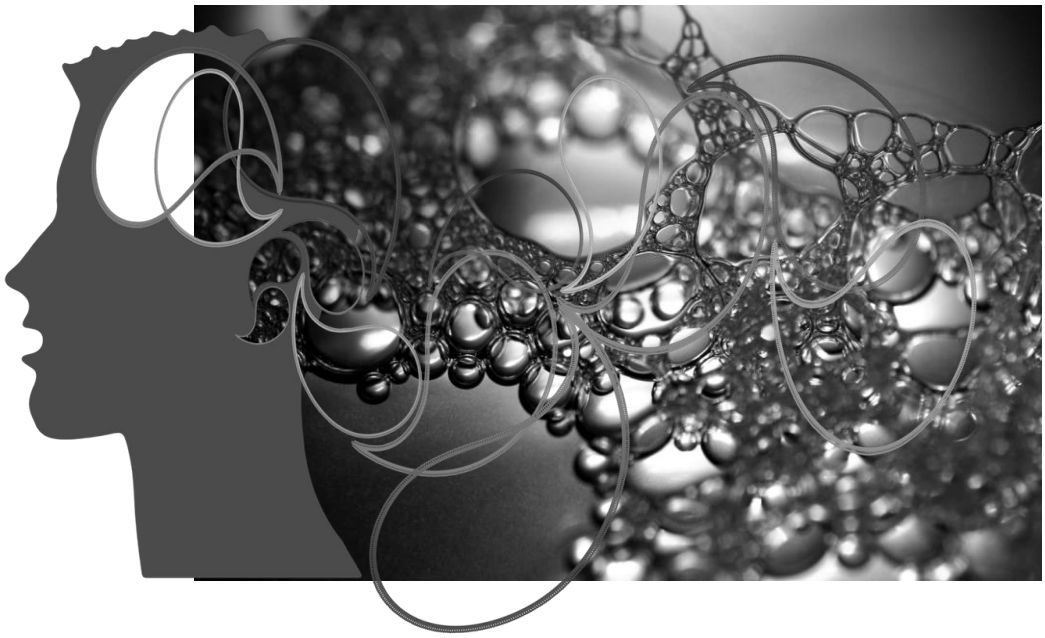
# The Construction of New Moral Spaces in the Development of an English Free School



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## The Preachings of a Middle Class White Girl

**I am eight years old**,
And sat in a class for specially selected
'gifted and talented' students.
Me, and fourteen other white kids
Who live in semi-detached houses
in the Nice Part of Bristol.
Somehow Cotham, Redland, and
Clifton produce children who are
destined for higher classes, brains rich
with knowledge;
recognised as having
"the potential to develop significantly
beyond what is expected,"
as though PGCEs now train in psychic
readings, as though there was a
prophecy
scrawled in the back of my work book,
as though our intrinsic "potential"
was plucked from something
Other than the 'T's we don't drop and
the
Cath Kidston frock. No, this is
a quality we must have been born
with,
equality the others weren't born with.

We are just eight years old,
and already the playground nurses
two distinct fates:
those who'll try, and those who'll
succeed,
a class hierarchy inflicted by our
seniors
from the age of high-time hopscotch
and classroom crayon fights;
from the age of inherent impartiality
and fairness, and as we sit there, side
by side
in the assembly hall
our teachers tell us to believe in
ourselves
but fail to mention
that whilst dreams are for everyone,
not all can be reached.
The sky is anyone's limit,
but it can only hold so many stars,
and renting a place in the earth's
boundless sphere requires an income
of over
thirty thousand pounds a year.

**I am 17 years old,**
and the radio informs me that a
headteacher has sent
letters home complaining about
unkempt appearances and dirty
clothes,
when some people can't afford a
washing machine, sometimes the
laundrette is closed.
The letter is sent to everyone but
all the parents know the name
printed at the top of the page, big and
bold
as any warrior braving battle
doesn't refer to us. It's them.
And the dirt on their shirts
seeps through to their skin,
scrub all you want but the brand
that stains your body
is never washing out, not for you
or your children.

Why are we fighting with such
determination for every child in
education
when the organization is unequal?

More pupils from Westminster College
attend Oxford or Cambridge each year
than the entire sum of those on free
school meals.
And yet I in turn can learn
to build platforms out of poetry,
where I can preach to those who sip
wine with white lips and rage war with
my words
like I can capture the struggle of the
poor
through the metaphysics of language.
Because a thesaurus
is the sturdiest sword you need when
you're middle class.
***Imogen Downes***

# Abstract

English free school policy, first introduced in the 2010 education white paper, advocated, among other things, opportunities for local people to establish new schools that served the needs of their communities (Department for Education, 2010). The assumption was that such a decentralised, flexible approach would generate new schools that better met the needs of those not currently provided for effectively by the education system. Although the Department for Education favoured a sponsor model, the opportunity for parents to set up their own schools was included in the policy (Department for Education, 2010) and there are a few examples of new schools created by parents without the support of approved providers.

This thesis plotted the efforts of various parties to position themselves in relation to one such, parent led, English free school: Ridgewell School. Purportedly created from within their community, the school actually generated many struggles and tensions as people attempted to colonise the emerging public space. The school was established in a rural area of England by a small group of parents who decided they wanted an alternative to the existing secondary school provision; an alternative that would provide better standards, and would be more sympathetic to the rural environment that their families lived in. However, the parents' approach was blind to the effects of existing class relations and they ended up struggling against a multitude of differing local interests and motivations. Education discourses played a critical role in this process as a reference point by which individuals legitimated and articulated their own positions. The founding parents were able to use existing education discourses to legitimate their claim for a new school whilst, at the same time, having to deal with the inflexible requirements of national legislative and regulatory procedures that made it difficult for the school to adapt to the local context. By contrast, other potentially interested parties (residents, parents, educators) were constrained by their existing sense of self (Archer, 2007) which in some cases excluded them from the emerging space entirely.

Using an extended case method (Burawoy, 2009), the analysis attempts to provide a robust account of class struggle in the formation of the new school. With reference to Beverly Skeggs, I argue that attributions of value were essential to this struggle (2004: 186). In the case of the new school, value judgements were central to the creation of new forms of appropriation, exploitation and governance, and the formation of new selves (2004: 186). With reference to Anne Rawls, I go further and argue that the normative process was essentially moral in nature: judgements relating to what is good and bad were essential to all value judgements in the data analysed. I argue that this assertion of 'moral power' (Rawls, 2010) within the emerging social space can be seen as an aspect of discourse, which in turn is evident in the historical discursive formation that is state education (Olssen, 2010b). Put simply, one's ability to pass judgement on others, based on historical discourses of legitimation, was key to the colonization of the new educational space (Garfinkel and Rawls, 2002).

Education policy has historically articulated state education with economic discourses (Green, 2013). The case study developed in this thesis provides opportunities for contributions to theoretical understandings relating to the normative dimensions of discourse in the formation of new educational spaces. As such, I hope that the theoretically driven accounts that have been produced will contribute to the assumptions that drive national education policy.

# Contents

## Introduction

This project was the outcome of a number of discussions I had with Professor Susan Robertson prior to starting a PhD. I have always been interested in class relations and inequality and my meetings with Professor Robertson were partly motivated by my political activism at the time. Susan persuaded me to undertake a PhD and suggested I needed to find a 'stone in the pond': an object of study that I could focus my ideas and energies on. It was the winter of 2010 and I was listening to Michael Gove's parliamentary speech introducing the new government's white paper on education whilst taking a brief sojourn from work to welcome my new son into the world. Inevitably my mind was very much focused on the future and it struck me that much of Gove's discourse was not so dissimilar to mine. He spoke of social justice, of the unfairness of the education system and of the need for radical change. His language about free schools was almost emancipatory, which both bewildered and irritated me. This very quickly became my stone in the pond: I did not think that free schools could really help the disadvantaged but, at the back of my mind, I thought they just might. I thought that this was privatisation by just another name but then the policy seemed so bold that any premeditated manipulation seemed foolhardy: how could the government predict the range of people who would apply to run free schools? And how could they possibly control the wide scope of projects that would inevitably ensue? It quickly became apparent that free schools were going to differ in terms of those who ran them. Some early free schools (e.g. All Saints Junior School in Reading) were led by service-providers from the start. Much smaller groups, including parent groups, led others. I was especially interested in these projects because they appeared to offer opportunities for a much wider range of people to get involved in education. Could these free schools really change the dynamics of education? If so, how? If not, why not? I

understood that class dynamics and social reproduction are complex issues and I wanted to find out some possible answers to these questions. As such I knew the only way to do this was by developing a case study of one of these locally led free schools. This research therefore set out to address the following:

- To examine the ways in which the new education space (free school) became colonised by different social groups and the way that these groups legitimated their part in the process.
- To identify the impact of this colonization on individual experiences of education and to consider the broader social impact of these outcomes.
- To examine the relationship between parental concepts of education and broader discourses of education, particularly those constructed by education policy.
- To consider the ways in which social orders formed within the new free school and the impact that these orders had on the new education space.

## Overview

> *'the awakening of moral observation has become necessary, and mankind can no longer be spared the cruel sight of the moral dissecting table and its knives and forceps... the older philosophy... has, with paltry evasions, always avoided investigation of the origin and history of the moral sensations. With what consequences is now very clearly apparent, since it has been demonstrated in many instances how the errors of the greatest philosophers usually have their point of departure in a false explanation of certain human actions and sensations; ...a false ethics is erected, religion and mythological monsters are then in turn called to buttress it, and the shadow of these dismal spirits in the end falls even across physics and the entire perception of the world.'*
>
> (Nietzsche and Faber, 1984: 32)

The thesis about free schools I produced is essentially about morals; about the things we think of as good or bad; about the way we pass judgements on others, on their actions, on the symbols and artefacts that they attach themselves to; about the impact judgement has on us; about the way it attracts us to, or repels us from, certain spaces; about the way we are born into a world of morality that pre-existed us; about the way we reproduce the moral values that it gave us. This may seem an odd place to start an account of free schools in England but these moral judgements characterised the judgements of so many of the participants. Ridgewell school, a school that had not previously existed, funded by government and led by people from within the immediate local area, quickly generated powerful social divisions between those involved in running the school, those involved in attending the school and those excluded from the entire process. Wealth was not a factor: all of the money, including that involved

in the bidding process, was provided externally and those who had significant wealth tended not to be involved in the project. Authority was not an issue: many of those involved in setting up the school were new to the area; were viewed as outsiders by many of the longer term residents, and none participated in local government. Expertise was not significant: those who took it upon themselves to create the new school had no experience of running schools or teaching. But people quickly took strong positions in relation to the new school and these endured over the period of the study. These positions were underpinned by powerful discourses of legitimation that both included and excluded certain people from certain activities in relation to the new school. At the heart of this process were thick ethical accounts that were both descriptive and evaluative (Sayer, 2011: 42). Participants referred to themselves as dynamic, risk takers, caring; they referred to others as lazy, complacent, unimaginative and dishonest. Each moral account lay claim to privileged positions in relation to the new school space. But such positions were not the outcome of chance; they were strongly influenced by the class based discursive formation that we know as education. In this sense, free schools can be seen as a contemporary iteration of longstanding education discourses (Green, 2013).

English free schools were first introduced in the 2010 education white paper: *The Importance of Teaching* (Department for Education, 2010b). Contained in the white paper, and in a number of pre election speeches, were references to the Swedish free schools (friskolen) and American charter schools. These policies promoted the importance of localism in education provision and the role of local actors in developing new schools that reflected the needs of the communities they served. In both instances the policy was characterised by an early interest from local groups, particularly parent groups. However, in both cases there was a subsequent waning of such interest: in Sweden only six parent-led schools remained by 2010 (Wiborg, 2010), whereas in the United States they have been dwarfed

by the number of charter schools run by larger education providers (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2016). In England, the idea that parents could set up their own schools was foregrounded in the white paper but, de facto, the government heavily promoted the idea of parents working in tandem with approved service providers to develop bids via a memorandum of understanding (the understanding being that, should the bid be successful, the service provider would sign the funding agreement with the Department for Education(DfE). For various reasons, there are a few examples of free schools that 'went it alone', creating their own schools without the support of approved providers.

This case plots one such community's interactions and efforts to position themselves in relation to a new school that was purportedly created by parents from within the community but actually generated many struggles and tensions as groups attempted to colonise the emerging public space (Goffman, 1971). Ridgewell school was established in a rural area of England by a small group of parents who decided they wanted a better alternative to the existing secondary school provision in the area. For the parents, this better alternative not only meant better standards, it also meant creating a school that was distinctive and would be more sympathetic to the rural environment that the families lived in. However, the parents ended up struggling against a multitude of differing local interests on one hand, and the inflexible requirements of the education system, perpetuated by its own historical discourses, on the other (Kant, Guyer and Wood, 1998). On one hand, local residents, teachers and others, with different ideal conceptualisations of education, acted in ways to prevent the school from opening. On the other hand, national legislative and regulatory procedures made it difficult for the school to adapt to the local context. The result of this process was a school that reflected existing educational arrangements rather than challenging them. Furthermore, despite the school's situation in an area of notable social deprivation, the school's intake was broadly in line with other local schools in terms of free

school meals and special needs, thus undermining the white paper's assertion that such arrangements are better suited to meet the needs of the communities they serve (Department for Education, 2010b).

Such a scenario may seem surprising: free schools' continued existence has often been justified in terms of increased educational opportunities and, as a result, an increase in absolute social mobility (Gove, 2009). However, I argue that the conceptualisations of education, predicated on utilitarian logic (Olssen, Codd and O'Neill, 2004: 78), create an over simplified account of the milieu. Such a description does not acknowledge the identities, values and morals of those who benefit from, and those who are disadvantaged by, the education system. In this case study, I place morality at the centre of my explanation because, I assert, moral judgements were significant in the way they affected the lived-experiences of the participants; the way that they valued and treated one another (Sayer, 2005: vii). Such an approach necessarily has profound implications for the presumption of education as a social good; I assert that there is considerable merit in taking the opposite position: that education should be seen as a source of struggle, that is, it has always been a site of contestation and stratified outcomes that produces both winners and losers. By taking such a position, it is possible to make a more radical case for new educational spaces that consider how education could offer genuinely positive social outcomes for all of those who engage with it.

My conclusions were drawn using a critical discourse analysis methodology applied to policy texts and data derived from a multiple case study, developed using the tenets of Burawoy's extended case method (2009). This method involves four types of extension: from observer into the lives of participants; observations over time and space; from micro processes to macro forces; and the extension of theory. The extensions of the method take place as interactions between events in the field, micro and macro scales, and the iterative construction (and reconstruction) of theory

(Burawoy, 2009: xv). In turn, these dialogues act in a dialectical relationship with one another, each informing the other to develop consistent simplifying assumptions about the case. In developing my explanations, I used an array of sources to develop thick descriptions of the internal elements that constituted the case (detailed descriptions of why people are doing things as well as what they are actually doing)(Ponterotto, 2006: 539). In addition, I used these sources to develop theoretical explanations of the relationship between internal micro constituents and external macro forces. I collected data from a number of different actors within the locality of the case study with a view to understanding the differing perspectives of people who had an interest in the school. My sampling was guided by the purpose of finding distinctiveness and differentiation between my participants, rather than seeking uniformity (Archer and Bhaskar, 1998 xv). I interviewed the parents who initiated the idea of the new school; the steering group who steered the bid through to its successful outcome; parents who had sent their children to the school; parents who were thinking of sending their children to the school and parents who demonstrated antipathy towards (and therefore did not want to send their children to) the school. In addition, I interviewed people from different localities to capture the differing perspectives of people who accessed the education system in different ways; I interviewed those who actively opposed the new school; I observed public meetings and observed the interactions of people on dedicated online forums; I extended out over time by revisiting the participants on a number of occasions over a period of two years. I extended the case by comparing it with two other parent initiated free schools and by identifying and examining the external forces that constrained and shaped the formation of the new school. Using secondary sources (Bray, Adamson and Mason, 2007), I constructed two alternative case studies, chosen for their distinctiveness and the interest they generated; I attended events designed to promote free schools' policy and to attract support from potential sponsors of new schools. These

observations were supported by a significant array of documents provided by policy makers, newspaper articles and marketing materials.

### Policy Texts

A range of policy texts was accessed with reference to the specific form of English free schools and how they are located within wider education policy. Texts relating to charter schools in the United States and Friskolen in Sweden were accessed, including government documents, municipal texts, and documentation released by approved providers and individual schools. These documents are referenced in chapter 1. Sources from both the Department of Education and the New Schools Network were used to identify various aspects of free schools governance within the English context. Department of Education sources were used to examine legislative aspects of free schools and were mostly taken from their website. The free schools monitoring form was the subject of a freedom of information request and was taken from the requester's site:

- The Importance of Teaching White Paper (Department for Education, 2010b)
- Academies Act. (Department for Education, 2010a)
- A guide to new mainstream free school revenue funding (Department for Education, 2016a)
- Free schools model funding agreement – breakdown of clauses (Department for Education, n.d.)
- Opening a UTC. A guide for UTC proposer groups on the pre-opening stage (Department for Education, 2014a)
- Template lease for free schools , UTCs and studio schools : explanatory note (Department for Education, 2014b)
- Completing the mainstream and 16-19 free school 2015 / 16 financial template Cover sheet (Department for Education, 2015a)

- Free Schools: Pre-opening proper group guidance for: mainstream, special, alternative provision and 16-19 free schools (Department for Education, 2015b)
- Free schools applications : criteria for assessment (Department for Education, 2016b)
- Free Schools Monitoring Form (Department for Education, n.d.)

Correspondence and legal documents between case schools and the Secretary of State's office were also referenced:

- All Saints Junior School Funding Agreement (Secretary of State for Education, 2011)
- Al Madinah Academy Funding Agreement (Secretary of State for Education, 2012)
- Letter to Shazia Parveen, Chair of Governors, Al Madinah Education Trust (Nash, 2014)

A number of texts produced by the Conservative Party, particularly transcripts of speeches relating to free schools and the Big Society, were used to understand the reasons why free schools policy was introduced:

- David Cameron Speech: The Big Society (Cameron, 2009)
- The Conservative Party: The Big Society not Big Government: Building a Big Society (The Conservative Party, 2010)
- Michael Gove: We need a Swedish education system (2008)
- Michael Gove's speech to the RSA What is education for? (2009)
- Michael Gove's speech to the Policy Exchange on free schools (2010a)
- Michael Gove to the Durand Academy (2011)
- Michael Gove's Autumn Address to Politeia (2012)
- Speech by Nicky Morgan - One Nation Education (2015)

Supporting material was also accessed from influential think tanks such as Policy Exchange (jointly set up by Michael Gove) to ascertain some of the origins of the ideas that underpinned free schools' policy:

- A guide to school choice reforms (Meyland-smith and Evans, 2009)
- Helping Schools Succeed (Lim and Davies, 2008)
- Choice what Choice? (Sturdy and Freedman, 2007)
- The Right to Choose? Yes Prime Minister (Stanfield, 2008)
- Schooling for Money (Sahlgren, 2010)

The New Schools Network provided extensive documentation online. As well as providing guidance for prospective applicants, a number of press releases were accessed that provided evidence of the charity's approach to relevant issues. Some of the documents cited have since been updated or are no longer available:

- Applicant's Handbook for Opening Alternative Provision Free Schools (New Schools Network, 2013a)
- Draft Petition and Survey
- Example Application form: Citizen School (Citizen School, 2014)
- Preparing a consultation questionnaire: practical guidance (New Schools Network, 2012a)
- PRESS RELEASE: New Schools Network: Hundreds more Free Schools groups united in common cause to transform education (New Schools Network, 2012b)
- NSN comments on Al-Madinah and Discovery Free Schools (New Schools Network, 2013c)
- NSN Press Release: Free Schools Movement gathers pace with 102 new schools approved (New Schools Network, 2013d)
- Faith free schools Application guidance (New Schools Network, 2014)

- Mainstream and 16-19 schools Free school application guidance (New Schools Network, 2015b)
- Building your Team (New Schools Network, 2015a)
- New Schools Network. Trustees' Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 August 2015 (New Schools Network, 2015c)
- New Schools Network-About Us (New Schools Network, 2016a)
- Free Schools 101 (New Schools Network, 2013b)

Additional online sources were accessed that related to the three case studies used. In the instance of the main case study (pseudonym Ridgewell School), the name has been changed in the following list and certain details have been removed from the bibliography to protect anonymity:

- Al Madinah School Homepage (Al-Madinah Education Trust, 2011)
- Al-Madinah Education Trust - Letter to Staff- Re: Covering of the hair on school premises (Al-Madinah Education Trust, 2013)
- Al-Madinah Education Trust - Letter to Parents -Staff Dress Code (Al Madinah Education Trust, 2013)
- Al-Madinah Education Trust - Response to Lord Nash's Letter (Al Madinah Trust, 2013)
- All Saints Junior School Website (All Saints Primary School, n.d.)
- All Saints Junior School Home School Agreement (All Saints Junior School, 2016)
- CfBT Schools Trust website (Education Development Trust, n.d.)
- West Reading Education Network website (West Reading Education Network, 2013)
- Ridgewell Academy : Home Admissions Policy (Ridgewell Academy, 2015)
- Ridgewell Academy : Home Academy Agreement (Ridgewell Academy, n.d.)
- Derby Campaign for Inclusive Education (website) (Lake, 2010)

Some Ofsted documentation was also used:

- School Report: Al Madinah School (Ofsted, 2013)
- School Report- Ridgewell Academy (Ofsted, 2015)
- Michael Wilshaw's Letter to Ridgewell Principal (Wilshaw, 2015)

Many other resources were accessed as part of the critical discourse analysis (discussed more extensively in the methodology section). With reference to the multiple case studies, a number of additional, contextual resources were used such as local newspaper reports, social media (Facebook groups and twitter accounts), and local online resources e.g. the Derby Humanist Association web site. These have been included in the various discourse analyses provided in the later chapters (chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7) and are referenced as part of the various accounts.

With reference to theorisation, I followed Geertz's distinction between experience-near concepts and experience-distant concepts to develop my theorisation through iterations of moving between empirical observations and theorisation. (Geertz, 2008: 124)**.** This process can never be completed and the theoretical model I present is the moment where I felt there were enough coherencies in my explanation to warrant abandoning the project. What was immediately clear when entering the field was the different ways in which different actors legitimated their claim to the new school and the school's claim to exist in a wider educational context. Furthermore, it was also apparent that, whilst referencing national education policy, this process of legitimation did not reflect the aims and values of policy arrangements closely. Therefore, there was a need to explain two issues a) the discrepancy between education, as conceived by government, and schooling, as conceived by local stakeholders in the new school b) the different ways that parents drew on concepts of education to help explain and justify their own decisions and experiences about their children's schooling. To generate insights into these issues I ended up drawing on two broad theoretical approaches. Firstly, to understand the way that

educational values had evolved and become manifest in English education policy I drew upon Foucault's concepts of a discursive formation: the regularity that is obtained between 'objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices' (Foucault, 1972: 38; 107). Drawing on historical comparative work on national education systems (Green, 2013) I mapped out the key characteristics of education as a discursive formation to argue that English compulsory education is a relatively fixed discursive structure, many parts of which have remained constant throughout its history. These parts not only include practices (accepted ways of being and doing) but also orders of discourse (the regulatory practices that govern text and utterances)(Young, 1981: 48). I used contemporary accounts that define class in terms of cultural struggle to demonstrate that the education discursive formation has always produced stratified outcomes. As Beverly Skeggs observes, class struggle describes attributions of value, forms of appropriation, exploitation and governance, and new selves' (Skeggs, 2004: 186). Class has always been a preoccupation of the social sciences, historically being associated with unequal economic divisions, mostly relating to levels of employment (Goldthorpe, Llewellyn and Payne, 1987). However, I argue that the process of social ordering evident in the creation of the new school had a strongly normative dimension and that how people judged and were judged by others was essential to the process of colonization of the new space (Sayer, 2011).

Secondly, I used Anne Rawls' work on moral orders to develop a coherent account of the normative dimensions of the case. At an ontological level, I use Rawls' interpretation of Durkheim's concept of social facts (Garfinkel and Rawls, 2002: 57) to establish what I refer to as *moral bubbles* within the case study. I use this metaphor to reflect the way that morality creates social order. For Rawls, Durkheim proposed that social facts are social artefacts that exist autonomously of us but also rely on us for reproduction: we are born into a world of social artefacts that we use to make sense of the social but, in using them we also reproduce them

(Rawls, 2005: 6). However, such social ordering is also necessarily normative: social orders are always constituted through normative judgements. Her work also highlights Durkheim's distinction between the animal and social self (Rawls, 2005: 6). In his essay *The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions,* Durkheim makes clear his theory that reason is the product of social participation (Rawls, 2005: 6). For Durkheim, the animal self is reactive and concerned with self-preservation, whereas the social self generates connectedness, overcoming the sense of the *other*. Integral to this approach is the notion of ritual, the earliest and most fundamental form of communication. Drawing on anthropological work, Durkheim used many examples from aboriginal religious practices to assert that rituals were fundamental to social solidarity and, through a process of mutual enactment, allowed for the emotional alignment of individuals and ultimately to the mechanical grouping of subjects into social orders (Rawls, 2005: 5). For Durkheim, ritual is the progenitor of religious practices, a significant aspect of all societies. Using these terms of reference, Rawls asserts that all social ordering is constituted through moral values: our sense of what is can only be communicated and affirmed with reference to normative constitutive assumptions (Rawls, 2010).

Rawls is part of a renewed interest in the importance of morality in sociology (Hitlin and Vaisey, 2012) that is, I argue, particularly pertinent to existing scholarship on education. Although little has been written linking education with the sociology of morality, Andrew Sayer does provide some useful starting points. In his book The Moral Significance of Class (2005), Sayer uses the concept of morality to extend Bourdieu's (often cited in educational contexts) notion of habitus (Sayer, 2005: 22). Sayer's work is as much a critique of conceptualisations of morality as it is of the limitations of Bourdieu's work. For Sayer, our sense of what is right or good is central to all motivation and purpose. Thus, what people do is inextricably guided by reasons (why they are going to do it), which is inextricably guided by a sense of what is right and good. With reference to the new free school, it

was apparent that the choices that parents made in relation to their child's school, their sense of what a good school was, and their sense of positioning in relation to the education discursive formation were all strongly guided by beliefs about what was right or good.

To supplement this account of the case study as *moral bubbling*, I used Margaret Archer's theory of reflexivity to make general deductions about individual agency in relation to these broader conditions of existence (2003). In a triangular relationship, individuals bring their own values, beliefs and morals to bear on education: we imagine ourselves as coherent, single beings; we act through this being in the external world as we understand it; we move forward with purpose and conviction based on our own sense of what is right and good (morals) (Archer, 2003). This means that we constantly position ourselves in relation to education based on our sense of ourselves as normative beings. Using a critical realist framework, Archer provides an account of the relationship between the internal elements that constitute the individual and the external conditions that are brought to bear on them. Central to Archer's model is the notion of *internal conversations*: the constant internalized activity that we all engage in to maintain our sense of wholeness in the world, to maintain our identity in the face of complex and contradictory external conditions (Archer, 2007: 2). Some of this talk involves interactions with external objects and a process whereby the object under consideration is bent back upon the subject; this is how Archer describes reflexivity (Archer, 2007: 2). At its most intense, reflexivity involves thrashing it out between object and subject (Archer, 2007: 2-3) so that the relationship between the two is resolved and both are accommodated within the mind of the individual. At the heart of this process is value: we act on internal goods that we care about most; that together make the constellation of objects that constitute our identity; the objects we project value onto also project back to us and make us whole. As Archer observes 'no one can have an ultimate concern and fail to do something about it' (Archer, 2007: 7). Thus, we engage with

purpose in the world, people initiate projects to protect themselves and the things they care about. Like Archer, I use the term object to refer extensively to social objects (discourses, practices, symbols etc.) (Archer, 2007: 4). This is not to deny the existence of a material world but to acknowledge the social aspect that is an intrinsic part of all objects as we see them. The key point here is that any attempts to pursue a project entails two sets of causal powers: our own and those that pertain to an external reality (Archer, 2007: 7). Archer argues that this process can break down and this can have a significant impact on social mobility. I used Archer's work to consider the dynamics of the case study at the level of the individual. Specifically, I was interested in what it was that stopped certain people becoming involved in the schools; why people let others colonise the space was of as much interest as the process of colonization itself.

This theoretical approach has certain implications for issues relating to social justice. Social orders, predicated on fragile social facts that constantly require mutual displays of cooperation to achieve, are essentially constitutive in character (they are underpinned by assumptions about what constitutes reality). Conversely, those unable to participate in the constitutive process (or are the negative focus of it) are forced into an anonymous role both internally and externally (Archer, 2000). Rawls distinguishes between morality (our constitutive statements about what is right and wrong) and ethics (transcendental claims about the good)(Rawls, 2010: 98). Thus, what we agree as right and wrong in different moments and spaces has implications for essentialist claims about all human needs. In the case of the empirical accounts generated from this study, this meant separating the moral justifications of individuals and groups from wider considerations about what is right for all those who had an interest in the project. There are two aspects that need to be addressed in order to make sense of this issue: firstly, there is the question of truth; secondly there is the question of obligation (Fairclough, 2003: 17). In terms of truth, I use Martha Nussbaum's 'thick vague theory of the good' (1992: 214).

Predicated on the assumption that humanity is a distinct class of object that must therefore have shared, distinctive characteristics (1992: 215-216), Nussbaum argues that to deny the capabilities and constraints that enable us to be human is therefore unethical. Specifically, Nussbaum moves from the most general, but uncomplicated, to more specific, but complex, categories of human capability. At the most general level, these capabilities and constraints relate to our mortality and our bodies; at the most complex, they involve the need for interconnection, respect and recognition. In this sense, constitutive moral bubbles have the potential to exclude and oppress those cast beyond it; those whose moral values go unacknowledged or run contrary to the moral judgements of the group (that is, they are constructed as wrong or bad).

In the case of the Ridgewell school, it was the very people who took it on themselves to address the inequities of the existing education system who were ultimately responsible for creating them in a new space. The parents who set up the school had wanted to create something different and the government had provided them with the resources on the grounds that they were better placed to do so than the local authority. However, in the process of claiming the school space as their own, they inevitably pushed aside groups who may also have had a claim on the space: they claimed the school because they were dynamic, therefore, other people could not be; they claimed the school because they had a vision, therefore other people could not have. For Rancière, such a problem is generated through the way that homogenisation takes place. As with Honneth, Rancière identifies the problem as the social relationships themselves, rather than the outcome of the social relationships (distribution). Todd May uses the term *passive equality* to refer to the current state of politics whereby a few powerful voices decide who is entitled to what (May, 2008: 3). Even those who profess to support the cause of inequality are actually part of the process because they are still part of the elite who assume they are entitled to represent others who are not entitled to speak. Furthermore, we are all

necessarily involved in the *policing* of social relationships: we all engage in activity that reinforces them. For example, in the case study policy makers, teachers, parents pupils, journalists, charities etc. were all involved in policing the education discursive formation: policy makers invoked the discursive elements of it in their policy texts, teachers used it to justify their practices, parents referred to it in justifying their school choices and journalists referred to it in their articles that passed judgment on free schools policy. For May, such policing of existing social relations, however well meaning, will always lead to passive outcomes because the nature of the relations can not be subverted (May, 2008). Referencing Rancière's notion of dissensus, May asserts that greater equality can only be achieved when those who are the subjects of policing assume equality as the precursor to social relations, rather than the outcome; something May refers to as *active equality* (May, 2008: 3). Inevitably this often means individuals can police or be subjected to policing within the same social structure. For example, in the case study, the school was subjected to policing by the Department for Education and Ofsted, The Department for Education and Ofsted were subjected to policing by the press, the school was subjected to policing by parents, parents were subjected to policing by the school, parents were subjected to policing by other parents and so on. This policing occurred within the domain of the education discursive formation. With reference to May, it is only when people within the social structure attempt to subvert these existing relationships that education, as we understand it, can change.

Such a scenario may seem unlikely but free schools do at least provide the possibility of active equality and I devote a significant amount of attention to one person in the case study for this reason. Sarah, who was the person who had the original idea for the school, had a history of engaging in local activism. She had written a book and a number of articles that espoused her homespun version of anarchism and provided examples of environmental, animal rights and anti-capitalist activism. When I first met

her, she was keen to talk about her past and she saw the school as a continuation of her subversive activities. That she was attracted to free schools education policy is significant and highlights the government's own rhetoric that refers to a *free schools movement* (New Schools Network, 2013d) and foregrounds examples of communities taking control of their own schools (Gove, 2010b). Such rhetoric appears to match well with May's notion of active equality. Indeed, there are some examples of schools engaging in a process of active equality. One of them-Al Madinah School- is one of the secondary case studies described in this thesis. Perhaps more through misunderstanding, the founders of this school wanted to set up a state funded school that was controlled by the Muslim community in Derby. However, as is detailed in the study, the old mechanisms of policing soon came to the fore and the group resigned under extreme pressure from all of those involved. Sarah too began with some radical ideas about her school. However, she was able to bring on board 'experts' who helped to quickly realign the school so that it was compliant with the various policing mechanisms. Despite a very difficult few years, the school is still in existence today, albeit in a very different form to the radical project originally proposed by Sarah in 2011.

The rest of my thesis is organised to best account for the theoretical outcomes of my research; it is not organised in any specific chronological order. In chapter 1 I provide some background context to English free schools. In chapter 2 I describe my methodological approach. I outline my ontic and epistemic assumptions in more detail using a critical realist framework (Archer and Bhaskar, 1998) and demonstrate how these link to both extended case, and critical discourse analysis methods. In doing so I attempt to demonstrate how my case extends out using discursive theoretical approaches (Fairclough, 2003). I argue that, because reasons can be causes, Burawoy's more materialist account of causality (and thus reality) can be widened to include discursive structures. Chapter 3 outlines my theoretical framework in more detail. In chapter 4 I provide a

description of the education discursive formation as revealed by historical policy texts. While this account is by no means exhaustive, I argue that it provides sufficient grounds to make the case that such a social object exists as a causal mechanism within the education context. I begin with the 1870 Education Reform Act, which was the first time education was made compulsory in law. I argue that the debates of the time reveal tensions amongst policy makers that have faded over time as the discourse contained within the legislature has come to dominate conceptualisations of education. This dominant discourse legitimates compulsory education through the macro scale concepts of productivity, fairness and social cohesion. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the case study: an English free school I have called Ridgewell School. In chapter 5 I focus on Sarah, the school and it's governing body. I examine the way they attempted to colonise the new space, the values they attempted to establish, the negotiations they had to engage in and compromises they had to make. I consider the way that they interfaced with external forces at a national and local level. I conclude that, despite their desire for a different form of schooling, these external forces brought the school into line with the existing education discursive formation. In chapter 6 I attempt to gain better insight into the causal mechanisms at work in attracting parents to the school. To do this, I focus on parents who sent their children to the new school, prospective parents who wanted to send their children to the school and parents who had no plans to send their children to the school. I conclude that all these parents engaged in a reflexive process with the emerging space and the education discursive formation, which created differentiated outcomes between them. This ordering revealed powerful, class based relationships with striking divisions between the different parents. There was also a strong sense of division between the parents: the former group defined the latter group as lazy, whereas the latter group felt excluded and judged by the former. In my concluding chapter I return to the theoretical themes of the thesis and argue that the education discursive formation deprives all the participants of recognition to differing extents. Sarah's vision of an

alternative education was severely restricted by macro education discourses. The parents of the school were restricted by a sense that their children were not able to go beyond a certain level of education. The parents who did not want to send their children to the school were barely recognised at all within the context of education: they could not place themselves in the emerging space, they had no voice within the schools their children attended and they did not feel welcome by the other parents. With reference to May's notion of active equality, I conclude by asserting that, whilst the localist tendencies of the policy are important, English free school policy is anything but an act of decentralization. The powerful centralizing tendencies of the education discursive formation and its relationship with pre existing class dynamics meant that people maintained their position in relation to both through the process of the new school's creation.

## Chapter 1: Background to free schools

This chapter provides some background context to English free schools policy, including the impact that international policy borrowing had on its formation. In 2010 the coalition government announced their plans for state education in England (Department for Education, 2010b). A significant part of this strategy was the free schools programme. This was the result of a convergence of international political and economic discourses and drew upon a range of ideas, from more abstract theories of communitarianism and neoliberalism, to policy borrowing from Swedish friskolen and American charter schools. Originally, 16 free school proposals were publicised in 2011, with 24 new schools opening that year (Bolton, 2016). The programme continued to flourish with 55 free schools opening in 2012, rising to 85 new schools in 2013 (Bolton, 2016). In this chapter I will map out the English free schools discursive structures, complete with the overlapping international discourses that form a key part of the structure, in the form of policy borrowing. I begin by giving an account of the two international policies that are attributed as the borrowed policies that underpin English free schools.

### International Context

#### *Swedish Friskolen*

Early rhetoric relating to the introduction of English free schools foregrounded links with Swedish public fee paying schools (friskolen) (Gove, 2010b). That then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, made direct references to Swedish friskolen is hardly surprising. Prior to 2010, the English press had often made the case that these schools were responsible for the strong showing of Sweden in the Programme for International Assessment (PISA) (Gove, 2008; Paton, 2008). However, comparisons between the two policies are hard to make for a number of reasons. Firstly, Swedish free schools were born out of a very different historical context: early welfare provision in Sweden had generally been

operated by the state, unlike in England where private charities and churches had primarily taken care of welfare projects, with the state left to fill the gaps (Wiborg, 2010: 5). Secondly, Swedish friskolen operate on a voucher system that provides considerably more private involvement in the school system than is possible under English free schools policy. Under the voucher system, anyone can apply for a permit to set up a friskolen. The schools run as private concerns: they charge fees and are allowed to make profit directly from this revenue. In turn, pupils are entitled to have their fees paid by the state (Wiborg, 2010: 10). The name friskolen thus reflects a parent's right to send their child to fee paying schools free of charge, something that makes little sense in an English context where free schools have the legal status of academies: state schools that are afforded greater freedom from the state. Furthermore, the 2010 education bill excluded the possibility of private companies running free schools for profit (Department for Education, 2010b) (the bodies that run the schools assume the legal entity of charitable trust). One could argue that the only aspect of the Swedish model borrowed in English policy was the free school brand. The 2010 white paper makes a number of legitimating references to English schools' relatively poor performance in the 2009 league tables whilst simultaneously foregrounding Swedish free schools and the country's good standing in the tables (Department for Education, 2010b).

As will be discussed later in this chapter, there are far greater similarities between English free schools and U.S. charter schools but the inconvenient truth was that prior to 2009 the U.S. performance in the PISA league tables had not been significantly better than England, whilst Sweden had often been cited as an improving country (OECD, 2009). Thus, the promotion of the Swedish model can be seen as politically favourable to the U.S. model at this time.

Since education reforms in the late 1980s, Swedish free schools have expanded rapidly. The introduction of a voucher system allowed state funded pupils to attend independently run schools, thus, registered independent schools could admit state funded pupils. This policy shift can largely be attributed to a change of attitude towards state provision (Blomqvist, 2004). Specifically, broadly neoliberal reforms were introduced that attempted to create a more productive education sector, through the imposition of a quasi-market. In this context, free schools were presented as part of two parallel discourses. Firstly, they were a mechanism for increasing choice and competition and, in turn, raising standards and reducing costs. Secondly, they reflected more traditional social democratic principles that attempted to justify free schools through communitarianism, contributing to the maintenance of groups as well as cultural and religious identities (Bunar, 2008: 424). The prominence of this discourse is evident in the initial cohort of free schools that emerged following the 1994 Education Act (Education Act, 1994).

Following the interim period, tensions within the new system ensued. Alternative schools that deviated from the national norm were subjected to public outcry, resulting from some high-profile cases of suspected misconduct, particularly from religious schools (Mortimore, 2011). Furthermore, an influx of pupils for seemingly successful schools resulted in competition for places that far outweighed the benefits of the new system. For example, in certain areas, and for certain schools, those parents with the means to do so moved houses, or camped out in the streets overnight, in order to secure places for their children (Allen, 2010). As a result of these tensions, the free school system was driven to engage in a reduced arena for alternative voices and a higher participation of public/private partnership involvement that potentially promised a more egalitarian system. In May 2013, the Swedish National Agency for Education recognised that the voucher system had produced vast

inequalities within the system, leading to a debate about the quality of education and life opportunities for young people (The Local, 2013).

The debate around independent profit making schools intensified in 2013, when Sweden saw the largest fall of any country in the PISA rankings (The Local, 2016). Since, the free schools system has come under closer scrutiny from the press and the government. The press has often portrayed these independent schools as making profit at the expense of pupils. For example the following cartoon appeared in the Aftonbladet newspaper:

> '*Think, forty-six thousand students times six thousand Krona in tax-free profits'* states a suited, smiling man whilst looking down at a crowd of school children.
> *'Kids are just lovely'* replies a second suited man stood adjacent to the first
>
> (Aftonbladet, 2016).

Even against the backdrop of a perceived recovery of the Swedish education system in the international Pisa tables, the reputation of the public independent schools has not recovered, with many focusing on the assertion in the 2016 report that fee paying schools' performance does not match the municipal schools (The Local, 2016). There have also been questions raised about those who run public fee paying schools in Sweden. Typically, this has mostly centred on the topic of religion. One story that has received some coverage documents the involvement of 'islamists' in the running of an independent science school (Bred, 2016). The ruling parties have been keen to present themselves as rigorous in their attempts to address such issues. For example, in 2013 the government introduced new measures to tackle short excessive profiteering: under the new regulations, free schools could be required to hire more teachers and those who held permits to run such schools could not reapply within 5 years if they sold their stake in a school (an often perceived sign that they were

profiteering in the short term). They have also been keen to assert (more with rhetoric than policy) the need to address issues of equivalence within the education system, ensuring that all children from all backgrounds receive a comparable education and that 'no kid should ever be left behind' (Roden, 2016).

The change of attitude in Sweden was duly noted in the English press and the discourse in relation to English free schools became much more sceptical in tone (Paton, 2010; Warrell, 2014; Jeffreys, 2015; Weale, 2015; Wigmore, 2016). This led to a change of rhetoric from the government, who chose to focus on charter schools as the international link with English free schools policy (Benn, 2011). In many ways this is more than just about political sleight of hand: the overt creation of a market with independent providers, profit motives and paying (via state subsidies) customers is very different to both the English and US models. Perhaps the most significant point of interest that does emerge from the comparison is the failure of the policy to generate diversity of provision with five out of six schools in 2007 making a profit of over 120 million SEK (Wiborg, 2010: 12). These large providers offer generalist approaches to education that are similar to those offered by the municipal schools. In comparison, parent involvement in running friskolen has faltered (Wiborg, 2010: 11-12). Although not as marked, a similar pattern has emerged in charter schools' provision, with the proportion of private providers continuing to increase in relation to independent schools, although the independent sector still accounts for more than half of all such schools (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2016). Although at a much earlier stage of development, the number of parent led schools in England is already very low, in large part due to the Department for Education's preference for a sponsor model of governance, whereby proposers of new free schools sign a memorandum of understanding with a provider so that they become responsible for running the school.

### *U.S Charter Schools*

Charter schools are publicly sponsored schools that, compared to public schools, have relative freedom from government control but are accountable for levels of academic performance (Brouillette, 2002; Fuller, 2009). The schools are predicated on the legal concept of 'a charter': an agreement between a state, or local government agency, to grant certain freedoms from central control in return for a prescribed level of performance (Brouillette, 2002; Fuller, 2009). Although such charters vary from state to state, they do have certain commonalities: the authority agrees to withdraw its exclusive franchise over education in a given district; schools are subject to performance criteria and the charter is renewed every 3 to 5 years following a review process; the schools must be open to admissions from pupils of all backgrounds and must not use performance tests; the school can only exist through choice (no pupil can be made to attend without choosing the school); the school is a legal entity with its own board (Kolderie, 1990). Although the majority of charter schools are still independent (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2016), the ratio varies from state to state. Colorado has a relatively low number of multi charter school providers at less than a quarter of the overall provision (Baker, 2015), whilst for other states, such as Illinois, the same figure is above 75% (Baker, 2015). It is also true that the number of not for profit multiple providers – called Education Management Organisations (EMO) -and for profit providers – known as Charter Management Organisations (CMO) - is growing year on year (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2016) and that there has also been a tendency for a concentration of providers, as certain actors start to dominate the market, particularly amongst CMOs (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2011). One of the difficult issues that independent charter schools face is developing and maintaining a distinctive identity. A number of case studies (e.g. Brouillette, 2002; Fuller, 2009, Wells, 2002) demonstrate the difficulties many of these schools encountered after setting up; often

morphing into very different organisations as they sought to expand their expertise and shared understandings in response to unforeseen challenges. However, it should also be noted that most EMO/CMO charter schools have not been created as the result of takeovers of independent schools, with 95% of chain schools historically created as start ups (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2011).

### *Educational Discourse in the United States*

Charter schools were the product of a complex assemblage in the U.S. that encompassed liberal economics, meritocracy and communitarianism (Brouillette, 2002: 25-38). The notion of schooling in the country has been typically presented with romantic connotations associated with historical communities (Tyack, 1974: 15-16). In such a discourse, the school represents the hub of the community: not just a place where children are educated, but also a space where people interact socially and politically (Tyack, 1974: 15-16). As such, it is the apotheosis of localism, the centralising mechanism within a structure of small, diverse and self-governing populations. Such cultural reference points create an ambivalence to hierarchical state structures that, by their nature, are a centralising force that serves to disempower local communities (Brouillette, 2002: 29).

This nostalgic version of schooling intersects, and often works against, more abstract national discourses that had their roots in industrialisation and tend to draw their references from classical economics (Brouillette, 2002: 28). Industrialisation has created tendencies towards an emphasis on skills as training in the education system, as well as a focus on organisation through a division of labour, that is, the need to separate children by age, ability, subject etc. The justification for these tendencies is the need for the nation state to compete on a global scale: workers are competing in a global market and thus need to be more skilled, and more

productive, than their competitors (Brouillette, 2002: 28). More recently, national educational discourses have tended to emphasise the importance of free markets in the education system: the idea that social goods are most efficiently created and consumed through the mechanism of market signals, which dictate supply and demand of commodities, thus realising what Adam Smith referred to as the invisible hand of the market (Robertson and Verger, 2012). Following this logic, schools that are removed from state control and are subject to market forces are more able to meet the needs of their stakeholders: those that do not, wither, whilst those able to respond to the wants of pupils and parents flourish (Timpane *et al.*, 2001). A derivation of this logic, which is foregrounded within the American system, is the intersection between classical economics and liberal notions of freedom. Although not new, these ideas gained additional impetus in the U.S. through the work of Milton Friedman and the Chicago School of Economics. These champions of neoliberalism emphasised the importance of choice in creating individual freedom (Peck, 2010).

The U.S. also has a long and significant history of promoting the importance of education as a force for social cohesion. Going back as far as 1916, John Dewey made a seminal case for the role of education in developing an effective democratic society (Dewey, 1997). For Dewey, education was the mechanism by which society developed its social consciousness so that all were able to flourish (Dewey, 1997). This articulation of education with democratic processes has recently received new direction through the work of contemporary communitarians. In his book, Bowling Alone, Robert Putnam explored the fragmentation of American society. For Putnam, the fact that so many Americans today go bowling alone is indicative of a more solitary, isolated society, compared to previous generations for whom bowling was an integral part of social life (2000). Furthermore, the work of writers such as Amitai Etzioni have promoted the notion of community and shared responsibility (1994).

Finally, as with all education systems, the notion of social mobility is integral to the justification of a common school system. In the U.S., the idea that education was a key mechanism in helping people 'get on' was very much part of the blueprint of the notion of a 'common school' (Timpane *et al.*, 2001: 17). These are the main fibres on the thread that constitute the educational discourse in the U.S: localism, markets, communities, freedom, choice and fairness.

### English Free Schools

English free schools were a central pillar of the UK Conservative Party's education plans prior to the 2010 general election (Conservative Party, 2010). Prior to the election, Michael Gove (then shadow Secretary of State for Education) had made a number of explicit references to both friskolen and charter schools as the progenitors of the policy (Gove, 2008, 2009, 2010a); the implementation of the policy was confirmed in the 2010 white paper (Department for Education, 2010b). Against the backdrop of a campaign that had promised to 'fix our broken society' (Cameron, 2008), free schools were volunteered as an answer to some of the complex social problems that had become manifest in the existing state education system. These problems centred on rising inequality and its negative corollary with social mobility on one hand (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2011), and a positive corollary between wealth and educational attainment on the other (Feinstein, 2003). Free schools were also offered as part of the solution to England's worsening performance in the PISA educational league tables (OECD, 2009) although the foregrounding of this reasoning occurred after the release of the 2009 results, immediately prior to the release of the 2010 education white paper (some might say a fortuitous occurrence for a new government wishing to implement new policies but one that makes little sense given that both Sweden and the U.S. performed worse in the league table than England).

Whilst international considerations were undoubtedly important, free schools policy was also strongly influenced by ideological factors inherent within the Conservative Party, and the existing political milieu that existed in England at the time. The Conservative Party had long referenced the English liberal tradition, as exemplified by Edmund Burke (1790), in its political outlook. In this sense, the overarching narrative of the Big Society, as outlined by Jess Norman (2010) can be seen as a link between the party's political roots and free schools' policy. In the book, Norman defines society in terms of Hobbes' social contract: an agreement between individuals that secures their own safety at the expense of autonomy (Norman, 2010: 93). The social contract is an axiom of the Big Society, albeit with a greater emphasis on community. Norman characterizes this process as a connected society whereby the state is one institution among many. Citing Michael Oakeshott, Norman warns against the tyranny of enterprising states, that is, states that attempt to impose rationalist agendas on society, replacing a single idea for the messiness of reality (Norman, 2010: 102). As with Burke, the Big Society promotes the notion of civil society, that is, local institutions acting as a buffer between State and individual. In this sense, the Big Society and the pre-existing communitarian ideas espoused by the previous government mirror each other in their approach to the relationship between individual, community and state. For example, Sarah Hale identifies community as a theme under the previous Labour government to the point that community involvement became necessary to access government funding for almost any local project (Hale, 2006). The Big Society therefore provided continuities between discourses within and between governments.

As already stated, the primary function of free schools was to afford actors other than the state the opportunity to fulfil local educational commitments (Department for Education, 2010b). These commitments could arise from: a need for places not currently met by state schools, the

want or desire for something different, or a school focused upon meeting the needs of a particular cohort of children (New Schools Network, 2013b). Initially, the government outlined five types of free school, with variations in admissions procedures, curricula, staffing and funding. Free schools are not required to follow the national curriculum, but they must ensure that the curriculum meets the needs for pupils so they are prepared for further or higher education, training or employment (New Schools Network, 2013a: 1). However, although this statement applies to all schools, the priority is different for special schools who must ensure that the children's educational needs are met (New Schools Network, 2013a: 2). Furthermore, alternative provision schools must provide a 'broad and balanced' curriculum with an emphasis upon literacy and numeracy (New Schools Network, 2013a: 2). Children in these schools are expected to return to mainstream education, thus, the curriculum provided must coincide with the expectations of referring commissioners in order to prevent further disadvantage to these children (New Schools Network, 2013a: 2). The commissioners are also able to determine the staffing arrangements of the free school, although there are some statutory requirements: teachers in mainstream free schools do not need to possess Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) unless they are the school Special Needs Coordinator (SENCO); all teachers in special schools must have QTS, however, the staffing qualifications of alternative provision schools has not been specified by the government (New Schools Network, 2013a: 2).

The funding arrangements of free schools provide a significant variation from other state schools, and this has been reflected in their distinctive governance arrangements whereby charitable trusts are established in order to enable agents other than the state to run schools as legal entities. Each free school has a trust, which has legal responsibility for the school, and legal ownership of the funding agreement, which details the specific arrangements between the school and the trust (Department for Education, 2016a). Parties that make up the trust can be any agent as long

as the trust is not operated on a for profit basis, although the assets of the school are legally signed over to it (Department for Education, 2016a).

Considering the potentially multifarious constructions of free schools, the application process was originally narrow in its criteria. For example, one aspect of the original application form required the trust board to contain sufficient and relevant expertise in order to run the school (New Schools Network, 2013b). Whereas well-connected professionals might be able to demonstrate such skills and knowledge, it is much harder for parent groups who have not had prior involvement in schools. Furthermore, the New Schools Network expressed their preference to potential bidders for such groups to work alongside sponsors (notes from free schools training event, Manchester, 2013). The awarding of a contract to The New Schools Network (NSN) to provide support through the application process also provided advantage to those with the resources to put a large bid together. Although all applicants could receive the basic level of support (the universal service) (NSN, 2013c), some applications were selected to receive a higher level of bespoke support through their development programme (2013c). This programme provided significant technical and financial help to selected applications. Since these initial arrangements, the application process has expanded and become even more involved: in 2016, the application form was amended and now contains over 40 pages of criteria with a development timeline that extends beyond two years before a new school can officially open (Department for Education, 2016b). Such arrangements thus make it increasingly unlikely that the range of community groups listed in the 2010 white paper could successfully bid for a new free school in the future.

The rhetoric relating to English free schools can best be described as an assemblage of disparate (and sometimes conflicting) ideas. On one hand, the policy looks towards the Swedish and U.S. decentralizing models education, whilst simultaneously ignoring the centralizing tendencies that

are evident in both models, with most of the friskolen, and more than half of charter schools being run by large private providers. On the other hand, the policy emphasises the need for England to be globally competitive, whilst simultaneously looking to countries that had performed worse in the PISA tests. Similar conflicts can be found in the philosophy underpinning the rhetoric. The Conservative instinct for decentralizing processes and creating a small state are undermined by the systemic exclusion of small, diverse local groups in favour of multinational sponsors and multi academy trusts that can operate over large areas. Taken in isolation, each of these reasons for implementing free schools makes sense. Taken together, they become almost nonsensical as a policy rationale.

# Chapter 2: Methodology

## Introduction

In this section I will detail my research aims, describe the methods I used and make a case as to their credibility. I draw upon the concept of an extended case method to demonstrate how empirical observations were translated into theoretical generalisations (Burawoy, 2009). The research itself can be broadly split into two endeavours. Firstly, a case study (Stake, 2005): an instance of a new English free school; secondly, an analysis of relevant policy texts. Both these approaches were brought together through the use of critical discourse analysis: a method of understanding a text's claims to valid knowledge and the social structures that it conveys. Thus, all data was treated as a text (any social artefact that conveys meaning).

Although this method does not require the same considerations that more positivist approaches require, such as statistical generalizability (Burawoy, 2009), some consideration needs to be given to the validity and ethicality of the data collection process (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). I will therefore outline a reflexive approach to data collection that aims to demonstrate careful consideration of the data and what can be deduced from it (Sayer, 2009). With reference to the process of data collection, I will adopt some of the elements of Guba and Lincoln's framework for establishing 'trustworthy' research (1985). Furthermore, I will attempt to demonstrate that, whilst no research can be labelled as 'ethical', I have been suitably reflexive in my approach (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004), and that my work is compliant with Bath Spa University's Code of Good Practice for Research (Bath Spa University, 2014) and the British Sociological Associations' Statement of Ethical Practice (2017).

My approach needed to account for the complex and polyvalent nature of the data that my research aims necessarily produced. Any approach to

social space requires a methodology that can accommodate the descriptions of the participants' experiences alongside a more objectivised account of the social formation. In addition, my approach had to provide opportunities to make essential normative judgements about the role of education, particularly in relation to basic human needs.

For these reasons, I chose to adopt a broadly critical realist approach to the project. Critical realism is a meta-theory that addresses the historical divide between those who attempt to understand the world as real and external to us (ontology), and those who attempt to understand the world as constructed through perception (epistemology) (Liedman 1994 in Danermark et al, , 2002: 74). Critical realism attempts to traverse these debates in two ways. Firstly, it adopts a realist logic that rejects both the 'ontic fallacy' (the world is purely ontological) and the 'epistemic fallacy' (the world is purely created through perception) (Sayer, 2012: 60). Instead, realists understand the world as a set of open, stratified, causal structures; open because the mechanisms by which humanity is produced (language and culture) generate infinite possibilities; structured because these possibilities are constrained by the interaction of reasonably fixed, pre-existing social systems; stratified because these systems interact at levels beyond our own perception of them; causal because anything that has an effect (including reasons) is real (Sayer, 2012: 18).

Secondly, critical realism is critical and thus normative. Whilst our perceptions of the world (and subsequent actions) are constrained to reality, our relationship with the real world is not unproblematic. A realist approach is confined to the solving of social problems as they present themselves to us. The resulting problem solving theories are limited to addressing the social world, as it exists. A critical approach attempts to deal with the condition within which problems present themselves.

As such, it focuses on transcending the existing social order to consider alternatives, whilst limiting consideration of such transformations that are possible from the existing order (Cox and Sinclair, 1996). In effect, theory becomes an engine that drives the real rather than a mirror that reflects it, and thus fits well with the normative framework of my project, based on the thick ethical account of human needs outlined by Martha Nussbaum (1992)(see chapter 2).

### Three dimensions of reality

In critical realist ontology, there are three dimensions to the world and our understanding of it: the real, the actual and the empirical (Bhaskar, 1975). The real refers to the causal structures that constitute the world. These structures consist of systems, their elements and the causal properties that emerge from them. Systems, in turn, are constituents of larger structures. However, the causal powers associated with a given system are not necessarily activated; it can possess certain possibilities even if the powers are dormant (e.g. a worker can be unemployed whilst still possessing the necessary skills to work) (Sayer, 2012: 12). The actual refers to the causal properties that have been activated within a given moment, and the necessary conditions that triggered them. The empirical refers to our understanding of the real and actual. What we can know is characterised by the transitive nature of knowledge: different purposes and abstractions produce different types of understanding (Sayer, 2009).

### The significance of abductive logic

Historically, approaches to research have been predicated on either inductive (knowledge derived from empirical events) or deductive (knowledge derived from necessary rules) methods of reasoning. Charles Sanders Peirce, however, was critical of these approaches as neither allow for the creation of knowledge beyond the original theoretical framing of

the problem. As Peirce observed, the process of knowledge creation involves the regression from a *consequent* (an empirical event) to a hypothetical *antecedent* (an asserted state of things that allows us to make sense of the empirical event) (Romm, 2010: 374). Thus reasoning actually exists in three parts: (1) an empirical event, which (2) relates to a rule, which (3) leads to a new supposition (Peirce 1990 cited in Danermark et al., 2002: 91). This type of knowledge reveals connections and relationships between things that are not immediately evident within inductive/deductive reasoning.

Critical realism acknowledges and formalises abduction within the research paradigm, often with reference to the redescription or recontextualisation of existing theorisations (Jensen, 1995: 148). Rather than focusing on an object per se, this process focuses on identifying the conditions that make an object possible (Danermark *et al.*, 2002: 96). It does so using four techniques: counterfactual thought (the examination of the effects of removing elements from a structure)(Danermark et al., 2002: 101), thought experiments (the consideration of hypothetical worlds)(Tetlock, 1996), examination of pathological cases (the study of extreme cases to establish pure cases)(Collier, 1994: 165), and the comparison of different cases (the examination of the unusual to establish commonalities and thus establish theoretical coherence)(Danermark et al., 2002: 105).

### Using Critical Discourse Analysis as Method

The purpose of critical discourse analysis is to reveal power and ideologies through the identification of discourse within texts (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 3). In this sense, discourse is the act of recreating the discursive formation: 'an institutionalised way of talking that regulates and reinforces action and thereby exerts power' (Link, 1983: 60). With reference to Foucault, there are two distinctive parts to the discursive process: the discursive and the extra-discursive (dispositive) (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 39). Discourse refers

to what was actually said and how it is conveyed whereas dispositive refers the conditions that underpin claims to valid knowledge. Discourse is powerful because it delineates a range of statements that can and cannot be said (Link and Link-Heer, 1990). Furthermore, such statements lead to extra-discursive outcomes (material artefacts, rituals, social practices) that, in turn, reinforce discourses. Discourses thus shape subjects who in turn act in ways that reproduce discourse; individuals are active agents in the sustenance of pre-existing discourses (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 38). Although it is impossible to change discourse at will, certain agents have sufficient resources to be able to influence them. For example, politicians and business lobbying groups can achieve discursive changes over a period of time. Thus, when examining texts, it is necessary to consider both how discourse delineates different social objects as well as the processes by which the text was produced.

There are a number of different approaches to critical discourse analysis but my work drew primarily on the textually oriented approach (Fairclough, 2003: 2). This approach builds on Halliday's functional linguistics, which works on the assumption that language can only be studied with reference to extra linguistic, socially constructed conditions within which language operates (Fairclough, 2003: 5). The selection and analysis of texts were essential to the methods employed.

**Selecting Texts**

Texts can be described as any example of discourse in use. This often involves language but can also involve the conveyance of meaning through other semiotic structures such as symbols and icons (Fairclough, 2003: 3). For this project, a range of texts was analysed, including interview transcripts, transcripts from observations, policy texts, newspaper articles, social media, web sites and historical documents. In terms of research insights, texts were selected for detail; because they provided context, contrast and definition (Fairclough, 2003: 6). As such, the bulk of the

conclusions of this project are predicated on small, intensively analysed samples. However, some basic corpus linguistics was employed to establish common themes using the Wordsmith software (Fairclough, 2003: 6).

With reference to Foucault's differentiation between discourse and extra discursive, two approaches were used for sampling. For the ethnographic part of the study, texts took the form of interactions where the point of interest was the interaction between participants, and between participants and researcher. To this end, what was actually happening was distinctively discursive (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 38). All conversations were recorded, listened to repeatedly and key points noted. Significant sections of texts (that emerged through an iterative process of theorisation) were transcribed and analysed in detail.

Additional texts were used primarily as part of the process of extending out from the case to identify external conditions and to link the case to wider theorisations. As such, these texts tended to shift towards the extra discursive, revealing not only the institutional artefacts and practices that underpin discursive utterances, but also enabling one to identify the conditions under which these socially reproduced elements came into existence. Within this research, these texts can also be split into two. Some were selected for genealogical interest: historical texts that provided continuities within the education discursive formation. Others were selected as an intermediary between the genealogy of education and the discursive texts that emerged from the case study. Such texts were characterised by their references to English free schools and associated discourses. The process of identifying significant texts was iterative and involved emerging conceptualisations of class, as I attempted to explain various aspects of the discourse that emerged from the different texts.

I wanted to move beyond a single focus on government policy texts however. Whilst sharing many of the historical discursive characteristics of

previous education policy, free schools represent a shift from previous policy in certain areas and I wanted to find out about the entire process, from inception at the level of central government to translation of policy at the point of implementation. In doing so I aimed to consider the discursive process in its entirety; to examine ways in which discourses shift and become subverted. To put it another way, I wanted to see free schools policy as an assemblage of different, but interrelated language formations (Olssen, 2010a). For this reason I chose to apply CDA techniques to an case study (Stake, 2005). Rather than being an internal case study that attempted to understand the internal components of a given case, my case study aimed to make more generalisable claims about the nature of education discourse and free schools policy. In order to bridge the gap between an instance of a free school and government policy I ended up developing a collective case study (Stake, 2005: 445). One (the main case) involved collecting qualitative data (interviews, focus groups, observations) and analysing it using CDA methods. The second two were developed from secondary sources and helped to make connections between the immediate experiences of the main case and more generalisable claims relating to education policy produced at government level.

**Analysis**

The analysis of texts drew extensively upon Fairclough's account of CDA. His *orders of discourse* contains three levels of analysis: genre, discourse and styles (Fairclough, 2003: 2). These orders reflect how discourses are presented, what they represent and the level of purpose attributed to them. Brown and Gilman (1960) posit that social relations differ along two axes: social hierarchy and social distance. Genres play a distinctive role in controlling discursive formations by connecting different actors over social distances. As such, genre is often significant in the initiation of new processes of recontextualisation.

According to Bernstein, this involves the destabilization and transformation of existing discursive formations so that they can eventually be colonised by new discourses (1990). Fairclough differentiates between abstract accounts of discourse as a social entity and discourse as the relatively durable structure of language (Fairclough, 2003: 3). The latter both represents and shapes the circumstances, processes and participants involved in social events (Fairclough, 2003: 124). Discourses play a significant role in the establishment of social hierarchies through presenting actors at different levels of generality and through differentiating the roles of different actors within the formation, as passive, active or non-existent (Fairclough, 2003: 136).

Styles relates to the ways in which we relate to each other within a discourse (Harvey, 1996: 79). They are predominantly revealed in texts through the level of commitments expressed within semantic and grammatical relations (modality) and statements about desirability (evaluations)(Fairclough, 2003: 172). Modality markers, such as modal verbs, demonstrate levels of commitment and entitlement within a text (Fairclough, 2003: 168). Evaluations exist with differing levels of explicitness: they can be as overt as evaluative statements or implied such as assumed values that underpin legitimating statements. Both can serve to reinforce pre-existing assumptions about the relative social positions of social characters within the discursive formation (Fairclough, 2003: 174). Levels of dialogicality are also factors in defining the level of commitment and entitlement amongst actors within discursive formations, that is, who gets to decide what dialogue will take place, who gets to join in, who is able to disagree, whose talk leads to actions (Fairclough, 2003: 79).

## The Case Study

My methodological approach to the case study was grounded in the tenets of the extended case method (ECM), as described by Michael Burawoy

(2009). This approach is broadly sympathetic to the axioms provided by Bhaskar et al (Bhaskar, 1975, 2011; Archer and Bhaskar, 1998; Collier, 1994). At the heart of Burawoy's method is the idea of *reflexive science* (Burawoy, 2009: 38). For Burawoy, reflexivity is the process of thematising the interactions between observer and participant: a form of triangulation through which the researcher is able to find continuity; to create solidity through dialogue between the cognitive maps, that are the product of rational thought, and the sensory moments that constitute our experiences of the world (Burawoy, 2009: 38-44).

This dialogue allows the ethnographer to engage in a process of generalisation defined through ECM's four extensions (Burawoy, 2009: 44-55): firstly, the extension of the observer into the lives of the participants; secondly, the extension of observations over time and space; thirdly, the extension from micro processes within the case to macro forces that operate beyond the case; fourthly, the extension of theory.

**The Main Case**

The focal point of my case study was a newly established free school in a rural area of England. The school had come to my attention because it had generated a significant amount of controversy in the local area and, accordingly, received a significant amount of attention in the local press accordingly. The group responsible for setting up the school had been active in creating press releases and developing a local marketing campaign. Concomitantly, a vocal coalition had emerged opposing the school. This was made up of various groups who felt aggrieved by the development of a new secondary school. Members of this group included residents who lived near the proposed site of the new build, teachers and governors from other state and private schools in the area, and people in the locality who opposed the project on ideological grounds. These points of tension meant it had potential to develop detailed accounts of the

process of territorialisation and social ordering within the emerging space. However, it was also something of an anomaly being a free school set up in a rural area (partly because of the need to prove demand for a new school, the majority of free schools have been established in more populated areas).

I employed a range of data collection methods to develop my observations in a consistent and comprehensive manner (Guba and Lincoln, 1985). These methods included focus groups and semi structured interviews, alongside observations and some unstructured interviews (O'Donoghue, 2007). The application of these methods was guided by the need for data saturation in relation to my research questions (Fusch and Ness, 2015). It quickly became apparent that the contested nature of the new school would provide an opportunity to observe a process of colonisation that had some particularly distinctive borders. An initial examination of local newspaper articles revealed a significant point of tension between locals resisting the new school and the school's steering group who were keen to assert their message that the school was needed.

To gain an understanding of these different perspectives on the new school I interviewed a range of groups. Firstly I interviewed those responsible for setting up the new school: a parent who had the original idea (Sarah); the school's governing body that had also been involved in the bidding process, and the chair of governors alongside the original head of the school. I first contacted Sarah by email and she offered to meet me. Initially she was enthusiastic about the prospect of research being undertaken about the school as she felt that all perspectives, even those that were dissenting, were of value to the project. Through Sarah I was also able to contact other members of the steering group, the head teacher and the chair of governors. At this point I was particularly interested in the ways in which those involved in the school legitimated its existence.

For this reason, I was keen to keep the interviews as informal and unstructured as possible. I wanted my participants to talk openly and freely about the process of setting up the school and, in particular, I wanted to hear them express their own educational values in relation to the school. I was particularly mindful of the possibility that levels of self-interest in the project (creating a new school for the participants' own children) could get hidden in more structured discussion. For this reason, I used a mixture of unstructured interviews; semi-structured interviews and focus groups conducted using open-ended questions. I was also able to negotiate observations of lessons during a school day (see appendix 1, points 6 and 7). What emerged was a productive mixture of informal discussion (mostly in the unstructured interactions with Sarah) and more formal interactions (mainly with the steering group, the head teacher and the chair of governors). As stated in the findings, this revealed discursive shifts as the school project progressed.

Secondly, I interviewed objectors who had organised themselves into a group to resist the development of the new school. This group consisted of local residents (who did not want a new school built next to their village, practitioners from local schools (including vocal representation from head teachers), and people in the area who objected to the new school on political grounds (all the local secondary schools were under local authority control prior to the bid for a new free school). Again, I conducted a mixture of semi-structured interviews and focus groups (see appendix 1, points 4 and 5). I attended an extraordinary parish council meeting at which members of the group were given time to make the case for rejecting the planning bid, a deputation that was subsequently upheld by both the parish and district councils. I also collected data from dedicated websites and online forums set up to promote the group and to allow them to share their thoughts. Although the group offered little in terms of the

colonisation of the new space (they were objecting to its very existence) they did provide an important counterpoint that helped me to make sense of some of the actions of the school's steering group in particular.

Having examined the process by which the new school space was legitimated, and some of the constraints involved in its formation, I was interested to find out more about other ways in which the space was becoming colonised, the social orders that were emerging within it, and the legitimating discourses that underpinned the process. I interviewed two parents: one who had sent her child to the school and one who was intending to send her child to the school (her daughter was currently at primary school)(see appendix 1, point 12). At this point, the school had a low intake of about 60 pupils and, given the sensitivity of the project within the local area, it was difficult to approach parents and to get them to talk openly about the school. I was, however, able to conduct a semi-structured interviews with both parents at length (for almost two hours). I conducted the interviews by firstly interviewing each parent individually (for about 45 minutes) and then spending about 30 minutes talking together about some of the issues that were brought up. I chose to use this method, as I was concerned about the level of discussion that these parents would engage in. As it was, both parents were very forthcoming and the data collected was detailed and wide-ranging. In addition, I extended the scope of these discussions by collecting data from public online forums set up by parents of the school. One was established directly to provide people with a space where they could exercise their support for the school project and the new build; the other was set up as a support page for parents of the school to share information and experiences.

Finally, I wanted to examine those excluded from the process: those parents who felt unable to, or did not want to send their children to the school. The critical friend had a contact that ran a parent group in a children's centre and she help me facilitate a meeting with the attending

parents. I conducted a focus group with six of these parents. The centre was near a number of housing estates where much of the housing stock was social housing. Most of the parents who attended the group were in social housing; all sent at least one of their children to the local comprehensive school and none were contemplating sending any of their children to Ridgewell School (see appendix 1, point 13).

Where possible, semi structured interviews and focus groups were recorded to ensure data analysis was robust and detailed. Where this was not possible, notes were made. A critical friend was present during all data collection activities to ensure notes were accurately recorded and interpretations of events were consistent (Guba and Lincoln, 1985).

In this aspect, the critical friend played an essential part in the study. She was local to the area and helped to identify and separate the different factions regarding the school and various stakeholders. This was also useful when determining samples for the study. Without this input the study would have run the risk of being too subjective and not attentive to the contextual nature of the research site. During the data-gathering process the critical friend played many different roles. Initially, as this is a rural area where the community were not used to many 'outsiders' coming into the area, the critical friend helped to establish a relationship with the participants.

As the research progressed an essential part of the process was for the critical friend and the researcher to debrief and reflect upon each other's opinions and interpretations of the research data. These discussions were used to inform the research findings and ensure that continued reflexivity was employed throughout the research process. The dialogic aspect of the study was achieved through a continuous discussion between the critical friend and the researcher. Rather than being solely utilised in the data

collection phase of the study, the critical friend was used throughout the study. This enabled the researcher to continuously reflect on the progress being made and the way in which theory was emerging from the data. The role of the critical friend, who has corroborated this account of her involvement, was discussed throughout the project.

**Extending the case over time and space**

I used an extensive array of sources to position the case within the national context of free schools. I attended events designed to promote free schools policy and to attract support from potential sponsors of new free schools. I attended a Westminster conference in London that aimed to promote discussion and debate about free schools. The event was attended by a number of people who were engaged in developing free schools in various ways. I also attended a day organised by the New Schools Network, which aimed to support free schools amongst prospective sponsors. These observations were supported by a significant array of documents provided by the New Schools Network that provided guidance and background information on free schools policy. These documents provided valuable context in terms of understanding the way that the policy was being managed at the level of national government.

However, the main method I employed to extend understanding over space and time was the use of two additional cases constructed from secondary sources (Bray, Adamson and Mason, 2007). Both cases were chosen for their distinctiveness and the interest generated, particularly in the press. Because they were both constructed from publicly available sources, I have not felt the need to anonymise them.

The first was the All Saints Junior School in Reading. The case was of interest because it was an early example of a free school with the funding agreement being signed in August 2011 (Secretary of State for Education).

The parents who started the project had also been particularly active in the area. They started the project because the existing All Saints Infant School did not have a corresponding junior school (Lepkowska, 2011). Following the successful bid for this school, the group formed the West Reading Educational Network (West Reading Education Network, 2013) and successfully bid to create a new secondary school in the same local area (West Reading Education Network, n.d.).

The school attracted a significant amount of coverage in both the local and national press. Furthermore, the group were very active at promoting themselves online, producing a web site and an online forum to support the bid. Because the free school was one of the first to open, it was also possible to obtain a copy of the funding agreement (Secretary of State for Education, 2011) and additional information on the school's sponsors (then called the Centre for British Teachers). This included copies of their accounts, details of their assets and various educationally related activities (Education Development Trust, n.d.). This was the original case I identified as a case study.

My thesis subsequently shifted focus from the role of private interests in free schools to the examination of parent led free schools. Whilst the All Saints case does not feature overtly in the remainder of my work, it did provide useful context about the relationship between new free schools and existing school provision. In particular, it was the first example I came across of parental involvement in the bidding process and the effect this can have on existing provision. In the words of an ex local authority employee I spoke to briefly, the existing infant school was a 'basket case' that the local authority had been trying to shut down for many years. Free schools policy enabled a relatively small group of local parents and teachers to extend school provision in the locality rather than the existing infant school being shut down.

The second comparative case was constructed from documents relating to the Al Madinah free school in Derby, a school that was a designated religious school with a Muslim ethos (Al-Madinah Education Trust, 2011). This school was of particular interest as an extreme case: the school became the focus of intense debate within the national press following a negative Ofsted inspection and the subsequent temporary closure of the school. The incident quickly became a national news story and the government was forced to intervene to prevent the identified issues from affecting the entire free schools programme (Hawley, 2013).

The school was proposed by a small group of protagonists who were associated with a local mosque. Having established a pre-school programme within the mosque itself, the group wanted to extend their provision to include a through school (both primary and secondary provision). Unfortunately the school ran into serious difficulties in its first year as tensions arose from within the local community: between staff and trustees; between national systems of governance and the school's own vision and; perhaps most seriously, between national news discourses and the school's trust (BBC, 2013a; Fricker, 2013; Gye, 2013; Hawley, 2013; New Schools Network, 2013c; Pidd, 2013).

As such, the case offered revealing insights into the relationship between local and national scales of governance; the way that the relationships operate; the conditions under which each function and the way that both attempt to navigate such constraints. Some contact was made with the original trustees of the school but, understandably, they were unwilling to talk to me in any detail. However, a plethora of secondary sources exist that provide a detail account of the various tensions that existed in relation to the school. These include various local forums that map the local conditions under which the project was initially proposed and various texts relating to governance issues (Ofsted reports, New Schools Network documentation).

The final part of my data collection involved the examination of historical policy texts as it became apparent to me that many aspects of free schools policy had precedents in historical discourses of education. To do this I adopted Fairclough's approach to sampling (Fairclough, 2003: 6) whereby a relatively small number of texts are selected based on their relevance to pre-identified linguistic features. However, as Fairclough also observes, this process can be enhanced by utilising certain aspects of corpus linguistics (Fairclough, 2003: 6). In the case of my study, a sample was initially established by searching documents for key words and phrases and using Wordsmith to identify collocations of significant words. Having done this, sections of documents were identified for their relevance to the discursive themes already identified within free schools policy. This process again had a significant reflexive aspect as the analysis of historical texts shifted my understanding of free schools as certain words and phrases became recontextualised.

### Ethics

> *'Man has an impulse to run up against the limits of language. Think, for example, of the astonishment that anything exists. … This running-up against the limits of language is Ethics.'*
>
> (Wittgenstein, 1978)

With reference to Heidegger's concept of facticity, ethics can be described as a preoccupation with obligation and responsibility. In any situation we find ourselves, we have obligations towards those around us. Although we have no control over the obligations we are presented with, we can choose not to meet them (to ignore the basic needs of those connected to us). Where we do take up responsibility for our obligations we enter the domain of ethics. In this sense, ethics is always relational: it is about how

we relate to others. By contrast, and with reference to Wittgenstein's quote, universalising ethical rules can never capture the vast array of phenomenological experiences we all encounter. My approach was predicated on this notion of ethics and sought to deal with ethical issues as they presented themselves.

However, I also had to acknowledge that I had to deal with both dimensions of research ethics: procedural (seeking approval from a relevant ethics committee) and reflexive (the everyday ethical dilemmas that arise in the process of doing research)(Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). However, I did not see these two dimensions as mutually exclusive and my aim was to demonstrate my reflexive ethical approach through meeting the criteria specified in the British Sociological Association's (BSA) statement of ethical practice.

**Protection from harm**

I have placed this section of the concept first because I posit that it is central to any ethical approach. As the BSA document states researchers have a responsibility to ensure that the physical, social and psychological wellbeing of research participants is not affected in an adverse manner by the research (British Sociological Association, 2017: 6). As a researcher, this is my obligation to my participants and one that I will now attempt to demonstrate I fulfilled by addressing three relevant areas: informed consent; openness and honesty; and confidentiality and anonymity.

**Informed consent**

Whilst acknowledging that it is not always possible, the BSA state that, as a far as possible, informed consent should be elicited from participants (British Sociological Association, 2017: 5). The default position for informed

consent for those undertaking research at Bath Spa University is that free and informed consent should normally be gained in writing from the participant(s) and/or their properly authorised representative(s) (Bath Spa University, 2014: 34). In the ethnographic section of the research, informed consent was recorded for all focus groups detailed in the study (see appendices 2-6) This involved an letter (sent in email form prior to interviews/focus groups/observations) explaining the project aims and the likely outcomes of the research (Bath Spa University, 2014: 34).

In addition, the questions to be asked were sent to participants in advance and agreed by all participants. All interviews and focus groups were recorded and participants were offered copies of the recording, complete with my explanation, which was given at the beginning of the session (no parents requested a copy of this). All participants were asked for consent and this was recorded by the co-interviewee (the critical friend) who attended the interviews for the purposes of triangulation. Some covert observations were undertaken in relation to public groups: a policy forum in Westminster, a New Schools Network training day, and a parish council meeting. In all cases, the purpose of the observations was to provide context; in all cases, information from the events was made publically available by the organisers, and in all cases, no specific details of the events have been included in the final write up of the research.

In addition, the PRIE states that all potential participants should be informed that they are free to withdraw from the research project and that they should be adequately briefed as to how the research is to be carried out from inception to dissemination. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw before any data was collected and they were briefed about the research project. It should be noted that this involved talking participants through the reflexive process employed and, whilst they understood how the project would unfold, this meant that future

events within the research could not be disseminated (e.g. future participants, the exact nature of the findings etc.).

**Openness and Honesty**

The BSA document states that there should be an emphasis on maximum openness throughout the research process. However, the statement also states that this is not always possible and that 'sociologists should normally avoid restrictions on their freedom to publish or otherwise broadcast research findings (British Sociological Association, 2017:10). A position of openness with participants was not easy to maintain throughout the research, particularly in the case of Sarah and the other members of the school's governing body. Initially, Sarah in particular had an open approach to my involvement and was keen for feedback and updates. I duly provided these in the form of transcripts of interviews, relevant readings and updates on my theorisations.

This position became increasingly difficult to maintain, however, as both our projects progressed. Towards the end of the data collection process, the school was the subject of a well-publicised judicial review over planning for a new school building. The issue was controversial in the local area and Sarah, in particular, became increasingly nervous about my own message and, as a result, started to try and exert more control over transcripts. This coincided with the stakes being raised with my own project as I neared completion, thus making participant withdrawal a more risky prospect. I decided to shift my focus towards openness and honesty through my own reflexive processes: ensuring honesty and integrity by discussing findings with critical friends to ensure that I had been fair in my deductions about my participants.

My overall approach worked outwards to identify the way that social conditions interact to create social events. As such, I have no reason to

make judgments of individual participants and I have asked others to identify any possible content that may cause offence to those who participated. I have created an overview of my work to inform participants of my findings. I believe this was the best compromise I could make, ensuring my representation was fair whilst not placing the project in unnecessary jeopardy.

**Confidentiality and anonymity**

As the Bath Spa University ethical guidelines state (Bath Spa University, 2014), privacy is normal practice in research and law, however, it also states that 'those who court publicity or are active in the public-eye' are not considered subject to privacy/anonymity rights' (Bath Spa University, 2014: 35). This is significant because many of the participants had made their involvement in the school public, including those who had opposed the school. This said, the BSA state that all anonymity should be honoured when guaranteed by the research. For this reason, I have attempted to anonymised all data harvested from participants, even when the data is already available in the public domain. In the case of the parents interviewed, I took great care to ensure their anonymity through the use of pseudonyms and reviewing any data that might reveal their identity. I have destroyed all recordings and transcripts to ensure that the data cannot be reused.

## Chapter 3: Towards a new Theorisation of Class

> *'The desire to go home that is a desire to be whole, to know where you are, to be the point of intersection of all the lines drawn through all the stars, to be the constellation-maker and the center of the world, that center called love. To awaken from sleep, to rest from awakening, to tame the animal, to let the soul go wild, to shelter in darkness and blaze with light, to cease to speak and be perfectly understood.'*
>
> (Solnit, 2008)

In this chapter I attempt to present my theoretical framework as an iterative process, produced through employing the extended case method. To do this, I will describe the development of a number of interrelated concepts and their trajectory within the research, from origin to a point of rest. I put the process in these terms to acknowledge the fact that each concept was born into the research from an initial standpoint (predicated on a number of moral assumptions) and finished at a point where I feel they have offered enough consistency to the issue at hand so as to be laid at rest. It is important to mention that the iterative process has no finality; it can go on indefinitely. To this end, the research follows the maxim related to art, attributed to Leonardo De Vinci, which is never finished, only abandoned. Thus the end point of the theory, the theoretical framework, is the point I felt able to abandon my theoretical exposition of the case: it was the point I felt comfortable walking away; the point I felt that the outcome produced enough consistency of explanation so as to offer some insight into the issue at hand. I see the theoretical framework has having an important role in developing continuity of thought across space. The end point of this project also becomes the starting point from which I can

enter new fields and link past work to future possibilities through the evolution of theory.

In terms of organisation, this chapter mirrors my chapters that relate to my empirical work. It references ways my case study informed the development of my theoretical explanations, whereas my chapters on the case reference the way my theoretical accounts explained and guided my data collection. In doing so I aim to demonstrate the reflexive nature of the process, that is, that both my theoretical and empirical accounts evolved concurrently rather than one leading to the other.

This does bring up an important question in relation to starting points: did the empirical framing of the project start from a theoretical idea or did the theory emerge from the empirical experiences? In truth, this is a difficult question to answer, particularly when my approach tacitly acknowledged the constituted nature of all human endeavours. I have always been interested in the role class plays in education and I have historically drawn heavily on Marxist theorisations of class to explain the enduring link between wealth and academic attainment (Feinstein, 2003) vis-à-vis the role of education in maintaining existing economic relations.

This is important because education is a complex activity that also affords opportunities beyond school (Robertson and Verger, 2012: 2). It is therefore important that everyone is able to flourish within the education system so that they are afforded life opportunities beyond the classroom. The issue of free schools was of interest because, intuitively, it appeared obvious to me that these new schools would reflect existing class relations but I could not clearly explain how I knew this. There was an argument that various filtering mechanisms in the bidding process secured middle class privileges (discussed in more detail later in the thesis) but I was constantly reminded of Paul Willis' identification of the puzzling issue of why people from working class backgrounds let the middle classes take such privileges

uncontested (Willis, 1977). Thus free schools represented potentially fertile ground for me to develop more complex explanations of class dynamics in educational contexts.

For me, Solnit's quote, used at the start of this chapter, encapsulates the end point of my process of theorisation. My explanations came to increasingly focus on conceptualising education as something we all participate in but do not all feel an equal entitlement to. Social positioning (Bourdieu, 1984) clearly had a role in this process but it immediately became apparent to me that the new school, and education in general, elicited powerful emotional responses from the participants and this in turn had an impact on the way that some people were included within, and some people excluded from, the new free school.

I thus abandon my theorisation with the assertion that morality is an essential constituent of social orders and thus to social ordering in education. This is significant because traditional accounts of social class, predicated on the issue of exploitation (Savage, Barlow and Dickens, 1995: 1), are not enough to explain the historical phenomenon of social stratification, particularly within the context of education. I will argue that, more than taste, moral judgements are crucial to the way people interact and differentiate between themselves.

Having drawn on the claim that morality is the essence of social ordering (Rawls, 2010) , I then needed to consider the mechanisms by which morality created social orders in educational contexts. Unlike traditional notions of class, processes of moral evaluation cannot privilege one set of values over another and thus cannot generate hierarchies through objective reasoning alone (Sayer, 2011: 4). As a result, all claims to moral truth are relative to, and therefore contestable via, any other structures of norms and values (Rawls, 2010: 95) and, in theory at least, any person has equal claim to legitimacy in any given context at any given time.

Logically, equal claim to legitimacy should lead to a lack of social stratification, as people are able to successfully make their case for their own values. However, it quickly became apparent that this was not the case with the new school: certain groups were able to impose arbitrary values on the situation whilst others avoided the school entirely, fearing negative judgements and avoiding taking unnecessary risks that might involve such judgments (Sayer, 2011). There were thus two aspects to the process of stratification: firstly, the way that certain people felt entitled to access the new school and, in the process, pass judgment on others; secondly, the way that certain people felt excluded from the process and avoided any situations where they might come into contact with those that might judge them.

This led me to conclude that these processes are better represented using a horizontal, as well as a vertical model of class: social spaces become colonised by people who sustain their exclusive values via shared rituals, artefacts and practices. Rather than being purely vertically stratified, social reality therefore needs to be seen in terms of horizontal spaces (Massey, 2005). In doing so, we can view the scope of the world that people are able to inhabit.

For some, the places we live in contain many opportunities to access and interact in spaces with reference to some identifiable set of predefined social values. For others, the world is much smaller and characterised by alienating spaces that cannot be accessed and, worse still, present the risk of negative judgement for those who attempt to engage from an uncertain position (Sayer, 2005). I use the term moral bubbling to refer to this process of vertical stratification and horizontal colonisation: we all engage in shared activities constituted around accepted morals and values; the issue is with how much space these bubbles of activity take up, how many different spaces can connect to it, and which spaces get squeezed as a

result. Thus the process of bubbling is one of overlaid and interconnected bubbles operating within confined spaces.

This metaphor was developed from conceptualisations of space developed by human geographers such as Doreen Massey and Neil Brenner, and work on colonisation of space that emerged from interactionism, particularly Ervine and Harold Garfinkel. I began by considering ways in which the new free school was represented as a space. Much of the current work on the subject of space focuses on the way it is internalised through our interactions. This has also led to a focus on scale; for example, Brenner (2004) posits that different scales of space are internalised in a given moment. To adopt the language of Lefebvre (Lefebvre, 1979: 290), there has been an explosion of spaces, which have increasingly intensified during the globalising neoliberal period (Brenner and Theodore, 2002).

In contrast to these models, however, I had framed the problem as more of a 'bottom up' than 'top down' process. The school was in an extremely rural area, those trying to set it up were volunteers and, although the project was funded by central government, it was done so with a decentralising agenda that left those setting up the school to complain about the lack of support available to them. In effect, the group was given the money and left to get on with it. But this distinctive approach to education policy did not appear to lead to any significantly unpredictable outcomes in terms of social stratification. This is what led me to shift my focus from more structural, economic accounts of space and consider the way that space is marked out and claimed by individuals and groups (Goffman, 1971), which in turn led me to consider the powerful role that moral claims make in this process.

Whilst this explanation of space accounts for the horizontal (the way that space is demarcated and claimed) it does not explain why some groups are able to claim space and why other groups let them. What became apparent

from the case study was that certain moral assumptions had greater claims to entitlement than others. Much of this ability to assume entitlement to run the school, to send children to the school or to oppose the school referenced a certain discourse that is familiar to those involved in education. It is a certain type of language often repeated by politicians and those responsible for forming, and maintaining consistency of, the national system of education.

Whilst there is evidence there is a global dimension to the discourse, there is also a significant history to the discourse within England and Wales. Furthermore, this national scale of policy has affected the global dimension to the discourse as much as it has been affected by globalisation (Green, 2013). I thus drew on the concept of a discursive formation to make the connection between the efficaciousness of moral assumptions in the process of colonization and a national education discourse. This led me to consider the genealogy of discourse to develop a clearer sense of what utterances are included in it, how they link together and the values that they connote (see next chapter).

When I presented my findings to colleagues, one of the issues raised was whether it mattered that a group of professional and well-connected parents had set up a school if they were the most capable people to do it. This was a very difficult point to refute because the metaphor of moral bubbles presented is ultimately non normative and relativist (it explains how colonisation occurred in relation to the new school but not whether or not this was right).

This was unsatisfactory for two reasons. Firstly, it meant that education's claim to affect social mobility had been removed (if only middle class parents can set up their own schools it creates a system that is skewed against the disadvantaged). Secondly, moral relativism cannot be accepted in such an unproblematic way because it leads to a world where all acts

can be justified as equal to any other (Nussbaum, 1992). For this reason I argue that recognition and respect are fundamental human needs and therefore become a matter of social justice (Nussbaum, 1992).

I finish by drawing on the work of Jacques Rancière and Todd May to claim that, if we are going to successfully address issues relating to moral bubbling and the unfair colonisation of spaces, like schools, we need to promote engagement in forms of active equality (the assumption of equality as a precondition of interaction), as opposed to the passive model currently produced by the discursive formation (the construction of equality as an outcome of education) (May, 2008). Such actions not only help to demonstrate moments of inequality within educational discourses, but can also help to subvert the values from which moral bubbles are constituted.

## Beginnings: Thinking about Class

I began to try and make sense of the case study by mapping out the historical debates relating to class. Class has always been a preoccupation of the social sciences. With its roots in the Marxist and Weberian traditions, it has come to be a term that attempts to explain the unequal divisions that are evident in all societies (Crompton, 2008: 25). Within this early tradition, however, unequal outcomes were also inextricably linked with a process of exploitation, particularly the Marxist assumption that class was predicated on the relations of production. Such models inevitably created conceptualisations of social groups predicated on binary oppositions: exploitation is by one social group over another (Savage, Barlow and Dickens, 1995: 5). This has caused certain tensions as descriptive accounts of class do not correspond accurately to such theoretical categories (Crompton, 2000). Furthermore, the assumption of exploitation, closely linked to capitalism, necessarily created tensions in

the relationship between social structure and an individual's ability to act beyond this structure (agency).

### New Theorisations of Class

The theoretical models of both Weber and Marx have been subsequently reinterpreted and developed by social scientists using a range of approaches. However, all adopt the central axioms of the original theorisations and, as a result, all contain the same tensions between structure and agency. For example, C. Wright Mills reflected the post war tendency to reference Weber's approach in his detailed accounts of corporate expansion and the concomitant rise of white collar bureaucratisation in post war America (Mills and Jacoby, 2002). Such a tendency was evident in both the U.S. and Britain, with a number of significant works referencing class, employment and status in their accounts of social stratification (for example, Glass, 1963; Warner, 1963).

As Savage points out, however, these accounts reflect the theoretical problems of Weber's work in presenting the middle classes as passive lieutenants of social domination by a ruling elite (Savage, Barlow and Dickens, 1995: 4). Others have drawn on the apparent ambiguity between objective and subjective class conceptualisations in Marx's analysis to develop an approach that encompasses both Marx and Weber's theorisations. For example, Ralf Dahrendorf's Class and Class Conflict in an Industrial Society (1959) developed a more relational model that defined class structure from positions and associations in relation to participation in, and exclusion from, the conditioning effects of authority. Thus, to an extent, the reproduction of class relations that is foregrounded in Weber's work is merged with Marx's class-consciousness and the structural relations of production.

More recently, Goldthorpe referenced Lockwood's concept of 'market situation' (Lockwood, 1989: 15) to develop an occupational class scheme based on employment relations (Goldthorpe, Llewellyn and Payne, 1987). Whilst these approaches provide an ever more complex and nuanced account of class, they still maintain the same distinction between structure and agency and, ultimately provide a privileged position for the structuring capabilities of class over the individual. As Rosemary Crompton observes, at their most extreme, such approaches create empty boxes to be filled with human activity, thus reducing the role of individual actors to puppets (Crompton, 2008: 42).

Other theorisations have attempted to dissolve the distinction between structure and agency. For example, the more contemporary work of Laclau and Mouffe (2014) has attempted to reduce the significance of class structure by separating the link between an economic superstructure and a political base, thus, the working class is not necessarily a revolutionary class.

From a different starting point, Eric Wright developed a relational model of Marxist class structure (2000). With reference to ecological paradigms, Wright's model differentiates between different levels of class aggregation within the class structure so that the individual is recognised as the unit of analysis with different levels of aggregation built up from the micro, to the meso to the macro (Wright, 2000: 187). Wright's *from the ground up* model recognises the individual as the interface between psychology and sociology: the individual as the micro unit of sociology and (presumably) the macro unit of psychology. It should be noted that these categories also have a distinctly spatial dimension: Wright explicitly states that, whilst they are a nested hierarchy, they are not levels of abstraction (Wright, 2000: 189). Wright also introduces a set of analytical concepts alongside these levels of analysis, central to which are class location (an individual's location within the class structure), class structure (the aggregation of all

class relations) and class formations (the forming of boundaries and solidaristic relations, sometimes across class locations) (Wright, 2000: 191-192). Despite the potential that Wright's model offers for developing more individualistic empirical accounts predicated on Marxist axioms, it does not resolve the structure/agency tension and thus still contains a level of ambiguity, something Wright himself acknowledges (2000: 189).

Nevertheless, the model does offer some opportunities for developing coherent class dynamics. I take issue with Wright's assertion that the different levels of analysis are not different levels of abstraction, even if this difference is qualitative. Whilst I agree that individuals can be as abstract as institutions, this is dependent on the theoretical model applied. In this instance, institutions are a more generalised concept than individuals and thus are more abstract. In this sense, Wright's framework has some relevance to this case study and does provide possibilities for understanding the individual actor's actions within wider contexts of social stratification. But the problem of the relationship between structure and agency remains: although Wright's model adds another layer of sophistication to the issue of social stratification, he does not generate an understanding of the relationship between micro mechanisms and macro forces.

### Morality and Class

What is missing from all of the accounts of social stratification to date is a normative dimension: a sense of what people value and think is right. This is important, partly because it was a significant factor in the data I collected, and partly because it provides opportunities for explanations about why people choose not to get involved in certain social spaces. Claiming it is because they do not understand what is happening to them (false consciousness) is not good enough because we have no way of demonstrating that we, as experts, know better. My own understanding is

that, at least in part, people do not engage with certain spaces because they do not value them; or they may think that they are morally wrong.

Thus I focused on the contemporary work on the sociology of morality, and particularly the work of Anne Rawls (2010). At the centre of this approach is the claim that social orders are essentially moral in character (Rawls, 2010). Derived from Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodological approach (Garfinkel and Rawls, 2002; Rawls, 2010), which in turn relies on axioms derived from Durkheim's work (Rawls, 2005), Rawls asserts that social orders are constituted by moral normative assumptions about the way that we should be in the world and are thus emergent of wider social structures: moral interactions are emergent properties of social institutions but social institutions cannot be reduced to the same set of interactions. Although the notion of emergent properties is well established in the field of social science and an axiom of critical realism (Danermark, 2002: 186), they are not explicitly mentioned in any of the theories of class discussed.

### Durkheim, Social Self and Enacted Practice

Rawls' emergent approach is predicated on a specific interpretation of Durkheim's social facts whereby the individual is constituted *through* social enactment. Central to this interpretation is Durkheim's two persons distinction: each of us is two persons at the same time, a social being and an animal being (Durkheim and Fields, 1995: 16). To be human is to be social but our social being is predicated on a prior animal being: our primitive sense of visibility and division allow us to intuitively understand objects and actions through opposites (Durkheim and Fields, 1995: 146). This intuitive understanding is guided strongly by feelings of affinity or repulsion towards a given object (Durkheim and Fields, 1995: 146).

Such 'animalistic' responses are essential to the human condition but, predicated on the simple binary opposition of the animal being, this

process is transformed into almost limitless possibilities by the nature of human interaction (Rawls, 2005: 82). The gateway to this transformation is, what Durkheim labels as, the moral force of the sacred and the profane (Rawls, 2005: 100). This distinction transforms the dualisms of the animal self into a collective moral force that is the mother of all other categorisations (Rawls, 2005: 100). From this axiom, Durkheim continues to develop a theory of normativity: at the heart of all human activity, including our reasoned arguments are decisions about what is acceptable and what is not; what is sacred and what is profane.

Whilst one should not credit Durkheim with originality in respect of the relationship between fact and value (Weber's notion of rational authority makes similar claims about the fact/value relationship), he does provide us with a distinctive historical account of the significance of religious ritual to humanity. Thus he uses the term *enacted practice* to privilege rigid social practices, which have their roots in religious rituals and artefacts, over individual values and beliefs (Rawls, 2005: 3). It is only through the shared understanding of enacted practices (predicated on absolute moral beliefs) that humans are able to communicate.

Although there is some variation in the rituals themselves, the sensibilities that underpin such rituals vary little (Rawls, 2005: 14). Validity is generated within the enacted practices, but beliefs and understanding are external to them. Although this thesis might appear a little speculative, Durkheim draws upon extensive examples from Aboriginal religious rituals to demonstrate the point that solidarity occurs only through ritual religious enactment, designed to align the emotional lives of group members, in a process he refers to as 'collective effervescence' (Durkheim and Fields, 1995: 16). An important point here is that shared beliefs are not essential to group solidarity. It is shared rituals (enacted practice) alone that keep the group together. Shared beliefs may emerge from these practices but they do not provide cohesion (Durkheim and Fields, 1995: 16). Thus, those

who attempt to transform society by transforming beliefs are misunderstanding the problem – it is not what you say but what you do that is important.

Durkheim also provides a historical context to his work. Although the singular practices of primitive societies had long since disappeared in complex Western societies, the importance of shared religious practices and the level of solidarity remained fundamental. The rise of secular society during the Enlightenment led to a breakdown in the singularity of religious practice, replaced by morally weaker, secular institutions (Rawls, 2005: 2). This process of fragmentation has been exacerbated as the need for a division of labour has come to the fore: as the necessity for a division in labour has become greater, so the process of enacted practices has become more fragmented (Durkheim, 2013). Within this context, practices become increasingly difficult to enact, solidarity becomes increasingly difficult to establish and a crisis in meaning ensues (Rawls, 2005: 3).

### Mutual Intelligibility

Rawls links Durkheim's notion of the social self with Harold Garfinkel's work on mutual intelligibility to create a more nuanced and complex account of the construction of moral orders (Garfinkel and Rawls, 2002). Garfinkel's conceptualisation of the social self, derived from the field of social psychology, creates a model of self as a complex unit consisting of both objective and subjective elements: we experience objects in the world ('I'), whilst also being an object in the world ('me') (Mead and Morris, 2009). From its original conception, social psychologists have seen language as an essential element of the construction of identity (Mead and Morris, 2009). Garfinkel extends the linguistic notion of mutual intelligibility to cover the creation of all social artefacts that are used to develop the social self through shared meaning. In doing so, he is able to link to Durkheim's notion of enacted practices: the social artefacts by

which we share meaning connect to Durkheim's notion of rituals as the root of shared practice (Garfinkel and Rawls, 2002: 25).

This reconceptualization of social self provides an alternative account to the traditional sociological portrayal of the relationship between individual and institution (Garfinkel & Rawls, 2002: 25). Although Garfinkel does not deny the significance of institutions in social action, he posits that they operate in a constraining, rather than constitutive, role. The sharing of meaning through social artefacts is what constitutes the self and society, whilst pre-existing agreements in the form of institutional rules offer constraints that need to be negotiated so that interaction can take place (Garfinkel and Rawls, 2002: 55). Thus, in the case of the new school, groups formed based on agreed principles and negotiated with wider social structures such as the Department for Education.

### Bounded Social Orders

Durkheim argued that relative equality is inevitable in primitive societies, where enacted social practices occur in a singular fashion: where there is no differentiation in shared ritual practices there is no scope for differentiation and thus unequal outcomes. However, as the possibilities for ritually enacted practices become limited, social ordering becomes increasingly significant. Where there is no possibility for shared actions and understandings, values start to be placed within hierarchical orders.

To put it in Erving Goffman's terms, where the traffic is all travelling in the same direction, there is no social order because the group of individuals is orderly. It is only when people are required to aggress against one another that social order becomes evident (Goffman, 1971). Here, the work of Goffman is helpful in elucidating the ways in which social groups legitimise their existence and colonise social spaces. For Goffman, it is not possible to talk about an individual as a single, immutable entity; to do so is to miss

the pluralistic and polyvalent nature of a person's interactions with the world. Goffman prefers to use the term 'unit', referring to the different ways in which individuals and groups of people can be in the world (Goffman, 1971: 3-27).

Thus, a person can be many different units depending upon which context they are interacting in. Furthermore, an individual may not be acting alone (a single unit), thus a unit can also refer to an orderly group, which acts as one (a unit with). Goffman identified two main types of units: vehicular units and participation units. Whereas vehicular units refer to a single or collective unit's movement through space (that is, the rules they agree to, the negotiations they have to undertake and signals they have to make), participation units refer to the ways in which people connect with others. Goffman identifies that this can happen in two ways: units can be active within social contexts (they can interact within social contexts) or they can be passive (they can be present within a context but only as observers).

Goffman makes the point that participation is never static, for example, a person walking down a street as a passive participant may see someone they know and strike up a conversation, thus becoming an active participant; furthermore, they may continue their journey together, changing to a 'unit with'. A point of note here is that participation and vehicular units are interlinked: one is constantly required to interact, to negotiate their movement past other units, whilst walking down a road for example. However, this negotiation is not with a view to developing, or joining, a 'unit with' (Goffman, 1971: 3-27). In terms of the case study, this model of colonisation of space is helpful in understanding the various interactions and group dynamics that led to the creation of previously undetermined spaces. The model is particularly useful in understanding the way that markers were laid down in the creation of the school so that the space was clearly part of a distinctive social group.

The process of social ordering begins with an individual's or a group's (unit) claims to social goods. Goffman makes the significant point that all goods are bounded, that is, everything we value has distinct edges: the point at which something stops being valued is the boundary. Thus, for Goffman, social goods are themselves territories, which units make claims against. Of course, in making such claims, units extend and shape the nature of the territory they are colonising. This linking of space (territory) and goods (value) provides insights into the way spaces are formed and the social orders that run through them. Goffman uses the term 'markers' to refer to claims made by units to a given territory. These markers take the form of claims, or justifications to certain goods. These claims are subject to constant reproduction that is open to the possibility of failure due to internal and external constraints. Claims on a territory are upheld in two ways: firstly, through the utilisation of playful interactions, such as obtrusion and self-violation, which serve as methods of boundary testing; secondly, through the imposition of more formal routines, regulations and social practices. Territories can also be subverted due to preclusiveness (a failure to uphold the claims of the unit from within) or by encroachment from another unit (Goffman, 1971: 28-61).

Interactions within territories are the basis of all social order and are distinguishable by the fixed nature of the ends that they pursue. Because the process of claiming is linked to the process of colonisation, the concern of the unit is with the conditions and constraints that are placed upon the territory rather than the ends themselves: to present a choice of ends would be to undermine the process of colonisation itself (Goffman, 1971: xi). Whilst empirically observable, such processes of legitimation have no immanent relationship to truth; their validity is predicated solely on the internal relationships by which the social unit is formed, that are in turn based upon successful claims to certain social goods.

Thus, in relation to the school, spatial markers are closely related to claims of legitimation in terms of social goods. To put it another way: certain individuals and groups made claims on the school because they were able to legitimate them in moral terms e.g. those who set the school up did so out of a sense of righteousness.

## Moral Bubbling

This account of Durkheim's principles of the social provides the most basic framework for my metaphor of moral bubbling. Put simply, I see them as the enacted practices that are bound together by moral values (an agreement over the boundaries of what is good and bad), shared rituals and an agreement over entitlement. In the case study, these enacted practices were multifarious and overlapping (hence bubbling). But I want to refer back to Erik Wright's observations of the spatial aspects of class: these enacted practices did not cover the same amount of space nor did the aggregations of moral bubbles. Some bubbles gathered more people, claimed more social space and were more interconnected than other bubbles. None of the enacted practices I observed could be described as self contained; none of the bubbles were free floating, thus the moral bubbling I am referring to is more akin to the foam one might see whilst washing dishes. The concept of space is integral to this metaphor and, with reference to the work of Doreen Massey, I will now make a case for a model of space that is not necessarily akin to scale.

## Bubbles as Space

According to Massey, confusion between time and space emanates from a sense that both are facets that exist independently of us. Such an approach ignores the work of Kant, which is central to most modern paradigms of thought. For Kant, time and space are a priori functions, that is they form the architecture by which we make sense of the world: we see

objects in space but only make sense of them through difference, as they change through time (Massey, 2005: 57). In other words, both time and space are internal facets that form the basic architecture of cognition.

For Massey, this understanding necessarily requires a redefinition of the ontological question. Rather than a dualism between our experiences of an external world, predicated on matter, and our internalised thoughts, predicated on time, the world is actually a range of narratives that play out as we move through space and time. This is not to say that the two operate indistinctly; both have their own characteristics (Adam, 1990; Hayden, 1998). This redefinition of the relationship between space and time necessarily creates a more dynamic account of the real. Rather than a timeless, closed system, space becomes a 'discrete multiplicity (that is) imbued with temporality' (Massey, 2005: 55).

The multiplicity of possibilities afforded by Massey's approach are effectively illustrated by the distinction between 'space' and 'place', where 'place' is the positioning of static objects and 'space' is the multiple interactions that occur between objects (Agnew, 2011). Whereas the former provides no possibility for diverse outcomes and agency, the latter provides for multiple trajectories to exist within the same context. To illustrate the point, a flat reading of violent crime data might lead one to draw conclusions about which places are safe to travel to, and which are not. However, a more complex reading of the spaces involved might lead to differing conclusions about the types of people and the types of activities that lead to violence in a given context.

Furthermore, it is possible for an individual to operate multiple trajectories through the same place: one might meet at a local pub as a drinker, barman or businessman; each role positions the objects in the place differently and provides multiple outcomes. Thus, to draw on the case of this study, a new free school exists as a place (a building, furniture, tools)

but one that is continually being recreated and always subject to the possibility of change. As a space, it contains actors that progress on multiple trajectories (teachers, parents, pupils) including those that exist individually (a teacher can also be a parent).

Massey's work provides an opportunity to develop a more sophisticated ontology relating to the metaphor of bubbles: although they can extend out through physical space, they are mostly experienced relationally: as we move through the world we move from one moral bubble to another; we move from one set of enacted practices to another; from practices we are familiar with to practices we are not. These practices are always bounded to an extent and these boundaries are experienced from within, that is they are cognitive: we make sense of the space we are in with reference to our pre-existing mental maps (Harvey, 1996: 4); we feel comfortable or uncomfortable in the space.

Conversely we can move through space by standing still: we can be judged by different moral standards by different people as space passes through us. Thus, the difference as to whether we are wilfully moving or space is moving through us is not significant. In terms of the case study, as with all enacted practices, the school had a physical manifestation but this was an outcome of the social spaces in which the school developed. This is not to say that the building was not important in terms of its efficacy. It acted as an artefact around which rituals could be enacted, which was particularly important because some of these rituals were enacted on a macro scale, with links to national discourses of governance, that is, the education discursive formation: the building, the artefacts and practices it contained could be recognised on a wider scale as *a school* and, along with this recognition, various moral legitimations could be attached to its reason for existing.

### Power, Discourse and Moral Bubbling

The spatial aspect of moral bubbling provided me with a framework to describe the process of colonisation but it did not provide the scope for explaining why it is that some groups are able to colonise space whilst others are not. With reference to Anne Rawls, I have made the case for the importance of morals in the process and Margaret Archer's work on internal conversations provides some guidance on why it is that some people withdraw from some spaces. However, this still does not explain the efficacy of certain moral legitimations: why a certain group's claims are successful and why others concede them.

This led me to consider the way that power is constructed on different scales and the way that these scales are internalised within a given moment (Brenner, 2004). Drawing on the work of Foucault, I argue that power provides a different dimension to morality in the process of colonising spaces. Foucault's work on discourse is invaluable in contextualising the process of moral legitimation (how some individuals and groups are able to lay claim to existing spaces whilst others are not). For Foucault, the formation of discourse is essentially a historical process. Discourse is made of statements: things that have historical precedent and are capable of repetition (Foucault, 1972: 38). All language thus has a discursive dimension (all words can only be recognised through a process of repetition).

However, order of the repetition (when words can and cannot be uttered and in what order) is also significant. Thus, who has repeated what, how it connects to what others have repeated and how repetitions endure over time are an important aspect of power. This is the basis of the concept of a discursive formation, the regularity of 'objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices' (Foucault, 1972: 38). The ability to select

and repeat statements is the process of power: a social agent, able to enact a given practice through a historical discursive structure that transforms them into a public character (Fairclough, 2003: 140). This stratification of outcomes is termed *orders of discourse* by Fairclough (2003: 24) and I argue that such orders are a dimension of power that is an element of moral bubbling.

By this I mean it is one's sense of entitlement, based on their understanding of their familiarity with the discursive formation and their understanding of their position within it, that creates unequal access to (and between) moral bubbles. For example, Sarah (the main protagonist behind setting up the free school) felt entitled to bid for the school, to connect with people who she thought would help with the bid, to persuade other parents to decide the school's ethos, and to decide who should and who should not go to the school. At this point I am not making any kind of moral judgement about these actions, I am making a point that certain individuals and groups, based on historical discourses and a historical sense of self (class), create a sense of entitlement that produces certain types of outcomes.

As the example illustrates, it is the extent of the claim that is important: where the claims cover greater parts of the public sphere (Habermas, 1991), have high levels of generality (Fairclough, 2003: 124), and necessarily involve greater claims to material resources, the moral bubble has the potential to become large or part of a constellation of such bubbles. Where resources are finite (artefacts, attention), or where they are mutually exclusive, a certain antagonistic relationship can occur (e.g. I am good therefore you must be bad). Such a process leads to unequal outcomes: certain people or groups occupy spaces within the public sphere that others are unable to access, therefore, some people have less space to operate in.

However, the account of morality so far creates no essential means by which such entitlement can be seen as transcendentally normative: unequal access to space cannot be seen as essentially good or bad. In the next section I will attempt to generate some essentialist principles that allow for a more generalised account of morality that transcends the moral order described.

### Morality and Ethics

The problem with accounts so far discussed is that they only provide scope for describing what is happening, they do not make the case for change. In terms of my case study, purely describing the context is unacceptable because one of the central tenets of education is its ability to change a person's circumstances (see the next chapter for more detail). Furthermore, the exclusion from any social space needs to be considered from a more normative perspective because of the potential harmful outcomes it can produce. Olssen draws upon a number of texts in which Foucault refers to a basic philosophy of life. Put simply, such a philosophy involves the basic human conditions of life, those required for humans to exist (Olssen, 2010a: Ch. 6).

Rawls also provides an ethical dimension to her framework. If all mutually intelligible interactions are equal, she argues, and all interactions are necessary to the development of self, it is also possible to make transcendental ethical arguments about the nature of interaction, that is, we can make claims about certain elements of interactions that are good (Rawls, 2010: 95). Using the work of Martha Nussbaum, I will now attempt to make a case for an essentialist account of moral orders (that they can be good or bad) before going on to consider how such orders can be challenged at the point when they do not meet the basic conditions of life.

### Nussbaum's Thick Rich Description of Human Rights

Contemporary debates relating to the notion of essential truth are closely associated with the Kantian notion that our understanding of the real world is mediated through our sensory perceptions and various conceptualisations of the world, a perspective that can be referred to as metaphysical realism (Nussbaum, 1992: 206). As a result, ethical propositions have also slid towards more relativist approaches: if the real world cannot be known, it is also impossible to say that one version of 'right' is better than another. Therefore, contemporary approaches tend to emphasise power as the arbiter of righteousness: our sense of what is right and wrong is merely the playing out of power relationships where the dominant voice imposes an order of discourse on the weaker voice. I agree with Rawls that social orders are ultimately the product of power relationships and, as Foucault makes clear, such orders are predicated on historical forms of power. Like Rawls, however, Nussbaum argues that such approaches do not necessarily undermine the case for moral essentialism (Nussbaum, 1992).

To counter claims of moral relativism, Nussbaum formulated what she refers to as her 'thick vague theory of the good' (Nussbaum, 1992: 214). To begin with, she argues that something must connect us all as humans. This is because we are all able to distinguish between a human and a non-human with relatively little effort. This means that humanity is a very distinct class of object that must therefore have shared, distinctive characteristics (Nussbaum, 1992: 215-216). Furthermore, to deny the capabilities and constraints that enable us to be human can therefore be said to be unethical: to deny what makes us human is to dehumanise.

To develop a greater level of specificity relating to the capabilities and constraints, Nussbaum sets out a three level process of categorisation,

moving from the most general, but uncomplicated, categories to more specific but complex categorisation. At the most general level, these capabilities and constraints relate to our mortality and our bodies: all humans live and die, and have an aversion to death; all humans get hungry and thirsty, have a need for shelter (to keep warm and dry), have a desire to be mobile (to move about), and have sexual desires; all humans have a capacity for pleasure and pain; to perceive, imagine and think; all humans are reliant on others from the day they are born; all humans have a desire to manage their own lives through the application of practical reasoning; all humans empathise with other humans; all humans have an ability to laugh and play; finally, all humans have a sense of separateness, that is, they perceive themselves (and are perceived) as distinctive units in themselves (for example, all humans have a name) (Nussbaum, 1992: 216-220) .

To deny any human their ability to enact these characteristics, or to remove the conditions that make these things possible, is to dehumanise and thus can be said to be unethical. Thus, to not value someone else's life; to deny them the opportunity to quench their thirst; or to deny them the opportunity to move, are actions that are essentially wrong. Basic human functioning accounts for a distinctive set of needs, above which, is a threshold of humanity (the point at which an individual can be human). But Nussbaum asserts that, despite increasing complexity, the extent to which human behaviour can be said to be ethical goes beyond this (Nussbaum, 1992: 221). It is not enough to merely allow people to live human lives; it is also important to ensure that people are able to live good lives. Although the mandate for this statement is less clear (Are we responsible for ensuring everyone lives a good life? If so, how far are we responsible?), Nussbaum points out that it is a necessary characteristic of all societies (all societies aspire to make life better for their populations) and therefore is an essential aspect of social policy. The point seems particularly acute in relation to education: it is impossible to imagine

socialised education that does not have as its core purpose a better life for all.

## A politics of recognition

Building on my conceptulaisation of moral bubbling and Nussbaum's thick rich ethics, I will now make a case for the importance of recognition as an essential dimension of social justice. The rebirth of the politics of recognition can largely be attributed to Charles Taylor, who used Hegelian principles to create a politics of equal recognition. For Taylor, the idea of equality is realised through two discourses. Firstly, there is the principle of equality of rights and entitlements that are attached to the discourse of citizenship. Through this discourse, each individual is recognised as the same through being a citizen (belonging to) a society. Secondly, each individual is recognised through the politics of difference: each individual is recognised as a unique entity (Taylor, 1992: 37-39).

However, Taylor's work largely focuses on the importance of identity in multicultural societies. This has led to a tranche of writing on the need for recognition amongst minority groups (for example, see Nancy Fraser, 2010). Much of this writing has been within the paradigm of critical theory and has thus positioned recognition with emancipation and emancipatory groups. However, as Axel Honneth has pointed out, such models only recognise groups that are already enabled as political entities. What they do not recognise are the everyday experiences that an individual might feel as unjust.

Everyday examples of these experiences can be found in the *Weight of the World* (Bourdieu, 1999), which provides detailed accounts of everyday social deprivation that exists beyond the public sphere, for example: the feminization of poverty, which disproportionately affects single mothers; long-term unemployment, which forces people into a life of isolation and

private disorganization; the experience of having one's vocational skills rendered obsolete by rapid technological development; increased pressure on the rural economy, where increased work levels are matched by increasing deprivation; and, the economic difficulties experienced by lower paid, large families, where both parents are required to work and yet still find it difficult to support their children (Fraser and Honneth, 2003).

Honneth's own framework refers back to the three spheres of recognition that were originally part of Hegel's approach: love, law, and achievement. These spheres exist concentrically: law encompasses love; achievement encompasses law (Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 142). Honneth's approach, however, is distinctive because he understands these spheres as existing within a specific historical context, that of bourgeois-capitalist society. For Honneth, this context creates a distinctive social order that, due to the emphasis on profit and exchange, is heavily stratified and heavily influenced by the politics of recognition (Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 142).

This is primarily due to the distinctiveness of the sphere of achievement. Love (as nurturing) and care (the reciprocal support of those who are close) are relative constants. However, the process of labour has transformed the sphere of achievement. Whilst under feudalism, relationships were defined more by a sense of belonging and thus a sense of care, within capitalism one's status is defined by achievement within a process of production. This has had a profound effect on our sense of justice and recognition. For Honneth, this shift places recognition at the heart of the matter. Thus today, all senses of injustice, judicial or otherwise, can be interpreted as a perceived lack of recognition (Fraser and Honneth, 2003).

### The Importance of Internal Conversations to Recognition

There is a danger that a turn to the essentialist dimension of morality can generate an ontological account, which loses the subjective dimensions of

the problem. For this reason, I want to return to a more subjective model that considers the way that each of us acts and reacts to discursive formations and the formation of moral bubbling. Margaret Archer's approach provides an account of the interplay between internal conversations and the external discursive conditions that affect (and are affected by) them.

In particular, Archer's theory of reflexivity provides an individualised internal account of recognition so that the researcher can make general deductions about individual actions in relation to broader conditions of existence (2003). In a triangular relationship, individuals bring their own values, beliefs and morals to bear on education: we imagine ourselves as coherent, single beings; we act through this being in the external world as we understand it; we move forward with purpose and conviction based on our own sense of what is right and good (morals) (Archer, 2003). This means that we constantly position ourselves in relation to education based on our sense of ourselves as normative beings.

Using a critical realist framework, she develops an account of the relationship between the internal elements that constitute the individual and the external conditions that are brought to bear on them. Central to Archer's model is the notion of *internal conversations*: the constant internalized activity that we all engage in to maintain our sense of wholeness in the world, to maintain our identity in the face of complex and contradictory external conditions (Archer, 2007: 2). Some of this talk involves interactions with external objects and a process whereby the object under consideration is bent back upon the subject; this is how Archer describes reflexivity (Archer, 2007: 2). At its most intense, reflexivity involves 'thrashing it out between object and subject' (Archer, 2007) so that the relationship between the two is resolved and both are accommodated within the mind of the individual.

At the heart of this process is value: we act on internal goods that we care about most; that together make the constellation of objects that constitute our identity: the objects we project value onto also project back to us and make us whole. As Archer observes 'no one can have an ultimate concern and fail to do something about it' (Archer, 2007: 7). Thus, we engage with purpose in the world; people initiate projects to protect themselves and the things they care about. Like Archer, I use the term object to refer extensively to social objects (discourses, practices, symbols etc.) (Archer, 2007: 4). This is not to deny the existence of a material world but to acknowledge the social aspect that is an intrinsic part of all objects as we see them. The key point here is that any attempts to pursue a project entails two sets of causal powers: our own and those that pertain to an external reality (Archer, 2007: 7). Archer argues that this process can break down and this can have a significant impact on social mobility.

## The Case for Active Equality

Although somewhat unorthodox for a sociological study, I want to finish by providing possibilities for action against the kind of social injustice related to morality and recognition outlined. With reference to Rancière's notion of dissensus (Ranciere and Corcoran, 2010) I argue that a sense of entitlement can be challenged and subverted so that a more equal distribution of moral spaces can be achieved. Rancière's work focuses on the paradoxical nature of the concept of democracy and the way this can lead to inequitable outcomes. I assert that this case study is a manifestation of *democratic paradox* at the level of collective activity between local groups and between local groups and the state. Democratic paradox refers to the inherent tensions that exist between conceptualisations of state and individual democracy (Ranciere and Corcoran, 2010).

This tension is predicated on a misconception of a relationship between *a state* and *the people* in the singular (*the people* as opposed to individual persons); between community and individual; between collective expression and individuality (Ranciere and Corcoran, 2010: 7). The result of this misconception is ultimately the suppression of desires and the privileging of collective voice within the public sphere: we express ourselves through existing institutional discourses; these discourses allow everyone to express themselves regardless of the time and space in which they exist; (but) institutional discourses do not acknowledge the distinctive time and space in which individuals exist. To put it another way, everyone can project their own desires onto democratic life in any way that makes sense to them but democratic life will also have a conditioning effect on us: it will constrain us to accommodate the essential aspects of its discursive form.

Whilst acknowledging the tensions associated with homogeneous democratic discourses and the need to suppress individual desire for the good, Rancière also provides a way forward for those who move through society relatively unrecognised, a process he refers to as *dissensus* (Ranciere and Corcoran, 2010; Rancière, 2011). For Rancière, the problem is not social institutions' tendency to homogenise, it is the inability of interest groups to change the way that such homogenisation takes place.

As with Honneth, Rancière identifies the problem as the social relationships themselves, rather than the outcome of the social relationships (distribution). Todd May uses the term *passive equality* to refer to the current state of politics whereby a few powerful voices decide who is entitled to what (May, 2008: 3). Even those who profess to support the cause of inequality are actually part of the process because they are still part of the elite who assume they are entitled to represent others who are not entitled to speak. Furthermore, we are involved in the *policing* of social relationships: we all engage in activity that reinforces them. For

example, in the case study, policy makers, teachers, parents, pupils, journalists, charities etc. were all involved in policing the education discursive formation and the social relationships that emanated from it: policy makers invoked the discursive elements of it in their policy texts; teachers used it to justify their practices; parents referred to it in justifying their school choices; and journalists referred to it in their articles that passed judgment on free schools policy.

For May, such policing of existing social relations, however well meaning, will always lead to passive outcomes because the nature of the relations can not be subverted (May, 2008). Referencing Rancière's notion of dissensus, May asserts that greater equality can only be achieved when those who are the subjects of policing assume equality as the precursor to social relations, rather than the outcome; something May refers to as *active equality* (May, 2008: 3). Inevitably this often means individuals can police or be subjected to policing within the same social structure. With reference to May, it is only when people within the social structure attempt to subvert these existing relationships that they will be subject to change.

## Conclusion

So a process of theorisation that began by referencing historical accounts of class struggle, economic inequality and exploitation reached a point of abandonment with the assertion that equality cannot be given, only taken (May, 2008: 90). I attempted to ameliorate the problems associated with structure and agency by producing a relational model of social stratification that had morality at its heart. To do this I used Durkheim's account of enacted social practices (Rawls, 2005: 3), the concept of space and colonisation taken from both human geography (Massey, 2005) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel and Rawls, 2002; Goffman, 1971). I drew on Anne Rawls' concept of morality to argue that all social orders are

ultimately constitutive of moral statements. In addition, I posited that Foucault's account of discourse and power adds an additional dimension to the process of social ordering and gives rise to my use of the metaphor of moral bubbling. Ultimately, I argue the extent of people's scope for action in the world is predicated on their sense of entitlement: where they feel their position within a discursive structure allows it, they will make more of their own moral assumptions and use them to legitimate wider agendas that require wider use of material resources. In metaphorical terms, they will construct larger bubbles or ones that connect to wider constellations.

But describing the context of the new school was not enough: to limit myself to this approach would have left my work bereft of a sense of how things should be. So I then considered wider normative issues of social ordering and, with reference to Martha Nussbaum and Mark Olssen, I argued that essential moral statements could be made within the domain of a philosophy of basic human life. Nussbaum identifies recognition and interaction as fundamental to the human condition and, a la Axel Honneth, I made the case that recognition is an issue that is pertinent to social justice.

Unlike more structural accounts, I argue that a recognition of everyday existence is a fundamental human right: it is only when our values and moral standpoints are recognised within the spaces we operate that proper interaction can take place. I finished with an argument as to what can be done to subvert and change the nature of moral bubbling. Whilst the process of ordering cannot be changed (ordering will always take place), the nature of moral bubbling can. Here I used Todd May's interpretation of Rancière's theory of dissensus to make a case for active equality: equal relationships have to be a presupposition of interaction, not an outcome, if power is to become neutralised and the subsequent moral bubbling to become more equal in its scope.

## Chapter 4: Mapping out the Genealogy of the English education discursive Formation

> *'The progress of schools and universities measures that of nationalism, just as schools and especially universities became its champions'*
>
> (Hobsbawm, 2010: 166)

As has already been discussed, references to education policy were a significant aspect of participants' reasons for their actions in relation to the new school. I have linked this to different scales of power (Brenner, 2004), and particularly the idea of an education discursive formation (see chapters 2 and 3). The purpose of this chapter is to provide at least a partial account of this English education discursive formation. To do this, I begin with a brief description of the wider historical context within which compulsory education emerged. This is important because the reasons for making education compulsory were multifaceted and often complex, with evidence of tensions and disagreements over the issue amongst policy makers.

Secondly, I undertake a critical discourse analysis to map out the lineage of educational concepts so as better to understand how they are used today and to what ends. Texts were selected based on their relevance to distinctive education policy shifts, which have occurred since education first became compulsory in statute. These texts included Forster's parliamentary speech to introduce the 1870 Reform Act, The Hadow Reports that began in the 1930s (and heavily influenced the 1944 Education Reform Act), The Plowden Report from 1967, Callaghan's Ruskin Speech from 1976, and texts relating to the major reform acts of 2006 and 2010. Sections were analysed thematically to establish consistencies (and distinctiveness) in discourse.

From this process, three distinctive themes emerged that legitimated and defined education in relation to: economic needs (global competitiveness), social cohesion (community), social justice (social mobility) and marketisation (new public management). I use Fairclough's term *orders of discourse* (2003: 24) to describe the way that normative concepts are ordered within the text. In this sense, they are the structural part of the discursive formation that is drawn on to enact practices that has an effect on moral bubbling.

### Historical Background to English Compulsory Education

Social policy is a complex entity that entwines different interests, values and conceptualisations of the world. However, this complex arrangement is often predicated on some relatively simple assumptions about the nature and purpose of a given social policy. In effect, a policy can have its own 'DNA' –a set of self-evident truths that act as a 'communion' on a national scale (Anderson, 2006: 6). In Foucault's terms these assumptions relate to the concept of discourse (any statement that is repeatable from a previous historical moment) (Foucault, 1972: 38) and discursive formations 'the general enunciative system that governs a group of verbal performances' (Foucault, 1972: 119). In the case of education discourses, these are relatively well defined within the context of the nation state: schools are accepted as a necessary constituent of the state and are constituted by certain necessary elements e.g. teacher, pupil, classroom, and curriculum. In addition, there are also a number of associated practices e.g. teaching, learning, literacy and so on.

I argue that the reasons for this consistency in education policy can be found in the historical roots of nation building. As Benedict Anderson observes, these roots have evolved from the complex interaction between new relations of production (capitalism), new technological forms of communication (print), and a fatality of linguistic diversity (2006: 43). The

interaction of these three elements in the formation of nation states ultimately created a sense of national consciousness through unified fields of exchange and communication, replacing smaller, fragmented spaces (Anderson, 2006; Green, 2013).

As Andy Green argues, Education is both defined by, and essential to, nation building (Green, 2013). Tracing the historical roots of compulsory education in Europe, Green argues that, despite romantic notions of education as part of a process towards democratic enlightenment (Rousseau, 1979), the concept of compulsory education actually has its routes in the totalitarian Prussian state of the early Nineteenth Century (Green, 2013: 40). It was the Prussian education system that was the first of its kind in Europe and one that many in England looked to as a model of distinction (Green, 2013: 20). As Green observes, this turn of events excludes the possibility of a necessary link between the expansion of the capital processes of production and education: Prussia had not engaged significantly in industrialisation at the point it introduced state education and England introduced its own system after its industrial revolution (Green, 2013: 48). For Green, what is consistently evident in the historical roots of education systems across Europe and the United States is that education is used as a method of reinforcing and re-imposing class relationships, usually at points of perceived social crisis. These crises were often the result of the rapid expansion of urban areas, which resulted in the breakdown in existing social structures such as the family (Green, 2013: 57).

Green draws on a number of examples of political texts that describe both the fear of a new urban working class (Green, 2013: 57) and the articulation of these fears with the need for compulsory education (Green, 2013: 60). These fears were complexified when the existing arrangements for schooling, consisting of Church, charity and private schools, broke down under the strain of the demand for provision (Green, 2013: 67) and thus

created a vacuum for reformers to propose reform of the system. As such, it can be deduced that education represents a consolidation of liberal regimes in the face of new social arrangements, and new struggles, with an emerging working class (Green, 2013: 41). The primary function of education was thus hegemonic: to present middle class interests as the common interests and securing common consent as a result (Green, 2013: 100).

Prior to the 1870 Education Reform Act, when education became statutory in England for children of a certain age, education provision in England had been fragmented and patchy (Chitty, 2009). Although much of these divisions reflected the emerging class dynamics of the industrial revolution, two distinct justifications for education emerged: the need for skills and training made necessary by industrialisation and the need to educate the masses to ensure they were able to participate in universal suffrage (Gillard, 2011). The justifications manifested themselves in complex ways across class boundaries and social contexts. For example, the old public schools were placed under increasing pressure to 'modernise' their curriculum to reflect new scientific knowledge, whilst the success of 'monitorial schools' - the steam engines of the moral world (Harrison, 1967) - demonstrated the drive towards a moral education for all. These two conceptualizations often acted in conflict with one another: the Church and politicians advocating a wider moral education whilst those who represented the interests of industry wanting a narrower curriculum that focused on work based skills, training and the teaching of the good habits of work (Chitty, 2002). Schools also became increasingly recognised in the political system, culminating in the 1870 Education Reform Act.

References to community are also significant in relation to a national system of education. The term has a long association with education, notably with reference to the moral education provided by voluntary schools that preceded compulsory education (Gillard, 2011; Hale, 2006). As

illustrated by Forster's speech, discussed later in this chapter, the term 'community' in this form is closely associated with moral correction of the undeserving poor; the community are endangered by the ignorant (criminals and unfortunate individuals) but education can remove this ignorance. The term, however, shifted in the early Twentieth Century, particularly through the influence of the Hadow Reports. These reports tended to define community in two ways: firstly, a community of learners (within the school); secondly, the school as part of the community (the common school) (Board of Education, 1931). Both of these definitions were also taken up by the Plowden Report, which directly referenced the Hadow Reports (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967: 29).

However, Plowden amplified the term 'common school' to reflect international conceptualisations of 'extended schools.' With particular attention to 'community schools' in the United States (U.S.), Plowden redescribes schools in economic terms as a resource that should be used by the whole community (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967). The recontextualisation of U.S. community discourses is interesting and represents a new direction of education policy in England. In the U.S., the notion of a school has gained some romantic credence based on historical context: the 'small, white painted building' at the heart of a pioneer community (Tyack, 1974: 15-16). In such a discourse, the school represents the hub of the community: not just a place where children are educated, but also a space where people interact socially and politically (Tyack, 1974: 15-16).

As such, it is the apotheosis of localism, the centralising mechanism within a structure of small, diverse and self-governing populations. Such cultural reference points create an ambivalence to hierarchical state structures that, by their nature, are a centralising force that serves to disempower local communities (Brouillette, 2002: 29). Such a conceptualisation of 'community' is, in many ways, the exact opposite of that described by

Forster. For Forster, a state education system was required to protect communities from themselves (the undeserving elements of the community), whilst the U.S. model represents the school as part of a local community that needed to protect itself from the state.

If Plowden represented a reorientation of community discourses in education, Tony Blair's 'third way' politics gave it new momentum. Sarah Hale identifies community as a New Labour theme rather than a specific policy, that is, it is something that is reflected in a range of areas to the point that the involvement of the community became necessary to access government funding for almost any local project (2006: 75). This reflects Blair's early rhetoric where he often associated himself with the concept of community (2006: 33). The extent to which Blair took communitarianism seriously has been debated (2006: 32) but he does make explicit reference to the work of the Christian communitarian John Macmurray (2006: 82). Although predating the new wave of communitarian writers, Macmurray concurs with the general principle that the potential of humanity is only realised through others.

Although it was the coalition government of 2010 that first introduced free schools policy, many aspects of Blair's communitarian discourse were still evident. Free schools were part of The Big Society political project (Cameron, 2009) that aimed to connect people to their communities, through affection rather than procedure and purpose (Norman, 2010). Thus, community has become a word that sits in tensions with other parts of the English education assemblage. From a term that separated the deserving from the undeserving poor, to something that had to be protected from itself, it has recontextualised and internalised other definitions, particularly from U.S. socio-cultural sources.

## A Critical Discourse Analysis of English Policy Texts

In this section I will conduct a critical discourse analysis to demonstrate the aspects of the education discursive formation that, I argue, has existed in education policy since education became compulsory under statute in 1870. I begin with William Forster's parliamentary speech that was the prelude to the 1870 Education Reform Bill. In doing so, I aim to highlight the comparable elements that exist between compulsory-education, at its moment of definition, and subsequent discourses relating to education policy.

### Theme 1: The Global Imperative

In justifying the education reform bill, Forster represented compulsory education as both a necessary part of the nation state and one that was alarmingly lacking (Gillard, 2011). For example:

> *'We must not delay. Upon the speedy provision of elementary education depends our industrial prosperity. It is of no use trying to give technical teaching to our artisans without elementary education; uneducated labourers-and many of our labourers are utterly uneducated-are for the most part, unskilled labourers, and if we leave our work folk any longer unskilled, notwithstanding their strong sinews and determined energy, they will become over-matched in the competition of the world.'*
>
> (Forster, 1870).

The modalising verb 'must' in the opening declaration reveals a high level of commitment to the need for education for all. This assertive language is in direct contrast to the abstract nouns that the claims are made against (education, prosperity, world competition). As far back as 1870 education

was thus imagined as a necessary component of the nation state that, in turn, was imagined as an actor within a globally competitive world. The linking of education with global competition, together with a highly modal style of rhetoric (represents the world with a high level of certainty) is a feature of many contemporary education policy texts. I shall refer to this aspect of education discourse as *the global imperative*: the sense that there is an alarming deficit in the national education system, that there is no alternative but to educate, that we need to compete globally and that we need to do so immediately. This style of discourse is characterized by a high level of commitment, references to abstract nouns and has been evident throughout the history of compulsory English education. For example, in 1955 Winston Churchill stated:

> *'In the last ten years, the soviet higher technical education for mechanical engineering has been developed both in numbers and quality to an extent, which far exceeds anything we have achieved. This is a matter, which needs the immediate attention of Her Majesty's Government…if we are – not to keep abreast – but even to maintain our proportionate place in the world'*
>
> (Young, n.d.).

Although the context has changed, the discursive elements identified in the first extract are still evident: the high level of modality with reference to abstract nouns ('Soviet education…has been developed both in numbers and quality'); the sense of urgency ('requires immediate attention') and the threat of global competition to the nation state, ('maintain our proportionate place in the world').

And an example of a more contemporary text produced by the Department of Education and Employment states:

> *'We are in a new age — the age of information and global*

> *competition. Familiar certainties and old ways of doing things are disappearing. The types of jobs we do have changed, as have the industries in which we work and the skills they need. At the same time, new opportunities are opening up as we see the potential of new technologies to change our lives for the better. We have no choice but to prepare for this new age in which the key to success will be the continuous education.'*
>
> (Department of Education and Employment, 1998).

Again, we see the same discursive features: the high level of commitment ('we *are* in a new age', 'we have no choice but to') contrasted with the extensive use of abstract nouns ('age of information', 'global competition'), and the use of global competition as an imperative ('we have no choice but to prepare for this new age').

Relating these analyses back to the initial theoretical model, the connection between national consciousness and education is made clear. It is only within the context of a nation state, which is in competition with other nation states, that the need for an education system makes sense. Thus, all justifications for education policy have their roots in the capitalist state and its dynamics.

### Theme 2: Meritocracy and the Deserving Poor

One aspect of education policy that is distinctively missing from Forster's introduction to the 1870 Education Bill is the issue of social mobility. Forster concludes his remarks to The House with the following:

> *'Let us then each of us think of our own homes, of the villages in which we have to live, of the towns in which it is our lot to be busy; and do we not know child after child—boys or girls—growing up to probable crime, to still more probable misery,*

*because badly taught or utterly untaught? Dare we then take on ourselves the responsibility of allowing this ignorance and this weakness to continue one year longer than we can help?'*

(Forster, 1870)

Here the legitimation for universal education is couched strongly in moral and causal terms: a lack of teaching is causally linked to crime. It is the duty of 'us' (parliament) to stop 'ignorance' and 'weakness'. This legitimation has strong normative references and relies particularly on a moral justification for the need for compulsory education (Fairclough, 2003: 98). There is also a strong power dynamic in this discourse: parliament is able to evaluate morality, and is thus morally aware; those who are to be acted upon (those not educated properly) are morally ignorant. The strong reference to causality also creates a strong relationship between 'crime' and 'untaught'. An order of discourse runs throughout the text and intersects with class dynamics associated with wealth. For example:

*'we have done well in assisting the benevolent gentlemen who have established schools, yet the result of the State leaving the initiative to volunteers, is, that where State help has been most wanted, State help has been least given, and that where it was desirable that State power should be most felt it was not felt at all. In helping those only who help themselves, or who can get others to help them, we have left un-helped those who most need help. Therefore, notwithstanding the large sums of money we have voted, we find a vast number of children badly taught, or utterly untaught, because there are too few schools and too many bad schools, and because there are large numbers of parents in this country who cannot, or will not, send their children to school.'*

(Forster, 1870)

Here there is a significant discrepancy in the agency attributed to the different actors. 'Gentlemen' are collocated with 'benevolent', providing them with a privileged position within the order of discourse. They are also given agency within the education system: they 'want' help from the government (as opposed to needing or being provided with help). The order of discourse is further established through a distinction between those 'who help themselves' and 'those who most need help': gentlemen want/ask, others are able to seek help whilst others are unable to help themselves. This point is further emphasized in the final sentence. Here a new evaluative order is introduced: good schools, bad schools, parents who cannot send their children to school, parents who will not send their children to school. This is a logic of appearance, that is, a list that gives no apparent prominence to any one of these issues (Fairclough, 2003: 94). However, it is worth noting the effect that repetition has here: the first two points (too few good schools, too many bad schools) are the same point reversed. Removing the initial, positive framing of the issue would create a more negative focus on those who currently provide education (benevolent gentlemen).

This discourse needs to be seen within the historical context of class dynamics and attitudes in England. It was not until the emergence of a welfare state after the Second World War that the notion of meritocracy was foregrounded within education policy. Prior to this, the notion of social mobility was focused on the discourse of a 'deserving poor': hardworking people who deserved a little bit more than they had (Chitty, 2002). More recently, the issue of social justice has become more significant in policy texts. The reasons for this shift are complex and nuanced. Historically, education provision expanded concurrently with the expansion of the middle classes after the Second World War (Chitty, 2002). The expansion of secondary education after the War to include modern schools was met with a wide level of frustration by middle class parents, who found

opportunities for their children to access a grammar school education limited. As Benn and Chitty (1996: 8) put it: 'The middle class was expanding and grammar schools were not'. As a consequence, the resulting reforms, which advocated the establishment of comprehensive schools, gave greater prominence to the ideas of social mobility and equal opportunity. However, it is worth noting that this type of social mobility was *for* the middle classes who were already familiar with the language of aspiration. In the ensuing years, a discourse has emerged that merges both the notion of a deserving poor and the notion of middle class aspiration. The following extract from the 2006 education white paper demonstrates the way both concepts are used interchangeably:

> *'…we must deliver for all children, but particularly for those whose family background is most challenging. Education is one of the keys to social mobility, and so we must make sure that a good education is available to every child in every community. This White Paper sets out how we will meet these challenges and build the school system we all want for our children. More than anything it is a White Paper about aspiration. We must have the highest aspirations for every child whatever their talents and ability. And we must have a schools system that can respond to those aspirations.*
>
> (Department for Education Schools and Family, 2006)

The first sentence of this extract reflects the same order of discourse defined in Forster's text: 'we (parliament) must (declaration of duty) deliver (active verb) for all children…particularly for those whose family background is most challenging'. Again, the poorest are presented passively (i.e. they need and are not able to help themselves). In essence, this is a reference to the deserving poor: those who cannot help themselves but deserve to be helped. In this extract, however, we can see the use of language that was absent from the educational discourse of

1870. Specifically, this is the language associated with meritocracy, namely 'social mobility' and 'aspiration'. However, an interesting logic of appearance (Fairclough, 2003: 94) exists in the opening two sentences of this passage. The first sentence refers to the 'most challenging' families. The next clause is declarative but has an additive relationship (Fairclough, 2003: 89) with the previous one: 'Education is one of the keys to social mobility'. The next clause is another declarative statement (demonstrates a high level of commitment), and also has an additive relationship with the first clause (and so we must make sure that a good education is available to every child in every community). The logic of appearance is thus:

- We must deliver education to those from the most challenging backgrounds
- And, education is the key to social mobility
- And, education should be available to all.

This use of additive logic means the passage can be read in a number of ways. For example, the passage could mean either that *education helps poor people become socially mobile*, or that *all children should have equal opportunities to do well*. This is significant because it means the text can simultaneously appeal to middle class aspiration whilst also declaring intent to discriminate against them, that is, by giving particular attention to the poor.

One final example from the same document provides a similar logic of appearance between social mobility, inequality and global competition:

> *'Standards must keep rising in the globalised world in which we now live. High standards must be universal to every child in every school in every community. The attainment gap between high and low achieving schools is too great. And a child's educational achievements are still too strongly linked to their*

*parents' social and economic background – a key barrier to social mobility.'*

(Department for Education Schools and Family, 2006)

The logic of appearance here is:

- The attainment gap between rich and poor is too great; standards need to keep rising.
- Education achievements are linked to economic background, a barrier to social mobility.

Each of these statements contains a causal link (standards needs to rise to reduce inequality; education standards cause social mobility). But there is also a logic of appearance between inequality and social mobility (one is mentioned after the other without recourse to a causal link). Furthermore, the use of globalisation is interesting. Here it is used as a form of causal inference between social mobility and inequality: globalisation means standards must rise; lack of standards causes inequality, (therefore) globalisation causes inequality when standards do not rise. The outcome of all of this is a text that can appeal to middle class aspiration and those wishing to reduce levels of poverty.

### Theme 3: Citizenship and Community

As discussed in the opening section of this chapter, Green makes the point that at a time of significant social change, the discursive link between education and social cohesion was historically significant (Green, 2013: 48). This connection is evident in historical texts. For example Forster's 1870 speech contained strong causal associations between education and political change:

*'To its honour, Parliament has lately decided that England shall in future be governed by popular government. I am one of those*

> *who would not wait until the people were educated before I would trust them with political power. If we had thus waited we might have waited long for education; but now that we have given them political power we must not wait any longer to give them education.'*
>
> (Forster, 1870).

Again, the case for education is made in highly committed terms ('we must not wait') but here its role is justified within the context of democratic process: if all have the potential to rule, all must have the ability to rule, that is, they must be educated so that they can rule. The use of pronouns in this passage is significant: 'I' (William Forster) is equivalent to 'we' (parliament), that is, it is used interchangeably (Fairclough, 2003). The agency between these two pronouns and 'them' (the people) is striking: *we* granted *them* power and *we* must give *them* education…*we* should educate *them* before *we* trust *them* with power'.

By contrast, the people are passive: they are given to, they are to be trusted, and they are to be educated. Again, this reflects the order of discourse that has already been established and, again, it uses thick moral language in its justification (Fairclough, 2003: 99). The use of the word 'trust' reflects a set of values predicated on fear: the opposite of trust is fear; we should only trust those who are educated therefore we should fear those who are not educated. Again, this is a reflection of the division between the deserving and undeserving poor here, the emphasis on those who are undeserving and worthy of fear. Although the tone of the language varies, more contemporary texts continue to reproduce the order of discourse. For example, in a speech given in 2002, Tony Blair said:

> *'It is completely unacceptable that young people out of control, excluded from school, are left free to roam the streets causing misery and mayhem in local communities...Schools*

> *need to know that the Government is on their side and the community is on their side against unruly children and abusive parents...This is not just about education. It is about what kind of country we want to be. We see all around us the consequences if families and communities fail: disaffection, lack of respect, vandalism, drugs, violence. And that is why, when I got together law enforcement agencies for that meeting on street crime, I didn't just ask the police, the Home Secretary and the Lord Chancellor, but the Ministers responsible for education, for health, for local government, for sport. Because every child denied a place in a good school is more at risk of falling into crime.'*
>
> (Blair, 2002).

Again the order of discourse is evident: a disengaged group (unruly children and abusive parents), capable of disruption (and thus to be feared) on one side; those capable of providing moral guidance (Government, schools and community) on the other side. Again there is a strong class dynamic at work here. Abusive parents and unruly children are collocated with symptoms of poverty: drugs, violence, crime and poor education. There is also a strong causal logic within the extract: the 'consequences' of 'failing families' is lack of respect, vandalism, drugs and violence. The sequence of statements also serves to extend the logic to include education by inference: children are excluded from school, they are left to roam the streets, they have unruly and abusive parents, they are from failing families, they fall into crime. Although this appears as an additive logical sequence, there is a strong inference that these events are connected and the moral language is oriented towards good schools and bad parents. In other texts, less direct language is used to describe 'failing families': words such as 'challenging' (Department for Education Schools and Family, 2006) and 'disadvantaged' (Gyimah, 2016) are often referred to, but this does not affect the order of discourse.

Such texts often work alongside wider moral panics induced by specific social events. For example, following the 'riots' of 2011, Michael Gove delivered a speech in which he said:

> *'For all the advances we have made, and are making in education, we still, every year allow thousands more children to join an educational underclass – they are the lost souls our school system has failed. It is from that underclass that gangs draw their recruits, young offenders institutions find their inmates and prisons replenish their cells. These are young people who, whatever the material circumstances, which surround them, grow up in the direst poverty - with a poverty of ambition, a poverty of discipline, a poverty of soul. I recognise that using a word like underclass has potentially controversial connotations. It can seem to divide society into them and us. But I believe there's a merit in plain speaking. I am also haunted by the thought that I might, if circumstances had been different, been one of them. I was born to a single parent, never knew my biological father and spent my first few months in care.'*
>
> (Gove, 2011)

The compound noun 'education underclass' is a direct link between education and an undeserving poor. In this extract Gove sets up a relationship between the word 'poverty' and the order of discourse already described. Rather than being a material condition, it is used to make highly evaluative, moral judgements. Firstly, the material reference to poverty is collocated with the thick moral term 'dire' (the direst poverty). In the next sentence poverty itself is used in moral terms 'poverty of ambition' and 'poverty of soul'. Despite the recognition that such a statement can create a sense of moral order, Gove goes on to give a strong indication that this is the case with his own reference to 'them' (I could have been one of them).

Again this is a set of statements with strong causal inference: ‘I could have been one of them; I was born to a single parent.’ Thus we even know something about who the underclass is.

All of these elements define an order of discourse of education that positions decision makers, participants and outsiders. However, there have been two relatively modern developments that have shifted the dynamics of the structure of the order of discourse. Firstly, the extent to which, and the veracity of judgments that are passed on the education system have increased. Secondly, there has been an increasing trend to link the concept of community with education. With reference to the first, education has increasingly been seen as a domain of politicians and parents, as opposed to exclusively that of educationalists. A key moment in the development of this discursive feature was James Callaghan’s Ruskin Speech in 1976. In the speech he stated:

> *‘There is nothing wrong with non-educationalists, even a prime minister, talking about (education). Everyone is allowed to put his oar in on how to overcome our economic problems, how to put the balance of payments right, how to secure more exports and so on and so on. Very important too. But I venture to say not as important in the long run as preparing future generations for life. RH Tawney, from whom I derived a great deal of my thinking years ago, wrote that the endowment of our children is the most precious of the natural resources of this community. So I do not hesitate to discuss how these endowments should be nurtured...Let me answer that question 'what do we want from the education of our children and young people?' with Tawney's words once more. He said: 'What a wise parent would wish for their children, so the state must wish for all its children.' I take it that no one claims*

*exclusive rights in this field. Public interest is strong and legitimate and will be satisfied.'*

(Callaghan, 1976).

Here, an equivalence is set up between the words 'community' and 'everyone'. Specific instances of everyone/community are 'prime minister', 'parents' and 'state'. Children are actually represented as belonging to the community through the possessive pronoun 'our' and thus are not equally part of it. There then follows the setting up of a relationship, which can only be described as a rhetorical sleight of hand.

Referencing R.H. Tawney, Callaghan states *'What a wise parent would wish for their children, so the state must wish for all its children.'* Thus, what a wise parent does, the state should do too, where a wise parent goes, the state should follow. In reality, the relationship between 'parents' and 'state' is asymmetric: it is difficult to conceive of parents having as much sway over the apparatus of government as the sway a government can have over parents (Fairclough, 2003; Ranciere and Corcoran, 2010). Callaghan concludes the extract with a reference to 'public interest': '*I take it that no one claims exclusive rights in this field. Public interest is strong and legitimate and will be satisfied'.* Here, the equivalence is scaled back up and the original relationship between parent and state is reversed: what is in the interests of parents is in the interests of the 'the public'. Thus parents do not have exclusive rights over how their children are educated.

### Theme 4: New Public Management

A more recent shift in the education discursive formation has been in the form of what has commonly been referred to as neoliberalism (Harvey, 2007). Many of the themes that constituted policy shifts towards academisation of schools can be located as part of this wider discursive shift. Specifically, the dichotomy between the conceptualisation of

education as a public service (regulated by states) and as a service that can be delivered, in theory, by any global provider (regulated by global trade rules) can be located within English policy discourses relating to academisation. Hartmann and Scherrer (2003: 6) posit that this dichotomy is based upon fundamentally different motives: the supply of state services, predicated on universal access and democratic participation, exists in tension with rules that aim to facilitate cross border economic activity. As such, services need to be defined using the language of trade. In relation to education, this can create tensions as the existing discourses of educational culture are replaced by 'trade-speak' (Altbach, 2004: 1). Hood (1991) referred to these new public sector discourses that emphasised managerial and business practices as New Public Management.

These discursive shifts are evident in later policy texts, particularly with reference to parental choice and competition as solutions to 'chronic problems of the past' (Department for Education Schools and Family, 2006). The 2005 education white paper exemplifies this dynamic, particularly chapter 5: Parents Driving Improvement. As the title states, this chapter makes a forceful argument for a causal link between parental engagement and educational standards. But the chapter is a peculiar assortment of disconnected statements. For example:

> *'Schools achieve most when they draw on real and effective parental engagement. Yet many parents still feel unsure about how to relate to schools, particularly when their child starts at secondary school. And where parents have real concerns about their school's progress, their voices can still be ignored or overlooked. We are determined to redress the balance and to remove any sense that parents' role stops at the school gate. We need to harness the energy and commitment which parents can bring to shape the education their children receive and the progress of their school.'*

(Department for Education Schools and Family, 2006)

Here a negative causal relationship is created between dynamic parents who raise standards and schools who ignore them and thus reduce their effectiveness. The pronoun 'we' is used as a representation of all parents. This negative view of schools is consistent with the assertion that schools had chronic problems that, by inference, they would not be able to overcome themselves.

This may sound like a radical shift in education policy but the paper offers little to suggest that the relationship between school and parent will change. For example:

> *'To ensure we learn from best practice, we plan to launch a national campaign, led by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and including other key partners such as the Secondary Heads Association and parents' organisations, to develop further and share schools' experience of the benefits of parental engagement.'*
>
> (Department for Education Schools and Family, 2006)

With reference to Rancière (1991), this phrase contains a significant paradox: schools will share the benefits of parental engagement with parents [sic]. Such a statement leaves parents bereft of the possibility of actively equal interactions with schools and one is left to wonder what engagement actually means in this context. In chapter 7, the document provides a clearer sense of the concept, by inference to what engagement clearly is not:

> *'Since February 2004, parenting contracts and parenting orders have been available to reinforce parents' responsibilities following the exclusion of their children.*

> *Schools, local authorities and parents have already agreed more than 400 contracts – feedback has been positive. We will allow parenting contracts to be used earlier in order to tackle poor behaviour before exclusions occur. Parenting orders, for parents that will not engage with voluntary measures, compel parents to attend a parenting programme and comply with any other conditions imposed by the court. We will extend parenting orders, so that schools can use them to make parents take responsibility for their children's bad behaviour in school and so that they can be used for serious misbehaviour where the pupil has not been excluded. '*
>
> (Department for Education Schools and Family, 2006).

Thus the collocation parental-engagement has shifted to parental-responsibility. This is important because semantically the relationship shifts from one where schools are held to account by parents to one where parents are held to account by schools. This is important because it undermines the neoliberal notion of individuals as rational, self motivated beings (Harvey, 2007) to which an ideological reference is made earlier in the text:

> *'Parents (including guardians, foster parents and others in a parenting role) have high aspirations for their children and understandably place high demands on schools. They want the best for their own child and also to have a strong stake in the performance of the school as a whole.'*
>
> (Department for Education Schools and Family, 2006)

In this section, parents are a single entity that place high demands on schools and drive up school performance. I want to argue here that such discursive shifts were the result of education's existing discursive formation and specifically the importance that social cohesion had played

historically. Imposing neoliberal principles on a long established pillar of the discursive process of nation building was always going to be a challenging project, even when one considers the extent to which neoliberalism has affected many aspects of life. For me, the pertinent question is: how has education remained relatively unchanged in such a fast changing environment?

To conclude, four themes have been identified within the education discursive formation that relate to this education discursive formation. As Foucault observes, such themes overlap and interlock (Olssen, 2010b: 14). It should also be emphasised that this list is by no means exhaustive. Rather it represents a heuristic: a set of guiding concepts that are sufficient to provide insights into the interaction between education policy and the participants in the case study.

Economic discourses are clearly evident, particularly globalisation that has, and continues to be, an important legitimising concept within the education discursive formation. These economic discourses tend to overlap with notions of fairness, particularly social mobility. Productivity and social mobility tend to be used interchangeably (as an equivalence) and where social mobility is developed as a distinctive characteristic of education, it is always presented in a positive causal relationship with productivity. Social cohesion can also form part of this relationship (communities improve productivity).

However, as Green observes, the need for social cohesion has historically been of prime importance in education and the texts used demonstrate the class dimension to the concept, which is often invoked at times of moral panic. The word community has an eminent position within this discourse allowing for the articulation of shared values and to identify problem others (those beyond the community, those harming the community). These themes will be referred to in the next section, which

attempts to make sense of the actions of those involved in setting up the school; the way that they legitimated their actions to colonise the emerging space. Finally, neoliberalising tendencies within the education discursive formation are evident in more recent policy texts. This tendency emphasises choice and competition and is a significant aspect of some of the participants' sense of education within the case study.

# Chapter 5: Sarah

## Background

This chapter focuses on one person in particular: Sarah. This is because she had a strong voice in the school at the centre of the case study (she was one of the original parents who came up with the idea for a new school). She was also the primary point of contact I had for the case study. Setting up the school was challenging for all of those concerned and Sarah was central to dealing with many of these early challenges. In effect, the school had to fight two battles: one to establish its acceptance within the local area (by other schools, residents and potential parents); the other to establish itself as a viable concern at a national level (by the Department for Education, Ofsted and other institutions that exist at a national scale).

Sarah and her family lived in a remote residence in a rural area of England. Set in a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the locality was sparsely populated and the existing schools in the area were well spread out. A defining aspect of the locality was its proximity to a relatively large urban area about 15 miles from Sarah's home. The town had a population of almost 30,000 and will be known as Bridletown for the purposes of this research. Although available data does not reveal a significant difference between Bridletown and the surrounding rural area in terms of poverty, the government's *Indices of Deprivation* showed that there was a marked difference between the Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LLSOA) within Bridletown itself (the indices of multiple deprivation were derived by dividing England and Wales into 32,482 areas, which have roughly the same population). What is most striking about the data is that these differences tend to exist within the same geographical area: Bridletown North. Here, one LLSOA is in the upper quartile of all LLSOAs ranked in terms of multiple deprivation (25,529/32,482), whilst another is ranked within the bottom quartile (3,424/32,482). A factor in this data is the

relatively large concentration of social housing within Bridletown North: in 2007 there were almost 1,438 social housing units in the area out of a total of 1485 units for the whole of Bridletown. Much of this social housing is clustered around housing estates that are managed by social housing trusts.

In terms of primary schools near Sarah, there was a distinctive split between the nearer schools, which were situated within the small villages in the rural areas, and those situated in Bridletown. There were 15 rural primary schools within a 15-mile radius of the family home, with the nearest about 3 miles away. These primary schools tended to be characterised by their smallness: 9 of the 15 schools had fewer than 100 pupils. By contrast, in Bridletown only 1 of the 7 primary schools was a small school with fewer than 100 pupils, and 4 of the 7 have more than 250 pupils. There are far fewer accessible secondary schools and those that are available are all in urban areas.

They also tended to be proportionately much larger (medium to large): of the 4 secondary schools that were within a 15 mile radius of the family home, 3 had more than 1000 pupils and one had over 2000 pupils. However, the nearest secondary school was a small school with only 660 pupils (4.6 miles away). Situated in a small urban area (2,500 residents), this school served a significantly deprived LLSOA, which was also in the bottom quartile on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). At the time that data was collected, Ofsted rated none of the four secondary schools as outstanding but the two nearest schools were rated as good, whereas the two further away schools were rated as satisfactory.

Sarah's children went to a small rural primary school near to the family home but were frustrated by the choice of secondary school places on offer. Sarah felt the local secondary education offering was inadequate: a large rural school some distance away was not appropriate for children

attending small primary schools in a rural setting. Not only was the size of the school an issue, a generic curriculum would not recognize the specific experiences that children in a rural setting had. With her children approaching secondary school age, she persuaded a few friends to put in a bid for a new free school. One of the bidding requirements was to demonstrate that there was enough local support to warrant a new school (New Schools Network, 2013b). Sarah set about promoting the idea with a considerable amount of energy: she knocked on doors, attended council meetings and even stood at the gates of existing secondary schools to garner support.

### The Book

Sarah had a history of local activism: she had co authored a book and a number of articles on the importance of people taking control of their communities. This 'activism' constituted a significant element of the initial conversations I had with her. Whilst providing me with the backstory of the school, she was keen to present herself as an activist and she spoke about her writing on the subject. Her book, entitled, whose title and authors have been redacted to protect anonymity is unequivocally anti-establishment. The opening paragraph of the introduction states:

> *'Suddenly people who have never taken a political stance before are finding their voices and demonstrating their opposition to the actions of the Government or industry, and generally demanding their rights'*

Furthermore, the text makes clear that this demanding of rights is not something that can happen through the normal democratic processes. The book makes a direct reference to the necessity for 'disobedience', and contains illustrations of historical instances of civil uprisings such as The Peterloo Massacre, The Tolpuddle Martyrs and the Suffragette Watch. The

book then proceeds to make comparisons between these historical instances and more contemporary examples of protest such as animal rights activism, protests against road building and those purporting to protect our basic rights and liberties. It also contains a significant chapter on 'community based economics'. This chapter closely references the work of the 'New Economics Foundation' and the director at the time, Edward Mayo. It begins with the assertion that 'Sustainable economics and direct action campaigning are two sides of the same coin'. The chapter advocates DIY alternatives to free markets, such as Local Economy Trading Systems, credit unions, cooperatives and neighbourhood food supply networks.

### Analysis of the Book

The justification for the book's advocation of local interventions heavily references discourses relating to social justice and the environment: because free markets are no good at sustainability, conviviality and social justice; they do not recognise the value of the unemployed and they do not provide for deprived areas. These justifications are made using a committed, demanding tenor with a noticeable lack of modalising verbs, giving a sense of certainty. For example:

> '*DIY culture isn't confined to any class, area or issue and it is much more than simple politics: most DIYers live and breathe their causes. They want direct action and take it.'*

This statement could have been taken from the pages of Todd May's interpretation of Rancière's work: 'Equality…cannot be given, only taken' (May, 2008: 90). Thus, some parts of the book can be characterised as having a strong anti-establishment theme.

However, the book also references community discourses that resonate with parts of the education discursive formation. For example:

> *'those involved in Do it Yourself Culture are taking responsibility for and control over their own lives…Activists say DIY Culture means making small changes individually and locally, rather than hanging about waiting for one big global remedy for all social and environmental ills.'*

Both statements taken together resonate with the logic of third way politics: a corrective for too much state (Keynesianism), on the one hand, and too little state, on the other (privatization) (Robertson and Verger, 2012). And it is certainly consistent with the notion of a Big Society. The following extract was taken from the Conservative Party Manifesto prior to the 2010 general election.

> *'(The Big Society is where) people come together to solve problems and improve life for themselves and their communities; a society in which the leading force for progress is social responsibility, not state control'*
>
> (The Conservative Party, 2010).

Thus, the relationship between Rancière's notion of *dissensus* and May's concept of *active equality* is separated from Sarah's DIY Culture and more formal political approaches such as The Big Society. There are two fundamental differences in this respect. Firstly, the logic of *dissensus* acts against the state, whereas The Big Society and DIY Culture do not necessarily exclude action by the state. To put it another way, the model they present is state plus local action: 'making small changes rather than waiting for a global remedy; the leading force for progress is social responsibility not state control'. By contrast, the concept of dissensus is predicated on the paradox of democracy: a universalising state voice always acts against individual desire. Democratic voice can only be exercised through the revelation and disruption of this paradox (Rancière,

2011). Thus, one can be seen as a *soft* relationship between state and community (both can potentially exist together) whilst one is a *hard* relationship (both cannot exist at the same time). This is important because it has a fundamental effect on the way one constructs the relationship between state and community. For example, Jesse Norman predicates his entire model of the Big Society on Burke's well known quote from Reflections on the Revolution in France:

> *'To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country and to mankind'*
>
> (Burke, 1790).

This quote actually reverses the logic of dissensus. Rather than individuals and groups challenging the state, compliance with the state begins with the same individuals and groups. Like The Big Society, DIY Culture offers little by way of a mechanism to disrupt existing discursive moral orders: values that are already established within communities, both local and state, have no way of being subverted and thus will inevitably be reproduced. This is highlighted within the discourse of the book. For example, whilst discussing community banking the following indirect quote is given:

> *'Six years ago I helped set up a credit union for a group of local women. Most of them had families and spent most of their time looking after people. They hadn't had very many education opportunities, but were extremely competent in their own way'*

Here we can see here an asymmetrical relationship between 'I' (the source of the quote) and 'women' (them). 'I' makes one direct normative

statement: 'they (hadn't got much) education) but they were competent in their own way.' This is a declarative statement that clearly established a claim to pass judgement on another group. The quote continues:

> *'That group of women are now unrecognizable. When I first met them they had trouble seeing themselves as worthy people who had a contribution to make; now they have much more self-confidence and belief in their ability to have an impact'*

What is evident in this passage is the source's unobserved assumption that 'I' (the source of the quote) is able to pass judgement on the 'women': he is able to declare that self-belief and ability had an impact. In Rancière's terms, this is a form of policing (Ranciere and Corcoran, 2010): the 'women' are required to seek validation of their position and it is the source that is able to confirm or deny their position. The relationship can never be reversed because one group will always require validation to confirm their social position from the other. The order of discourse is thus secured: the source ('I') has moral authority and is able to pass judgment on 'they' (the women). The crucial point here is that, whilst Rancière is unequivocal in his construction of the relationship between the state and the individual, Sarah's definition is not. This creates the possibility of opposing readings of the same relationship. This is crucial in the subsequent unfolding of the case study.

### The School Progresses

It was not difficult to see why a policy like free schools would appeal to Sarah. She had a problem with the choice of secondary school given to her by the state. In various policy texts, free schools had appealed to local communities to take responsibility and take control over their own requirements (New Schools Network, 2013d), which resonated with the values of the DIY Culture that Sarah had written about in her book. Sarah

began a local campaign to garner support for a new school by giving presentations at village halls, leafleting, knocking on doors, getting coverage in the local press and canvassing parents at school gates.

When Sarah spoke about these early activities, she used an uncompromising tone; the emphasis was on energy, persuasion and confrontation. She talked willingly about being chased away from school gates by teachers and head teachers, being heckled at village hall presentations, about the vocal 'critics' and the increasing hostility that she experienced the closer she got to the Bridletown (notes from interview with Sarah, 2013). This reflects the values of the book: not waiting for others to do what you can do for yourself, taking, demanding, opposing, and taking control.

There was also a sense of embryonic moral bubbling that emerged in these early stages. Those involved in the project were few in number and Sarah consistently referred to 'we' when talking about the efforts to garner support. For her, this was very much her project. These were the few people who were able to share her vision and able to assist her. There was also a strong sense of 'the other': the critics, the hecklers, and residents in Bridletown, teachers, and governors of other schools. When the group spoke about these early days, they often referred to their isolation from, and antagonism towards, many in the local area. However, there was also a sense of defiance: they were the few who had the vision and energy to change the education system and they were appealing to those in the local community who had the courage to support the school, however tentatively. For example:

> *'We did a spiel, a speech, …but I think we had …increasing hostility getting up towards Bridletown, so a lot of governors and heads, we'd turn up to meetings and governors (from other schools) would have said 'I'll go to this one', that's it, heckled.*

*But we got the signatures. And then we did the (theme park) open day, which was inspirational. It was Darren's idea (another member of the steering group) because we'd advertised it gone on the radio all these road shows but I think nobody really thought that a new school to get people out at all, to get people out to a freezing parish hall on a Thursday night in November, forget it. We thought 'we need something big to get the parents to come to us; to put something on. And then we thought The Adventure Park. So we went to talk to them and they were incredibly supportive. He's got an MBE; he's a champion of business; he's a farmer turned entrepreneur. And he said 'you can have it for free' and we said 'my goodness a free day at the Adventure Park.'*

The strong sense of separation between the group and other parties, such as governors, is evident in this extract. However, there are also some moral assumptions: the allegedly self-interested actions of the supporters of local schools (e.g 'I'll go to this one') are in contrast to those who are willing to take risks and act generously, such as the adventure park owner.

The group had looked for help from the park owner because of the government's requirement to demonstrate a need for a new school within the local area. Much of the group's initial activity was therefore focused on getting signatures to demonstrate such a need existed. The businessman provided free access to his adventure park for local families for a day and, as parents entered, they were invited to pledge their support for the new school by signing a petition. This added a significant number of signatures to the document and the New Schools Network (a trust set up to provide support for people putting together bids) used the group's strategy as an exemplar in their presentation materials for prospective bidders.

However, the strategy has not been without its issues. Although the process demonstrated support in terms of the number of signatures, it did not highlight potential resistance to the project. As it turned out, resistance emerged from a number of grievances. Firstly, existing state schools, angered by the lack of consultation, treated the proposed new school as a threat to existing schools and staffing, particularly as they believed there was already enough provision in the area. Secondly, private schools in the area were worried that a free school would damage their own intake and threaten their survival. Thirdly, the proposed site for the new school (beside a small village in an area of outstanding natural beauty) angered local residents, particularly as they felt they had not been consulted properly: many found out about the proposed development post hoc and felt that, although there was an attempt to consult, this was precursory (a drop box left in the local post office without any additional signage).

### Residents

Despite resistance from other schools in the area, the main opposition to the new school came from local residents. Although small in number, this group was extremely effective in subverting the school's development. In many ways, they mirrored the school's steering group in their social constitution, comprising of individuals from professional backgrounds, including a head teacher from a school not in the area. Part of the bid was for a new purpose-built school that could accommodate 700 pupils. However, due to the short timescales involved, the school first opened in a nearby village hall with just over 60 pupils (Year 7 and 8). This was originally planned to be for a year whilst the new school was being built. However, there followed a period of uncertainty. Following deputations from local residents, the district council rejected planning for the new school. The national government eventually overturned this judgment and the school was able to go ahead with the new build.

### Struggling to Establish a Vision

At this point, the school also struggled to find a shared vision amongst its founding members. One of the government's requirements for any free school bid was for the steering group to demonstrate 'necessary expertise'. The existing group of parents, led by Sarah, managed to coopt two retired educationalists onto the group. This couple, an ex-head teacher (Geoffrey) and a teacher (Carrie), were new to the area and were initially reluctant to get involved in the new school. However, these newer members of the group were able to talk lucidly about the aims of the project. Geoffrey spoke about the need to give the existing schools in the area a 'kick up the backside', emphasising their poor performance and the lack of opportunities they provided for local children. However, there was also a sense that these newcomers subverted the pre-existing moral assumptions underpinning the group's emerging practices. For example, Carrie spoke emotionally about the 'terrible' experiences that parents and children had had at local schools.

> *'The (theme park) was one of the most moving things that I have experienced in my teaching career. I sat at a table in this freezing cold hall and everyone who came in was offered a personal interview so families came and sat in front of you and the first thing that struck me was 'my word they're huge families here'. They had like 6 children and all of different ages so you've got the older children holding the baby and this sort of thing and people sat in front of me and told me their life history about how awful their own education had been and 'old so and so', he's at such and such a school now and it's awful and we really don't like it but it's too late for them-and these children were standing in front of us-but I want something different for this one. I want this school for my child. And after the presentation parents would come back and sit down and pour out their life history about how awful school had been for*

*them one to one. I had one man who came back and almost wept about how also school had been. It wasn't relevant, it was just terrible, and they just wanted something different really.'*

What is significant here is the way the narrative is constructed. Carrie's description of large families; of men almost in tears; of honest but problematical parenting (wanting a better life for their children but not knowing any other way); of older children looking after the younger ones is an account that echoes earlier conceptualisations of the 'deserving poor': those virtuous people who have little and deserve a little better (Skeggs, 2004: 123).

This approach created certain tensions with the moral assumptions that were at the centre of Sarah's legitimising discourses for the new school. For Carrie, the school was legitimated through improved provision for those without; it needed to create opportunities for those who had none. It was about 'the other' (those not currently validated by the education discursive formation). Sarah's assumptions about the purpose of the school were more existential: it provided opportunities for 'us' - the community: we create change for ourselves, we empower ourselves. What emerged from this discursive dissonance was an embryonic moral bubble, one whereby the project, which started as a project for 'us', started to become a project for 'them' run by 'us'. This emerging moral order thus reflected the values that underpinned the themes of the education discursive formation more than it challenged it.

It was also clear from this interview that Geoffrey had become the group's spokesperson. He took control, replying to every question with a full answer. The answers focused on the construction of a narrative of his involvement in the school and a clear distinction was made between 'him', as educational expert, and the rest of the group who were an enthusiastic group of novices. Despite the fact that Sarah had organised the meeting,

she spoke little in the interview, only answering questions that were addressed to her directly. Whilst this dynamic may well have been influenced by my own position within the group - as an educationalist it may well have been that Geoffrey felt a need to provide an educational account of the process - he foregrounded themes identified as part of education discourses and tended to background the group's initial motivations for setting up the school.

For example:

> *'It went from a kitchen table utopia dreaming. And then it just seemed to be hitting, at that stage, so many of the crucial points. It was a parent-led group and I came in at that point with something I'd learnt from (my job as a head teacher) - professionals on tap, not on top. So kind of standing back and testing out… and they had done so much in educational philosophy and learning and it was so exciting and you thought yeah there is something here. And then Sarah came on board and we started talking more to the young people and to the generations who live on-because it's a very stable community. And so many of them had failed at school and so many of them had been bullied at school. And they accepted it. It was the norm. So it was one of those things. Education wasn't a gateway to the future. It was a necessity that you had to go through, that you got out of as soon as possible and then you got on with your life. And I thought this is so wrong and the more you talk the more you got aware of the circumstances the more you realise that (the area) is the lowest average wage earner authority anywhere in the country. And you realise why, you realise that these are people who were not in touch with education. Education wasn't theirs it was something that was done to them. And here was a group that was excited about the*

*potential and you thought, yeah, they have every right to succeed.'*

As a professional, Geoffrey was able to pass judgment on the local schools *as schools*. He could use the existing language of the discursive formation; access the existing orders of discourse as someone who had a relatively privileged position in relation to them. In this extract, he emphasizes the meritocratic aspect of the education discursive formation. The declarative statement: 'education wasn't a gateway to future' shows a high level of commitment and thus authority. He was even more assertive in his declaration of a causal link between deprivation in the area and education: 'the more you talk the more you got aware of the circumstances the more you realise that (the area) is the lowest average wage earner authority anywhere in the country. And you realise why, you realise that these are people who were not in touch with education.' It is unusual for texts to reveal such strong assertions about causal relationships, mainly because establishing relationships of this type requires a good deal of precision. As has already been discussed, the IMDs for the area do not reveal significantly high levels of deprivation and the one area where there was (North Bridletown) is over 15 miles from the proposed site of the school.

If Geoffrey's justifications were clearly the motivation for setting up the school, it appeared odd to build the school such a distance from the core area of deprivation and place it in a much more affluent area. I am not claiming here that Geoffrey's assertions were disingenuous. Rather, I am observing the way that a new set of values was superimposed over existing moral assumptions that had emerged from the interactions of the parents. In effect, an original set of ideas, predicated on the notion of being anti establishment, had been compelled to turn to someone who could provide legitimation from within the establishment.

### Necessary Expertise

At this point it is important to outline the external conditions within which the group were working. Geoffrey's inclusion in the process was not solely the product of personalities and local interactions. For the group, it was necessary to have someone like Geoffrey's input but he was not always a willing partner in the project:

> *'Literally, within a week of moving in we had a phone call from a neighbour who is a friend of Sarah's and she said, 'Would you go along to this presentation?' And free schools were completely politically divorced from where I was at that stage so I went along to convince them all that they should become parent governors and to work to invest in the present stock of schools which they assured me they had tried and it's been a rollercoaster ever since. If only we'd moved in a week later we might have had a life!'*

The parent group had been united by what they didn't want (existing school provision) but they were not clear about what the new school would actually do that was distinctive from the existing mainstream schools. Sarah was very keen on creating a school with an environmentalist ethos; some wanted to focus on a nurturing environment, whilst others wanted to develop a creative curriculum. The issue was further complicated as the group sought out additional expertise to meet the requirements of the bid. At the time of the bid, The New Schools Network required a 50 to 100 page application that included:

- *A clear vision;*
- *A detailed education plan including a curriculum model, how you will measure success, and your staffing structure. The requirements vary slightly depending on the type of school you wish to set up;*

- *Evidence of demand from local parents or commissioners. In addition to demand from parents or commissioners you will need to show that there is a need within your local area for new, high quality, school places. In order to do this, you must show one of the following:*
    - *Basic need - that there is a basic need for new places for the age range of the school that you wish to set up; or*
    - *Local schools are underperforming - you should specifically look at Ofsted judgements when making this case*

- *You will need to demonstrate that you have the capacity and capability to set up and eventually run the school;*
    - *A robust governance structure;*
    - *Financial plans; and*
    - *Details of your preferred premises.*

(New Schools Network, 2013b)

Thus, a high level of knowledge of the existing education system was required. In effect, the role of the steering group was restricted to championing the cause within the locality. This was made even more explicit in the additional guidance available from the NSN. For example one document contained a sub-section entitled: 'The expertise you will need'. This section stated that groups would require: financial, educational and other expertise. Amongst 'other' expertise, groups were required to demonstrate that they were adept at: managing school finances, leadership, project management, and marketing (New Schools Network, 2016b). Although the original group of parents contained professionals who could demonstrate expertise in the field of project management and marketing (Sarah had worked for a well-known marketing company in the past), they clearly required a significant amount of specific support from educational professionals. This was particularly so as the NSN state that

demonstrable professional backgrounds in both finance and education are essential for any bid to be successful (New Schools Network, 2015: 6).

Furthermore, the same NSW document contained additional criteria relating to the quality of expertise. Those involved in the bid with an educational background needed to include specific details of the last three positions they had held and details of employees educational track records (the school's Key Stage 2 or 5A*-C GCSE including English and maths and, if available, the school's best 8 value added scores for the years they were in post)(New Schools Network, 2015: 4).

Coopting people like Geoffrey and Carrie onto the steering group was thus a necessary part for the bid to be successful. However, talking to the group, there was a sense that they felt uneasy about the situation and that there was a split between the idealistic parents and the more practically minded educationalists. This was revealed in the focus group interview:

> (Geoffrey) *The trouble is we very quickly realised we lifted this boulder to the top of a mountain and my god it was about to go and then it was all kinds of hell! It was frightening. It was absolutely frightening.*
>
> (Sarah) *We were part of the NSW development programme. That was our first kind of success but then they said OK we're going to do mock interviews and so on.*
>
> (Geoffrey) *We sat in one of these mock interviews and you suddenly realised how challenging it was to start a school with nothing –you had no building no staff. You had a vision but you had no policies and you looked around the table (turns to Sarah)…. it was 'the divi' one.* (NSW panel member) said about our special needs policy and, yes it's vital, but we hadn't

written anything and one of our parent governors came up with 'we were going to be inclusive'

(Sarah) *And he said 'well how are you going to do mixed ability groups, I don't quite understand'. It was very aggressive questioning and we were like rabbits in a headlight. And she said 'well you know if you're a bit of a div you can do this….' (laughter).*

(Geoffrey) *And I just sat in my seat and thought 'oh my…'*

(Sarah) *Well you know we weren't used to….we're not educationalists. We were under stress. She didn't mean it like that she was just trying to explain it. But it really exposed u s-I think it's a strength and a weakness to be naïve and idealistic. But also absolutely terrifying….in a group they were longing for because of white rural communities, rural deprivation and yet we were really skating on thin ice. Luckily we had two educationalists on board.*

What is evident in this interaction is the tension that existed between the experts and the parents. For her part, Sarah is emphasising the positive qualities of the bid (their first 'success', their 'idealism', giving the government 'what they were longing for') and placing these qualities in opposition to the educationalists (aggressive, terrifying, under stress).

In terms of an order of discourse, Sarah was placing the parents in a more virtuous position than those in control of education: whilst the group was naïve about education, education was naïve about the group. She also sets up equivalences between the group and the white rural local community and then the white rural community and rural deprivation. Although this

sentence appears like an logic of appearance (Fairclough, 2003: 94), the use of the pronoun (we) creates a hierarchy, that is, 'we-the group' is given greater significance than 'them-the white rural community (who are) deprived. Thus, the group is simultaneously part of the community but also above the community. This relationship is further emphasised by the phrase 'white rural community.' This is highly inferential: government documentation discusses rural localities within the context of 'white working class' rather than white rural communities (e.g. House of Commons Education Committee, 2014).

Thus, whilst the group is within the community, Sarah again places them above it. Conversely, Geoffrey does not make this distinction - the group are part of a deprived community. They understand the problems, they have a 'vision' but their lack of expertise was 'frightening'. Despite his own knowledge and experience, there is a sense that he lacked confidence in the group's ability to successfully bid for the school. At the point where he expresses his exasperation: 'Oh my', Sarah intervenes to defend the group whilst conceding that they were naïve (a strength and a weakness). Geoffrey also contrasts the group's responses with the importance of the interviewer in this context. Although his name has been anonymised in the transcript, Geoffrey made a point of stating his name, including his title.

Thus, Geoffrey's presentation of the moral hierarchy places the educationalist above the naivety of the group. His role was to help them become educationalists, to bridge the gap between the lay person and the expert. It is interesting that Sarah was willing to concede this point to Geoffrey. What is more, she stated on a number of other occasions her lack of confidence in her own knowledge of education. She felt she needed guidance in her role as governor. In addition, she also thought an initial Ofsted inspection had been a good thing for the school because the feedback they offered was much needed and provided guidance for the

future of the school, particularly given the 'lack of expertise' she felt the steering group had (from interview notes 2015).

The initial negotiations over prevailing discourse thus centred around educational expertise. What is significant is the parents' willingness to yield their own vision to comply with existing educational discourses. For Geoffrey's part, his efforts to marry the 'enthusiasm' of the group with existing educational discourses tended to push the group away from their vision: in bridging the gap between 'visionaries' and 'establishment', he actually participated in the creation of an asymmetric relationship between state structures and the newly formed group. To put this in Rancière's language, state technologies, designed to disperse individual desires, were implemented against the individualism of the group (Ranciere and Corcoran, 2010: 41).

### Isolation from Local Schools

Despite Sarah's attempt to affiliate the group with the community, the lack of confidence in their own expertise was exacerbated by the group's isolation from other schools in the locality. She found the reaction of other schools in the area frustrating. Initially, local schools engaged with the project but they were dismissive of her idea as they thought it would not be viable. However, as the project progressed they became more hostile and the steering group became increasingly isolated.

Although Sarah felt that much of this antipathy was politically motivated (the new school would not be a local authority school) the reasons for the antipathy from existing providers was complex and it would be inadequate to reduce the tension to the historical, political divisions that have existed around the local management of schools following the 1988 Education Reform Act (Chitty, 2002:59). To emphasise this point, a number of independent schools were also part of a coalition against the project. In response to the proposed new school, two 'open letters' appeared on the

Internet, one from a head teacher of a local authority school and one from the head of a local independent school. Both letters were long (almost 1500 words each) and emphasised both the quality of local schools and the difficult economic circumstances in which they had to operate. In the case of the state school, the overriding issue was one of falling rolls created by a falling population of young people of school age. This was made particularly difficult due to the relatively low funding per pupil received by schools in the area. The head teacher of the school claimed that both these factors were significant in creating a predicted £115,000 funding shortfall for the coming year. In turn, the head teacher claimed that this meant it was necessary for the school to draw up plans to make some members of staff redundant.

The steering group clearly felt isolated, feeling that other local schools had refused to engage in cross-curricular activities such as sport (a frustration that the steering group communicated in the local press). The group's reaction to this issue reveals a fault line in the moral discourses that were at play within the context. To an extent, the group agreed with the existing schools about the difficulties they faced. In my last interview with her, Sarah wanted to highlight the difficult funding arrangements that existing schools had, pointing out that they had the lowest per pupil funding in the country, and the additional difficulty they had dealing with falling rolls.

However, she also pointed out that there would be a rise in pupil places over the next few years, which validated the need for a new school. At other times, the group's reaction followed the anti state rhetoric of the 1988 Education Act (Chitty, 2002)(Leo, Hearne and Galloway, 2010: 6). For example, when I asked two of the founding members of the steering group if collaboration with local schools was desirable, they replied that it was but that opening a non-authority school was always going to be 'unpalatable' for the existing schools.

### The External Service Provider

Although, the initial policy foregrounded the role of community groups in the formation of free schools, the New Schools Network were keen to promote the use of 'existing education providers' in both the bidding process and the running of schools (New Schools Network, 2015: 6). These could be either an existing academy trust or an education provider: charities or companies that are involved in running schools or chains of schools. Some providers have an international portfolio, for example, The Education Development Trust, which runs schools across the world (Education Development Trust, n.d.). Thus they are not necessarily representative of the specific localities in which they operate. For example, one approved provider, Kunskapsskolan, used their own 'KED' programme across schools they were responsible for (Kunskapsskolan Education, 2010). These generic resources were not necessarily compatible with the individual visions created by bidding groups. In the case of The Ridgewell Academy, the group was keen to hang onto their original ethos that reflected the views of those involved in the project and they were not interested in working with a sponsor model.

However, as has already been stated, the group did not feel confident about its level of educational expertise. Isolated from other educational professionals in the local area, the group turned to their own networks of friends for additional support. Geoffrey and Carrie's involvement was the product of this strategy but, as has already been described, this did not necessarily produce a group with a shared sense of purpose and identity. Another member of the group had links with a multinational publishing company that had recently moved into the global education market. The group agreed that they would approach the company and this led to a short-lived partnership between them. The steering group believed that the company had no strategic interest in free schools but were interested in collaborating on the project, mainly because they wanted a test ground

for their educational software. Although the group felt the company provided invaluable support in the bidding process (they provided an educational consultant), they eventually pulled out. The reasons for their withdrawal were complex, in part due to a change in the strategic direction of the UK part of the organisation, and in part due to the increasingly demanding key performance indicators stipulated by the steering group (something the company would have been accountable for should they have taken on the management of the school)(from interview notes, 2015).

What is significant here is the group's willingness to go beyond their immediate community to progress the project. As has already been discussed, expertise was a concept that was foregrounded in the NSN documentation (New Schools Network, 2015a) , educational expertise in particular. The group were in agreement that the supporting company provided invaluable support for the bid and they were unequivocal in claiming that they would not have been successful had it not been for this support.

In doing so, they revealed a significant power dynamic: the group began with an ideal of community activism, a message that they felt was inherently against local authority schools and was, to an extent, anti state education (they wanted a rural school with a different curriculum). However, from the beginning, they ran into a state discourse that, to an extent, they were going to have to comply with. Geoffrey in particular realised this but, as someone who was part of the group, had limited influence over moving them towards this discourse, hence his alarm at the group's response to the special needs question at the NSN meeting. The supporting company were able to bridge this gap because they were from beyond the emerging space. In a sense, they represented a point of alignment between the group and powerful state conditioning technologies (Foucault, 2010). Sarah's positive account of the supporting company's contribution to the project is the antithesis of her, and the rest

of the steering group's, attitude towards the New Schools Network. Whereas they agreed that the education provider had been invaluable, they were also united in their negative response to the NSN. For example, Sarah's perception of the NSN was that they were ineffective. Those who supported the group were young and indifferent to the needs of those they were supposed to be supporting. They lacked enthusiasm for the cause and appeared to be more interested in furthering their own careers than supporting the free schools project (from interview notes, 2015).

Despite the fact that a non-governmental body was overseeing free schools (the New Schools Network is a charitable trust awarded the contract to run free schools by the government), the steering group did not feel that this was an organisation that had their interests at heart. In fact, Sarah spoke emotively about her sense of being abandoned by the group, of being left to sink or swim, that the NSN would only step in at the point that the group could demonstrate it could survive as a going entity. Ironically, much of this frustration was due to the ambiguity of the NSN: they were both champions of the start-up groups and an organisation that represented the education establishment. They represented the government whilst reflecting the new rhetoric that accompanied the implementation of free schools policy (Cabinet Office, 2010; Department for Education, 2010b; Gove, 2010a, 2011). As a result, they neither offered the steering group educational expertise or the support required to realise their radical ambitions.

## Chapter 6: Education Networks and Ambiguous Change

The NSN is an example of a registered charity that is part of wider social networks in education, referred to by Stephen Ball as 'policy communities' (Ball and Youdell, 2007: 43). These networks vary in definition and organisation: sometimes bounded by criteria or legal frameworks, sometimes operating as loose connections based on partnerships (Skogstad, 2005: 5). They are informal and fluid with shifting membership and ambiguous relationships and accountabilities (Newman, 2001: 108). As such, these networks have a discursive dimension that is potentially transformative, creating involvement of new agents within the education arena and introducing competition and entrepreneurialism into a new hegemonic vision of education (Ball, 2007: 127).

However, in this chapter I will consider the discursive effects of the NSN on the case study. I will argue that, rather than being a precursor for change, the fuzzy discursive boundaries created by NSN - between existing educational policing mechanisms (Rancière, 2011) and the new demands of groups like the parents in the case study – tended to act as a sop against potentially radical discursive shifts in education discourse. To extend the point, I considered the case of a community group who set up a free school that was arguably a more radical reconceptualization of education, but who then found themselves at the centre of a moral panic on a national scale.

With a colleague, I attended one of the NSN workshops for those interested in bidding for a new free school. The following extract was taken from my write up of the event:

> *'It was easy to connect with the thoughts of the steering group about the NSN. The presentations were based on clearly standardised, pre-produced materials and the presenters*

> *appeared to be sticking to a well-defined script. They appeared unwilling to interact with their audience: there were some group activities but those leading the workshops circulated without stopping to answer questions or give feedback in any meaningful way. It was also possible to identify with the steering group's assertions that the group were more interested in their careers than the free schools project. There was a palpable lack of enthusiasm and energy amongst the group. There was very little interaction between the course leaders and those attending and, when this did happen, it did not extend beyond initial responses: there was no extended discussion or development of ideas.'*
>
> (from notes taken at NSN training day 2014).

My notes also contained some conjecture about the possible reasons for such an approach, including the use of a 'scorched earth' metaphor. It felt like the NSN was actually acting as a buffer to try and stop individual groups from progressing with their bids. This is impossible to verify either way but it does highlight the potentially ambiguous nature of networks like NSN. Although a registered charity, the lines between state, business and education are blurred in the constitution of the NSN. The organisation was founded by Rachel Wolf, a previous advisor to the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove (Clark, 2010).

Furthermore, the board of directors reveals strong affiliations with other educational charitable trusts, governmental departments and business. For example, the Absolute Return for Kids academy chain (ARK) is well represented: a number of directors work for, or are affiliated with NSN. For example, Amanda Spielman, had also been head of The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) and ended up as head of Ofsted. Paul Marshall, one of the founders of ARK, was also a director of NSN. Marshall is a wealthy businessman whose interest in education can

best be described as philanthropic: he is a committed Christian who believes that 'education is the key to realizing our potential' (The Evening Standard, 2011). However, in an interview with The Evening Standard, Marshall clearly emphasised that this benevolence came with strings attached. Setting education within the context of historical failure, Marshall emphasises the importance of academisation and the role of philanthropy in developing better schools. Although this process involves the raising of additional funds - he has set about raising money for ARK by putting on lavish fundraising events designed to attract the wealthy - Marshall openly admits that 'The best way to encourage the rich to give is to allow them a strategic involvement for their money, which is why (we) founded Ark back in 2002' (The Evening Standard, 2011).

Thus the NSN can be seen as an archetypal organisation in the new education landscape: representatives of government, regulatory bodies, charities, education providers and high finance all intertwine in what Francis Beckett refers to as 'the slightly grubby circle' (Beckett, 2007) of policy arrangements. To illustrate the point further, soon after being set up, the NSN secured a £500,000 grant from central government after, controversially, no other potential bidders were invited to apply (Syal, 2010). Although unreported, this amount would appear to be only a part of the full amount of funding that NSN received from the Department for Education (DfE). For example, in both 2014 and 2015, the NSN accounts reveal that they received a total of £1,239,097 in DfE grants per annum (New Schools Network, 2015c).

Yet there is a danger of over-interpreting these new arrangements. Although they undoubtedly represent new interests and relationships within education policy, it would difficult to describe them as a 'new hegemonic vision' (Ball and Youdell, 2007). I realise that this could be a contentious claim and I need to immediately qualify it by saying that I am not disputing the fact that there has been a significant shift in the amount

of private interest involved in education. What I am claiming, however, is that the education discursive formation largely remains intact and that, when tension points emerge between new and old ways of doing things, invariably, it is the established order that holds sway. For example, in *The Evening Standard* interview Marshall states:

> *'At Ark, we demonstrate that if you set high expectations, robust discipline and focus relentlessly on literacy and numeracy, poor children can achieve as well as prosperous ones.'*
>
> (The Evening Standard, 2011)

As has already been discussed, the focus on 'poor children' is evident in the educational discourse of 1870, as is the collocation of 'poor' with basic skills 'literacy and numeracy': it is the basic skills that the poor need to help them gain a little more. Similarly, Marshall's assertion that *'poor children can achieve as well as prosperous ones'* chimes with the post war meritocratic discourses. Thus, despite Marshall's assertions that the state has historically let children down, his vision is indistinguishable from historical visions of what education should be. Again, I want to clarify this point: I am not commenting on the effectiveness of ARK schools. What I am saying is they are playing by the same rules, which schools have historically had to play by. Rather than being radical institutions, such schools are relatively indistinguishable from pre-existing schools.

It is also worth noting the relative lack of interest that the private sector has historically shown in education. As far back as 1990, in response to the City Technology College programme, the then shadow education spokesmen, Jack Straw, opined that sponsors were:

> *'second-order companies whose directors were interested in political leverage or honours'*

(Beckett, 2007).

Despite this observation, Beckett asserts that the subsequent Labour government (including Jack Straw) had no more success in attracting sponsors for their Academies programme, claiming that the sponsors were a 'ragbag of second hand car salesmen, evangelical Christians, advertising agencies, churches, property speculators and a few others.' (Beckett, 2007: 23). Furthermore, the original requirement of a £2 million pound contribution from academy sponsors was rapidly diluted and then dropped by the government as it struggled to find organisations willing to meet the demand. Ten years on, the portfolio of non government organisations involved in running schools has expanded hugely, The character of this involvement, however, has not: the academy chains, charitable trusts and businesses involved in running schools still have their roots in philanthropy, religion or private education. Despite some publicised interest from large, multinational companies, there is little evidence that this has materialised into direct involvement in the running of schools (see: Murdoch, 2011; Vasagar, 2012). In the case of Sarah and the steering group, they were able to procure policy expertise via a large publishing company but the company's interest was more focused on using the new school as a test bed for their new education software than getting directly involved in the running of the school (from interview notes, 2015). When the demands from the steering group (and the demands of the bid) grew, the company pulled out (from interview notes, 2015).

In terms of free schools provision, what emerged was a group of medium sized academy chains and service providers that have grown by becoming partners in bids for free schools, sponsoring new academies and procuring contracts for services previously provided by local authorities. For example, the Education Development Trust (previously CfBT) started as a charity that ran international schools. It went on to run a portfolio of academies, free schools and private schools, as well as running curriculum support services

for local authorities and, historically, carrying out inspections on behalf of Ofsted. Again I need to emphasise that these developments are not insignificant and the history of markets would suggest that the activities of large companies begin in the domains of smaller organisations (Crouch, 2011). However, what I would like to do is to reframe the issue of private interests in education. Instead of considering how education has been privatised, I posit that it is more pertinent to consider how private interests have been resisted in education.

### The Free Schools Movement

To consider this question in more detail I now turn to the then government's apparent attempt to destabilise historical education discourses. When first introduced, free schools were embedded in a discourse that promoted local communities as a force for change and set them against the state. For example:

> *'Today, I have written to the first group of MPs – in two cities – Derby and Leicester – asking if they are open to reform, to opportunity, to improvement; or if they want to keep the door closed to new solutions and stick rigidly to the status quo which is failing the children in their areas…I want the MPs in those cities to work with me to persuade their local authorities and their local communities that we need rapidly to improve their schools. They have a simple choice – stand with those in the academies and free schools movement who want to put children first – or stand with the adults who are blocking school improvement.'*
>
> (Gove, 2012)

The last sentence is uncompromising: it sets up a choice between a 'movement' and those blocking school improvement. This can be described as the 'there is no alternative' (TINA) principle (Fairclough, 2003: 99). This style of reporting rather than explaining a problem is indicative of many

political texts (Fairclough, 2003: 99) and has the effect of creating a sense of inevitability about the given issue (Graham, 2001b, 2001a). In this instance, Gove also created a mutually exclusive relationship between the two groups so that the reader is faced with a limited choice: either to be part of the solution or part of the problem.

It is also significant that Gove used the phrase 'free schools movement' as the label for the solution. Used as a noun, the phrase tends to refer to a group of people working together for a shared cause. It thus gives the impression of a 'bottom up' approach to a problem: people working together to realise shared interests. The term has a significant representation in political history, for example E.P Thompson's seminal work that reinterprets English Social history through the depiction of popular movements in the formation of class. One is minded of Thompson's assertion that class (and thus movements) are created when people 'feel and articulate the identity of their needs as between themselves, and usually opposed to, others' (Thompson, 2002: 4). The point here is that the concept of a 'movement' invokes ideas of a) being oppressed and b) moving against that oppression. Up until the present day, the term is used to signify unified action *against* something. For example: The Occupy Movement, The Tea Party Movement, and The Black Lives Matter Movement. It is also worth mentioning the international dimension to the concept: many of the most prominent 'movements' today are global phenomena (e.g. Occupy and Black Lives Matter).

The concept of a *Free Schools Movement* in England is therefore also grounded in the notion of a *movement* as a global discourse. In educational contexts, the term has a precedent in the Independent Reform Movement in the United States that advocated change to formal schooling arrangements through the introduction of independent community schools. As such, it is the apotheosis of localism, the centralising mechanism within a structure of small, diverse and self-governing

populations. Such cultural reference points create an ambivalence to hierarchical state structures that, by their nature, are a centralising force that serves to disempower local communities (Brouillette, 2002: 29). Thus, the notion of community schooling is deeply embedded within U.S. historical discourses and is evident in the current Charter Schools policy. (Brouillette, 2002; Fuller, 2009). The link between U.S charter schools and U.K. free schools is well documented. For example, the 2010 White Paper: 'The Importance of Teaching' makes a number of references to charter schools as blueprints for good practice (Department for Education, 2010b).

### The Case of the Al Madinah Academy

This emphasis on community is, however, hard to translate into the English education discursive formation. Based on a number of secondary resources, I will now construct a case study based on the events surrounding the Al Madinah Academy in Derby. In doing so, I hope to elucidate ways in which new education discourses, such as representations of community, that were intrinsic in the construction of the free schools movement, can run into conflict with the existing discursive formation and, that this can create significant challenges for those attempting to subvert the status quo.

In September 2012, the Al Madinah Academy (free school) opened in Derby, one of the communities challenged by Michael Gove to take on the free schools reform. Set up by a 'community group', the school was distinctive because it was an Islamic Faith Designated school (Al-Madinah Education Trust, 2011) and was originally a 'through school': one that offered provision for primary and secondary pupils (4-16) (Al-Madinah Education Trust, 2011). The community group in question was three parents who had previously set up a pre-school in their local mosque, funded by community contributions, additional funding from the mosque and local authority grants. Although the pre-school had historically been

well attended, it received a poor Ofsted report in 2008. The original purpose of the proposed new school was ambiguous and, as with Ridgewell School, the project was buffeted by other local voices, with conflicting interests, from the beginning. Significantly, this was even reflected in the status of the school. Although the application was for a faith designated school, the school was described as a 'Muslim ethos' school in the group's marketing materials (Al-Madinah Education Trust, 2011) and was mostly reported in the press in this way (e.g. Bayley, 2013a).

The NSN was very clear in its own literature that there was a legal distinction between these two entities. A faith-designated school (faith school) was one where faith was legally recognised as central to its character. Such schools were allowed to: provide religious education and collective worship according to the tenets of the faith of the school; give preference to those of the same faith as the school when appointing teachers; admit up to 50% of pupils on the basis of faith if the school was oversubscribed (New Schools Network, 2014).

By contrast, a school that had a 'faith ethos' could align itself with a particular faith or a set of morals but could not: provide religious education and collective worship where the religion was not Christian (unless the school successfully applied to the Secretary of State for an exemption); adopt faith based admission arrangements; or, recruit teachers on the basis of faith unless it could be justified as a genuine occupational requirement (New Schools Network, 2014). Given the constraints on setting up a non Christian, religious ethos school it might seem surprising that the group was not clear about their approach from the outset. On the *frequently asked questions* page on the group's web site, they did attempt to clarify matters:

> *'The school has been set up as an Islamic Faith Designated school and not an Islamic Ethos school. We have used the*

*terminology Islamic ethos in our marketing and literature as this is better understood by the whole community.'*

(Al-Madinah Education Trust, 2011)

This seems a curious statement, particularly given the level of animosity towards Muslim communities that was evident in the national press at the time. The group's desire not to push the fact that it was a faith-designated school appears to be largely due to conflict within the local community. Firstly, a group who called themselves the Derby Campaign for Inclusive Education (DCIE) started campaigning for 'inclusive education' in the city. The group was formed as a direct response to the 'Mosque's' school plans' (This is Derbyshire, 2010a) and the group's web site contained a specific section on the Al Madinah School. The group stated that its members were drawn from a wide range of beliefs and had members who were muslims, atheists, and christians, including ex-vicars (This is Derbyshire, 2010a).

However, the only named individual on any of the available publications was also a founding member of the Derbyshire Secularists and Humanists (This is Derbyshire, 2010b). The group do not appear to have sustained their activities beyond the acceptance of the bid by the Department for Education: there is no evidence of the group's activities other than some initial press releases and the website. These sources do include some detail of their activities, which appear to have mainly included leafleting parents outside the mosque in an attempt to persuade them of the virtues of a secular education. Although such arguments are well rehearsed, it is unclear why the group chose to focus solely on the Al Madinah Academy, particularly when there were more than twenty Church of England designated faith schools in the area. Whilst one could argue that the school was a new development, and thus worthy of opposition, the group does not afford the same coverage to the Hindu free school that also opened in the area. Furthermore, the group's assertion that the school could lead to an increase in right wing attacks is reminiscent of David Gillborn's account

of the way that a degenerate working class is used to justify discriminatory practices by a respectable middle class (Gillborn, 2010).

The group also came under pressure from people who opposed a state funded Muslim school. Although a number of press releases foregrounded this issue (e.g. Derby Telegraph, 2012), it is important not to over simplify the problem. There is a large Pakistani Muslim population in Derby, which is served by 14 mosques of varying Islamic orders and there have been some historical tensions relating to the mosques. These have centred on the formation of new institutions, such as the Derby Islamic Centre (Derby Islamic Centre, n.d.).

Thus, achieving consensus amongst the different groups was a complex task, made more difficult by a degree of mistrust of government policy by some Muslim orders (Communities and Local Government, 2009), particularly in relation to the discourses of integration (integration was often perceived as only spoken about in relation to minority groups and only in times of crisis)(Communities and Local Government, 2009). There is also evidence of a perception that community funding was increasingly controlled by white middle class community groups and Pakistani Muslim groups were therefore less able to access local community funding streams (Communities and Local Government, 2009).

In addition, there was a tradition of self-funding community projects within the Muslim community in Derby. For example, the Derby Islamic Centre development was largely funded by contributions from within the Pakistani Muslim population (Derby Islamic Centre, n.d.). All of these issues made the formation of a state-funded Muslim school a complex task, both in liaising with the local population and successfully meeting the requirements of a free school bid. From the outset, these issues were evident. Firstly, there was significant opposition to the project from within the Pakistani Muslim population in Derby, with one ‘spokesman’ claiming

that the formation of a school with a 'Muslim ethos' would lead to a 'lost generation' (Derby Telegraph, 2012). This opposition was widespread with a number of reports stating that the remaining mosques in the city had withdrawn their support for the project. It was this opposition that appears to have led to the ambiguity about the legal status of the school: by calling it a Muslim ethos school, the group evaded potential criticism that they were placing Islam under the auspices of the state.

However, with support from the NSN the group's bid was successful and the school opened in September 2012 (BBC, 2012). But a number of issues persisted. Firstly, the exact nature of the role of the steering group in the new school was not clear. From the outset, the group's identity was very different from the Ridgewell steering group. Coming from a culture where self-funding community based projects were the norm, the group appeared reticent about getting involved with the wider free schools initiative. Having successfully set up a nursery within the grounds of the mosque, the group was keen to develop a primary school on the same site. In 2010 they stated that they had raised £100,000 to pay for furniture, laptops and equipment for the school and that they expected annual running costs of about £120,000, which were ideally to be funded in part by the government (This is Derbyshire, 2010c).

The group, therefore, did not want the entire project to be funded by government and they seemed unclear about the extent of their role in the new school. Significantly, the school did not open at the mosque: the new proposal involved a site a mile away but, as this site was not available until the beginning of 2013, the school began by opening in a temporary premises almost 3 miles away. Although this is a significant shift from the original idea, the group attribute the change to the requisite consultation process (Al-Madinah Education Trust, 2011). Furthermore, this process appears to have been undertaken with a considerable amount of diligence and it is notable that the NSN used the group's consultation documents as

exemplar materials on their web site (New Schools Network, 2012a).

Another point of interest was the staffing arrangements at the school. The school appointed a non Muslim head teacher because of a lack of suitably qualified Muslims to undertake the role (Al-Madinah Education Trust, 2011). According to the group's web site, this was because:

> *'(the new head teacher) demonstrated vital traits of a superb leader, has understanding of OFSTED requirements and has demonstrated a willingness to develop his understanding of Islam and is determined to make this project a success. The Principal scored very highly in the majority of the key areas of the interview process.'*
>
> (Al-Madinah Education Trust, 2011)

As with Ridgewell School, 'expertise' (an ability to work within existing educational discourses and practices) is foregrounded over the group's own purposes and vision. This is exemplified by the strong sense of ordering in the passage, which is organised in an ordered list about the qualities of the head teacher: firstly he was a superb leader; secondly he understood Ofsted; thirdly he was willing to learn about Islam; fourthly he was determined to make the project a success. Furthermore, there is a significant difference in the commitment to each of the statements in the list: the head *has demonstrated vital traits (*of a leader*)*; he *has understanding* (of Ofsted), and he *is willing* (to develop an understanding of Islam). The opening statement contains the normative adjectives *'vital'* and '*superb'*, something missing from the subsequent statements.

In addition, there is a difference in the application of the verb 'demonstrated': in the first statement the verb is used as an intransitive verb, referencing the noun 'traits'. The third statement appears to mirror this: *'demonstrated a willingness'.* However, the verb *demonstrated* is

actually referencing an adjectival noun *'a willingness'* (willingness is an adjective). Thus, whereas the first statement references a thing (albeit an intransitive one), the third statement references a state of being (to be willing); the first is something the person *has* the third statement is something he *is.*

**Adaption and Friction**

In effect, the statement was an acknowledgement of a need to adapt, to ensure the project fitted within the existing educational parameters. Such moments are evident in most documented cases of community schools, both in England and other countries (Brouillette, 2002; Allen, 2010; Wiborg, 2010). However, I want to argue that such moments are often accompanied by moments of friction as local groups struggle to hold on to the values and order that they have already established. This is evident in the next section of the statement produced by the Al Madinah group:

> *'We do not see having a non-Muslim head as being a major weakness to the school set up as the Islamic ethos throughout the school would be lead by the Director of Islamic studies who is part of the senior leadership team and will work alongside the Principal to ensure that this is underpinned into the school's curriculum, policies, procedures etc. It must be noted a Girls Islamic school in Bradford is a notable example of where a school has achieved great academic results under a non-Muslim head.'*
>
> (Al-Madinah Education Trust, 2011)

Here the relationship between the Islamic values of the group and the requirements of the curriculum are presented in an additive fashion: the school will deliver great academic results (under a non-Muslim head) *and* the school will deliver an *Islamic ethos.* This is discursively significant because there is no indication as to how or why these two value systems

will fit together; the outcome of such ambiguities can be friction between a steering group and the new management systems put in place (Brouillette, 2002).

This is what appeared to happen in the case of the Al Madinah School with far-reaching consequences for all involved. In the summer of 2013, one year after the school had opened, the appointed head teacher resigned, citing poor health caused by stress (Pidd, 2013). This followed the earlier resignation of the deputy head (and head of the primary school) who claimed that she had been bullied by the school's governors (Baines and Spencer, 2013). The head made a number of statements to the press about the disagreement, and also informed the DfE and Education Funding Authority of his concerns about the management of the school (Pidd, 2013). These concerns related to 'finance issues, operational leadership issues [and] ability and experience concerns' (Cutts-Mckay cited in Pidd, 2013).

A focal point of the tension between the head and the governors was the proposed building of a new sports hall. The head, reportedly, stated that the governing body wanted to earmark £350,000 of school money for the project, which was something he was strongly opposed to: the money, he felt, should have been used to improve the pupils' education (Pidd, 2013). There was clearly a breakdown in the relationship between the governors and the school's senior managers, with one of the governors publicly labelling the head as 'evil' (Pidd, 2013). A side note at this point is the role of the press in reporting this breakdown in the relationship: whereas a significant number of column inches was dedicated to normative statements that outline the head's values and purpose, virtually none were afforded to the governors.

In short, the head's personal story is well documented whereas the governors' story is not. For example, a Daily Mail article on 22nd September

2013 (Baines and Spencer, 2013) refers to both the head and deputy by name and uses a number of direct quotes attributed to them and other teaching staff. The problems they encountered were well documented with the head stating that he was 'bullied and sidelined' (Baines and Spencer, 2013) and other staff stating that teaching in the school was 'like being in Pakistan' (Baines and Spencer, 2013). In contrast, there is no direct or reported speech from members of the school's trust, who were instead referred to as 'religious hardliners' (Baines and Spencer, 2013).

In addition, it was widely reported that an initial Ofsted inspection was linked to the head's resignation and his role as a 'whistleblower' (Pidd, 2013). This may have been the case (the school was inspected a year earlier than would be expected so there may have been some concerns raised). However, it also paints the head as part of the solution rather than part of the problem. The issue here is that this aspect of the relationship between staff and governors is entirely omitted from press coverage. Thus, the group's voice is absent from the debate; their value and purpose are unrecognized; their position in the public sphere becomes unjust (Fraser and Honneth, 2003).

### Ofsted

The issues at the school became a national news story following a problematical Ofsted inspection in October 2013. However, the report itself was actually published after the school started to create headlines in the national press: the school had been temporarily closed by Ofsted during the inspection because appropriate background checks had not been completed on teaching staff and the school had thus been deemed non-compliant (Bayley, 2013b). It was at this point that the news stories about the school emerged. The published report was damning, rating the school as inadequate in every category and it led to the school being placed in special measures (Bayley, 2013a). However, there were

significant discrepancies between the accounts in the press and the issues identified by Ofsted.

Although the press reported on discriminatory practices in the school, these were refuted in the inspection report, which actually stated that relationships between staff and pupils was a strength of the school, and that no discriminatory practices between boys and girls observed. The report also stated that Islamic Studies made a positive contribution to pupils' understanding of the similarities between different religions and the clear vision and purpose that the governing body had identified for the school's role within the community. The weaknesses that it identified were not in what the school was trying to do, but rather its lack of efficacy in how it implemented its vision (Ofsted, 2013). But the report was also unequivocal in its account of the school's weaknesses:

> *'This school is dysfunctional. The basic systems and processes a school needs to operate well are not in place. This is a school, which has been set up and run by representatives of the community with limited knowledge and experience. Leadership and management, including governance, are inadequate and have been unable to improve the school. The school has not been adequately monitored or supported.'*
>
> (Ofsted, 2013)

Contrary to the press coverage of the situation, the purpose and ethos of the Trust was thus actually commended by Ofsted: the report clearly stated that the school was a worthwhile project. Furthermore, a point that went completely unnoticed in the press coverage was the tacit criticism that *'the school has not been adequately monitored or supported* (Bayley, 2013a). This raises a number of important issues about the support provided by the New Schools Network and Department for Education.

Although the subject of the monitoring of free schools has been kept confidential to an extent, some details have emerged. For example, following a freedom of information request by Laura McInerney, a template of the pre Ofsted inspection form has been released (2013). As she observes, this template uses exactly the same criteria used for an Ofsted inspection, which means that free schools are subject to exactly the same monitoring arrangements as state schools, despite the supposed freedom from government (McInerney, 2013). The head teacher of Al Madinah confirmed that a DfE inspection did take place in December 2012 and was carried out by qualified Ofsted inspectors. He also stated that the report did not pick up on the safeguarding issues raised by the Ofsted team. In fact, he stated that teaching, achievement, behaviour safeguarding, and leadership and management were not inadequate in the pre Ofsted inspection. The discrepancy between this account of the school and the subsequent account by Ofsted is significant.

### Ofsted as a Policing Mechanism

In effect, the Al Madinah School became an early tension point between the policing of the existing education discursive formation and those looking to do something different. Ofsted has been a particularly powerful voice in relation to the policing of free schools. It is worth considering Ofsted's purpose and role at this moment. On their website, they state that they:

> *'help providers that are not yet of good standard to improve, monitor their progress and share with them the best practice we find. Our goal is to achieve excellence in education and skills for learners of all ages, and in the care of children and young people.'*
>
> (Ofsted, 2016)

The language references abstract nouns (best practice, excellence) in a committed fashion. This is partly due to a significant process of reification that occurs in the passage. In effect, verbs 'help' and 'achieve' are transitive verbs but they appear to refer to something more concrete. This is partly due to the indeterminate nature of the noun 'practice', which is closely related to the verb 'to practise' (e.g. I practise best practice). To an extent, this gives the effect of a nominalization (a noun derived from a verb), which, in turn, has the effect of reifying the process of practising education so that it becomes 'a practice'.

There are also two examples of adjectival nouns. Firstly, 'excellence' is used as a noun 'to achieve excellence'. Excellence can also take the adjectival form 'excellent'. Something similar occurs with the use of the phrase 'good standard'. Here, the adjective 'good' is turned into a compound noun 'good standard' which is given status as an adjectival noun through a collocation with the preposition 'of' (of good standard). Both the use of 'excellence' and the use of 'good standard' have the effect of reifying the process of being an excellent educator and educating to a good standard so that they become objects (to have excellence, to have a standard) and thus privilege the objective over the subjective. As such, there is little room for subverting the social order evident in Ofsted's discourse. Education is presented as *a fait accompli* something immutable that exists beyond debate.

By way of comparison, the New Schools Network describes its own mission in the following way:

> *'We are a small charity that works to transform the standard of education in England by delivering more high-quality free schools and campaigning to win public and political support for free schools.'*
>
> (New Schools Network, 2016a)

Here the language is less committed. For example, the use of the word 'standard' is used differently: it is collocated with the definite article (the) so that it becomes an adjective rather than a noun (a synonym of 'quality'). Thus their mission is much more process driven: to transform the *quality* of education. This softening of the word *standard* is necessary because the group straddles two purposes: the policing of education and 'campaigning' with local activists.

The issue of commitment is significant because it reveals a power relation: Ofsted *are* whereas NSN *do*; Ofsted *is* a something, NSN works with something. This is not the precondition of equality that May refers to (May, 2008), thus NSN's campaigning role was necessarily limited. Without the ability to subvert, those who challenged existing educational discourses were likely to be ineffective. Despite support from the NSN, the progress of the Al Madinah school was set on a path, defined by the Ofsted inspection, which ultimately led to the demise of the project.

**The end of The Al Madinah Project**

Following the publication of the Ofsted report, there was a wide ranging response from the coalition government, including a number of quotes by the Prime Minister stating that he would 'not hesitate to close the school' (Hawley, 2013). Lord Nash, a spokesperson for the Department of Education (who also chairs and sponsors the Futures Academy chain) wrote to the governors of the school threatening to revoke their funding if it did not address a set of issues, which Nash claimed were in breach of the funding agreement. The NSN also released a response to the Ofsted report in which Natalie Evans, Director of the New Schools Network, was quoted as saying:

'*Underperformance in any school is completely unacceptable*

> *given the costs to students and their families. Too often concerns are not addressed quickly enough or, worse, at all. "Over 350 (356) maintained schools are currently in special measures, nearly a third of which have languished there for over a year (106 schools, 29.8%). If a school is not good enough we should see swift action. In these cases, this has happened within six months. "Despite the intense scrutiny they are under, the overwhelming majority of Free Schools are delivering on their promise to pupils and parents: providing excellent education whether through bilingual learning, extended days or specialist curricula.'*
>
> (New Schools Network, 2013c)

Some of the participants in this research were frustrated that the Department for Education and the New Schools Network applied a 'sink or swim' strategy to new free schools (from interview notes, 2015). Their perception was that those starting up free schools took all of the risk, whilst the DfE and NSN reaped the benefits of those that succeeded. However, for the purposes of this research, what is significant is what constitutes 'success'. The Al Madinah case shows that two prerequisites for setting up a free school were ceding to the values of Ofsted, and complying with the wider values and discourses of the press. As the Al Madinah case shows, this policing of the education discursive formation did not leave many possibilities for innovation and difference. By contrast, those responsible for supporting free schools had no mandate to disrupt or change *education as it is.* The New Schools Network took a passive line in relation to Ofsted and the Department for Education and they were largely anonymous until they publicly denounced the school.

On 21st November 2013, the Board of Trustees of the Al Madinah School offered their resignation pending a period of transition (Derby Telegraph, 2014). By this point the pressure on the Board had become severe, to the

point that even leaders of the Jamia Mosque (the organisation that the original bid was attached to) had publicly stated that they should stand down (BBC, 2013a). The Chair of the Board had expressed the group's desire to oversee a period of transition for 'the future of our children' (BBC, 2013a). However, their role in the school effectively ended at this point and, despite their wishes, they were prevented from making any contribution towards the new direction of the school (Derby Telegraph, 2014). Since then, the school has been taken over by The Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust, (an existing academy chain) closed down its secondary school and has focused on its primary provision (BBC, 2013b).

The reason Al Madinah failed so quickly whilst Ridgewell survived is a prescient one. An obvious answer to this question is that both schools received different grades as the outcome of their Ofsted inspection (Al Madinah was unsatisfactory whilst Ridgewell required improvement).

It is also worth noting that The Discovery Montessori free school in Crawley was shut down after an unsatisfactory Ofsted inspection at about the same time as the Al Madinah Academy (BBC, 2014). Thus the role of Ofsted as a trigger for the different outcomes was significant but there are two points here that infer the entire problem cannot be reduced to Ofsted's actions. Firstly, the Al Madinah Academy was inspected at an earlier date in its development than either the Discovery New School (opened in September 2011 and inspected in May 2013) or Ridgewell (opened in Sept 2013 and inspected in May 2015). In contrast, Al Madinah had been open just over a year when it was inspected. These might seem like small differences but some who have set up free schools have pointed out the unfairness of expecting new schools to meet the same criteria as established schools within the required time frame for inspections (Blume, 2015).

From my own observations of Ridgewell School in its first year, I can concur with this view. This is from my notes of an observation I made at the

beginning of the school's second year of existence:

> *'As we entered the make shift school, the space was awash with noise and energy. Teachers (including the head teacher) were mingling with children and children were congregating in different parts of the building. The atmosphere was energetic and noisy but I could not say it felt dangerous or unsafe. Whether what the children were doing was purposeful was impossible to say: everyone seemed to be engaged in a different activity in a different part of the building.*
>
> *Later, the head teacher invited us to watch some presentations that some of the children were doing to promote their ideas for the design of the new school. The children presented confidently and seemed at ease with the adults in the room. Would I send my own children into this space? Yes. The school was welcoming and the children seemed to be getting on. Do I think they could guarantee compliance with a minimum standard of education? I'm not so sure. The cross curricular, cross age group approach did make it impossible to establish what each child had done or was capable of doing in any area of the curriculum. This view is somewhat reinforced by my session with the governors who told me the school had no system in place to track children's progress.'*
>
> (from notes taken after visiting Ridgewell school, 2014).

I need to emphasise here that I am not claiming Ridgewell was a poor or failing school. The staff was enthusiastic and the atmosphere was very welcoming. However, I am claiming that there were inevitably procedural elements of the school that, similar to the Al Madinah, were underdeveloped in relation to more established schools (record keeping, curriculum, classroom management). My impression was that these things

would settle down over time and thus any new school needs grace to establish itself properly. Of course, in the case of the Al Madinah School, the Ofsted was triggered by the fallout between the governors and senior management, the subsequent resignation of the head and deputy and the complaint made by the head to Ofsted about the school.

The other significant trigger for the sequence of events in the case of Al Madinah was the wave of Islamophobia, predicated on the discourse of a war on terror, which was prevalent in the national press at time (Kundnani, 2007). Once the school had been identified as having weaknesses, the discourse entered a new dimension whereby the religious status of the school became the focus. As observed, the different interventions of the state-based institutions was significant: the government stated they would have no hesitation in shutting the school down (Hawley, 2013) thus publicly following the editorial line of the media (Nash, 2014).

By contrast, Ofsted steadfastly maintained their own focus on 'standards' and went as far as refuting some of the allegations about the school made by the press and by Lord Nash (2014), going as far as stating that the pastoral care in the school was good and there was no evidence of discrimination (Ofsted, 2013). Finally the NSN, the organisation that campaigned to promote the free schools movement (New Schools Network, 2016a), was characterised by its anonymity throughout the incident. As an example of an educational network they were unable to offer any support to the school despite supporting them through the bidding process and even going as far as using some of the school's documents as exemplars for other bidders. Ridgewell too felt that this part of the organisation of free schools was weak, stating they found the feedback from Ofsted's inspection more useful than any intervention from NSN (from interview notes, 2015).

Despite a tranche of literature on the rise of networks within the education

system (Ball and Youdell, 2007), I argue that the case of the Al Madinah Academy demonstrates that such networks can develop from weak discursive positions and thus offer weak policy interventions. The work of authors such as Stephen Ball on the role of the private sector in education mirror the emergence of a new education policy discourse that foregrounds parental choice, freedom for schools and the opening up of education to new actors (Ball and Junemann, 2012: 31). This discourse has been referred to as the discourse of new public management (Hood, 1995). That such networks exist is undeniable but the work, particularly of Ball, overstates their transformative nature. The NSN is one example of a group encouraged into existence by central government but with no real mandate to change anything. Even if such a mandate existed, the example of the ARK foundation illustrates the intractable nature of the existing education policy discourse. Such discourses have a long history and are ultimately constitutive of the State as we know it (Green, 2013). As the case of the NSN demonstrates, rather than challenging the status quo, such groups can act as a sop between the differing agendas of central government and local groups (such as the bidding groups in the case of free schools), creating uncertainty from their ambiguous position within the process of governance.

## Chapter 7: Meet the Parents

As has already been discussed, from an early stage, the steering group developed a hortatory discourse (Fairclough, 2003: 96) that focused on the school as a space that would provide new opportunities for those from deprived backgrounds. Unpicking this approach is complicated and I do not wish to dispute either the intention or the outcomes of this justification. It is important to emphasise Geoffrey's claim that the overall average earnings for the area were the lowest in the country (Office for National Statistics, 2015). To-date, however, the school has not developed a distinctive intake in terms of pupils eligible for pupil premium (34%) nor those children who have special educational needs (11%) (from interview notes, 2015). These figures are broadly in line with the intakes of other schools in the area (from interview notes, 2015). Furthermore, the school has struggled to find ways of getting parents who do send their children to the school to get involved with the governance of the school. The current school intake is relatively small but I wondered whether there were any identifiable social dynamics that were emerging in relation to the new school. Specifically, I wanted to know how parents and prospective parents interfaced with the emerging elements that constituted the school space (the steering group, the staff and those that opposed the school) as well as the way parents positioned themselves in relation to the school, to education and to each other.

I interviewed two groups of parents from Bridletown. The first was a group of two parents, one whose foster child was at the school, and one who was considering sending her child to the school. I went to one of the parent's houses to interview them. They had both lived in the town for most of their lives and considered themselves to have a higher position educationally in relation to other families in the town. Interestingly, they tended to categorise people's positions in relation to education using three discrete categories: the mediocre, the middling and the high achievers. Children

labelled as ‘mediocre’ tended to come from Easton-on-the-River or Northampton (two areas in North Bridletown).

The difference between the middling and high achievers was not differentiated in the same way but the parents were adamant that their children were ‘middling’ kids. I met the second group at a local children’s centre. The centre served an area of North Bridletown and the group I met attended a weekly parent support group at the centre. The group was run by one of the district’s link workers whose job was to improve the links between families and schools. Attendance at the group was voluntary but many of those who attended identified with certain needs they had in terms of their child’s education. The focus group consisted of six parents. None of the parents sent their children to Ridgewell and, apart from one, were not considering the option for any of their children. Although most of the parents expressed dissatisfaction with Bridletown School, most sent at least one of their children there. One parent had sent her son with autism to the school but then sent him to a specialist school to ensure his specific needs were being catered for.

Interestingly, this group also tended to identify with ‘children in the middle’ but also made references to the ‘special needs’ of some of their children. These dynamics mirrored the Ridgewell School parents’ categorisation but the ‘special needs’ tended to emphasise deficits (sometimes medical) that compelled these parents to choose a school that was able to meet their child’s needs. This is distinct from the Ridgewell parents’ use of the term ‘mediocre’, a term whose normative dimensions will be discussed later in this section. Both sets of parents also highlighted the importance of choice. However, the Ridgewell parents tended to reference the act of choosing in terms of individualism, aptitude and personalised learning whereas the children’s centre group constructed choice in a more constrained fashion, highlighting problems with travel and ensuring their child’s specific needs were being met.

I want to argue that these interviews reveal two things. Firstly, the perspective that the groups took to legitimate education was significantly different to that of the education discursive formation. This led to differing values and moral assumptions about the purposes of education. Whereas the educational discursive formation focused on how the individual could meet the needs of the state, focusing on performance and competition, the parents interviewed were more interested in the way the state could meet the needs of their child, focussing on kinder, nurturing environments where their children would be happy.

Secondly, I want to highlight the observation that both groups of parents were also divided in their sense of each other. The Ridgewell parents were very aware of educational 'mediocrity' and its link to deprivation and they were keen to distance themselves from it. In effect the Ridgewell parents acted to police the school in its capacity as a manifestation of the education discursive formation. By contrast, those who I interviewed at the children's centre were excluded from the process. By this I mean that the Ridgewell parents acted to protect their own position in the social order by acting against the North Bridletown parents. In doing so, they also created a buffer between the North Bridletown families and the new school. This moral bubbling between prospective parents created an order of discourse that acted as a buffer between the school and families from deprived areas, which may have contributed to the school's inability to attract a significant number of parents from these backgrounds.

### The Ridgewell Parents

Sam and Tina were a mother and daughter. Having brought up Tina and her brother, Sam began fostering and has cared for Rachael since before she started school. According to Sam, Rachael had a difficult start to her schooling, having been 'bullied' at her first primary school. The school in

question was the same attended by her first two children but Sam found the current head teacher very difficult to deal with in relation to addressing the issues that had arisen with Rachael. Specifically, Sam stated that the head teacher repeatedly denied that any bullying occurred in the school and refused to respond to Sam's requests. Sam stated that Rachael became distressed and began to refuse to go to school so Sam sought out a suitable alternative school. Sam felt that Rachael settled in much better at the new school and was generally more positive about her education until her final year.

At this point, Sam felt she lost motivation and her progress slowed. Sam's other children had attended Bridletown Secondary School when they were younger. However, Sam was reluctant to send Rachael there and she chose Ridgewell instead. Her reasoning for doing so was complex and involved a mixture of unsubstantiated claims about Bridletown school and an educational philosophy that referenced, but had little to do with, the education discursive formation. Interestingly, her support for schools was not unequivocal; in fact it was, more often than not, negative and undermining. In effect, she was always looking for the exception rather than the rule: the school that was just right for her child in a world where schools were not right.

Tina's daughter was still at primary school but Tina was keen for her to follow Rachael to Ridgewell School and she was in the process of applying for a place. She mirrored many of her mother's ideas about education and was particularly worried about her daughter being bullied at school.

### The Children's Centre Parents

The parents I met at the children's centre were all residents on a local estate where many of the properties were owned by a social housing trust. All of the parents who spoke had children with identifiable special

educational needs (either autism or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). Two of the parents had considered the possibility of sending their children, who were currently at Bridletown, to Ridgewell when it opened but decided against it. The third (whose child had autism) felt that it was impossible but considered sending her youngest child there in the future. Annalie had one child who went to Bridletown but, having been diagnosed as having ADHD at primary school, he spent much of his school time in their dedicated special needs unit.

Clare had three children; the oldest had started at Bridletown but, due to his autism, was sent to a specialist school. Clare felt he had really struggled at Bridletown and felt that the move to a specialist school really helped her son. She also had a younger son who was at Bridletown and she felt he was very settled at the school. Her youngest child was of pre school age but she had already considered Ridgewell as a possible secondary school because she felt her daughter was already showing signs of being 'difficult'.

Debbie had had a son at Bridletown but he had left to attend a school for children with behavioural problems. She also had two younger children who were both in upper Key Stage 2 of primary school, the eldest in year 6. She had not planned to send these younger children to Ridgewell School, even though she was apprehensive about sending them to Bridletown.

### The Absence of Meritocracy

None of the parents interviewed were positive about their children's experiences at Bridletown School. The most consistently cited issue was the large size of the school. This issue tended to act as a moral assumption around which an entire discourse of connected ideas had emerged. Furthermore, a significant theme was the establishment of an *equivalence* (Fairclough, 2003: 100) between the largeness of the school and large class sizes. For example:

*'But with Bridletown School there is so much bullying that goes on there like, me and my brothers went there. I know it's a different head now but we all got bullied there and got our fair share of it and the classes are big, like 30. We had 32 when I was there and we had 10 classes to a year. It was huge.'*

Tina

This linkage between *large class* and *large school* allowed for a number of other observations to enter the discourse. As Tina's quote illustrates, something that was foregrounded by many of the parents was 'bullying'. In this respect, all of the parents offered a strikingly similar narrative, which centred on the causal relationship between bullying and size of school (Fairclough, 2003: 89): Bridletown school was large, *which caused* impersonal relationships and a lack of surveillance and monitoring *which caused* bullying. Sam used a comparable observation that illustrates this causal argument:

*'My father-in-law hit the nail on the head….he was a teacher….not at Bridletown School but a similar sized school and there was a fight in the playground…a really bad fight that the teachers had to prise apart and he realised he didn't know the students. You know, they ran off, he asked the others 'what's his name?' and the other didn't want to grass each other up. And he said there was a knife involved and everything but it was a school without CCTV and stuff and realised then that 'this school is too big when the teachers don't actually recognise all the pupils let alone know their names. And I think at that school they do have a lot of problems, there's a lot of problems with bullying….it's just too big, it's too big.'*

It is interesting to note that Sam established another equivalence between 'bullying' and 'fight': there was a fight; they do have a lot of problems with bullying. This ambiguity was characteristic of all the accounts of bullying: everyone agreed that it was a problem at Bridletown School but no one provided an account of what bullying was (Sam's account was the most extended). This ambiguity allowed for a logic of appearance to develop around bullying (e.g. disruption, unruly behaviour, stress, alienation, uncaring staff) that was underpinned by moral assumptions about the school's size. For example, the link worker highlighted the uncaring attitude of the school staff:

> *'At Bridletown, there's no consistency in the teaching up there. One of the parents I'm working with (to parents) I don't know if you've read it on Facebook? (gentle laughter). She's put in a complaint because her daughter had stomach cramps and didn't want to take part in P.E. and the teacher turned round and said, 'Well if you didn't eat loads of junk and you weren't overweight you would be able to do P.E.' She's been there a long time and I think that you forget that you've gone in to thrive and nurturing. And there's still a bit of that old school with some of the teachers so they don't get a consistent teaching pattern across…if you've got 26 teachers there's no way they're ever going to be the same. You've got ones who go 'Oh they're great teachers and you've got others who they say 'Oh I can't stand her she just shouts all the time.'*

This section of text exemplifies the chain of causality that characteristically underpins the relationships that had developed in the discourse: the school was big (there are 26 classes); this caused a lack of monitoring; this caused a lack of consistency; this caused bad teachers to go unchecked; this caused bad teachers to stay for a long time; this caused bad teachers to be worse. Another aspect of this quote is the proxy status of the parent. All of

the parents' comments about the school were characterised by a lack of clear information and the substitution of their child's experiences with their own experiences. This is exemplified by the following example from Sam:

> *'If children feel happy and they're confident and they feel that they're doing well then they want to do better, don't they? If you're saying to a child that's fantastic you're doing really well, it's an ego boost isn't it? I think if their ego's up and their enthusiasm's up isn't it? If you're just sat in a class and you've got your hand up. I had a friend whose daughter for one lesson - she had her hand up like this and the teacher didn't get round to her…and she was just sat there like this and I said, 'Oh I can remember doing that at school, changing arms because your arm is aching.'*

The quick shifts between pronouns in this extract are indicative of the blurring of boundaries between pupil, parent and others. In this instance, 'they' (child) shifts to 'you' (parent to child), 'you' (parent) shifts to 'you' (pupil) so that a sequence that began with 'children' ends with Sam as a pupil at school. This shifting between pupil and parent is also evident in the comments made by the link worker from the children's centre:

> *'When you go somewhere like Bridletown School you do get a bit lost because of the size of it but also I've always believed that primary school, they're a nurturing environment and you can drop your children off you can chat to the teacher, you know everyone in the playground , there's that sense of you're a part of your children's education. And then they go to secondary school, at the most vulnerable age of their life, and suddenly they need to be independent, they need to get the bus in. Unless your child has a detention or are really awful you wouldn't hear*

*from a school unless you get a letter about a parents' evening. There's absolutely, for me, I mean my job role is linking with schools; and communication with parents is always the thing that comes up. They might have heard a few weeks later that their child has been in detention all week. Whereas something happens in primary they'll phone you on the day and go this has happened how are we going to deal with it? And it just changed everything I think. It must be hard for children they're so young still. And suddenly, it's almost like they're getting cut off from their family and being pushed into being too grown up.'*

Here, the extract begins with an ambiguous statement that blurs the boundaries between parent and child. Crucial to this boundary blurring is the equivalence created around the pronoun *you* (When you go to Bridletown *you* do get lost). At this point, the reference to *you* could be the author, parent or the child. However, the pronoun referring to children shifts to *they* immediately after the opening sentence, and *you* is reserved solely for references to the parents. These shifts between pronouns have the effect of making it difficult to distinguish between the pupils and parents, specifically in terms of their needs: pupils and parent act as a single entity that is defined by needs.

I refer to this amalgamation of parent and pupil as an *entity with needs*: a single entity, constituted of parent and child that is realised as *in need* when projected into the school context. This *entity of needs* generates a number of discursive effects. One such effect is to create a school as *imagined space*, that is, the construction of a school as a conglomeration of the experiences of pupils and parents. For example, whilst talking about the choice of secondary schools for their daughters, Sam and Tina said the following:

Tina: *'When I was at Bridletown School I used to just gas to my mates. I had no interest in learning whatsoever and I could get away with it because classes were so big. I wasn't rude or disruptive so I just didn't learn anything. I just sat there gassing.'*

Sam: '*…or writing things on the blackboard to copy down. Put it on a piece of paper and give it to me then. How am I learning by just copying stuff that you've written on the board? You're chatting with your mate and not writing anything down.'*

Tina: '*I'm more of a visual learner so someone doing anatomy and reeling off all these words-it would completely go over me. I'd be like 'I don't know what you just said to me.' If someone said ok and done it visually I'd say 'ah ok, this is interesting ok I get it this.' So it's how you go writing down, I could write forever and chat and have no idea what I'd just written. Can't they recognise that? People have different ways of learning don't they?*'

Their responses are indicative of many in that they refer to a series of abstract objects and processes. Sam imagined children copying things off a blackboard in the way that she experienced and she even began to engage in imagined conversational dialogue with her old teachers, for example, '*How am I learning by just copying off the board?*'.

Tina also imagined a scenario, possibly from her past: an anatomy lesson where she was forced to reel off words and got lost. She also engaged in an imaginary dialogue with a teacher: '*Ah ok this is interesting, I get this'* and appealed to someone beyond the immediate context: *'Can't they recognise that?'.* The dynamics of the language highlight the importance of everyday relationships and interactions in the process of schooling. Tina and Sam felt

ignored and anonymous whilst at school and they wanted something different for their children. However, the virtues related to this aspect of the discourse are more complex than just wanting attention for their children. This is illustrated by Tina's next contribution to the conversation:

> *'(my daughter) goes to quite a big school but she's doing really well. She's a quiet shy girl and I was really worried about her but she's really come out of her shell…she's a real teacher's pet. She loves praise and will do anything for stickers and stamps. That really works with her.'*

What is interesting here is the dichotomies between Tina's account of her own experiences and her account of her daughter's experiences: her daughter was happy at school, Tina was not; her daughter got attention, Tina did not; her daughter liked praise, Tina liked to talk to her friends (she had earlier referred to herself as a *'real gasser'* at school). There is also an interesting dichotomy in the final clause *'that really works for her'.* There is a high level of commitment in the clause: it *really* works, thus Tina is making a normative statement but in a relativistic manner (it's very good for *her* -my daughter- but not for everyone else). In contrast, there is also a high level of generality in the statement. The use of the pronoun *'that'* does not directly relate to a noun (it could be praise, stickers or stamps); in addition, the level of ambiguity is intensified with the use of the dichotomous verb '*works': it* can only be in two states (*works/does not work),* thus the inference is that what works for her daughter does not work in other contexts.

The dynamics of this conversation in relation to education are complex. Schools tend to be portrayed as binary: they work or they do not; they give people what they need or they do not. However, these dynamics cannot be reduced to an economic notion of self-interest. If we consider Tina's account of her own schooling, she struggled to learn because she was

*'chatting'* but she was also frustrated that she did not learn, to the point of blaming her teachers for her own behaviour. There is also reference to natural dispositions: Tina was a *gasser*, her daughter was a *teacher's pet.* All of these statements appear somewhat paradoxical unless one considers that a third person is present. Here I will use Bakhtin's notion of the superaddressee (Bakhtin *et al.*, 2010: 126-127) to help explain the dialogical process the parents were engaged with. With reference to Bakhtin's concept, as well as addressing the schools and their children, the parents are also conversing with an abstract entity who they are at one with: they understand and accept the parent's ideas perfectly and vice versa. The question is, what kind of superaddressee are the parents imagining as part of their interactions? To answer this, I went through the transcript of Sam and Tina's interview and drew the following normative (should) statements from what they had said:

- Schools should be small: big schools lead to bullying
- Teachers should know all the students (by name)
- All children are different and should be taught in different ways
- Schools should look at each child as a person: they should not teach subjects
- Schools should be for children in the middle: schools are not for gifted children and children with additional needs
- Teachers should teach one-to-one: they should know their pupils and what their weaknesses are.
- Teachers should be enthusiastic and they should make the children enthusiastic
- School should make children happy and confident; they should want to go to school.

The values alluded to in these statements go beyond the school: they hold the school to account; they are statements about the ways a school can be good so that their children can be good. To further develop the theoretical generalisation, I used these normative statements to deduce the following about good schools:

- Are small
- Have one to-one-relationships (the more the better)
- Care for and nurture pupils
- Are calm and orderly places

From these value statements about schools, we can also make some tentative claims about what parents wanted for their children:

- *Schools need to be small because* children must be with an adult
- *Schools must have one-to-one relationships because:* children need to interact with adults to develop
- *Schools must care and nurture pupils because* pupils need to feel loved
- *Schools must be calm and orderly places because* children should not be scared.

And finally, we can make some deductions about what children are:

- Calm (schools need to make sure they are kept calm)
- In need of constant care (they need one-to-one relationships)
- Easily scared (so schools need to be calm)

This list is tentative but does at least give a sense of the way that these parents imagined school and the way that children were positioned within it. In terms of moral assumptions, the statements align with more caring

attributes, often associated with parenting, and at odds with the discourses of meritocracy and progress, which are themes of the education discursive formation (see chapter 4). A conversation between the link worker and a parent from the children's centre expresses this idea more clearly. When talking about a teacher at Bridletown, the following interaction occurred:

> LW: *'When I first started my job as a support advisor and she said, 'Well yes, it's probably a very good job but all these parents who can't look after their kids, they should just put them all on a little island somewhere on their own.'*
> P: *(laughter) 'Is that what she said'?'*
> LW: *'Yeah, and I thought I've really got my work cut out here, working with this school.'*
> P*: 'Is she a mother? Has she got kids?'*
> LW: *'No'*
> P: *'So she's got no idea what she's talking about then.'*
> LW: '*My daughter says when she does assemblies she talks about her plants - to 15 year olds. She talks about weeding her garden and what she's been growing at the weekend. She's very much for the gifted and talented side of school.'*

What this example shows is the participants' strong affiliation with moral assumptions about parenting: kind, patient, loving, caring. This construction is, of course, one construction of parenting. Other parental discourses foreground the notion of discipline: children need to be punished, set boundaries and taught to obey. Others highlight the importance of play and exercise, the need to be boisterous and energetic.

It is interesting that such a passive account of both school and children are imagined in the particular version of schools presented by all the parents. Bakhtin highlights the way in which we are in constant conversation with

the past in every utterance we give (Holquist, 2002). Perhaps this is part of the issue here: parents are remembering their own sense of school negatively. This is little bit conjectural but I do want to make a more assertive claim that education is imagined in a particular way and that a distinctive set of normative claims emerge from this version of events. Furthermore, whilst this discourse appears to be consistent across the participants' accounts, it is distinctively different from those that have developed among policy makers in that it does not directly appeal to the educational discursive formation in the way that free schools policy did.

### Free Schools Policy and the Morality of One Nation Education

To demonstrate the difference between the parental discourses discussed and free schools policy discourses, I have selected a speech given by Nicky Morgan (Secretary of State for Education)(2015). The speech is apposite for a number of reasons. Firstly, it represents a text that is reasonably contemporaneous with the discussions I undertook with the parents. Secondly, policy speeches tend to offer a stronger legitimating rhetoric than texts that also have a legislative purpose. That is, they tend to justify actions more clearly in terms of causal relationships and normative statements (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012). Thirdly, the ideas in oratory texts tend to follow more closely the structure of an argument and thus ideas and sections tend to flow from a single theme (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 38). This makes the identification of truth claims and their proximity to moral assumptions easier. Finally, the content of the speech is highly derivative: it does not change or develop what has been said in previous policy texts; as will be discussed, each element of the text can be attributed to previous texts. I will use a comparative method to consider the ways in which the moral assumptions that underpin the text both resonate and contradict with those identified in the discourses of the parent participants.

**Morgan's Moral Imperative**

There are some points of resonance between the parents' moral assumptions about education and the normative statements referenced in Morgan's speech. For example, Morgan states:

> *'We believe that outcomes matter more than methods, and that there is rarely one, standardised solution that will work in every classroom for government to impose. …This approach means that our education system can benefit from characteristics that we know will deliver the best possible outcomes for children and parents: responsiveness to need and performance'*
>
> (Morgan, 2015)

Although the passage appears to mirror some of the language of the parents, (responsiveness to need, non-standardized teaching) the voice is very much that of the government. This is revealed through the relationship between the '*education system'* and '*children and parents'.* Significantly, the education system is personified and thus given agency: the education system '*benefit*s' from a non-standardized approach and it will '*deliver'* better outcomes for '*children and parents'. 'Children and parents',* by contrast, are not given agency; they are the passive recipients of what the education system gives them. Change, therefore, is for the purposes of the education system, not directly for children and parents.

This hierarchical relationship between an education system, parents and children allows Morgan to create a very different account of education, something she develops throughout the rest of the speech. These brief points of resonance are quickly discarded and a more distinctive, contradictory account of the moral imperative of education is presented (Morgan, 2015). In another section of the text, Morgan states:

*'And to those who say we should let our children be creative, imaginative, and happy - of course I agree, both as a parent and as the Education Secretary. But I would ask them this - how creative can a child be if they struggle to understand the words on the page in front of them - they certainly can't enjoy them? What are the limits placed on a child's imagination, when they cannot write down their ideas for others to read?'*

In this passage, the requirements of the education system-the basic skills of reading and writing-are placed before the normative values of the parents. In fact, they are placed in a *necessary* relationship: one cannot happen without the other; children can only be happy through reading and writing. Thus, the relationship between the two imagined forms of education are shifted from an equivalence (Fairclough, 2003: 100) to a hierarchical relationship in which excellence becomes the moral imperative. The relationship between the two normative discourses becomes more dichotomous as the text progresses. For example, the following extract is from later in the speech:

*'Rather than giving children from poor families access to great education, (the previous government) instead created a new cadre of pseudo qualifications, which claimed to be equivalent to academic qualifications. Teenagers got more certificates, and school results seemed to improve. But the qualifications weren't credible in the jobs market - they weren't real. They were, to be frank, a fraud on the young people taking them. Now let me be clear, I don't think there was anything deliberately ill-intentioned about this attitude, in fact, I'd go so far as to say it was motivated by kindness. But it was kindness driven by tacit snobbery, by a fatalistic lack of confidence in human potential. By a world view that certain kids - and let's be honest, 'kids like these' always meant kids from poorer*

*homes - could never succeed academically. And so we shouldn't even try.'*

(Morgan, 2015).

Here '*kindness'* and '*success'* are placed in a much more oppositional relationship: children had not succeeded *because* of kindness. By inference, it is therefore possible to deduce that one cannot be kind if a child is to succeed at school. Kindness is actually snobbish, fatalistic and dishonest (*let's be honest* infers dishonesty i.e. let us stop being dishonest). It is significant that Morgan accuses Tony Blair's government of these traits rather than parents. In this sense, she is making the previous government the *other*: the problem that had failed in education, rather than teachers and parents. An inanimate noun ('*the jobs market')* is also used as part of Morgan's justification for her moral imperative. This leads to personification: the jobs market is given agency in the process of schooling. Children may have been getting better qualifications out of kindness and that may have appeared to make children happier, but actually they were being treated dishonestly because *the jobs market* knew they were not creditable. This is a variation on the economic justification for schooling. Indeed, she continues to make a more direct reference to the historical discourse relating to global competition:

*'Even if you don't share the moral imperative, you at least see the practical one. In an increasingly globalised world we need to make sure that young people in England can go toe to toe with their peers from across the globe and come out on top.'*

(Morgan, 2015)

Thus we are back to a clearly identifiable theme from the education discursive formation. Morgan has moved from acknowledging some the moral assumptions underpinning the parents' construction of education (kindness, imagination, happiness, creativity) to pushing a more traditional

agenda that promotes excellence, global competition and social ordering based on merit.

The point I am making here is that the parents' discourse is distinctively different from the education discursive formation and, despite some attempts to blur the lines between these differences (such as that outlined in Morgan's speech), they are often mutually exclusive: one exists at the expense of the other. This point was illustrated by an interaction I had with Sam when I interviewed her. Whilst talking about her ambitions for her daughter she stated that she felt it was important for her daughter to reach her potential. Following Burawoy's principle of creating tension points within the research process (Burawoy, 1991: 291-300), I responded by stating that I thought it was important for children to be as excellent as they could be at school. My response was designed to test Sam's tolerance to a word often used in government texts (e.g. Department for Education, 2010; Morgan, 2015). She responded in the following way:

> *'If children don't excel at anything, that doesn't bother me, it's the fact that she tries her hardest. It's the trying and I think like, she started doing German at school and most kids hated the German. They're now doing Spanish cos they asked the children. They were always going*
> *'I hate German'*
> *'What subjects would you like to learn, what language would you like to learn?' 'We have to do a language'*
> *and they said*
> *'Spain' so they've now got a Spanish teacher and (my daughter) is like*
> *'oh there's this competition online and you can do it as well, you have to answer these questions in Spanish and then you can enter an international competition.' And because she's enjoying it and she's interested in it, she's got a lot of the*

*questions wrong, but she's enthusiastic and I think that that counts for a lot that it's not 'oh school.' And the fact that she's happy, she wants to go to school and she's trying really well. For me it's not a case of (being excellent).'*

Here, Sam rejected my assertion that excellence was important in favour of happiness*:* enjoyment was more important than outcome. Later in the interview she stated that she was happy as long as her daughter reached her potential. This is important because *potential* implies a limit to one's abilities: one should do their best but should stop when they reach their limits; they should not over reach themselves. To be excellent is to stand out from what is normal or accepted. Everyone can reach their potential but only a few can be excellent; those who try to be excellent run the risk of failure. Interestingly, Sam justified her answer by stating that '*we can't all go to private school'.* Thus there was a sense that excellence was something that happened in a different space, one that she could only see herself and her daughter on the outside of. Excellence occurred in private institutions, her daughter could succeed in reaching her potential at Ridgewell School. In a sense, therefore, the school offered a haven from the prevalent *bullying* at Bridletown and the possibility of failure at a private institution. Driven by memories of their own education the overriding sense that I got from all the parents was one of fear: fear of bullying, failure, authoritarian teachers, neglect, disorientation. The sense that school was a place of opportunity, as depicted by Morgan and other contributors to the education discursive formation, was not even acknowledged, the idea actually felt like it was anathema during the interviews.

A more explicit statement relating to the difference between educational and parental discourses was made by Debbie, a parent at the children's

centre, who had two children: one at Bridletown School and another who was a year away from attending the school. She said:

> *'This is scary….because I've got to start looking at my options haven't I know. I know my son's petrified of going to Bridletown…He's absolutely petrified; he really doesn't want to go to Bridletown because it's so big and because he's been subject to bullying and he's quite a quiet, shy person. He takes his time before he builds up trust with friendships and I think that's bothering him quite a bit so he's begged me to let him go somewhere else but it's a difficult one isn't it because it's means of transport'*

Again, the same themes are evident: a fear of bullying and the risk of unhappiness. The word *petrified*, however, is evidence of the emotive nature of the subject. Again, neither Debbie nor any of the other participants in the focus group mentioned educational progress or excellence throughout the discussion.

### Who's Bullying Whom? Status, Schools and Families

I have avoided the word *class* in my description of the dynamics between the parents involved in the case study so far. However, perceptions of status were a significant factor in the identities of the two groups. What was apparent from the interviews was a clear sense of a historical social order and it is the reconstitution of this order around the new school that I want to focus on. Each participant revealed a sense of positionality that allowed them to feel either included or excluded at certain points of interaction relating to the emerging school space. Furthermore, participants often had a clear sense of with whom they were included, and who was not included with them. The social order that emerged within and around Ridgewell School was also, to a large extent, part of a process

of social reproduction: parents already had a clear sense of who should be positioned where in relation to the emerging space. For example, when talking about her daughter's 'good teacher', Tina made the following comment:

> *'Freda's teacher, Miss Latterny, I think she really gets Freda- you know sometimes she goes off in a daydream and she needs to be reminded and she's just so spot on with Freda. She doesn't want to be in trouble at all but she can take her time and be a bit….and the fact that she recognises that…I feel kind of happy that she knows that. Again, the numbers, I was a bit worried about her school because it has big classes just because I think it's difficult to pick her out. But with Miss Latterny, she's quite good because she has disruptive children but she doesn't exclude them from playing with other kids but she's kind of aware of maybe…so if Freda's being a bit naughty it might be because she's hanging around…I shouldn't say names…probably (names child). That kind of thing and it's all….maybe it's their age but I think she's got a really good understanding of their personalities as well, you know'*

Such statements will not be unfamiliar to anyone who has operated in a school setting but it is worth considering the moral assumptions from which such a discourse is constructed. Tina acknowledges that her daughter can fall foul of the demands placed on her in school: she daydreams and takes her time. She can also be a bit naughty but she does not want to be in trouble. One can therefore reasonably deduce that the *others* in this statement, the disruptive children, do want to be in trouble or are at least indifferent to the prospect of being in trouble. If Freda does get into trouble, it is because her propensity to behave has been disrupted by those who do not share the same normative values. There is a sense

that Miss Latterny is a good teacher because she recognises Freda's place in the order of things and finds her a safe space in which to exist, safe from the deviant behaviour of those below but protected from the harsh demands made on those who would be excellent. Tina is happy to accept that Freda is not exceptional: she immediately draws our attention to her daydreaming and slowness; she is quick to shut down any possibility that this might be the case. Miss Latterny thus acts as a buffer between what is below (disruptive children) and the harsh demands of the educational discursive formation.

As has already been discussed, Sam was also keen to protect her child from the more extreme demands of school life, rebutting my claim that excellence was of primary importance in a child's education. She had also been keen to point out that Ridgewell School had been complicit in prioritising the children's happiness over academic excellence (allowing the children to take Spanish rather than German). Mirroring Tina's construction of Miss Latterny as a good teacher, she also had a keen sense that Ridgewell was protecting her daughter from the lower status 'naughty' children. When I asked her if she thought Ridgewell was helping children from economically deprived backgrounds to succeed, she said:

> *'I would say probably not because of (Ridgewell's) location. If it was perhaps in Bridletown it would perhaps attract more, I think a lot of people from, especially as foster carers we see that lack of parents' care, they don't give a shit basically and I don't think any of those sort of parents would think 'oh yeah I'll get my kid up at the crack of dawn, get them off to school, you know, get them down to the school bus, because it's effort.'*

It is interesting that, when asked about the 'economically deprived', Sam spoke about the families she had (possibly indirectly) experienced as a foster carer. In doing so, she equated serious social issues (e.g. abuse, neglect, violence) with poverty. In effect this was part of a wider process of the demonization of the poor that has been well documented (Jones, 2012).

In fact, comments from the children's centre group about Ridgewell tended to reinforce some of Sam's comments. As has previously been detailed, Debbie was worried about her son's transition to secondary school. She was almost certainly going to choose Bridletown despite her son being 'petrified' of attending the school. When I asked the group about the prospect of sending their children to Ridgewell, the first issue raised was travel. As has already been stated, the school was a significant distance from Bridletown but a bus service was provided for pupils at a cost of £3 a day. This was a significant outlay but Debbie was keen to state that this was not what put her off the idea of sending her son to the school. The bigger problem was, as Sam stated, the travel time on top of a long school day: the bus trip was one hour, school started at 8.30 and finished at 5. This meant that children getting the bus would be picked up at 7.30 and return at 6; for Debbie, this was a 'hell of a long day'. Sam and Debbie's accounts of the school day at Ridgewell are both markedly different and similar. They are different in the moral values that they espouse (about children, parenting, education etc.) but similar in what they use to assert their moral assumptions (the school's day). As Debbie went on to explain; for her, keeping children away from home for such a length of time was a dereliction of duty as a parent: parents should nurture and care for their children. By contrast, Sam emphasised structure and effort. This was not just limited to the sort of parents who 'don't give a shit'. For example, whilst talking about a child who had started at Ridgewell but subsequently left, she commented:

*'(he) hated the long day because the bus comes at 20 past 7 in the morning and he and his mum said it was a nightmare getting him out of bed for school but then he's up 'til 10 o'clock at night whereas Rhianna goes to bed at a decent time. You know, you are not going get a child up at six if they're going to bed at ten.'*

Here we can see the committed, moral tone that characterised Sam's account of the school day at Ridgewell. For example, the absence of modalising verbs in the statement 'you are not going to get a child up at six if they go to bed at ten' leaves little room for different accounts of the issue: a 'TINA' type statement (there is no alternative)(Fairclough, 2003: 99). Furthermore, Sam uses the thick adjective *decent* to describe her daughter's bedtime (one can infer that the child who left Ridgewell went to bed at an indecent time).

### The default setting on the human being

*'if we do not care enough about making things happen, then we become passive beings to whom things happen'*

(Archer, 2000).

Margaret Archer's words encapsulate the importance of morality within the human condition. With reference to the analysis of the participants' differing perspectives on Ridgewell School, all of those who commented on it cared about the new school. They may not have cared about it in a way that meant they sent their children there; they may not have even contemplated sending their children there. The imposition of a new and different kind of school, however, necessitated its accommodation within existing discourses, which in turn were predicated on moral assumptions. What all the parents cared about was education and they cared about education because it affected their children and they cared about their

children. They cared about their children partly because, in various ways, they represented themselves: criticism of their children was criticism of them and their ability to *parent* and, furthermore, as a single *entity of needs* the parents actually are their children operating in imagined spaces. However, because the parents cared, moral discourses came to the fore and dominated the process of social ordering. In this section, I want to make two points: firstly, that morals were essential to the social ordering that occurred in the development of the school space; secondly, that the morality was the product of a dialectical relationship with external constraints: the moral narrative emerged from a set of external conditions, which were in turn reproduced through moral narratives. The relationship between moral purpose and external conditions is thus self-sustaining and obdurate, which, in turn, makes social shifts (such as those described within models of social mobility) extremely difficult.

Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, the deeply ingrained dispositions that orientate our lives to the world around us, is useful in helping to explain the parents' differing normative approaches (Sayer, 2005: 25). This is particularly so when one considers the way that the parents were able to clearly distinguish themselves from other parents and their children. The related concept of *distinction* is useful in explaining this strong sense of division: according to Bourdieu, taste is defined by those who have social capital, that is status causes taste, which in turn generates status (Bourdieu, 1984); it could be argued that the parents had a clear sense of taste and were able to position themselves within the relevant fields presented by the new school. However, as Skeggs notes, there is a danger that some interpretations of Bourdieu's concepts can lead to a cold and mechanical classification that do not being out the emotional impact associated with social exclusion (Skeggs, 1997: 10). As a result, some authors, such as Sayer, attempt to use Bourdieu's work as a starting point for their own conceptual frameworks (Sayer, 2005). Whilst accepting the concept of habitus as a process that is both constitutive of, and structured

by, external social structures, Sayer attempts to foreground ethical dispositions of social practices. Sayer asserts that these aspects of social reproduction are not always acknowledged in Bourdieu's work because the focus is often on an actors' circumstances, which exaggerates their compliance to their given social position (Sayer, 2005: 23). Thus, Sayer attempts to extend Bourdieu's conceptual framework to consider a wider range of social relationships: the relationship between embodied dispositions and reasoning; the normative and evaluative character of the habitus; and the nature of emotions, commitments and ethical dispositions (Sayer, 2005: 23). I argue that this extension into the more normative realm of human behaviour can help to explain the apparent contradictions in the participants' attitudes towards their children's education.

Sam and Tina perceive themselves and their children as 'middling'. Those above them were 'privileged': they have money and they are able to send their children to private schools. The role of private schools in the construction of educational narratives is interesting. In effect, they act as forms of heterotopias: they have their own rules and regulations, their own internal logics, everyone is positioned according to these internal structures. From the outside, private schools act as an impenetrable container: those who are excluded do not know what happens on the inside but the schools clearly offer an entirely separate way of life: not only in terms of opportunities but also in terms of the way people are. In this sense, the activities of private schools become invisible within moral discourse. When I mentioned 'excellence', Sam equated it with a private education. Her moral judgements about such a form of education were weak: she simply insisted that excellent education was for those who could afford to send their children to private schools. This division between her daughter and others was strengthened by her categorisation of pupils into *gifted*, *middling* and *mediocre*. A suitable end for her daughter would be for her to reach her potential, to realise her position, which was to be a *middling* child. In effect, Sam was complicit in the act of segregation

between her daughter and idealised forms of education that would fit with Bourdieu's notion of *distinction*. Sam did not want her daughter to move in an unfettered manner towards educational excellence. The problem is that most social theorists, who have a close affinity with an idealised form of education, tend to over state the scope of such a form with reference to the wider population. Bourdieu is correct in his assertion that taste and distinction are socially constructed and socially reproduced, but his concept of habitus assumes that we are all trying to get to the same place, when people cannot it is because they are passive actors who are unable to find advantage in a hostile field. Sam's observation highlights the fact that, rather than struggling towards a shared goal, people actively reject the supposed ideal on moral grounds. Sam does not want her daughter to even engage with the idea that she might be gifted or capable of excellence. She justifies her stance by foregrounding the importance of her daughter's happiness: it is more important for her daughter to be happy that to strive for something she might not attain. Indeed, such feelings will not be alien to many of us. Failure is often difficult for us to deal with, particularly in relation to our offspring. It is therefore not very surprising that Sam put effort into shutting down aspirational discourses, particularly from a position that she perceives as not advantageous.

However, it also true that Sam's moral perspective was consciously different from those whose children attended private schools. To an extent, Sam's self-limitation mirrors Paul Willis' classic ethnographic work on working class school boys in England in the 1970s (1977). For Willis, the boys who were participants were able to distinguish between the paradox of individual and group logics that were inherent within the school system. Educational discourses were predicated on the notion of the individual conforming to educational principles of improving one's self worth through increasing one's effort and productivity. However, as Willis observes, this was meaningless at the collective level: individuals striving to improve their current situation rendered the existing class and group dynamics in which

they exist meaningless to the point that mobility at this level would necessitate the destruction of the group or class in question (Willis, 1977: 128). Applying this to Sam's situation, social mobility as a theme of the national education discursive formation ultimately necessitates the destruction of the values, morals, practices and reflexive process that make up her everyday life. Put simply, it means that to consider a move towards outstanding educational achievement would mean leaving her existing sense of self behind. Furthermore, even if Sam rejected this part of the educational discursive formation, her way of life would also be under threat if her friends, family and acquaintances attempted to engage with the educational discourses in this way. In essence, what Willis is describing is a kind of pact between class actors to sustain a way of life, a pact that is implicitly critical of the education discursive formation, a pact he refers to as *counter culture* (Willis, 1977). Of course, Willis was talking about a group of boys who actively attempted to disrupt and penetrate the school system; Sam could certainly not be called part of an active counter culture against education. However, there were some elements of all of the parents' moral approaches that resonated with this idea. For example, Willis describes the way in which the vertical class scale of occupation was transformed into a differentiated, multi-dimensional structure, which 'promised to hold riches for all' (Willis, 1977: 129). For Willis, such a milieu is counter-cultural because it reinforces the differentiation at the centre of individual biographies, thus undermining the individualism that is essential to the education discursive formation.

Willis theorisation, with its focus on counter-culture and penetration is much more strident than anything that can be deduced from my interaction with the parents. However, I want to use Willis' observations as a starting point for a more nuanced account of Sam's (and eventually other parents') rejection of the education discursive formation and her subsequent concession of related narratives to *the wealthy* and *the gifted.* I argue that Sam's actions affirm Willis' theorisation in a) asserting that

there is a mutually exclusive relationship between an imagined education system and moral orders b) that this culture becomes particularly distinct and differentiated amongst those who have historically not conformed to this educational narrative. However, I want to make the point that such a distinction between the education discursive formation and moral bubbling is always evident: one of Sarah's main justifications for setting up Ridgewell was that she wanted a school that would meet the emotional needs of children like hers. She did not state she wanted a school that would push her children towards greater attainment. I also want to argue that the moral bubbles that emerged in this case were the historical product of the education discursive formation; in this sense they were the latest iteration of a counter narrative that has consistently developed as a response to the individualistic narrative that underpins the education system. But, with reference to Nussbaum and Honneth, I also want to remake the point that recognition is not only a right, born out of fundamental human needs, it is also an end that people will necessarily find means to pursue: people will always look for (and find) ways to be recognised. Honneth's approach is particularly salient with reference to this case study because of his attempts to shift focus away from that which is already visible in the public sphere, particularly moral issues promoted by the publicity-savvy organisations (Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 115). In the case of Sam and the other parents, their moralising was not well articulated on a national scale, certainly in comparison with the presentation of the education as an issue of social justice (the right to a good education). However, as Honneth reminds us, the issue of social justice needs to be examined at a more existential level: the issue at hand is the ways in which a 'subject's expectations can be disappointed by society' (Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 127). Thus Honneth takes us away from a more objective notion of social justice that is framed at a national scale. However, Sam's attitude towards the 'privileged' and the 'gifted' does not immediately equate with Honneth's subjective account of *injustice as crisis.* For Honneth, injustice is perceived at the point where 'it can no longer be rationally understood

why an institutional rule should count on agreement in accordance with generally accepted reasons' (Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 130). In Sam's case, she is relatively passive in her attitude towards the 'privileged' and 'gifted'*;* she seems happy for them to maintain their position. In Honneth's terms, this means that Sam has not experienced a sense of injustice and is therefore not the subject of injustice. However, I want to argue that, just because someone does not feel humiliated or undermined, it does not mean they are be treated justly. To do this I will interpret the parents' predicament through the prism of Margaret Archer's work on morality and realism (Archer, 2000).

### Making their Way Through the World

As has been previously discussed, Archer's work focuses on the way that we imagine ourselves as coherent, single beings that interact with an external world, as we understand it. Furthermore, we move forward with purpose and conviction through this world based on our own sense of what is right and good (morals) (Archer, 2003). Central to this interaction between our sense of self and our understanding of the external world are our *internal conversations*: the constant internalized activity that we all engage in to maintain our sense of wholeness in the world, to maintain our identity in the face of complex and contradictory external conditions (Archer, 2007: 2), a thrashing out between object and subject so that the relationship between the two is resolved and both are accommodated within the mind of the individual.

Sam found a space where her internal conversations made sense, where she was able to maintain a coherent sense of self in relation to education. This space entailed avoiding certain contexts that would threaten this coherency (private schools, educational failure, bullying). This process of avoidance required legitimation constituted from moral assumptions (Rawls, 2010). In the case of private schools, they could only be accessed

by the privileged; in the case of academic success, it was for only for those gifted enough; in the case of those living in poverty, it was because they were mediocre. What is significant is that the morals are relational to Sam: they relate to her position when faced with educational contexts. The moral statements that could underpin all of her other statements are:

- It is right to work hard.
- It is wrong to be deliberately hurt by others
- We are morally right so we must not deviate from our moral path.

These assumptions lead to a further set of thick moral statements:

- We are not rich so it would be wrong to think of sending my child to a private school (if we were rich it would be right)
- We are not gifted so it would be wrong to try and excel (if we were gifted it would be right)
- We are righteous and we are vulnerable to the unrighteous (they can lead us astray or bully us)

In contrast to Sam, Sarah's internal conversations reveal more agency, acknowledging social difference whilst also assuming that it is good to try and change existing structures. This is largely because Sarah's moral assumptions were less relational than Sam's and she is willing to take an Archimedean Point when considering her morals (Archer, 2000: 129). In doing so, she was able to transcend her personal circumstances and offer more ethical outcomes for the good of the community. At this point it would be easy to say that Sarah produced a more educated perspective (she adopted a method of thought not dissimilar to this thesis!). However, such an assertion does not take into consideration the role of scale and distance that enable certain individuals to engage in these types of internal conversations (Walzer, 1993). Sarah and the other parents, who initiated

the idea for the school, lived in a rural area a significant distance from most of the children who attended (or could attend) the school.

Sarah's father was a high status professional from another country and, although Sarah was not working during the time this study was undertaken, she had had a professional career in another part of the country. At least superficially, Sarah was able to give the air of someone for whom work was not an immediate concern. Although she often stated that she needed to withdraw from the school to get a job, she tended to talk in more aspirational terms about the work she wanted to do. For example, she had mooted the idea with a fellow member of the original group of starting an education marketing company.

I do not wish to make light of Sarah's circumstances: she was not exceptionally wealthy or privileged and work was clearly necessary in the future. What I would say is that Sarah was able to take a more critical approach to the problem because of the distance she was afforded between other parents, economic necessities and the system of state education. This last point is particularly interesting because Sarah's position allowed her to pass moral judgement on the education system itself: to stand back and decide what was good and what was bad about it. With reference to Bourdieu's notion of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), this is important because it enables the individual to pick and choose the parts of the education system on moral grounds. In other words, their internal conversations maintain the coherency from a position of *knowing better*.

I argue that there is nothing wrong with Sarah's position per se (it is one that is similar to my interactions with my own children's schools). However, it is also important to say that such approaches are not necessarily ethical. This is a particularly prescient point when one considers the internal conversations of those parents I met at the children's centre. For many of them, maintaining a coherent sense of self as they moved

through the educational world was much more difficult. They were clearly aware of the risk of being judged by others.

Debbie spoke painfully about trying to get involved in her children's education; how school Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) had repeatedly turned her away; how, on one occasion, she had turned up to a PTA event to find no one there. There may well have been good reasons why the groups did not require her help and the missed event may well have been a misunderstanding. But Debbie clearly felt these events emotionally as rejection. Even when she spoke about them, her voice became quiet, her words were mumbled and she started talking extensively in the first person, as if rehearsing her internal conversation. As with all internal conversations, there were certain moral assumptions that Debbie was acting on: she was offering her help, which was a good thing; they were refusing her help, which was a bad thing; she had a right to be included.

The language of rights, particularly consumer rights, was a distinctive characteristic of the children's centre group. More so than the other parents, the group emphasised choice as part of the process of education: they chose a school based on what special provisions it offered for their *entity of needs*. More than the other groups they also exercised this right more frequently, with a number of parents detailing how they had moved their children to a number of different schools, sometimes out of choice (to provide a better environment) and sometimes not (many of the group moved houses frequently and some of their children had been excluded from school). But this emphasis on provision and choice did not, and could not, lead to moral bubbling because they did not link to other moral spaces related to the school, nor did they link to the education discursive formation in any significant way.

The privatisation of the individual is espoused as the ideal by some, for example Melanie Beattie whose books have become best sellers (see

Beattie, 2011). However, as I hope I have demonstrated, this is simply not possible in the intensively social activity of education. The children's centre parents' isolation and social restriction was exemplified by a number of conversations I had with them. All the parents agreed that they spent as little time as possible at their children's school; one parent described how she dropped her children off and picked them up as late as possible to avoid having to interact with other parents or teachers. With reference to Ridgewell School, perhaps the most telling interaction was the following interaction between the parents and the link worker:

> P:*' I've got a kid who goes to Ridgewell School who lives on the same estate (as me)and it's the hours that bother me. And you know, her (the mother's) lad leaves home at ridiculous o' clock in the morning - he leaves home at half 6 doesn't he?*
>
> LW: *Yeah I don't think he'll be there for very long anyway (long laughter-that's a bit hard!).....'*
>
> P2*: That's unusual cos (the mother) sent (her other child) to Bridletown*
>
> P1: *David did go to Bridletown*
>
> P2: *Did he?*
>
> P1: *Yeah*
>
> LW: *He got excluded I think didn't he?*
>
> P2: *Oh of course - he did go to Bridletown . he went on the bus with (my daughter)*

D: *Yeah he didn't cope with it, he couldn't cope with the (inaudible)*

P2: *I thought he was still on the bus with her!*

D: *He's another prime example there, isn't he?*

LW: *He won't cope with anyone telling him what to do so I don't know what school he'll end up at.*

This interaction captures the rootless nature of the discourses in which the group often engaged. On one hand there was a child on the estate whose mother has sent him to Ridgewell School. The parents do not say anything about this child apart from that he would not be there for long. One can assume that this prediction is based on his brother's actions, which necessarily limited his possibilities for his schooling. The act of choosing a school, and characterising themselves as consumers in the process, was the only way that this group could morally justify their actions. But this choice was disrupted by the constant possibility of having to re-choose schools to avoid the moral judgements of others and the outcomes of these judgements, which included those of other parents such as Sam.

## Conclusion

> *Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!*
>
> (Carroll, 2012: 33)

It is easy to consider the case of Ridgewell School and point to the founding parents' privileged lifestyle and social advantages but I hope my approach has made clear that this will not suffice. I hope my application of normative theories to the empirical data provides new ways to think about the issue of class and social stratification. Of course, I am not the first to provide this insight (Sayer, 2005) but I hope my exploration of the idea within an educational context will provide new avenues of understanding with reference to educational outcomes. I also hope I have identified some of the relationships between the internal structures that constituted the new school space and the external conditions within which this process occurred. The education discursive formation remains a powerful condition that regulates education practice in England. Furthermore, I hope I have demonstrated that the case illustrates some connections between morality (as constituted practice), education and class.

As a well educated, confident person who had no trouble in seeing new opportunities and taking on new challenges, Sarah was a consummate social operator who was the driving force behind the development of Ridgewell School. Sarah was not exceptionally wealthy, she had not lived in the local area for a significant amount of time and, above all, she exhibited strongly anti-establishment sentiments (I would use the term anarchistic). The idea of such middle class, countercultural sentiments is, of course, nothing new (Roszak, 1995) but the idea of those with such tendencies setting up new schools as part of a state education system has at least some obvious contradictory elements.

Two claims can be made, however, in relation to Sarah's social position. Firstly, she exhibited a more vocal dissatisfaction with the local state education provision than any of the other parents interviewed. Secondly, she asserted her entitlement to create and define a new school more powerfully than anyone else interviewed. At this point I am minded of Rancière's concept of the metapolitics whereby anti-establishment narratives become methods of policing existing social orders (May, 2008: 44).

In this sense, Sarah is no different to the many academics (me included) that pass on narratives critical of educational relations to their students whilst studiously preserving their own advantageous position within an educational social order (Rancière, 1991). It is also worth noting that Rancière's concept actually creates a sympathetic relationship between Marxism and neoliberalism as theories that advocate the end of politics (May, 2008: 45). In terms of deeper class structures they are often indistinguishable. Although this may initially appear as semantics, it affords certain actors flexibility in their legitimating strategies for colonisation: their actions are a) anti-state (and therefore) b) for the greater good (which might entail) colonisation of the same state privileges they are acting against. At the same time, they are able to invoke social justice discourses when their efforts to colonise are resisted.

By contrast, the group opposing the school were ultimately unsuccessful in garnering enough support to resist the colonisation of the emerging space. Despite being strategically organised, articulate and motivated, their opposition came to an abrupt end at the point that the judicial review ruled in favour of the school-planning proposal. To an extent this demonstrates the relative weakness of their position: they made a demand on the state apparatus that relied on the democratic process and the existing processes of policing it. When their demands were not met, they had no reason to carry on: they had presented their case through

democratic discourse which, as Rancière observes, is paradoxical as individuals put their faith in a collective process to realise their individual demands whilst simultaneously giving up their individuality.

When the state ruled against them, some declared it was the end of democracy; others said they would ensure that the school did not deviate from its planning proposal; but nobody expressed an alternative discourse by which the ruling could be contested. I suggest the same response would not have occurred had the ruling gone against the school governors. This is because their project was characterised by a less conflicted anti-establishment message: to an extent the group was claiming moral authority even over state processes. The premise of the project was that people like Sarah (aka the 'community') could do the job of running a school better than the local authority because they did not pay heed to the state processes, often looking for a minimal but sufficient response.

A significant aspect of the interviews with those disputing the school was their frustration at what they perceived as a lack of commitment to consultation and democratic discussion by the school's steering group. For example, rather than attempting to consult all interested parties, the steering group focused their attention on demonstrating demand for the school by organising a free day at a local adventure park for interested families. By contrast, they did the minimum amount to consult local residents about the proposed school site.

Furthermore, they refused to meet with those opposing the school and refused to respond to any issues raised by local residents at the requisite public meetings. Whilst the dispute group invested heavily in the governmental process, particularly the district council's decision on planning, the steering group paid lip service to the process and, to an extent, treated all local government representations with disdain. The

group were always going to appeal against any negative judgement relating to planning and were confident of getting a positive decision eventually.

In effect, the dispute group felt they had a moral case because, from their perspective, the steering group were not playing by the rules and thus their actions were predicated on trust in a natural, democratic process that would find moral favour with them based on their integrity. However, the steering group had their own moral codes and these turned out to be more effective in encompassing the claims of the dispute group and ultimately lead to a successful colonisation of the space. Invoking a dominant neoliberal discourse, the group took the stance that existing state processes were morally corrupt: the local authority, as one group member opined, needed a damn good kick up the arse. In this sense, the group were utilising the external conditions to their advantage. As David Harvey observes, neoliberal discourses are often set up against democratic processes, portraying them as inefficient and unresponsive to the needs of capital accumulation (Harvey, 2007: 66). As has already been discussed, the different scales at which these two competing logics existed was significant. To use Wright's framework as reference, the macro scale is powerful because it creates distance between the interactions of the individuals (micro units) and the judgements that affect them (Wright, 2000). In this sense, neoliberal discourses that exist on a national scale encompass local democratic interactions and thus are decisive in playing out of moral claims and, ultimately, the process of colonisation.

However, it should also be noted that the moral authority generated through neoliberal discourses is complex and is not secured through anti state sentiments alone. As Robertson points out, market discourses also suffer from a negative reputation in the area of education. As a result, the dominant state discourse promotes third sector involvement through public/private partnerships that avoid the worst excesses of markets whilst

benefiting from the creativity and flexibility that they afford (Robertson and Verger, 2012).

Furthermore, as Rosenau points out, the 'not-for-profit' element, that is often a characteristic of such partnerships, resonates with contexts that require compassion and commitment to individuals (2000: 218). But this authority can only work when it converges with the interests of dominant discourses on a national scale (Gillborn, 2010). In the case of the Al Madinah school - a religious school that was proposed by a group associated with a Muslim mosque in Derby - this was not the case. The proposers of the school bore many similarities with the Ridgewell steering group and even wanted to contribute towards the cost of the school. However, it did not fit within the white middle class hegemony on which state policy is predicated (Gillborn, 2010). In this sense, Sarah and her colleagues were in a privileged position in regard to their ability to interact with the external conditions created by the free schools governance arrangements.

Those disputing the school were operating within a limited discourse and could not sustain their resistance to the project. Those associated with the Al Madinah project were eventually subjected to a significant amount of symbolic violence by politicians and the press and were eventually forced to withdraw from the project. It is significant that they were able to successfully bid for a school in the first place. In a sense, this reveals the dynamic possibilities of the policy; but one policy alone cannot subvert the hegemonic machinery of state government (Gillborn, 2010). This case also lays bare some of the limitations of the educational networks that have played an increasing role in education (Ball, 2007). The ambiguous role the NSN played in the advocacy of free schools revealed the way that such organisations can emerge from (but not replace) existing practices.

One could argue that all of the groups discussed so far were in a relatively advantaged position: all were able to engage with local and national politics at a certain level: all felt they were entitled to recognition by government; each felt they had a right to impose their own moral perspective on the situation as the dominant moral argument; each felt that their reasons for wanting to influence education policy were truthful.

However, there was a qualitatively different approach amongst the parents of the new school who were interviewed. This group took their moral cues from a much narrower interpretation of education discourse, which focused on their moral rights, partly as consumers. Many scholars have commented on a post-modern shift towards a consumer-led society and the qualitative difference this makes to social structures (e.g. Baudrillard, 1998; Bauman, 2004) and the willingness of parents to be constructed in this way placed limitations on their agency. The Ridgewell parents interviewed attempted to colonise the new space with self-limiting discourse - wanting their children to reach their potential but not to be excellent. In fact, the parents carved out a moral position between those they conceived as privileged and those they portrayed as poor and lazy. On the one hand, those who were wealthy were able to engage in esoteric activities that did not involve effort; on the other, the poor were too lazy to try to achieve anything educationally.

What is foregrounded here is the moral imperative of hard work: achievement without effort was worth less than effort for achievement; no effort and no achievement had no moral value. Such moral values have their roots in an industrial work ethic (Bauman, 2004: 18), which has had a strong historical presence within state education. In the 1970's, Paul Willis provided accounts of working class privileging of practical ability over academic intelligence (Willis, 1977). Furthermore, the moral precept of any work, on any condition, as the only moral way of gaining one's right to live goes as far back as the industrial revolution (Bauman, 2004: 12). Of course,

such moral assertions are passive and have a Stoic quality: they celebrate one's individual effort, made more virtuous by perceptions of exploitation by those who endeavour less.

And so I finish, appropriately, by considering those parents who I interviewed at the children's centre. Predominantly living in social housing, they were completely disconnected from the new school project. Interviewing them was a bewildering experience. On one hand, they appeared to privilege (and exercise) choice more than any of the other parents interviewed. All had moved their children from one primary school to another at least once and all cited their child's needs as the main reason for doing so. These needs were often medicalised - the children had special needs and so needed special provision to cater for them.

However, the moral assertions were more complex than with the other groups interviewed. More practical elements, such as regularly moving house and lack of transport, were mentioned, and sometimes contradictory. For example, Debbie stated that she chose the school that was nearest to her because of transport issues whilst also stating that paying for the bus to the new school (over 10 miles away) was not an issue. It was also difficult to match her statements about sending her child to the nearest school with moving her child because of his special needs. In addition, there was a general antipathy towards the new school and a sense that the school was not for these families despite a general perception that it was a good school for children with special needs. It seemed that, being a small school, it was good for certain types of needs (those who were vulnerable) and not for others (those who were disruptive).

This may sound like a case of the observer moralising about the truthfulness of these parents' claims but this is not my aim. I want to emphasise the fragmented nature of these claims to educational spaces:

sometimes consumers, sometimes in need of medical support, sometimes unable to travel, sometimes excluded - these parents were struggling to find a coherent internal conversation to take to the world of education. I argue that this was a symptom of the voiceless - those whose values were unrecognised within the education system. They walked through educational spaces, ghostlike, never able to assert themselves; never able to change the world to provide coherency to their sense of self (Archer, 2007). They were not able to walk through spaces unafraid of the consequences.

Each group demonstrated a discursively distinctive position in relation to the new school and, I have argued, the school as a social space delimited each group's position. In terms of more traditional redistributive models of social justice (Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 10), this outcome makes little sense. In purely economic terms, the school was financed by the state and there was no evidence to suggest that the school's funding was the outcome of private interests and associated networks (Ball and Youdell, 2009). Although the steering group had received some support from an international publishing company, this was extremely limited and the school was the mostly the product of the parents, their contacts and friends who originally came up with the idea. One might turn to the notion of class as a way of explaining the social ordering that occurred around the school but, for me, such approaches do not offer a comprehensive explanation. It is difficult to contest that those involved in the bid were self-assured and used to dealing with many of the social situations associated with public life.

However, none of the original group had any experience of working in, or running, a school. Geoffrey's data was particularly interesting in this respect. He was keen to emphasise the naïve way in which the group presented themselves, particularly to DfE representatives and the group themselves foregrounded their inexperience in explaining some of

decisions in relation to the bidding process. The school has since lurched from one crisis to another and the future of the project is still not secured; it is difficult to deduce that a similar group derived from those attending the Children's Centre would have any less success in bidding for, and running, a new school.

Here, Fraser's distinction between different dimensions of social justice is useful (Fraser and Honneth, 2003). In particular, her model of a politics of recognition helps us to go beyond the purely material and consider the ways in which minority groups can become excluded by dint of their difference. Using Fraser's framework, the explanation to the social ordering that occurred in the case of the new school lies in a combination of material inequality and lack of mutual recognition of the values of the different groups spoken to.

However, a la Honneth, I posit that any explanation needs to focus more on the issue of recognition. This was public money available to any group interested in setting up a school. Some of the parents I spoke to at the Children's Centre spoke enthusiastically about their application for similar funds to set up a youth centre on the estate using similarly available funds. Although their housing association had been instrumental in this process, and their had been tensions between tenants and the association, the project did come to fruition.

Honneth's position is distinctive from Fraser in that he conceptualises redistribution *as* recognition rather than as a separate entity. I argue that it is this approach that provides the most coherent account of the process of social colonization that occurred in the case of Ridgewell. Whilst representing a significant shift in our understanding of identity politics, Fraser's focus on minority representation, as a significant element in the development of a difference friendly world (Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 7),

can actually be assimilated by groups such as the parents who started the Ridgewell project.

This is illustrated by Sarah's own sense of identity. Many of the groups she used in her book are represented as minority groups engaged in direct action to improve their own social standing. Sarah herself saw herself as one of a group of under-represented rural parents whose needs were not recognised within the local context. This explanation is unsatisfactory because such parents are clearly afforded educational opportunities that poorer parents in the urban setting are not, as evidenced by the fact that they were the ones able to initiate a new school whilst others were not. As Honneth asserts, the problem here is the role that recognition plays in Fraser's model of social justice. In his own words, 'It is with this indirect demand for a link between critical social theory and present-day social movements that I am interested in…The danger I see in such an affiliation is an unintended reduction of social suffering and moral discontent to just that part of it that has already been made visible in the political public sphere by publicity-savvy organizations.' (Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 115).

A la Rawls (Rawls, 2010), I argue normativity cuts through all social artefacts: everything we do and everything we value contains some form of normative judgement. If we are unable to recognise all values in all social situations, a social justice deficit will ensue. In the case of Ridgewell, the educational values of the parents from the Children's Centre were simply not recognised as values. By contrast, whilst Sarah and the other parents who set the school up were small in number, their assertions about education were always taken seriously within the public domain.

From an ethical standpoint this is unacceptable. Only when we provide all interested parties with proper opportunities to assert themselves will things change; only when the parents from economically poor areas like the housing estates near the Children's Centre are able to legitimately

engage in activism in the same way as Sarah, her friends, and those who challenged her, will education really create the opportunities that its status as a social good should demand.

## Glossary of Terms

This glossary covers some of the often used, but more unusual, concepts I refer to in this study. I have included it at the beginning of the document to help the reader understand my methods of working and the way I have constructed my arguments. I accept that these terms are contested and that putting a glossary at the front of the thesis may give the sense that they are used uncritically. Thus I want to emphasise that the glossary is for the purposes of guiding the reader; they will be discussed in more detail in the body of the work.

**Animal and Social Self**

Durkheim makes the distinction between our animal and social selves, a division that distinguishes us from all other beings. The animal self lives in a present moment, while the social self lives in a moral universe of goals and duties. It is our ability to share goals based on moral assumptions that makes us social. We reaffirm the social through rituals and other enacted practices. However, at the heart of this dichotomy is a strong impulse: when we are recognised (and are recognised by) social groups we are able to include ourselves and interact; where we feel excluded, we withdraw and revert to our animal selves.

**Education discursive formation**

A discursive formation is 'the general enunciative system that governs a group of verbal performances' (Foucault, 1972: 117). It is all that can be said on a subject and a regulation of how things can be said. It is all that can be repeated from the past on a given topic. I claim that education is a discursive system because it can be identified as a bounded area of practice (some things are generally accepted about the way we do education and the way we should do it). Therefore, the education discursive formation describes everything that can be said about education, the rules that govern what should be said and the normative

assumptions that are at the heart of placing these statements in a hierarchy of importance. This is important to the study because it allows me to set the boundaries of the study: what is relevant to it and what is not.

**Enacted practice**

Enacted practices are points of action based on a moral agreement. Durkheim used the term extensively to refer to religious rituals in basic social groups. These rituals represented a moment of agreement and trust between individuals. At the centre of enacted practice is morality. All actions are predicated on moral assumptions: we do things because we think they are right; we do things with others because we think they are righteous like us; what we do is guided by our sense of righteousness. I make a distinction between enacted practices and rituals. Whereas rituals are fixed by time (they are repeated inflexibly) and space (they use the same symbols and artefacts), enacted practices are more flexible: certain things can happen but they do not have to happen at identifiable times and with predefined objects.

**Entity of Needs**

The discursive feature of parental language whereby parents conflate their own sense of identity with their child's. An outcome of empirical events, I use the term in relation to education and specifically the practice of a parent engaging in internal conversations whereby they juxtapose their own experiences of school with their experiences of their child's schooling as a parent. The result is an imagined educational experience: a parent imagines their child in the classroom based on their own historical experiences. Such internal conversations can also form part of enacted practices, particularly when articulated with social artefacts such as those that constitute education discursive formation.

**Internal Conversations**

The constant, internalized activity that we engage in to maintain our sense of wholeness in the world, to maintain our identity in the face of complex and contradictory external conditions. This activity involves interactions with external objects and a process whereby the object under consideration is bent back upon the subject. At its most intense, internal conversations involve thrashing it out between object and subject so that the relationship between the two is resolved and both are accommodated within the mind of the individual. At the heart of this process is value: we act on internal goods that we care about most, which together make the constellation of objects that constitute our identity.

**Moral order**

The notion that all social orders are based on morals, and are thus moral orders. The term references the work of Anne Rawls and is based on the idea of constitutive reason (that all reason is constituted from a moral point that acts to regulate the emerging value structures. Rawls also references empirical work that links pro-social (altruistic, socially motived) behaviour with reputation (the importance of good deeds to one's social standing). We achieve status (from other people) for our perceived goodness and, as such, moral ordering is a rebuttal of certain accounts of individuals as self-motivated and rational.

**Moral bubbling**

The linking of the notion of moral ordering with claims to social space (see definition of space): if I am good I will carry out good actions, which will necessarily require the colonization of certain spaces. This self-referencing logic is at the heart of the growth of moral bubbles but moral bubbles cannot grow without consent from significant others. Thus, those who colonise spaces need to be confident that others will verify their actions. This in turn leads to colonization by perceived entitlement: those who are confident enough in their claims; those who feel entitled to legitimately

take over a space will try to do so, even if they do not succeed. To some extent we all develop moral bubbles but, given that morality is dichotomous (if a is good then b must be bad), such activity is high stakes and the structure of existing constellations of moral bubbles can prevent us from even trying to extend the reach of the spaces we already inhabit. Furthermore, as some extend their own spaces, they can impinge upon others who withdraw for fear of being morally undermined.

**Social Facts**

My interpretation of social facts is based on Durkheim's construction. I interpret them as social structures that we are born into. As such, they have an objective reality but this reality is only partial. I use the metaphor of a symbiotic relationship to help describe the status of social facts: their existence creates us as individuals whilst they simultaneously require us to reproduce them. For example, language shapes our understanding of the world and our place in it. It provides us with references to time and space and helps us to order concepts in different ways. But language also requires individuals to reproduce it. Without humanity, language would disappear.

**Space**

Space is the product of all interactions, from the global to those that take place within everyday localities. We understand space as the possibilities of existence, as a multiplicity of possibilities and trajectories. This is partly because space is always under construction, being reproduced, amended, contested or withdrawn from. Despite these possibilities for shifts within existing spaces, they are often colonised through a process of legitimation. This process usually involves some form of boundary markers that might be material or could be inferential. As a result, we travel through space (or it travels through us) with a constant sense of familiarity or alienation. Space is different to place: place is fixed whereas space can overlay place so that the same place can contain many spaces. For example, a village hall is a

place (its parameters are fixed) but contains many spaces (clubs, council meetings, family events) and each of these spaces has a different centre point that is formed from moral assumptions. In terms of this study, I refer to a single space as the unit of analysis: the new school. This space is closely linked to, but not reducible to, the school building. I am referring to the complex construction between those who initially claimed the space, those who opposed it, those who contributed to framing it (including the discursive formation), and those excluded from it. As such, space is an abstract concept that is as much about the process, as it is about the outcome of formation. This process involves intentionality (the assumption of entitlement), legitimation (the process of securing a claim to space) and realization (the successful manifestation of a claim to space). This conceptualisation of space is what led to my metaphor of moral bubbling: the reaching upwards to claim legitimation creates horizontal pressure that, in turn, can potentially be converted into horizontal space.

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## Appendix 1: Research Timeline (data collection)

| | Activity | Start Date |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Document search**<br>Policy stakeholders identified: NSN, DfE, Government, Ofsted. Service providers.<br>Online document searches conducted.<br>Freedom of information requests created for documents (relating to sponsor bids and governance arrangements) and new schools network (list of approved new free schools). | Jul 2013 |
| 2 | Article search to establish initial case studies (eventually All Saints Primary and Al Madinah Academy). | Jul 2013 |
| 3 | Article search (including publicly available comments on social media sites) for Ridgewell Academy | Jul 2013 |
| 4 | Focus group with group opposing new school. Two-hour interview with four members of the group (recorded) | Oct 2013 |
| 5 | Observations of council meeting relating to school planning. Parish council extraordinary meeting where those opposing schools presented their case that planning should not be approved for the new build (notes taken and checked with critical friend-–also in attendance). | Oct 2013 |
| 6 | Unstructured interview with Sarah prior to focus group meeting with steering group. Established reasons for the school bid, background to initial actions (discussion with friends and other parents). Early development of a steering group | Jan 2014 |
| 7 | Focus group with five members of Ridgewell steering group who were responsible for the original bid. 2 hour interview (recorded) | Jan 2014 |
| 8 | Semi structured interview with head teacher and chair of governors. One-hour interview on school premises notes taken and checked with critical friend). | Jan 2014 |
| 9 | Tour of new school and classroom observations (notes taken and checked with critical friend-–also in attendance). | Jan 2014 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 10 | Presented early findings at International Journal of Arts and Sciences' conference for peer feedback (Paris) | Mar 2014 |
| 11 | Observation of NSN free schools training event (Manchester). Whole day event (notes taken and checked with critical friend –also in attendance). | Mar 2014 |
| 12 | Focus group with parents of Ridgewell school pupils. 45-minute individual semi structured interviews and 30-minute follow up focus group with two parents (recorded). | Apr 2014 |
| 13 | Focus group with parents at children's centre. Two-hour interview with six parents (recorded). | Apr 2014 |
| 14 | Collation of historical documents for genealogy. Identification of key historical texts through search of Hansard online archives. | Jan 2015 |
| 15 | Presented initial findings at BSA conference for peer feedback (Glasgow) | |
| 16 | Follow up interviews reviewing progress of case study and triangulation of data. Two interviews" one with Sarah (individually) and one with second member of steering group. 3 hours in total (notes taken and checked with Sarah for accuracy via email). Attempted to follow up parents originally interviewed but unable to establish contact. | Oct 2015 |

## Appendix 2: Letter to Ridgewell School steering group prior (first interview)

*Emailed to participants prior to group interview (26/1/14) and presented as hard copy prior to interview.*

Dear (participants)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research fro my PhD thesis.

My research focuses on the role of community in educational governance. I am looking at the way community based policy initiatives, such as The Big Society, work at a local level. I am specifically interested in community voice (how much influence do people at a local level have in the implementation of education policy and, how schools being redefined by community based policies

I'm interested in interviewing you and your fellow governors at (redacted) because your experiences are at the heart of this process. I'd like to find out what motivated you to propose the school in the first place, how you found the proposal process (supportive, frustrating etc.), how you have worked with other agents in setting up the school and how you have managed to negotiate with competing voices at a local level.

I think I have previously sent you my work bio, but here is the link again in case you are interested. As you will see, I have been involved with many educational initiatives, previously. [redacted]

The interview will be semi-structured and guided by you. This means that I won't stick rigidly to the questions, as I am more interested in your thoughts. Just to reassure you, you have a right to withdraw from the research at any point.
The exemplar questions I will use as a guide are:

<u>Values and beliefs</u>
What was the inspiration to setting up the free school?
How did this happen?
Who drove the idea?

<u>The Proposal</u>
Can you tell me about the proposal process?
Did you work with the New Schools Network?
If so, what support did they offer you?

Did anyone else support you with the proposal process?
Did you have any expertise you felt helped in this process?

The Community

Free Schools have a community focus, what would you determine as the community in your case?
Can you tell me about your interactions, and more formal consultations, with the local community?
How did you establish whether there was a demand for your school?
How have the community reacted?

Politics

Can you tell me about the planning process for the new school.
What dealings have you had with the parish and district councils?
What role has the DfE played in establishing the new school?

The School

What do you think the school provides that wasn't already available in the community?
Does the school reflect the original purpose, or have the goals changed?
Would you recommend setting up a free school to other people?

If there are any questions that you would rather not answer, that is fine. Also, please do let me know if you would like any amendments to be made.

With your agreement I would like to record the interview using a digital voice recorder. The recording is confidential and will not be released, it is just for my own information; although I will be bringing a research assistant, there is a limit to the amount of notes we can take.

I can dedicate the whole day to this, so I can work around your own commitments-what ever is easiest for you. I can do individual, paired or a group interviews. I am happy to be flexible; the most important thing to me is that I can interview you in whichever way suits you.

Please can you confirm that you're still happy to go for the 31st and what time you would like me to meet you.

Best wishes,

Graham
*(consent for continued participation in the study given verbally as part of the interview process)*

## Appendix 3: Letter to group opposing new school (focus group)

Dear (redacted)

*Emailed to participants prior to group interview (24/10/13) and presented as hard copy prior to interview.*

I am a Lecturer in Education Studies based at Bath Spa University. I am currently conducting some research into the changing forms of governance regarding education within England; focusing upon academies and free schools because of their unique governance arrangements.

As part of my research I would like to conduct some informal interviews with different people involved in the process of establishing free schools and academies. I have read your webpage and various blogs and there is an extremely vocal opposition to the (redacted) Academy. Such a vocal response is unique and I was wondering whether some of the people involved in constructing (redacted) would be willing to spare some time to talk to me. I think that it is really important that everyone's views are represented and I would be very interested in talking to you; I believe that any time you are able to spare for me would be an invaluable addition to my research.

Any interviews would be informal and would be conducted by me, although, with your permission, I would also like my research assistant to attend in order to assist with my note taking. The interviews will be semi-structured in order to ensure that your voice is heard, therefore, I will not be following a rigid set of questions. However, if you would like me to send a rough structure of questions prior to the interview, please do ask. As my research is conducted via the university I am bound by their research ethics policy which can be found by following this

link: [redacted]

Any information would be anonymised and you have the right to withdraw your input towards the research at any time.

Thank you for your time.

## Appendix 4: questions to group opposing new school (focus group)

*Emailed to participants prior to group interview (29/10/13) and presented as hard copy prior to interview.*

1.Can you tell me something about the people who set up (redacted)?

2.Who are they?

3.What are their reasons for promoting it?

4.Can you tell me something about (the group)?

5.Who is involved? (individuals and groups)

6.What are the key objections?

7.Who would you say the school represents 'the community' and why?

8.The school's consultation document outlines an extensive consultation process (see below), which concludes that a majority of parents/carers, local residents and local business owners in favour of the School, as well as half of staff at local schools and elected council representatives. Does this process not demonstrate there is a desire for a new school?

9.The department of education agreed funding for the new school. How were the various issues raised by (redacted) represented to them?

10. Have you had any direct correspondence with the department of education?

11. What was the campaign's role in the planning decision on May 9th? Were you able to make a direct representation to the district council? Do you have any formal/informal contact with councilors?

12. How would you explain the rejection of planning consent for the temporary theme park site?

13. And what work have you been doing in relation to the current planning application to develop the touring park site?

14. How much press coverage have you received for the dispute campaign?

15. Are you happy with the amount of coverage and the way it has been reported?

## Appendix 5: Email to parents of Ridgewell School (focus group)

Dear (redacted),

I'm doing some research based on schools in [redacted] and I need to interview (or chat to) some parents who send/looking to send their children to (name redacted).

It's all very informal, I just need to get your opinions of schools and what you'd like to see for your kids/ what you would have liked. There are a lot of people unhappy with schools in (the area), but there are also lots who are happy. What seems to me though is that parents aren't asked, it's just councillors etc that get their say, so I'm trying to add your voice to my research.

Everything will be made completely anonymous, so you don't need to worry; anything you say won't be traceable to you (I can give you the details of the Uni ethics policy if you'd like it).

Just to reassure you, you have a right to withdraw from the research at any point.

Do you think you'd be happy to talk to me?

Also, do you know anyone else who'd be happy to talk to me? I'm planning on being around this Thursday day and evening, but can come down at other times.

Thanks for you help.

## Appendix 6: Letter to parent group at children's centre (focus group)

Dear (redacted),

I'm doing some research based on schools in [redacted] and I need to interview (or chat to) some parents who send/looking to send their children to (name redacted).

It's all very informal, I just need to get your opinions of schools and what you'd like to see for your kids/ what you would have liked. There are a lot of people unhappy with schools in (the area), but there are also lots who are happy. What seems to me though is that parents aren't asked, it's just councillors etc that get their say, so I'm trying to add your voice to my research.

Everything will be made completely anonymous, so you don't need to worry; anything you say won't be traceable to you (I can give you the details of the Uni ethics policy if you'd like it).

If you would like a copy of the questions prior to the interview, these can be forwarded. However, the interview will be informal and won't be sticking to a rigid set questions.

Just to reassure you, you have a right to withdraw from the research at any point.

Do you think you'd be happy to talk to me?

Thanks for you help.