmospheres of Greenfield Comprehensive (particularly in Chapter 2) I tried to provide the reader with a more in-depth description of the school and its own specificity. This should help in assessing the possibility of generalising some of the abstract processes happening in my case study to those in other schools.

Finally, Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) suggest that ethnography makes explicit use of interpretative procedures in the analysis of data. This is unlike researchers working within a positivist stance, who may claim that their quantitative data are objective and value-free. In ethnography, the researcher deals with words and interpretations of interactions being observed. As ethnographers are studying how social actors interpret meanings, they themselves ascribe meanings to what they see and hear, and the analysis is therefore more obviously subjective. Furthermore, what the researcher will see and hear, and what (s)he will report in the final text, is itself framed by the research focus. The social reality being studied is then filtered through the interests and interpretations of the researcher. Whenever possible, I included participants' own accounts to help the reader in discerning my interpretations of the data collected.

In the field

Theoretical sampling

When one aims to produce theoretical generalisations, choosing a case to illustrate the social processes under study is an important procedure. The case is not chosen for its statistical representativeness of other cases, but rather on the likelihood that the specific case has in providing the researcher with new insights on the area of study. This is generally called theoretical sampling (Mitchell, 1983), and can be applied to the case of study as well as to the sample of people that, once in the field, the researcher decides to observe and interview.

The selection of the school was then given careful thought. For the purposes of my research project, I wished to study a co-educational, multi-ethnic, comprehensive school in a large English city. Finding a school with these characteristics and willing to participate in my research study was thought of as being probably the most difficult step. Some of the issues addressed with this project can be seen as politically sensitive (such as 'race' and discipline issues), and it was conceivable that schools would not consider allowing the presence of a researcher for that reason. Therefore, I thought that it could be useful to identify and contact schools that were actively engaged in anti-racist teaching and other initiatives towards educational equality. Once this would be accomplished, the school would be chosen on its willingness to participate in this study. Somehow surprisingly, finding a school was eventually a much easier task than I had anticipated. My supervisor had contact with an inspector for equal opportunities, who suggested a school that could be interested in hosting a research project. I then met with the headteacher, who agreed to host my research project (see next section).

As mentioned above, deciding what the researcher will observe and who to interview is as important a selection procedure as choosing the case. This is what Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) called 'sampling within cases' (p. 45). Decisions at this stage have to do with which people to include in the study, and when and where to observe and interview them, which points out to the need of the researcher to consider what data are relevant and available before starting its collection. My decisions about whom to observe and interview went through some changes during the course of fieldwork.

In relation to pupils, I decided to observe two forms with pupils from diverse ethnic groups, genders and social class backgrounds, one in Year 7 (11

year olds) and the other in Year 10 (14 year olds). It was the headteacher who chose which particular form in Year 7 I was to observe. Year 7 was chosen for being the first year group in secondary education. Pupils entering a new school may have more room to negotiate their schooling identities, as the information they have about teachers and that these have about the pupils is relatively small. Therefore, this year group could help in understanding the ways in which reputations and identities are created in school. Furthermore, I thought that it could also provide interesting aspects for comparison with the older pupils attending Year 10. Year 10 was chosen because it is one of the year groups in which discipline problems are more evident, leading more often to exclusions from school (Parsons, 1995). Also, I thought that in case I decided to do a follow-up with these pupils in the ensuing school year, it would be easier to track them down (whereas most of Year 11 pupils would have moved away from school, either to work or to a FE college). In Year 10, as I wished to look across a range of 'ability' sets in Science, it was left to me to decide which forms to observe. I selected the forms that represented all the different sets in this subject.

In relation to the teaching staff, I included in my study those teaching the classes that I decided to observe, that is, Science and Personal and Social Education. The choice of these subjects had to do with the different status they have in school and therefore the different atmospheres that are promoted in each classroom. Science is an examined core subject; this means that Science teachers have to deal with a wide variety of pupils in terms of attainment, providing the conditions to academic differentiation. It is commonly perceived as being a difficult subject to master, as it is technically specific, and therefore has the reputation of being a 'hard' subject. In Science lessons, expected work and behaviour from pupils tend to be clearly defined. On the other hand, Personal and Social Education is seen as a 'soft' subject, in which the tasks are considerably less fixed. These may include watching videos and promoting group discussions, and the pupils are aware that the work they carry out in these lessons will not be assessed. Therefore, in Personal and Social Education processes such as academic differentiation are considerably less evident. These two subjects were then observed, as well as a couple of morning Assemblies in Year 7, and a day of meetings with parents.

Interviews with school staff included the Personal and Social Education teacher and several Science teachers, as well as teachers of other subjects, such as Music and PE, and the form tutor. Interviews with other school staff

were carried out with the headteacher, and two learning mentors. I discuss the reasons for the choice of the staff further below.

Negotiating access

Access to the field started being negotiated by the end of June 1999. As I have already mentioned, it was through my supervisor's contact with an inspector for equal opportunities that a potential school for my study was identified. Initially, I tried to contact the headteacher of Greenfield Comprehensive by phone, in order to arrange a meeting to discuss my research project and the practicalities it would involve. After attempting to arrange the appointment for about two weeks, and not being able to go beyond his personal assistant, I sent a registered letter to the headteacher of the school, to which I finally got a reply. A meeting was then arranged for mid-August. At that time, I thought that it would only be after the meeting that Mr Williams (the headteacher) would decide whether to accept to host my research project at the school. It was just as the meeting proceeded, and he started asking questions about practical details involved, that I realised that access had already been gained effectively.

I decided that I would not give a full account about my research aims, after considering carefully the problems involved in deceiving participants in research (this will be explored below). I told the headteacher that I was interested in pupils' experiences in school, omitting that teachers would also be the focus of my study. This was to try and reduce some of the reactivity from teachers to my presence in their classrooms. The inspector for equal opportunities had already signalled the headteacher that I was interested in looking at academic achievement. Issues of discipline were not presented at that time as being of relevance to my study. I decided that I would disclose my interest in school discipline during the conduct of fieldwork, due to its sensitive nature and because I did not want to give the impression that I was only interested in looking at the more negative aspects of schooling. Wishing to look at how ethnicity, gender and class influence school experiences and identities, but not wanting to direct the participants towards these matters, I did not specify my interest in the operation of such social markers.

The headteacher agreed in general to what I presented as being my research project. However, there were some points of disagreement. When we discussed issues of confidentiality, he told me that he would prefer the name of the school to be known, as he would like to publicly show the school's

commitment to educational research. I was quite surprised with this request, and just replied that it was not current practice and that I would have to discuss it further with my supervisor. He also added that it was the school's policy to emphasise its positive aspects. 'For every six positives, one negative. I would like this to apply to you' (fieldnotes). He stressed that he would like me to focus on the good pupils and not only on the underachieving, and to show how attitudes change positively towards the school during the course of the school year. This made me feel very constrained, with the feeling that he was trying to control my study and its findings.

Mr Williams also agreed with the length of the study, which was meant to take one school year, although expressing hurry on having results. I tried to negotiate this with him, saying that I would discuss with my supervisor the possibility of providing him with a summary of the findings before submitting my thesis.

Although I told Mr Williams that my research project would focus mainly on pupils, I also expressed my interest in interviewing some teachers and other members of staff. He agreed to that requirement and suggested some people for me to interview. When discussing consent from the participants to carry out interviews, Mr Williams dismissed the issue. He said that he wanted the school to be involved in research projects, so I needed not worry in writing a letter to the pupils' parents or asking teachers for their permission to participate in the study.

Mr Williams introduced me then to the head of the student services, Ms Clarke, with whom I should arrange from then on all the practicalities of my research project. During most of the period of fieldwork, it was with Ms Clarke that I negotiated access to pupils and classes. She arranged for me to observe a Science class in Year 7, as well as her own Personal and Social Development class, with the same form of pupils. These observations were planned to begin in September, as soon as the school opened. I wished to be present when the first encounters of pupils with their teachers took place, to better understand how relationships and reputations were formed. However, I only effectively gained access to Science lessons in Year 7 from the end of November 1999, and started observing Personal and Social Education from the following January. Briefly, this had to do with the lack of organisation that characterised the atmosphere in school at the time. Timetables were changed several times, forms were rearranged and building work in the school site was on-going, and my fieldwork was thus delayed (this is explored in more detail in

Chapter 2). Interviews with pupils in Year 7 were also arranged with the head of student services, and started taking place from the middle of February.

In relation to Year 10, I was given more liberty to approach the head of Science (Ms Babbra) directly and decide with her which forms to observe. I met then with Ms Babbra in the beginning of February, to arrange my access to Science lessons. However, it was not until the beginning of June that I actually started observing Science lessons in Year 10. Ms Babbra advanced several reasons for this delay, such as the change of timetables, the labs not being fully equipped, or OFSTED inspections taking place.

Access to the pupils in Year 10 to carry out interviews proved even more difficult, and became practically impossible. I was to arrange interviews with pupils with the head of Year 10, who was supposed to contact me by phone. As she failed to do so for several weeks, I first tried to contact her by phone as well, and not succeeding I attempted to arrange a meeting by going to her office. When we met, she was not sympathetic, and ended up shouting at me saying not to phone her ever again, that she would call me whenever she could arrange the meeting. This caused me some distress. Furthermore, as it happened in the end of school year, I decided jointly with my supervisor that in view of the delays already incurred I would drop my work with Year 10, also ceasing to observe Science lessons by that time. This would allow me to concentrate on Year 7 and make the most of the remaining time in the field. As she effectively never contacted me, I think this was a sensible decision.

All the problems of getting access to particular people and lessons meant that at the end of my first year at the school I still had to carry out interviews with teachers, with the headteacher and a second set of individual interviews with pupils in Year 7. Ms Clarke, who had been my key informant, also left the school at the end of the school year 1999-2000. Meanwhile, a new headteacher (Mr Jones) came into the school, and I successfully negotiated with him continued access for the first term of the then starting school year. Mr Jones did not appoint a contact person with whom I could arrange all the practicalities, making me rely constantly on him. He also tried to exert a more controlling role over my study, in terms of access to people. Initially he asked me to reveal to him all the teachers I would like to interview, so that he could take all the necessary steps. It was made clear that I should not approach people directly, or enter the school unless he had agreed to that. As he failed to arrange the interviews, I managed to win some freedom of movement within the school with his permission. Initially I wrote letters to the teachers I wanted

to observe, and when this proved to have no results, I managed to go and contact them in person.

In relation to pupils, Mr Jones and I agreed that I would write to parents asking for their permission to interview them, which I did (cf. Appendix V). None of the parents wrote back to the school denying permission. We also agreed to interview pupils only during their lunch breaks or after school so that I would not disrupt their lessons. Finally, I was allowed to consult the school records of pupils in the form under study in the premises.

Researcher's role and identity

Once in the field, ethnographers can play different roles depending on the nature and degree of their participation in the research context, and on whether the aims of the research project is disclosed to those being studied.

Many terms have been used to describe possible roles for an ethnographer to play once in the field collecting data. For instance, Gold (1958) has described a continuum of four possible roles: complete participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant, and complete observer. The complete participant would be played by a researcher whose identity as such is not known to the participants, and that engages fully in the core activities of the group being studied (at least for the duration of fieldwork). With this role, the researcher mingles with the people being studied as if he or she were a member of the group. This entails a breach on the ethical principles of research on social sciences, by deceiving participants of research, as their permission to participate in the study is not obtained. On the opposite end, the complete observer is generally someone conducting research with minimal interaction with participants, with the researcher withdrawing from the activities in order not to influence the events being observed. According to Gold's (1958) definition, my role could then be described as observer-as-participant, in that I prioritised observation over participation in the school life, although trying to build relationships with those being studied in order to get closer to their experiences of schooling.

I rather like to describe the role I played whilst in Greenfield Comprehensive as a 'peripheral membership', a term used by Patricia and Peter Adler (1987). These authors understand it as a marginal role, less committed to the context being studied than researchers with an active or complete membership. Whilst researchers playing this role are still interested

in close interaction with participants to understand social processes, they do not participate in the central activities that bind the people under study.

In my study, and for most of the time in which fieldwork took place, this was the case. I was recognised as a member of the school community, as far as I was a 'research assistant'. I was given a badge with my name and title, which officially allowed me to enter and circulate in the school. However, I did not participate in the central activities of the school, such as teaching, supporting students or even learning. My role was peripheral to the school. I would observe lessons and perhaps hang around a bit, but the school did not assign me other responsibilities. For instance, in case the teacher had to leave the classroom for a little while, I was never asked to take charge of the class. Another member of staff would be called to supervise pupils' activities and behaviour. When the school changed headteacher, my role became more peripheral. Whilst previously I was officially recognised as being a member of the school community, the arrival of the new headteacher came to change this. From then on, I had to sign in reception as a visitor, and my work within the school was more scrutinised than before. Nevertheless, these changes were more apparent at the official level, and on reflection it seems to me that my interactions with teachers and pupils remained largely similar to what they had been under the former headteacher.

Although the reasons for my presence in the school were made clear from the start of the data collection, this had to be constantly reminded to pupils. They asked me many times whether I was a journalist or a teacher. I often had to assure them that I would just observe classes and carry out interviews, taking no part in the school activities, and particularly that I would not be assessing them. Similarly, teachers were informed that it was not my aim to evaluate their teaching skills. I rather expressed my interest in looking at social interactions and my willingness to learn about a different educational system.

The choice of my role within the school had to do primarily with epistemological reasons (cf. Adler and Adler, 1987). I do think that a researcher who is not directly engaged in the actions and processes under study can assume a more detached position, having a broader view of what is happening. I do not intend here to say that a researcher who assumes a detached role is more 'objective', but rather that (s)he is more available to pay attention to whatever is being studied. Playing an active role in the field, such as being a teacher, would not only constrain my study in terms of the time

available to collect data, but perhaps more importantly, would position myself as a member of staff. I think this could heavily influence the data collected, particularly from pupils, as such position could be felt as intimidating when asking particularly sensitive questions. In spite of this, one should not instantly assume that my role as a peripheral member was immediately accepted. Even though some teachers would introduce me to their classes as a researcher, an outsider that was there for a period of time to learn about their school, this role had to be constantly negotiated. Particularly during the first months of classroom observation, I registered many incidents of such role negotiation. Sometimes, in the corridor pupils would ask me who I was and why I was observing their class. However, very frequently the negotiation of my role was a much more subtle process. For instance, during the lessons, pupils who were misbehaving without the teacher's awareness would often look at me as if checking whether I would report them to the teacher. Although I never did, I remember that there was one time that I felt I had really won their approval. This was during the teacher's absence from the room, and pupils were playing around, jumping over tables or just doing whatever they pleased. When the teacher came in and asked them whether they had behaved properly, they replied positively whilst some were checking on my reaction. Once again I said nothing, and from then on these dissimulated inquests by the pupils became much less frequent.

Not only does the role that the researcher adopts once in the field affect the relationship with research participants, but identity aspects, such as ethnicity, age, gender, and social background are as likely to have an impact on the research study. All these are important in shaping relationships with the participants in the study, and can affect the data collected. For instance, the fact that I am white may have prevented some of the black or Asian pupils to confide in me issues about 'race' and ethnicity, especially if referring to the white pupils. However, this is not so straightforward as it seems. As Troyna (1998) argued:

> attempts to isolate the effects of the ethnicity of researchers – or, more accurately, their skin colour – in considerations of the efficacy, authenticity and credibility of 'race' and ethnic relations research are at best partial and, in many instances, misplaced. It is now being recognized that researchers bring multiple identities to the research process and in complex ways these are constantly

being negotiated in the course of interviews in ways which might attenuate or strengthen the insider/outsider status of the researcher (p. 101).

In relation to ethnic identity, being white but Portuguese might have helped me in reducing resistance in pupils' responses. My foreign accent helped me in presenting myself as an outsider not only to the school, but to the country, opening up possible 'alliances' with these pupils. Sometimes, it also helped me in probing meanings of slang. With teachers, being foreign helped me in being allowed to ask more questions than I would normally be able to. Although I did not explore this as fully as I could, because many times I felt uncomfortable in the role of the 'incompetent' researcher, I think it made me be seen as less threatening or intimidating to participants of research. This was compounded by the fact that I was younger than most teachers (I was 27-28 years old at that time). With pupils, being over 15 years older than them and therefore easily positioned as an adult closer to the school staff, more assurances had to be made about my role as a researcher.

Being female also may have had an impact on the collection of data. Being aware of this, I tried to assess the impact that gender had on the accounts elicited. Perhaps because the pupils were relatively young, around 11 years old, I do not feel that it really had a strong influence. For instance, when discussing Science lessons on sexual education I felt that both boys and girls were quite at ease with me. Being reflexive about all these issues is nevertheless necessary, and can help in understanding how our multiple identities can act to one's advantage in the collection of data.

Moreover, assurances of confidentiality and social competencies can help in building up a relationship of trust, which in turn can lead to the disclosure of more information on the topic being studied (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). I thus attempted to create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere with participants, where all kind of matters from the personal to the mundane could be discussed. I genuinely tried to show that I had the time to listen to people's concerns and to address whatever issues they wished. Equally, I tried to balance my relationship with participants by answering to their own questions about me. Pupils were likely to question me about where I come from, which religion I have, where I live or why I came to England. On the other hand, teachers seemed to play their professional identities, not making any personal question, but rather trying to know what I had 'found out'. Sometimes it was difficult for me to manage these answers, as at the period of

data collection my ideas about the issues were still quite unorganised and therefore I did not want to make some sort of final statements. Mostly, I tried to show that I was looking at a range of issues, and that I still needed to look at a lot more things to be able to put forward any precise ideas.

The appearance and the personal characteristics of the researcher can also influence the relationship that is established with the participants in the course of fieldwork (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). In relation to personal appearance, dress is an important issue. I decided to dress in a semi-formal style, which was felt to make several kinds of people more at ease with me, as I needed to establish relationships with multiple audiences. Wearing formal clothes could prevent pupils from establishing an informal relationship with me, whereas casual clothing could be perceived by both pupils and teachers as a lack of professionalism or commitment towards the research. In practice, this meant that I would not wear jeans or trainers in school. Nonetheless, I came to dress more casually when interviewing pupils, particularly after realising that most of the teachers with the same age as me dressed very casually. I thus tried to adjust my clothing to the particular setting I was in.

Ethics and politics in my ethnography

By the very nature of social research, due to the matters and the settings that are studied, ethical and political issues are inherent to the process of research (Vaughan, 1969). These may emerge at any stage of the research process: throughout the research design, in the negotiation of access to the setting under study, in the conduct of observations and interviews, in the analysis or publishing of findings. In the sub-section below, I describe in more detail how these issues were dealt with in my own ethnographic case study.

Informed consent and deception

Researchers have the ethical obligation to inform the participants about every aspect of the research study. The deliberate omission or withholding of information implies deceiving the participants, which is against the principles of honesty and trust that should rule research relationships (BERA, 1992; BSA, 1994). Although I respected most of these principles, such as explaining what the project was about, seeking informed consent, allowing participants to withdraw from the study, and giving assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, there were some details left undisclosed. The decision to withhold from participants some information was nevertheless taken after carefully considering its implications.

The statements of ethics of the two relevant associations for my area of research, namely, the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and the British Sociological Association (BSA)[68], vary slightly about this aspect. The BERA (1992) suggests that:

> Participants in a research study have the right to be informed about the aims, purposes and likely publication of findings involved in the research and of potential consequences for participants, and to give their informed consent before participating in research. (par. 7)

The BSA (1994) principle on the responsibility to the research participants rather stresses that deception should be avoided as far as possible:

> *As far as possible* sociological research should be based on the freely given informed consent of those studied. This implies a responsibility on the sociologist to explain *as fully as possible*, and in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken, and how it is to be promoted. (p. 3, my emphasis)

The British Sociological Association notes that ethical principles should be read as guidelines to inform the decisions taken by the researchers. This accounts for the fact that, in some cases, research studies require the use of deception in order to collect richer data. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggest:

> There is (...) the danger that the information provided will influence the behaviour of the people under study in such a way as to invalidate the findings. (p. 72)

In social research, there is often the tension between the search for knowledge and the abiding to ethical codes by not deceiving participants. As Christians (2000) suggests, in some instances both these criteria cannot be guaranteed, and a modicum of deception is required in order to obtain knowledge as long as this is valuable to society.

My decision to partly omit details on some of my key questions, and therefore to deceive the participants, was the result of a careful reflection. I

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[68] Both the British Educational Research Association and the British Sociological Association statements of ethics can be found in Appendix IV.

informed participants that my study was on pupils' experiences in school, trying to understand how they construct their schooling identities. Thus, I stressed that I would be looking at how pupils interact between themselves and with teachers. The role of ethnicity, gender and class was not referred to explicitly, as in my study I wished to understand how the participants raised these issues, rather than questioning them directly. This could misconstrue the data by attributing to the participants an over-consciousness about the influence of these social markers in their experiences. Initially, I also downplayed the importance of the role played by teachers in my study, although I did say that I was interested in looking at teacher-pupil interactions. This was because I was not interested in studying teaching styles and competencies. Also, I did not want to add to the pressure put on teachers by official inspections of their classrooms. When some teachers asked me whether I wanted their class plans, I explained then in more detail that I only intended to look at how pupils interacted in class. Moreover, during the fieldwork I disclosed that I was not only interested in academic achievement, but also in discipline. As mentioned before, this was not signalled to the headteacher in our first meeting, as I did not wish him to think that I would only look at the problems the school had. I had decided that throughout the school year I would show then my interest in issues of discipline, as well as my concern in looking at all aspects, negative and positive. Thus, when I asked for the reports on pupils' discipline, I also asked for any records on merits[69].

In relation to informed consent, as I previously mentioned the first headteacher at Greenfield Comprehensive suggested that no written consent needed to be asked from parents, as he had announced that the school would often be involved in research projects. When the new headteacher arrived in school, he decided that consent should be sought, and so I sent a letter to parents asking them to write to me via the school in case they did not wish their child to take part in my research project (cf. Appendix V). The decision to do so, rather than asking them to write in case they agreed that their child participated, was taken to assure an opportunity to withdraw from the study. Having spent a long time at the school, I recognised that many materials were sent home, but were not always received. Thus, I used the possibility of

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[69] Curiously, although the school kept information about detentions and exclusions, there were no records on the merits given to pupils for good behaviour.

choosing withdrawal (rather than participation) as a decisive step towards not excluding pupils from the study.

Anonymity and confidentiality

Throughout the handling of fieldwork and in the writing of this thesis, I have constantly assessed the potential harm that I could cause to the participants. Throughout the period of data collection, and particularly before starting any interview, I gave assurances of the participants' anonymity and the confidentiality of the data. Whilst at Greenfield Comprehensive, this meant that in conversation with a participant of research I would not disclose sensitive information about another participant, or his/her identity.

Protecting people's identities, by changing names of participants and of the school in this thesis and any future publications, was an important step to ensure that no harm results from my research project to those who participated in it. And whilst every effort has been made to keep the schools' identity anonymous, it might be proven that not enough has been made. As Christians (2000) has written in this respect:

> Despite the signature status of privacy protection, watertight confidentiality has proven to be impossible. Pseudonyms and disguised locations are often recognized by insiders. What researchers consider innocent is perceived by participants as misleading or even betrayal. (p. 139)

During the writing of this thesis I often struggled with decisions concerning which issues I needed to disregard so that I would protect the school's identity and thus reduce my sense of betraying the trust given by those who allowed me to enter their school lives. Discussing with knowledgeable others, particularly with my supervisor, about the implications of such decisions was very valuable. Often, I did not include in this thesis information that would jeopardise the anonymity of the school. However, sometimes I felt that the importance of those issues to understand the atmosphere at Greenfield Comprehensive and the experiences of pupils and staff was too great to be ignored.

Relationships of power in research

Politics and issues of power[70] are present not only in our daily life but also emerge in research in the relationships of the researcher with its sponsors, the institution being studied and the participants.

My research project was made possible through funding of the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology and the European Social Fund. These institutions could have influenced my research project by determining the topic of research and the methodology. In this specific case, this would have been accomplished particularly by approving or not the allocation of funding to the carrying out of the research proposal I submitted. Eventually, I was granted a scholarship and the freedom to pursue the academic issues I was interested in. Therefore, it can be argued that this was a case in which the relationship of power that I developed with my sponsors was successfully negotiated.

In relation to the school in which the study took place, this was not so straightforward. As I mentioned above, when negotiating access to the school the first headteacher pressurised me to focus particularly on the positive aspects of Greenfield Comprehensive and on those pupils who were being successful. This would have limited my research project to some aspects of the school life and the collection of an also limited range of data (excluding, for instance, pupils' discipline records). The appointment of a member of staff with whom I arranged the practicalities of the research project, and the freedom I was given to circulate in the school, resulted in my being able to pursue the topics that I saw as relevant, and which emerged from preliminary analysis of the information collected through observation and interviews.

These issues emerged particularly in interviews. And this was where I think that my relationship of power with participants became more balanced. Using semi-structured interviews allowed participants to address not only the issues that I considered relevant after a period of classroom observation, but also those of their concern. The interest I had expressed in their own perspectives on schooling encouraged pupils to put forward topics of their concern, redefining the power relationship by dictating what they saw as important. The relationship of trust I developed with pupils meant that many chose to voice to me their own problems, some of which I had not anticipated.

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[70] I use here a definition of power that draws on Foucault's work, which is diffuse and decentred, as opposed to more structural notions of power that see power as belonging to people, and therefore defining them as powerful or powerless. I understand sources of power as being multiple, and that implies that often we can change relationships of power.

An example of this happening was the emergence of issues such as bullying. After assessing the importance of this issue to the understanding of the atmosphere at Greenfield Comprehensive and of pupils' school experiences I decided to further it.

Methods

In this section, I describe in more detail the methods used for the collection of data in my study. Participant observation, semi-structured interviews and the collection of documents were used to gather information on pupils and teachers' school experiences at Greenfield Comprehensive. I then explain how data were organised and analysed in the thesis.

Methods of Data Collection

Participant observation

Concepts of participant observation are varied in the literature, ranging from the participation of the researcher in the core activities of a group being studied, to just being around and observing the daily lives of those being researched. I conceive participant observation in this broader sense. As I have mentioned before, I think of my role at the school as somehow marginal, a 'peripheral membership' (Adler and Adler, 1987). However, my presence in lessons or assemblies had an impact on the people being researched, and therefore I participated in the lives of school teachers and pupils.

Observation is perhaps the method that researchers feel better prepared to use. In our daily life we observe people and events in order to make sense of the social world that surrounds us. As a method in social sciences, participant observation is used with a similar aim:

> to build up, over a period of time, an account of the way in which participants being studied manage and organise their lives as social actors (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992, pp. 127-128).

In research, observation is used in a purposive and systematic manner (Adler and Adler, 1994). However unstructured the method of observation employed, the researcher is guided by at least broad theoretical ideas that determine what is considered relevant to take note of.

My rationale for choosing participant observation as one of the methods for data collection emerges from its strong correspondence with symbolic

interactionism and other interpretative perspectives. These perspectives stress the interactive and interpretative nature of social processes, based on peoples' constant construction of meaning, in which I was interested. Therefore, observing directly how teachers and pupils interact, what they do and say in the school daily routine helps in understanding how schooling identities are constructed.

This unstructured method of observation has several advantages over a more formal, and structured one. Firstly, it does not require a detailed planning prior to its conduct nor the use of measurement instruments (Robson, 1996). This allows for flexibility in the use of observation, meaning that I could decide to pursue unexpected directions or ideas as they emerged during the collection of data. Secondly, the fact that in unstructured observation one does not work with predetermined categories (Adler and Adler, 1994) also enabled me to gather data that better illustrate the complexity of issues that characterise life in schools.

As any other method, unstructured observation has its disadvantages. Generally mentioned are criticisms in the area of the validity and reliability of data (Adler and Adler, 1994; Dennis, 1993; Robson, 1996). Dealing with these issues in the research planning is, in my view, a way of making out the best of unstructured observation.

Issues of validity refer to the effects of the observer on the data, also known as 'observer effects' (Robson, 1996), that is, how people being studied act as they generally do, or try to manage their image to impress the researcher or otherwise. This was dealt with in two ways. Firstly, as I spent a considerably long time in the field the participants of research had the chance to get accustomed to me being around. I do not imply that my presence had no effect at all, but rather that it was diminished. Secondly, I also triangulated the methods of data collection. Observation was not used as the sole method of data collection (and it rarely is), but in conjunction with interviews and the collection of documents. This enabled me, for instance, to see what pupils do, what they say they do, and what teachers think they do.

In my study, reliability of data refers to 'observer consistency'[71] (Robson, 1993, p. 208), that is the consistency of findings when a researcher observes events on different occasions. I tried to strengthen the reliability of data by conducting systematic observations, repeated under different contexts (cf.

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[71] And not to inter-observers consistency, as there was no other observers.

Adler and Adler, 1994). Observing lessons with different teachers throughout the school year, and triangulating observation with other methods of data collection (in this case interviews and documents), helped me in doing so.

Another commonly pointed out disadvantage refers to the large amounts of data generated through the use of unstructured observation, which requires extensive periods of time dedicated both to its organisation and analysis. Finding the time to type up detailed notes, soon after observation took place, helped me not only in recalling events, but also to better organise the time spent with such task, not leaving huge piles of data to organise later.

It was the careful consideration of all these issues that made me choose participant observation as a method to collect data, used as described below.

When I observed the first lesson in each subject, I entered the room with the teacher and was introduced to the pupils in the form. From then on, I waited in the corridor for the teacher to arrive, and only then would enter the classroom with the pupils. Once there, I sat at a desk near the back of the room, from where I observed what happened, took notes, and audio-recorded the lesson. Notes were taken in as much detail as I could manage. I marked down the time approximately every 5 minutes, as a way to keep concentrated in the events. Usually, the notes taken were not very extensive in relation to the curricular contents being transmitted. I rather focused my attention on the interactions taking place between pupils and the teacher, and amongst the pupils themselves. The fieldnotes were then organised and typed at home, with the help of the audiotapes. These allowed me to describe verbal interactions in greater detail verbal interactions (cf. Appendix III for an extract of an observation sheet).

In my study, observation focused mainly on Science and Personal and Social Education (PSE) lessons, in Year 7. I observed a total of 18 Science lessons. 15 of those lessons were observed from the end of November 1999 to the middle of January 2000. I went to all of the three weekly Science lessons during that period. In the end of March, I observed three more lessons. This had not been previously planned. Initially I planned only to observe around 15 lessons for every subject in a form per year group (Year 7 and 10). However, whilst conducting interviews with this form, 7B, I became aware that they were learning about Sexual Education in the Science lessons, and saw this as a chance of observing directly verbal interactions on issues relating to gender and sexuality. I asked the Science teacher for permission to re-start observing his lessons, and he allowed me to do so.

PSE had one weekly session for most of the school year. I observed a total of 9 lessons, and these were spread out across the school year, from January until June 2000. There were several reasons for not having observed more PSE lessons. Firstly, the onset of my observations on these lessons was postponed by the school, as there were changes in the way this subject was organised (initially it was taught in smaller periods every day by a learning mentor). Secondly, the teacher, Ms Clarke (my key informant) sometimes asked me to do interviews with pupils whilst these were in her lesson. This meant I could not observe her lessons so often, even though I would personally have preferred to. And finally, as from after Easter the subject started being taught by the form tutor, I had to renegotiate access to these lessons, which took me some more time.

Apart from the lessons mentioned, I also observed a couple of Year 7 assemblies. The first was early in the year and the second was close to the Summer break. The assemblies were held in different places (the first in the school's hall and the second in the gym), and apart from the pupils in Year 7 there were several teachers of that year group, including the head of Year. In the second assembly observed, the new head was also present, as he was being introduced to the school pupils. The assemblies were audio-recorded, and written notes were also taken.

Finally, I went to a day of meetings with parents that took place in the beginning of Winter term, in January 2000. This day was planned to set academic targets, through negotiation with the teacher, the guardian(s) and the pupil concerned. I observed the meetings that Mr Roberts (Science teacher, also head of Year 7) held with 7 pupils in Year 7, only 3 of them in the form under study. As initially I was not introduced to the people round the table, I did not record all of the meetings. It was only after two of the meetings took place that I managed to get Mr Roberts's attention and tell him to introduce me to the parents and ask their permission to record. All of them agreed, and I also took written notes of what was happening.

Although I was granted permission to stay additional time at the school, this was done to a considerably lesser extent than I had anticipated. This had to do mostly with my sense of unease in such circumstances. Particularly when I was in a corridor waiting to meet someone, I was often approached by a member of staff asking me what I was doing there. Once informed, they would try to locate the person concerned so that I could meet him or her immediately or otherwise leave. Access to common spaces such as the staffroom also

proved difficult if not impossible. The staffroom was always locked, for security reasons, I was told. Thus I only entered the room when I was accompanied by a teacher. In spite of all these constraints, I still managed to take some notes of events happening in the corridors or outside. These were never tape-recorded, and notes were only taken when something thought as relevant to my study happened, and after leaving the premises. The bulk of my observations, therefore, took place in the more formal setting of the classroom.

Semi-structured interviews

If participant observation is a privileged method to see people interacting in their natural setting, interviews can be extremely rich for understanding how people make sense of their social experiences and for exploring events not witnessed in the field. The large amount of information that can be provided in the course of an interview makes it an appealing strategy for the collection of data (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992). It is not therefore surprising that interviews are so widely used in sociology. Benney and Hughes (1984) came to argue in this respect that 'sociology has become the science of the interview' (p. 215). They use two arguments to support this view. Firstly, that the style of interviews used by researchers sometimes defines better the boundaries between subject areas than the logic behind the studies themselves. One needs only to think of the frequently different uses of large-scale interviews and the in-depth interview to understand this point. Secondly, it is argued that sociology's main interest is the study of social interaction. Relatively similar to daily verbal exchanges, central in human interactions, interviews help in exploring people's constructions of social reality. This stresses the relevance of conducting interviews in sociology, as verbal interactions are partly its own subject matter.

The rationale for the use of interviews in my study is then its appropriateness as a method for the study of social interaction, particularly when using ethnography as a research strategy. Observing what people do was helpful to see interaction as it happens. Asking people how they interpreted their actions helped me in entering their own social worlds.

In my ethnographic study, I decided to use semi-structured interviews, which aim to include the advantages of both structured and unstructured interviews. In structured interviews, the questions to be asked, and categories of possible answers are predetermined (Robson, 1996). Researchers using unstructured interviews (sometimes known as qualitative interviews) seek to

understand in depth the behaviour of social actors, therefore not imposing categories *a priori* (Fontana and Frey, 1994). The interviews I conducted were semi-structured insofar as I had devised interview schedules, but freely changed the order of questions or asked additional questions in order to allow participants to suggest new insights to the topic of study (cf. Appendix II for the interview schedules as they were initially planned).

Interviews conducted within an ethnographic study can thus be particularly useful in complementing data gathered through participant observation (Burgess, 1984). This is not only by providing a different sort of accounts of similar events. Particularly, it helps to strengthen the internal validity of data, by reducing reactivity to the researcher, which is generally perceived as the greatest disadvantage of interviews. Reactivity or 'the effects of audience' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 130) refers to the changes occurred in people's behaviour and opinions by being aware that they are being studied. Furthermore, by being familiar with the context under study and how people act within that context can help the researcher in interpreting the data collected through interviews.

The previous interactions with participants of research can also be useful in creating a relation of trust that can lead to the disclosure of information otherwise not possible. As I mentioned before, the constant negotiation of my role with pupils by showing them that I would not report them to their teacher when misbehaving has undoubtedly helped me in being seen as a person to be trusted.

The type of questions posed in the interviews was essentially non-directive or open-ended, meaning that the respondents were free to choose the kind of answer they wanted to give (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992). This was decided in the light of the appropriateness of this type of questions for the exploratory nature of my study. Questions such as 'How do you like school?' and 'What do you think about Science and PSE lessons?' resulted in a large diversity of accounts from pupils, in their own terms, which I think is more useful to illustrate the variety of school experiences and identities.

Interviews with pupils were negotiated with their teachers, as the headteacher instructed me, and so they were not asked directly for their consent to participate in the study. Therefore, I made sure that the pupils agreed to be interviewed before actually doing so. In most cases they did agree. Sometimes, the interviews were seen as a way of avoiding a certain lesson or teacher. Other pupils used it as a chance to talk about their problems at

school. In the second set of interviews (taking place outside school hours), where consent had been sought, a few of the pupils refused to be interviewed. Interviews with school staff were negotiated individually, and therefore they were given the chance to decide whether to be interviewed. Their hidden agendas were also varied. For instance, particular teachers could have used interviews as a chance of pouring out their feelings of professional dissatisfaction, whilst others may have agreed to be interviewed to show a good image of the school.

Before the interviews started, I explained who I was and that I was interested in knowing about people's experiences in school. I made assurances about the confidentiality of the issues addressed and of the anonymity of people as well as the school's name. I also sought permission to tape-record the interviews, to which all participants agreed.

The interviews took place in classrooms or offices. Although sometimes this was not the best option due to the surrounding noise or the possibility of interruptions, there was no other choice. With pupils, I tried to sit them with their back to the door, so they would not be distracted by their friends who would sometimes come and look through the door.

The length of interviews varied from 20 to 50 minutes. In many cases, the time spent in such encounters had to do with the availability of the participants. In others, the participants' hidden agendas probably helped in determining how much time was allowed for my enquiries. For instance, in interviews with pupils taking place at lunchtime or after school the length of time spent was generally smaller than those that took place when pupils were supposed to be in a lesson.

In relation to pupils, I conducted a first set of interviews with two of them at a time. With this I wished to make pupils feel more comfortable, as well as see how they negotiated meanings of their experiences with each other. Following the headteacher's suggestion, these interviews took place during school hours. I sought permission from the teachers of the subjects being taught to take pupils from the lesson, and to bring them back when the interviews were finished. This first set of interviews was conducted with a total of 23 pupils, out of the 26 that were in the form under study. The constant absenteeism of the remaining three pupils in 7B was the reason why they were not interviewed.

The interviews were used to elicit pupils' accounts of their experiences in school, preference of subjects and teachers, issues of discipline and behaviour,

interactions with teachers and other pupils and images of an 'ideal pupil' (cf. Appendix II with the interview schedules). Interviews were conducted for around five weeks, starting in mid-February of my first year in school.

A second set of interviews was carried out in the first term of the second year I spent at the school (2000-01), when pupils were in Year 8. Some had to be repeated in the following January, as the tape where they had been recorded was accidentally damaged before being transcribed. These interviews proved much more difficult to organise, as half of 7B was now distributed throughout all the other forms in Year 8 (this was discussed in detail in Chapter 4). I only managed to interview 17 pupils this time, as some had left the school and others were persistently absent. A couple of the pupils whose accounts were on the damaged tape refused to repeat the interviews. It should be mentioned that there was a new head in school, and we had agreed to send a letter to parents asking their consent. None of the parents replied that (s)he did not want her or his child to participate. However, as some of the pupils did not want to do so, I respected their wish by not pressuring them to repeat the interviews. One of them said that he did not want to spend the time required, and the other only wished to be interviewed with his five friends, which I did not consider appropriate.

This second set of interviews was carried out with just one pupil at a time, and was a follow-up to the first interviews. I asked them general questions about the changes that had taken place in the school since the previous year, and more specific questions about the splitting of 7B, friendships, and ethnic background.

Interviews with school staff took place at different times. I started by interviewing two learning mentors at the end of July, just before the school year finished. To these, I asked general questions about their experiences at the school and its atmosphere, their relationship with the teaching staff, the kind of support asked by and provided for pupils in Year 7, and also to comment on each of the pupils in 7B they had worked with (cf. interview schedules in Appendix II).

Interviews with teachers aimed to account for their previous and present teaching experiences, understand how they perceived the school's atmosphere and to elicit their images of pupils in 7B in relation to issues of academic achievement and discipline, trying to draw their conceptions of an 'ideal' pupil (Becker, 1952). These interviews were initially carried out with the PSE teacher (also head of the Student Services), the Science teacher (also head of Year 7)

and the form tutor (also 7B's PSE teacher from Easter time). In the second year at Greenfield Comprehensive, I conducted interviews with some other teachers. Initially, I planned to interview teachers whom I identified (through pupils' records) as having given a large number of detentions and exclusions. However, all of those teachers had left the school. I decided then to interview as many teachers as possible, amongst those who had had contact with the pupils in the form under study. These were their Year 7 PE and Music teachers, and two Science teachers in Year 8. I also repeated the interviews with their Year 7's Science teacher and the form tutor, trying to understand what changes had occurred in the school in the meantime.

Some more specific interviews were carried out with other teachers. An interview with the head of Year 8 examined why 7B was split across several forms in Year 8. A couple of interviews were also carried out with the head of Science in Year 10, to elicit conceptions about academic differentiation and 'setting by ability', and then decide which Science groups in Year 10 I would observe.

An interview with the headteacher, Mr Jones, was carried out at the end of my fieldwork, by the end of February 2001. With him I tried to gather information about his experiences as head of Greenfield Comprehensive, and to obtain his account of the aims and implementation of the *Fresh Start* initiative. After knowing that there had been important changes in school in terms of academic achievement after I left, I went back and interviewed Mr Jones once again. This was in May 2002, and besides questions relating to these changes, I further explored his view on the implementation of the *Fresh Start* initiative at Greenfield Comprehensive.

All interviews were transcribed. Initially, I fully transcribed the first set of interviews with pupils, although being aware that this was perhaps unnecessary, extremely time-consuming and a very tiring effort. It was just as my attention became focused on more particular issues, that I began only transcribing parts of the interviews, those considered more relevant to the emerging themes in the analysis. The reason I did not do this before related to my reluctance to put aside potential insights for my study whilst I did not have a clearer view of the subject. Whilst transcribing, I noted the tape-counter figure next to each question or quotes that seemed particularly relevant. This ensured that I could always return quickly to the exact point of any question or taped discussion.

Collection of school documents

Schools, as many other institutions, produce and use many kinds of documents. School prospectuses, timetables, and pupil reports are just a few examples of how written documents permeate life in educational institutions.

Using the collection of documents as a method to gather data can be helpful to illustrate multiple and sometimes conflicting accounts (Hodder, 1994). However, such documents should not be taken at face value. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) point out, written documents do not represent 'true' or 'neutral' accounts of social reality. Rather, they should be seen as textual constructions that should be subject to critical analysis. Therefore, documents should be read and analysed by putting in context their production and use.

At Greenfield Comprehensive I had access to several kinds of school documents. Some were more official and public, such as the school prospectus. These were written to parents, pupils, teachers and other staff, and aimed to transmit a certain school ethos and organisation. Others were more private and written for smaller audiences, as a report on a discipline incident. This kind of document was to be shared only among school staff. The main documents to which I had access were: the school prospectus, timetables and day plans, documents on the school's policy on discipline, on Special Educational Needs (SEN), a table of 7B's achievement in Science, and pupils' personal records.

The school prospectus was given to me by Mr Williams, at the end of our first meeting in which he accepted to host my research project. Access to other documents was only negotiated in the second year in the school, with the new headteacher, Mr Jones. I asked him if he could provide me with documents on equal opportunities and discipline, and he agreed to send them. As the time in which I left the school was approaching and he had not given me the documents, I asked him once again, and he showed me a drawer saying that I could take whatever I wished. Although he was not initially aware, the school did not have a written statement on equal opportunities. I collected all the documents available, which were written for teachers and support staff.

As I mentioned previously, I also managed to get access to the reports on pupils in 7B, the form under study. These files included demographic information about the pupils such as name, address, age, ethnic group, gender, parents and siblings, and entitlement to free meals. Many of the files also included information on previous academic achievement, particularly Key

Stage 2 results at the end of primary school. Sometimes letters from parents had been added to these files, or specialist reports from staff working with children with SEN. But mainly, pupils' files included incident reports, relating to indiscipline events and how they were dealt with by the school. Particularly relevant was the absence of any records on good behaviour, such as school merits. When I asked a teacher about this, she told me they were planning to organise such information in the future. She also suggested that I contact the head of Year, who also did not have a record of the merits that pupils had gained. I saw this lack of organisation in the promotion of good behaviour as particularly relevant in a school where 'For every negative, six positives!' (Mr Williams, headteacher, fieldnotes) was supposed to be a common practice.

Access to the personal files was gained in December 2000, the second school year in which I was at the school. The information I looked at relates then to nearly five terms of school attendance. As I was not allowed to take the files off the school premises or photocopy them, I took detailed notes. In the cases in which I found issues particularly relevant to my study, I copied the original text in full. School documents were used to illustrate the intended school ethos, and to complement information gathered on pupils, particularly in relation to achievement and discipline.

Managing and using the data

Storage and retrieval

As mentioned before, interviews and subject lessons were tape-recorded. At home, the fieldnotes taken in lessons were completed with information I recalled after leaving the setting, and with the help of the tapes, particularly to transcribe verbal interactions. Interviews were transcribed more fully. As ideas about the research became more focused, only parts of interviews were transcribed and the rest was summarised.

The fieldnotes relating to both interviews and observations include a description of the context, including when and where data were collected, who was present, and the description of any particular events that happened at the time. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggest, this approach is useful for recalling situations in more detail, as well as providing a more accurate account of events.

In relation to the school documents that I managed to gather, I indexed them for later consultation.

The notes resulting from the collection of data through interviews and observation were stored using a word-processor in a personal computer. After gathering information about software that aims to assist in the analysis of qualitative data, I decided to collect data for a couple of weeks and only then make a final decision on whether to use specific software for storing and retrieving data.

The first software packages designed to assist the analysis of qualitative data simply replaced the code-and-retrieve approach that ethnographers used to conduct manually. Such tasks consist of coding segments of text using descriptive and analytic categories. This allows the researcher to retrieve the segments of text for the analysis of data in a quick way (Richards and Richards, 1994; Tesch, 1990). A widely known package that performs this task is *Ethnograph*. However, current versions of word-processors allow for similar operations to be carried out as successfully (although not so quickly), using the features of 'cut' and 'paste', and 'find' and 'replace'. This advantage is particularly relevant if one considers the costs of software for qualitative analysis. Specialised software can have particular advantages in drawing relationships not only at the textual but also at the conceptual level of the data, helping in theory building. Software packages such as NUDIST, developed by Thomas and Lyn Richards (1994), order concepts in a hierarchic tree, and help in drawing relationships between subordinate and superordinate categories.

In spite of the facilities that these packages increasingly offer, there is the danger that ethnographers (particularly inexperienced ones, like me) become submerged in the technicalities of the tasks involved, spending time that could otherwise be used in fieldwork or carrying out a deeper analysis of the data. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggested:

> Whatever merits are to be found in computer applications, however, we must recognize that they only provide adjuncts to the sociological or anthropological imagination. They certainly do not provide 'automatic' solutions to problems of representation and analysis. Understanding and interpretation are the outcome of interactions between the ethnographer and the data, which are themselves constructs. There is no mechanistic substitution for those complex processes of reading and interpretation. (p. 202)

Due to all the problems of gaining access to and in the field, I did not have much time left to learn about such specialised packages, and felt that I should

rather concentrate my efforts on fieldwork. Therefore, I decided to store all the information collected in a word-processing application.

Analysis

I used a loose version of analysis as proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their *Discovery of Grounded Theory*. These authors postulate a close relationship between data and theory building, where concepts and theory constantly emerge from the data analysis, and influence the subsequent collection of data. This approach is referred to as 'the constant comparative method of analysis' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, pp. 101-116), as data are broken down in segments of text that are compared with other segments, with the researcher looking for similarities and differences in the way in which particular concepts emerge in the data.

By the time I left the field, no new categories were being generated. This does not guarantee that I reached exhaustion of all categories. Had I extended the period of fieldwork I would have possibly identified new categories, to the point that no different ones emerged from the data. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the period of fieldwork allowed me to identify the issues, categories, and relationships between these that were relevant to explore the topic under study. I now describe the procedures I used to carry out the analysis of the data collected through interviews, observation and written documents in my ethnographic case study.

As I mentioned above, initially I transcribed all interviews, lessons and meetings observed. As I became more focused in relation to the scope of my research project, transcriptions of interviews were conducted less fully, focusing on what was of direct interest to my study or on emerging categories. After the data were transcribed, I read and reread the text until I became familiar with it. I then started trying to find common characteristics between events or actions in order to find themes[72] and then developed categories for coding segments of text. Particularly, I used the method of 'open coding' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998):

> to uncover, name, and develop concepts (...) open up the text and expose the thoughts, ideas, and meanings contained therein (p. 102).

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[72] Some of these had been previously identified with the literature review I carried out prior to the fieldwork.

As these authors suggest, in this method of analysis the researcher creates segments of text that are examined in depth, looking for similarities and differences with other parts of text. The aim was to make sense of the data, identifying the main conceptual aspects of the phenomena under study, and to attempt to generate new theoretical insights (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). The procedure to create categories was both manual and with the assistance of a word processing-application, namely the word count function to identify the frequency of occurrence of particular words in the transcripts. Segments of text were thus attached codes for categories, very often several of these. As it can be seen throughout this thesis, in many instances a segment of text was categorised with several, interconnected themes or categories.

After having developed categories and coded the transcripts, I developed a codebook, where the meaning, boundaries and examples of each category were written down. This helped me organise data and reach more stable categories in cases of uncertainty.

Negative cases, unusual or controversial categories were also considered in the analysis. Initially, there might be a tendency for researchers, particularly inexperienced ones, to ignore data that does not 'fit'. However, I agree that often these can be very helpful in further illuminating certain processes under study[73].

After reaching stable categories, I attempted in the subsequent analysis to establish relationships between those and sub-categories in order to achieve a more complete understanding of the phenomena under study. In grounded theory, this is generally attempted using the 'constant comparative method' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, pp. 101-116). As summarised by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995):

> In this procedure, the analyst examines each item of data coded in terms of a particular category, and notes its similarities with and differences to other data that have been similarly categorized. This may lead to vaguely understood categories being differentiated into several more clearly defined ones, as well as to the specification of sub-categories. In this way, new categories or sub-categories emerge and there may be a considerable amount of reassignment of data among the categories.

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[73] For instance, in a case study of Sophie, a high-achieving girl, for whom teachers had very high expectations, it did not initially fit in my account how she contested their expectations (whilst other pupils would struggle to be seen so highly by teachers). I then came to realise how that was an expression of her ambivalence and of the tension she felt between her own schooling identity and teachers' categorisations.

As this process of systematic sifting and comparison develops, so the mutual relationships and internal structures of categories will be more clearly displayed. (p. 213)

In relation to the focus of my study, this task was carried out aiming to find relationships between the concepts of 'ideal' pupil, schooling identities and different categories (such as discipline, achievement, ethnicity, gender and class), and within these categories. This enabled me to broadly conceptualise the data. From this detailed network of concepts, I then redefined the themes that I addressed in this thesis. These relate to education policy, discipline, selection and pupils' schooling identities. A final network of themes and concepts was explored in the concluding chapter.

Limitations of this study

The present study has its limitations. Here I address those that were not wholly dealt with in the planning and conduct of my ethnographic study, and which refer to the methodological choices that I undertook.

Many of the aspects described in this thesis are possibly specific to Greenfield Comprehensive. This was a school where education policy was being experimented, namely the *Fresh Start* initiative. This might have highlighted particular processes that are less visible in other contexts (for instance, how the school struggled to ascertain a new, *fresh* identity). It might be argued though, that such processes were specific to the school, rather than more visible, or existing in a larger degree. Every case is indeed unique, and the particularities of Greenfield Comprehensive might make some aspects especially difficult to generalise from. Nevertheless, the school had some points in common with others: it was a 'failing' multi-ethnic comprehensive school attended by pupils coming largely from disadvantaged backgrounds and many refugee children. Teachers and researchers familiar with these contexts may find some of my analysis particularly relevant to their experiences.

The present study focused on pupils throughout their Year 7 and part of Year 8, and therefore inferences of the processes described in this thesis should be made with great care, particularly in relation to the formation of schooling identities. Several other authors have suggested that the differentiation of pupils' adaptations and identities is more visible in later school years (cf. Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970; Ball, 1981). Had this study

been longitudinal, or had I been able to pursue my planned study of pupils in Year 10, this process could have also been explored. The fact that the study was not longitudinal also did not allow me to explore further how some pupils' restricted schooling opportunities (for instance, by virtue of processes of academic selection such as setting) influence their subsequent trajectories (in school and in the job market).

Also in relation to the participants of research, particularly to pupils, it should be noted that the form under study did not include any Turkish or black girls. I often addressed the impact of ethnicity throughout this thesis, and explored how teachers' expectations and organisational practices were disadvantaging some pupils of ethnic minority background, particularly by limiting the range of schooling identities available to these pupils. In spite of generally not making claims about these ethnic groups as a whole, it should be kept in mind that often I could not explore fully how gender articulated with ethnicity. The findings described in relation to ethnicity may thus be more related to gender than I was able to acknowledge. The study of a form without any black or Turkish girls was in spite of my asking the headteacher for a representative form in terms of ethnicity and gender. In view of problems of access to the field, it was not an option to renegotiate this.

Although initially I set out to explore pupils' informal social interactions, and particularly how peer groups and school sub-cultures influence the process of identity formation, I was not able to do this as fully as I planned. Whilst this was partly due to the school staff closely monitoring my movement within the school, it was to a larger extent the result of my own insecurity as a researcher. Initially, I was officially granted permission to hang around the school. Nevertheless, I felt constrained to do so whenever teachers questioned me about my reasons to be waiting in a corridor. I also did not feel comfortable, as an adult, to intrude in pupils' informal spaces in the playground. The difficulty in accessing the staffroom, as I mentioned above, also meant that I was not able to observe how teachers share unofficial information about pupils, and thus reinforce reputations. All of this meant that my observation focused more on the formal spaces of school, such as classrooms and corridors.

In relation to the methods of data collection, I felt that the use of observation was not so fully explored as I could have had. This had mainly to do with me having English as a Second Language, which meant that sometimes in the classroom it was more difficult to understand precisely what

was going on than in the context of interviews, which took place with only one or two people at a time. The noise characteristic of many lessons and of the building work going out just outside meant that sometimes not even the audiotapes were of assistance to me in this respect.

Whilst many of the limitations referred to above are shortcomings for this research project, some can also be seen as possibilities for my own improvement in the design and conduct of future ethnographies. Furthermore, although the research is not without flaws, I am confident that it does justice to the complexity of life in Greenfield Comprehensive and identifies major issues of interest (and concern) in relation to my key research questions.

Conclusions

I started my writing on methodology by looking at the origins of ethnography. Rather than proposing a model for the development of this research strategy, such as Lincoln and Denzin's (1994) five moments model[74], I tried to illustrate the emergence of specific research postures and methods of data collection within this tradition.

I described then in detail how ethnography was conceptualised and used in my study of education policy regarding discipline, selection and the formation of pupils' schooling identities at Greenfield Comprehensive School. As a 'peripheral member' (Adler and Adler, 1987) at the school, I used participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and the collection of varied school documents to gain a better understanding of the daily experiences of pupils and members of staff.

The insights gained throughout the period of fieldwork were used in this thesis to look at a variety of issues such as discipline and control, the institutionalisation of academic failure, and its impact in the shaping of schooling identities.

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[74] See Delamont, Coffey and Atkinson (2000), for a critique of this model.

Appendix II - Interview schedules

Interviews with pupils

In Year 7

(Introducing myself and the aims of the study, asking permission for recording, reassure confidentiality).

1. How do you like your class? And the school?
2. Which are your favourite subjects? Why?
3. Any subjects you don't like? Why?
4. Are there any teachers that you especially like or dislike? Why?
5. What do you think about Science and PSE lessons?
6. Thinking about the school as a whole, do you think teachers treat everyone fairly? Give some examples.
7. Do you behave differently in some subjects? Why do you think is that?
8. How would you describe yourself as a pupil?
9. Do any of you get into trouble a lot? Why is that? Does it happen often? Give me an example.
10. It seems that there are a lot of fights going on. Can you tell me about that?
11. Do you think there is a lot of bullying in this school? Who does it? Who is bullied? How does the school deal with it?
12. Who are the best pupils in your class? Why? (How would you describe a good pupil?)
13. Do you think teachers take your opinions and suggestions seriously?
14. Are there things that you would like to discuss with your teachers that you can't? Which?
15. I finished with the main questions. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

(Reassuring confidentiality, and thanking for their help).

In Year 8

1. How is school going?
2. Is school different in any way from last year? Do you like it better or worse? Why is that?
3. What are the best and worst things about school?
4. Are there any moments from last year that stand out, in a good or bad way?

5. Do you think that you have changed since last year? In what way?
6. I was told that 7B was split into several forms. When were you told about that?
7. Do you know why that happened?
8. Do you think it is better this way?
9. How do you like your new form?
10. Who are your best friends in school?
11. Why do you hang around together?
12. Where they also your best friends last year?
13. I am living in England, but I have Portuguese background. How would you describe your own background?

Interviews with teachers

Year 7's Science and PSE teacher, and form tutor

1. How long have you been teaching for?
2. Is this your first year teaching in this school? How have you liked the experience?
3. How different is this school from the ones where you taught before?
4. What's the atmosphere been like in the school? Has it changed a lot during the year? Are there any moments, good or bad that stand up?
5. What do you think of 7B in terms of academic achievement? How do you compare it to the other forms in Year 7? Is Year 7 different from other year groups? Why do you think is that?
6. Do you think pupils in Year 7 would benefit from being split into different groups? Why?
7. Here's a list of the pupils in 7B. Could you make a brief comment on each of those you've worked with? / Are there any pupils in 7B that stand out, for good or bad reasons?
8. Is there any other comment you would like to make?

Year 8's form tutor, Science, PSE, Music and PE teachers

1. How long have you been teaching for?
2. Is this your first year teaching in this school? How have you liked the experience? Do you think that most teachers here would think like that?
3. How different is this school from the ones where you taught before?
4. What's the atmosphere like in the school? Are there any moments, good or bad that stand out? Something interesting, amusing, or puzzling?
5. I've been focusing my study about pupils who are in 8B. What do you think about them?
6. Did you teach 7B last year? Do you think that pupils in 7B benefited from being split into different forms? Why?
7. And do you think that generally pupils in Year 8 benefit from being set for some subjects?
8. Here's a list of the pupils that were in 7B last year. Could you make a brief comment on each of those you know?
9. What is for you an ideal pupil?
10. Is there anything that happened to you as a teacher, that reminded you of things that happened to you as a pupil?
11. Is there any other comment you would like to make?

Head of Science in Year 10

First interview:

1. How many ability groups you have in Science?
2. What criteria did you use to split the different pupils into ability groups?
3. Is there much movement between groups?
4. What did you tell the pupils about this decision?
5. Are there any comments you would like to make?

Second interview:

1. How long have you been teaching for?
2. Is this your first year teaching in this school? How have you liked the experience? Do you think that most teachers here would think like that?
3. How different is this school from the ones where you taught before?
4. What's the atmosphere like in the school? Are there any moments, good or bad that stand out? (Something interesting, amusing, or puzzling)?
5. Since when is Year 8 set in Science?
6. How many sets do you have in Science in Year 8?
7. Which criteria do you use to split the pupils into different sets?
8. Do you take the decision by yourself, or do you discuss it with the Department?
9. Is there much movement between sets? What kind of things do you take into account when taking the decision of moving pupils between sets? Is it successful? In what way?
10. How were the pupils told about the decision to split them in different groups?
11. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Interviews with the headteacher

First interview

1. How long have you been teaching for? And how long have you worked as a headteacher?
2. How have you liked the experience of working in this school so far?
3. How different is this school from the ones where you worked before?
4. On the basis of your experience so far, how do you view the Fresh Start policy? Is there anything you think is really good about it, or anything you'd like to change?
5. Are there any particular nice things that happened whilst you've been here?
6. What are the biggest problems you're facing? (Staff, pupils,...) What particular initiatives did you set up to deal with those problems?
7. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Second interview

1. I'm aware that Greenfield Comprehensive is reported to have made a considerable progress in terms of academic attainment from when it first reopened to the last school year. How do you explain such fast improvement?
2. What do you think was the role of the Government, the local council and the school's governors in such improvement?

3. What would you say were the main differences between the way you lead the school and that of the previous management? (The headteacher chose not to answer this question)

4. The Fresh Start initiative seems to have been practically abandoned. What do you think about it?

5. The Government seems to be using a lot of setting, and also separating pupils to different pathways, like in Key Stage 4 with vocational and academic courses. What do you think about it?

6. Do you think that practices such as setting or splitting pupils into different groups (rearranging the composition of forms) contributes to better results?

7. One of the things I notice is different in the school is the building work, and people were telling me it had a strong impact in pupils' discipline. Is there still a problem?

8. What do you think is your biggest achievement in school so far?

9. Which are the biggest challenges the school is now facing?

10. Anything else you would like to add?

Interviews with the learning mentors

1. How long have you been working as a learning mentor?

2. Is this your first year working in this school?

3. Have you worked in schools before? How different is this school in relation to the other ones?

4. What's the atmosphere been like in the school? Has it changed a lot during the year? Are there any moments, good or bad that stand out?

5. How do you get on with the teachers?

6. In what kind of situations do pupils in Year 7 ask for your help?

7. Here's a list of the pupils in 7B. Could you make a brief comment on each of those you've worked with?

8. Any other comment you would like to add?

Appendix III - Example of an observation sheet

YEAR	7	FORM	B
SUBJECT	Science	ROOM	A132
DATE	13 Jan. 2000	TIME	11.30-12.15
TEACHER	Mr Roberts		

TIME	OBSERVATION	COMMENTS
11.30	The teacher arrives and the pupils come in the classroom. I sit at the back. Pupils go to their seats and start settling down.	
11.36 (022)	The teacher asks Brian and Terry to distribute the exercise books. After this he does the registration. When he says Adam's name, the pupil replies, 'Yeah.' The teacher corrects him and says, "Yes, Sir". He asks about Joe, and someone says that he is in the Student Services. The teacher asks Sebastien to go there and apologise but the learning mentors have to have the conversation later so that Joe can come to the lesson.	
11.40 (049)	Lucy gets in late, because she went to take her book. I had seen her earlier in the corridor. The class is doing page 108 in the exercise book. The teacher asks questions about it. Sebastien comes in. Then Ismail and Joe (with his basketball in his hand) come in. Ismail sits next to Ahmet and Joe sits next to Omi.	

Appendix IV - Ethical guidelines for social research

BERA Ethical Guidelines

Introduction

The British Educational Research Association adopted the following set of ethical guidelines at its Annual General Meeting on 28 August 1992. These are based on guidelines developed at a BERA seminar in March 1988 (published in Research Intelligence, February 1989) and the proposed ethical standards of the American Educational Research Association as published in Educational Researcher, December 1991. (We are grateful to the AERA Committee on Standards for permission to adapt their guidelines.)

The Guidelines

1. The British Educational Research Association believes that all educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for persons, respect for knowledge, respect for democratic values, and respect for the quality of educational research.

Responsibility to the research profession

2. Educational researchers should aim to avoid fabrication, falsification, or misrepresentation of evidence, data, findings, or conclusions.

3. Educational researchers should aim to report their findings to all relevant stakeholders and so refrain from keeping secret or selectively communicating their findings.

4. Educational researchers should aim to report research conceptions, procedures, results, and analyses accurately and in sufficient detail to allow other researchers to understand and interpret them.

5. Educational researchers should aim to decline requests to review the work of others when strong conflicts of interest are involved or when such requests cannot be conscientiously fulfilled on time. Materials sent for review should be read in their

entirety and considered carefully, with evaluative comments justified with explicit reasons.

6. Educational researchers should aim to conduct their professional lives in such a way that they do not jeopardize future research, the public standing of the field, or the publication of results.

Responsibility to the participants

7. Participants in a research study have the right to be informed about the aims, purposes and likely publication of findings involved in the research and of potential consequences for participants, and to give their informed consent before participating in research.

8. Care should be taken when interviewing children and students up to school leaving age; permission should be obtained from the school, and if they so suggest, the parents.

9. Honesty and openness should characterize the relationship between researchers, participants and institutional representatives.

10. Participants have the right to withdraw from a study at any time.

11. Researchers have a responsibility to be mindful of cultural, religious, gendered, and other significant differences within the research population in the planning, conducting, and reporting of their research.

Responsibility to the public

12. Educational researchers should communicate their findings and the practical significance of their research in clear, straightforward, and appropriate language to relevant research populations, institutional representatives, and other stakeholders.

13. Informants and participants have a right to remain anonymous. This right should be respected when no clear understanding to the contrary has been reached. Researchers are responsible for taking appropriate precautions to protect the confidentiality of both participants and data. However, participants should also be made aware that in certain situations anonymity cannot be achieved.

Relationship with funding agencies

14. The data and results of a research study belong to the researchers who designed and conducted the study unless alternative contractual arrangements have been made with respect to either the data or the results or both.

15. Educational researchers should remain free to interpret and publish their findings without censorship or approval from individuals or organizations, including sponsors, funding agencies, participants, colleagues, supervisors, or administrators. This understanding should be conveyed to participants as part of the responsibility to secure informed consent. This does not mean however that researchers should not take every care to ensure that agreements on publication are reached.

16. Educational researchers should not agree to conduct research that conflicts with academic freedom, nor should they agree to undue or questionable influence by government or other funding agencies. Examples of such improper influence include endeavours to interfere with the conduct of research, the analysis of findings, or the reporting of interpretations. Researchers should report to BERA attempts by sponsors or funding agencies to use any questionable influence, so that BERA may respond publicly as an association on behalf of its members thereby protecting any individual or contract.

17. The aims and sponsorship of research should be made explicit by the researcher. Sponsors or funders have the right to have disclaimers included in research reports to differentiate their sponsorship from the conclusions of the research.

18. Educational researchers should fulfil their responsibilities to agencies funding research, which are entitled to an account of the use of their funds, and to a report of the procedures, findings, and implications of the funded research.

19 The host institution should appoint staff in the light of its routine practices and according to its normal criteria. The funding agency may have an advisory role in this respect, but should not have control over appointments.

20. Sponsored research projects should have an advisory group consisting of representatives from those groups and agencies which have a legitimate interest in the area of inquiry. This advisory group should facilitate access of the researcher(s) to sources of data, other specialists in the field and the wider educational community.

21. The funding agency should respect the right of the researcher(s) to keep his or her sources of data confidential.

22. In the event of a dispute between the funding agency and researcher(s) over the conduct of the research, or threatened termination of contract, the terms of the dispute and/or grounds for termination should be made explicit by the funding agency or researcher and be open to scrutiny by the advisory group. If either party feels that grounds for termination are unreasonable then there should be recourse to arbitration by a body or individual acceptable to both parties.

Publication

23. Researcher(s) have a duty to report both to the funding agency and to the wider public, including educational practitioners and other interested parties. The right to publish is therefore entailed by this duty to report. Researchers conducting sponsored research should retain the right to publish the findings under their own names. The right to publish is essential to the long-term viability of any research activity, to the credibility of the researcher (and of the funding agency in seeking to use research findings) and in the interests of an open society. The methodological principle of maximising the dissemination of information to all interested parties is an integral part of research strategy aimed at testing on a continuous basis the relevance,

accuracy and comprehensiveness of findings as they emerge within the process of inquiry.

24. The conditions under which the right to publish might be legitimately restricted are: general legislation (e.g. in the area of libel or race relations); undertakings given to participants concerning confidentiality and generally not to cause unnecessary harm to those affected by the research findings; and failure to report findings in a manner consistent with the values of inquiry i.e. to report findings honestly, accurately, comprehensively, in context, and without undue sensationalisation.

25. Publications should indicate whether or not they are subject to reporting restrictions.

26. The researcher(s) should have the right, as a last resort and following discussions with the funding agency and advisory group, to publicly dissociate themselves from misleadingly selective accounts of the research.

27. Funding bodies should not be allowed to exercise restrictions on publication by default, e.g. by failing to answer requests for permission to publish, or by undue delay.

28. Resources need to be made available for dissemination and publication and should be built in to funding.

29. In the event of a dispute over publication, the researcher should seek recourse first to the advisory group and secondly to an independent arbitration body or individual.

Intellectual ownership

30. Authorship should be determined on the basis that all those, regardless of status, who have made a substantive and/or creative contribution to the generation of an intellectual product are entitled to be listed as authors of that product. (Examples of creative contributions are: writing first drafts or substantial portions; significant rewriting or substantive editing; contributing generative ideas or basic conceptual schema or analytic categories; collecting data which requires significant interpretation or judgement; and interpreting data.)

31. First authorship and order of authorship should be the consequence of relative leadership and creative contribution.

Relationship with host institution

32. Institutions should both develop their own codes of practice which govern ethical principles and establish appropriate standards of academic freedom, including the freedom to disseminate research findings. While such codes should be observed within all research, including non-contract research, they are particularly important in respect of contract research. Such codes should be honoured by institutions and researchers in the negotiation of contractual arrangements put forward by funding agencies, and in the carrying out of these obligations once they have been agreed.

33. While academic staff should not engage in contract research without agreement by the institution, the latter should not be allowed to compel academic staff to engage in particular contract research.

34. It is assumed that contracts will in all cases be interpreted reasonably and with regard to due process. However, should a legitimate disagreement arise between the funding agency and the researchers engaged on it, then the researchers' institutions should give the researchers full and loyal support in resolving this disagreement.

BSA Statement of Ethical Practice

The British Sociological Association gratefully acknowledges the use made of the ethical codes produced by the American Sociological Association, the Association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth and the Social Research Association.

Styles of sociological work are diverse and subject to change, not least because sociologists work within a wide variety of settings. Sociologists, in carrying out their work, inevitably face ethical, and sometimes legal, dilemmas which arise out of competing obligations and conflicts of interest. The following statement aims to alert the members of the Association to issues that raise ethical concerns and to indicate potential problems and conflicts of interest that might arise in the course of their professional activities.

While they are not exhaustive, the statement points to a set of obligations to which members should normally adhere as principles for guiding their conduct. Departures from the principles should be the result of deliberation and not ignorance. The strength of this statement and its binding force rest ultimately on active discussion, reflection, and continued use by sociologists. In addition, the statement will help to communicate the professional position of sociologists to others, especially those involved in or affected by the activities of sociologists.

The statement is meant, primarily, to inform members' ethical judgements rather than to impose on them an external set of standards. The purpose is to make members aware of the ethical issues that may arise in their work, and to encourage them to educate themselves and their colleagues to behave ethically. The statement does not, therefore, provide a set of recipes for resolving ethical choices or dilemmas, but recognises that often it will be necessary to make such choices on the basis of principles and values, and the (often conflicting) interests of those involved.

Professional integrity

Members should strive to maintain the integrity of sociological enquiry as a discipline, the freedom to research and study, and to publish and promote the results of sociological research. Members have a responsibility both to safeguard the proper interests of those involved in or affected by their work, and to report their findings

accurately and truthfully. They need to consider the effects of their involvement and the consequences of their work or its misuse for those they study and other interested parties.

While recognising that training and skill are necessary to the conduct of social research, members should themselves recognise the boundaries of their professional competence. They should not accept work of a kind that they are not qualified to carry out. Members should satisfy themselves that the research they undertake is worthwhile and that the techniques proposed are appropriate. They should be clear about the limits of their detachment from and involvement in their areas of study.

Members should be careful not to claim an expertise in areas outside those that would be recognised academically as their true fields of expertise. Particularly in their relations with the media, members should have regard for the reputation of the discipline and refrain from offering expert commentaries in a form that would appear to give credence to material which, as researchers, they would regard as comprising inadequate or tendentious evidence.

Relations with and responsibilities towards research participants

Sociologists, when they carry out research, enter into personal and moral relationships with those they study, be they individuals, households, social groups or corporate entities. Although sociologists, like other researchers are committed to the advancement of knowledge, that goal does not, of itself, provide an entitlement to override the rights of others. Members must satisfy themselves that a study is necessary for the furtherance of knowledge before embarking upon it. Members should be aware that they have some responsibility for the use to which their research may be put. Discharging that responsibility may on occasion be difficult, especially in situations of social conflict, competing social interests or where there is unanticipated misuse of the research by third parties.

1. Relationships with research participants

Sociologists have a responsibility to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being of research participants is not adversely affected by the research. They should strive to protect the rights of those they study, their interests, sensitivities and privacy, while recognising the difficulty of balancing potentially conflicting interests. Because sociologists study the relatively powerless as well as those more powerful than themselves, research relationships are frequently characterised by disparities of power and status. Despite this, research relationships should be characterised, whenever possible, by trust. In some cases, where the public interest dictates otherwise and particularly where power is being abused, obligations of trust and protection may weigh less heavily. Nevertheless, these obligations should not be discarded lightly.

As far as possible sociological research should be based on the freely given informed consent of those studied. This implies a responsibility on the sociologist to

explain as fully as possible, and in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken, and how it is to be promoted.

(i) Research participants should be made aware of their right to refuse participation whenever and for whatever reason they wish.

(ii) Research participants should understand how far they will be afforded anonymity and confidentiality and should be able to reject the use of data-gathering devices such as tape recorders and video cameras. Sociologists should be careful, on the one hand, not to give unrealistic guarantees of confidentiality and, on the other, not to permit communication of research films or records to audiences other than those to which the research participants have agreed.

(iii) Where there is a likelihood that data may be shared with other researchers, the potential uses to which the data might be put may need to be discussed with research participants.

(iv) When making notes, filming or recording for research purposes, sociologists should make clear to research participants the purpose of the notes, filming or recording, and, as precisely as possible, to whom it will be communicated.

(v) It should also be borne in mind that in some research contexts, especially those involving field research, it may be necessary for the obtaining of consent to be regarded, not as a once-and-for-all prior event, but as a process, subject to renegotiation over time. In addition, particular care may need to be taken during periods of prolonged fieldwork where it is easy for research participants to forget that they are being studied.

(vi) In some situations access to a research setting is gained via a 'gatekeeper'. In these situations members should adhere to the principle of obtaining informed consent directly from the research participants to whom access is required, while at the same time taking account of the gatekeepers' interest. Since the relationship between the research participant and the gatekeeper may continue long after the sociologist has left the research setting, care should be taken not to disturb that relationship unduly.

It is incumbent upon members to be aware of the possible consequences of their work. Wherever possible they should attempt to anticipate, and to guard against, consequences for research participants which can be predicted to be harmful. Members are not absolved from this responsibility by the consent given by research participants. In many of its guises, social research intrudes into the lives of those studied. While some participants in sociological research may find the experience a positive and welcome one, for others, the experience may be disturbing. Even if not exposed to harm, those studied may feel wronged by aspects of the research process. This can be particularly so if they perceive apparent intrusions into their private and personal worlds, or where research gives rise to false hopes, uncalled for self-

knowledge, or unnecessary anxiety. Members should consider carefully the possibility that the research experience may be a disturbing one and, normally, should attempt to minimise disturbance to those participating in research. It should be borne in mind that decisions made on the basis of research may have effects on individuals as members of a group, even if individual research participants are protected by confidentiality and anonymity. Special care should be taken where research participants are particularly vulnerable by virtue of factors such as age, social status and powerlessness. Where research participants are ill or too young or too old to participate, proxies may need to be used in order to gather data. In these situations care should be taken not to intrude on the personal space of the person to whom the data ultimately refer, or to disturb the relationship between this person and the proxy. Where it can be inferred that the person about whom data are sought would object to supplying certain kinds of information, that material should not be sought from the proxy.

2. Covert Research

There are serious ethical dangers in the use of covert research but covert methods may avoid certain problems. For instance, difficulties arise when research participants change their behaviour because they know they are being studied. Researchers may also face problems when access to spheres of social life is closed to social scientists by powerful or secretive interests. However, covert methods violate the principles of informed consent and may invade the privacy of those being studied. Participant or non-participant observation in non-public spaces or experimental manipulation of research participants without their knowledge should be resorted to only where it is impossible to use other methods to obtain essential data. In such studies it is important to safeguard the anonymity of research participants. Ideally, where informed consent has not been obtained prior to the research it should be obtained post-hoc.

3. Anonymity, privacy and confidentiality

1.The anonymity and privacy of those who participate in the research process should be respected. Personal information concerning research participants should be kept confidential. In some cases it may be necessary to decide whether it is proper or appropriate even to record certain kinds of sensitive information.

2. Where possible, threats to the confidentiality and anonymity of research data should be anticipated by researchers. The identities and research records of those participating in research should be kept confidential whether or not an explicit pledge of confidentiality has been given. Appropriate measures should be taken to store research data in a secure manner. Members should have regard to their obligations under the Data Protection Act. Where appropriate and practicable, methods for preserving the privacy of data should be used. These may include the removal of identifiers, the use of pseudonyms and other technical means for breaking the link

between data and identifiable individuals such as 'broadbanding' or micro-aggregation. Members should also take care to prevent data being published or released in a form which would permit the actual or potential identification of research participants. Potential informants and research participants, especially those possessing a combination of attributes which make them readily identifiable, may need to be reminded that it can be difficult to disguise their identity without introducing an unacceptably large measure of distortion into the data.

3.Guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity given to research participants must be honoured, unless there are clear and overriding reasons to do otherwise. Other people, such as colleagues, research staff or others, given access to the data must also be made aware of their obligations in this respect. By the same token, sociologists should respect the efforts taken by other researchers to maintain anonymity. Research data given in confidence do not enjoy legal privilege, that is they may be liable to subpoena by a court. Research participants may also need to be made aware that it may not be possible to avoid legal threats to the privacy of the data.

4.There may be less compelling grounds for extending guarantees of privacy or confidentiality to public organisations, collectivities, governments, officials or agencies than to individuals or small groups. Nevertheless, where guarantees have been given they should be honoured, unless there are clear and compelling reasons not to do so.

4. Reputation of the Discipline

During their research members should avoid, where they can, actions which may have deleterious consequences for sociologists who come after them or which might undermine the reputation of sociology as a discipline.

Relations with & responsibilities towards sponsors and/or funders

A common interest exists between sponsor, funder and sociologist as long as the aim of the social inquiry is to advance knowledge, although such knowledge may only be of limited benefit to the sponsor and the funder. That relationship is best served if the atmosphere is conducive to high professional standards. Members should attempt to ensure that sponsors and/or funders appreciate the obligations that sociologists have not only to them, but also to society at large, research participants and professional colleagues and the sociological community. The relationship between sponsors or funders and social researchers should be such as to enable social inquiry to be undertaken as objectively as possible. Research should be undertaken with a view to providing information or explanation rather than being constrained to reach particular conclusions or prescribe particular courses of action.

1.Clarifying obligations, roles and rights

Members should clarify in advance the respective obligations of funders and researchers where possible in the form of a written contract. They should refer the sponsor or funder to the relevant parts of the professional code to which they adhere.

Members should also be careful not to promise or imply acceptance of conditions which are contrary to their professional ethics or competing commitments. Where some or all of those involved in the research are also acting as sponsors and/or funders of research the potential for conflict between the different roles and interests should also be made clear to them.

Members should also recognise their own general or specific obligations to the sponsors whether contractually defined or only the subject of informal and often unwritten agreements. They should be honest and candid about their qualifications and expertise, the limitations, advantages and disadvantages of the various methods of analysis and data, and acknowledge the necessity for discretion with confidential information obtained from sponsors. They should also try not to conceal factors which are likely to affect satisfactory conditions or the completion of a proposed research project or contract.

2.Pre-empting outcomes and negotiations about research

Members should not accept contractual conditions that are contingent upon a particular outcome or set of findings from a proposed inquiry. A conflict of obligations may also occur if the funder requires particular methods to be used.

Members should try to clarify, before signing the contract, that they are entitled to be able to disclose the source of their funds, its personnel, the aims of the institution, and the purposes of the project.

Members should also try to clarify their right to publish and spread the results of their research.

Members have an obligation to ensure sponsors grasp the implications of the choice between alternative research methods.

3.Guarding privileged information and negotiating problematic sponsorship

Members are frequently furnished with information by the funder who may legitimately require it to be kept confidential. Methods and procedures that have been utilised to produce published data should not, however, be kept confidential unless otherwise agreed.

When negotiating sponsorships members should be aware of the requirements of the law with respect to the ownership of and rights of access to data.

In some political, social and cultural contexts some sources of funding and sponsorship may be contentious. Candour and frankness about the source of funding may create problems of access or co-operation for the social researcher but concealment may have serious consequences for colleagues, the discipline and research participants. The emphasis should be on maximum openness.

Where sponsors and funders also act directly or indirectly as gatekeepers and control access to participants, researchers should not devolve their responsibility to protect the participants' interests onto the gatekeeper. Members should be wary of

inadvertently disturbing the relationship between participants and gatekeepers since that will continue long after the researcher has left.

4.Obligations to sponsors and/or Funders during the Research Process

Members have a responsibility to notify the sponsor and/or funder of any proposed departure from the terms of reference of the proposed change in the nature of the contracted research.

A research study should not be undertaken on the basis of resources known from the start to be inadequate, whether the work is of a sociological or inter-disciplinary kind.

When financial support or sponsorship has been accepted, members must make every reasonable effort to complete the proposed research on schedule, including reports to the funding source.

Members should be prepared to take comments from sponsors or funders or research participants.

Members should, wherever possible, spread their research findings.

Members should normally avoid restrictions on their freedom to publish or otherwise broadcast research findings.

Appendix V - Letter regarding informed consent

Marta Araújo
(address)
(phone number)

(Date)

Dear (title and name of parents/carers),

I am a research student at the University of London (Institute of Education) and I am carrying out research work at Greenfield Comprehensive School.

The study involves interviewing pupils in Year 8, and it aims to better understand how their conceptions of academic achievement influence their identities as pupils. To avoid disrupting pupils' school activities, I plan to carry out the interviews during lunch break or just after school. They will be about 30 minutes long.

The study will be submitted as my PhD thesis. I can assure you that all names of people and places will be changed, so as to preserve confidentiality.

If you do <u>not</u> accept that the pupil who you are responsible for participates in my research project, could you please be so kind and fill in the slip below and send it back to the school as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

Marta Araújo

(please tear away slip)

As parent/carer of the pupil _____ , I hereby do <u>not</u> give permission for him/her to take part in the research study referred to above, and to be interviewed on the _____ , at _____ a.m./p.m.

Signature

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