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PhD thesis, Bath Spa University.**

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TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF ATTACHMENT AWARE APPROACHES IN SCHOOLS - NORMATIVE OR TRANSFORMATIVE?

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Ethics, Data and Copyright Statements

1 Ethics

This study was approved by the Bath Spa University Ethics Panel on 28/11/2019. Should you have any concerns regarding ethical matters relating to this study, please contact the Research Support Office at Bath Spa University (researchsupportoffice@bathspa.ac.uk)

All participants provided written informed consent prior to enrolment in the study, and for any associated datasets to be utilised as presented within this thesis.

2 Data

The full underlying dataset is available on request from the author, Richard Parker. These datasets are not publicly available as they contain information that could compromise the privacy of research participants and identify participating schools.

3 Copyright

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Abstract

This thesis considers the ways in which school staff conceptualise the theoretical and practical aspects of Attachment Aware Schools (AAS), how understandings vary across different types of institution and across staff strata. Taking a critical theoretical perspective, it asks whether AAS represents a radical and transformative approach to education, or whether it is simply a 'soft' form of social control which 'cools out' potential challenges to the social order.

The research was undertaken on three different sites – a suburban primary school, a PRU on an industrial estate and an inner-city girls' secondary school – which were developing AAS approaches. Participants were invited to reflect on their understanding of AAS, the rationale for developing it in their particular context, and the power relationships involved. They discussed the extent to which the initiative was targeted at specific groups or individuals, or towards the whole school community, the benefits or disbenefits experienced by different groups, and the empowerment or otherwise of these groups in the process. These perceptions were considered in the light of evidence on AAS from the wider literature, and government policies with regard to attachment, behaviour and mental health in schools.

The fieldwork period (February 2020 – July 2021) coincided with the Covid pandemic. This not only affected the research focus, methodology and practicalities such as access to sites and individuals, but also impacted on the understanding and perspectives of participants, highlighting the potential importance of AAS in the recovery process, but also the ambivalent nature of government policy in this regard.

The thesis concludes that there is evidence that AAS *can* have a transformative impact on individuals and schools, where such approaches are internalised within the school culture and there is an explicit management perspective which promotes this. However, this can be limited, either by a school/MAT culture which continues to promote normative values, or by neoliberal performative frameworks.

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I would also like to thank 'John', 'Chaz', 'Marie' and 'Mollie' – they know who they are! – for enabling me to access their schools, and for their insightful observations. I was hugely impressed with the work being undertaken on all three sites and hope that any critical comments I have made will be seen in that light. My thanks, too, go to all the colleagues in those schools and MATs, who gave generously of their time in focus groups, interviews and other informal discussions. My appreciation and thanks also go to Dr Janet Rose, Dr Louise Gilbert, Mike Gorman and Julia MacDonald, with whom we established the original Bath Attachment Aware Schools project ten years ago, as well as to many other colleagues at Bath Spa University, the Attachment Research Community, Bath and North East Somerset Council, who have contributed over the years.

This thesis is dedicated to my children and grandchildren, who taught me everything I know about attachment; and to Siobhan, who made it all possible.

Richard Parker

List of acronyms used in this thesis

AAS	Attachment Aware Schools
AHT	Assistant Headteacher
AR	Action Research
ARC	Attachment Research Community
BAAF	British Association for Adoption and Fostering
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
BPS	British Psychological Society
BSU	Bath Spa University
B&NES	Bath and North East Somerset Council
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CCCS	Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham
CE	Critical Ethnography
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DfE	Department for Education
DoH	Department of Health
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
EC	Emotion Coaching
EHT	Executive Headteacher
ELSA	Emotional Literacy Support Assistant
EPIP	Centre for Education Policy in Practice
GRT	Gypsy, Roma and Traveller
HT	Headteacher
ICIS	In Care, In School
IDACI	Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation
ITE	Initial Teacher Education

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ITT	Initial Teacher Training
LA	Local Authority
LAC	Looked After Child (ie child or young person in care)
LSA/LA	Learning Support Assistant
MAT	Multi-academy Trust
NCTL	National College for Teaching and Leadership
NICE	National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
NGA	National Governance Association
PAR	Participant Action Research
PHE	Public Health England
PRA	Preliminary Reconstructive Analysis (Stage 2 of Carspecken research process)
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial
RP	Restorative Practice
SAT	Single Academy Trust (ie a school which is an academy in its own right – Government documentation uses a hyphen for Multi-academy Trusts but not for SATs)
SEAL	Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning
SEND	Special Educational Need and/or Disability
ST	Senior Teacher
TA	Teaching Assistant
UCET	Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Defining attachment theory

Attachment and education policy

The notion of attachment aware schools (AAS)

Attachment aware schools in practice

Developing the research project

Key Research Questions

Applying the Theoretical Perspective

Challenges and contributions - what this study seeks to achieve

Thesis Structure

Glossary

It just changed the conversation, because you stop talking about what sanctions do you use... and you start talking about what's going on for that child in that situation.

Guy, PRU Classroom Teacher

I said 'look, you're supposed to be excluded, what are you doing?'. She said 'You're not excluding me', she says, 'I've come here, I want to be here so I'm staying here'. I said, 'Will you behave?' She says 'All right' and that was it... because she wanted to be there, she'd found somewhere she wanted to go.

Chaz, former PRU Headteacher

It's a little bit of a subtle change but the onus is more on the children, actually, learning the skills that they need, rather than teachers doing it for the children. We noticed that children were becoming quite passive... and we wanted them to take the lead on their learning and their development.

John, Primary School Headteacher

We want everyone to feel included in our school – we want everybody to achieve their very best if not more. So I think the way we try to treat everybody – we try to treat everybody equally – is definitely an attachment approach.

Mollie, Secondary School Assistant Headteacher

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When you start to talk about attachment, when you start to talk about how the brain works... you can almost see the guilt start to dissipate from those people who feel that it's their fault that their children are like this.

Dave, PRU MAT CEO

In a 2018 survey conducted by the British government of organizations working with children in need of help and protection, attachment theory was, by a large margin, cited as the most frequently used underpinning perspective.

Duschinsky (2020: vii)

Introduction

Attachment theory has been highly influential in areas such as mental health and social care since it was first developed by Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth (1967), from the 1950s to the 1980s. Its application in schools has been much more recent, stemming from the work of Geddes (2006), Bomber (2007) and Bergin and Bergin (2009). The implementation of Attachment Aware Schools (AAS) approaches has pointed up clear tensions, polarities and philosophical inconsistencies within the English education system: between traditional and progressive, didactic and child-centred approaches; separation of the learning and the feeling child, the clinically unwell and the wilfully unruly, the competent and the vulnerable; and behaviour management systems based on sanctions and rewards, against those based on relationships and self-awareness. The quotations above point up different aspects of these issues: the focus on individual children's needs, inclusion against exclusion, positive, whole school approaches and support for parents/carers. Nonetheless, for many professionals, attachment-based approaches, while well-intentioned, are still focussed on specific groups, individuals and vulnerabilities.

This thesis considers the ways in which teachers and other school staff conceptualise the theoretical and practical aspects of Attachment Aware Schools (AAS) and how understandings vary across different types of institution and across staff strata. Taking a critical theoretical perspective, it asks whether AAS represents a potentially radical and transformative approach to education, or whether it is simply a 'soft' form of social

control which 'cools out' potential challenges from teachers and students to the existing social order. The significance of this research is that there is, as yet, very little empirical work in this area, from a critical perspective, on schools, and on relationships between AAS implementation in schools and wider societal issues. In particular, this thesis challenges neo-Foucauldian emphases on 'soft' social control, arguing from a Freirean perspective that practitioners – and by implication, students and parents/carers – do gain agency from such approaches. The study itself took place during the Covid lockdown, illuminating the theoretical and practical issues of undertaking research at such a time, but also the implications which the pandemic had for practice in schools. The thesis considers the extent to which Covid changes might imply a paradigm change in attitudes in schools, leading to wider support for AAS approaches, but concludes that these should be seen more in terms of a 'moral panic' (Cohen, 2011), in which neoliberal hegemony is ultimately reasserted at a systemic level, although Covid impacts continue to support AAS developments at individual, school and intermediate body levels, particularly in areas such as children's mental health.

Defining attachment theory

Attachment theory was promoted by the psychotherapists John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth from the 1950s to the 1980s. Bowlby described attachment as 'lasting psychological connectedness between human beings' (1969: 194). They considered that children needed to develop a secure attachment with their main caregiver in their early years. This theory has been developed over time to acknowledge that multiple attachments can occur with other adults throughout life, although early experiences may continue to have an impact. Secure attachments support mental processes that enable the child to regulate emotions, reduce fear, attune to others, have self-understanding and insight, empathy for others and appropriate moral reasoning. Insecure attachments, where a child cannot rely on an adult to respond to their needs in times of stress, can mean that they are unable to learn how to soothe themselves, manage their emotions and engage in reciprocal relationships (Bath Spa University, 2014).

The key elements of attachment are a 'secure base', where children feel safe, and an 'internal working model' whereby individuals see others as trustworthy, themselves as valuable and as effective in interacting with others (Bowlby, 1988). Bowlby suggested that this latter should be in place by the age of three, although it is possible to develop secure attachments at a later age (eg in recovering from early trauma) and for adolescents a further stage of development takes place as attachment shifts from parents and/or trusted adults to friends and future partners. The secure base is also the place from which children can explore the world, always keeping a 'line of flight' back to the parent (Duschinsky *et al.*, 2015b; Holmes, 2015).

The original psychological model has received support from more recent neuroscientific research such as by Siegel (1999) and Cozolino (2014), and this element had powerful resonance in one of the schools in this study. However, Woolgar and Simmonds (2019) warn of the dangers of too simplistic an equation of 'scientific' data such as brain scans with the complexity of individual responses. Similarly, Duschinsky *et al.* (2015a) express concerns at the potential co-option of the attachment model to support a deficit view of working class or single parent families, and Smith *et al.* (2017) indicate the patriarchal implications of the emphasis on the mother-child bond. Nonetheless, Duschinsky *et al.* (2015b) conclude that this is a misreading of attachment theory, and that Ainsworth herself emphasised its potentially liberatory aspects; two female respondents also rejected this view, with one stating that she was using attachment insights to support her own sons' personal development (Transcript 12).

Although familiar in areas such as medicine and social care, the theory was little known in UK schools until Geddes' (2006) book *Attachment in the classroom*. Her approach was popularised by Bomber (2007), but it had limited impact in the UK until the mid 2010's. The idea of applying attachment theory to the classroom context gained greater traction in the USA; a literature review by Bergin and Bergin (2009) set out detailed criteria, which have had considerable influence internationally. These were:

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Teacher Behaviours

1. Sensitive, warm interactions
2. Well-prepared and high expectations
3. Autonomy supportive
4. Promote prosocial behaviour among students
5. Non-coercive discipline
6. Relationship-specific interventions

School Organisation

1. School-wide interventions
2. Extracurricular activities
3. Small schools
4. Continuity of people and place
5. Facilitated transitions
6. Decreased transitions

(Bergin and Bergin, 2009: 162)

Attachment and Education Policy

The notion of education as the transmission of knowledge, values and the imposition of discipline is deeply embedded in the English education system:

Behaviour and discipline are the cornerstone to so much of what defines this country's most successful schools.

Williamson, 2021

The adoption of attachment-based approaches might be seen as directly conflicting with such views. The early development of ideas about attachment in schools in England coincided with the *Every Child Matters* Initiative (HM Treasury, 2003). New Labour government policy between 1997 and 2010 attempted to reconcile a rhetoric of child-centred strategies in areas such as social care and youth justice with essentially neoliberal market-driven approaches in education. This led to contradictions. For example, in the Children Act 2004, five key outcomes for all children were identified, to be coordinated through a 'Children's Trust' arrangement led by the local authority, but at the same time the local education authority was abolished and individual schools were exempted from many of the requirements to cooperate placed on other statutory agencies. These contradictions were to some extent masked by a common performative framework and

prescriptive national strategies. The Wiltshire Children's Plan 2008-2011, for example, had ten priorities, only two of which related to educational attainment (Wiltshire Council, 2011).

It was perhaps inevitable that a focus on children's wellbeing in schools should take the form of a national strategy – *Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning [SEAL]* (DCSF, 2007a). This was intended to be:

A comprehensive, whole-school approach to promoting the social and emotional skills that underpin effective learning, positive behaviour, regular attendance, staff effectiveness and the emotional health and wellbeing of all who learn and work in schools.

DCSF, 2007a: 4

However, this was criticised at the time for its confused definition of 'wellbeing' (Ereaut and Whiting, 2008), while Spratt (2016) indicates the highly normative implications of the language used to describe the approach, as opposed to the more liberating language of flourishing and personal development used in other contexts. Indeed, Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) and Gillies (2011) present the approach as a form of 'soft' social control, although this thesis argues that this reflects a misunderstanding of the extent and effect of *SEAL*. Unlike other national strategies, there was no performative inspection framework; the initiative was abandoned under the 2010 Coalition government and largely disappeared. Despite a continuing romanticised folklore among teachers (Parker and Levinson, 2018), subsequent evaluations (Banerjee *et al.*, 2014; DoH and DfE, 2017; Humphrey *et al.*, 2013) concluded that the strategy had only been effective where a whole school approach to, and ethos of, wellbeing had been adopted.

The incoming Coalition administration clearly set itself against notions of 'bogus pop psychology' (Malik, 2013), highlighting didactic instructional methods in *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010) and simplistic, sanctions-based approaches to school discipline (Taylor, 2011). Although some references to AAS were made in policy documents between 2010 and 2020, as outlined in the literature review, the first specific reference to attachment awareness being a requirement on schools was made in non-statutory

guidance on children with a social worker, (DfE, 2021a). This was still ambiguous – somewhat disingenuously the document suggests elsewhere that this would affect ‘at least 98%’ of schools (DfE, 2021a: 8).

There are some interesting contrasts between *SEAL* and AAS. *SEAL* was imposed and supported by central government; with AAS the government was at best ambivalent and sometimes directly hostile. The focus of *SEAL* was a prescriptive taught curriculum; AAS starts with a whole school approach, which can be developed in a variety of ways. *SEAL* was based on a vague concept of wellbeing, which was criticised at the time for a lack of precision, whereas AAS has been developed from established attachment theory, albeit acknowledging more recent developments in the field of neuroscience and childhood trauma. However, a simplistic categorisation of *SEAL* as a normative imposition of neoliberal value-structures, against AAS as a transformative and liberating challenge to those structures may be a misrepresentation. The principles of *SEAL* were challenged both by the incoming Coalition administration and by neo-Foucauldian critics as being too therapeutic and emotion-orientated, whereas attachment-based approaches have been adopted by a range of Conservative politicians (Timpson, J., 2016; Timpson, E., 2019; Leadsom, 2021) even though these conflict with other policies. Indeed, even a simple equation of AAS with resistance to government policy is difficult to sustain in the face of a recent report from Scotland, where the devolved government has been promoting attachment-based approaches since 2012, and yet similar barriers of entrenched cultural resistance to AAS are identified among teachers (Furnivall and MacDonald, 2022).

The notion of Attachment Aware Schools (AAS)

‘Attachment Aware Schools’ (AAS) is used in this thesis to describe a management approach to school ethos and policy which highlights the importance of all members of the school community, especially staff, being aware of attachment theory and its implications for learning and behaviour. It implies schools becoming more caring and nurturing communities, ensuring that staff and pupils feel safe and secure. Its key elements are a commitment to:

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- Child/young person-centred learning
- Understanding behaviour as an expression of emotions
- Policies which are based on relationships
- A whole school approach
- Linking with other professionals, parents/carers and the wider community
- An acknowledgment of attachment theory as a way of understanding these issues

It should, however, be noted that, employing the principles of the initial Bath Spa University (BSU) project, the research did not adopt a fixed definition, particularly as its purpose was to examine the perspectives of different actors within each school as to their understanding of what attachment/trauma-aware approaches were, and what the impacts had been. Indeed, the operational model in each of the research schools was different, with one school focussing on emotion coaching, another on trauma-informed practice and the third on restorative approaches (see Glossary).

The original BSU AAS project was developed with Bath and North East Somerset Council (B&NES) in 2012 (Bath Spa University, 2022). This built on two previous initiatives within the Centre for Education Policy in Practice (EPIP) at the university: *Emotion Coaching* (EC) and *In Care, In School* (ICIS) (Parker, 2012). *In Care, In School* was another joint project between B&NES and BSU, involving a range of local and national partners (Bath Spa University, 2012), working with a group of young people in care and care leavers to identify and address the barriers which they experienced at school. A resource pack was produced by the young people, based on their own experiences, aimed at both teachers and fellow pupils. Although the project achieved a high national profile, with significant media coverage and a parliamentary launch, feedback from schools tended to suggest either that children in care were not a priority because there were so few individuals in most classes, or that schools needed more support in developing whole school strategies to address the issues raised (Parker and Gorman, 2013; Parker, 2015a). At the same time, colleagues in the B&NES Early Years team were commissioning interventions based on attachment theory to challenge school perceptions of poor behaviour in some Reception

classes, but did not have the resources to make that approach sustainable across the whole authority (Bath and North East Somerset Council, undated).

Emotion coaching (EC) was a development funded by the BSU Knowledge Exchange Fund and two Community Area Boards in the new Wiltshire Unitary County (Parker, 2010; Parker and Rose, 2011; Parker and Rose, 2013). This applied the parenting theories propounded by Gottman (1997) – including reference to attachment theory - to the school context, in order to provide a more holistic and emotionally literate approach to relationships both within and beyond the school. This led to some significant improvements in behaviour and performance for vulnerable children, and for students across the school as a whole (Rose *et al.*, 2015). The project had been designed as a mixed methods research programme, including regular reviews and focus groups with staff, in some cases also involving parents. This provided a robust research methodology, a sustainable support framework and an operational strategy which could be used to promote attachment aware approaches in schools. Although other operational strategies have been used to develop AAS in English schools over the past few years, according to Harrison (2022) emotion coaching remains the most popular model.

The AAS project (Bath Spa University, 2022) sought to embed the findings from the first two projects in a practical and universal approach which could be used to support all members of the school community – staff and students – to remove barriers to learning and participation, and to provide relationship-based approaches and emotional support for all. It was intended to reflect EPIP research foci: challenging inequality; supporting the active participation of children and young people; and using the research strengths of the university to support individuals and organisations on the front line (Parker, 2012). As the project expanded it moved more towards considerations of managerial processes and government policy, with an assumption that AAS would deliver changes advocated by the research team, thereby improving levels of behaviour, attainment and general wellbeing. This view was reflected in the project reports and evaluations which were published, by BSU (Bath Spa University, 2022) and by Oxford University (Rees Centre, 2018), both of

which adopted mixed methods approaches, drawing varyingly on psychological, statistical and qualitative methodologies.

In a position paper published with Martin Levinson (Parker and Levinson, 2018) we began to query some of the deeper philosophical and theoretical assumptions which underlay AAS, and resistance to it. These we linked both to Dewey's (1938/1997) separation of 'traditional' and 'progressive' approaches to education, and to Bailey and Ball's (2016) analysis of education in a neoliberal society. While – like Dewey – rejecting simplistic equivalences, we questioned approaches which separated the learning child from the feeling child, those with a clinical disorder from the simply unruly, and those which reduced behaviour policies to a mechanistic system of sanctions and rewards. We indicated that an over-reliance on performative measures such as examination results, and a definition of learning as a repetition of rote-learned 'facts' was likely to further marginalise the less advantaged in society. By contrast, we outlined the potential for AAS to address whole school issues of children's – and staff – emotional needs, to provide a dynamic engagement in and context for learning. Nonetheless, we acknowledged the potential validity of some critiques of AAS, particularly those which saw it as a new form of normative social control (Ecclestone and Lewis, 2014), and the danger that attachment *per se* might be seen as a deficit or medicalised term, which applied only to certain marginalised groups.

At the same time, I was becoming concerned that the evaluation of AAS approaches to date had been somewhat self-justifying. This was to some extent inevitable, given the limited resources available for research, and I had already published a brief article (Parker, 2015b), pointing up the disparities in funding between AAS and conventional school behaviour research. AAS research tended to be undertaken by those who were already committed and enthusiastic to demonstrate the effectiveness of the approach, while the limited funding available for independent evaluations, again, was provided by interested parties such as Virtual Schools (see Glossary). The methodological parameters of such research tended to be within a positivist or scientific paradigm, albeit with some more qualitative interactionist perspectives offered through interviews and focus groups.

This meant that, to date, there had been no empirical research on AAS from a critical perspective which could address and challenge the theoretical and practical issues of the effectiveness or otherwise of adopting AAS programmes. This research is intended to help fill that gap.

Attachment aware schools in practice

The 'Attachment Aware Schools' (AAS) strategy was promulgated to B&NES schools from September 2013. This coincided with growing interest in attachment issues at national government level, with the establishment of a National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) working group to consider guidelines on attachment for children in care (NICE, 2015) and a commission for BSU to develop training materials on attachment for school leaders (Bath Spa University, 2014). The National College for Teaching and Leadership was asked to establish a working group on attachment as part of initial teacher training. While some civil servants were reluctant to consider relationships as an issue in behaviour management (Parker *et al.*, 2016), the new Core Framework for Initial Teacher Training (DfE, 2016b) made specific reference to attachment. Other government documentation at the time also referred to AAS, including the joint Department for Education and Department of Health statutory guidance on promoting the health and well-being of looked after children, published in May 2015 (DfE and DoH, 2015), and DfE advice to school staff on mental health and behaviour in schools the following March (DfE, 2018). The Education Committee Report published in April 2016 included a witness session which made reference to the BSU attachment work (House of Commons, 2016). Public Health England, reporting in December 2016, identified secure attachment as the most important protective factor for children's mental health, and called for schools to have a positive climate, an 'open door' policy to raise problems, and a whole school approach (Public Health England, 2016).

An informal group of virtual headteachers, academics and training providers was also established from 2013 to coordinate and promote AAS approaches. Several virtual schools commissioned independent evaluations of their AAS developments from the Rees

Centre at Oxford University (Rees Centre, 2018). The AAS group was constituted as a charity – the Attachment Research Community (ARC) – in 2017 (ARC, 2020). These developments were not uniform; in the same year the DfE published a report on behaviour in schools (Bennett, 2017) which reasserted traditional ‘zero tolerance’ disciplinary approaches; and despite the publication of a Green Paper on mental health in schools (DoH and DfE, 2017) AAS was not promoted in national policy. The requirement to include attachment in ITT courses was not enforced and was omitted from the revised Core Framework in 2019 (DfE, 2019b). Concerns following the Covid Pandemic led to some softening in DfE advice to schools (DfE, 2020a), and the guidance on the extended role of virtual headteachers gave specific requirements to implement AAS approaches (DfE, 2021a). This was counterbalanced by a reassertion of the Bennett approach to discipline in consultations on behaviour in schools and on initial teacher training the same month (DfE, 2021b; c); and although later guidance on admissions (DfE, 2022a) adopted a softer and more relationship-orientated tone, a consultation on behaviour launched in February 2022 adopted an approach strongly based on sanctions and rewards (DfE, 2022b).

Developing this research project

AAS can be seen in different ways: a child-centred behaviour management strategy or a challenge to traditional norms of education. In either case, the question arises as to whether the approaches are adopted merely to normalise and limit poor behaviour, or to alter the power relationship between children, schools and wider society? Similarly, are the apparent contradictions within government policy merely differences of emphasis within an overall neoliberal framework of social control, or do they reveal contradictions within which children, teachers and school leaders have real agency for change?

The purpose of this research, therefore, is to establish the extent to which either of those polarities can be seen to be valid. It was originally conceived as an action research project (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010) with two establishments – a suburban primary school and a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) situated on an urban fringe industrial estate – where senior

managers had asked for assistance in developing AAS approaches. The initial plan included agreed programmes of focus groups and interviews along similar lines to those used in earlier EC/AAS projects, with the active involvement of students and parents/carers, but these had to be suspended in the light of 2020 Covid lockdown restrictions. Fieldwork took place in two phases: February to June 2020 and January to June 2021. These reflected the changing pressures on schools during the lockdown period (see Chapter 3). The adoption of a more flexible critical ethnographic methodology enabled issues arising from the first phase to be pursued in the second. These included the emergent role of the Multi-academy Trust (MAT) as a key determinant of school orientation towards AAS, and the desirability of including a comparator secondary school. Interviews with the chief executives of the two MATs involved were secured, and an inner-city secondary girls' school was identified, which was developing AAS approaches along similar lines to the BSU model. Participants were invited to reflect on their understanding of AAS, the rationale for developing it in their particular context, and the power relationships involved. They were further invited to discuss the extent to which the initiative was targeted at specific groups or individuals, or towards the whole school community, the benefits or disbenefits experienced by different groups, and the empowerment or otherwise of these groups in the process. These perceptions were considered in the light of evidence from the wider literature concerning AAS, and government policies with regard to attachment, behaviour and mental health in schools. The research also reflected the impact of the Covid pandemic on schools, on attitudes to relationship-based approaches, young people's mental health and the potential role of AAS in the recovery process. It further considered the contradictory and ambivalent government policy positions in this area, as well as the Covid impact on the research process itself.

Key research questions

The development of the research questions is described in detail in Chapter 3. However, the core questions were:

Teacher perceptions of Attachment Aware approaches in schools - Normative or transformative?

- What do we mean by 'Attachment Aware Schools' (AAS)?
- How is AAS perceived, enacted and resisted by different actors at different levels?
- Who benefits: why, when and where?
- What does this tell us about social structures, inequalities and policy enactment at a wider level?

On each site respondents at every level were asked to discuss their understanding of AAS, the implications for introducing it into their school, how it fitted in with existing policies and approaches, and what they felt the impacts had been. The particular issues raised during focus groups and interviews were refined during the course of research. The version used in the final schedule included:

- Who decides – is the initiative top-down or bottom-up?
- Who is it for – is it universal or targeted?
- Who has or has not benefitted from the initiative?
- Who has been empowered/disempowered?
- Segmentation issues– race, class and gender
- Wider issues of power and authority
- Role of the Multi-academy Trust (MAT)
- The impact of Covid

These views were then compared and contrasted with the literature and policy perspectives outlined, in order to establish the extent to which they reflected the practicalities of implementing AAS initiatives, the relevant policy drivers and inhibitors, and the level of agency which they implied for individuals within this process. In turn they were related to wider issues of social structure and control, in order to address the main research question.

Applying the theoretical perspective

This research is set within a critical theoretical perspective, which identifies power relationships within social structure, and the systems and processes which underpin them. It focusses on emancipation and social change, challenging notions of 'objectivity', 'value neutrality' and the separation between subject and object (self and the world). Central to this approach is the notion of values (Crotty, 1998). Carspecken (2005), drawing on Willis (1977), distinguishes between those who perceive all action to be situated within the context of the neoliberal state, where even resistance is culturally constrained, and those such as Freire (1972) who emphasise the links between research and social action, where minor acts of resistance can reveal the contradictions and inconsistencies of the hegemonic state. In the former interpretation, although individuals have agency, the very act of resistance – eg disrespecting school rules – reinforces their disempowered position in society. In the latter, it can be argued that working with the disempowered gives them agency, although there are a number of significant caveats.

First, while the researcher may seek to understand and adopt the perspective of the disadvantaged group, the filter for articulating that perspective is the academic discourse – in this case a PhD thesis – a point which is strongly articulated by Denzin (2003), Madison (2005) and Strachan (2021). Although this study is self-funded, a major issue within the BSU AAS team, from the early stages, was the difficulty in securing funding to expand the research; all additional funding secured was for small-scale evaluations of existing AAS-related projects, and the one national evaluation project, based at Oxford University, is funded by a charity related to a private sector company, with strong links to the Conservative Party (Timpson Company, 2022).

This illustrates a number of other issues. While AAS may be seen to be subversive, 'alternative', or not fitting into a traditional education narrative, the anxiety of researchers to be seen to be 'successful' in traditional academic terms can actually reinforce a top-down hegemonic approach. The implementation of the national research is controlled through its association with a private sector company and a respectable

university, even though some of those involved have in the past adopted more critical academic stances (eg Harlow *et al.*, 2012).

Further, while an academic perspective may seek to portray a particular action as a form of resistance, this may not be in the consciousness of the actors. For example, as illustrated in Parker and Levinson (2018), classroom disruption may simply indicate boredom or, in Riley's (2013) analysis, reflect a teacher's, rather than the students', attachment needs.

Moreover, to what extent is a particular initiative, however well-intentioned by the researcher/innovator, representative of a transformational approach? This might be related both to Freire's critique of activism without conscious understanding as being self-defeating (Freire, 1972) and a wider critique of some action research approaches as inadvertently imposing hegemonic values on unwilling communities (Levinson, 2017; Vandenberg and Hall, 2011).

Attachment awareness has been seen as a key feature of many approaches to disadvantaged young people – see Levinson and Thompson (2016) and Timpson (2019). The original AAS project grew from a conscious attempt to empower marginalised young people, and this thesis is predicated on the assumption that, under certain conditions, AAS approaches can be transformational for teachers, schools and, by implication, students, their families/carers and communities. However, much of the support for the development of AAS and mental health/ emotional wellbeing nationally has come from highly conventional sources such as the Royal Family (Royal UK, 2022) and the Alex Timpson Trust, linked with a national shoe repair company (Timpson Company, 2022). While the Timpson company has an undoubtedly clear moral foundation and values, and consciously practises attachment aware approaches in its support for staff, this is set firmly within a paternalistic 'philanthropic Tory' framework, with several members of the family giving explicit support to the Conservative party and one serving as a Conservative minister. Indeed, a sign at the door of the company's main office exhorts employees to 'Leave your politics in the car park' – a specific endorsement of the 'value free'

approaches which, Carspecken (2005) and others maintain, prevent social research and social action from being truly effective.

Challenges and contributions – what this study seeks to achieve

The research in this thesis challenges traditional conceptions of action research and critical ethnographic approaches. These provided a methodological framework which fitted the critical theoretical model, but which was modified to take into account the different phases of fieldwork and Covid restrictions. The theoretical modelling identified the tensions within both action research and ethnography between a focus on externally-determined social theory, and on individual and community-based understandings. This allowed a critical perspective to be developed, drawing both on Freire's (1972) concept of 'conscientisation', and Madison's (2010) definition of 'activism', as shifting over time, but fundamentally reaching for the underlying causes of inequalities. In turn, this was applied to the varying interpretations by respondents of the AAS approach, in order to establish the extent to which these were change-orientated (ie transformational) or merely normative, in reproducing the hegemonic status quo.

While there have been a small number of critical theoretical studies of attachment theory *per se* (eg Duschinsky, 2020), most studies of attachment aware schools tend to adopt psychological or mixed methods approaches – a combination of positivist and interactionist perspectives. This thesis examines the interactions of social power relationships and the inequalities which underpin them, in the implementation of AAS in schools. It questions the levels of agency which different individuals have, at different levels in the school hierarchy, and considers the relationship between these and the maintenance of hegemony within the neoliberal state. In so doing it challenges received ideas from some Marxist, postmodernist and neo-Foucauldian thinkers, who imply that such supposed autonomy is futile, self-deluding and actively promotes hegemonic 'soft' social control. It suggests that, in some circumstances, AAS can and does provide a conscious 'transformational' alternative to neoliberal values and approaches.

Further, the thesis considers the differing context and type of school within which AAS developments are taking place, both in terms of age range and of wider social expectations of different types of school. Thus, the constraints and expectations on a church primary school in an affluent suburb are very different to those in a PRU on an industrial estate or an inner-city, single sex, secondary school; these include the range of social and ethnic backgrounds of students, community perceptions of the school and of its students. Moreover, the governance structure and support for institutional managers are highly important; in two of the schools their Multi-academy Trust (MAT) played an important role in promoting AAS, albeit in different ways. The school which was a Single Academy Trust (SAT) was able to develop its own approaches, but was highly vulnerable to competing community and performative pressures when difficulties arose.

There has been very little work under any academic paradigm on links between AAS and wider social/policy issues. Cameron *et al.* (2015) seek to bridge school and social care approaches but make only two references to AAS; Harlow's (2019) article, focusing on links between social care and school attachment programmes, lacks detailed acknowledgment of the school context. Indeed, this gap may well underlie the apparent disjunction identified in this research, between government policies towards 'discipline' in schools and mental health for young people. While primarily focussed on school perceptions and approaches, this thesis examines these gaps, both in terms of policy implementation, and the way in which they illuminate ongoing assumptions, values and structural inequalities in the neoliberal state.

Most studies of AAS to date (eg Harrison, 2022; Rose *et al.*, 2019) focus on positive benefits in terms of student behaviour, learning and wellbeing. This thesis suggests that this is related to the nature of the research process itself, where much of the work has been undertaken by enthusiasts, or commissioned by organisations committed to 'proving' that AAS 'works'. Many of these studies also emphasise positive impacts on teachers' confidence and understanding, based on surveys and a limited number of focus groups. While this thesis does find evidence of significant changes for individuals, the outcomes are more nuanced, acknowledging different and conflicting

interpretations/understandings, related to different school contexts, individuals' hierarchical position, relationships with families, local communities and the wider social structure. It has further— despite the constraints of the Covid pandemic, which has also seriously impacted on other studies (Harrison, 2022) – enabled a more rounded perspective to be developed on change over time, as against 'snapshot' questionnaire/interview processes. The wider issue, of change over time in political policy statements concerning attachment and AAS, which has not hitherto been considered in academic literature, has also been addressed.

Although there have been a number of studies of the impact of the Covid Pandemic on society, and on academic research, and a small number of studies on specific impacts of Covid in the classroom (Carpenter *et al.*, 2021) and on young people (McCluskey *et al.*, 2021), this thesis brings together these insights with those drawn from the study data to examine their implications for theoretical research frameworks, methodology, school level practice and political policy. This enables a critical approach to the role of AAS in identifying structural inequalities and, potentially, to challenging these. The thesis considers the extent to which the challenges of Covid might imply a paradigm change in societal attitudes in schools, but concludes that these in themselves should be seen more in terms of a 'moral panic' (Cohen, 2011), whereby neoliberal hegemony is ultimately reasserted, although the wider aspects of AAS can be transformational.

The thesis also considers the role of mental health, as an indicator both of teacher concerns for the wellbeing of individual students, and of the willingness of the government to consider this. It suggests that an ambivalence can be found at policy level between an acknowledgment of concern to address perceived issues of mental health in schools, and the maintenance of a neoliberal framework of traditional school discipline. This distinction, between individual pathology, to be 'cured' by specialists such as child psychologists or social workers, and school disciplinary frameworks into which all children are to be inducted and made to fit, runs strongly through government responses both to the Bennett (2017) and the Timpson (2019) reports, and can be seen in the debates about post-Covid 'catch-up' funding for individual tuition, against mental health support, as well

as the contradictory advice on school attendance and on behaviour (DfE 2022a; b). Moreover, a further distinction needs to be drawn between a deficit focus on individual mental illness, and a whole-school approach to wellbeing, both of which terms are used in the 2017 Green Paper (Parker and Levinson, 2018). Government policy has tended to focus on the former, emphasising the school role as a first line of 'Psychological First Aid' (DfE, 2021e) and ultimately as a referral mechanism to specialist agencies. This contrasts strongly with the academic literature on declining mental health among young people, much of which acknowledges the wider social context of the issues (Children's Commissioner, 2020; Marmot *et al.*, 2020), and with the experience of respondents in this study. The question becomes as to whether a focus on mental health is itself a way of obfuscating those wider issues, or an opportunity to address them. This study finds that, in the sample schools, it is attachment-based approaches which are likely to be seen as more effective in supporting students, and that this contradiction may of itself empower and encourage more teachers and schools to challenge the prevailing neoliberal narrative.

Thesis structure

This introductory chapter sets out the framework of the research, introducing the main concepts included in the empirical study and providing a glossary of terms.

Chapter 2 outlines the main literature on attachment in schools and considers a range of potential critiques. It discusses the relationship between literature, research and policy-making, and the insights these provide on wider social structures and relationships.

Chapter 3 considers the theoretical and philosophical framework of the study, its ontology, epistemology and changing methodology. It describes the methods and approaches used for data collection and discusses both their ethical implications and the personal positionality of the researcher.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the empirical research, comparing and contrasting these with the literature and theoretical perspectives.

Chapter 5 discusses the broader implications of these findings in terms of teacher agency, education and social structures, and the potential or otherwise of AAS approaches to transform education.

Chapter 6 summarises the implications of the study, outlining its limitations and scope for future research. It concludes that there is evidence that AAS *can* have a transformative impact on individuals and schools, where such approaches are internalised within the school culture and there is an explicit management perspective which promotes this. However, this can be limited, either by a school/MAT culture which continues to promote essentially normative values, even while articulating AAS approaches, or by an external performative culture, policed by organisations such as Ofsted.

The appendices include background details of the research school sites, relevant government policy documentation, and the full text of my article on Covid impacts.

Glossary

A number of terms are used within this thesis, which it may be helpful to clarify:

Activism is used in two senses. Freire (1972) negatively counterposes ‘activism’ – action without reflection – and ‘verbalism’ – words without action – as inimical to social change (see Praxis, below, and Holmes and Smyth, 2011). However, Madison (2010) stresses the importance of ‘activism’ as a feature of research, although she emphasises the need for researchers first to reflect and empathise with the communities with which they are engaged. Levinson (2017) and Eisenhart (2019) indicate the contradictory dangers of researchers imposing an external ideology on communities even if this ideology derives from a partial reading of Freire’s ideas.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) The concept was originally developed in the USA as part of a study of early life experience as a cause of death in adults (Felitti *et al.*, 1998), but was broadened to encompass a range of potentially ‘damaging’ experiences and outcomes (Joining Forces for Children, 2020). The Wave Trust (2020), which promoted these concepts in the UK, was highly influential in producing reports into ‘Youth violence’ (Hosking, 1999; Hosking and Walsh, 2005; Walsh, 2008) and into early intervention/early years (Allen and Duncan Smith, 2009; Hosking and Walsh, 2010; Leadsom *et al.*, 2014; Leadsom, 2021; Walsh, 2018). The ideas were also adopted by the Scottish Government (Public Health Scotland, 2020) and have been promoted in England by the Home Office (2022). ACES approaches have been criticised as overly deterministic and normative, and their methodology, relying on adult post-reporting, as flawed. While sceptical of the rising popularity of ACES, both in policy documentation and in academic literature, Kelly-Irving and Delpierre (2019) suggest that they can be a useful indicator of issues in particular contexts.

Attachment Aware Schools (AAS) is used to describe a management approach to school ethos and policy which highlights the importance of all members of the school community, especially staff, being aware of attachment theory and its implications for learning and behaviour. It implies making schools more caring and nurturing communities, ensuring that staff and pupils feel safe and secure.

Behaviourism is a school of psychology originating with Watson (1925). This saw psychology in positivist terms as an objective experimental science, whereby human beings responded to external stimuli, by contrast with the other schools of psychology and psychotherapy at the time. Watson’s ideas were popularised and extended to the school context by Skinner, particularly in *The Technology of Teaching* (Skinner, 1968), where he advocated that teachers should create an environment of punishment and reward, or ‘operant conditioning’, to maximise learning. The term ‘behaviourism’ has tended to be used in a pejorative sense by advocates of alternative, child-centred and relationship-based approaches to learning – see Lees (2016), Murris (2016) and Pattison and Thomas (2016) – and is explored in the context of AAS by Parker *et al.* (2016). In this

thesis it is used as a shorthand to denote approaches to school discipline based on zero tolerance, sanctions and rewards.

Community can be used in the singular to apply to society, or the polity, as whole, or to refer to a particular geographical area. In the plural it can be used to refer to neighbourhoods, communities of interest, to communities of practice (Wenger, 1999) or to specific social or ethnic minorities. Participants in this research tended to refer to the latter, particularly to diverse communities in inner-city areas and to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities in rural areas. A recognition of constraints and barriers for specific communities might be associated with more transformational orientations, whereas an undifferentiated concept of 'community' as a whole – despite the association of the word with radical approaches to community action and PAR (eg Alinsky, 1971) – may actually imply a normative acceptance of dominant values.

Conscientisation is used on the basis of Freire's original definition of 'consciousness of oppression... The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is... the result of their own conscientisation... They also must intervene critically in the situation which surrounds them and marks them' (Freire, 1972: 28, 42/3). Freire's approach has been refined by later commentators such as Sanders (2020) but its central feature of conscious and critical engagement with the environment within which actors are attempting to operate, whether Brazilian peasant farmers or UK classroom assistants, is a key element of this analysis.

Cooling out was first used by Goffman (1952) in describing the way in which confidence tricksters reassured their victims. It was later adopted by Clark to describe how higher education institutions in the USA mollify and mask the under-attainment of students by 're-defining failure and providing for a "soft" denial' (Clark, 1960: 569). Margolis and Romero (2000) suggest that the concept is relevant to a range of disadvantaged groups, including women and people of colour.

Emotion coaching (EC) is a strategy which focuses on the emotions which underlie any particular behaviour, rather than a narrow behaviourist approach based on sanctions and rewards. It was originally observed by Gottman in the USA (Gottman 1997) as a pattern of behaviour by parents, and has been developed as a parenting strategy by Gottman and by Havighurst *et al.* (2010) in Australia. It has been applied in schools via a number of BSU projects (see Rose *et al.* 2015) and was adopted within the BSU AAS programme from 2013 as providing a simple and practical approach which could be applied ‘in the moment’ to support other attachment aware strategies (see Bath Spa University 2014). It is currently promoted via Emotion Coaching UK (2022).

Inclusion/ Inclusivity ‘means ensuring every child, no matter what their individual needs or barriers to learning, has equal access to learning and the same opportunities to achieve’ (Ryan, 2019). It is often seen as primarily concerned with special educational needs and disability (SEND), but Ryan points out:

Inclusion in schools is not just about providing additional support to children with special educational needs. It’s about creating a learning environment that works for all pupils, whether they have a disability, speak English as an additional language, are a member of a minority community, come from a low-income family – or find it harder to learn and achieve for other reasons.

Ryan, 2019

In other words, inclusion is a whole-school, universal issue. Norwich and Eaton (2015) draw a distinction between **medical** approaches which reinforce a deficit model rooted in individual pathology, and **social** approaches, which focus on removing barriers to full participation in society. Hehir *et al.* (2016), in their review of 280 studies from 25 countries, distinguish between **exclusion**, where the individual student is prevented from accessing education; **segregation**, in which students learn in separate environments; **integration**, which implies the individual being constrained to operate within externally imposed norms which may not be appropriate for them; and full **inclusion**. Booth and Ainscow (2011) indicate that addressing these issues requires changes to culture, policies and practices at all levels.

Moral panic was used by Cohen (2011) in 1972 to describe an exaggerated societal reaction to a perceived threat, often amplified by the media. His model demonstrates the way in which society distances itself from that threat, reasserting the norms and values of the status quo. Cohen originally investigated reactions to the 'Mods' and 'Rockers' of the 1960s but the term has been used to describe a range of phenomena. In this thesis it is counterpoised with Kuhn's (2012) notion of paradigm change to suggest that government responses to the Covid pandemic have been fleeting and normative, rather than representing any substantive or transformative change.

Multi-academy Trusts (MATs) were introduced by the Coalition government following the Academies Act (2010), to provide governance for grouped academy schools (House of Commons, 2017). They are self-governing charitable companies and operate via a funding agreement with the DfE. They are subject to contractual performance management via DfE Regional Schools Commissioners. The Government White Paper published in March 2022 (DfE, 2022d) aims that all schools will be part of a MAT by 2030, with a strengthened accountability framework.

Neoliberalism Although used in different ways from the 1890s, the term first rose to prominence after the second world war, as an alternative to concepts of centralised state planning and Keynesian economics in liberal democracies. Some of its original proponents, such as Friedman (1951), distanced themselves from the label, but it was highly influential in the re-positioning of Western governments from the 1980s, despite its associations with repressive regimes in South America. Bailey and Ball (2016) describe the way in which different strands of neoliberal thinking have influenced UK government education policy since the 1990s. Monbiot indicates that:

Neoliberalism sees competition as the defining characteristic of human relations. It redefines citizens as consumers, whose democratic choices are best exercised by buying and selling... It maintains that "the market" delivers benefits that could never be achieved by planning.

Monbiot (2016)

This marketisation, he suggests, leads to privatisation, increased inequality, ‘a stifling regime of assessment and monitoring, designed to identify the winners and punish the losers’, which in turn impacts on the mental and physical health of the underprivileged. Many of these issues were raised by respondents in this study, although they did not use the term ‘neoliberal’ itself.

Norms/normative behaviours are commonly defined as appropriate and acceptable behaviours in a given situation, enforced by positive and negative sanctions, which are a tacit form of social control (Haralambos and Heald, 1980). Parsons (1951) developed the notion of norms as the basis of social order, drawing on Hobbes (1651/1968) – see Etzrodt (2020). The Bennett Report (2017) on school behaviour puts considerable emphasis on maintaining school norms, in a disciplinary sense. Norms and values are identified by Habermas as one of the three main ontological realms (Habermas, 1978), and these ideas were developed by Carspecken (1996) as a core feature of his critical ethnographic methodology. Madison (2005) and Lugones (1987) stress the importance of understanding the varying cultural norms of different communities in relation to those of the dominant power structure, while Ecclestone (2017) stresses the imposition of normative values by the neoliberal state. Stern *et al.* (2021b) discuss this in the context of race and gender, where the white middle class nuclear family is held to be the norm. Treharne *et al.* (2018) further suggest that researchers should challenge the conventional biomedical ethics processes which reinforce these assumptions in much academic research.

Praxis is used in the Freirean sense of action combined with reflection. Freire describes words without action as ‘verbalism’ and actions without reflection as ‘activism’ (Freire, 1972: 60). The notion of ‘praxis’ can be found in Aristotle and later philosophers (Illich, 1973), but was highlighted by neo-Hegelians such as Marx (1845/1969) and was influential in later writings such as Habermas (1978) – see Chapter 3.

Reflection/ reflexivity is used in both positive and negative senses, to reflect Freire’s (1972) and Madison’s (2005) emphasis on the importance of reflection in determining

action, but also the critique from neo-Foucauldians such as Perryman *et al.* (2017), who suggest that reflective approaches have been co-opted within neoliberal society as a form of soft social control of professionals, obscuring social realities behind ‘acceptable’ discourses of professional practice. This thesis rejects this latter argument, demonstrating significant evidence of individual agency and social critique among practitioners, albeit that this is not necessarily consistently challenging the status quo.

Single Academy Trust (SAT) is sometimes referred to as a ‘stand-alone’ academy, usually where the former school governing body becomes the Trust which is responsible for the school. This status was offered in the Academies Act (2010) to schools which were rated by Ofsted as ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’. However, if a SAT school is subsequently found to be ‘inadequate’, under the Education and Adoption Act (2016) the Secretary of State can require the school to become part of another Multi-academy Trust.

Targeted and Universal approaches. There is a dilemma between providing services for all students, and in targeting support to specific needs. The *In Care, In School* Project (Bath Spa University, 2012) drew attention to the stigma which children in care feel about being singled out for support, and the difficulties which schools faced in attempting to cater for a perceived minority of students. This has been reinforced recently in both APPG (2022) and MacAlister (2021). This underpinned the universal, or whole-school, strategy adopted within the BSU AAS project, which emphasised the benefits to the whole school community, while recognising that specific needs could be addressed within this approach. A similar change of emphasis can be discerned within New Labour government policy, following the Children Act (2004). Coalition and Conservative policy, post 2010, took a very different approach (Bailey and Ball, 2016; Simon, 2017), which identified specific groups and individuals as being in need of targeted support – arguably a deficit model which blames individuals for their own disadvantage. This is linked to the medical v social models discussed above, in the context of inclusion. While there is scope for discussion as to the extent to which individualised programmes can be managed within a universal environment, some medicalised approaches may be incompatible with this (see Chapter 2).

Traditional v Progressive discussions of education are based on Dewey's (1937/1998) distinction between approaches concerned with the transmission of knowledge and skills, implying conformity to rules, standards and obedience to social norms; and those which are student-centred, emphasising self-expression and learning through experience (Dewey, 1938/1997:20). Dewey himself challenged over-simplistic applications of this dichotomy (see Parker and Levinson, 2018), while Biesta (2010) argues that this can hamper rational discussion of the purpose of education. Whitty (2006) has broadened the debate to include a range of different teacher perspectives, linked to current educational and political developments. Nonetheless, this thesis argues that this dichotomy can help illuminate some of the issues involved in understanding the complexity of developments and approaches in classrooms, schools and society as a whole.

Transformation is central to the research question, which seeks to determine how adopting AAS approaches affects relationships, practice and policy at individual, school, intermediate, policy or societal level, and the extent to which this can be seen to be transformational, as opposed to merely reinforcing existing norms. Hyde-Dryden *et al* (2022), in their study of attachment aware schools, categorise them as 'transformational', 'positive' or 'mixed', in terms of the researchers' perception of their level of engagement with AAS. However, this research adopts a critical realist perspective (Cruikshank, 2012), using Freire's (1972) concept of 'conscientisation' (see above) as a lens through which to examine this. It also considers the insights of Scales *et al.* (2020) in distinguishing between approaches which are merely 'caring' – and therefore potentially normative – and those which challenge young people in their own terms. 'Conscientisation' implies a personal engagement in and reflection on the wider social context, as opposed to unreflective 'activism' for its own sake, and, while this may be problematic in terms of some of the views expressed by respondents, the thesis reflects the views of Stern *et al.* (2021) that, to be transformative, approaches must recognise and address wider social inequalities.

Trauma is defined in this context as the impact of unresolved occurrences that gave rise to fear, helplessness or horror, which may have a profound effect on the child's feelings of physical and emotional safety (ARC, 2022). Experiences of trauma (such as abuse or witnessing domestic violence) may shape a child's responses to future stressful situations. At their most severe, these experiences can lead to recognised mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder, while developmental trauma can impact on children's relationships and ability to feel safe in the school environment. It is estimated that up to three-quarters of adult mental health issues have their origin in childhood (Kessler *et al.*, 2007), while one in four children may have experienced trauma sufficient to impact on school behaviour (O'Connor and Russell, 2004). Trauma-based, trauma-aware and trauma informed approaches are increasingly being used in schools, often alongside initiatives such as ACES, and neuroscientific approaches (see UK Trauma Council, 2022). The Attachment Research Community has adopted the term 'Attachment and Trauma Aware' in its more recent publications.

Virtual School The notion of a 'virtual school' supporting the education of children in care within a local authority was included in the White Paper *Care Matters; Time for change* (DCSF, 2007b). Specific funding for supporting children in care was given to local authorities via 'Pupil Premium Plus' in 2013 (PAC- UK, 2014) and the role of the virtual headteacher was made statutory in the Children and Families Act (2014). The Children and Social Work Act (2017) extended the role of the virtual school head to supporting adopted children, and this was further extended to all children in contact with a social worker in 2021 (DfE, 2021a). The Virtual School does not provide classes for children *per se*, but has oversight of all eligible pupils in mainstream, special and alternative provision. A significant number of virtual schools currently provide support and training for schools in attachment and trauma aware approaches.

Vulnerable/Vulnerability The dictionary definition is:

exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally.

(of a person) in need of special care, support, or protection because of age, disability, or risk of abuse or neglect.

Oxford Languages (2022)

In this thesis 'vulnerable' is used in both ways. In the first sense, children may be seen as in danger of specific threats, such as exclusion (Graham *et al.*, 2019; Timpson, 2019) or lower attainment (McCluskey *et al.*, 2016); schools, teachers and parents may be exposed to specific social pressures (see Chapters 4 and 5). Researchers are urged to make themselves 'vulnerable' in order to connect with communities (Madison, 2005). However, the word is not neutral. Ecclestone (2017) and Williamson (2012) see vulnerability, in the second sense, as a way of disempowering the less privileged in society, presenting inequalities as a result of individual pathology rather than social structure. Edelman (2018) suggests that, in the research process, its use may actually stifle the voice of the less powerful. The term is used in a generic sense in government pronouncements, for example on lockdown recovery (Williamson, 2021) or attendance (DfE, 2022a), and by practitioners aligned with medical models of intervention (eg Bomber, 2015b). However, the research found some examples of parents and schools subverting this label to secure control and resources (Transcript 1; Transcript 11).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

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Attachment theory – normative or transformative?

There is a rich literature on attachment theory *per se*, but a more limited discussion of its application in schools. There is a wider literature on associated elements, such as trauma, mental health and wellbeing, emotions and relationships, as well as specific work on behaviour, learning, engagement and exclusion. These latter elements can be seen as relating to broader issues such as disadvantage, empowerment and agency, as well as the position of attachment theory in policy-making and the overall structure of social relationships in neoliberal society.

There are essentially two patterns of thinking – a normative view which expects children and young people to conform to prescribed hegemonic norms and values, and an approach, described here as ‘transformative’, which seeks to empower children and young people to flourish and survive in society. This was perhaps best summarised by Dr Maggie Atkinson, then Children’s Commissioner: ‘it is the duty of the public body to adapt to the child, not the other way round’ (Atkinson, 2013).

The literature around attachment awareness in schools (AAS) can be described around these two themes, although the relationships are more complex. Thus, many psychology-based approaches, which seek to cause the individual child to conform, using a medicalised or pathological model, might be seen as normative, whereas those employing a more social model could be argued to be transformative, particularly if their effect is to cause changes in practice at classroom or school level, or in perceptions of behaviour and discipline at wider policy levels (see Norwich and Eaton, 2015). Similarly, some interventions which began as a response to normative concerns about social order and the need to intervene with individual miscreants, such as restorative approaches (Daniels, 2013; McCluskey *et al.*, 2008), can be subverted to supporting learning (Gomez *et al.*, 2020), whole school (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2019) or even whole system approaches – such as in the Hull Restorative City Initiative (Finnis, 2015). The question then becomes as to whether these changes are substantive in terms of the wider social order – representing real change – or merely illusory, as many postmodernist writers would

suggest (Foucault, 1977a), representing a form of ‘soft,’ rather than overtly coercive, social control. Some writers, such as Ecclestone (2017) and Perryman *et al.* (2017) argue that the adoption of AAS-type practices actively co-opts teachers into strengthening the hegemony of the neoliberal state.

This leads to a further issue – the extent to which individual actors are aware of their position and are actively engaged in changing it. This is discussed in Chapter 3, in terms of ontology – views of the world and one’s place within it (eg Habermas, 1978) – and epistemology – how we understand and investigate this (eg Carspecken, 1996). There is a difference between perceiving the external world as a given order in which you must find your place, or as a shifting set of realities which you have agency and the power to change. These might broadly be equated on the one hand with some of the medico-scientific models in the literature, including some of the more deterministic interpretations of attachment theory itself (Duschinsky, 2020); and on the other with more social models, such as in education and social care (Cameron *et al.*, 2015; Smith *et al.*, 2017) or with feminist and black interpretations of attachment (Ainsworth, 1967; Causadias *et al.*, 2021; Duschinsky *et al.*, 2015b).

A third strand can be found within critical theory (Crotty, 1998), which questions the extent to which the individual has agency within an overall oppressive social framework, or is merely subject to external social, economic and historical forces. The latter position might be seen as relevant both to traditional Marxist thinking (Marx 1845/1969) and to the postmodernist discussion above, where there is a perceived danger of false consciousness – feeling satisfied with one’s position and role in the social hierarchy without striving effectively to change it; or believing that the limited and well-intentioned actions which one is taking will not fundamentally change society. This is challenged by more libertarian Marxist theory, especially that deriving from Freire (1972), which emphasises the importance of ‘conscientisation’ – understanding one’s position in the wider society – and ‘praxis’ – bringing together that understanding with action to promote change. Freire is critical of ‘activism’ – change for its own sake, which does not include that wider understanding – and that definition is a significant challenge to the

notion of transformation which underlies this thesis. Nonetheless, following Madison (2010), this thesis argues the need to consider the wider definition at individual, school, community and societal level in order to understand the underlying processes of change.

This argument between individual/medical, collective/social and models of individual agency can be seen, too, in the policy debates of the past quarter-century. Bailey and Ball (2016) point to apparent policy continuities and discontinuities within the overall neoliberal thrust of government policy. Despite the adoption of supposed child-centred policies in *Every Child Matters* (HM Treasury, 2003), the Children Act (2004), and in areas such as Youth Justice (Crime and Disorder Act, 1998), the New Labour government pursued a neoliberal policy with regard to schools, reducing the influence of the local authorities which were expected to promote integrated working, and increasing school autonomy (Riddell, 2019). Despite a child-centred rhetoric, the Behaviour Support Partnerships, established under the Steer reports (Steer, 2006; 2009), were firmly under the control of local headteachers, while those issues which could be seen as threatening social stability, such as school attendance, exclusions, and the performance of children in care, were subject to performative monitoring from central government and Ofsted. It is perhaps significant that the *Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)* initiative (DCSF, 2007a) – which might have been seen to be promoting more child-centred approaches – disappeared once support was withdrawn by the incoming Coalition government, despite a continuing romanticised view of the project among some teachers (Parker and Levinson, 2018). It was criticised at the time as having a dangerously emotional and ‘therapeutic’ content (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009; Gillies, 2011), although later evaluations suggested that its failure was as a result of its not being adopted as a whole school strategy, as opposed to a classroom activity (Banerjee *et al.*, 2014; Humphrey *et al.*, 2013).

While the rhetoric of the Coalition and subsequent Conservative governments appears to have strengthened the more normative aspects of policy, there are ongoing discontinuities, which Bailey and Ball (2016) relate to the tensions between neoconservative interventionist and paternalistic approaches on the one hand, and

neoliberal, market-driven approaches on the other. This chapter maps those inconsistencies in policy, from dismissive statements about ‘bogus pop psychology... which is an excuse for not teaching poor children how to add up’ (Malik, 2013), to the requirement that local authorities:

Ensure that education settings understand the impact that issues such as trauma and attachment difficulties and other mental health issues can have on children with a social worker and are “attachment aware”.

DfE, 2021a: 18

It considers whether those apparently contradictory policies are merely aberrations within ‘a single overarching governmentality of the self’, as Ecclestone suggests (Ecclestone, 2017: 59), or if they do in themselves indicate a space within which there exists an ongoing potential for teachers actively and consciously to promote change (Sheikh and Bagley, 2018; Troman, 2008).

The literature on attachment

The research question in this study is essentially whether the application of attachment awareness to schools has any transformational effect, and, if so, at what level? Different academic and professional approaches, with their associated theoretical paradigms, languages and research methodologies, are likely to foreground different aspects of this question. Moreover, this particular study is set within a critical theoretical framework which seeks to identify the underlying power relationships, systems and processes which underpin them, with a focus on emancipation, social change and underlying values. The core element of this research is the theory of attachment adumbrated by Bowlby and his associates (Bowlby, 1982; Duschinsky, 2020; Holmes, 2014) but much more important is the way in which this has been developed and applied over time, across different disciplines, and the meanings which have been ascribed to it by different social actors, and across society as a whole.

There are thus a number of literatures which need to be considered, including those reflecting predominantly positivist scientific paradigms, such as Biology, Health, Neuroscience and Psychology (eg Woolgar and Simmonds, 2019). Secondly, Duschinsky *et al.* (2015a) suggest, more interactionist or phenomenological perspectives have influenced some approaches to attachment theory within the 'psy' disciplines – 'psychologists, psychiatrists, criminologists, psychoanalysts, and the rest' (Foucault, 1974: 85) – which have informed professional practice literature in areas such as social work, social care and social pedagogy. Some of this literature has been translated into educational thought and practice, although it is important to distinguish between the different traditions within education itself. This can be seen, too, in policy terms, with apparent tensions between holistic child-centred approaches such as mental health, and targeted top-down interventions, eg on behaviour and discipline (see Parker and Levinson, 2018). Similarly, there are different literatures on teacher, on pupil and on family agency and resistance in the face of policy initiatives.

There are also a number of wider issues to which these literatures give rise which might be categorised as Philosophical, Theoretical, Social, Educational and Political.

Philosophical concerns are perhaps most related to concepts of being, relationships with others, family and ethics. In this context perhaps the philosophical basis of education, the relationship between mind and body – 'the separation between the learning child and the feeling child' (Parker, 2018) is of prime importance, as well as the Aristotelian concept of 'eudaimonism', or 'flourishing' (Spratt, 2016). Theoretical models include the general paradigms and methodologies suggested above, but in particular notions of medical vs social, or universal vs individual approaches, as well as issues of segmentation by social class, gender and race (Stern *et al.*, 2021b). Social aspects might include issues such as parenting, concepts of socialisation and peer relations, constructions of adolescence, social care and criminality. Issues in education might include pedagogy, traditional v progressive methods, context (age range; alternative education), theories of learning, 'neuromyths', initial teacher training, professional development and support for staff, supervision, reflective practice, coaching and mentoring. Finally, within the political sphere, there are the notions of policy formation, performativity, governmentality and

‘modernisation’, linked to a range of ideas concerning the relationship between education, democracy and the research process. (See, for example Bourn and Hatley, 2022; Ranson and Stewart, 1994; Robertson and Dale, 2015).

Another issue within this context is the connection between the popular ‘how to’ texts, empirical research studies and more philosophical approaches. This has been a feature of attachment debates since Bowlby began to popularise his theories on mother-child attachment in the 1960s (Duschinsky, 2020), but in the school context may also relate to the tensions between those who wish to create a ‘science’ of knowledge and behaviour, and those who espouse more child-centred, exploratory approaches (Furedi, 2014; Mujis and Reynolds 2001).

The application of attachment theory to schools

Attachment and government policy

The application of attachment theory to schools in England – as opposed to health and social care – has been relatively recent. As with the literature on attachment theory in general, there is a mixture of populist ‘how to’ manuals, empirically based research and some, more limited, theoretical and philosophical work (eg Parker and Levinson, 2018). The empirical work was until recently largely confined to specialist areas such as early years, behaviour management and adolescent studies, mainly within Psychology. This has been generally focussed on individual pathologies, and there is relatively little empirical work on more universal approaches such as attachment and school performance (see Meins, 2014). Significantly, the English literature – especially in the more popular ‘how to’ area – has tended to follow trends in government policy. Thus, during the New Labour period (1997-2010), although there was some ambivalence with the continuing autonomous approach to school leadership (DfES, 2005a), initiatives such as *Every Child Matters* (HM Treasury, 2003) encouraged the notion of a more integrated and universal approach to children, leading to a focus on ‘wellbeing’, and on social and emotional aspects of learning – *SEAL* – (DCSF, 2007a; Watson *et al.*, 2012).

The early stages of the Coalition government (2010-2015) saw some considerable retrenchment in schools, influenced by a neoliberal ideology which rejected notions of 'pop psychology' (Malik, 2013). It is significant that there were relatively few publications on pupil wellbeing either in the 'how to' category, or in terms of empirical research, between 2011 and 2015, with the exception of the Children's Society 'Good Childhood' Reports and index, established from 2009 (Children's Society, 2012; 2015; Layard and Dunn, 2009). However, that same ideology promoted a notion of targeted intervention in specific areas of disadvantage (Bailey and Ball, 2016), and thus, paradoxically, the notion of attachment-based approaches for specific 'deprived' groups – particularly young children and children in care – began to gain currency. It needs to be emphasised, though, that despite statements of intent in UK government and parliamentary reports (Allen, 2011; APPG, 2012; Field, 2010), no significant empirical research was commissioned, other than that related to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Attachment Guidelines (NICE, 2015), which was initially focussed on a medical and individualised approach to children in care.

At the same time, research internationally and in other parts of the UK (eg Furnivall *et al.*, 2012) was pointing to the importance of attachment theory as a universal means of understanding children; this was adopted by the Scottish Government for all members of the children's workforce, including teachers, in 2012 (Scottish Government, 2012). Other international developments in areas such as emotion coaching (Gottman, 1997), neurobiology (Cozolino, 2013; Siegel, 1999), and teachers' personal attachment orientation (Riley, 2009; 2013), also influenced the development of such approaches.

A new phase in research on AAS and on government policy towards this can be discerned from around 2015, perhaps not unrelated to changes in leadership at the Department for Education. The impetus for this came from several sources. First, although concerns about attachment-related issues had come with respect to specific 'disadvantaged' groups, the practical implementation of attachment-aware approaches were demonstrated to require whole-school strategies. The NICE Guidelines, originally focussed

on children in care, recommended such broader approaches (NICE, 2015). This was reinforced by the findings of several longer-term evaluations of the *SEAL* programme (Banerjee *et al.*, 2014; Humphrey *et al.*, 2013) and on wider interventions on children's mental health in schools (DoH and DfE, 2017). In 2016 the journal *CYP Now* published a paper entitled *The Policy Context on Attachment and Neglect* (Hayes, 2016), reinforcing the new importance of attachment theory in this area.

Secondly, there was a wider concern in government circles that the neoliberal emphasis on academic attainment in quasi-independent schools at the Department for Education was leading to a lack of focus on wider social issues and potential threats to the status quo. The issue of attachment had been raised as a concern in Parliament in 2010 (House of Commons, 2010), and, as early as 2012, Iain Duncan Smith, as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, had warned in a speech of the social consequences of poor infant attachment (Duncan Smith, 2012). It was the Home Office which established a project to improve information sharing between different agencies (Home Office, 2014), while there were public disagreements between the then Home Secretary, Theresa May, and the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, over the latter's handling of the alleged 'Trojan Horse' Islamist conspiracy in Birmingham schools (Holmwood and O'Toole, 2018). This disjunction between DfE and Home Office approaches could still be seen in 2022, where the only reference to adverse childhood experiences (ACES) in a DfE consultation document on behaviour was a cross-reference to a Home Office website (DfE, 2022b).

The third and most important influence was the growth of concern about children and young people's mental health, itself prompted in part by funding reductions in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) as part of the Coalition government's austerity measures. Successive government and parliamentary reports called for action in this area, and in particular the inclusion of attachment-based approaches in teacher education (House of Commons, 2014). There was continuing ambivalence from the DfE – typified by the publication in 2017 of both a 'zero tolerance' report on behaviour in schools (Bennett, 2017) and a Green Paper on Children's Mental Health (DoH and DfE, 2017). Nonetheless, individual local authorities did publish attachment aware behaviour

policies (Ahmed, 2018), many of these directly influenced and led by the Virtual Schools for looked-after children (Kelly and Watt, 2019). This reflects a key finding which has emerged from this research as to the importance of the ‘intermediate body’ – particularly the multi-academy trust (MAT) – in promoting AAS approaches.

The political priorities of Brexit, and the subsequent triumph of the neoliberal faction within the Conservative party, had a direct impact on these developments. Although the government-commissioned Timpson Review of School Exclusions was highly critical of insensitive school behaviour policies (Timpson, 2019), this was met in November that year with the publication of non-statutory guidance on Character Education, a highly normative and individualistic approach to encourage ‘good’ behaviour and values (DfE, 2019d). In the same month a revised Core Framework for ITT was published (DfE, 2019b); this was slimmed-down from the original document (DfE, 2016b) to reduce references to specific details, including attachment issues, although it did highlight ‘the importance of building strong, positive relationships with pupils – as well as their parents and carers’ (DfE 2019b: 6). However, this was published alongside a summary of the Bennett Report for trainees (DfE, 2019c), implying that this was the model to be adopted.

The impact of the Covid pandemic, and a recognition of the need for support for all pupils in returning to schools after the first lockdown, led to an initial acknowledgment within the DfE of the need to address emotional wellbeing (DfE, 2020b; Parker and Wright, 2020). However, this position was reversed under subsequent concerns over ‘lost learning’ (Cattan *et al.*, 2021), and a desire to return to business as usual:

Although remote learning was a tremendous success in terms of enabling children to carry on with their lessons from home, the lack of regular structure and discipline will inevitably have had an effect on their behaviour... parents... would expect children to be in orderly rows or groups, listening to a teacher who didn’t have to shout to be heard.

Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education, 7 April 2021
(cited in Simpson, 2021c)

Indeed, two DfE documents published within weeks of each other in June 2021 gave directly contradictory messages, with one (DfE 2021a) calling for all schools be attachment aware and the other (DfE 2021b) repeating the principles of the Bennett Report.

Attachment awareness under New Labour

The concept of attachment in schools was popularised by Heather Geddes (2006), an educational psychologist, Kate Cairns (Cairns, 2006; Cairns and Stanway, 2004), a social worker and foster carer, and by a school therapist, Louise Bomber (2007). While Geddes, Cairns and Bomber refer to the role of secure attachment in promoting effective school performance, all three emphasise the importance of individual therapies in achieving this. In the USA, where the concept was arguably somewhat better established, Kennedy (2008), drawing on Siegel (1999), argued for better understanding on the part of schools of the neurobiological, psychological and social psychological underpinnings of attachment theory, as well as appropriate interventions to develop nurturing and supportive relationships with all students. The following year Bergin and Bergin (2009) published a detailed literature study in the *Educational Psychology Review*, drawing on a range of mainly psychological research.

Bergin and Bergin summarised their research into twelve proposals, six for teachers and six for schools (see also page 15), which were:

Teacher Behaviours

1. *Sensitive, warm interactions*
2. *Well-prepared and high expectations*
3. *Autonomy supportive*
4. *Promote prosocial behaviour among students*
5. *Non-coercive discipline*
6. *Relationship-specific interventions*

School Organisation

7. *School-wide interventions*
8. *Extracurricular activities*
9. *Small schools*
10. *Continuity of people and place*

11. Facilitated transitions

12. Decreased transitions

Bergin and Bergin, 2009: 162

This approach has tended to influence much of the subsequent international literature on attachment aware schools, including Harlow (2019). Coincidentally, many of their proposals, especially over attachment awareness, transitions and school size, were also present in Wetz's (2009) book, *Urban Village Schools*, reflecting on his experience as a secondary school headteacher in inner-city Bristol. Wetz (2010), in a paper for CfBT Education Trust, also proposed the inclusion of attachment awareness in teacher training.

Wellbeing as a proxy for attachment awareness?

There was in England during the decade 2000 – 2010 an ongoing literature on emotional wellbeing in schools, inspired by *Every Child Matters* (HM Treasury, 2003) and *SEAL* (DCSF, 2007a), ranging from 'how to' guides such as Burrell and Riley (2005), Cowie (2004), or Morris (2009), to formal evaluations of the *SEAL* scheme such as Hallam (2009). Much of this was influenced by Goleman's (1995) notion of 'emotional intelligence', coming from the USA and, while this latter may be seen with hindsight as contributing to prejudices over 'neuromyths' (Howard-Jones, 2014) it did provide a simple and accessible approach. This was derived from contemporary North American literature on wellbeing and early years development, based on the US Head Start programme (eg Brooks-Gunn, 2003), and influenced New Labour policies such as *Every Child Matters* and *Sure Start* (Bate and Foster, 2017), as well as front line practice (Walsh and Gardner, 2005). However, there was little reference to attachment theory in the wider literature on children's wellbeing: for example, Collins and Foley (2008) in '*Promoting children's wellbeing*' make only three passing references, in the context of child protection, identity and self-esteem, while Knowles (2009) makes only two. This is in strong contrast to later publications, such as Rose *et al.* (2016c) *Health and Well-being in Early Childhood*, where attachment theory is included as a chapter in its own right.

The emphasis on wellbeing was particularly marked in Early Years policy, where an initial targeted focus on deprivation through the *Sure Start* and *Neighbourhood Nurseries* initiatives (Smith *et al.*, 2007) was superseded, following the Children Act 2004, by an approach based on the development of Children's Centres, which could offer both targeted and universal support. The Green Paper '*Meeting the Childcare Challenge*' (DfEE, 1998), on which these initiatives were based, was one of the first publications to refer to the concept of 'early intervention' to support vulnerable children, and this concept re-emerged towards the end of the decade, in publications from more conservative/normative organisations such as The Centre for Social Justice (Allen and Duncan-Smith, 2009), and The Wave Trust (Hosking and Walsh, 2010). Later reports included Field (2010) and Allen (2011) on early years and early intervention respectively. Both of the latter reports were produced by Labour politicians on behalf of the Coalition government; these might be seen as typifying the new Cameron 'Compassionate Conservative' neoliberal approach, as described by Simon (2017). It is perhaps significant that much of the impetus for the BSU AAS developments described in the introduction came from the local Early Years team (Bath and North East Somerset Council, undated).

A cogent critique of this simplistic approach to wellbeing is provided by Spratt (2016). She quotes Ereaut and Whiting's (2008) report to the DCSF to demonstrate the considerable confusion in UK government circles as to the precise policy definition of 'wellbeing'. Examining approaches within the Scottish context she suggests that there are four possible discourses:

1. Physical health, related to medicine
2. Social and emotional literacy, related to psychology
3. Care, related to social work
4. 'Flourishing' – 'eudaimonism' - related to Aristotelian philosophy

Spratt argues that notions of physical health and emotional literacy are essentially normative, with an implication that individuals should conform to dominant cultural expectations. Care should in principle be more transformative, given the Scottish

government's stated discourse with respect to the rights of the 'whole child'. However, Spratt refers to Cockburn's (2011) and Hendrick's (2003) reflections on the balance of power – particularly adult/child – in social work relationships, quoting Noddings' (2005) suggestion that these can only be balanced where there is a truly 'dialogic encounter' between them. These issues are also reflected in Harlow's (2013, 2012) work. The notion of 'flourishing', as we have seen, has more potential to promote a positive and transformational application of attachment theory to the school context. Watson *et al.* (2012) offer another critical perspective. Taking a post-structuralist approach, based on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (2004), they challenge the prevailing views that perceive wellbeing as externally-imposed checklists of specific items that are needed in order to live well and instead suggest that wellbeing should be understood, and experiences revealed, at the level of the subjective child (Watson *et al.*, 2012). A similar approach was later used by Duschinsky *et al.* (2015b) in their analysis of attachment-based approaches.

These critiques were situated historically at a time when the New Labour project was unravelling, through active Coalition government policy – the 'bonfire of the Quangos' (Tapsfield, 2012; The Guardian, 2012) – and through disillusionment with the contradictions between an enforced top-down 'progressive' policy within an essentially neoliberal approach (Bailey and Ball, 2016). Despite its policy priority until 2010, there was little significant literature on universal wellbeing in English schools as such for several years after White (2011), although individual issues – early intervention, early years, special needs/behaviour, mental health and children in care – did receive attention, reflecting government priorities and the atomisation of approaches to children's social care (see MacAlister, 2021). There were nonetheless significant international literatures which affected thinking on attachment and schools later in the decade.

While some sections of the Conservative Party, and especially those responsible for the Department for Education between 2010 and 2014, were explicitly hostile to the wellbeing/compassionate Conservatism approach, Williamson (2012) suggests – in a theme which is echoed in Ecclestone's later writings, eg Ecclestone (2017) - and by

Bialostock and Aronson (2016), although neither of them reference Williamson's work – that the notion of the 'affective school' actually contributes to and supports the neoliberal project.

Well-being, as a policy term, is an imagined state of affect that does not so much 'enfeeble' or increase the 'vulnerability' of the self as evacuate the idea of an authentic self from educational policy-making altogether and replace it with the idea that emotional wellness must in fact be managed and performed.

Williamson, 2012: 438

Williamson grounds his argument in the then-stated policy intention of the new Prime Minister, David Cameron, to produce a 'happiness index' measuring 'national well-being' (*ibid.*, 439). He suggests that this would lead to a performative approach whereby schools would be inspected on happiness and emotion in their development plans, and the effectiveness of their 'strategies to perform 'affect management'' (*ibid.*). While there is little evidence of the emergence of performance measures for these softer 'affective' strategies, along the lines predicted by Williamson, the emergence of 'Character Education' as a government priority (DfE, 2019d) might be seen to demonstrate such an approach, supporting, rather than challenging dominant norms and values. The Ofsted Framework for Inspections, published in May 2019, gave no specific affective measures, but stated that inspections would consider the effectiveness of character development in every establishment (Ofsted, 2019: 11). This was revised, following the Covid Pandemic, to include wider references to character and to mental health (Ofsted, 2021 a; b).

Attachment and schools since 2010

Despite the existence of academic studies such as Geddes (2006), and Bergin and Bergin (2009), bridging the gap between attachment theory and schooling, and popular 'how to' literature such as Bomber (2007) and Wetz (2009), there was relatively little literature on attachment theory in schools in England during the early 2010s. As indicated above, there were wider literatures which focussed on the needs of groups who might be deemed to be particularly vulnerable. The Palgrave Handbook on Attachment Theory published in 2014 (Holmes and Farnfield, 2014) made virtually no reference to attachment in schools

other than in the context of individual children with an external diagnosis of attachment 'disorder' misbehaving.

This was perhaps not surprising, given the therapeutic and psychological origins of attachment theory itself. It could be argued that the association of 'therapeutic' approaches with New Labour (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009), the abandonment of *SEAL* and of the notion of an integrated children's workforce, were all part of a neoliberal discourse at government level which denigrated 'bogus pop psychology' (Malik, 2013). The Steer Reports' approach to behaviour in school, focussing on staff-student relationships and school engagement, was rejected in favour of a simplistic checklist (Taylor, 2011). In 2017, the Bennett report on Behaviour in Schools (Bennett, 2017) made no mention of 'relationships' and this continued to be the case up to the 2022 DfE consultations on behaviour and exclusions (DfE, 2022b). Civil servants responsible for the new Coalition policies on school discipline seemed genuinely bemused when the word 'relationships' was used by headteachers (Parker *et al.*, 2016: 463). By contrast, the Scottish Government, which had in 2008 adopted a relationships-based approach to discipline in school (Scottish Government 2008), commissioned detailed reports into attachment approaches (Furnivall *et al.*, 2012) and, in 2012, adopted an explicitly attachment-based perspective for the whole children's workforce, including schools (Scottish Government, 2012).

The role of emotion coaching

An important influence, linked to Goleman's (1995) work, was the concept of 'emotion coaching' (EC). This was developed in the USA by psychologist John Gottman, based on observations of parents' interactions with their children. Gottman identified four main parental responses to stressful situations: dismissing, disapproving, *laissez-faire* and emotion coaching (Scott, 2014). In *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child* (Gottman, 1997), the preface to which was supplied by Goleman, Gottman argued that the 'emotion coaching' response, validating the child's feelings, empathising and joint problem-solving,

led to more resilient children, who were better able to form relationships and to achieve at school.

While Gottman's ideas have been applied more generally in the USA in terms of family therapy, there are explicit links with attachment theory (Fry, 2020; Fu *et al.*, 2012). EC, too, has been developed in a number of different ways. In Australia Havighurst *et al.* (2010; 2013) have created a training programme for parents, 'Tuning in to Kids', and, more recently, 'Tuning in to Teens' (Kehoe *et al.* 2020). In the UK, EC has been developed as a strategy for schools and other practitioners in the children's workforce (Digby *et al.*, 2017; Gilbert *et al.* 2021; Rose *et al.*, 2015). The BSU/B&NES AAS project adopted emotion coaching as a way of operationalising the programme, and this was adopted in other projects (Clifford and McBlain, 2017; Rees Centre, 2018). The national research project on AAS highlighted the adoption of EC as a key practical technique in many schools (Harrison, 2022).

Neuroscience and learning theory

A further important area was the linking of neuroscience and learning. The notion of a cross-disciplinary approach, bringing together psychological, neurobiological and educational perspectives (Kennedy, 2008) had powerful resonance with the interventionist 'scientific' and multi-agency strategies of New Labour (Mujis and Reynolds, 2001). More recently, although concerned about the notion of 'neuromyths' (see page 83), Howard-Jones *et al.* (2020) have discussed the importance for teachers on having an informed and critical approach to 'the science of learning' in the classroom. The notion that there was a significant international body of research which provided a neuroscientific basis for attachment theory and its application in the classroom was highlighted in Cozolino's (2013): *The social neuroscience of education: optimizing attachment and learning in the classroom*. This gave succour both to managerial 'what works' strategies and to teachers arguing for more progressive approaches, while providing some counterbalance to those in the incoming UK Coalition government who dismissed such approaches as 'pop psychology' (Malik, 2013).

Teacher attachment styles

Although most literature on attachment in schools has concentrated on pupils' relationships with their teachers and each other (eg Commodari, 2013), some researchers have considered the effect of teachers' own attachment styles on their classroom practice and behavioural responses to their pupils (eg Kesner, 1994; Lifshin *et al.*, 2020). Riley's research in Australian schools demonstrated a link between less experienced teachers' desire to be loved, and incidents of classroom disruption (Riley, 2009), as well as on teachers' career longevity (Riley, 2013). He suggests that most experienced teachers have developed an internal working model (Bowlby, 1988) which allows them to cope with disruption without feeling personally threatened. Taggart (quoted in Bath Spa University, 2014), building on Kohlrrieser's (2012) attachment-related ideas of 'secure base leadership', suggested that school leaders who had 'avoidant' attachment styles often depended on visible success for their self- esteem, and that this led to stress-related 'burn out'. Taggart's wider work on early years classrooms (Taggart, 2016; 2019) challenges both conventional gendered models of attachment and caring, and the positivist philosophies which underlie them. Rather than accept the separation of thought and feelings which these philosophies imply, he suggests that teachers should recognise the need to develop their own working models. 'In this way, compassionate teachers will be able to foster a compassionate heart in the children they serve'. (Taggart, 2019: 25). Similarly, recognising 'the need to reconnect with professional identity and practices that foreground emotionally sensitive ways of working with children and build on children's needs for secure attachments' (Watson *et al.*, 2012: 199) is a fundamental feature of Watson *et al.*'s critique of the standards-driven policies of the New Labour regime.

The importance of these approaches is their rejection of the top-down teacher-pupil relationship, and in their acceptance of a model which challenges the epistemological assumptions of the status quo. In other words, accepting that teachers' own subjective experience will influence their own normative/evaluative outlook, approaches and construction of reality, takes us towards an understanding of attachment approaches in schools which may be transformative, rather than merely recreating current power

structures and relationships. The need for teachers and school leaders at all levels to accept and understand their own emotional needs and limitations was emphasised by a number of respondents, notably Frances, Assistant Head for Behaviour in the secondary school (Transcript 9) and Dave, PRU MAT CEO (Transcript 13).

Attachment, vulnerability and children in care

Despite the reservations expressed by some senior figures in the Coalition government, there was a growing concern over the continuing failure to narrow the gap between the achievement of children in care and their peers in school (APPG, 2012) and wider issues related to children's mental health (House of Commons, 2014). The Report *Attachment Matters for All* (Furnivall *et al.*, 2012), commissioned by the Scottish Government, had drawn on earlier work on children suffering trauma and loss by Scottish Attachment in Action (Grant and King, 2011) and by the Centre for excellence for looked-after children in Scotland (CELSIS), but had made an unequivocal case for a universal approach to children's attachment across all services. In the same year, the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (APPG, 2012) Report 'Education Matters in Care' stated:

There is a lack of understanding at the school chalk face of the massive impact early trauma, neglect and abuse has on children's emotional state and how this has a knock on effect for their behaviour and learning... Teachers need training on trauma and attachment issues and the impact they have on education.

APPG, 2012: 45, 46

The following year the UK National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) was commissioned to draw up guidelines for attachment in children and young people who are adopted from care, in-care or at high risk of going into care (NICE 2015). These were published two years later, and again included recommendations on implementing attachment aware approaches across all schools. However, the issues relating to attachment in schools were still largely focussed on this 'disadvantaged' group. While BSU was commissioned in 2013 by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) to produce training materials on attachment for school leaders (Bath Spa

University, 2014) this was largely on the basis of the national profile of its *In Care, In School* materials (Parker and Gorman, 2013; Timpson, 2013).

Such literature as was published on attachment in school around this time tended to be related to psychotherapeutic and practical interventions (Bomber, 2011; Bomber and Hughes, 2013; Golding, 2013; Marshall, 2014) rather than universal approaches for all pupils, and it is significant, as already noted, that the Routledge Handbook on Attachment Theory mentioned schools only as an example of locations where disruptive behaviour might play out (Holmes and Farnfield, 2014). By contrast, Moullin *et al.* (2014), focussing on the early years, stated:

Children with insecure attachment are at risk of the most prominent impediments to education and upward social mobility in the UK: behavioural problems, poor literacy, and leaving school without further education, employment or training. Behaviour problems are a particular concern for the UK where the gap in such problems between the most disadvantaged children and their peers is larger than in Australia, Canada or the US.

Moullin *et al.*, 2014: 4

The report further suggested that insecure attachments might affect up to 40% of the population and that:

Parents who are living in poverty, have poor mental health or are young are also more likely to struggle with parenting and have insecurely attached children.

Ibid.:5

Thus, a report rooted in the arguably normative Early Intervention/Early Years tradition then raises the issue of universality, and, implicitly, the need for a transformative approach. Meins (2014), from the perspective of an academic Professor of Psychology, stated that these concerns stemmed from a lack of understanding of the scientific evidence. She suggested that the best evidence would come from a meta-analysis, pooling data from multiple studies, but that the limited evidence to date was inconclusive. Meins challenged figures given for middle-class families in the study, suggesting that 'insecure attachment isn't abnormal – it's not even unusual' (Meins, 2014: 2), concluding that:

Teacher perceptions of Attachment Aware approaches in schools - Normative or transformative?

Studies on attachment and children's educational attainment are as rare as hen's teeth, so it's dangerous to draw conclusions when there is so little evidence.

Ibid.:2

This positivist 'scientific' approach can be aligned with the individualistic neoliberal views expressed by Andrea Leadsom MP, suggesting in a House of Commons debate that 'poor attachment is no respecter of class or wealth' (House of Commons, 2010). Moreover, Meins' commitment to 'meta-analysis', and her critique of research on attachment and education, demonstrate some of the contradictions in this research area. In February 2015, the present author suggested that the reluctance of major funding organisations to support research into attachment awareness in schools, as opposed to studies which adopted a behaviourist approach based on sanctions and rewards, was related to their unwillingness to challenge the values and assumptions of the dominant culture (Parker, 2015b).

It is perhaps significant that the only major national study on attachment awareness in schools to date (June, 2022) is being undertaken by the Rees Centre, Oxford, which was originally established by a private sector care provider, (Core Assets, 2020). This research was commissioned by The Alex Timpson Trust, a charity linked to the Timpson Group (Timpson Group, 2020). While undeniably a serious attempt to promote attachment awareness in schools (see Timpson, 2016), it should be seen in the context of the philanthropic and individualistic traditions of the Conservative right; John Timpson's son, Edward, was at the time Minister for Children in the Conservative government (Gov.uk, 2020a). Indeed, as Bailey and Ball (2016) suggest, this illustrates a tension between the Conservative party's paternalistic interventionist traditions and its market-driven neoliberal aspects. However, the overall implication remains that, without a consciously oppositional response, such initiatives remain set within a normative, soft-controlling framework.

Children's mental health

As early as 2013 the Girl Guides issued guidance on healthy relationships (Girlguiding, 2013). The Health Select Committee (House of Commons, 2014) made specific recommendations in its report on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), concerning teacher training and the role of schools in promoting mental health, and this was followed by the Department of Health/NHS England report *Future in Mind* (DoH, 2015), which again emphasised whole school approaches to, and staff training in, mental health. In the same year the National Children's Bureau produced a report, *What works in promoting social and emotional well-being and responding to mental health problems in schools* (Weare, 2015), on behalf of a network of 40 children's organisations.

These publications made only limited reference to attachment, but the Department for Education and Department of Health *Statutory guidance on promoting the health and well-being of looked after children*, published in May 2015 (DfE and DoH, 2015), and the DfE *Advice for school staff on mental health and behaviour in schools*, first published in 2014, (DfE, 2018b), both made specific reference to attachment awareness, as did the Education Select Committee report on *The mental health and well-being of looked-after children* (House of Commons, 2016), and the Education and Health Select Committees' joint report *Children and young people's mental health – the role of education* (House of Commons, 2017). Similarly, as noted, the *Core Framework for Initial Teacher Training* (DfE, 2016b) included attachment awareness as a core part of the programme for trainee teachers.

This new priority at government level was associated with an increasing volume of literature on attachment in schools, some of it directly related, such as Timpson (2016) *Looking after looked after children*. The majority of the published literature was either of the more popular 'how to' nature, such as Colley and Cooper (2017), aimed at PGCE students; based on limited single-institution studies, such as Webber (2017) and Ubha and Cahill (2014); or focussing on specific groups, such as Sharp *et al.* (2016) on adolescents, and Granot (2016) on disability. Some wider 'how to' publications on mental

health in schools, such as Glazzard and Bostwick (2018) made passing reference to attachment. Following the recognition of the need to support adopted children, and the expansion of the virtual school role to encompass this, under the Children and Social Work Act (2017), several books were published on the attachment needs of adopted children, and those who had suffered trauma, in school. While Gore Langton and Boy (2017) focussed specifically on this group, Brooks (2019) took a wider and more universal approach. Coincidentally, several popular parenting books such as Silverton (2021) *There's no such thing as naughty* also took an attachment-related perspective. There was a limited literature of wider studies, based mainly on published evaluation reports eg Rose *et al.* (2016a), which were summarised in Rose *et al.* (2019); and by Sebba and her colleagues (Rees Centre, 2018). Harlow (2019) provided an overview of the literature on attachment aware schools to date. However, the only detailed national study on attachment aware schools (Rees Centre, 2022) will not report until October 2022.

Concerns over 'disadvantaged' groups, the need for concerted government action and links with mental health can be seen to be coming together in approaches to behaviour, and here again the ambivalence within Conservative government circles between traditionalist attitudes to 'discipline' and wider, more progressive, approaches, becomes apparent. These views do not necessarily fit into neat polarities; it is conceivable for paternalist traditional conservatives to adopt a more liberal approach to attachment, as is it for neoliberal enthusiasts to support a more reductionist authoritarian approach. Notwithstanding the supposed adoption of AAS in the 2016 policy documents on wellbeing and on teacher training, the Bennett Report into behaviour in schools (Bennett, 2017) adopted an uncompromising 'zero tolerance' approach; no reference was made to 'relationships' throughout the whole report (Parker and Levinson, 2018). The then Secretary of State, Justine Greening, attempted to balance this with a commitment to supporting mental health in schools (DfE, 2017a), and this 'balancing' appears to have underlain government policy in the following years. However, the subsequent Green Paper *Transforming children and young people's mental health provision* (DoH and DfE, 2017) was described by the joint Education and Health and Care Select Committees report as 'unambitious' and 'failing a generation' (House of Commons, 2018a). In its own

response, the All Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood (APPG, 2018b) added its recommendation for:

Health and education professionals to receive initial training and CPD in attachment and brain development and the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma-informed practice.

APPG, 2018b: 8

Despite these recommendations, the requirement for attachment to be included in all initial teacher training courses was removed in November 2019 in favour of a reassertion of the Bennett-inspired 'zero tolerance' approach to school discipline (DfE, 2019b; c). While the impact of the Covid lockdowns was acknowledged in some DfE documentation (DfE, 2020a; DfE 2021b), and updated guidance on mental health in schools was published in September 2021, in collaboration with Public Health England (Public Health England and DfE, 2021), there was no mention of attachment issues throughout this latter document. The overall thrust of government policy at the time remained the normative sanctions and rewards approach to behaviour and discipline, (DfE, 2020c; DfE, 2021b; DfE, 2022b), specifically invoking both the Bennett Report (2017) and the Charlie Taylor Checklist (Taylor, 2011)

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)

The interest in attachment in some government circles coincided with the emergence of the concept of 'Adverse Childhood Experiences' (ACES) as influencing future life chances. The concept was originally developed in the USA as part of a study of early life experience as a cause of death in adults (Felitti *et al.*, 1998), but was broadened to encompass a range of potentially 'damaging' experiences and outcomes (Joining Forces for Children, 2020), which could be presented as a simple checklist (ACES too high, 2020). The Wave Trust (2020), which promoted these concepts in the UK, was highly influential in producing reports into 'Youth violence' (Hosking, 1999; Hosking and Walsh, 2005; Walsh, 2008) and into early intervention/early years (Allen and Duncan Smith, 2009; Hosking and

Walsh, 2010; Leadsom *et al.*, 2014; Leadsom, 2021; Walsh, 2018). The ideas were also adopted by the Scottish Government (Public Health Scotland, 2020).

Although these might be seen as supporting a more progressive agenda, the antecedents of the ACES approach, particularly in the UK, are much more towards a normative model. The Walsh (2008) report on violence was sponsored by the Metropolitan Police, while The Wave Trust home page, in an interesting reflection of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977a) counterposes pictures of policing, schools and prisons. Allen and Duncan Smith (2009) was highlighted by Duschinsky *et al.* (2015a) as an example of the co-option of attachment theory to support a deficit model of families experiencing poverty, while the cross-party manifesto on early years (Leadsom *et al.*, 2014) was led by an MP associated with the right wing of the Conservative Party. The one reference to ACES in the Draft Guidance on Behaviour in Schools (DfE, 2022b) is a link to a training pack on the Home Office website, initiated by the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner (Home Office, 2022).

In methodological terms Hardt and Rutter (2004) warned of the dangers of too heavy a reliance on a methodology based on adult retrospection, as risking too deterministic a model, while, more recently, Finkelhor, an original proponent of the approach (Finkelhor *et al.*, 2013; Finkelhor, 2018), has expressed reservations about the crudity and consequent validity of the actual scales being used. Kelly-Irving and Delpierre (2019) raise concerns that an over-simplification of ACES can promote, rather than reduce inequality, and ignores the differential effects of ACES on, and potential resilience of individuals:

Attributing the experience of ACEs to this set of identifiers is scientifically wrong but could also be extremely stigmatising, especially if ACEs are being used by social workers or child protection agencies or even by individuals themselves to 'diagnose' or identify a risk.

Kelly-Irving and Delpierre, 2019: 452

Against this, they argue, ACES can be used sensitively to support and empower communities, recognising the need for structural change and collective action. Nonetheless, they remain sceptical about the rising use of ACES approaches in policy

making and in the academic literature, demonstrating through a study of publications a rise in titles making references to ACES from only one before 1995, fewer than 20 in 2010 and over 180 in 2018 (*ibid.*, 446). It is a significant coincidence that the All Party Parliamentary Group on Adverse Childhood Experiences (APPG, 2018a) was established in February 2018, chaired, again, at the time, by Andrea Leadsom, although it has subsequently broadened its brief to cover all forms of childhood trauma (Hobhouse, 2021).

Restorative practice

A similar ambivalence can be seen in relation to youth justice, where the New Labour mantra of: 'Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' (Blair, 1993) gave rise to a new approach to offenders, including the development of restorative approaches (Daniels, 2013; McCluskey *et al.*, 2008). Such approaches were already being used more widely in schools before 2010 (Finnis, 2015) and indeed influenced early developments in the BSU Emotion Coaching project (Parker, 2010). The approach also came later to influence AAS-related practice in all three schools in this study, in one case being seen as the main operational strategy. Under the Coalition government Secretaries of State for Justice with arguably differing political perspectives – Kenneth Clark (Chandiramani, 2010; Puffett, 2011a; Puffett 2011b) and Michael Gove (Puffett, 2015; Puffett, 2016) – made efforts to reduce the role of youth offending teams, and to abolish the Youth Justice Board, but were defeated by coalitions of local statutory and third sector interests. It is ironic that an initiative which originated in a normative policy to enforce social control became seen as a strategy which could support alternative approaches in schools. However, it may be that, despite its normative antecedents, its association with opposition to central government prescription gives it an air of independence; the present author has argued elsewhere that the class origins of individual police officers actually gives some common identity with disadvantaged young people (Parker, 1980). This contrasts with the notion of ACES, which shares many common features and proponents with youth justice and restorative approaches, but which has tended to support a deficit model of young people, based on individual pathology, rather than a wider social change orientation.

Exclusions, school attachment and engagement

There is an interesting interplay between the notions of pupil engagement with school, formal exclusion from school and 'school attachment'. A considerable international literature exists on the latter, much of which derives from Libbey (2004) in the USA. Libbey indicates a series of factors which can be used to measure school engagement and therefore act as predictors of academic and social success. However, although she uses the word 'attachment' in the sense of pupils' engagement with school, her work does not relate back to the psycho-social attachment theories associated with Bowlby and Ainsworth. This is the also case in some more recent psychological research in this area, such as Sevari and Rezaei (2019) with high school students in Iran, Anli (2019), Yildiz and Kilic (2020), both in Turkey. Others, such as Mert (2020), Toraman and Aycicek (2019), also in Turkey, Omodan and Tsotetsi (2018) in Nigeria, and Venta *et al.* (2019) in the USA have adopted more specific references to mainstream attachment theory in analysing student responses. Scales *et al.* (2020), considering the effect of staff-student relationships on student motivation and performance in US middle schools do not specifically mention attachment theory *per se*, but do reference Pianta *et al.* (2012) whose work was influential in the development of the BSU AAS model (see Parker *et al.*, 2016; Rose *et al.*, 2019).

In England, notions of pupil engagement have tended to be associated with issues of behaviour and exclusion. The balanced approach to supporting students exhibiting challenging behaviour across several schools adopted in the Steer reports (Steer, 2005; 2009) was rejected after 2010 in favour of behaviourist checklists (Taylor, 2011) and zero tolerance approaches (Bennett, 2017). As early as 2012 the Children's Commissioner was warning of the growing number of official and 'unofficial' exclusions which were taking place under the new policies. The next year a follow-up report pointed to the inequalities experienced between different social and ethnic groups, and this was reinforced by another report in 2019 (Children's Commissioner, 2012; 2013; 2019). Further evidence was provided of the treatment of exclusions for children with mental health difficulties in a study by the University of Oxford (Cole, 2015), while McCluskey *et al.* (2016) drew

attention to wider inequalities in their study of exclusions in Wales. Adoption UK produced a report for their client group soon afterwards (Armstrong-Brown and White, 2017). The right-leaning Centre for Social Justice produced its own report (Centre for Social Justice, 2018), while in the same year the Education Select Committee published a critical report entitled *Forgotten children: Alternative provision and the scandal of ever-increasing exclusions* (House of Commons, 2018b). The following year the ESRC funded *Excluded Lives*, a 4 year multi-disciplinary study across a number of universities of the impacts of exclusion (University of Oxford, 2019; Excluded Lives, 2022). Cole *et al.* (2019), and later Tawell and McCluskey (2021), provided significant evidence as to the disparities between exclusion rates in different UK administrations. This they related to the shift in power in England from local authorities to individual headteachers under academisation – an issue which this thesis also explores in terms of MATs – the move away from government promotion of inclusion, performative examination-based inspection processes, reductions in funding and in local authority support. The RSA report *Pinball Kids: Preventing school exclusions* (Partridge *et al.*, 2020) was published in 2020, while Daniels *et al.* (2020) provided further information on the specific impacts of Covid lockdowns on exclusions and excluded children.

Given the levels of academic and policy concern being expressed, the then Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds, commissioned the former Children’s Minister, Edward Timpson, to produce a report (Timpson, 2019), alongside an independent literature review (Graham *et al.*, 2019). Timpson’s report confirmed the rise in both permanent and fixed-term official exclusions which had taken place since 2013, and attempted to quantify the extent of unofficial exclusions and ‘off-rolling’ – persuading parents to remove their children from school rolls by home-educating them (see Ofsted, 2018a). As a former minister, Timpson maintained a balanced and diplomatic approach:

This report covers both the need for effective behaviour management in schools (to establish and maintain high expectations) and the need to understand and respond to individual children (so they are supported to meet those expectations).

Timpson, 2019: 7

However, Timpson also emphasised the need for schools to understand the impact of their behaviour policies on individuals from specific groups ‘such as disability or race, and should give particular consideration to the fair treatment of pupils from groups who are vulnerable to exclusion’ (*ibid.*: 6) He further directly addressed issues of attachment, relating this to ‘behaviour that may look like defiance but is often rooted in mistrust, fear or negative examples of behaviour they have seen in their own lives’ (*ibid.*: 41), and pointed out that:

These children may respond differently to particular sanctions which, rather than leading to changing their behaviour, can further damage relationships with adults around them.

Ibid.: 41

In other parts of his review Timpson addressed issues such as the challenges of transition – eg primary to secondary school – (*ibid.*: 71) for children with attachment difficulties, and the lack of support for adopted children who ‘had needs resulting from their traumatic early life experiences’ (*ibid.*: 91). He proposed the introduction of local authority-led local forums (*ibid.*: 12; 63) which appear very similar to the Steer Report Behaviour Support Partnerships, abandoned by the Coalition government in 2010 (Steer, 2005; 2009).

The independent literature review commissioned by the DfE to support the report was equally forthright:

Certain vulnerabilities, individually or combined, increased a child’s risk of exclusion. These included: SEND, including social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, poverty, low attainment, being from certain minority ethnic groups, being bullied, poor relationships with teachers, life trauma and challenges in their home lives.

Graham et al., 2019:6

The review called for whole system change, particularly in secondary schools.

A degree of pupil disaffection and behavioural issues could be avoided if aspects of secondary schools' culture and values were re-examined... Pointers include the tension between pupils' wellbeing and exam results, and the level of support offered through transition and afterwards.

Ibid.: 96-97

Although attachment issues were not highlighted in the Executive Summary of either report, the link between school disaffection, relationships and a person-centred approach to students was clear, as was the rejection of zero-tolerance approaches to discipline. Again, relating this to the overall research question might imply that adopting an attachment aware approach would actually require a radical transformation of the English education system, particularly at secondary level, as stressed by Dix (2017). However, the piecemeal, 'balanced' approach contained in Timpson's report failed to achieve such a change; Hinds was replaced three months later with a much more neoliberal Secretary of State, Gavin Williamson, under a new Prime Minister. In a press release in April 2021, Williamson stated:

Behaviour and discipline are the cornerstone to so much of what defines this country's most successful schools... Whether it's supporting some of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged children with the routines and structures needed to help them fulfil their potential, or helping prepare young people for the expectations of the workplace... orderly and disciplined classrooms are best.

Williamson, 2021

The discussion of school engagement and exclusion has tended to be posed in terms of a binary choice between a liberal agenda, which seeks to make schools as inclusive as possible, and a competitive neoliberal agenda where schools' role in maintaining the 'quality' of learning – and implicitly the values and social structures embedded within the curriculum and associated disciplinary arrangements – is seen as paramount:

The school ethos, its vision and the strategies used to achieve it, must be consistent with one another, and must be consistently demonstrated. Rules and values that fluctuate too much confuse what the school stands for. Exceptions may be permitted, but they must be exceptional.

Bennett, 2017: 37

This quotation stands in stark contrast to Atkinson's demand that the public body should adapt to the child (Atkinson, 2013). As already noted, Timpson's report on exclusion steers a careful line between supporting schools' requirements to maintain discipline, and the needs of individual children. Similarly, the research on 'school attachment', outlined above, is written mainly from a positivist and psychological perspective. Resistance and/or antipathy to school as an institution is presented as a result of individual pathology rather than any collective experience, and does not challenge the fundamental values of the school in a wider social context.

Alternative provision

There is a particular issue with regard to the role of alternative provision, including pupil referral units (PRUs), in this process. Both Bennett and Timpson highlight their role in offering a more appropriate experience for children who find it difficult to cope in a mainstream school environment, but Timpson, in particular, presents this as ideally a form of early intervention, with a view to encouraging school reintegration wherever possible (Timpson, 2019: 75). Parker and Levinson (2018) describe the way in which successive government reports (Taylor, 2012; DfE, 2015; DfE 2018a) have tended towards standardising and normalising alternative provision within an overall neoliberal performative framework.

There is thus a dilemma between alternative provision as offering an alternative educational experience which is more child/person/family centred, and as a staging post towards reintegration in mainstream schooling, suggesting that a PRU is not only an alternative setting for education, but should provide 'a therapeutic milieu in which efforts can be made to address deeply rooted experiences of rejection and ingrained feelings of being unloved and unvalued' (Levinson and Thompson, 2016: 40). When PRUs are successful in addressing these issues, student behaviour improves, and they may be seen as ready for reintegration. However, having experienced a more sensitive and supportive educational environment, Levinson and Thompson argue, the students are more likely to be critical of mainstream school structures, rules and processes (*ibid.*) – a point which is

also demonstrated by Ralph (2021). Adopting an attachment-related approach in the PRU, therefore, can strengthen the resistance of young people to a school system which they perceive as unfair (see Graham *et al.*, 2019), turning them from passive consumers to active critics. This may be reinforced in turn by external cultural perspectives: Levinson (2015) describes the way in which a Gypsy young person got himself excluded from school to fit in with his peer group, and there is anecdotal evidence of young people in care behaving in the same way (Bath Spa University, 2012¹). Alongside children in care, Graham *et al.* (2019: 57) identify Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) groups among those most likely to be excluded from school, and Timpson suggests that GRT young people are 5.2 times more likely to be excluded than the norm (Timpson, 2019: 35). Thus, while engagement with school may perhaps be measured using exclusion as a proxy, there is some danger in assuming that the adoption of AAS approaches will of itself transform the life chances of disadvantaged groups, particularly if these co-exist with more traditional disciplinary approaches and cultural values which reinforce groups' suspicions of school (see Levinson, 2017).

Much of the writing on excluded children – especially government reports – tend to reflect a two-dimensional and normative view that if only these children were treated as effectively in mainstream schools as in alternative provision, and mainstream schools changed their approach to accommodate them, they would see the error of their ways and behave accordingly. It is unlikely that this position could actually be reached in all schools, given the prevailing performative neoliberal culture – see for example Benson *et al.* (2011), which suggests that only 35% of US middle schools can be described as 'caring'. Moreover, this ignores a third dimension, of young people's own agency. It can be seen both in the impact of young people seeing the contradiction between an attachment-based approach adopted in a PRU (Levinson and Thompson, 2016) and the performative culture of the mainstream school, as well as in the operation of their own culture (Levinson, 2015).

¹ In a dramatised scenario a group of boys are arguing about why only the child in care was not punished after an incident (the actual offence – not identified in the video - was robbing a chocolate machine). The care leaver who told this story explained that his behaviour got steadily worse until eventually he stapled his teacher's tie to the workbench, which got him the badge of honour of a fixed-term exclusion.

Ralph (2021), in his study of students in a secondary school 'vocational' provision (effectively an internal exclusion unit), demonstrates the way in which a return from a negotiated egalitarian relationship with staff in year 10 to 'reintegrated' mainstream classroom relationships with other staff reinforced their sense of exclusion and consequent non-compliance. The danger is that, as with Willis' 'Lads' (Willis, 1977), rejecting the mainstream school culture may lead to reduced longer-term outcomes, keeping such young people in their place. This might be seen in terms either of Ecclestone's vision of neoliberal obfuscation (Ecclestone, 2017), or of Freire's concept of 'activism' (Freire, 1972; 42) – resistance without conscious thought, which is ultimately self-defeating. McCluskey *et al.* (2016) suggest that, alongside strategies to reduce disciplinary exclusions and raise the attainment of vulnerable/disadvantaged students, schools need to focus on challenging inequality and promoting equity. While the thrust of many reports on exclusion is to improve reintegration into mainstream school, it is arguable that the more person-centred culture of a PRU or a 'vocational' unit would be a better context for addressing issues of personal agency and effectiveness, and effectively empower young people to challenge and transform those outcomes.

Attachment and teacher training

Another policy ambivalence can be seen with regard to teacher training and continuous professional development, recommended in the APPG (2012) and other reports. Wetz's (2010) report for the CfBT Trust had been explicit about this, but, notwithstanding the commissioning of AAS training materials by NCTL (Bath Spa University, 2014) and some tentative discussions with teacher training organisations (Parker *et al.*, 2016), the government response to a Health Select Committee recommendation calling for mental health issues to be a mandatory part of initial teacher training and continuing professional development (House of Commons, 2014), was that this was a matter for local determination and priority (House of Commons, 2015). The Carter Interim Review of Initial Teacher Training (Carter, 2015) included recommendations that child development

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should be included in all courses, and the final Core Framework for ITT (DfE 2016b) specifically included a requirement for attachment awareness.

However, there was no systematic attempt to support or monitor this; as late as September 2018 the first recommendation of the Become report ‘Teachers who care’ was that: ‘All routes into teaching should include information about children in care, including trauma and attachment aware behaviour management’ (Become, 2018: 4), implying that this was not happening. The requirement was removed from the 2019 revised framework (DfE, 2019b). Although this did retain a reference to ‘the importance of building strong, positive relationships with pupils – as well as their parents and carers’ (*ibid.*:6), it also included strong cross references to the Bennett (2017) Report on behaviour and, significantly, a summary of that report, aimed at trainee teachers, was published alongside it (DfE, 2019c). This approach was maintained in the further consultation on Initial Teacher Training (ITT), launched by the DfE between June and August 2021 (DfE 2021c). However, this provoked considerable opposition from a range of stakeholders, including the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET), ARC and the British Psychological Society (BPS), all of whom in their submissions emphasised the need for adequate training and emotional support for trainees and early career teachers in understanding and implementing attachment-based approaches (see ARC, 2021b).

Character education

‘Character education’ may be seen in many ways as the antithesis of attachment awareness. It was originally promoted in the UK by the Jubilee Centre at Birmingham University, established by a US Foundation, whose mission is:

To empower the rising generation of Americans to build flourishing lives anchored in strong character, inspired by quality education, driven by an entrepreneurial mindset, and guided by the desire to create value for others

Kern Family Foundation, 2020

In their study of the development of character education in British schools, Arthur *et al.* (2015) suggest that the UK development was a direct response to the 2011 riots in a number of towns, and both the government response to the Health Committee Report on mental health services for children (Houses of Parliament, 2015), and the 2017 policy documentation on mental health and behaviour in schools (DfE, 2017b) refer to the approach as a core feature of the government strategy:

Prime Minister David Cameron... claimed that the riots were caused by people 'showing indifference to right and wrong' and having 'a twisted moral code'. He mentioned schools as part of a solution to counter the 'slow-motion moral collapse'.

Arthur *et al.*, 2015: 8

There is limited empirical research on the impact of character education. Bavarian *et al.* (2013) demonstrate some improvements in student motivation and attendance in one US school, while Arthur and O'Shaughnessy (2013) summarise a number of publications in the USA which make the same claims. However, the detailed research report 'Character Education in UK Schools' (Arthur *et al.*, 2015) focussed on 'moral character' and sought:

To redress what is seen by many academics and practitioners as an imbalance in UK schools where too much emphasis is placed on academic attainment to the detriment of the development of good character

ibid.: 7

Character education, therefore, is an example of neoliberal Conservative approaches to 'Broken Britain' (Bailey and Ball, 2016; Simon, 2017). As with Early Intervention, it is intended to correct and normalise individuals who would otherwise go astray. Yet it was highlighted in the government response to the Health Committee report on CAMHS as a key strategy to promote mental health in schools (House of Commons, 2015), and was promoted and funded alongside the Bennett behaviour strategy, to the point that the re-publication of this strategy coincided with the launch of the non-statutory guidance on character education in schools (DfE 2019c, 2019d). In 2017 the DfE commissioned a number of reports under the heading *Supporting Mental health in Schools and Colleges* from NatCen Social Research and the National Children's Bureau (DfE, 2017b). This

included a report on *Developing character skills in schools* (Marshall et al., 2017), which stated that:

*The DfE understands character education to include any activities that aim to develop desirable character traits or attributes in children and young people. The DfE **believe** [my highlighting] that such desirable character traits:*

- *Can support improved academic attainment;*
- *Are valued by employers; and*
- *Can enable children to make a positive contribution to British society.*

Marshall et al., 2017: 10

This survey, which sought to review schools' understanding and practice of character education, found a wide divergence of approaches between different phases of school – with secondary schools emphasising employability – different geographical areas, with schools in areas of deprivation emphasising positivity and self-belief – and PRUs and special schools focussing on resilience, self-esteem and self-regulation. What is striking in this literature is that – other than these individualised categories – there is no concept of relationships or joint endeavour, other than in regimented organisations such as the Scouts, the CCF or the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, which are mentioned in the appendix to the guidelines (DfE 2019d: 12-18).

Similarly, while there was little direct reference to the government's stated priority of mental health *per se*, the 2019 Framework for the Inspection of schools (Ofsted, 2019) specified that inspectors would examine how:

The provider's wider work support[s] learners to develop their character – including their resilience, confidence and independence – and help them know how to keep physically and mentally healthy.

Ofsted, 2019: 11

The subsequent revision to the framework, published in October 2021, although including a reference to developing character, included in that context a much wider range of issues including equalities, mental and physical health, relationships and online safety. Significantly, there was no reference to character education in the Public Health England

and DfE (2021) guidance on mental health in schools, and it was not mentioned by any respondent in this present research.

Much of the philosophical literature around character education makes use of Aristotle's Virtue Ethics and the notion of 'flourishing' (eg Kristjánsson, 2019). In their analysis of concepts of happiness in the context of children's wellbeing, Watson *et al.* (2012) point out the contested nature of this concept. However, unlike Illich, who develops these ideas as a choice between right- and left-wing agendas (Illich, 1973: 66), Kristjánsson and his colleagues maintain a studied neutrality. Character education is presented as a matter of individual personal responsibility. Part of that individual responsibility is to contribute to the (undefined) community – see Glossary and Appendix 4 – but this is a linear relationship – 'I contribute to the community because I am a good person' – rather than, as indicated above, in any sense of collective endeavour. This point is important in considering some neoliberal approaches, such as Heller-Sahlgren (2018), below.

Ultimately, while character education has been given a high profile in government strategy with regard to mental health and wellbeing in schools, it is neither transformative in challenging the neoliberal hegemony, nor does it address the issues of relationships which lie at the heart of attachment theory. The concept is vague, ill-defined and variable, and it could be argued that it has neither the solid theoretical framework nor the empirical research base of attachment theory. Its acceptability as a non-threatening, normative approach, which supports a neoliberal narrative, and 'significant investment by the Department of Education in projects aimed at developing desirable character traits in children and young people through the Character Innovation Fund' (Marshall *et al.*, 2017: 6) is in stark contrast to AAS, which does potentially enable alternative and transformative approaches to emerge (Parker *et al.*, 2016).

The impact of the Covid Pandemic

The Covid lockdown and return to school have overlain much of this study, in terms of practicalities, research methodology, and the impact on schools, teachers, parents/carers

and children. It has impacted, too, on policy, in the management of school closures and returns, and in the wider sense of attitudes to children and learning.

The literature in this area has been limited, but Barry and Matthew Carpenters' essay on The Recovery Curriculum (Carpenter and Carpenter, 2020), highlighting the need to adopt more relational approaches to support children's return to school, was highly influential, and was taken up by DfE in its guidance to schools (DfE, 2020b). Carpenter was explicit about the transformational nature of education in these circumstances:

*It is down to you, as that skilled, intuitive teacher, who can lift the mask of fear and disenfranchisement from the child. You can engage that child as a learner once more, for **engagement is the liberation of intrinsic motivation** [my highlighting].*

Carpenter, 2020

Parker and Wright (2020) linked this directly with AAS approaches, and in a later article the present author describes the implications of Covid for attachment approaches, both in terms of research and on the schools themselves (Appendix 6). Carpenter *et al.* (2021), in a classroom-based study of attachment issues for children in a special school, indicated both the relative lack of empirical research in this area, but also the further evidence which had emerged to support earlier contentions on the importance of AAS approaches in helping children to recover from the lockdowns. McCluskey *et al.* (2021), in their study of the impact of Covid on mental health among 45 young people, make a similar point about the lack of front-line qualitative research, as opposed to surveys. Although they do not mention attachment *per se*, they reference the Scottish Government's stance on behaviour as communication, related to past traumatic experience (Scottish Government, 2020).

By late 2020, national research was already demonstrating the wider impacts of the pandemic on children, their families and their learning. Alongside Daniels *et al.* (2020) on school exclusions, quoted above, the Children's Commissioner (2020) in October, and Marmot *et al.* (2020) in December highlighted the amplification of inequalities in areas

such as early years, access to learning resources, examination grades, child and parent mental health, and Special Educational Needs and Disability. Research by the British Academy (2021), the Social Mobility Commission (2021), and individual reports by the ESRC (UK Research and Innovation, 2021) reinforced earlier findings on widening Covid-related inequalities, and examined specific pressures on parents, carers and communities. The Public Accounts Committee (House of Commons, 2021) and the Education Policy Institute (2021) both stressed the unequal treatment of disadvantaged children in lockdown. ImpactEd (2021) suggested that, although pupil wellbeing was stable during the first period of remote teaching, challenges with remote learning were felt more strongly by pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 experienced challenges with motivation for learning, while girls in particular experienced anxiety about returning to school. *CYP Now* published a special edition focussing on mental health (Hayes, 2021). Schools, too identified concerns about ‘lost’ children: those pupils who had struggled the most during lockdown were not always those previously identified as vulnerable.

There was an apparent shift in emphasis within the Department for Education, from an endorsement of the Recovery Curriculum in July 2020 to the appointment of Sir Kevan Collins as Recovery Commissioner in February 2021 (Simpson, 2021a). This coincided with reports from the Education Endowment Fund (2021), the Institute for Fiscal Studies (Cattan *et al.*, 2021) and the Sutton Trust (2021), all of which emphasised the notion of ‘lost learning’ and the need for catch-up tutoring, rather than supporting children’s emotional and mental health needs; the latter report, for example, mentioned the mental health and wellbeing of teachers, but not pupils. It was not until Collins had been in post for several weeks that children’s emotional needs were mentioned (Simpson, 2021b). Similarly, the Secretary of State made clear his own views about a return to ‘normal’ at the beginning of April 2021 (Williamson, 2021). Despite the extension of the local authority virtual head role to promoting attachment awareness in all schools (DfE, 2021a), the subsequent call for evidence on behaviour in the light of Covid (DfE, 2021b), made no reference to ‘relationships’, ‘attachment’ or ‘trauma’, adopting an approach based entirely on the Bennett (2017) report. There was one reference to well-being in a

question about the effectiveness of ‘in-school behavioural units’, and four to mental health, three of which were in the context of ‘managed moves’ and the fourth, of SEND, all of which presented misbehaviour as a form of individual pathology which needed to be cured. A further consultation the following year (DfE, 2022b) continued to promote the same discourse.

At the same time a new policy discourse on inclusion appears to have emerged (Jacobs, 2021) in other government documentation, notably on attendance and in the White and Green papers, on SEND (DfE, 2022a; d; e). This is possibly linked both to the notions of ‘lost learning’ and ‘catch up’ discussed above (Lepper, 2022) and to more recent reports on mental health for disadvantaged groups (Children’s Commissioner, 2022; Wijedasa *et al.*, 2022), and therefore might still be seen to represent a normative approach. The attendance guidance stresses the need to target ‘Pupils at risk of persistent absence’ (DfE, 2022a: paragraph 4), but at the same time emphasises the importance of involving all pupils in these initiatives. The language used is considerably softer than in previous guidance, referring to ‘respectful relationships and appropriate communication for staff and pupils... a positive and respectful culture’, taking into account individual pupil ‘vulnerability... the importance of school as a place of safety’, and effective ‘communication with families’ (*ibid.*). This appears to move concerns over absence into a more transformational discourse. It is interesting to observe that, despite a specific question on attendance in the interview schedules, pupil absence did not appear to be a significant factor in any of the three schools in this research; it was mentioned largely by more senior staff (see Appendix 5), was not raised as an issue in the primary school and was only developed in detail by one, secondary school, respondent. Indeed, in the PRU, staff strongly supported the MAT decision to maximise the definition of ‘vulnerable’ pupils to enable as many students as possible to continue to attend during lockdowns (Transcripts 11 and 13). This might support the view that attendance itself is a limited normative issue – a consequence rather than a cause of other factors. Similarly, while reflecting the concerns expressed by school respondents about students’ mental health, this is still within an overall targeted approach. This suggests that the more liberal

discourse adopted reflects more a 'vulnerablising' of less powerful groups, as suggested by Ecclestone (2017), rather than any systemic change in itself.

Critiques of attachment aware approaches in schools

Current research

Much of the published research on attachment awareness and emotion coaching in schools to date has been either within a positivist psychological or a more qualitative case study framework, although some wider studies, including those at BSU – see Rose *et al.*, 2019 – have adopted a mixed-methods approach involving both quantitative and case study data. Given that a number of these are self-evaluations of interventions by those who are committed to AAS, it might be expected that they would be positive about the scheme. However, several external evaluations of AAS programmes, using a similar mixed methods methodology, have come to broadly similar conclusions about its effectiveness and impact, as have the working papers from the national project evaluating attachment aware approaches in schools (Harrison, 2022). Hyde-Dryden *et al* (2022) use the word 'transformational' as a category of school response to AAS, although, as discussed in the Glossary, this is not used in the same sense as in this thesis. This may, however, enable some initial propositions to be developed as to the transformational effectiveness of the AAS approach.

It is important to distinguish between the different approaches and respondent groups in each study; the BSU studies included conversations and interviews with professional staff, pupils and parents/carers, and the Rees Centre project evaluations, with staff and pupils. The Rees/Timpson national research has mainly involved surveys and interviews with school staff, although published working papers have also included observations of staff training, interviews with local authority staff and a parent governor (Nash and Trivedi, 2022), and focus groups with pupils (Tah *et al.*, 2021). All of these studies include quantitative statistical analyses supporting the underlying assertion that AAS approaches are effective – see Rose *et al.* (2019). However, given the theoretical parameters of this

thesis, while they express a commitment to whole-institution change, the mixed-methods studies do not necessarily challenge the assumptions of the overall social structure, and there are different critiques which need to be considered.

The trade-off

Some critiques are ideologically driven. From the intellectual right, Heller-Sahlgren (2018) of the Centre for Education Economics argues on the basis of both Aristotelian philosophy and Rousseau's *Emile* (Rousseau, 1762/1979) that learning comes from suffering:

There is another crucial theme in Emile, which is often ignored entirely: the importance of the child's suffering... In fact Rousseau... describes this as the single most important part of children's education: 'To suffer is the first and most necessary thing for [Emile] to learn.'

Heller-Sahlgren 2018: 10

This approach conflicts with that taken by Watson *et al.* (2012), who quote Rousseau as arguing for the separateness and integrity of children's identity. Moreover, for Heller-Sahlgren:

True happiness means that one lives well. A person who lives well must maintain his or her desires and abilities in equilibrium. This in turn requires virtue – since happiness cannot be attained unless one is worthy of it... Rousseau wants Emile to acquire the integrity necessary to reach eudemonia.

Heller-Sahlgren 2018: 10

This approach to 'eudemonia' can be compared with those of Kristjánsson (2019) and Spratt (2016). Kristjánsson is strongly associated with the UK Character Education movement (Jubilee Centre, 2020). The Centre has distanced itself from directly performative approaches (Arthur *et al.*, 2015), but retains a neutral stance which does not challenge, but implicitly reinforces, the dominant value structure. The US antecedents of the movement, and some of the earlier publications of the Centre, were more concerned with an instrumental equivalence of character education and improved school performance (Arthur and O'Shaughnessy, 2014). For Spratt, by contrast, 'eudemonia'

represents 'the unique contribution that education makes to childhood wellbeing' (Spratt, 2016: 229). Taking a more challenging perspective, which is reminiscent of Taggart (2016) and Watson *et al.* (2012), she suggests:

A caring community is simultaneously the foundation of meaningful learning and the product of working together... a caring pedagogy can create the space for a eudaimonic approach to wellbeing that values the perspectives of children

Spratt, 2016: 237

Heller-Sahlgren challenges the view that pupil happiness leads to higher attainment, using statistical data from the 2012 PISA Report (OECD, 2012) to demonstrate that, while progressive teaching methods lead to greater measures of pupil happiness, traditional teaching methods lead to higher performance scores (Heller-Sahlgren, 2018: 16-17). He puts forward a cost-benefit analysis which suggests that progressive, child centred approaches lead to happier adults, whereas more competitive traditional approaches lead to higher salary levels in life (*ibid.*: 20). Heller-Sahlgren concludes:

The key lesson is ... to acknowledge that interventions seeking to raise certain outcomes often involve a cost in terms of other outcomes – which must be taken into account when policymakers decide which reforms to pursue. It is time to start taking the concept of trade-offs seriously in education.

Ibid.: 24

This is not dissimilar to Illich's interpretation of Aristotle's concept of 'praxis' (Illich, 1973). However, while Heller-Sahlgren presents the notion of policy decisions as objective and value-free – a positivist and normative approach – Illich is clear that there is a conscious value-judgment to make between right and left, good and evil, performative imposition and personal emancipation. A perhaps more liberal intermediate view was expressed in policy terms by the Joint Education and Health Committee Report on children's mental health (House of Commons, 2017b), which stated:

Achieving a balance between promoting academic attainment and well-being should not be regarded as a zero-sum activity. Greater well-being can equip pupils to achieve academically. If the pressure to promote academic excellence is detrimentally affecting pupils, it becomes self-defeating.

The question remains, however, as to whether this is a form of ‘soft’ normative, or a more socially challenging, approach.

The separation between ‘soft’ supportive approaches to children (‘mental health’) and ‘hard’ performative approaches to education (‘learning and discipline’) underlies many of the apparent contradictions in current government policy. However, this apparent dichotomy may itself be illusory: Scales *et al.* (2020), for example, indicate the need for appropriate challenge, alongside ‘caring’, for approaches to be truly transformational.

Neuromyths and the scientific approach to education

Another approach from the neoliberal right has been to dismiss all child-centred interventions as ‘bogus pop psychology... which is an excuse for not teaching poor children how to add up’ (Malik, 2013). This might initially be seen as similar to concerns from the scientific community, as expressed by Howard-Jones:

For several decades, myths about the brain – neuromyths – have persisted in schools and colleges, often being used to justify ineffective approaches to teaching. Many of these are biased distortions of scientific fact.

Howard-Jones, 2014: 1

However, to present all neurobiological approaches as ‘neuromyths’ is misleading. While criticising over-simplistic ‘left brain’ type models (Etchells, 2014), McMahon and Etchells (2018) argue for a more critical and informed approach to neurobiology in initial teacher training. McMahon (2020) draws a distinction between the ‘learning sciences’ – neurobiology and psychology; the ‘science of learning’, which is the practical application of a range of different academic perspectives to classroom learning; and the ‘new science’ of education, which is the application of limited, specific and arguably reductionist forms of scientific techniques – eg from randomised control trials and statistical analyses – to policy formation. While, McMahon argues, the challenges posed

by this latter element should not be ignored, the wider ‘science of learning’ is of much more value in understanding classroom interaction. Similarly, Garrett-Cox (2020) uses a range of ‘aspects of learning’ to describe the Bristol University ‘Science of Learning for Initial Teacher Education’ (SoLfITE) project – individualisation, approach responses, fearfulness, brain plasticity and relationships, prior knowledge, working memory, conscious and unconscious communication, rehearsal and application of ideas, and sleep – which are much more reflective of the wider cross-disciplinary and subjective approaches proposed by Siegel (1999).

McMahon (2020), quoting Whitty and Furlong (2017), further suggests that a narrow interpretation of cognitive psychology has been appropriated to support neoliberal views, as providing a single ‘answer’, which can be supported or rejected depending upon the policy needs of the day, as opposed to illuminating the range of possible understandings of the role of neuroscience in learning. A similar view is taken by Howard-Jones (2020) himself, suggesting, in the context of climate change – far from the received view of the scientist as a ‘value-free’ observer – that ‘effective’ teaching is that which promotes personal and societal change. Thus the ‘neuromyths’ controversy, while it has been claimed in order to support particular neoliberal policy positions, is itself subject to challenge.

A different neurobiological critique is offered by Woolgar and Simmonds (2019). They indicate that:

Common misunderstandings and over-simplified messages... have tended to obscure the individual differences in maltreated children.

Woolgar and Simmonds, 2019: 241

Woolgar and Simmonds challenge popular notions of neurobiology. The illustration on the front cover of the Allen Report was of brain scans of two three year-old-children from different social backgrounds (Allen, 2011), and this image is still used in presentations on attachment, especially in the Early Years (eg Hosking, 2021).

The findings for early attachment and brain imaging are scarce... This may surprise some readers familiar with secondary or tertiary texts that spuriously link poor early attachment quality to, say, smaller brains.

Woolgar and Simmonds, 2019: 248

They suggest that presentations of 'the science are not only simplified but grossly simplistic' and fail to embrace the diversity, range, nuances and changing nature of the findings 'as well as the unintended consequences of such a partial **scientism** [my emphasis]' (*ibid.*, 244). This approach, in their view, can lead to inappropriate assessments of individual children – an issue which was also raised, in the context of schools, by the NICE (2015) Guidelines. They quote the case of an adopted child, where professionals had taken:

A one-size-fits-all attachment and/or trauma framework...assessments had missed a range of specific mental health problems that had led to poor management, a lack of interventions, inappropriate educational provision and ongoing stress in the family.

Woolgar and Simmonds, 2019: 249

They further caution that reliance on 'scientific' explanations, while reassuring to practitioners:

Minimise the impact of factors such as inequality, poverty and austerity on families and replace this with a scientific lens through which to interpret behaviour.

Ibid.:242-3

Thus, while embracing rather than rejecting biological and neurobiological approaches, Woolgar and Simmonds are urging – as with McMahon and Howard-Jones – that these need to be seen within a wider scientific, methodological and political context.

The word 'scientism' is also used by Furedi in his essay *Keep the Scourge of Scientism out of schools* (Furedi, 2014). Furedi argues that: 'the realm of science is being plundered in search of moral authority' (Furedi, 2014: 12). Like Harlow (2012; 2013) he is highly critical of the wider social and political implications of 'evidence based' approaches:

Despite the undistinguished record of 'evidence based' policy, governments desperate to legitimise their authority have embraced it with unprecedented enthusiasm in recent years.

Furedi, 2014: 12

Unlike Howard-Jones, McMahon, or Woolgar and Simmonds, Furedi argues that, while 'scientific' methods are appropriate in a medical context, they are entirely inappropriate for the complexities of education, as based on 'the idea that children are afflicted by various emotional and intellectual deficits that educationalists must "fix" through an intervention' (Furedi, 2014: 13). This medicalised approach, he suggests, is a result of a one-sided emphasis on 'motivation' and 'what works'. 'This is also what underpins the demands for evidence based or RCT-fuelled education' (*ibid.*). Reflecting the views expressed by Ecclestone (2017) and others, Furedi further suggests, in an implied critique of AAS-type approaches:

The promotion of the ethos of intervention is paralleled by the proliferation of therapeutic initiatives... Such therapy-based interventions are usually geared towards raising pupils' self-esteem or improving their "emotional literacy" or "emotional intelligence". In their most caricatured form, these educational interventions are delivered through wellbeing and happiness classes.

Furedi, 2014: 13

As an alternative to 'scientistic' approaches, Furedi proposes that teachers should have an:

Opportunity... to exercise professional judgment and to learn the value of what Aristotle calls phronesis – the virtue of judgment. Experimentation in education should be part of a teacher's everyday life. What we need is a pedagogy that is integral to the experience of the classroom, not procedures inappropriately imported from the field of health.

Ibid.: 14

The critique of 'therapy based' interventions is discussed below. This thesis suggests that this is based on a misunderstanding of actual practice in schools, on the difference between whole-school policies and targeted interventions, and on an erroneous

assumption of consistency in government policy. Many of those engaged with developing AAS would argue – reflecting Furedi’s alternative – that their approach is one which is integral to their everyday experience with children (Carpenter *et al.*, 2021), sometimes against indifference or obstruction from senior managers (see Rose *et al.* 2016b). Furedi’s critique is helpful in pointing up the dangers and ideological assumptions of a narrow definition of science and evidence-based approaches. However, it tends to support the dismissive neoliberal policy approach to ‘bogus pop psychology’ (Malik, 2013) with which this section began. Moreover, the appeal to Aristotelian ethics *per se* is equally applicable to neoliberal (Heller-Sahlgren 2018) or supposedly value-neutral ‘character education’ approaches (Kristjánsson, 2019).

Social care and psychotherapy

If, therefore, the application of crude scientific-based models of neuroscience and attachment to schools are contested, what of attachment theory itself? Attempting to reconcile social work and school-based approaches, Harlow also acknowledges the limitations of crude social care applications of attachment and ‘brain science’. Rather, she suggests, quoting Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) and Schofield and Beek’s (2005) models of social action that:

The emphasis on whole school change shifts attention away from specific parents, carers or children, and encourages systemic organisational change that aims to benefit all concerned.

Harlow, 2019: 10

Thus, Harlow is promoting a holistic view of both individuals and organisations. A stronger social care-based critique comes from Smith *et al.*, who again caution against simplistic assumptions about attachment as a catch-all explanation:

It has become the ‘master theory’ to which other ways of conceiving of childcare and of relationships more generally become subordinated. Yet many of the assumptions underlying attachment theory, and the claims made for it are contestable...

Smith *et al.*, 2017: 1606

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The current prominence given to it risks 'biologising', individualising and politicising the cultural and practical aspects of bringing up children.

Ibid.: 1619

They suggest that the 'biologised' model of attachment supports traditional views of family structure and ignores wider social issues. In its place they propose Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition with its three components of (i) love/emotional recognition, (ii) legal recognition of human rights, and (iii) solidarity/social esteem as part of a community. These, they indicate, are not inconsistent with Bowlby's concept of attachment and emotional connection, but set it within a wider social context (Smith *et al.*, 2017: 1619). Honneth's conceptual framework is also used by Ralph (2021) in his study of disaffected school students, as do Watson *et al.* (2012) in their analysis of children's social and emotional wellbeing in schools, cited earlier, although only the latter make specific reference to attachment theory. McCluskey *et al.* (2016) similarly use Fraser's (2000) version of theory of recognition in their discussion of student exclusions.

Watson *et al.* further refer to Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) theories of intersections and planes of reference, which are a central feature of Duschinsky *et al.*'s (2015b) exploration of feminist critiques of attachment. Whereas Smith *et al.* perceive the need to reconcile attachment-based approaches with wider social concerns, Duschinsky *et al.* suggest that the solution may lie within attachment theory itself:

The politics of the attachment system might tend to support a conservative agenda, but a perspective which considers the couplings and connections of the attachment system provides resources for a countervailing progressive politics and form of social analysis.

Duschinsky *et al.*, 2015b: 188

This more social view of the application of attachment theory is also found in the work of Jeremy Holmes, Bowlby's biographer (Holmes, 2014). A child psychiatrist and psychotherapist, Holmes, like Furedi (2014), criticises the excessively individualistic and medicalised approach to children's mental health in the 2017 Green Paper, and its lack of social context:

The socio-political dimension in mental health is conspicuous by its absence. There is strong epidemiological evidence for links between income inequality and mental ill-health such as borderline personality, teenage pregnancy and delinquency... Schools in deprived areas, with high rates of children eligible for free school meals, social housing and lone parent families have higher rates of child mental health, and worse provision than the better off districts. Thanks to austerity policies this discrepancy is widening. But little of this is heard in political or public mental health discourse.

Holmes and Parker, 2018: 1

Moreover, Holmes is keen to stress the need for approaches to empower all those involved:

Effective social and psychological change requires an overarching narrative that rings true for those concerned.

Ibid.: 1

Like Harlow (2019), Smith *et al.* (2017), and Woolgar and Simmonds (2019), Holmes accepts the validity of AAS approaches, taking these issues into account.

Attachment is not yet another psychotherapy brand-name. It offers instead an integrative framework which encompasses the three fundamental components of all effective psychotherapies: the attachment relationship itself (sensitive, validating, accepting), an explanatory framework (differentiating secure and insecure attachments) and promoting change (fostering a reflexive stance; accepting the inevitability of error; active participation). Putting these principles into practice is the prime aim and mission of the Attachment Aware Schools project.

Ibid.: 3

Holmes sees AAS as essentially universal, social and change-orientated. Like Harlow, he presents a questioning and reflexive approach as supporting that change orientation. While this would support the overall contention of this thesis, that this reflexivity can support a transformative approach, the critique from some neo-Foucauldian writers (Ecclestone, 2017; Perryman *et al.*, 2017) is discussed below.

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The focus on a universal approach has also been challenged by some psychotherapists.

Golding emphasises that:

Differentiating between children who are different but reasonably emotionally secure ... and those who are emotionally troubled can be a difficult task... These are the children whose attachment development may have been compromised, making it harder for them to use the support of staff and assistants in the school.

Golding, 2013: 19

Meeting the emotional needs of children in a school is therefore a priority and must precede meeting their academic needs.

Ibid.: 25

While Golding's views are not necessarily inconsistent with AAS approaches, they do illustrate an individualistic and arguably medicalised model. Moreover, she quotes

Bomber:

We cannot fast-track children who have experienced trauma and loss into emotional and sensory literacy, without first giving them the opportunity to fully negotiate the developmental stage of dependency ... this relationship is what we must provide in schools.

Bomber, 2007:10, quoted in Golding, 2013: 16

Bomber herself, in 2015, published a 'WEB ALERT' warning of the 'diverse interventions under the banner of attachment' (Bomber, 2015a). She stated in a widely-circulated letter that:

I am ... concerned by some who are seeming to be advocating for particular kinds of strategies/tools/interventions... which in my experience, do not support the development of secure attachment relationships for those who present with complex trauma vulnerabilities.

Bomber, 2015b

In a private letter she was more specific:

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I am concerned that interventions like emotion coaching could actually exacerbate difficulties. Any relational interventions we use with these pupils needs to minimise anxiety, fear, panic and shame in order to keep stress low.

Bomber, 2015c

Although espousing a child-centred philosophy, the approaches outlined by Golding and Bomber are much closer to a normative approach. The applications described appear to be derived from externally-driven psychological models of trauma and dependency, rather than from an understanding of individual children's experience, or an attempt to challenge the wider, universal context of the school. While this should not be exaggerated – Bomber does call for whole-school approaches, and the BSU AAS approach accepted the importance of multi-agency working and appropriate specialist support – there is an analogy with some deficit concepts of alternative provision, whereby children are taken out of the mainstream school context to be 'cured' so as to be able to cope with an oppressive school environment.

Challenges from the academic left

Some of the radical critique of AAS in schools has come through its association with 'Scientism' and 'Evidence-based policy' (Furedi, 2014; Harlow *et al.*, 2012), but also through its association with particularly narrow interpretations of 'wellbeing' (Spratt, 2016; Williamson, 2012). Williamson argues that:

Teachers have adopted a set of arguments about the functional effectiveness of technology in education with the emotionally affective appeals of the child-centred concern with the self.

Williamson, 2012: 437

Similarly, Bialostock and Aronson suggest that an excessive focus on emotions in school is socialising the current generation for work in the neoliberal workplace:

Affect and emotional dispositions have become fundamental for navigating an uncertain landscape of flexible accumulation... Yet the neoliberal character of the contemporary US economy ... also impinges on "noneconomic" spheres, including individuals' sense of identity, interests, happiness, hopes and even the subjective

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values of life and self. These hegemonic forms of consciousness legitimate and reinforce the languages and practices enacted in society as a whole, teachers included.

Bialostock and Aronson, 2016: 96

Ecclestone's analysis, developing from her earlier collaboration with Hayes (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009) is that the increasing emphasis on 'therapeutic education' is part of a wider development of 'therapeutic governance' through which the neoliberal state maintains control of all its citizens:

*The normalisation of state intervention in psycho-emotional development... with a resurrection of claims from the 1930s about the lifelong effects of neglect, **poor attachment** [my emphasis] and dysfunctional parenting...*

Ecclestone, 2017: 49

There has been a very significant expansion of vulnerability as a powerful cultural and political resource... For example the Office for Standards in Education elides 'disadvantaged' and 'vulnerable' to encompass migrant children, those with special educational needs, pupils who are disengaged or simply who are not meeting their targets...

Ibid.: 50-51

On these arguments, attachment-based approaches are simply a manifestation, in Foucauldian terms, of the 'soft' power of the state. Ecclestone further suggests:

Self-reflexivity... is now the dominant framework for governance... These updated versions of older radical notions ... were once powerful critiques of liberal and neoliberal governance... they are now crucial for realising its therapeutic form.

Ibid.: 59

Perryman *et al.* develop this idea in terms of teaching itself, suggesting that there is now a:

Cult of self-reflection in teaching, enshrined in the Teachers' Standards... a deliberate creation of a discourse around self-improvement and reflexivity.

Perryman *et al.*, 2017: 755

Teachers now joining a school may not be ruled by an autocratic head nor cowed by the tendrils of performativity that terrorise their soul... but will be ruled by

themselves, by becoming a truly reflective practitioner under the subtle persuasion of governmentality, dominated yet free.

Ibid.: 755

The notion of 'soft power', and the perspectives of Ecclestone and others above, can be challenged in a number of ways. First, they assume that the majority of schools are operating along 'therapeutic' lines. Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) made this assertion when the New Labour government was promoting *SEAL* (DCSF, 2007a). However, the programme was discontinued under the Coalition government and subsequent evaluations (Banerjee *et al.*, 2014; Humphrey *et al.*, 2013) found little evidence that it had become embedded in schools in the longer term. Moreover, the performative emphasis on 'school improvement', measured by academic results, under both New Labour and Conservative governments has militated against such approaches (see House of Commons, 2017a; Timpson, 2019). This contrasts with Perryman *et al.*'s assumption that there has been a diminution in overtly performative management styles, although it is arguable that, as they suggest, reflexivity may be co-opted to support a performative approach. The lack of overtly 'therapeutic' schools can be illustrated through the national study of attachment aware schools, which took several years to meet an initial target sample size of 300 schools (Harrison, 2022). Benson *et al.* (2011), in a study of US middle schools, suggested that only 35% offered a 'caring' environment, while only 22% offered both caring and high expectations, which combination, they suggest, is the main predictor of effective school engagement.

The second misunderstanding is of the internal dynamic of schools. Both Furedi (2014) and Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) refer to classroom lessons in emotional wellbeing as the basis of therapeutic approaches. However, most analyses of *SEAL* and associated programmes (Bannerji *et al.*, 2014; DoH and DfE, 2017; Humphrey *et al.*, 2013) indicated that a whole-school ethos was much more important than individual lessons. Similarly, this ethos has to be endorsed by the school leadership to be effective; otherwise emotional wellbeing programmes become a tool employed by individual teachers or teaching assistants, targeted at individual pupils. The BSU evaluation of the Somerset Emotion Coaching Project found that:

It is important for all the heads to be on board... we have been lucky our head is on board... it has to come from the top to be effective as a whole school taking it on board...

There wasn't the backing necessarily from the senior leaders... it's a bit bottom up.

Rose et al., 2016b: 42

Thirdly, there is a need to distinguish between long-term trend and short-term opportunism in government policy. While Ecclestone emphasises the importance of 'therapeutic governance' as a key feature of the neoliberal state, she describes it as:

An inconsistent... cluster of different reframings of public and social policy... collapsing into a single overarching governmentality of the self... Yet, its devolution of governance to diverse types of therapeutic entrepreneurs suggests [the state] has no clear direction and perhaps little interest in whether this 'works'.

Ecclestone, 2017: 59

In other words, as with norms – see Glossary – this might reflect a Hobbesian (Hobbes, 1651/1968) view of society, whereby the individual subject accepts the sovereign power in order to guarantee his/her survival, but the sovereign power has little interest in the details of elements such as education and social care, preferring to leave these to individual philanthropy, provided that its underlying structure and ideology are not threatened. A rather different approach is expressed by Bailey and Ball:

The new governing space of education in England is an incoherent, ad hoc, diverse fragile and evolving network of complex relations... New Right market policies and 'freedoms' of various sorts, are set alongside a traditional One Nation values-driven vision ... Conservative education policy rests on a 'messy' combination of regulation, competition and performance management... Although the transformation process may sometimes appear to be disjointed, it has an internal logic, a set of discernible, if not necessarily planned, facets.

Bailey and Ball, 2016: 145

Thus, for Ecclestone 'therapeutic governance' underlies and supports the neoliberal state, despite apparent policy inconsistencies, whereas Bailey and Ball see a more coherent, if not entirely smooth, development of policy. By defining the state in this way, Ecclestone avoids the simple challenge – clear from much of the policy literature – that not all government policies have followed the 'therapeutic governance' model, under either

New Labour or Conservative administrations, and indeed many have been directly antagonistic to it. This might perhaps be best illustrated in the table on the next page, which summarises some key policy documents between 2010 and February 2022.

What is clear is that there have been tensions, even within the same ministerial periods, which are better explained by Bailey and Ball's 'disjointed flow', than Ecclestone's 'underlying assumptions'. This is important for this research. If Ecclestone's approach is accepted, then any attempt to challenge neoliberal hegemony is doomed to failure; reflective practice (Perryman *et al.*, 2016) and AAS itself (Ecclestone, 2017) are forms of self-delusional 'soft' control. However, if there are policy inconsistencies, these offer scope for resistance, challenge and new self-awareness – 'conscientisation' in Freire's (1972: 15) terms – which offer alternatives to the received wisdom of the status quo at a number of levels.

A key element of this study, therefore, is the extent to which practitioners have agency in developing AAS approaches, and are able to take control of and subvert top-down policy initiatives for their own ends. The growth of popular literature concerning AAS has been documented above, while at intermediate policy level the development of organisations such as the Attachment Research Community (ARC, 2020) has provided a forum to promote the AAS approach. Neither of these developments are necessarily in themselves transformational – as we have seen, a significant proportion of the popular literature is itself uncritical and normative, while the ARC was seed-funded by a philanthropic charity for its first two years – but the existence of an alternative discourse can challenge policy, especially when, by contrast with Ecclestone's and Furedi's assumptions, that policy is seen to be based on traditional, rather than progressive, models.

Table 1: The ebb and flow of DfE policy perspectives 2010 – February 2022

Year	Liberal/progressive/therapeutic?	Traditional/normative?	Sec of State
Pre 2010	Every Child Matters (HM Treasury, 2003)		Charles Clarke
		<i>Higher Standards, Better Schools For All, More choice for parents and pupils (DfES, 2005)</i>	Ruth Kelly
	<i>Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning - SEAL (DCSF, 2007)</i>		Alan Johnson Ed Balls
2010		The Importance of Teaching (DfE 2010)	Michael Gove
2011		Charlie Taylor's checklist (Taylor, 2011)	
2012		Improving alternative provision (DfE, 2012)	
2013			
2014	Children and Families Act, 2014		Nicky Morgan
		<i>National Curriculum (DfE, 2014a)/British Values(DfE, 2014b)/CCF in Schools (DfE, 2014c)</i>	
2015	Promoting the health and well-being of looked after children (DfE and DoH, 2015)	Educational Excellence Everywhere (DfE, 2015a)	
2016	Core Framework for ITT (DfE, 2016b)		Justine Greening
2017		Tom Bennett behaviour report (Bennett, 2017)	
2018	Mental health in schools (DfE, 2018b)		Damian Hinds
2019		Revised Core Framework for ITT (DfE, 2019b) Character Education in Schools (DfE, 2019d)	Gavin Williamson
2020	Recovery curriculum (DfE, 2020b)		
2021	Extended role of virtual school head (DfE, 2021a)	Consultation on Behaviour (DfE 2021b) Consultation on ITT (DfE, 2021c)	Nadhim Zahawi
2022	School Attendance (DfE, 2022a)	Consultation on Behaviour (DfE, 2022b)	

For teachers, Taylor (2007), building on Lipsky's (1980) concept of the 'Street Level Bureaucrat', took a pessimistic view that the growth of performativity had stifled individual initiative and control. However, Troman (2008) demonstrates ways in which teachers were still able to determine what aspects of particular initiatives they were willing to implement, according to their own values. These findings were reinforced by Sheikh and Bagley (2018), who – using a psycho-social model – developed the notion of 'affective disruption' to explain teacher engagement or otherwise in policy implementation, and associated concepts of 'decisional legitimacy' and 'hierarchical trust'. While such interpretations would be contested by writers such as Perryman *et al.* (2017) they do appear to be reflected in the data from this research.

Issues of segmentation, class, gender and race

Another area which has emerged is the impact of social class, gender and race. These issues of segmentation are crucial to the overall analysis of the relationship between attachment awareness and social inequality which underlies this research. The idea of AAS as a means of socialising and controlling the unruly working class is central to the discussion of behaviour, exclusion and alternative provision outlined above, and a wider critique of this application of attachment theory can be found in Duschinsky *et al.* (2015a). As with Ecclestone (2017) and Furedi (2014) they take a Foucauldian approach, emphasising.

Attachment theory as an important part of the discursive 'software' which operates the 'hardware' of the state's biopolitical surveillance and policing of childrearing.

Duschinsky *et al.* 2015a: 228

Quoting Holland's (2001) research they indicate that:

[Her] study of child protection assessments in Britain found attachment used in the reasoning for the decision in every case; she also notes that attachment is the primary justification used when removing children from their families and placing them in care.

Although their focus is on social work, rather than education, there are some useful parallels which can be drawn:

[The] Narey Report on Social Work Education (2014), which urged that social workers should be taught much more about 'child development and attachment theory' and much less about 'non-oppressive practice'... offers a clear illustration of how attachment has been invoked to delegitimize social critique in the name of the needs of children and to contour the relationship between and respective responsibilities of the State and the family.

Duschinsky *et al.* 2015a: 231-2

Narey was a former Director General of the Prison Service (Gov.uk, 2020b), which again gives some insight into contemporary government conceptions of mental health, behaviour and attachment, as well as a direct parallel with Foucault (1977a).

Duschinsky, in papers published in 2015 (Duschinsky *et al.*, 2015a; 2015b), and in his book *Cornerstones of attachment research* (Duschinsky, 2020), as with Smith *et al.* (2017), aligns his analysis with feminist and queer theory critiques of attachment theory, suggesting that this may support patriarchal stereotypes and oppress women. However, unlike Smith *et al.*, Duschinsky *et al.* (2015a) suggest that attachment theory can help to resolve the issue raised by Foucault, as to why individuals identify with: 'the cultures and institutions which discipline our identities and limit our potential to flourish' (Duschinsky *et al.*, 2015a: 233). They draw a distinction between feminist writers such as Butler (1997) who:

Suggests that attachment is the missing affective explanation for why we submit to what Foucault calls disciplinary power, which assesses us against normative standards and causes us to regulate ourselves to achieve them.

Duschinsky *et al.*, 2015a: 232

and Berlant (2011), who, while accepting attachment theory as a basis for human relationships, perceives this as much more negotiable, particularly in later life; an area of subjective struggle, rather than a fixed state. Berlant, they suggest, emphasises

Ainsworth's (1967) conceptualisation of attachment as the relationship between the individual and their secure base. She recognises:

A disjuncture between the demands of attachment processes and the wider needs and conditions of flourishing for a human being. Many of Bowlby's statements about the advantages for a child's mental development of attentive mothering are premised on a conflation of the two.

Duschinsky *et al.*, 2015a: 235

This being the case, they argue that attachment-based approaches can be a basis for 'efforts to achieve social justice in order to provide the conditions for human flourishing' (Duschinsky *et al.*, 2015a: 239). It is interesting to note the reference to 'flourishing' in this context, again as the crucial element which attachment-based approaches can bring to education (see Spratt, 2016).

Race and attachment

There has been relatively little discussion in the literature, of the relationship between race and attachment, with the notable exception of Arnold's (2012) work on the impacts of migration, separation and loss on families of African Caribbean origin in the UK and Venta *et al.* (2019) on Hispanic adolescents migrating to the USA. Nakhid-Chator, in her study on attachment and suicides in Trinidadian schools, specifically relates these to the post-colonial 'patriarchal traditions of schooling' (Nakhid-Chator, 2020: 9). She states:

The relationships... between the child/adolescent and caregiver were based on strict adherence to patterns of behaviors (sic) that were seldom questioned, and attachment styles to parents and teachers that were moulded by societal dictates and cultural patterns... I likened the similarities of punitive discipline in the schools to the rigid and inflexible patriarchy of colonialist rule, and I noted the lingering effects of domination and authoritarian rule that continued in the homes and schools of the teenagers.

Ibid.: 9-10

Both writers emphasise the importance of understanding the wider historical, social and cultural context of individual communities, as well as, in Arnold's work, the experience of

migration itself. Arnold discusses the notion of intergenerational trauma where the cultural stereotypes derived from a history of colonisation and slavery, and the practical experience of migration, can lead to family violence and misunderstanding of male roles. However, while Nakhid-Chator suggests that some of the suicides she studies are related to this misplaced culture of masculinity, Arnold takes a more nuanced approach, indicating the need to avoid reinforcing dominant stereotypes, particularly of black men, and pointing to the way in which many families successfully managed the process of migration. Arnold further indicates the need to consider the cultural values of the children of immigrants separately from those of their parents, and to reflect the wider social context:

It is necessary to understand the history of the past experiences of serial immigrations of African Caribbean families. Unsatisfactory reconstituting of many, and the seeming transgenerational trauma, have impacted adversely on the lives of many children...

There is a need to consider other factors within the family, such as unfair treatment, favouritism, physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and also factors in the wider society. There may be racism and other forms of hostility from the dominant ethnic group directed at the individual, the family or the ethnic group to which the family belongs. Government policy may not facilitate the provision of essential amenities and services.

Arnold 2012: 20

She concludes that attachment theory can help to challenge cultural stereotypes:

Using the principles of attachment theory, separation and loss... [is] necessary in order to remove the assumptions that problems are mainly the result of family structures or are innate in their cultural practices.

Arnold 2012: 139

In the USA, the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 led to an increased critical appraisal of the importance of race and racism in attachment discourse, and several academic journals produced editions on this. The journal *Zero to Three*, for example, included an article by Scott *et al.* (2021) discussing the impact of toxic stress on black family relationships, alongside others more focussed on specific strategies to combat racism and

promote social equity. The special edition of *Attachment and Human Development* highlighted the paucity of work currently being undertaken to bring attachment and race perspectives together:

The goal of this special issue is to bring together attachment researchers and scholars studying Black youth and families to leverage and extend attachment-related work to advance anti-racist perspectives.

Stern *et al.*, 2021a

Within this publication a distinction might be drawn between those contributors who take a more optimistic approach, arguing for specific strategies to reinforce the contribution of attachment perspectives, and those who take a more critical approach. In the first category Graham (2021) indicates the important role of the school, Dunbar *et al.* (2021), and Tyrell and Mastern (2021) describe supportive factors provided by mothers and fathers respectively. By contrast Gaztambide (2021) quotes critical race theory to challenge conventional psychotherapy as supporting anti-black, capitalist and implicitly white supremacist views, while Causadias *et al.* (2021) suggest that attachment researchers have not paid sufficient attention to non-white perspectives. In a further detailed article, Stern *et al.* (2021b) consider the antecedents of attachment theory, from Ainsworth's (1967) early work in Uganda to Bowlby's essentially white, British models (Bowlby, 1944), and discuss the extent to which modern theorists have taken into account wider issues of race, class and gender, the particular cultural and historical experiences of oppression and separation for different communities, and the impacts which initiatives to improve attachment security might have on these – including the particular experience of women and LGBT groups. They conclude that:

To the extent that attachment theory is applied in ways that reinforce deficit narratives about Black youth and caregivers, enforce White middle-class parenting norms as ideal... or present data in decontextualized ways that ignore or deny the role of systemic racism – then the theory is being used to promote racism by upholding White supremacist and colonialist ideas. On the other hand, if attachment theory is applied in ways that challenge and seek to dismantle these oppressive systems... the theory stands to make a meaningful contribution to anti-racist efforts.

Stern *et al.*, 2021b: 18

Thus, it can be argued that, in terms of class, race and gender, the application of attachment-based approaches can either be normative – eg in terms of ignoring gendered roles and racial stereotypes – or transformative, in terms of recognising and addressing inequalities. However, we need to distinguish between those approaches which seek to address inequalities merely as aberrations within a broadly benign social system, and those which relate those inequalities to a wider critical analysis of the social system as a whole, whether based on social class, post-colonial, feminist, queer or critical race theories. It might further be argued that this is a false distinction, and that the recognition that something is wrong does not of itself require a detailed theoretical analysis. In essence this might be seen as a dialogue between a purist definition of ‘praxis’, as defined by Freire (1972) and Madison’s (2010) more pragmatic approach to ‘radical activism’ (see Chapter 3).

The intricacy of these ideas of intersectionality can be seen in the respondents’ views in this research. In the primary school, issues of class, race and gender were somewhat muted, although staff were concerned not to make inappropriate generalisations. Several PRU staff, from all levels, although wary of generalisations, did articulate views about the relationship between social class and attachment-related behaviours, particularly with regard to linguistic ability; the MAT CEO was concerned to emphasise the importance of perspectives from disadvantaged parents and from the Gypsy community. Secondary school staff, while proud of their anti-racist and feminist traditions, recognised the complexity of the interactions between these, social class and their AAS approach – two of them specifically rejected the feminist critique of patriarchy within attachment theory. By contrast, staff from both the secondary school and the PRU highlighted the success of the schools in supporting students undergoing gender reassignment. In both cases they attributed this success to the overall supportive ethos of the school, rather than to any specific theoretical position.

Chapter 3: Methodology and research design

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Introduction

This chapter considers the theoretical perspectives, methodology and methods adopted in this research, and the ethical issues which arise. It examines the role of critical theory and epistemology and discusses the different methodologies adopted, in particular action research and critical ethnography, and the impact of the Covid pandemic. It describes the development of the research questions and plan, and the changes which had to be made as a result of the Covid lockdowns. It further considers the implications of the study, both in terms of the conventional ethical approval framework and the critical ethnographical approach adopted. This approach demands that the researcher himself reflect on his personal positionality within the research, which is set out in the final section.

Theoretical perspective

As outlined in the previous chapter, the notion of AAS has been developed in a number of ways in academic literature and by policy makers. A number of critiques have been considered, ranging from free market economics (eg Heller Sahlgren, 2018) to postmodernist or Foucauldian views (eg Ecclestone, 2017). Further, specific research into AAS has tended to fall into a particular set of paradigms, which, while not necessarily overtly supporting the status quo, do not, of themselves, offer a coherent overall critique. This means that research on AAS can appear to be self-justifying, without offering any challenge to the overall structure of society, while in a value-neutral sense it becomes part of a false dualism of traditional/progressive, disciplinarian/permissive approaches to school management, a pick and mix approach to schooling which does of itself not change anything (Parker and Levinson, 2018).

The question, therefore, becomes what can be understood about AAS in the context of education and society as a whole, and how can we identify its impact? A diversity of perspectives can be adopted. From an ontological point of view, those who adopt a simplistic realist or objectivist perspective (Crotty, 1998) assume that an objective truth can be determined; that AAS can be defined and its impact measured – see Parker

(2015b). By apparent contrast, there is a range of alternative ontologies which see the world as 'constructed', or as existing in the human mind. Some of these, such as postmodernism, reject any notion of absolute truth or values, whereas others see society, ideas and values as created through the interaction between human beings and external forces, such as nature, power relations and ownership of the means of production.

The research question as to normative or transformative impacts of AAS is, therefore, problematic. While there is broad academic consensus on the definition of 'norms', the definition of 'transformation' is more ambiguous (see Glossary). Positivist and interactionist approaches emphasise impacts on individuals, while critical theorists concentrate on changes and challenges to the social system as a whole. Moreover, for positivists, only direct empirical evidence of cause and effect can 'prove' that AAS is transformative, and social context is largely irrelevant. Those drawing from interpretive or phenomenological traditions may indicate the evidence of transformative experience for individuals, but cannot necessarily generalise this to a wider view of society. It might be argued that the 'mixed methods' approaches adopted by many AAS researchers in the field represent an attempt to co-opt essentially positivist approaches to make the research more acceptable to those in power, thereby promoting educational and social transformation. This paradox, of an apparently 'top-down' approach which is at the same time challenging the status quo, is considered in chapters 4 and 5.

Using critical theory

This thesis adopts a critical theoretical approach. This perspective is often seen as deriving from Marxian and post-Marxian theorists of the early twentieth century, mediated through the overtly Marxist approaches of writers such as Gramsci, Althusser and Freire, but also through members of the Frankfurt School such as Horkheimer and Adorno (Crotty 1998). It is arguable that the early writings of Pragmatist philosophers such as Dewey (1938/1997) reflect a critical approach, although Crotty (1998) suggests that this element was short-lived in the United States, and was accommodated into an acceptance of the status quo, only reappearing within the more individualistic and

subjectivist stances of the interpretivist and phenomenological approaches which developed from the 1950s, eg Becker (1963). Indeed, it can be argued that until recently critical approaches in the United States have been a minority view and have maintained a much more orthodox Marxist interpretation (eg Bowles and Gintis, 1976) than their European counterparts such as Althusser (1969) and Bordieu (1977), although more recent theorists of qualitative research such as Denzin and Lincoln (1998) might be seen to be moving back to such critical perspectives.

The development of critical theory in Europe is often presented as the debate between Habermas – an early pupil of Horkheimer – and the Frankfurt school, with Habermas' (1978) *Knowledge and Human Interests* as its key text. However, it can be argued that the internal debates of French Marxist, neo-Marxist and Existentialist thinkers – Sartre, De Beauvoir, Marcuse, Althusser and Bourdieu – were equally important, and certainly their debates have resonance with the critical ethnographical approaches discussed later in this chapter. Willener (1970), describing the 1968 'May Explosion' in Paris, states:

The first characteristic of this inter-sectional politico-cultural anarcho-Marxist current is to proceed to a total critique of established society, a critique that is also directed at the established opposition... phenomena that are an affirmation of a new society... microcosms, a prototype that prefigures, if not the society of tomorrow, at least some of its problems and solutions.

Willener 1970: xiv and xv

While the hopes of social change engendered by the 'May Events' were rapidly dashed, leading to disillusionment on the part of the 'May generation' (Agnes, 1978), Willener's 'microcosms' are similar to Foucault's notion of 'episteme' – the 'unconscious' structures underlying the production of knowledge in a particular time and place (O'Farrell, 2005). The development of this strand of critical thinking, Crotty (1998) suggests, led to the post-structural approaches of Barthes (1968) and Foucault (eg 1977a) which, while accepting the importance of societal power relationships, see attempts to challenge those power relationships as fragmented, futile and self-delusional. This, it can be argued, is in conflict with critical realist epistemology and methodology, for example, as expressed by

Cruikshank (2012), drawing on Bhaskar (1979/1998). This polarity is central to the key research question of this thesis and is explored in a number of ways.

Although much critical theory derives from Marxian and neo-Marxian analyses, other perspectives are important. Freire's (1972) model of 'conscientisation' has been criticised by Madison (2005) and by Sanders (2020) as taking too little account of other elements of identity than social class, especially gender and race, in influencing individual responses to a given situation. Crotty (1998) and Taggart (2019) both draw attention to feminist approaches, especially Gilligan's (1982) challenge to Cartesian dualisms of mind and body. Josephine Butler's *The psychic life of power* (Butler, 1997) is of particular relevance both to the ethical framework adopted, and to emergent issues of gender and gender identity in this research. Similarly, Critical Race Theory emphasises 'understanding the processes that shape and sustain race inequality in society,' (Taylor *et al.*, 2015). Other writers such as Clarke *et al.* (1975) and Willis (1977) have used critical theory to explore young people's views of themselves and their place in society.

Fundamental to the critical theoretical approach is the notion that our understanding of the world derives both from the power relationships and inequalities of current neoliberal society, and our active engagement with these. It thus potentially encompasses both realist and idealist ontologies. The title of this thesis is intended to expose two issues in critical thinking: the extent to which human engagement with the world can be transformative in any meaningful sense, and the extent to which it is the objective historical structures of society which limit and suborn the effectiveness of such apparent transformations. The notion of human engagement might be seen as linked to constructionist interpretations of society, and yet finds its place in writings of convinced Marxists such as Freire (1972) and even Marx himself (Marx, 1845/1969), who identify objective structural inequalities and oppressions as the area of struggle. Paradoxically there has been a tendency among leftist writers, such as Foucault (1977a; b), using post-structural analyses, to recognise social inequalities of power and oppression within an essentially constructivist approach, which deconstructs the issues without offering any potential for human action to transform this objective reality.

Towards a critical epistemology

The complexity of research paradigms and ontologies makes simplistic assumptions about reality difficult, as Crotty (1998) points out, but at the same time this very complexity may help in addressing the question posed. He argues that, while some ontologies and epistemologies appear mutually inclusive or exclusive – Positivism, is by definition, objectivist, Phenomenology constructivist, Postmodernism anti-objectivist – in the actual research context these are often mixed. As noted earlier, recent studies of AAS have tended to adopt ‘mixed methods’ approaches. Even the conventional dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative approaches, according to Crotty, is false:

When investigators talk, as they often do, of exploring meaning by way of qualitative methods and then confirming or validating their findings by a quantitative study, they are privileging the latter in a thoroughly positivist manner. What turns their study into a positivist piece of work is not the use of quantitative methods but the attribution of objectivity, validity and generalisability to qualitative findings.

Crotty (1998: 41)

Cruikshank (2012) similarly counterposes positivist, social constructivist and critical realist approaches, pointing out that both of the latter approaches derive from postmodernist thinking. Quoting Bhaskar’s (1975/1997) conceptions of ‘science’, he argues that crude versions of social constructivism imply a binary rejection of positivist ‘truth’ and thereby deny the possibility of any positive application of knowledge to improve the human condition. By contrast critical realist approaches do accept the possibility of human agency and intervention – albeit limited by context and external social structures. This he suggests is particularly important in areas such as medicine which rely both on direct human interaction and on wider structures of authority, belief and ideology. This analysis is relevant both to the social context of the school, which is the subject of this study, and to the wider theoretical questions of limitations and human agency which are implied in its title and main research question. This thesis therefore adopts an approach based on critical realism, which assumes that:

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- Research is a form of social criticism
- All thought is mediated by power relations
- Facts are not isolated from values and ideological assumptions
- Relations between concept and object are not fixed, but mediated by social relations of neoliberal society
- Language is central to the formation of subjectivity, consciousness and false consciousness
- The structures of society reproduce existing patterns of privilege, oppression and subordination, most forcefully when subordinated groups accept that subordination as natural and necessary – for example when children in care or young prisoners quote their own case files to establish their subjective identity
- These structures of oppression are multi-faceted and should not be seen in isolation eg by separating issues of class, race or gender
- Mainstream research unwittingly reproduces systems of class, race, gender and other oppression

Adapted from Carspecken (1996)

This differentiates the research from many of the perspectives, and from the empirical research programmes, outlined in earlier chapters. The adoption of a critical realist epistemology means that the research can engage with the evidence – both quantitative and qualitative – produced by more positivist or ‘scientific’ modes of thought, such as in social psychology, and with the more theoretical critiques which are emerging from both the political left and right. By revealing the theoretical antecedents of these arguments we can begin to understand where they lie in terms of the critical analysis outlined above, and ‘map’ the ways in which the research question can be addressed. This will not necessarily convince those wedded to a neoliberal view of society and a ‘value-free’, positivist ‘scientific’ method, and may not find favour with those who argue that meanings arise out of individual social interactions and therefore cannot be generalised. Moreover, it directly challenges those within the critical tradition who reject the notion of any non-subjective truth, no matter how it is defined (Apple 1996). Nonetheless, this

study can establish a benchmark in its own terms and within a critical theoretical epistemology which can synthesise these different elements of research to address the question posed.

Methodological considerations

Apple (1996) points out that adopting a critical theoretical approach does not involve abandoning methodological rigour, the need for coherent social theory, and empirical substantiation, although it does call into question:

The kinds of dust-bowl empiricism that still characterises so much research today or the vulgar objectivism that fails to recognise the role of the researcher and the society in which she or he lives both in constructing the lenses through which research is accomplished and the social role of the researcher in accomplishing it.

Apple, 1996: xi and xii

Much current thinking concerning critical theory is influenced by Habermas (1978). His perspectives have been developed in different ways through different methodologies, of which action research and critical ethnography are most relevant to this study. This research programme was originally conceived as a critical historical policy review, supplemented as appropriate with interviews from members of each of the stakeholder groups. However, while McCulloch (2011) emphasises the importance of historical techniques such as documentary analysis as a feature of critical study, it was recognised that such a methodology, although potentially clarifying policy positions, would be unlikely to reveal more complex patterns of individual motivation and their relationship to wider, possibly contradictory, macro-economic and political responses, particularly with regard to the less powerful groups identified – junior staff, students, parents/carers and their communities. Further, the outcomes of any such discussions were likely to be heavily influenced by the researcher's perspectives and prejudices. Access to these less powerful groups was likely to be de-contextualised and opportunistic, and risked missing the actual lived experience of groups and individuals, thereby ignoring important issues and alternative perspectives. Despite adopting the critical methodologies outlined below,

the practicalities of research during Covid lockdowns made access to many such views impractical, leading to a re-focussing of the research onto more limited staff perspectives. While enabling some important issues to be explored, this remains a significant limitation of this study.

During the planning process the researcher was contacted by two different settings asking for help in developing AAS approaches, and these provided an empirical evidence base for the study. One setting was a mainstream primary school in a relatively affluent area, whereas the other was a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) on the outskirts of a small city. As the research developed a third, secondary, school was added to allow for a wider comparison of issues which were emerging. Profiles of all three schools are given in Appendix 2. The primary school was addressing the developments from first base, whereas individual staff within the PRU had already identified the need to develop AAS strategies, but had hitherto been unable to progress these because of successive management reorganisations, although the new Executive Headteacher was keen to pursue AAS within her trauma-informed strategy. The secondary school was already developing its own AAS initiative, linked to existing restorative practice in the school; because of Covid lockdown arrangements it was not possible for the researcher to work on site and therefore all contact was by telephone or, in one case, off-site.

Action Research

Several methodologies were considered in the light of the theoretical perspective adopted, and approaches were adapted in the light of Covid restrictions. The initial approach considered was Action Research, which is defined as: ‘as a continuum of action-oriented research processes that combine inquiry with creating direct social change and is not limited to just explanation of information or data’ (Bell *et al.*, 2004). Three broad traditions can be identified:

1. **action orientations**, led by the researcher, in collaboration with participants, which aims to improve their capacity and wider social understanding in order to

improve the situation; these are often seen as related to Lewin's work on action research and social dynamics (Lewin, 1946)

2. **participative research**, where the researcher works with participants to develop their ideas within the project framework with a view to understanding and changing their local situation; this is often related to Whyte's (1989; 1993) interactionist approaches (see below, on ethnography)
3. **Participatory Action Research (PAR)**, where the researcher and participants work on an equal basis to improve the situation; learning is fed back into the project through a process of critical reflection leading to a common understanding of the wider social context; this is often associated with the work of Paulo Freire (1972)

Derived from Bell *et al.* (2004)

Jacobs (2018) uses a similar categorisation, linking the three categories to Habermas' (1978) concepts of technical, practical and emancipatory knowledge respectively. He relates these categories directly to positivist, interpretive and critical theoretical approaches. Thiollent (2011), however, combines the first two categories into a single concept of 'action research', which he associates with a hierarchical and Westernised world view, as compared with the emancipatory potential of PAR. Although emphasising its Marxian and existentialist theoretical origins, he argues that in the context in which he was working, with Brazil slowly recovering from a military dictatorship, PAR was equally valid across a range of political perspectives, both as an academic approach, and in rebuilding society. Canlas and Karpudewan (2020) also emphasise the fundamental structural implications and the role of the community in PAR, as opposed to traditional action research approaches, although they relate this to interpretivist/constructivist, rather than critical theoretical approaches. This parallels some of the debates within ethnography explored below.

Much theorising around school-based research has followed a traditional action research model; indeed, Lewin's notion of the spiral of research has much resonance with Stenhouse's (1975) theories of curriculum research and development. Given that much school-based research has tended to focus on and be undertaken by teachers, this might

seem to support the implied hierarchical power relationship of teachers with pupils in the classroom, although writers such as Hargreaves (1967) have suggested that this was more of a two-way process. However, Lewin's approach was criticised from an early stage as too limited and prescriptive, and as implying a narrow positivist psycho-statistical paradigm (Hopkins, 1985). Later writers such as Costello (2011) and McNiff and Whitehead (2010) emphasise the more radical antecedents of the action research model, although these might be seen as reflecting some of the theoretical eclecticism discussed below in the context of Carspecken, rather than a consistent theoretical and political position. This present research was originally intended to consider and directly involve participants from the wider communities involved with the school in order to challenge issues of equality and empowerment, and thus might be seen as encompassing those aspects of PAR, albeit that this involvement became impractical in the light of Covid restrictions.

There is a potential confusion of language with regard to 'action research' or 'PAR'. The initial research proposal adopted an 'action research' approach to both sites, based on McNiff and Whitehead (2010). The model might be seen as fitting a participative/practical and interpretive approach; the project, as proposed, was intended directly to involve a number of groups, including less powerful stakeholders such as children and parents/carers, and to include a mechanism for reflection and change at school level. It was not established to validate the programme but to explore how it operated in specific contexts, the ultimate impact which it had and on whom. Moreover, the research was situated within a critical theoretical paradigm and might thus be considered to meet the definition of PAR. Despite their adoption of essentially critical theoretical perspectives McNiff and Whitehead (*ibid.*) and Costello (2011) refer to 'action research' rather than 'PAR', and this terminology was adopted for the project. A number of critiques and comparisons of action research and critical ethnography – the other methodology adopted – make specific reference to 'PAR' as opposed to 'action research' and therefore this terminology has been adopted where appropriate and relevant.

Ethnographic approaches

The onset of Coronavirus and associated restrictions in March 2020 meant that the proposed action research timetable could not be followed, while changes in school planning perspectives – not least as a result the Coronavirus lockdown – meant that the notion of a single time-limited action research project on each site was unrealistic. It was likely that any data gathering would need to move into the following academic year, with different cohorts of students, parents/carers and possible changes of staff. This would have undermined the credibility of the study as action research *per se*. A review of the data already gathered suggested that a critical ethnographical approach might be more appropriate, and this methodology was adopted post lockdown.

Crotty (1998) indicates that the two forms of inquiry are closely related:

While critical inquiry will certainly be linked to action research... the critical form of inquiry has come to be embodied in ethnography too, transforming it in the process. Now it is no longer a characteristically uncritical form of research that merely seeks to understand a culture. It is critical ethnography that strives to unmask hegemony and address oppressive forces.

Crotty, 1998 p12

Ethnography is linked both with developments in anthropology, coming from positivist, neo-scientific approaches of the nineteenth century, via the work of individuals such as Margaret Mead (1928), and with the Chicago School of Sociology (eg Whyte, 1993). Mead emphasised the need to understand a culture in its own terms, and thus might be seen as challenging the Eurocentric and imperialist basis of much nineteenth century anthropology. In this sense she moved towards a relativist and arguably phenomenological discussion. Some of Mead's critics have emphasised her own subjective interpretation and selection of data to impose a particular Westernised – albeit critical – understanding of the phenomena she describes (see Newman, 1996). Other writers such as Strathern (2016) have claimed Mead as an early exponent of a feminist approach to research, as opposed to the relativist approach with which her work is often associated.

The Chicago school, by contrast, placed ethnography firmly within an interactionist context. Whyte's 1943 study *Street Corner Society* drew much of its initial inspiration from anthropology, especially the work of Malinowski (Whyte 1993), and was by Whyte's own admission prompted by his concerns for social justice (*ibid.*). However, it was the new 'theory of interaction', linking both subjective and objective ontologies, which underpinned his work (Whyte 1993: 287). Whyte also emphasised the importance of checking drafts with those involved to confirm their accuracy – which again prefigures the intersubjective approaches developed by Habermas and others (Whyte 1993), and indeed similar emphases in more recent ethnographic writing eg Carspecken (1996) and Levinson (2017).

While it might be unfair to typify traditional ethnography as entirely relativist and value-free, in comparison with Willener's (1970) study of 1968 Paris it does not challenge existing established oppositional norms and approaches. Whyte's discussions of and involvement with the politics around 'Cornerville' are in terms of the operation of local political systems, rather than any radical alternatives (Whyte 1993). A more radical approach can be seen in the work of Paul Willis and colleagues in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham University (Willis 1977), where an explicit relationship is drawn between the agency, identity and culture of individuals and groups, and their position with regard to inequalities and power relationships within the wider social structure. Of particular relevance to this study is the notion of 'cultural resistance' developed by CCCS on the basis of Foucault's work (Duncombe, 2007; Foucault, 1977b; Gilroy, 1982).

Critical ethnography

This approach was further developed by Carspecken (1996), who had based his earlier work on methodologies derived from the CCCS (Carspecken, 1991). He argues that:

Critical epistemology has evolved... through battles against the oppressive effects of biased research that at first appeared to be "neutral"... validity claims and values connect intimately through the relationship of democratic principles and truth. Truth claims presuppose... winning the consent of other people when power relations are equalized.

Carspecken, 1996 p8

Carspecken's approach is rooted, like Interactionism, in the American Pragmatist tradition, but rather than the notion of truth itself, it is concerned with issues of validity. While any assertion is fallible, and truth claims are subject to social, cultural and structural biases, Carspecken rejects relativist approaches and argues that both human communication and empirical evidence ultimately assume the existence of a common reality (Carspecken, 1996). However, he is equally sceptical of deterministic approaches – particularly those favoured by more traditional forms of Marxist analysis – and sees social action as a complex set of potential pathways, influenced by the subjective experience of the individuals involved and the external conditions which inform that action and experience. He takes as his starting point Habermas' (1978) three 'ontological realms' – the objective, the subjective and the normative/evaluative – and suggests that each has a role to play in critical epistemology – assumptions of shared reality, the role of self-knowledge and the importance of value agreements and norms.

The key point in Critical Ethnography, therefore, is to share the different understandings of social reality, power distribution and inequality among different groups of actors – especially those who are most oppressed – and thereby democratise the research process. This means that studies have to start on a localised, bottom-up basis, while taking into account the wider social system, which includes not only social, political and economic conditions, but also cultural influences. Carspecken distinguishes between face to face interaction in settings, and these wider contexts, which influence social routines, or constrain/influence individual behaviour through culture or coercion. He indicates that individuals are still free to respond to or challenge these conventions and norms, but it is the unequal distribution of social power that limits the level of challenge. Thus, the adoption of an AAS approach on one site may represent a challenge to the power relations within the classroom, the position of students or the assumptions of politicians,

but it may equally be a way of ‘cooling out’ troublesome students (Clark, 1960) and marginalising their challenge by confirming an inferior social status – or even drawing them into supporting the norms and values of the status quo.

Critiques of Carspecken’s approach

Carspecken’s methodology has been challenged by other critical ethnographers. In a review of his original publication Jungck (1996) indicated that, although his approach overall was helpful for researchers, Carspecken’s concept of ‘culture’ was somewhat ‘thin’ and vague. She suggested that the approach was too prescriptive and definitive for many postmodernist thinkers, while feminists would find it too rational and linear, with insufficient focus on relationships. This distinction – between Carspecken’s approach as a flexible, but rigorous, set of methods, and potential flaws in its theoretical underpinning – is explored in detail by Holmes and Smyth (2011). They suggest that Carspecken’s attempts to synthesise ideas from the European ‘New Marxism’ of the 1970’s, from the US Pragmatist tradition, from Phenomenology and Expressionism, alongside his emphasis on practical outcomes, leads to an eclectic mix of philosophies selected to support his overall contentions, rather than representing a coherent theoretical position. While this may be a logical consequence of his adoption of essentially Pragmatic philosophical approaches, they indicate that this in itself conflicts with his supposedly critical theoretical stance.

Holmes and Smyth further suggest that the strength of Carspecken’s methodology lies in its emphasis on epistemology, validity and individual values – again related to Pragmatic approaches – rather than in developing an informed critical analysis and interpretive framework. They see Carspecken’s emphasis on reflection as a way of challenging bias as essentially individualistic, limiting potential challenge to the immediate peer or subject group, rather than a broader social critique. Despite his quoting Freire (eg Carspecken, 2002), they suggest Carspecken’s emphasis on action may stray into Freire’s definition of ‘activism’ – the danger that unreflective action intended to promote change may actually support the status quo – a key issue in this thesis. Indeed, they counterpose Carspecken’s

early research in the UK (Carspecken, 1991), which was explicitly 'left wing and radical' (Holmes and Smyth, 2011: 152), with his later work, which they indicate, tends to depoliticise critical theory, drawing on authors who are 'more abstract and theoretical, and less concerned with political or social activism' (Holmes and Smyth, 2011: 152). This, they suggest, reflects Carspecken's own socialisation and subjective experience working in US academic settings and philosophical frameworks.

Vandenberg and Hall (2011) similarly acknowledge the strengths of Carspecken's approach for researchers, particularly in making value structures explicit, its emphasis on the relationship between decision making and action and its encouragement of involvement of participants at all stages. Like Holmes and Smyth, they suggest that Carspecken does not sufficiently address the relationship between communicative frameworks and dominant power structures and argue that the underlying theoretical 'idea of 'truth' based on social consensus ... can often inadvertently foster the reinforcement of dominant power relations'. (*ibid.*: 26). They indicate that:

By revealing the power relations that shape participants' actions and views, critical ethnographers may unintentionally validate dominant structures by failing to question their own views and research processes. Researchers may target particular populations/participants, without questioning how they came to identify them, and make decisions during data collection and analysis without reflecting on those choices.

Ibid.: 29

Rather than reject Carspecken's ideas entirely, Vandenberg and Hall posit an approach which acknowledges these limitations and potential biases. They question Carspecken's notional separation of researcher and participants' views in the initial stages of research, a point raised by both Levinson (2017) and Eisenhart (2019). Vandenberg and Hall call for much greater reflection and engagement with participants throughout the research process, with a particular emphasis on potential bias during data collection – an issue which Levinson (2020) extends even to the transcription process itself. As with Holmes and Smyth, Vandenberg and Hall indicate that Carspecken fails adequately to consider bias and the potential impact of dominant discourses in the choice of comparator studies

and theories during the later analytical stages, and suggest that this can at least in part be mitigated through further engagement with participants, which takes into account issues of access to resources, wider social factors and the power relationships which are at play. These issues were also emphasised in studies considering the impact of Covid on academic research, which are discussed below (see Bick *et al.*, 2020; Levine *et al.*, 2021; Strachan, 2021).

A further relevant factor is the use of critical ethnography as an alternative methodology within medical settings. Vandenberg and Hall (2011) suggest that this is increasingly the case, while Hardcastle *et al.* (2006) describe using Carspecken's five-stage process with nurses in a renal unit. Cruikshank (2012) considers the wider context of critical theory in nursing research, while Holmes and Smyth (2011), although providing a theoretical overview, make specific reference to their School of Nursing base, which they compare with Carspecken's early work in schools. The medical context is relevant to this thesis in several ways. First, medicine is situated within an institutional hierarchy which is itself related to an academic hierarchy. Thus, nurses might be seen as equating to classroom teachers and teaching assistants (Tas) to nursing auxiliaries, although the analogy of doctors and senior teachers is not necessarily accurate. Secondly, that institutional hierarchy is itself subject to public policy and, in some cases, direct performative management, although again the institutional structures are not necessarily completely analogous. Thirdly, medical structures are generally seen as being related to the treatment of individual patients, which might be equated with the 'targeted' approaches described in the literature review. However, and particularly in the light of the Covid Pandemic, that 'targeted' discourse is increasingly being challenged in favour of a discourse on 'public health' (Marmot *et al.*, 2020), while the perspectives provided by critical ethnography support a more universal, or social, view of the medical system as a whole.

Alternative approaches– Soyoni Madison

An alternative approach to critical ethnography can be found in the work of Soyoni Madison (2005). She grounds her work in a Pragmatic question of what will 'make the greatest contribution to equity, freedom and justice' (Madison, 2005) and quotes Thomas (1993) description of critical ethnography as 'ethnography with a political purpose'. Although she draws some of her theoretical background from similar sources, particularly Habermas, and commends aspects of Carspecken's empirical methodology, she adopts a much more phenomenological approach, as opposed to those quoted above, which might be typified as academic, philosophical and neo-Marxian. She is highly critical of the biomedical model, which she suggests dominates much of the current Western academic approach to research, and of the arrogance of 'academy power' (Kazubarshi-Houston *et al.*, 2018), which 'domesticates' (Madison, 2005) potential challenges to the status quo into academic publications which are inaccessible to the oppressed communities which they purport to support. Rather, she suggests, critical ethnographers should 'Be still, stand in love and pay attention' (Kazubarshi-Houston *et al.*, 2018; 458) to the communities with whom they work.

There are several consequences to this view. As with many critical ethnographers, Madison indicates the importance of self-reflection, and understanding one's own positionality as a researcher: 'self-consciously locating the researcher in the research process, critically self-reflexive, accountable for one's biases, vulnerabilities and blind spots' (Madison, 2010: 12-13). She sees Habermas (1978) as paying insufficient attention to the importance of subjectivity, challenging his supposedly narrow academic interpretation in favour of a wider notion of 'embodiment' (Madison, 2010: 7), which includes not only thoughts and feelings, but also the physical presence of the researcher and its impact on the research location. This she relates to the critiques of mind/body dichotomies which can be found from feminists such as Butler (1997), postmodernist thinkers such as Derrida (1974), and also interactionist notions of performance found in Goffman (1961) and Conquergood (1991). She presents this notion both as representing individuals' (researcher and participant) understanding of everyday life and the role of

research, and as a potential way of sharing and disseminating research findings with affected communities, a point which is also elaborated by Levinson (2020). Similarly, both Madison and Levinson refer to 'playfulness' to describe the desired relationship between researcher and participants, in terms both of playing with ideas, and of personal interaction.

Madison suggests that, unless a researcher has a reflexive understanding of her own positionality, she will be unable fully to engage and identify with the complexity of codes, language and expectations in the community within which she is researching. She asks: 'How do we create and maintain a dialogue of collaboration in our research projects between ourselves and Others?' (Madison, 2005). Madison quotes Lugones' (1987) concept of 'world travelling', whereby the researcher becomes linguistically competent, understands the norms, forms positive individual relationships and a common purpose with a particular group, which then enables a genuine dialogue between the researcher and the 'Other', which can present issues through their eyes. Otherwise, as Murillo (2004) and Conquergood (1991) indicate, research merely 'rips off' or reinforces existing dominant stereotypes, rather than surfacing real issues of inequality and resistance, for example, in areas such as female genital mutilation, where some Western ethnographic research has tended to accept a cultural stereotype without mentioning resistance in local communities (Madison, 2005).

This issue of self-reflection is engaged, too, in relation to the broader social context: 'Politics alone are incomplete without self-reflection' (Madison, 2005). She asks: 'how the specificity of the local story [is] relevant to the broader meanings and operations of the human condition'. However, while addressing directly issues of social inequality and change, Madison is not committed to any specific political ideology and rejects deterministic approaches:

A radical act is a confrontation with the root of a problem. It is to reach for the causes of an issue and not simply respond to its symptoms... How radical performances become radical is certainly a matter of who asks and who answers the question. Although we may define "the radical" in general terms, what is

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ultimately radical shifts and changes depending on the subject(ivity) and circumstances.

Madison, 2010: 18-19

Critical ethnography and Action Research/PAR

Palmer and Caldas (2017), while indicating the centrality of critiques of cultural hegemony, oppression and asymmetrical power relationships, and the commitment to fostering social change, draw a distinction between the neo-Marxist, or Freirean, emphasis on 'praxis' – found, for example, in Carspecken (2016; 2002) – against Madison's (2010) focus on 'performance'. They suggest that the former approach is more closely linked with PAR, with its emphasis on transformation, an overtly critical political stance and a focus on collaboration with participants, while the latter emphasises the role of the researcher activist in terms of trust, interaction, and sustainability of role with the community. They describe the way in which different strands of critical theory – post colonialist, critical race and queer theory, feminist and cultural indigenous approaches – have taken up different aspects of ethnography, reflecting the flexibility of the model. They propose that, in the process, a distinction has emerged, on the one hand, between participatory research and dialogue with communities; and, on the other, exploring alternative, non-Western and indigenous ways of knowing and producing knowledge.

In turn, this raises a number of issues concerning validity, conflicting with traditional concepts of ethnography and the role of the Academy. Herr and Anderson (2005), for example, give five different criteria for validity, ranging from peer academic review to achievement of community-identified goals. Denzin (2003), quoted by Palmer and Caldas (2017), like Madison (2005), Strachan (2021) and Trehearne *et al.* (2018), challenges the bioscientific model of research and indicates the possible inappropriateness, particularly in postcolonial and indigenous research, of concepts such as confidentiality or anonymity. Indeed, Palmer and Caldas indicate, quoting Mertens (2007), that there may in certain forms of critical ethnography be a place for quantitative or mixed methods research – an anathema to conventional interactionist approaches (see Crotty, 1998). They further suggest, as with Madison and other critical ethnographers (eg Foley and Valenzuela,

2005), that the pressures of 'scholarly' production can often be in conflict with making research accessible to the wider community.

Eisenhart (2019) addresses in detail the theoretical and practical relationship between ethnographic and PAR perspectives. As with other commentators, she indicates the commonality of approach in the emphasis on participants' perspectives, the importance of cultural differences and their commitment to social change. Eisenhart suggests that action research offers a 'stance towards research that is more democratic and action-orientated... ethnography lends... legitimacy as a research approach'. Within this context she explores the tensions between the two approaches in terms of the relationship between the researcher and the participant community. As with Vandenberg and Hall (2011), she indicates the contradictions between the action/outcome orientation of action research, and the need to seek funding and ethical approval within the academy framework. Quoting Levinson (2017), she suggests this limits the potential involvement of community partners in the initial stages of the process. Moreover, PAR, of itself, implies the active engagement of partners as researchers, and yet this is not necessarily always the case; she quotes several joint PAR/CE studies where participant groups were happy to be involved, but did not contribute actively to the research process, despite this element being foregrounded in the project brief. Thus, there is a danger that communities become passive information-givers in a change process – albeit positively intended – which is determined by the researchers themselves, thereby recreating the very power inequalities which the PAR sought to challenge in the first place. Elements of this can be seen in the different relationship between the researcher and the first two schools, and with the secondary school, although, arguably, the shift from action research towards critical ethnography meant there was little actual difference in research outcomes.

Further, Eisenhart acknowledges Levinson's (2017) point that communities themselves are not homogenous and may, at both an individual and a community level, express views which appear to support the status quo and to challenge the assumptions of the PAR, or even withdraw from participation. Ironically, the right to withdraw from participation is a fundamental feature of the liberal, positivist, medico-scientific ethical framework which is

implicitly challenged by both PAR and CE, and yet, as Levinson points out, refusing to acknowledge that right of withdrawal leaves researchers vulnerable to charges of ‘neo-colonialism, cultural imperialism, chauvinism, ethnocentrism, etc.’ (*ibid.*: 20). This issue arose in the course of the present research in terms of the extent to which individual members of staff were expected to implement the school AAS programme. The PRU leadership took the view that all staff should be implementing the programme, enforced if necessary via performance management, whereas the primary school relied on a more *laissez-faire* approach. Secondary school leaders saw the issue in terms of staff development and reflection, rather than top-down imposition, although one assistant head did refer to ‘non-negotiables’ (Transcript 16). This thesis argues (see chapters 4 and 5) that these might be seen in terms of Berlin’s Two Concepts of Liberty (Berlin, 1969), with the primary school representing a ‘negative’, more normative, approach, linked to maintaining the status quo, and traditional ethnographic perspectives; and the PRU a ‘positive’ view, representing more communitarian approaches to social change, which again might be associated with PAR. The secondary school, while inviting staff buy-in – which might be seen as a negative approach – was positively seeking to impose a cultural change.

Eisenhart also suggests that researchers should be aware of the tension between a PAR focus on social change, which may implicitly or explicitly bring in perspectives which are alien to the lived experience of the communities involved, and the ethnographic focus on surfacing that experience, with a community-informed consideration of what is to be gained and lost. For example, she quotes Levinson’s (2017) research on a Gypsy community which saw a PAR project attempting to improve relations with schools as a threat to its own cultural identity and values. Reflecting on her own research, which aimed to encourage young women from disadvantaged backgrounds to take up engineering, Eisenhart questions whether she should have focussed more on raising consciousness of barriers and strategies to overcome them (a PAR perspective), or on the recruitment and training of those young women as researchers, to ensure that their community perspectives were better reflected (an ethnographic approach). This latter, she proposes, should not lose sight of the need to relate these to a broader social

analysis: 'mapping the social relations of struggle' (Hussey, 2012). Researchers, she argues, have a responsibility to be 'drawn into the compromised conditions of the political process' (Eisenhart, 2019: 115), recognising the different intellectual registers which this entails.

Levinson (2017) takes a slightly different approach. He uses a variety of models of participation (Arnstein, 1969; Hart, 1997; Shier, 2001) to illustrate the range and inconsistency of definition of this concept. While drawing a similar distinction between the social action orientation and antecedents of PAR, and the more traditional academic traditions of CE, he argues that the central theoretical tenets of PAR, based on Freirean concepts of 'conscientisation' and 'praxis', are essentially external to the everyday experience of participant communities. Moreover, he suggests that a key element of PAR/CE collaboration is the shared understanding of concepts such as empowerment, inclusivity and social action within the research team, and with the communities themselves, recognising the variability of understandings and experiences which exist. Where this shared understanding of ideas does not exist, he argues, collaboration between researchers, and between researchers and communities, is not effective, and may result in researchers reverting to hierarchical academic discourses, stating, for example, that 'the research is for their own good.' (Levinson, 2017; 19). Conversely, even where shared understanding is achieved, this will not necessarily address the impact of the intervention – particularly unintended consequences – on the community itself. Further, where shared understanding is uncertain, Levinson suggests, researchers may seek to present the views of trained participant researchers as representative of the community as a whole, or quote individual community members who share their views, rather than considering dissonant voices or views. These he defines as 'faux participants' (*ibid.*: 21).

Eisenhart's emphasis on the importance of engaging participants as researchers, although to some extent resolving the dilemma which she poses between researcher and community-based perspectives, may be somewhat exaggerated. While this is a central tenet of action research she acknowledges the practical difficulties, even in PAR

programmes, in retaining participants' interest and direct involvement in research, as opposed to other aspects of the projects. The study in this thesis, as originally envisaged, did involve participants as researchers, and the PRU site even established a staff working group to support this. The main initial contact was the former Head of Centre, now acting as a volunteer at the centre, who was a strong advocate for AAS and at first played a role similar to 'Doc' and 'Angelo' in Whyte's (1993) study, as an interpreter and facilitator of contacts. In the primary school, the main individual contact was the headteacher, which might imply some contradiction between his advocacy and his gatekeeper role (see below). However, at a later stage in the process, the primary school Assistant Head also expressed a clear commitment to the wider research objectives (Transcript 14). The development of a critical ethnographic methodology in the light of the Covid lockdown meant that this issue was less relevant; there was no attempt to engage individuals at the secondary school as co-researchers, although the main contact with the school, a member of the researcher's own family, did act both as a gatekeeper and in providing ongoing informal commentary on developments at the school. Similarly, the issue of faux participants did not arise, other than as a feature of the opportunistic sampling of research participants and the transcript analysis process (see below).

A further issue considered by both Eisenhart and Levinson is the 'compromised' position of the researcher with regard to political action. For Eisenhart, who counterposes the social justice elements of PAR against notions of 'unethical meddling' (Speed, 2006, quoted in Eisenhart, 2019: 16), this is a consequence of the complexity of issues of participation and engagement between PAR and critical ethnographical approaches. Levinson, on the other hand, while emphasising: 'the traditions of critical ethnography in seeking to highlight and address social inequalities' (Levinson, 2017: 6) relates this to the wider issue of diversity within communities, suggesting that:

The demand for equality is liable to result in the glossing over of diversity within groups, as this would be to introduce different (and quite possibly, contradictory) needs and interests amongst the group members. Amongst those seeking to influence policy, this is understandable, and can be seen as serving the greater

good. For those seeking to improve understandings, however, it is important not to depict cultures as stable and bounded entities.

Levinson, 2017; 15

Nonetheless, Levinson also acknowledges the practical consequences of external social and political events, such as cuts to services, both on the research and on the communities involved. Again, this forms an important element of this study. At site level, each school was affected significantly by external issues before and during the research process; the PRU had suffered considerable changes in management immediately prior to the research; the secondary school was affected by community political issues which spilled into it during the fieldwork period; while the primary school, although relatively stable, was affected by administrative reorganisation within the MAT. At a system level, the researcher was involved in a campaign to promote attachment and trauma awareness, involving national politicians (see researcher positionality below). At the same time, schools, MATs and the research process itself were significantly impacted by the Covid pandemic. The effects on schools are discussed in chapters 4 and 5, but a number of Covid research impacts are particularly relevant here.

The impact of Covid on methodology

At a theoretical level there is an issue as to whether the experience of the pandemic has caused a paradigm change (Kuhn, 2012) within the research community, leading to a significant re-imagining of the purpose of research, and the relationship between researchers and their subjects:

COVID-19 has turned the world upside down, accelerating trends which were already latent or in progress, and inverting normal assumptions... It has added another dimension to the radical uncertainty that is faced at all levels of society – the familial, the firm, the community, the nation and globally.

Kerslake et al., 2020: 4

The author has argued (Appendix 6) that, while initially influential in many fields, such a view is misplaced, and that subsequent academic and policy discourse has tended

towards emphasising a return to the status quo, both in terms of practical policy (Simpson, 2021c) and theoretical perspectives. Rather, much of the Covid-related theorising of 2020-21 should be seen in terms of a 'moral panic' (Cohen, 2011).

Nonetheless there is a potential for the changes in perception which have arisen since Covid to challenge the performative culture of current neoliberal dominant ideology, to expose the contradictions of government policy, and to create a more pupil-centred approach in schools.

Some publications have considered the impacts of Covid on the research process itself. Owen-Smith (2020) describes the post-Covid situation in US universities as resulting from long-term state disinvestment from HE. He calls for a research strategy which challenges 'destructive competition', whereby the range of fields and topics funded is limited, large-scale interdisciplinary research and teaching become more difficult, and the academic research workforce is homogenised. Otherwise, Owen-Smith suggests, research becomes:

Less flexible, less diverse, less comprehensive, more unstable, less prominent on the global stage, and more isolated from the very communities and concerns we may wish for it to serve.

Owen-Smith, 2020: 3

The challenge to research which seeks to gain the voice of and to empower the less powerful, and to engage in issues which may not represent the dominant ideology – a key feature of critical ethnography – is discussed by Strachan (2021). She considers issues of accessibility, methods, confidentiality, gender, potential domestic violence and research data security. She suggests that Covid restrictions could lead to a change in dynamics which empowers the disadvantaged and devolves research activity to local communities, thereby challenging the digital divide and providing more climate-friendly approaches, as principal investigators reduce their travel. This reflects concerns expressed by critical ethnographers such as Madison (2010) to encompass post-colonial and indigenous perspectives. Fosci *et al.* (2020) and Ramvilas *et al.* (2021) indicate the importance of concepts such as open/citizen science in democratising research activity, particularly in developing nations.

Practical issues such as access, maintaining trust and the management of online sessions with marginalised communities under lockdown are discussed by Bick *et al.* (2020). Like Levine *et al.* (2021) they indicate the impact of Covid-related changes, not only on methods, but on theoretical and methodological perspectives:

*Epistemological choices that are indivisibly linked with... research questions, theories, analysis, and even discipline... students' struggles in making these choices speak not only to the question **how** qualitative research is possible during pandemic times, but what **kind** of research and **with whom**.*

Bick *et al.*, 2020: 7

While these discussions may still imply the traditional separation of researcher and subject, Gunel *et al.* (2020), in their *Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography*, address the role of researchers themselves. They question traditional views of fieldwork in the light of the pandemic, particularly in terms of researcher positionality, the implied separation of 'field' and 'home', 'gendered' and 'ablist' assumptions about access, and the tendency to perceive those being researched as 'suffering subjects'. They suggest that innovations such as online work have come about to support subjects' rather than researchers' needs, such as shielding or caring responsibilities. Researchers, they propose, should reconceptualise notions of 'field', 'being there', collecting data, and linear timescales of collection/analysis. They should develop new engagements and commitments in the context of a neoliberal economy, labour constraints and 'the shifting political economy of knowledge'.

By patchwork ethnography, we refer to ethnographic processes and protocols designed around short-term field visits, using fragmentary yet rigorous data, and other innovations that resist the fixity, holism, and certainty demanded in the publication process... Patchwork ethnography refers not to one-time, short, instrumental trips and relationships à la consultants, but rather, to research efforts that maintain the long-term commitments, language proficiency, contextual knowledge, and slow thinking that characterizes so-called traditional fieldwork... while fully attending to how changing living and working conditions are profoundly and irrevocably changing knowledge production.

Gunel *et al.*, 2020

From methodology to method

Although many commentators draw distinctions between the deterministic and external values-driven approaches of PAR/action research and the reflective understanding of community perspectives within critical ethnography, this may in practice be a false dichotomy, given the PAR focus on community engagement on the one hand, and the conceptual divisions between neo-Marxian structuralist (eg Carspecken, 2005) and more phenomenological, indigenous and post-feminist approaches to critical ethnography typified by Madison (2010). Similarly, Jordan (2009) points out that not all action research projects are necessarily concerned with community change, while a number of writers acknowledge the strong commitment within critical ethnography to address social inequality (eg Levinson, 2017). Moreover, a range of commentators – notably Jungck (1996), Holmes and Smyth (2011), Vandenberg and Hall (2011), and even Madison herself (2005), while critical of aspects of Carspecken’s theorising, commend the robustness and practicality of his methods.

The adoption of a critical ethnographic methodology in this research developed from the Covid lockdown. This gave methodological rigour, while retaining the original critical theoretical perspective. At the same time, as Levinson (2020) indicates, the CE methodology also provided greater flexibility to expand the research beyond the boundaries originally envisaged, enabling the inclusion of another school and a more detailed consideration of the role of multi-academy trusts (MATs). The original research plan had envisaged data collection at the Primary School between October 2019 and May 2020 and at the PRU between January and July 2020. Detailed timetables for activities and interventions had been established with managers in both settings, but delays in obtaining ethical approval had constricted the proposed fieldwork on both sites into February – July 2020 to ensure, as far as possible, consistency of staff and student focus groups within a single academic year. Changes to the original research timescale, combined with continuing restrictions on access to schools during the Autumn of 2020, meant that data collection effectively took place in two phases: February – June 2020 and January – June 2021, as shown on the table below.

Table 2: Research Fieldwork July 2019 – June 2021

2019	
July	Research proposal, data plan and ethics statement submitted; Initial contacts on first two sites; staff training session on primary school site
August	
September	TA and parent training session on primary school site
October	Research proposal and data plan approved; staff training session on PRU site
November	Second staff training session on PRU site
December	Ethical approval granted for primary school site
2020	
January	Ethical approval granted for both sites
February	Focus groups on first two sites (PRU and primary school)
March	Physical access to sites ceases Methodology revised Some online/telephone data collection <i>Initial Preliminary Reconstructive Analysis – PRA (Carspecken, 1996) drafted</i>
April	
May	
June	
July	
August	
September	Methodology further revised in light of continuing inability to access physical sites
October	
November	
December	Secondary school site adopted (online/telephone only)
2021	
January	Secondary school interviews begin
February	MAT CEO and PRU follow-up interviews
March	Primary follow-up and continuing secondary school interviews
April	
May	<i>Secondary school PRA drafted</i>
June	<i>Secondary follow-up interview: MAT PRA drafted</i>
July	<i>Stage 3 (Dialogical Data Generation – Carspecken, 1996) analysis drafted</i>

Practical applications

Carspecken (1996) recommends a five-stage process, involving:

1. Building a primary record from on-site observations and discussions
2. Developing a 'Preliminary Reconstructive Analysis' on the basis of this data
3. 'Dialogical Data Generation' – checking out the initial impressions from the preliminary reconstructive analysis with key actors in each site. Like Noddings (see

page 55), Carspecken presents this as a way of ‘democratising’ the research relationship

4. Systems analysis and comparison across the sites
5. Developing social/theoretical models for the whole social system

The initial data for this research had been collected in several ways, including site visits and meetings with staff and parents; the researcher had provided training sessions for staff, and in one case, parents, in the two schools. As part of the initial fieldwork the researcher had already undertaken some staff focus groups and a headteacher interview – which might be seen as a form of dialogical data generation – to inform feedback to senior staff. In a modification to Carspecken’s model – which focuses primarily on the researcher’s own perceptions in the first stage – this data, supplemented with a small number of online and telephone interviews during the first lockdown period (March-July 2020), was used to produce a Preliminary Reconstructive Analysis (PRA) for both sites, as well as informing the detailed literature review which was undertaken during the Autumn of 2020. This PRA raised a number of issues for further investigation, including the role of the Multi-academy Trust (MAT – see Glossary), and the replicability or otherwise of some of the findings in mainstream secondary schools. The analysis also raised questions around issues of social segmentation – such as class, race and gender – in relationship to attachment, and wider issues of leadership and governance. While the initial Covid lockdown had clearly impacted on schools, on the perceived value of AAS as a response, and on issues about mental health and wellbeing, the levels of reported concern at this stage were lower than in the later phases of the research, a finding which replicated that of ImpactEd (2021).

The lack of access to schools during this period led to further modifications of the Carspecken model. The first related to the principle that critical ethnography is co-created with those who are the subject of the study. It was no longer feasible in any meaningful sense to develop an ongoing relationship with students and parents/carers, and therefore the research was re-focussed to consider mainly the perspectives of practitioners, particularly teachers. There was a similar issue in accessing policy-makers. Here it was

unlikely that interviews *per se* would add significantly to insights which could be derived from policy documents. However, given the new focus which had arisen on the role of the MAT, as an intermediary body, interviews were secured with the CEOs of both MATs involved. Secondly, the co-creation of knowledge implies that the PRA is shared and refined with the group. The original research model had intended that this should be achieved via a pattern of focus groups and semi-structured interviews but, even with a more restricted group, it was unlikely that this could be achieved, given restrictions to physical access to schools, and the defensiveness of senior managers not wishing to put further pressure on their staff. Individual members of staff on both of the original sites had indicated their willingness to be involved in further discussion, while the CEO interviews provided a further opportunity to triangulate responses for these two sites. These interviews therefore became the basis of the Stage 3 dialogue on the first two sites, although a slightly different process was adopted for the secondary school (see below).

Further, the concept of ethnography traditionally implies face-to-face contact, where nuances of tone, social/physical context and body language can be taken into account (Williams, 2018). There was a need to adapt this, and in particular to move from the more interactive method of focus groups to individual interviews. Several different online platforms were used for the latter, according to individuals' preference and access to systems. In some cases school internet filters blocked access and personal email addresses or telephone interviews were used. Following the easing of the third lockdown in June 2021, the final interview took place on a face-to-face basis. While there may be an argument that different technologies lead to different interview outcomes, this did not appear to be the case, as in every instance the researcher was making detailed handwritten notes and did not seek to make eye contact – albeit virtual – with the respondents. Indeed, Hine argues that the main criterion for use of alternative technologies should be 'fitness for a purpose... without relying on canonical versions of what methodologies should be' (Hine, 2007: 652).

The idea of including a secondary school had been considered at the planning stage, in order to consider different impacts of AAS on students by age and stage. This had not been taken forward because of the difficulty in accessing and replicating the action research methodology in that context. The greater flexibility offered by critical ethnography and the use of online/telephone access meant that this was now possible. A single-sex secondary school in a large inner-city area was identified, forming a contrast in terms of social class, ethnicity and gender balance with the two other more rural and suburban sites. While it was not possible to undertake face-to-face training with the secondary school, the school had – of its own initiative and unconnected with the research project – commissioned a partner organisation which had developed training materials with the BSU team, and thus there was considerable fidelity to the model being promoted on the other two sites. Involving the school not only allowed a greater focus on the issues of social segmentation which had emerged during the first phase of research but also enabled a wider discussion of the differing phases and changes of the pandemic, and changing attitudes to mental health and wellbeing. As a stand-alone academy, or Single Academy Trust (SAT), the school did not relate to a MAT, but demonstrated potential vulnerabilities in attempting to maintain its distinctive values in the face of external community pressures on the one hand, and a performative neoliberal culture on the other.

A second phase of interviews took place with the secondary school, follow up interviews with teachers from the initial sites, and with MAT CEOs, between January and April 2021. The CEOs and initial phase teachers all contributed on a voluntary basis but there were issues of access in the secondary school, as the main contact, an Assistant Headteacher, was reluctant to put pressure on more junior staff, and it took several weeks of persuasion to secure an interview with a classroom teacher. In order to provide an element of third stage dialogic generation to replicate that of the first two sites, a further follow-up interview took place with that Assistant Headteacher in June. These interviews additionally explored the issues of social segmentation, power and authority – in particular the role of the MAT/governing body – mental health and wellbeing, and the impact of Covid, which had emerged during the initial phase. Of particular note was the

markedly different discourse over Covid which had developed over this time, and the need to situate respondents' views within the broader chronological and policy context.

There was an issue as to whether a MAT should be seen as a separate entity, or as a loose confederation of individual schools. Given its importance in terms of policy formation, school governance and influence on classroom practice, this study demonstrates that the MAT, where it exists, can have a significant impact on the development of AAS approaches in individual schools. However, in terms of Carspecken's (1996) methodology, there is a question as to whether it should be seen as a 'site' in its own right, or as a 'locale' ie a wider framework which both influences and is influenced by the sites which it contains. There is a *prima facie* argument that a MAT is a legal entity, has its own policies and approaches, and therefore should be seen as a site in itself. However, given the principal focus in this research on individual schools, there is a common-sense counter-argument which sees the MAT as a collective area within which schools operate. It would be possible to argue that the PRU MAT does more strongly demonstrate the criteria for a single organisation, while the primary school MAT represents a more federal model. For the purposes of this research, therefore, the MATs were considered both in relation to their individual schools, and as an entity in themselves. In a further modification to the Carspecken model, a single PRA was prepared to examine this latter issue to reflect the commonalties and differences described by the two CEOs, although a purist Carspecken approach would define them as a locale, to be considered only at the fourth stage of the process.

Who is involved?

The overall rationale for a critical study is to expose inequalities of power and agency. The responsibility of the researcher is to ensure that less powerful groups have an equality of voice with the more powerful. In the context of this study, which is about the impact of a management initiative, there is a need to ensure that the discourse and attitudes which underlie the initiative – however well intentioned – do not drown out alternative views and perspectives. This is as much bound up with the prejudices and values of the

researcher as with the discourse of the dominant ideologies of the social system (Hall, 1997). However, this distinction between power and subordination is complex: an institutional manager may feel constrained by her wider organisation or government policy, while children may exercise a form of coercive power against 'weak' teachers, which can in itself challenge the hegemony of the school. Even a compassionate-minded government minister may feel constrained by edicts from prime ministerial advisers (Black, 2015).

Further, there are issues of language. Much of the discourse around AAS takes place in an academic language accessible to government policy-makers, academics and senior institutional managers rather than parents/carers and local communities. The first phase PRA analysis demonstrated that junior front-line practitioners on both sites were confidently using EC techniques without necessarily articulating these as such. Similarly, some of the most sophisticated analyses of AAS approaches were made by individuals expressing these ideas using non-standard English constructions (see in particular Transcripts 9, 11 and 12). Two of those respondents apologised during the course of their interviews for their strong regional accents. By contrast, most senior managers articulated their ideas, which were arguably more normative, in Standard English (see Transcripts 7 and 11), although those who took a more radical view tended to have more regional accents and non-standard English constructions (see Transcripts 5 and 13). These differences may be related to sociolinguistic codes, and particularly metapragmatic models of speech, as identified by Agha (2005), which suggest that the actor's role, activity and interactive relationship with others are central to any conversation. While there is no significant evidence in this research of this impacting, positively or negatively, on wider policy formation within or beyond the school, the researcher was party during early fieldwork to some anecdotal and observational evidence of the quality of relationships with students for those individuals. This might suggest that those teachers who can bridge the 'register range' (Agha, 2005; 24) between theoretical understanding, classroom practice and individual student perceptions, are likely to be more effective in supporting students and implementing change. However, it was not possible to investigate this aspect because of the lack of direct access to children and young people

as a result of Covid restrictions. While this would be desirable in a later study, it does remain a limitation to this present research.

Given the focus on individual actors' perceptions and understandings of AAS, the original research proposal highlighted the different hierarchical positions which needed to be taken into account. It envisaged interviews and focus groups with policy makers, managers, staff, students and parents/ carers. The first phase PRAs indicated the importance of intermediate bodies, especially MATs, and the possible need to distinguish between heads of establishment and senior manager perspectives, as well as the potential role of wider community influences and perceptions, giving the following list:

- *Policy-makers eg DfE ministers and civil servants*
- Intermediate eg local authority, Multi-academy Trust (MAT) leaders
- Heads of establishment
- Senior managers
- Front line staff (teachers, TAs, LSAs, mentors etc)
- *Students*
- *Parents/carers*
- *Communities*

The working definitions used for each group are given in Appendix 4.

In the event, as outlined above, it did not prove practicable directly to include individual responses from individuals in the groups highlighted in italics, and this remains a limitation of this study. However, some perspectives were provided indirectly by respondents, through documentation and through the limited observations which could take place, and these have been included where appropriate.

Developing the research questions

The main research questions, as submitted in the research plan (July 2019), were:

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- What do we mean by attachment aware schools (AAS)?
- What are the motivations for establishing AAS?
- What are the policy drivers and inhibitors which relate to government policy with regard to AAS?
- At what level do these issues operate – national, local (local authority or MAT), institutional, individual classroom?
- How is attachment awareness understood by different groups (staff, pupils, parents/carers, policymakers)?
- Who do attachment aware approaches empower/disempower?
- To what extent are such policies embraced, resisted or subverted – by whom and at what levels?
- How do these considerations relate to wider issues of education philosophy and government policy?

These were refined in the course of the research to read:

- What do we mean by 'Attachment Aware Schools (AAS)?
- How is AAS perceived, enacted and resisted by different actors at different levels?
- Who benefits – why, when and where?
- What does this tell us about social structures, inequalities and policy enactment at a wider level?

A schedule was prepared for the focus groups, which also became the basis for the phase one interviews. This focussed on respondents' experience of implementing AAS approaches, following the initial training sessions; their feedback on any perceived changes in student behaviour, attendance and attainment; and reflections on any impacts on relationships within the school, including both staff and pupils. It asked about their feelings about the initiatives, whether these were influenced by their specific role within the school, and invited them to reflect on feedback from students and parents/carers, as well as to make any general comments about strengths and weaknesses of the approach

to date. The schedule was modified for the two headteacher interviews to include questions about the position of AAS within the school development plan, the role of the local management board and the MAT. The data from these interviews was used as the basis for the initial preliminary reconstructive analyses.

The schedule was further modified for the second phase. The researcher had not been able to undertake any preliminary observation work at the secondary school, nor had any involvement with the AAS developments, and, with the exception of his main contact, had not met any of the respondents prior to the telephone interviews. Secondary school respondents were therefore additionally asked to explain their role within the school and their understanding of AAS at the beginning of the interview. In response to issues emerging from the first phase, questions were added about segmentation and the impact of the Covid lockdown. For the two MAT CEOs a similar schedule was used as for the headteachers, with the addition of the same two areas. The secondary school and CEO data was used to produce PRAs for each group and contributed to the stage 3 dialogical data analysis.

A different schedule was used for the follow-up interviews. This asked respondents to reflect on developments over the intervening period, specifically addressing the emergent themes of:

- Who decides – is the initiative top-down or bottom up?
- Who is it for – is it universal or targeted?
- Who has or has not benefitted from the initiative?
- Who has been empowered/disempowered?
- Segmentation issues – race, class and gender
- Wider issues of power and authority
- Role of the Multi-academy Trust (MAT)
- The impact of Covid

Questions were also added, in response to further emergent stage 2 issues, on restorative approaches and on mental health. New issues which emerged from this process included poverty, especially food poverty, and school responses to this in their communities; the importance of structured CPD within schools and MATs; links between attachment and learning; and the role of restorative approaches. The transcripts, with the PRAs and raw transcripts from the initial data collection, were used to create the Stage 3 dialogical data analysis. This was compared with PRA, transcript data and other materials (mainly emails and personal observations/discussions) to develop the Findings and Discussion Chapters 4 and 5.

Sampling

Sampling for focus groups was both purposive and opportunistic (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998), recognising the limited availability of respondents, particularly under the Covid lockdowns, the need to focus on those individuals most likely to provide rich information (intensity sampling), and to maximise the range of responses within the constraints of the pandemic (Arthur *et al.*, 2012). Denzin and Lincoln emphasise the Existentialist notions of generalisability which underlie ethnographic approaches, while Bhatti stresses the need for flexibility of approach:

What actually happens in the field defines the final focus of the research and the way in which it is written up and presented... some of the questions worth considering might be...

...Will I be able to choose a sample or will the sample choose me?

Bhatti, 2012: 81

The focus groups were established by the schools themselves, dependent on the availability of individual staff. The primary school TA focus group was held during school time, to ensure staff could attend, and also included the SENCO, a senior member of staff. During the course of the discussion one of those involved – the only trained Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) in the school – was called away to deal with an incident. The teacher focus group was held after school. Several of the staff, including the

headteacher, were away on a school residential trip, but all others present that day attended, including the assistant head, who was deputising for the headteacher.

The PRU organised the groups by phase, although the primary phase meeting had to be cancelled because of the lockdown and only the secondary phase group took place. No current senior staff were present, but the group was joined by the former head of centre who continued to act as a volunteer at the school. An interview was held with the executive headteacher on the same day, and later online interviews were held with the former head of centre and the primary phase leader to ensure as broad as possible coverage during that phase of the research. A telephone interview also took place with the primary school headteacher to ensure a consistent focus across both sites. Further interviews took place with the MAT CEOs and one member of staff from each school as part of phase two of the research. In the primary school the assistant head and another member of staff were approached in order to follow up points of interest made during the focus groups, but only the assistant head responded. In the PRU a classroom teacher, who had played a leading role in the focus group and had remained in contact with the researcher, was keen to offer an interview.

The situation in the secondary school was different, as described above, as introductions to staff were made via the gatekeeper, an Assistant Headteacher. She initially approached three senior members of staff, but only two responded positively. The early interviews suggested that some insight from classroom-level staff might be helpful, and although the gatekeeper was initially reluctant to put staff under further pressure an interview was secured with one individual. As described elsewhere, the school was under considerable pressure during the Summer term 2021, but the gatekeeper herself agreed to give a follow-up interview in early June.

It could be argued that the voluntary nature of participation, and the researcher's role and positionality could lead to bias in each school, and to faux participant (Levinson, 2017) views being privileged. This does not appear to have been the case in the primary school, where the researcher's personal position was more closely identified with the

school and MAT hierarchy, but a diversity of views emerged via the focus groups. In the PRU, despite his association with the former head of centre, a range of views were expressed, including some critical of the current management. Follow-up interviews on both sites appeared to indicate a level of change, which could be correlated with statements from senior managers. In the secondary school the sample was limited to those whom the gatekeeper was willing to put forward, and therefore could be seen to be only those who would reflect her perspectives and values. Interestingly, the one individual invited who did not engage with the research was an older member of staff who was critical of some current developments. However, there was some diversity of perspective among those who responded, and oppositional views were acknowledged in all the interviews. Indeed, in her follow-up interview the gatekeeper apologised for her negative and downbeat tone, which she ascribed to the Covid lockdown and the difficulties which the school had experienced over the past few weeks (Transcript 16). It therefore appears that, while a larger number of interviews on all three sites would have been desirable to confirm the validity of the data, these do appear to provide a coherent and consistent view of developments, in terms of a critical ethnographic approach.

Coding and transcript analysis

Carspecken warns against excessively mechanistic approaches to coding:

When coding, it is important to be as immersed as one can in the context of the interactions. This means reading though the primary record, slowly and repeatedly.

Carspecken, 1996 149

Madison (2005) refers to 'clumping' of data, arguing, like Carspecken, that the analysis should be against the emergent themes from the data itself, rather than an externally imposed framework. Throughout both phases of the research process each transcript was first read to establish key emergent themes. Given that the focus of this study was on the impact of AAS on individuals and groups, the approach taken in the first stage of research was to code the statements in the transcripts against the groups to which they applied –

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senior managers, front line staff, students, parents/carers etc. These views were subsequently coded against the questions below to produce the preliminary reconstructive analysis.

- What is the various actors' understanding of an attachment aware school?
- What might be the reasons for developing an AAS approach?
- Who decides – is the initiative top-down or bottom up?
- Who is it for – is it universal or targeted?
- Who has or has not benefitted from the initiative?
- Who has been empowered/disempowered?

The same social group categories were used to code the initial interviews for the second data collection phase. However, other questions were added to reflect the emergent themes of:

- Covid
- Segmentation (Class, Race, Gender, Feminist Perspectives)
- CPD
- Transformation
- Learning
- School Ethos
- Relationships
- Mental Health

These themes were then developed as part of the second phase PRAs.

The Stage 3 comparative Interviews were not coded in the same way but, rather, were used as a dialogue with each respondent to further elaborate the themes of understanding, focus, relationships etc identified above, and to establish their understanding of the changes which had taken place on their site since the initial data

collection. In the case of the two original schools the time gap was over 12 months, although in the secondary school the gap was only six months. The analysis produced, although organised against these themes, included a significant number of verbatim statements from respondents, fulfilling Carspecken's (1996), Levinson's (2020) and Madison's (2005) strictures that respondents' own expressions should be used as far as possible.

A limited amount of quantitative document analysis of transcripts was also undertaken. This consisted of simple word frequency counts and was used mainly to compare respondent priorities with issues identified as part of the literature review (Appendix 5). This might be seen as conflicting with the general theoretical thrust of this research, by privileging a positivist method (Crotty, 1998), but Cruikshank (2012), Palmer and Caldas (2017) suggest this is increasingly acceptable within critical ethnography.

Ethical issues

Critical research is premised on empowering the less powerful in society. However, all three school projects were intended to investigate the impact of a management initiative on key groups and individuals. The approaches being studied could be seen as 'top down' initiatives and might therefore be in conflict with the critical theoretical orientation of the research, with the ultimate intention to 'unmask hegemony and address oppressive forces' (Crotty 1998). The research needed from the outset to acknowledge this potential disparity in power. Indeed, although work with school managers was vital to progressing the project, as originally conceived, the purpose of the research was to investigate patterns of ownership and control of the key ideas and relationships within the school.

Ethics and the research design

In developing the research design, Carspecken (1996) refers to the importance of personal positionality and values, recognising the power relationships which exist between different groups of actors, and the need for a broad set of questions and items

for examination. Carspecken does not address the issues of ethics *per se* – the word does not appear in his book – but he does emphasise the need for the researcher to act with responsibility and integrity. By contrast, Madison (2005) discusses in detail the implications of different philosophical interpretations of ethics for critical ethnography, challenging the privileging of reason against emotions, questioning concepts of ‘the greater good’ and emphasising the importance of investigating the researcher’s understanding and relationship with ‘the Other’. She is highly critical of traditional ethics approaches deriving from biomedical models. This might, for example, include the Nuremberg Code (BMJ, 1996) which reflects a particular theoretical and historical context, in this case, the reassertion of liberal capitalist values in the wake of the second world war. Madison suggests that CE researchers need to maintain a reflexive and self-critical perspective on their own values and biases, and to question the origins of the theories and paradigms within which they are working.

This issue is also addressed by MacLeod *et al.* (2018), who suggest that traditional academic ethics processes are more concerned with bureaucratic protocols than systematic approaches to seeking truth. In the same vein Taggart (2019) indicates that the notion of a rule-based system of ethics goes back to the mind/body separation of Cartesian science, and is in conflict with feminist approaches (eg Gilligan 1982) which challenge this. Like Madison, Trehearne *et al.* reject the biomedical model which they see as underpinning most traditional ethics processes, describing them as ‘hegemonic-neutral, normative, procedural and concerned with risk avoidance’ (Trehearne *et al.*, 2018: 438), calling for an alternative ethics, which fits the challenges and epistemologies of critical research. Such an approach, MacLeod *et al.* (2018) suggest, includes challenging mainstream assumptions and taken-for-granted epistemologies, engaging in reflexivity and self-criticality, and seeking meanings which unpack power relations, promote social justice and highlight inequalities.

In this context, the nature of the ethical approaches being adopted can itself be questioned. The BERA (2018) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, for example, are drawn up in an eclectic way, to cover ‘the diverse range of possible approaches’ (*ibid.*:

28) and could be seen as sponsoring the very forms of false 'value-free' approach criticised by critical theorists (eg Carspecken, 2005). Like Madison (2005), Macleod *et al.* (2018) question the way in which researchers and ethics committees define 'harm' on the basis of external academic criteria which are divorced from the actual context of the research; they indicate the way in which this conflicts with the focus on power relationships and social justice which theoretically underlie critical research methodologies. Writing in the same volume, Treharne *et al.* (2018) propose a re-imagining of ethics committee processes that moves away from a set of tick-box bureaucratic categories to acknowledging the epistemological complexity of research, the particular aims of the researchers in their own terms and the way in which researchers will address these issues in the field. However, pragmatically, they, like Eisenhart (2019), accept that critical theorists have to collude with traditional academic ethics committees in order to obtain research approvals.

Discussions with the BSU Ethics Panel raised a number of traditional ethical issues which had to be addressed prior to approval being granted in January 2020. These included:

Informed consent and right to withdraw

In research of this nature there cannot be an absolute right for staff to withdraw from an activity which is integrated into staff and classroom practice, as this is part of the normal working of the school and is a legitimate management requirement. However, it was accepted that it would be unethical to require participation in data collection/feedback activities, and attendance at the limited number of staff focus sessions was voluntary. All those participating in focus groups and interviews were asked to sign informed consent forms giving specific options to withdraw at any time. This included online and telephone interviews, where forms were emailed to individuals in advance. Similar provisions were planned – including age-appropriate documentation – for pupils and parents/carers, although this was not eventually implemented because of Covid lockdown requirements.

Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity

It was difficult in a relatively small-scale study absolutely to ensure that privacy, confidentiality and anonymity was maintained. For example, on each site there was only one SENCo, one headteacher, and a limited number of senior staff.

For those reasons a number of steps were taken.

- A formal data management plan was created and lodged with the University
- Both of the initial phase heads of institution publicly indicated their support for the BERA guidelines, especially with regard to privacy, confidentiality and anonymity
- All staff and parent/carer briefings included reference to the BERA guidelines, and reassurances concerning confidentiality
- No raw data, including participant lists, was shared with managers
- All feedback of qualitative data during the action research phase of the projects was edited to minimise the risk of identifying individual contributors
- All participants were briefed in advance of focus groups and individual interviews to reassure them as to the confidential nature of the research process
- All focus groups were reminded at the outset of the need to maintain Chatham House rules in terms of confidentiality
- All interview transcripts were shared with respondents, and where necessary amended, to ensure that anonymity was preserved
- All respondents were allocated a pseudonym by the researcher, which was used in subsequent analyses. Similarly, the three schools and the two MATs involved were referred to in only general terms: a small primary school in the suburbs of a market town; a PRU on the outskirts of a small city; a single-sex girls secondary school in an inner-city area; a medium-sized church-based MAT; and a MAT specialising in work with excluded and vulnerable groups

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There was a potential issue of power imbalance for those who might wish to give negative feedback, particularly during the first phase of the research, where respondents were aware that the researcher would be discussing outcomes in general terms with senior staff. This was to some extent mitigated by emphasising the confidential and anonymous nature of the data collection process. Moreover, given that the research was intended to identify what was or was not working in terms of AAS it was illogical and contrary to the interests of the schools for contentious information to be ignored or suppressed. This was less of an issue in the second phase of the research, where the emphasis in all interviews was on the research itself, rather than feedback to managers.

During the course of the research two significant issues of confidentiality arose, in different schools, where the researcher was party to information which, while relevant to the research, could have created difficulties for the schools involved were it to be published. In one case, other evidence arose during the second phase of fieldwork to substantiate the issue, and no reference was made to it in subsequent analyses. In the other, the researcher negotiated with the respondent, who had made oblique references to the matter in her interview, the level of detail which could be included in the final version of the thesis.

The role of gatekeepers

One issue, which was not raised by the Ethics Panel, but which became relevant in the course of the research, was the role of gatekeepers. This is often seen as axiomatic in school-based research (see BERA, 2018), and reflects the legal reality and responsibilities of the school headteacher, particularly in terms of Safeguarding and Duty of Care (Headteachers' Standards, Section 2, Paragraph 7: DfE, 2020d). In all three schools in this study the AAS development had come from above. In the two original schools the research programme and reporting framework were agreed in advance with the head, even though the purpose of the study was to establish responses and perspectives at a number of levels within (and initially beyond) the school itself. The Covid lockdowns led to the abandonment of the formal reporting framework, although the researcher

remained in informal contact with both heads. During the early stages of the pandemic the headteachers were understandably protective of individual staff, and all further contacts with staff in the later phases of the research were cleared with them. On the third site the AAS initiative was being undertaken separately from the research process through the Senior Management Team, but permission for the research activity was negotiated with the headteacher on the researcher's behalf by a member of that team, a family member, who also acted as gatekeeper. In this latter role she identified individual members of staff who might be approached for interviews. It could be argued that this limited access to staff who were less supportive of the overall management approach, although this diversity of views was acknowledged in all of the interviews which took place and is reflected in the Findings and Discussion chapters; see also discussion on Researcher Positionality below. Nonetheless it remains a limitation of this particular study and – as with parents/carers and students – further research would be desirable with a wider group of staff at the school.

This approach, while correct in conventional ethical terms, might be seen as reinforcing the hierarchical and normative assumptions of traditional academic research. However, the absolute requirement to obtain legal and ethical access in order to undertake the research might equally be seen as a form of necessary compromise, in Eisenhart's (2019) terms. While the gatekeeper role did potentially restrict access to some individuals, this did not compromise the research itself. Moreover, a key finding of the research, complementing those of Rose *et al.* (2016b) and Harrison (2022), was the important role of whole-institution leadership in empowering more junior staff. Thus, the access provided by gatekeepers both facilitated the research and, perhaps paradoxically, enabled a critical analysis which reinforced the importance of their position.

Notions of vulnerability

Much of the discussion with the BSU Ethics Panel centred on the notion of 'vulnerability', for children and young people, parents/carers, or indeed front-line staff themselves. The notion of 'vulnerability' is itself contentious (see Glossary). In conventional ethics all

children and young people are considered as potentially vulnerable, given their age and potential power relationships with adults, whether teachers or parents/carers. Within Critical Ethnography, Madison stresses the need for the researcher to make herself vulnerable in order to identify with the disadvantaged (Madison, 2021; 2005) while Carspecken refers to researchers being open to being 'wounded in the field' (Carspecken, 1996: 170). However, there is a growing challenge to this perspective within more critical theoretical approaches. Ecclestone presents notions such as 'vulnerability' as 'moral imperatives for intervention', and implicitly social control, within a neoliberal society (Ecclestone, 2017:57), while, in the research context, Edelman (2018) suggests that the notion of vulnerability may actually stifle the voice of the less powerful. Treharne *et al.* (2018) indicate that this can particularly be the case with children. They add:

While critical researchers need to question how notions of 'vulnerabilities' and 'harms' are understood and deployed in research, they equally need to inspect very thoroughly the procedures they implement, the interactions that they have, and how the outcomes of the research may impact not only on individuals, but also on their families and communities.

Ibid.: 438

A key element of this research was to establish whether the adoption of attachment-aware approaches empowers or disempowers individuals – and whom? Are children and young people being made quiescent through an 'emotionalised' curriculum, as Bialostock and Aronson (2017) argue, or does the acknowledgment of their individuality begin a process of self-understanding and re-empowerment (Levinson and Thompson, 2016). Several methods were planned in the two initial schools to gain student voice, including focus groups and interviews, but these were abandoned in the light of Covid restrictions. A number of respondents described in some detail their perceptions of student responses to and engagement with the AAS initiatives, which has enabled some proxy views to be cited. However, this remains a fundamental limitation to this thesis, in that the independent voice of students and young people has not been empowered, and this would be desirable in any future research of this nature.

Notions of vulnerability for parents are more nuanced. Respondents in the mainstream schools described a range of parental contexts, from middle-class, wealthy parents confident to engage with and challenge the school, to those from socially excluded or minority groups, or facing economic hardship, who found school a hostile or alien environment. Middle-class parents on all three sites were more confident to act as advocates for their children and in the mainstream sites were content to use perceived vulnerabilities of their children, particularly in areas such as SEN or mental health, to access services and resources. This tends to confirm Rose *et al.*'s (2016b) and Curran *et al.*'s (2021) contentions that parents of children with identified needs see direct benefits from schools adopting more radical interventionist approaches. Indeed, a briefing session for parents in the primary school, held in September 2019, revealed considerable enthusiasm for the AAS initiative, including a request for a parents' focus group. Those in less advantaged circumstances tended to have difficulties in engaging with the schools, and were suspicious of accepting services linked to their children's vulnerabilities. This position was to some extent reversed in the PRU where, although articulate middle-class children were better placed to take advantage of the opportunities offered, middle-class parents would sometimes resist the stigma of their child being placed there, preferring to see other services and/or schools as responsible for their child's predicament (see Transcript 11). Conversely, the Unit had a strong ethos of collaboration with parents, and several respondents indicated that collaboration with less confident families had actually improved during lockdown. The issue of parental vulnerability and engagement is explored in Chapters 4 and 5 but from the perspective of research methodology a similar reservation has to be made as with children and young people, in that the evidence presented is from staff perspectives only, and that further direct research with parents/carers would be desirable.

With staff, issues of vulnerability are even more complex. Hargreaves (1967) described the two-way nature of power relationships between students and teachers in the classroom, while the adoption of increasingly performative measures since the Education (Schools) Act 1992 has caused teachers to feel 'judged', especially over classroom behaviour. Similarly, it can be argued (Whitty 2006) that this emphasis on performativity

can lead to a 'them and us' relationship between teachers and school managers, further increasing that perceived vulnerability or insecurity. In terms of AAS initiatives, Riley (2013) suggests that the adoption of attachment-based approaches can support more vulnerable staff, while several recent research papers (Harrison, 2022; Rees Centre, 2018; Rose *et al.*, 2019) report increased self-confidence on the part of teachers. Similarly, Sheik and Bagley (2018), and Troman (2009) demonstrate that teachers are adept at modifying or subverting external initiatives for their own classrooms. However, echoing Ecclestone (2017), Perryman *et al.* (2017) suggest that the type of self-reflective approach described in this research may itself be a form of 'soft' social control – see Glossary of terms in Chapter 1 - although this thesis challenges that proposition.

Researcher positionality

Critical ethnography also needs to take account of the researcher's own positionality. My own motivation in developing this research was as someone who has had a long-term engagement with issues of policy in social care and education, as a youth worker, a teacher, a local government officer and as a researcher. I had promoted the original *Emotion Coaching* (Parker, 2012) and *In Care, In School* (Parker and Gorman, 2013) programmes, as well as the AAS developments (Bath Spa University, 2022) as part of my role at the University, and was in a personal capacity a founder trustee of the Attachment Research Community (ARC, 2020). I therefore had a strong personal investment in the study, as well as a commitment to applying the learning to promote further social change. However, from a theoretical point of view I wanted to apply a critical approach to determine whether or not these programmes were effective and indeed did achieve our stated social and political aims.

At an early stage I was challenged by a colleague who had a similar professional background to myself in local government before becoming an academic. Responding to a presentation on my proposed research he asked me: 'You don't really believe in this attachment stuff, do you?'. I made a vague response about the issue not being about the detail of a particular initiative, but a more general orientation towards making schools

better places for children and adults, rather than zero-tolerance performance factories. That I do believe in, and in a sense, it underlies my longer-term commitment as a local government officer and as an academic for the past thirty-five years. I would like to believe it also underlay my seven-year school teaching career before then but in truth I feel that at the time I was much more wedded to a neo-Marxist or Freirean ideology of achieving change through the curriculum, alongside the often-contradictory daily practicalities of classroom survival in 1980s schools, which could be equally hostile for pupils and staff. In a sense, therefore, my adoption of a critical realist approach marks a return to my original academic roots (see Parker 1980), although mediated by forty years of practical experience.

Nonetheless, given my own long-term involvement and profile in this field, and my direct role as a trustee of the primary school MAT, I did need to reflect on the practical, ethical and methodological implications for my data collection and analysis. The evidence of the PRA data on the two initial sites was that the research was seen by institutional managers as a resource, through providing ideas, feedback and training to support their implementation of the AAS initiative.

I've really valued your linking it [emotion coaching] into attachment awareness. Increasingly we've really noticed the link between the children that find life difficult and those that had difficulty coping in mainstream school and the ones that have – you know – a clear attachment issues from when they were younger and even currently.

John (Primary School HT)

I think it has become more evident since we've been working with yourself recently... as to tying all of those together.

Olivia (PRU ST)

The third site was slightly different, in that the most senior institutional managers (the headteacher and deputy headteacher) were not directly involved, and I was not involved in the CPD activity. In that case all four respondents regarded me more as a sounding-board and used the interviews as an opportunity to reflect on their own and school-wide practice.

The principle of a localised ‘bottom-up’ approach to research is also fundamental to critical ethnographical methodology (Carspecken, 1996). My relationship with individual respondents in all three cases was different. In the primary school I was closely associated with the initial AAS/EC project, as a former member of the MAT Board and a local government officer. This did not appear overly to affect the focus groups with staff (Transcripts 1 and 2) nor the interviews with the school head and the MAT CEO. However, there was a certain diffidence of tone in the interview with the assistant head, who was keen to link in-school developments with the staff training which I had led, and my previous role in the MAT:

I’m kind of seeing [it] used across the school and I know it is the emotion coaching language and approach. And that would be hugely positive, I’m sure, for you...

The fly in the ointment around at the moment, which you probably wouldn’t know about, is a restructuring going on.

Henry (Primary School AH)

These issues did not appear in the PRU, where I had no previous relationship with the Centre, other than in the context of the research and associated training activities. My introduction to the site was via the former head, Chaz, who was himself seen by the staff – and, indeed, through my informal observations, by some students – as a point of stability through the difficult times and changes of management structure over the past few years. His involvement in the focus group appeared to facilitate some deeper reflection and challenge by staff:

What about using debrief? What about having Chaz available once a fortnight or whatever, to come in, rather than having leadership team for the debrief... run it so... when we’re talking about what happened...having someone externally ‘when that happened, what happened before that, what led up to it, who was supporting you there when you had all those kids doing that to you, where was the person that.. why was that student... who could have taken ...?’

Guy (PRU teacher)

This raised a number of ethical issues with regard to the relationship with institutional managers and the internal politics of a staff team which had recently been subject to

considerable change, with the danger that the research might be used to support a particular factional view. In the event, the change in methodology and access to the school meant that all further data gathering took place via individual interviews, and Chaz' role became more one of consultant, and peer reviewer of draft texts, rather than an active researcher. At the same time the PRU developed a more consistent management approach, based on a shared understanding of trauma informed practice/neuroscience, which appeared to have been welcomed by staff (Transcripts 11 and 13). However, as late as August 2021, I was still receiving requests from individual staff to provide further AAS training (Parker, 2021), possibly indicating some residual concerns about the direction of the school.

The situation in the secondary school was different again, as access had been obtained via a family member who was on the senior leadership team. While she was happy to facilitate access to specific individuals, who provided interviews, there were some significant ethical issues with regard to specific events and pressures at the school, which she had discussed confidentially with me when seeking advice, but did not wish to be included as part of the final report. This illustrates the type of dilemma faced by the researcher in terms of 'privileged access' (Carspecken, 1996: 167), in this context having access to information which was highly relevant to the overall research question, but being unable ethically fully to divulge it because of the nature of the relationship with the respondent outside the research process.

Sampling, too, was an issue, as described above. Although the original action research programmes were based on a structured sampling – albeit moderated by the management teams in each school - the pressures of Covid lockdown led to a more opportunistic approach. Further, the fact that I was unable to be present on any of the sites meant that I was reliant on gatekeepers to obtain access to individuals and could not build up my own relationship with individual members of staff who I felt would have an interesting contribution. There is some evidence that this led in turn to my accessing staff who were more enthusiastic about AAS – in both the primary and the secondary schools it was an older member of staff who did not respond to my request for interviews,

despite this being cleared with the gatekeeper. Conversely, in the PRU, it was a teacher who was committed to the approach who was keen to offer an interview, which was cleared with the gatekeeper after the offer had been made. However, all participant responses did address the challenges, as well as the positive aspects of AAS implementation in their site.

While transcribing discussions I tried to acknowledge my potential biases (see Levinson, 2020) and attempted to remain as close to the actual data as possible. I made an audio record of all interviews and focus groups. During the face to face focus groups and interview I made extensive handwritten notes and recorded body language where this was relevant. While this meant that I was not always making eye contact it did mean that I had a second record which could triangulate my initial impressions. I continued this approach for all subsequent interviews, online and by telephone, although in practice I made little use of this during the later phase, as my detailed transcription included these elements. I deliberately chose to transcribe all the audio records manually, rather than using any transcription software, so as to ensure I had a full understanding of what was said.

In terms of analysis, as outlined above, I followed Carspecken's (1996) and Madison's (2005) prescription of immersing myself in the data, triangulating individual views against the emergent themes. Some of these themes, of course, had come from my original research questions and therefore reflected my own assumptions. However, I attempted to check back with respondents where there appeared to be some dissonance or inconsistencies (for example Mollie's reference to students feeling 'untouchable') and further triangulated this through a transcripts key words exercise (Appendix 5). More broadly, given the theoretical perspective adopted, while I acknowledge the essentially subjective nature of the academic research process – the micro-elements of critical realism, in Bhaskar's (2020) terms - I would argue that setting this within the context of government policy and wider social relationships – Bhaskar's (2020) macro-elements - gives this further validity.

Two personal elements may also have impacted on the research process itself, as I was shielding from March 2020 onwards and therefore could have only limited face to face contact, even after the end of the formal lockdown. This issue is specifically mentioned by Gunel *et al.* (2021). Further, I did not have sufficient confidence in my own IT skills to attempt to recreate virtual focus groups. Given the pressures on individuals and schools during the fieldwork period, and the difficulty in securing individual online interviews, it is unlikely that such approaches would have been achievable, but this was not tested in practice.

Overall, I was not seen as being in a value-neutral position and was regarded by all stakeholders as an advocate for AAS. As an academic researcher I could be seen to be maintaining certain professional and academic discourses of the dominant culture. In the same way, I was associated with the institutional managers on all three sites, in the primary school as a former local authority officer and MAT trustee, and in the secondary school as a relative of an Assistant Head. In the PRU, I was associated both with the current and the previous heads, although in practice tensions between staff and management appeared to have reduced during the research period. However, as I have argued above, I believe that this personal positionality does not invalidate the data collection processes and overall analysis presented in this thesis.

Chapter 4: Findings

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Introduction

The question posed throughout this thesis is whether the adoption of attachment aware approaches in schools (AAS) is essentially normative – ie keeping young people in their place within the dominant structures and norms of neoliberal society – or whether such approaches have the potential to be transformative, in terms of individuals' life chances, in the ways in which schools operate, or, indeed, in changing those overall structures and norms.

Following the methodology described in chapter 3, the initial reconstructive analyses of the three sites and the Multi-academy Trust (MAT) data suggested that there were indeed aspects of the approaches to AAS which could be seen in this way, and this was reinforced in the follow-up interviews.

The context: sites and hierarchies

There were significant differences between the three sites, in terms of age-range, social, ethnic and community background of the students and families involved, and external perceptions of the schools. The primary school was well-viewed and relatively popular, although struggling to recruit to full capacity in a suburban area with an aging population. The secondary school, in an inner-city area, was heavily over-subscribed, partly because of its academic performance and partly because its single-sex status made it attractive to some communities. Students at the PRU, by contrast, had been directed to the centre either by the local authority, or by partner schools. Each site had a particular culture; the primary school identified strongly with the local church, built on the same site and at the same time (Primary School website, 2022); the secondary school had a strong feminist ethos – it had successfully resisted attempts by the local authority to impose co-education in the 1990s (Secondary School website, 2021); while the PRU had managed to

maintain its core ethos, despite successive changes of management, with established staff expressing support for the new management structure because they felt that it reflected their values.

The management frameworks on each site were again different. The Primary school was part of a church-based MAT with a highly devolved local governance structure, whereas the PRU MAT was much more centralised in terms of administration and ethos. The secondary school, as a Single Academy Trust (SAT), had more notional autonomy, but at the same time was more vulnerable to performative interventions via the Regional Schools Commissioner and Ofsted.

These differences were reflected in the way in which AAS was developed on each site. On the primary site, the headteacher led the development himself, with varying degrees of commitment from staff members. However, this was considerably enhanced by an initiative led by the MAT, whereby schools were challenged and supported in changing their behaviour policies. In the PRU, while the executive headteacher took a very direct approach, personally supporting staff and students, and offering both formal and informal CPD, she was from an early stage concerned to devolve responsibility through her leadership team and to gain staff ownership. She linked this both with performance management and with the core values of the MAT, and suggested that staff who were not happy with the approach might be more comfortable elsewhere. The secondary school operated a distributed management approach and, although the AAS initiative had come originally from the deputy headteacher, it was implemented through the whole leadership team. However, it was noticeable that both senior managers and the classroom teacher interviewed related the success of the intervention to the leadership of the head.

A lot of it comes back to our headteacher... She's 100% focussed on every single child in the school doing well and, you know, it wouldn't surprise me if in a school of 1,200 students, she knew everyone's name on site.

Jo (Teacher)

Another key difference was between the hierarchical levels of staff in each institution. The original research proposal identified a number of possible levels at which an initiative might take place:

- Policy eg DfE
- Intermediate eg local authority, Multi-academy Trust (MAT)
- Heads of establishment
- Senior managers
- Classroom practitioners (teachers, TAs, LSAs, mentors etc)
- Students
- Parents/carers
- Communities

In practice, the research data confirmed the relatively marginalised position of the local authority in any such development (see discussion below) but identified the growing and important role of the MAT. Again, senior managers on all three sites closely identified their role with that of the head; while at times this discussion does focus on the specific role of the headteacher, in the distributed management approach of the secondary school, for example, it is difficult to separate these, and there is no evidence emerging to suggest this would be desirable. There are significant differences between the management role and that of classroom practitioners; interestingly, the primary school assistant head, who was also a classroom teacher, described himself as “in a middle sort of role”, clearly distinguishing between these two identities, and at times using a different voice to explain the different perspectives:

I'm fairly positive as a senior leader [the MAT has] been supportive. The fly in the ointment around at the moment ... is a restructuring going on ... it's extremely unpopular in the general staff. Because we like our finance manager and our school business manager. They like working here and we like working with them.

Henry (AHT)

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Differences did arise, in hierarchical terms, between qualified teachers and other staff – mentors, TAs and LSAs – in the two mainstream schools, whereas in the PRU these were not seen as relevant; both the executive head and the CEO expressed strong views that it was relationships and authority with the students which was important, not hierarchical status, and the researcher’s observation was that these were indistinguishable in the PRU staff focus group.

If someone’s got it, they’ve got it. It doesn’t matter what rung they’re on, they’ve got it and they command an authority.

Marie (EHT)

It doesn’t matter what job they do... because actually, when it comes to managing the behaviour of our young people, when it comes to inputs to our young people, there’s no hierarchy about that.

Dave (MAT CEO)

The original research design envisaged interviews and focus groups with both students and parents/carers. However, it was not possible to include these under the Covid lockdown, and therefore only proxy data from staff was available. Similar issues applied to senior policy-makers, although it was decided at an early stage of the pandemic that these were unlikely significantly to enhance data which was already available in policy documents. However, the two MAT CEOs were involved, recognising the direct operational role which they were playing in AAS developments

Key themes

A number of themes were pursued in focus groups and interviews in order to understand individuals’ differing views. The initial themes were:

- Understanding and implementation of AAS
- Who decides – is the initiative top-down or bottom up?
- Who is it for – is it universal or targeted?
- Who has or has not benefitted from the initiative?

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- Who has been empowered/disempowered?

Further issues emerged in the course of fieldwork, which were:

- Segmentation issues – race, class and gender
- The impact of Covid
- AAS and mental health

These are discussed in the following sections

The application of attachment theory to schools

The understanding of AAS diverged across all three sites. For the primary school the focus for most teachers was on emotion coaching (EC) as a technique for managing behaviour, although as the initiative developed there appears to have been a wider appreciation of this as a way of supporting well-being and achievement for a broader group of pupils. This approach was much better established among the TAs, some of whom were actively seeking further training as Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs). Managers all saw AAS developments as linked to the behaviour support training which had been commissioned by the MAT, while the headteacher articulated a clear view of attachment awareness as part of an empowerment strategy for pupils: “Giving the children the keys to unlock their future” (John).

The PRU Executive Head similarly described her main role as “teaching [students]... about negotiating, using their words to negotiate” (Marie). The MAT CEO, sought to:

Ensure our young people have a positive experience of education. But that doesn't mean we let them get away with stuff.... the consequence has to be inevitable. It doesn't have to be severe... that could be a raised eyebrow. Because the strength of relationship is enough that if I show disappointment in you, that's all I need to do.

Dave (MAT CEO)

The first stage of fieldwork (February – June 2020) revealed a gap between PRU managers, who saw AAS as part of a strategy to develop staff awareness of attachment and trauma-informed approaches, and frontline staff who, while committed to relationship-based approaches, were suspicious of yet another initiative, given the number of management changes in recent years. This suspicion appeared to have largely dissipated by the time of the second phase of fieldwork (February 2021), with staff much more likely to articulate the trauma and neuroscience-informed theoretical model promoted by the Executive Headteacher:

It just changed the conversation, because you stop talking about what sanctions do you use... and you start talking about what's going on for that child in that situation. And that's gradually crept in, because then other people start using that... there's teachers that have been there a little while... have started talking like that themselves.

Guy (Teacher)

Managers in the secondary school also articulated a clear rationale for adopting AAS approaches, and this appeared to be understood and accepted in principle by classroom staff. However, an interview with a classroom teacher suggested that this theoretical understanding did not necessarily translate into classroom practice, as opposed to wider pastoral concerns:

I'd say it was about ten years ago... reading about attachment awareness, the things that I've read, we put in place within school. So, it would have been in my capacity as a head of year.

Jo (Teacher)

Attachment Aware Schools and professional status

Some of the different understandings identified may relate to hierarchical status. In the mainstream schools there was clearly a distance between senior managers and front-line staff, in terms of classroom management, although possibly less so in terms of more liminal spaces such as corridors, where managers may be expected to take a lead. This distinction was seen as of lesser importance in the PRU:

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Obviously there's a hierarchy, because it's a school, but it's not about the hierarchy... like our restraint training, because there's no hierarchy when it comes to restraint. So, if someone comes in and I'm sitting here with a young person and they say 'there's a telephone call for you Dave', they've recognised I need to leave. I leave, Chief Executive or not.

Dave (MAT CEO)

It is largely the classroom practitioners who are expected to manage the pressures involved in relationships with children and young people, and a variety of responses can be identified. Some primary school teachers took a traditional behaviourist approach to behaviour management – reinforcing their hierarchical position – while others prioritised the development of relationships with their pupils.

A long time ago, and our school rules were based on this, we had someone in to do assertive discipline... basically 'I've asked you to move and so'... not getting involved in any arguments, then just repeating the instruction, and then we've got the consequences, the warning..

I'll be honest, in our class we have to tailor things a little...a lot of children, they can cope with that – 'Oh yes I was chatting' – but for some that is enough to break a relationship that you've got with them. They just feel belittled, I guess.

Primary school teachers' focus group

Both of these approaches might be seen as consistent with the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2011), but the differing interpretation of these standards demonstrates the potential contradictions between the ideological assumptions of the policy makers who originated these standards, and those of the teachers who are implementing them. Indeed, this difference might be seen as reflecting Carspecken's (1996) distinction between 'outer' subjectivity – acting as you believe you are expected to play your role – and 'inner' subjectivity – behaving in accordance with your own experience and values.

In terms of other non-teacher roles, Primary school TAs, while exhibiting some diffidence with regard to the theoretical notions of AAS/EC (see below), were confident in applying these in practice:

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When I've heard it used and used it myself in the classroom... It's just a different way of seeing how you can help a child – getting onto their level, rather than pounding them with 'what's the matter now? ... It's more a matter of 'I can see' – you show that child that you agree with them – you're validating the feelings like that – then 'we'll sort it out'.

Marianne (TA)

This may also be related to changing conceptions of the TA role:

We are in a period of transition for the TA's role of washing up paint jars and sticking bits of work into books. We are now becoming more of an involved part social worker, carer, part-time parent. It feels like all those roles are being merged into one.

Carly (TA)

However, this was seen within a context of teamwork and mutual respect:

They will all have your back, you know. There is no teacher here, I would say, that doesn't – we're just part of the team.

Marianne (TA)

The MAT CEO, too, saw the importance of including all staff:

Where time is a pressure, what tends to happen is key groups don't get the depth of training that they need, so not everybody owns it... one of the key groups we've identified... are our Midday Supervisors. It is in that free time where there's not quite so much controlled space – they need to be more aware of attachment than some of our other staff, because they see the behaviours, they don't necessarily see the way it's supported within a structured learning environment.

Pete (MAT CEO)

There was a similar status distinction in the secondary school. The assistant head for teaching and learning, distinguished between those staff – teachers and learning support assistants (LAs) – whose professional career was seen as orientated to the pastoral side, and those who were curriculum-orientated:

People who have a natural career progression in pastoral base support, teaching or whatever it is, they've naturally gravitated towards the training a lot more than others.

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Carole (AHT)

By contrast with some of the primary school teachers, the assistant head for behaviour was critical of traditional disciplinary styles:

It's staff ego ie this kind of archaic approach to behaviour where you must respect me, you must be silent when I speak to you, you must not answer me... OK that's the approach you want to take but, let's look, it's not going to work.

Frances (AHT)

Both Frances and Jo pointed out the important role of non-teaching colleagues:

The team that works with vulnerable students, is very good, very experienced and communicate regularly... getting to know the students with attachment issues... the learning mentors, the relationships they develop with those students and how they support them, I think are fantastic.

Jo (Teacher)

However, the assistant head for achievement was more sceptical about the status of support staff as a whole:

I do sometimes wonder if admin staff feel slightly out of the loop... The [LAs] attached to faculties I think would feel more included and more part of the team than those who aren't... [one has] actually become the deputy SENCO – she's not got a teaching qualification. I think she often feels a bit forlorn and she's running around after EHCP students without a sense of belonging.

Mollie (AHT)

This does suggest an implicit hierarchy in secondary schools, not simply between those who are or are not qualified teachers, but also between those who aspire to an academic rather than a pastoral role. This potentially reinforces dominant norms about the relative importance of transmitting knowledge, against developing positive relationships with students.

As indicated above, there was far less formal status distinction among staff, in professional terms, in the PRU. This may reflect both the relative 'outsider' status of the

students, whereby the staff have more leeway for alternative approaches as part of an expectation that they will maintain social control, and also the practical necessity to ensure that all staff are ready to intervene and support each other in the case of an incident. The PRU is perceived by many in education as having lower status as a school because of the low status of its students who have been excluded from mainstream schools. One respondent in Timpson (2019: 74) described PRUs as ‘the ‘underbelly’ of our education system’. As a result, staff do not have to strive to keep up appearances, but are able and encouraged to adopt a student-centred approach and to develop their own solutions. The role of senior managers in leading the change programme appears to have been appreciated:

Mostly Marie and [Head of Centre] are having those conversations, but the staff are gradually getting more confident in having those conversations with the students.

Guy (Teacher)

There is a considerable literature (eg Gore Langton and Boy, 2017) which suggests that whole-school, non-hierarchical and mutually supportive staff relationships are important in supporting vulnerable children in schools. On this argument, hierarchical assumptions may militate against effective implementation of AAS approaches, as reflecting the dominant value structure. It is interesting to note that, in both of the mainstream schools, there was a strong rhetoric of staff teamwork, despite some implicit hierarchical assumptions. The question becomes as to whether AAS approaches do actually modify those assumptions and social structures at school level, and whether those changes are merely superficial or can be transformational.

Implementing AAS in practice

The primary school head saw AAS as fundamental to the core school values, but promoted the approach via Emotion Coaching (EC); it was notable that primary school front line staff appeared more comfortable discussing practical EC approaches, than the

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more strategic issues of AAS, and this remained the case in the follow-up interviews, where these were also linked with the new MAT-wide behaviour strategy.

The emotion coaching language like 'It's OK to feel angry, but it's never OK to hit somebody ... I've seen consistently in the school... We started with emotion coaching so when the Pivotal training came along and we were told 'this is going to be your behaviour approach in your school'... it was a good fit.

Henry (AHT)

In the PRU the Executive Headteacher saw the AAS approach as supporting her strategic aim of introducing an understanding of trauma and related neuroscience. Staff were confident in the focus group to describe relationship-based practice, but were somewhat more diffident in relating this to the new AAS strategy. However, the consistent way in which the MAT values and approaches were promoted seems by the following year to have given staff a theoretical framework which reinforced their subjective understanding of good practice:

What really had the biggest impact... was when Marie started talking about... 'what's going on in that child's brain when that's happening?' Because then, the people who would say: 'well they just need sorting out'... you just can't say it, can you?

Guy (Teacher)

For the secondary school, the initiative was led by the Leadership Team as a whole. It was the theoretical framework which was foregrounded, alongside an understanding that not all staff were equally comfortable with the approach and its associated procedures – in this case a commitment to restorative approaches:

We make sure we follow up on every challenge in a lesson with a restorative conversation. Staff hate it – or they hated it at first – but they're coming round to it now, they're seeing the benefits and the impact of rebuilding the relationship before the students go back into the classroom. It's taken two years, I would say, to really get the staff on board.

Frances (AHT)

In all three sites the development of the new approach was underpinned with a practical help sheet for staff. Carspecken suggests that such 'symbolic representations' can be used to move from a vague subjective understanding of the issues involved, to 'an internal standard by which we judge the adequacy of our self-expressive acts' (Carspecken, 1996: 168) ie a normative/evaluative ontology, in Habermas' (1978) terms. In the primary school this took the form of lanyards with printed 'conversation starters' to support staff; these were remarked upon in both the TA and the teacher focus groups (Transcripts 1 and 2) and were still being used a year later:

On our name badges, our lanyards, we have a little check card on the back giving us a kind of mini script and language to use, and I find that helps as well to kind of drip into my brain what language I'm using when I have to deal with children who are in an emotional state.

Henry (AHT)

Similarly, secondary school managers referred to 'restorative conversation scripts', although in a later follow-up interview an assistant head stated that staff needed reminding as to how to undertake these conversations, following the Covid lockdowns, suggesting that they had not been internalised by staff to the same extent as in the primary school.

Rather than just discussing attachment theory as a theory, I think we now need to give staff practical approaches, then we will revisit that we need to use restorative conversations.

Mollie (AHT)

A PRU senior teacher indicated the growing use of a teacher-developed 'reflection sheet' across the primary age-range:

We have a reflection sheet... we've managed to encourage that to be used across our primary provision with all of our pupils... What we've seen is the older class, the TA, the teacher in there, adapt what is there to aid reflection, to suit the need of having slightly older children.

Olivia (ST)

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However, this did not appear to have been adopted by secondary colleagues, despite the increasing liaison between the two age-ranges, although Guy referred to a number of other primary age-range strategies which were being adopted:

What we've started doing a lot is working a bit more closely with primary and taking on some of their ways of working. Little things like bringing in Lego...

Guy (Teacher)

It seems, in this case, it was not the individual operational activities which were important, but the overall strategic approach which had been internalised. It is arguable therefore that, while the symbolic representation can be important in establishing an approach from a top-down management perspective, it is the bottom-up internalisation of the approach and its associated theories which are truly transformative.

Attachment and learning

A key feature of AAS developments on all three sites was the relationship between AAS and learning. The Primary School MAT CEO was keen to stress that the core of his approach was towards removing barriers to learning:

What we've seen over the last three or four years now has been a growth in a need to understand more about attachment awareness and trauma. We've put a huge amount of work around understanding barriers for learning for every single child and that's underpinning our educational strategy.

Pete (MAT CEO)

This echoes Scales *et al.* (2020), who emphasise the importance of appropriate challenge in meeting children's attachment needs, as opposed to merely being 'caring'. Henry describes this as a change in his own perception of EC within the school:

I do use it a bit more if they're well-behaved but not working very well. So, it's OK to find things hard but it's never OK to give up.

Henry (AHT)

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In the PRU, staff prioritised their practical strategies to encouraging learning, as well as describing how AAS approaches supported student achievement and outcomes.

The only way we're going to get our children to want to engage in their learning with us is to get them into the frontal cortex of their brain and in order to do that we have to develop really positive and trusting relationships with us so that they will take the risk of learning and failing with us.

Marie (EHT)

I've been working really hard to get his entry level Maths finished and he's pinky promised me [laughs] .. but that's the thing, you can just find your little way in; 'I can see you're tired today, we won't do it today' and he's promised me we'll do it tomorrow.

PRU staff focus group

I think we're definitely seeing engagement... we've, historically ... always done quite well in terms of grades, so, even when things were really challenging... we still managed to get the students some really good grades.

Guy (Teacher)

We're definitely into a huge improvement journey... from the last couple of years of outcomes in terms of destinations, exam results, attendance, referrals to other agencies... we know that now these young people are getting a good deal.

Dave (MAT CEO)

All four secondary school respondents, regardless of role, spoke in terms of AAS supporting learning, with student attainment as a key priority.

In the ideal world, we need to look at how attachment supports behaviour for learning systems and maybe looking at the behaviour for learning and the mental health policy becoming one.

Frances (AHT)

The students who've got better attachment do seem to do better, because they're able to ... speak to adults about ... what they're not understanding... Students who are lower-achieving, they struggle to articulate their feelings ... I mean, one girl I can think of in Year 11, she's going to underachieve in [subject] because there's just a set of factors which haven't worked out... And rather than express that and say 'excuse me, I don't understand it, it makes me feel anxious', she swore at the teacher.

Mollie (AHT)

This illustrates a clear link between AAS and ‘flourishing’ in Spratt’s (2016) categorisation, as opposed to the health, emotional and social categories of wellbeing, which Spratt suggests are frequently subverted to support normative, rather than transformative, ends.

Moreover, this finding challenges the assertions of Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) who argue that ‘therapeutic’ approaches to education are undermining the quality of learning or of Bialostock and Aronson (2016) that the ‘emotionalisation’ of the curriculum is preparing pupils to submit uncritically to neoliberal values and work patterns. Further, both sets of writers assume that ‘therapeutic’ education is taught in the classroom via specific lessons. Although the secondary school did include a specific two-week classroom-based programme to support students after the first lockdown, this was seen as an aberration to the normal fortnightly PSHE programme:

We really focussed for the first two weeks on PSHE... we usually do that once every fortnight, but when we came back we had nine lessons on it, so it was... a lesson every single day... By having those PSHE lessons and ... filtering some of the learning that we had done in September... that allowed students to come back and ... maintain... those positive relations.

Carole (AHT)

Similarly, the primary school introduced their EC programme via whole-school approaches such as school assemblies, briefings for parents and poster campaigns, rather than prescribed classroom activities:

Henry John introduced these little cards... It was part of getting it in and was disseminated to TAs who weren’t here for your input initially ...

Teacher And we’ve amalgamated the language that’s used on there for those children’s de-escalation plans as well. And the Behavioural person for [local authority], I think she quite likes it too.

Henry John introduced it to the children in an assembly as well...

Teacher We have a big display board in the hall with ... what the different steps are, and that’s quite a visual for dinner times – for children as well as for the adults.

Primary school teacher focus group

Underlying theoretical perspectives

In terms of underlying theory it is worth noting that, while all teachers in the primary school focus group were confident in discussing the theoretical background of EC, and relating this to other existing school strategies, this was not uniformly the case in the TA focus group, where one individual even questioned whether she was competent to be involved, although taking a full part in the subsequent discussion:

I am using it but I don't understand all... I'm doing what I've been told to do, do you know what I mean? I don't know the background behind it, that's all I'm trying to say. Am I the right person to be here?

Anna (TA)

This diffidence with regard to ideas could be seen among PRU secondary staff in the initial focus group, although again they were confident in describing their practice. The staff focus group and interviews with senior managers suggested that the PRU primary team were further ahead with implementing AAS based approaches.

In primary they've got a reflection sheet ... it's a model that we want to introduce here, but we can't have one person who's able to do that, or three people. It has to be everyone's able to do that and we're still on that journey, of getting everyone on board.

Marie (EHT)

However, as indicated above, a later interview suggested that secondary were now actively engaged in learning with and from primary age-range colleagues. This appeared to result from the practical modelling of approaches from the leadership team, particularly the Executive Headteacher, linked to informal CPD on the core theoretical model, based on trauma and neuroscience, and through staff debriefs on individual children and incidents. Thus, on this site, a shared subjective understanding as to 'what works best' with this particular group of young people has been transformed into a shared objective view of 'what is happening in their brains' when incidents occur, leading to a new normative/evaluative approach which all members of staff are able to articulate – a clear example of 'praxis' (Habermas, 1978) in action.

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The secondary school respondents all expressed a clear theoretical understanding of the principles of attachment theory. Like the primary school TAs and the PRU secondary staff, the classroom teacher was confident in describing relationship-based approaches, but was vaguer as to how the theory of attachment applied to the classroom. This is perhaps similar to the attitude of some of the primary school staff who intellectualised attachment as an interesting theory, rather than considering the detailed implications for their practice. It may also represent a generational view of teaching as a profession, given that this individual was of an age with some of the older and more sceptical primary school teachers. Riley (2013) suggests that, to survive in the classroom, long-serving teachers need to develop, consciously or otherwise, a robust internal working model (Bowlby, 1988) to maintain their self-confidence and relationships with their students, and thus behaviours which are supportive of AAS approaches may be taken for granted and not necessarily be recognised as such.

Theories of change

Within these theoretical perspectives, individuals expressed different approaches to change. The primary school headteacher articulated a clear empowerment agenda:

*The emphasis has changed from... what we can do **for** [his emphasis] the children, to helping children do things for themselves’.*

John (HT)

The Primary MAT CEO saw his role as “understanding the barriers to learning for every single child” (Transcript 10). While this seems to encapsulate a concern for the individual as a whole person, which challenges a neoliberal view of the individual merely as a consumer, and rejects the notion of ‘conformist ‘well/can cope’ sheep and nonconformist ‘sick/needs specialist support’ goats’ (Parker and Levinson, 2018; 876), this is set within the norms and values of an Established Church framework, which does not necessarily challenge the status quo. Similarly, several – although not all – of the teachers in the primary school focus group saw EC as effectively relating to classroom control. Although Henry’s views had evolved between February 2020 and March 2021 towards a much

more comprehensive understanding of AAS/EC being applicable for all students, he still articulated this mainly in terms of whole school behaviour policies and meeting the needs of those with “mild to moderate” difficulties (Transcript 14). The shared world-views, subjective experience, norms and values of all involved were broadly consistent across the primary school. Changes can be observed, which were transformational for individuals, effectively implemented across the school, but which arguably did not transform the wider social context.

The PRU demonstrated a different type of change. Clear and consistent messaging, teaching by example and informal CPD based on the everyday experience of staff and students at the Centre, gave staff a theoretical framework by which to assess their current practice, “making staff more confident” (Olivia), “something to hang your coat on” (Chaz). Guy explained:

It almost feels like we didn't know stuff. Now you know stuff... it's not really coming from anywhere, it's always been there.

Guy (Teacher)

By contrast, the secondary school respondents, as discussed above, were articulating a clear whole-school and universal approach, while acknowledging that this had not necessarily been internalised to the same extent by all staff. Here the issue was more the impact of external pressures, the practicalities of managing lockdown, and expectations as to how the school was expected to perform within a neoliberal framework:

The staff culture has become a bit negative at the moment, so that's what we need to work on... if we get the culture right I think the wellbeing will be a lot better, and that comes through that consistency and the practical tips I think, at this stage.

Mollie (AHT)

These pressures revealed the fragility of the overall approach, challenging the shared world views, subjective experience and self-identity of the individuals involved, and leading to a re-calibration of norms and values. As in the primary school it may also

reflect a tension between inner (how we would like to behave) and outer (how we are expected to behave) subjectivities (Carspecken, 1996).

Initial research questions

Top down or bottom up?

The question of where decisions are taken surfaced issues in the wider governance of initiatives of this nature, the impact of intermediate structures such as multi-academy trusts and local authorities, and the nature of institutional leadership. A number of studies (Harrison, 2022; Rose *et al.* 2016b) have emphasised the important role played by heads of establishment in implementing AAS approaches. If, however, AAS is to be transformational, there needs to be ownership and active participation at all levels. The question then becomes the extent to which a particular programme is merely reproducing dominant social hierarchies and values, or to which it can be challenged, subverted and shared by subordinate groups.

The role of intermediate bodies

An interesting finding has been the role of intermediate bodies – typically local authorities and multi-academy trusts (MATs) – in supporting and promoting projects. The role of the MAT emerged in both the primary school and the PRU; the secondary school was a Single Academy Trust (SAT), which gave it strong notional autonomy, but which was a disadvantage when unanticipated external pressures arose, and where it felt vulnerable to performative intervention or even being forced into joining a MAT, thereby losing that autonomy.

The primary school initially adopted a ‘pick and mix’ approach, using local authority and MAT support on an ad hoc basis.

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We've had quite a lot of outside agencies, so we've had the Behaviour Support, which we do have to pay for because we are an academy. We've had the SEN team in with a surgery around these... I've been on some training myself That was organised by the Virtual School...

Sylvia, primary school SENCo,

Similarly, the MAT CEO, pointed to potential difficulties in operating across local authority boundaries:

What we've started to see, is that there was a need for a consistency in approach. There are geographical differences, partly through geographical differences in training, which is due to different local authorities.

Pete (MAT CEO)

The secondary school cooperated positively, but not uncritically, with available local authority and other statutory services:

[The Lead Mentor] liaises with CAMHS... and the WAMHS [Wellbeing and Mental Health in Schools] consultant will meet with the learning mentors, with myself, the designated safeguarding lead, and we have a mental health lead, who's the Deputy Head... what we are trying to do is ... making sure students access the GP, all the early help, support that we can implement...

[She] will hold agencies to account. She'll make sure they're sticking to their appointments, for an update on their care, because what tends to happen, historically, agencies will meet with students so the schools are not actually sure ... what's been discussed and what's been agreed.

Frances (AHT)

The PRU had been actively involved in the development of its MAT strategic plan prior to and during lockdown. This was seen by senior managers, and increasingly by frontline staff, as supporting its own priorities and students:

Those things have been agreed from the ground up through whole trust-wide inset days which have encapsulated a) the values and ethos of our company, but also our direction. So, it came from the bottom up, it's been now ratified by the Board.

Marie (EHT)

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The thing I find positive about [MAT name] is that they are very much child centred so I feel personally that they are singing from the same song sheet as me, they're in it for our young people and I think that makes a big difference.

Olivia (ST)

By contrast with the other two sites, PRU staff at all levels were sceptical about local authority support, seeing it as hostile or simply non-existent:

[The MAT said] 'putting him here is not meeting his needs, we are letting this child down and we're not going along with that'... seeing that happen gave me a bit of confidence that actually, they're not just going to chuck kids in regardless. And I think that has probably sent a bit of a message to the local authority as well.

Guy (Teacher)

*When I first started **here** [her emphasis] there were a few months that I did feel uncomfortable, because I didn't know [local authority name] policies and procedures, and I wasn't proven here and I felt very much – not from a school point of view, but from a local authority point of view – that there were people ready to take me down.*

Marie (EHT)

I mean they really did disappear into their bedrooms, these other agencies who were, should, be, there to support these young people and their families.

Dave (MAT CEO)

Management approaches

There were contrasting ways of managing AAS initiatives. In the first phase sites both heads set out clear expectations about the way in which they wished to pursue the approach. The primary school head was clearly leading from the front, consulting widely with his local management board, parents and staff, offering practical support in the form of materials, posters and assemblies for the children, and setting out parameters within which he wished staff to operate; for example, insisting that EC approaches be used before he would intervene in cases of misbehaviour:

And for myself it's really helpful, rather than a teacher coming to my office door and saying 'so and so's had a meltdown' – effectively 'come and sort it' – I can say 'have you been through the emotion coaching script?'

John (HT)

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Nonetheless, while all teaching staff appreciated the head's lead, and were aware of and could articulate the initiative, implementation was not necessarily consistent; some teachers were highly supportive of the approach, while others preferred to retain the former sanctions-based disciplinary approaches. TAs on the other hand were highly engaged, using the techniques and offering their own suggestions. There was also an initial attempt to engage pupils themselves in the process – some teachers encouraged pupils to write scripts for their own use with peers – although the headteacher was mildly sceptical about the extent to which this learning had survived the Covid lockdown:

I don't know if the children would remember now – you know what children's memories are like!

John (HT)

Parents, too, were involved – including a briefing/training session with the researcher, where those present requested their own focus group as part of the research, although later Covid restrictions prevented this. There is also evidence of their active engagement in using EC techniques:

With my little boy, who I was very concerned about in September, because his Mum and Dad are on the same page as us and do the same things as us, I would say it's made a huge difference.

Primary school teacher focus group

The PRU Executive Head made a conscious attempt to develop a more distributed leadership approach. She delivered her own CPD, established a support group of senior staff to coordinate the AAS initiative and encouraged the primary age range staff to build on and extend existing practice. She was keen to ensure that the approach was modelled by the leadership team and articulated the aim of distributing ownership among the staff, but was clear that ultimately she would embed it via performance management:

I'm going to do it in a more open way to invite ownership from staff. And from that point, actually hold people to account through performance management and ask them to evidence the trauma-informed/attachment aware approach/emotion coaching.

Marie (EHT)

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The emphasis on staff developing their own response within the overall framework initially highlighted differences of approach between the PRU primary and secondary teams. However, by February 2021, the modelling, CPD and reinforcement in practice of Trauma Informed approaches, and the encouragement of collaboration between primary and secondary teams appeared to have encouraged PRU staff to internalise AAS as a theoretical model.

The thing that's had the biggest impact on changing staff views on behaviour and the emotional side of things, is Marie talking about that.

Guy (Teacher)

The secondary school programme, although formally initiated by the Deputy Head, was managed through the Leadership Team. All three Assistant Heads interviewed described this as enhancing existing programmes, especially restorative approaches, which the school had been implementing for several years:

The students are aware that there's things happening within the school that are extra or that are different, and that is starting to filter through, and I do think that the importance that we've placed around restorative conversations and positive relationships..

Carole (AHT)

In restorative conversations it works really well to use attachment approaches, embedding it more, where students are aware of it as well.

Mollie (AHT)

They highlighted the importance of a specific CPD session which had been delivered in November 2020, but all expressed concerns that this had not been fully implemented and internalised by all staff because of the Covid lockdown, 'bubble' arrangements and the need to prioritise online learning. Attachment training itself was seen as part of the ongoing management dialogue between school leaders and staff. In a follow-up interview in June 2021 Mollie stated:

It feels like attachment training, it did become bottom up but now I feel we need to spread the culture again of having clear boundaries as well. And I think our staff

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are quite good at that. Once we have set it up as a leadership team, we do get staff buy-in – they understand our ‘why, and then... hopefully, that will be bottom up and we can embed the attachment training as well.

Mollie (AHT)

Staff engagement

These differences between sites may relate to individual management style, the culture of the institution, its location, and more general social perceptions of the different schools. For example, a ‘good’ church primary school in a favoured suburb may be expected to perform differently from a PRU on an industrial estate or an oversubscribed inner-city secondary school. Staff may well have internalised such views, with primary school staff – especially teachers – expecting a top-down hierarchical model emphasising professional standards, against a secondary school staff used to a more consultative approach, while PRU staff at all levels expressed a wartime camaraderie and a willingness to try out new ideas, despite a suspicion of ever-changing management structures.

It’s a little bit like going to war together, there is a definite camaraderie that you establish, because only those people working in our setting understand sometimes what is going on, on some of those days.

Olivia (ST)

There were lots of really not nice changes – I think that what happened was, it brought everyone together, staff and students... students feeling ... almost trying to prove that we don’t care about them... ‘every other adult has let me down so you ain’t no different’ - until you prove otherwise. I think the fact that all the staff are still there... the students knew most of what was going on because it’s really difficult to hide things. And so, they knew that those adults were still there, wanted to be there.

Guy (Teacher)

On the primary school and PRU sites there was evidence of front-line practitioners developing their own initiatives in support of the programme:

Marianne has found the most amazing Lego man with a blank head - and I think that four children are now using it. Just checking periodically through the day –

how are you feeling now? Which head are we going to put on now, and I'm wondering why?

Carly (TA)

There was less evidence of this in the secondary school context, possibly reflecting the actual sample of staff interviewed, but equally as a result of the external pressures faced by the school in terms of Covid, examinations, and local politics.

There is a paradox as to whether a 'top down' approach can at the same time promote a 'bottom up' engagement in an activity which seeks to empower those with lesser status and to challenge existing social norms. This was perhaps best expressed by the primary school assistant head:

If it hadn't... come from top down to start with, then it probably wouldn't have happened. But... there was a definite theme of people coming up and asking for help... So in that sense, yes, it's come from bottom up but then how we've done it has been imposed from top down.

Henry (AHT)

Targeted or universal

Another key issue in identifying transformational against normative approaches is the distinction between targeted and universal strategies. A targeted approach implies a medical model based on individual pathology: there is something wrong with you which needs to be cured. A universal approach, on the other hand, implies a social, or collective, model: we are doing something from which everyone can benefit. Leaders on all three sites, and both CEOs, gave a consistent message that AAS was a universal strategy for developing relationships across the whole school, but views were much more variable within the primary school teacher group.

Targeted approaches

Some primary school teachers suggested in 2020 that EC was not appropriate for younger age groups, or associated it with managing individual 'poor' behaviour. It was linked

strongly with SEND, although, paradoxically, several took the view that it was not effective with children on the Autism Spectrum.

I've got very young children - Reception class ... and the majority of them don't really get it. If they are upset about something, all they want to do is blame somebody else, and they don't really get the talking through their emotion. We have one child who is particularly aggressive – he gets very cross very easily – and it works really well with him.

I think it doesn't work particularly with children on the ASD spectrum. I would say these are very young, very immature children ... summer-born boys – they don't really get it yet.

Primary school teachers' focus group

EC was seen by some teachers as a mechanism for social control – managing those individuals who could or would not conform to the norms of the school, and implicitly those of wider society. Follow-up interviews in 2021 suggested that views were changing, with a broader emphasis on AAS/EC being applicable for all children, although an acceptance that some teaching staff still saw this as being limited.

We see it, I think, as being most effective for the children who have kind of mild to moderate behaviour needs, be it disengagement, to disruption within a class. The children who have been... perfectly behaved, it's being used less with. I can see a role for it with all of them, but I don't think it's being used yet.

Henry (AHT)

These changes were ascribed partly to the impact of Covid 'bubble' arrangements, which meant that teachers were having to deal with classroom issues themselves rather than refer them on, and partly to the new approach to behaviour support being promoted across the MAT.

These children, plus some of them who are, if you like, below that level, who are tricky, but not, kind of, to the level where they are at risk of disrupting everyone, they've had to get on with it a bit in bubble life. They've ... [not been] ... taken out of the room.

Henry (AHT)

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We're bringing in high quality practitioners who are working with members of our staff to train them up and then that CPD is being delivered across the trust... I don't think it's good enough that we have one person, potentially in every school, who is the attachment member of staff. It needs to be really clearly embedded in all of the work... anybody coming in to the trust, we want to ensure that they all understand it.

Pete (MAT CEO)

Support and relationships

Primary school TAs and all PRU staff took an approach which was practical, pragmatic and child-centred. They expressed a degree of scepticism about formal SEND categories and had practical strategies for coping with challenging behaviour, based on an understanding of the individual child or young person's needs.

Children are not just text book children are they? We're all individuals – it works for that one, but not for that one and therefore we approach that in a slightly different way... I think that's what's hard really, when you come in and you have two children who may have exactly the same complex needs; one child may have had parents... who may have managed to get funding for them and come into school with adult help, and the other child may not have had anything like that ...

Marianne (TA)

Marianne *On Monday morning if we can't get them from the playground to the classroom in one piece, then we know they have had a rotten weekend... You can talk to them, but a bit like Anna says, sometimes they just put the shutters up and that's it.*

Anna *Absolutely! You just can't get through. Trying to do a lot of distraction always.*

Marianne *'Take this thing for me' – give them a job.*

Anna *Give them something to do then try to go back there – how are you feeling?*

Marianne *And also, when the red mist hits and they've really lost [it], it's definitely not the time to 'wonder' about anything!*

Anna *Just give them time out!*

Primary School TA Focus Group

Without prompting, a PRU senior teacher discussed this in terms of children identified with ASD, suggesting that mainstream teachers did not have the time to identify the

triggers for such behaviours, and the sort of strategies which could be used to develop the children's resilience and ability to self-regulate.

I think a lot of why our young people come to us is feeling not listened to. And in our setting being smaller ratios and having these reflection times when we don't tell them they're wrong for getting cross, we don't tell them off for that, we have our set script along that: 'it's ok to be angry but we have to think about how we show that, how we tell people that, because it's not ok to hurt people'.

Olivia (ST)

In this context EC was seen as a means of empowering self-regulation – for staff as much as for pupils. It was also notable that in the PRU staff focus group a TA who worked across both primary and secondary phases described using very similar strategies for both age ranges:

Especially with the primary – it feels like, if they get past a point, they are really heightened and they're tired and upset, it doesn't matter what you say or do, it doesn't matter what you promised, it's like you can't reach them any more... so we try to intervene before it gets to that point...

I said 'It's OK to be angry and to not know why you are angry – it happens to me sometimes as well' – and I said, 'but thank you for not hitting anyone or breaking anything. That shows me how mature you are'.

PRU secondary age range focus group

Secondary school respondents were also more likely to relate AAS to universal approaches.

We want everyone to feel included in our school – we want everybody to achieve their very best if not more. So, I think the way we try to treat everybody – we try to treat everybody equally – is definitely an attachment approach.

Mollie (AHT)

As in the primary school they indicated the impact of Covid bubbles on classroom teachers taking responsibility for a wider range of behaviour and other needs.

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We had to take the option away from students really being removed from lessons... Because we're finding the more they're in the learning process, the better they're self-regulating, the better they are doing academically.

Frances (AHT)

Supporting parents and families

Similar discourses can be seen in terms of relations with parents, where some primary school teachers implicitly distinguished between good and inadequate parents:

With the ones whose parents are on board I would say that's made the biggest difference. But it's ... getting the parents on board and coming to training – the types of parents that don't come to the training is what you really want there.

Primary school teachers' focus group

The PRU and secondary school were much more focussed on supporting all parents – including those from socially excluded communities - in managing relationships with their children.

We try to take a supportive approach to attendance because what we find is, in the past, when we've threatened parents with fines and things like that, it just sets up a challenge between the parents and the school. The focus is then removed from the student. So, we tend to get the student in, to see what benefits they are on, whether we've got the links with the appropriate services.

Frances (AHT)

Thus, again, it appears that the recourse to a discourse of individual pathology is related to a supposed professional and hierarchical position, which tends to 'other' children and families who are perceived not to conform to social norms, while more universal approaches are adopted by those who relate more directly with student needs.

Withdrawal units and exclusions

An interesting aspect of this dichotomy is the attitude to withdrawal units and exclusions within the three sites. In the primary school the headteacher, the SENCO and the assistant head referred to the nurture unit they were developing as a flexible response

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for children who had difficulty in coping with full-time classroom activities, but this was not mentioned in the teacher focus group. Similarly, the secondary school was looking to make more positive use of the student support centre. In the PRU withdrawal activities were seen as a norm, via off site groups, walks or library visits – part of tailoring the curriculum offer to the students’ needs, including during lockdown.

I’ve managed to build into our timetable weekly swimming sessions, trips to the donkey sanctuary on Fridays, to work with their social/emotional programme up there... and getting them out regularly ... in the forest and walks and things like that, so I think that’s been really important.

Olivia (ST)

We’d do one student at a time. We’d meet them at their home and we’d try to walk somewhere where there’s a local park, even little things like a walk on the local beach... we’d take a football or a basketball and we’d just use the facilities.

Guy (Teacher)

In terms of exclusions, some primary school teachers appeared embarrassed to mention a fixed-term exclusion which had taken place at the school.

With one child in my class unfortunately... am I allowed to say where he is this week?... He’s currently excluded. I’m not saying it’s to do with emotion coaching because... I think he, when he’s in a good place, he feels fully supported and valued but it’s not helping put a lid on the most extreme of behaviour.

Primary school teachers’ focus group

This perhaps reflects an acceptance of a current dominant norm which sees exclusions as undesirable (Timpson, 2019) and indicates a failure of their professional practice as a teacher.

The secondary school was keen to pursue alternatives to fixed term or internal exclusion, and this was part of the post-Covid review which the school was undertaking .

This year... when they demonstrated some high-end behaviour we’ve called a meeting with the services that they engage in and not excluded them. So we’ve

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kept them in school whereas previously we would have had them off site straight away... But then again what it has made us think is, do we need that moving forward?

Frances (AHT)

The issue here is how far withdrawal work remains non-stigmatising for the students involved, or whether there is a point beyond which setting limits means that individuals are excluded – legally or metaphorically – because they cannot meet externally imposed norms. The PRU staff and Executive Headteacher expressed some frustration at having to police a smoking policy, which was clearly causing conflict between the young people's culture and more general societal expectations.

I would say exclusions would go down over time. At this point in time they've spiked but that's because of the level of smoking, where we've been bound by our own policy, which is very annoying because we shoot ourselves in the foot..

Marie (EHT)

You're not going to be building the best relationships when you're chasing kids around and catching them smoking.

PRU Secondary staff focus group

The former head of the PRU had another view, using formal exclusion not so much as a sanction but rather as a way of opening up a dialogue with the young person.

I said 'look, you're supposed to be excluded, what are you doing?'. She said 'You're not excluding me', she says, 'I've come here, I want to be here so I'm staying here'. I said, 'Will you behave?' She says 'All right' and that was it... because she wanted to be there, she'd found somewhere she wanted to go.

Chaz (Former headteacher)

For heads of institutions there is an overriding responsibility for safeguarding students and staff, and clearly there are situational ethics concerning the age, vulnerabilities and contexts of children's and young people's behaviour. However, in all three sites there was a tension between withdrawal/exclusion of individuals because they could not be coped with and are rejected as people; and withdrawal/exclusion as a means of promoting dialogue. This point was developed in the response by the Attachment Research

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Community to the DfE Consultation on Behaviour (DfE, 2021b), which stressed the difference between:

Rooms and facilities which are intended to provide a safe space and/or time out facilities to enable children to cope with the pressures of school life, and those which have a limited punitive function.

ARC, 2021; 1

It further reflects Spratt's (2016) typology of different definitions of children's well-being, which suggests that many approaches, to health, to emotional well-being and to social care, while apparently neutral or even positive in intent, can carry strong normative implications, whereas a discourse of 'flourishing' – 'eudaimonia' in Aristotle's definition – can challenge this, particularly where it is linked to an orientation towards learning.

Who benefits?

There was broad consensus that AAS was potentially beneficial to all the parties involved. There was an interesting symbiosis between the schools and their MATs in this area. As early as June 2020 the primary school head was referring to advice received from the MAT in delivering a post-Covid 'Recovery Curriculum':

I think that emotion coaching will fit really well within that recovery curriculum, which is very much focussing on the children's needs and emotions, as they return to school... we looked at it across [MAT name].

John (HT)

The assistant headteacher referenced the importance of the MAT-led behaviour initiative in developing the AAS approach:

We were three-line whip from [MAT name] – 'you've had this training, you are going to use it in your school'... it's less punitive, ... much more fits the emotion coaching model.

Henry (AHT)

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In the PRU senior staff stressed the centrality of AAS to the MAT value structures.

It's important for me that as an organisation we live our values'. Dave (MAT CEO)

Through [MAT name] we have seen the ability to really focus on and understand our children from a Trauma Informed, Attachment Informed point of view, and they have got the ... scaffolding behind that.

Olivia (ST)

At the same time an experienced classroom teacher who had been sceptical about the initiative and potential management support in February 2020 (Transcript 3), was enthusiastically embracing trauma-based approaches, and his perception of the supportive attitude of the MAT, twelve months later.

I think the ability to say no and the fact that [MAT name] are actually going to do it... Now we've got someone who is an experienced AP head, who wants to be in AP, and who is able to argue with the local authority, which I don't think they have done in the past.

Guy (Teacher)

Thus, intermediate bodies and - by association – schools within their MAT, benefitted directly by being seen to be implementing their core values. Senior managers and institution heads too saw benefits for themselves in terms of consistency of approaches, school values and ethos, as well as practical responses to incidents. On the whole, few staff expressed any views as to disbenefits, even if they had reservations about the effectiveness of approaches with specific students, or their own levels of understanding. The primary head, as we have seen, took a *laissez-faire* approach, accepting that not all staff were conforming all the time, leading by example and taking the opportunity provided by the MAT-led initiative to train and co-opt more sceptical staff members.

I would say it's well-embedded fifty percent across the school. And then it's in and out of the other fifty percent.

John (AHT)

The PRU executive headteacher on the other hand worked via the modelling provided by her recently-appointed leadership team, by direct leadership through delivering CPD and

by working through specific issues with staff. She suggested that those unwilling or unable to adopt her AAS approach might be less comfortable in the school, or less able to relate to the students. This she associated with performance management and a need to manage out those who were unwilling to conform.

The people who don't completely embrace trauma-informed relational nurture, attachment aware practice, are the ones who have the least success with students... the people who are doing it are reaping rewards, those who aren't doing it, aren't, but that doesn't help them, it makes it worse – shines a spotlight on it, almost.

Marie (EHT)

As with the PRU, the secondary school approach was strongly linked to its overall values and the leadership role of the head. By contrast with both the primary school and, to an extent, the PRU - the head was operating a distributed management system whereby the operational control was through the leadership team as a whole, rather than herself. Similarly, those managers, acknowledging current inconsistencies in practice, recognised the need to secure further support from individual members of staff. However, rather than seeing this as a fixed position for or against the approach, like the primary school head, they expressed this in more dynamic terms of influencing staff culture.

Our key priorities are challenge, wellbeing and teamwork. I think it works really well for all of those... We also have our CAIR values, that's about Compassion, Ambition, Integrity and Resilience and again I think attachment aware schools, and attachment, is really important for all of those – we put it into our student notices every day as well.

Mollie (AHT)

These positions were very much linked with an overall view of AAS as benefitting staff and students alike – a point made consistently across all three sites during the second phase of fieldwork:

Researcher: *Who do you think has benefitted the most from introducing this initiative?*

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Henry: *Teachers, if they really think about it, and reflect, and I see it with the children themselves.*

Transcript 14

Guy: *I think everybody... the staff, from the point of view they've got an answer to this... I think the students are more supported.*

Transcript 11

Mollie: *If it's used correctly it's for everyone. It's for staff, in terms of giving them control over situations, to build rapport with students. With students it's ... a way of understanding why they behave the way they have, and talking it through. It's for parents as well, so we can explain to our parents if students haven't got things right, where they recognise they've done wrong, and that helps the parents to understand their child.*

Transcript 16

Although all parties saw children and young people as potentially benefitting from the approach, this was articulated in slightly different ways. Some primary school teachers had a more limited view around controlling individual behaviour, whereas primary school and PRU heads, and all secondary school and PRU staff saw this in broader terms. It was noticeable that the primary school teachers' focus group tended to discuss children's issues in general terms of poor parenting and wider social pressures, while the primary TAs, PRU and secondary school staff were more concerned with helping individual students to cope with the issues which they faced. Similarly, among some primary school teachers, there was an implicit separation of parents into a deficit model of 'inadequate', against those who were 'good', while the PRU staff viewed all parents as effectively facing similar issues. Indeed, the PRU MAT CEO emphasised the difficulties which parents of excluded children faced, and the way in which an understanding of trauma informed practice could help support them:

When you start to talk about how the brain works... you can almost see the guilt start to dissipate from those people who feel that it's their fault that their children are like this.

Dave (MAT CEO)

Secondary school staff too tended to empathise with pressures on parents/carers and families.

What we've found is it depends on where a parent is at in their lives... especially over the past few weeks, parents who have been really negative over the school are going through a really stressful time, and again the school is a sounding board... because actually, as I say, we will do everything we can to support all our girls here.

Frances (AHT)

To this point, it could be argued that the outcome of AAS reflects the dominant norms of society, encouraging children to self-regulate, behave and perform better at school. The MATs involved may be seen as 'successful' and enabled to expand. The heads are seen externally as successful because their schools are well-managed and children well-behaved. By this argument parents who are likely to benefit are those who reflect the dominant values. However, again, there are some differences between those staff who perform according to the dominant value structure, and those who go beyond this, seeking actively to empower children, young people and families. The question becomes: are we promoting conformity by 'cooling out' (Clark, 1960) angry young people/families/communities, or are we offering them an opportunity to take control of their own lives and futures?

Empowerment

Empowering staff

This notion of empowerment is crucial to a transformational approach. Managers at all three sites articulated a discourse of empowerment for children and young people and sought to lead their staff in that direction. In the primary school, the head was initially shaping the development and offering it to the staff and pupils:

For... members of staff other than me, they feel more empowered because they've got a set script they can use ... it's giving us a common language to approach the children with.

John (HT)

Similarly, he made it clear that he would only intervene in an incident if an EC approach had been tried first. This did not appear to be seen by staff as threatening but was only

empowering them to the extent that they were willing to implement it. TAs in the school saw this approach as empowering them, both in terms of classroom practice and in, potentially, accessing further training and promotion opportunities. Although this training itself was suspended as a result of the Covid lockdown, the CPD initiatives taken by the MAT effectively reinforced the cascading of the ideas within the school, thereby empowering more individual members of staff to engage with the issues.

By contrast, the PRU Executive Head specifically distinguished between her leadership role, and the need for the development to be 'shaped' by the staff. Although initially apparently more confrontational, this combination of a clear direction, value structure, engagement with staff and informal training, combined with a willingness to challenge practice, if necessary via performance management, seems to have overcome initial staff scepticism and promoted an internalisation of these approaches.

Researcher: *Do you think staff now feel empowered by this new approach, or are you still sort of fighting the old battles against the management?*

Guy: *I don't see those battles anywhere near as much as I used to. In fact... I don't think there's anyone who isn't on board.*

Transcript 11

This initial scepticism may of course reflect more the subjective experience of staff who had experienced considerable management change in the previous few years, than an objective difference in shared understandings and normative values. Indeed, as indicated by Chaz, Olivia and Guy, some of the PRU staff described the new approaches as enhancing their existing practice and theoretical understanding – a key element of 'praxis' or transformative thinking.

The secondary school emphasised the importance of staff, pupil and parent/carer empowerment. Here it was the creation of a culture which enabled individuals to take this on which was emphasised:

I think we need to re-empower our staff and create a culture again, a positive culture of buy-in...

Mollie (AHT)

However, unlike the PRU, where there was an expectation that all staff, in particular, would conform to the model, the secondary school was more accepting that there was a potential diversity of response, and individuals were encouraged, rather than constrained, to participate.

I would say maybe a third of our teachers... are really kind of starting to embed it into their own practice.

Carole (AHT)

This might be seen in some ways as aligning more to the primary school response, which reflected the more normative and conventional value structure of a church school in a favoured area. The secondary school response may simply be a pragmatic acknowledgement of the highly diverse nature of the school, staff and local community, and the relative complexity of a secondary school catering for a wide range of age, ability and social background.

A theme which emerged from initial discussions with the PRU front-line staff was the distinction between debrief as a top-down hierarchical process, where sanctions on students were negotiated with managers, and as a form of non-judgmental reflective supervision whereby staff could improve their own understanding of, and empowerment within, a given situation. This appeared to have been addressed by the management approach of the new Executive Headteacher and her team:

As soon as you know what's going on in the brain..., it changed the debriefs completely because people saying 'yeh but, yeh but, yeh but'. As soon as you've got that explanation you can't.. there's no argument.

Guy (Teacher)

Although there was no parallel discussion of supervision within the primary school context, this is a reasonably well-established concept within the AAS literature (see Colley and Cooper, 2017), and might be compared with the primary headteacher's reluctance to be drawn into dealing with behavioural incidents until EC approaches had been explored.

In this latter case the headteacher appears to be articulating an empowerment model for staff and pupils by emphasising the importance of understanding the child's point of view, rather than taking on a hierarchical role of punishing a child. One teacher described debriefing her class, using EC approaches, if a distressing incident had occurred during the day:

I've found it's really helpful for the rest of the class, because they have witnessed a fair amount of [incidents] there, whether that be violent or angry or just scary for them, and we've used quite a lot of talking about the situation afterwards... what makes them feel safe and what makes them feel happy and calm and relaxed ... while they're in school.

Primary school staff focus group

This initial emphasis on EC was reinforced by the MAT initiative on behaviour support. It links, too, with the secondary school emphasis on restorative approaches, for both pupils and staff, and all respondents were clear on the structures which existed to support individual staff, both in developing classroom approaches, and through management support.

Empowering students

Underlying these issues, on all three sites, is the extent to which these understandings are shared by children and young people, and by parents/carers. There were some interesting nuances of language, as on all sites there was a rhetoric of empowerment and children's voice. The headteacher of the Primary School, for example, had a consistent focus on children's agency:

Supporting those children that, with those self-regulation needs, giving them strategies, but also giving staff the tools so that they really consistently apply the same messages.

John (HT)

He was keen to involve the children in developing and using the scripts being used to support the initiative. The PRU and the secondary school also had a strong discourse on empowering children by listening to them, encouraging them to express their feelings in their own words, and to negotiate their own way through difficult situations. There is

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some evidence of young people being enabled to take control of their own learning and lives, and finding positive validation of their own culture:

We were the first to get the Arts Award; we had Dance, boys doing dance, they were all doing break dance, stuff like that, and we worked with local primary schools. They went in and taught their youngsters how to break dance, how to beat box.

Chaz (Former PRU Headteacher)

Just a couple of days ago, the school was in the TES magazine for a picture of our students for Afro Hair Day.

Mollie (Secondary school AHT)

However, there is some danger that the activities described risk stereotyping/colonising young people's culture and thereby reinforcing their outsider status. The question, therefore, becomes the extent to which this empowerment is felt by the children and young people themselves as part of their everyday experience at the school. Indeed, Mollie suggested that this empowerment might have gone too far, although, in a later conversation, she clarified that she was referring to a *laissez-faire* 'caring' pastoral approach rather than one of positive engagement and challenge:

We've empowered the students to a point where they... feel almost untouchable... we really need to think through how we have some punitive approaches whilst also allowing staff and students to have restorative conversations afterwards.

Mollie (AHT)

In a particular situation in the secondary school, for example, students challenged the application of its norms and rules as part of a wider political challenge emanating from international events and orchestrated from within the local community. It could be argued that the students being confident to challenge the school in this way does demonstrate their empowerment, even though their protest was against the school's refusal to countenance a particular political position, as conflicting with the requirement for political neutrality imposed by neoliberal culture (see DfE, 2022c). The reactions of staff to this challenge, however, were significant. Some sided with the students, while others tried to establish a dialogue with them, which explained the school dilemma

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without giving up on their overall approach. However, others could not cope with this challenge to their authority, and their self-view as liberal, tolerant people, and reverted to a traditional hierarchical approach to school discipline. In this sense, therefore, the potentially transformative role of the school was challenged by wider issues of dominant culture, revealing the potential conflicts involved.

Empowering parents/carers

The other group affected in this way are parents/carers. Views at the primary school ranged from deficit models of feckless parents and/or external social constraints undermining the family, to some supportive partnership models, and a commitment from senior staff to involving parents in AAS developments. However, it appears that it was those parents who shared its values who were most likely to feel involved. The PRU staff focus group made relatively little mention of parents, families or carers, although Guy made several references to working with parents. Senior managers had as a priority the development of a Family School partnership approach:

Family school, which is developing our families to have the same understanding and knowledge about the neuroscience behind attachment and trauma, and developing scripts for them, with them, so that we develop more consistency so that students come and have that approach here at school... and they get that there at home as well. So, raising family self-esteem and also aspirations.

Marie (EHT)

Alongside an appreciation of the family difficulties which both cause and are caused by the behaviours of its students, the general tone was supportive to parents, indicating the positive impacts of AAS approaches on home life. While this might appear to be a normative approach, the former head of the unit gave some positive examples of attempting to engage with disadvantaged parents and communities on their own terms, while a senior manager suggested that engagement with less confident parents had improved during lockdown:

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We're finding we're engaging some parents that we wouldn't really get in an actual face to face meeting, in joining us virtually, so we've learned a few things as well that I think we can take forward.

Olivia (ST)

The PRU CEO was even more forthright, seeing the role of the MAT as enabling disadvantaged families to find their voice, and challenging the external circumstances which led to such inequalities.

The real experts in that room were the people whose children were in the PRU.... they can't bloody win. You know? If my child isn't ODD it's bad parenting and if they are ODD they've got that because you're a bad parent. And I think that needs to change.

Dave (MAT CEO)

In the secondary school there was a discourse of family empowerment, but relatively little evidence of this in practice, other than in individual work with students and their families. Indeed, Mollie referred to “a lack of a voice for some of our parents” (Transcript 8). This raises an issue as to the value structures which were being implied. In some cases, encouraging families to engage with support services of which they are suspicious, or even suggesting ‘realistic’ aspirations as to future career goals might be seen as imposing dominant norms on disadvantaged cultures, but in other contexts, where girls are being encouraged to go beyond the expectations imposed by their home environment, these might be seen as transformative.

A similar paradox can be found around local communities. As Mollie expressed it:

One of our top priorities is our representation of the school to the community and we don't want people saying that we're not a supportive school. So, we try to be supportive within reason.

Mollie (AHT)

This raises the question as to what is the community (see Glossary and Appendix 4), and who determines what is reasonable? When challenged, the school found it difficult to

manage the conflict between local community and dominant cultural norms, again demonstrating the contested nature of this relationship.

Themes which emerged in the course of the research

Inequalities, social segmentation and intersectional issues

Social class

While there was a recognition of social inequalities and their potential impact on attachment, these were articulated differently on each site. In the primary school there was some discussion of differing levels of support for children at the school, particularly in the context of the Covid lockdowns, related to the relative affluence and educational levels of families and parents, but even here the assistant head was keen to avoid stereotyping, giving examples of affluent families who had not supported their children effectively, and those in more challenging circumstances who had.

If the parents are poorly-educated with a poor literacy standard, they've not been able to support very well at all, the home learning. Where you've got parents who are educated and motivated... they've generally taken it very seriously and supported well... There's a girl whose parents both work... [she] has been left to her own devices in her room for three months and hasn't made any progress at all, and she's back and struggling. They're not... disadvantaged in the slightest... and there's equally cases of another child who's on our pupil premium register...single mum, who is highly, highly motivated that her child doesn't suffer and they did every bit of home learning... I'd say that parental attitude is right up there with ... which social class they're in.

Henry (AHT)

This reflects the context and relatively affluent geographical location of the school itself, but also the overall individualistic and religious culture of the school and MAT. The MAT CEO recognised the need to understand and work with local people, including, for example, Somali Muslim and Traveller communities; but this was still within the context of this individualistic approach, rather than any wider social analysis.

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That understanding of 'we want to be able to help your child and actually we need to have a cultural discussion about the best ways we can do that, because this isn't interfering, we're not asking for anything different, what we're asking for is an ability to be able to support your child and learn in the best possible way'. The most important part of all of that, is always having that conversation.

Pete (MAT CEO)

PRU staff, on the other hand, were much more conscious of the social disadvantages suffered by their students, often as a consequence of exclusion from school. This was not necessarily seen in terms of traditional class structures, but in terms of wider social exclusion. There was a strong level of challenge in many of the interviews. The MAT CEO, was passionate about the way in which the disadvantages suffered by the students and their families were compounded by class-based prejudices and stereotypes.

She was using all the skills and techniques she had to try and keep that young man safe. And the teams of people that were supposed to be supporting them doing that were judging her that she wasn't good enough. And then they went back to... their lovely semi-detached in West London, and their degree-educated partners, to feel good about themselves.

Dave (MAT CEO)

Chaz recounted the way in which his proposal for a former student to open the new building had been vetoed by the local authority in favour of the family of a local footballer.

I wanted ... the first girl in the whole thing... she'd done so well. She's had two or three kids but is a care worker in one of the children's homes, and I wanted her to open it, but they wouldn't have that.

Chaz (Former headteacher)

Guy discussed ways in which more middle-class students were advantaged because they had the language skills to understand their situation and potentially to change it, but at the same time the levels of denial from middle-class parents which could mitigate against this:

He was of ... middle class. His parents are teachers... he saw himself as intelligent so he was ... willing to engage.... he left knowing what was going on when he was

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getting angry. But he was quite articulate in the first place... although he might not have been emotionally literate ...

I've experienced that in the past, of middle-class families being 'well that's not for us. We don't think'... 'We've got support' and them being reluctant... by the time they get to us, it's harder for them to deny that there's an issue.

Guy (Teacher)

Perhaps not surprisingly, given its geographical and social context, issues of social inequality were much to the fore in the secondary school. Although they made clear links between poverty, manifested in free school meals, overcrowding, etc, as impacting on attachment issues in the school, respondents were inconsistent in linking this directly with broader issues of social class, in some instances echoing comments made by Andrea Leadsom (House of Commons, 2010):

Our middle-class students, their parents are happy for us to do ... referrals whereas those who may be from a minority background, the parents are worried about what that will mean, or worried that that might mean involving social services.

Frances (AHT)

I do think that, when it comes to class, that, actually, attachment, or not having a successful attachment, can happen in any type of class, any type of family. And I think it's really important that we ... start understanding that a little bit better.

Carole (AHT)

I don't want to make assumptions. I think it's about linking that with achievement, rather than class...

Mollie (AHT)

Segmentation by race

Perhaps reflecting their geographical location, issues of race were more muted in the primary school and PRU, other than Dave's noting in passing a slow rise in the proportion of ethnic minority students in the MAT, and some limited discussion by Pete, Chaz and Dave of involvement with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities (Transcripts 10, 5 and 13). Issues of race and inequality were important features in all discussions with secondary school respondents, including the school's explicitly anti-racist stance, issues for non-white staff, school exclusions, and staff training, particularly in unconscious bias. Most of the respondents discussed the importance of parental and community links, and

the impact of the Black Lives Matter movements on the school; and the school had published its anti-racist policy in response to the Equality Act Regulations (2017) requirement to publish its equality targets. However, there was some ambivalence over links between attachment and race. Carole and Frances echoed Arnold's (2012) ideas:

I think it comes back to... thinking about different types of families that children belong to, and the historical background of these families, that their parents or their grandparents have experienced. And... the different things that are going on, not just about racism... that ... feed into the conversation around attachment and why... children's parents tend to act in particular ways, or maybe have experienced particular things. So I do think that race and attachment theory... there's a correlation between them both.

Carole (AHT)

It's a mixture of race, I would say, social and economic factors ... we've done a lot of work with staff in understanding... 'do you think you have built up the best relationship you can with that student, based on your perception of that student, or how that student behaves... and understanding why that student doesn't feel secure in this building, or in this environment, and looking at our positions of power in the classroom'?

Frances (AHT)

Mollie took a slightly different view:

It's more likely to be class than race. And then I think about a student who is a wealthy Black African student but really struggles with her relationship with her mother... She's incredibly high-achieving, incredibly motivated... I think about another student who's of Indian descent, and she is incredibly high-achieving. She's got SEN, recently diagnosed, of ADHD. Again, she's from a very high class background, but really struggles with her relationship with her parents, so I don't think there necessarily is a link between race and class and attachment. I think if you've got a loving home, you've got a loving home.

Mollie (AHT)

An externally motivated political challenge to the school's position and self-image had been experienced as challenging by many staff. Thus, in this context there appears to be some dissonance between the overall ethos of the school, as expressed in its anti-racist policy, and its articulation across all areas of school activity. If AAS is to be transformational – as Stern *et al.* (2021) suggest, it might be reasonable to see this as

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directly related to the school's anti-racist policy, whereas it appears limited here – as does the policy itself - when challenged by norms and values which are not acceptable in dominant cultural discourse. Conversely, this might be seen as a counsel of perfection: staff were aware that there is a relationship between attachment theory, social and race inequality and were seeking to apply it, where appropriate. There is very little literature in this field in the UK – Arnold (2012) is an exception – and, as Stern *et al.* (2021) point out, relatively little in the USA, despite a greater focus there on approaches such as critical race theory. While race and attachment are clearly an important aspect, particularly in inner-city areas, there is insufficient evidence in this study to draw firm conclusions.

Gender issues

One unanticipated finding was a lack of apparent impact of gender in this field. Very few issues were raised in the primary school, and even the CEO indicated it was not an area he had addressed:

It's more to do with the individual – I haven't noticed the difference between whether they're boys or girls really.

Henry (AHT)

I don't think I could say that there's a really clear pattern on that. ... maybe it's because we're not looking in the right place.

Pete (MAT CEO)

In the PRU the main concerns raised were lack of emotional engagement with male staff from girls – ascribed to a greater tendency for mainstream schools to offer emotional support at an earlier stage to girls rather than boys – and a convergence of mental health issues such as eating disorders amongst both boys and girls.

I think that the girls tend to be not so keen on talking... It might be they have the conversations with the female staff... lots of the girls who come to us have already got support for their emotional needs.

Guy (Teacher)

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The alternative provision we've got for children who've been excluded or at risk of permanent exclusion, that always used to be all boys. And then the children who were out for medical reasons used to be girls. But that's not true any more... eating disorders among boys is much more common.

Dave (MAT CEO)

Secondary respondents made generalised comments about girls' tendency to respond to emotional stimuli, and, in one case, potential difficulties in relationships with younger male staff, but suggested that gender itself was not an issue at an all-female school.

It's not an issue. Our students have said that they like the role models of our leadership team being mainly female... I shouldn't generalise but I do think girls are more emotive in response and hold a grudge more than boys. I don't know if that's necessarily attachment... whereas I think boys are more pragmatic and think things through. But I think girls are generally better at having the reflective conversations afterwards... and talking about their emotions.

Mollie (AHT)

Some of our girls are not exposed to... interacting with males other than their brothers or their dads or close family members, so what then tends to happen if there's a young male member of staff ... they might develop a bit of a liking to that member of staff so they will act out, or they won't speak.

Frances (AHT)

Part of the rationale for including an all-female school with a strongly feminist ethos was to address gender issues - particularly the critique of Bowlby from a feminist perspective (Duschinsky *et al.*, 2015b; Smith *et al.*, 2017; Duschinsky, 2020). However, two of the respondents, who were familiar from their academic background with the feminist critique of Bowlby, specifically rejected this analysis. Carole stated:

I don't think that it's necessarily a patriarchal theory. If anything I think it's allowing us to have a conversation and open up the... different mindset about attachment... what was interesting for me, as a mam of two boys, was that the impact that that had on me, of how I would raise them... at a personal level, as opposed to a professional.

Carole (AHT)

By contrast two of the secondary and one of the PRU respondents referred to support for non-binary young people, and students who were undergoing gender reassignment.

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We're just trying to teach our students that gender doesn't matter. We've got some non-binary students who don't identify with a gender... we've even got a student here who has actually changed their name... to a boy's name and want to be identified with the pronoun of 'he'... all our letters now, don't say 'your daughter', they say 'your child', to encourage our students to be who they want to be.

Mollie (AHT)

We had a young person who transited from male to female recently... I don't think they would have done that had they not felt secure and safe. They couldn't do it in mainstream, which was the reason they ended up... being permanently excluded... they felt safe enough to do that in a place that many other people would consider to be a high-risk environment.

Dave (MAT CEO)

The data is insufficient to draw any firm conclusions; it would be important to establish through further research the extent to which relational approaches such as AAS actually facilitate more transformational perspectives such as feminism or queer theory (Butler, 1990), or whether, as Spratt (2016) suggests, they may be co-opted to normalise and control otherwise challenging identities. This does not necessarily imply a transformative approach as a whole and, indeed, the specific rejection of feminist perspectives on attachment might appear reactionary.

The impact of Covid

There is a subtle interaction between the main focus of this research – attachment awareness in schools - and the impact of the Covid pandemic. The challenges presented, for example, to access and methodology, were common to many research projects under lockdown (see Bick *et al.*, 2020, and Levine *et al.*, 2021), but AAS is closely related to Covid developments in schools. Thus, as early as June 2020, as quoted above, the primary school, encouraged by its MAT, was working on Recovery Curriculum developments, and a senior teacher from the PRU discussed in detail the Covid implications for students and families.

A lot of our parents, before the Covid 19 lockdown, would have had their child at home after their exclusion for a week to three weeks sometimes... and that is often

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when their child is at a real crisis point and the system has gone wrong for them... a lot of our parents have communicated how different their child is going into lockdown and maintaining their behaviour and their attitude.

Olivia (ST)

Between January and April 2021 Covid was dominating school agendas; respondents from all three sites spoke at length about its implications, most of them relating it directly to AAS, and this continued to be the case throughout the second fieldwork period.

I think it feeds into everything... even if the students have an issue with something else, a lot of the issues stem from Covid. For example, use of phones, use of social media, it's all because of Covid they didn't have socialisation, real human interactions.

Mollie (AHT)

I think September's going to be the hardest point for us. The end of this year, we're anticipating it being a kind of welcome back and getting everybody there and still doing that recovery part... I think we're going to see some of those issues, particularly as children come back after the Summer break.

Pete (MAT CEO)

This had significant impacts, both in terms of methodology and research outcomes, which are discussed in detail in Chapter 3 and in Appendix 6. There is need to acknowledge the overlap between the research process and the emergent findings. Moreover, the issues around pupil recovery from the pandemic correlate with those related to AAS; opinions are divided between those who advocate a 'progressive' approach based on relationships and mental wellbeing (eg Carpenter and Carpenter, 2020) and those who advocate a more traditional and instrumental approach to 'catch up learning' such as Cattan *et al.* (2021), the Education Endowment Fund (2021), and the Sutton Trust (2021).

A number of commentators, such as Kerslake *et al.* (2020) present Covid impacts as a fundamental shift, or paradigm change, in social attitudes. This latter point was articulated by respondents from the mainstream primary and secondary sites, but less so on the PRU site, perhaps because it was already marginalised, both in terms of its clientele and its status compared with other schools. The CEO saw this in long-term developmental terms:

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I had no idea it would go on as long as it did, obviously, but for me it was always about 'let's position ourselves as doing this as a marathon'. Because my experience of working with our young people and their families... is that nothing good happens overnight.

Dave (MAT CEO)

As outlined in Appendix 6, the progress of the pandemic was dynamic and changing throughout the research period. As it developed it illustrated the contradictions and dilemmas at the heart of government policy. There was an apparent shift in emphasis within the Department for Education, from an endorsement of wellbeing and relationships approaches (DfE, 2020b) to a much more instrumental approach which emphasised the notion of 'lost learning' and the need for catch-up tutoring (see above). A Downing Street press release in February 2021 indicated that Kevan Collins, the new 'Education Recovery Commissioner' would address:

Factors such as curriculum content and quantity of teaching time in the coming months, to ensure the impact the pandemic has had on learning is addressed as quickly and comprehensively as possible.

Simpson, 2021a

It was not until four weeks later that Collins indicated that issues of mental health and wellbeing would be included (Simpson, 2021b). He subsequently resigned on 2 June, citing lack of government funding support (Weale, 2021).

Respondents from all three sites saw the Covid pandemic as impacting directly on their implementation of AAS approaches, both negatively, in slowing the pace of planned developments, and positively, in terms of providing an environment for change. There does, however, appear to be some difference in the level of transformation perceived as a result of AAS on each site, with some primary school respondents more positive about the impact of AAS/EC as such, whereas some secondary school respondents were more guarded about it in the wider context of Covid.

Covid definitely allowed us to take a deep breath, to think about our approach, to kind of carefully plan some of these – I'd say a hard core of three or four - children

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who were really difficult to manage... That allowed us to think 'how are we going to deal with these children, let's think emotion coaching'.

Henry (Primary school AHT)

I'd say everything is put on pause, really, for Covid. So, in terms of the training – we actually had some staff training in November, which was really good, but again, what we've done with that training is quite limited... I don't think we've done much in terms of whole school development.

Frances (Secondary school AHT)

It's been really quite difficult to... get the ball rolling with it, because... the children aren't there and we had priorities of ensuring the children are able to log into remote online learning systems, that they are completing their work et cetera.

Carole (Secondary school AHT)

The latter points reflect the reality – mentioned by all four secondary school respondents - of attempting to implement AAS developments against the other practical priorities of Covid lockdown, as opposed to the other two schools, where the implementation of AAS had begun prior to the pandemic. For PRU staff Covid developments appeared to have had relatively less impact and tended to complement AAS approaches:

Things like students who are presenting on site as possibly unsafe, under the current situation with Covid, whereas normally it might be 'they're taught on line and that's it'... we've seen things put in place... Whereas before, students might have been written off and alternative provision sought, there's a lot more 'What can we do to meet their needs?'

Guy (Teacher)

Indeed, the CEO remarked:

There was a part of me, I have to be honest, that saw some of these children thrive and thought 'hold on a minute – everything we've been doing, and all we had to do was send them home for a couple of months and it would have been better'... but of course that isn't true.

Dave (MAT CEO)

Attachment and mental health

Mental health is often taken as a proxy issue for considering relationship, attachment and wellbeing issues in schools (Parker and Levinson, 2018), and this theme emerged strongly from two sites, but less so the primary school, during the second phase of the research. There was a distinction among primary school respondents, some of whom, particularly the teachers, tended to categorise children according to individual pathology, and those who saw children in a more holistic way, as individuals expressing their needs. Those in the former group tended to articulate their views in terms of SEND and the autistic spectrum, while the latter group spoke in terms of emotional needs, rather than mental health, in either case. This individualised discourse was still present in the views expressed by the Assistant Head in March 2021.

The class I've got now, I use it a lot, with children who are testing the boundaries, and it's become much, much more everyday... I do use it a bit more if they're well-behaved but not working very well.

Henry (AHT)

The MAT CEO emphasised inclusivity and enablement, with only one reference to children's mental health, in the context of the Covid lockdown. By contrast, mental health was a high priority in the secondary school, with one assistant head specifically instancing Sobel's (2018) work on the relationship between poverty and poor mental health in schools.

There seems to be a lot of correlation between pupil premium and incidence of poor mental health and all the differing pastoral support you put in to school.

Frances (AHT)

This issue was also highlighted in comments from secondary school respondents over the impact of Covid on pupils, staff and parents/carers:

When they... did come back, it was really unbelievable the amount of students who were displaying behaviour that was not normal for the type of student that they were before they had gone off, and there's been a real rise of things like... self-

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harm... there's a lot of things going on around relationships and friendships, particularly around social media, bullying and things like that.

Carole (AHT)

The services are already at full capacity so then the school are taking on probably more than what we should. And then that's impacting staff wellbeing, because they're carrying so much... there are a lot of worried parents at the moment and we're having to manage their anxieties. That's coming out in aggressive behaviour on the phone, horrible emails, just reactive responses that wouldn't normally happen.

Frances (AHT)

These views reflect the Children's Commissioner's (2020) and Marmot *et al's* (2020) findings concerning the unequal impact of mental health issues under Covid, and might also be related to Strand and Lindorff's (2018) work on the disproportionality of SEND diagnoses among different ethnic minority groups.

The challenge of addressing mental health needs also emerged in the PRU. As with the primary school TAs, individual mental health needs were referred to in passing by Chaz and Guy, but as an everyday reality, rather than a significant issue in itself. The CEO related this directly to AAS approaches:

We continue to stay abreast of the developing understanding of trauma, and ACES around our young people... Because there's no doubt the complexity of the young people we're seeing is increasing... And unfortunately, you can see that... crudely, through numbers of ex-pupils who are committing suicide.

Dave (MAT CEO)

Thus, as might have been anticipated from earlier discussions, there was no evidence of mental health issues being dismissed merely as a form of individual pathology, even in the primary school, whereas this was seen as part of a pattern of wider social challenges, both in the PRU and the secondary school. This suggests that, far from supporting a normative view of mental health, AAS can be transformative, in giving a holistic and child-centred approach to wellbeing. Moreover, while within the primary school the overall ethos is of acceptance and inclusion within a broadly church-based value structure, the

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other two sites both approach the issues from a much more critical perspective, recognising the underlying challenges of social inequality posed by mental health.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Attachment/trauma aware approaches, schools and the social structure

AAS – transformation?

Or social control?

Staff understanding and perceptions of AAS

Teacher perceptions and implications for practice

Who decides - top down or bottom up?

Leadership styles

The role of theory

Who is it for – is it universal or targeted?

Benefits/disbenefits

Empowerment/disempowerment

Segmentation issues– race, class and gender

Wider issues of power and authority

Intermediate bodies – the role of the local authority

Multi-academy trusts

The impact of Covid

Mental health

General conclusions

Implications for schools

Implications for wider policy issues

Attachment/trauma aware approaches, schools and the social structure

This thesis began with a question. Is the adoption of attachment/trauma aware approaches in schools (AAS) transformative, or is it merely a ‘soft’ form of social control? If the former, how is it transformative, and for whom? If the latter, how does that social control operate, and what does it tell us about power relationships in society? Can it be subverted, and if so at what levels and by whom? As we have seen, the notion of

transformation itself is used differently by different actors in different contexts, and notions of power and hegemony are different within different theoretical perspectives. This chapter draws together the evidence from this research in a wider societal and theoretical context, and considers the implications of attachment/trauma aware approaches for teachers, schools and society as a whole.

AAS – transformation?

Kelly *et al.* (2020) refer to the importance of ‘transforming’ the school environment as a feature of AAS, while Hyde-Dryden *et al.* (2022) use ‘transformational’ to describe schools which have successfully implemented it. However, Scales *et al.* (2020) distinguish between approaches which merely express a ‘caring’ approach to students and those which actually use relationships to challenge and empower them. Citing earlier research (Benson *et al.*, 2011), which suggests that only 35% of US Middle Schools are seen as caring, and only 22% combine caring with high expectations, they argue that it is this latter approach which makes a difference, particularly for more disadvantaged students. This is reflected in all three sites of this study, where challenge and empowerment were cited by respondents as central to their AAS strategy. Moreover, the importance of this ‘transformation’ was seen by staff; in both the primary school and the PRU individual respondents described how AAS had changed their practice. There was a slight difference of emphasis in the secondary school. Some respondents felt that external pressures, especially the Covid lockdowns, had militated against fully developing AAS approaches among the staff, but saw this as a temporary setback.

Overall, there was less emphasis on the transformation of relationships with parents/carers in the mainstream schools, compared with the PRU. These relationships had been impacted as a result of the Covid restrictions; in the primary school a proposed focus group with parents had to be abandoned, although respondents reported some improvement in liaison with families as a result of the pandemic. There appeared to be less proactive engagement with parents in the Secondary school, although there were references to the adverse impacts of the pandemic. This might reflect Scales *et al.*’s

distinction between 'caring' and 'empowering' approaches. By contrast, the PRU was actively seeking to improve relationships with parents, and although a planned 'family school' initiative had to be postponed, there was evidence that the impact of changes introduced as a result of the pandemic had been positive. The MAT CEO specifically related such changes to the adoption of attachment/trauma informed perspectives.

Thus, the evidence appears initially to support the view that the adoption of AAS approaches can be transformational for individual students, staff, and in some cases families. However, the extent to which this has 'transformed' whole institutions is less clear. There is a contrast between the mainstream schools, where senior managers were frank about the need for greater consistency across the staff, and the PRU, where this increased consistency appeared to have been established. Similarly, it was only in the PRU context that a transformative, as opposed to a more generally 'caring' approach (Scales *et al.*, 2020) to parents/carers can be clearly discerned.

Another area of potential transformation was the pandemic itself. This had a number of impacts, both positive and negative, and caused considerable reflection on all three sites as to priorities and future developments. In the Primary School it enabled the MAT to implement a radical change to behaviour management policy, using an approach similar to that described by Kelly *et al.* (2020), whereby certain members of staff became 'champions', cascading training to their peers. In both mainstream schools the constraints of 'bubbles' meant that teachers had to solve problems for themselves, in the process increasing their capacity to address issues of relationships and behaviour. However, some respondents, particularly in the secondary school, felt that competing pressures as a result of lockdowns had reduced the effectiveness of the originally planned AAS initiative. The pandemic itself appeared to have had relatively less impact in the PRU, where tailored approaches and online learning were already in place.

Or social control?

Nevertheless, these appearances of transformation may be flawed. This thesis examines this in the light of wider critiques set out by Bailey and Ball (2016) and Ecclestone (2017), which consider actors' activity and agency in the context of power relationships in society. They suggest that, despite apparent internal contradictions and anomalies, the overall aim of education is to secure passive acceptance of the neoliberal state, and to maintain individuals' economic role within this. In this interpretation, the adoption of the notion of 'vulnerability' further disempowers those individuals so identified, as does the adoption of 'relationships-based' approaches, particularly where this is universally applied, for example to all children/staff in a school. Similarly, Perryman *et al.* (2017) suggest that even the notion of self-reflection is co-opted to give the appearance of teacher autonomy and control, while actually ensuring that teachers 'police' their own activity (Donzelot, 1977).

This critique has been considered in a number of ways:

- Staff understanding and perceptions of AAS
- Teacher professionalism and implications for practice
- Who decides – is the initiative top-down or bottom up?
- Leadership styles
- The role of theory
- Who is it for – is it universal or targeted?
- Who has or has not benefitted from the initiative?
- Who has been empowered/disempowered?
- Segmentation issues – race, class and gender
- Wider issues of power and authority
- The impact of Covid
- AAS and mental health

Staff understanding and perceptions of AAS

The previous chapter suggested that staff understanding of AAS was to some extent dependent on their hierarchical position, with more senior managers inclined to a more intellectualised and theoretical approach, while more junior, classroom-facing, staff concentrated on the practicalities of behaviour management and support for individual children. There are effectively three different positions which might be adopted – the theoretical, the professional and the practical. These might broadly equate to the hierarchy under capitalism identified by Bowles and Gintis (1976) whereby a small social elite are allowed the freedom to think creatively, a larger managerial group follow and enforce social norms, while others are disempowered. Bowles and Gintis indicate that this freedom of thought is not challenging to society, because the elite have a vested interest in preserving the status quo and, indeed, this enables society to reinvent itself and deal with challenges and contradictions. Ecclestone suggests that even notions of ‘empowerment and self-help’ (Ecclestone, 2017; 59) have been co-opted to support the status quo.

On this argument AAS might well be seen in terms of ‘soft’ social control. Further, the ‘professional’ stance for the intermediate group, broadly identified as classroom teachers, can be typified in terms of the ‘Teachers’ Standards’ (DfE, 2011), a document which directly derives from, and supports, the neoliberal ideology expressed in *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010). However, the evidence of this research suggests a more complex picture. The majority of senior staff (CEOs, heads and assistant heads) appear to adopt a critical political position with regard to the status quo, while, even within the primary school, the overtly Christian position adopted is at odds with a consumerist neoliberal ideology. Classroom teachers in the primary school, are concerned to appear ‘professional’. It is arguable that some of this relates to their status in the profession, as compared with secondary colleagues, as well as reflecting wider social expectations of behaviours and attitudes of staff in a ‘respectable’ church school. This appeal to teacher professionalism was much more nuanced in the secondary school, where a distinction was drawn between pastoral and academic roles. Here, still, there

was an implication that real teaching is to do with transmitting knowledge in the classroom, whereas relationship-based work with children can be done by anyone.

This suggests a number of paradoxes. First, if 'real' teaching is the transmission of knowledge, then attachment-based work, as presented in neoliberal discourse, is irrelevant and thus might be seen to be challenging this discourse. Second, much of the critique of 'therapeutic education' (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009; Furedi, 2014) relies on an assumption that this is actually being taught didactically in the classroom rather than being part of a whole-school approach. This study demonstrates that this is not the case; indeed, the use of a one-period per day PSHE programme to support the post-lockdown return in the secondary school was seen as an anomaly. Thus, again, the neoliberal argument that AAS is not 'proper' classroom teaching negates itself, as a misrepresentation of what is actually happening. However, the notion that adopting a whole school approach can act as a form of 'soft' social control, and that those managing such approaches have lower social status than academic staff, does potentially support the neo-Foucauldian position. This issue, of the perceived lower status of teachers engaged in pastoral work, is also reflected in the RSA report on school exclusions (Partridge *et al.*, 2020).

A key element in this issue of hierarchical status is the relationship between qualified teachers and other frontline staff. There was a clear distinction in the primary school, where separate focus groups were initially established, although both groups stressed teamwork and mutual support. In the secondary school, despite the high status given to learning mentors, there was still some variability in views, and a continuing implication that curriculum-related roles had higher status than pastoral. In the PRU this distinction was explicitly rejected at all levels. It may be the excluded, outsider, status of the PRU (Timpson, 2019) which enables the organisation to challenge social norms and hierarchies, because it is not seen as a threat to the social order as a whole. Moreover, its role in socialising young people who pose a threat to society may be seen as an example of 'soft' social control. However, the whole thrust of government policy since 2012 (see Parker and Levinson, 2018) has been to bring alternative provision into the existing

neoliberal performative framework. Given the overall ethos of the MAT, and the explicit intention to empower young people in their own terms, this thesis argues that the PRU is consciously adopting AAS as an oppositional strategy to transform young people's lives, and society in general. However, the CEO expressed concerns that this might not be successful. In the mainstream schools this challenge is less explicit, but the adoption of whole school AAS approaches does have the potential to transform the school cultures, and the overall societal norms within which they operate.

The data therefore supports the notion of different understandings, or multiple realities, which coalesce around a single concept of AAS. There is no overt challenge to the overall concept of AAS *per se*, even though it may be operationalised in different ways. Similarly, the precise definition of AAS is not contested – none of the actors in the three schools addressed, for example, the debates in principle about the general applicability or otherwise of AAS/EC to more deeply traumatised children (see Bomber, 2015c; Golding, 2013), although some expressed reservations about particular groups or individuals. In other words, there appears to be a common normative/evaluative approach on all sites, although there is some divergence in the understanding of the practical implications, particularly in the primary school. However, a distinction needs to be drawn between the overall concept of AAS, the way in which it is understood and implemented on the different sites, and the specific approaches and procedures which are associated with it, all of which reflect both the subjective experience and social awareness of the actors involved.

Teacher Professionalism and implications for practice

In many ways, it is how AAS is implemented which enables the issue of transformation, against social control, to be addressed. The primary school teachers were more comfortable discussing the practical manifestation of AAS – emotion coaching – as opposed to its theoretical base. Similarly, the secondary teacher interviewed, while expressing familiarity with attachment theory, saw this as something she had studied as part of an MA course several years before and did not apply this directly to her classroom

teaching, despite clearly describing relationship-based approaches. The primary school TAs, too, were somewhat diffident about discussing theoretical background despite describing child-centred, relational practice.

At first sight this 'practical' approach might support Bowles and Gintis' (1976) and later analyses that capitalist/neoliberal society requires a quiescent, rule-following proletariat in order to reproduce itself, and that the adoption of AAS approaches actually supports this. However, this might be challenged in terms of the TAs' more general view that AAS initiatives enhanced their role and gave opportunities for personal development. Perryman *et al.* (2017) would suggest that this is illusory and merely co-opts the TAs into a broader maintenance of the status quo. A somewhat different perspective can be gained from Freire's concept of 'conscientisation' (Freire, 1972). While critical of 'activism' per se, as merely contributing to that wider status quo, Freire suggests that, where combined with a consciousness of social inequality, this can promote transformational change.

Reflection – true reflection – leads to action... that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection.
Freire, 1972; 41

It is arguable that this consciousness can be seen on several levels: the understanding of concepts such as attachment/trauma theory; their link to actual practice; and their application to a wider analysis of society – 'praxis' in a Marxist sense (Crotty, 1998).

This relationship can be seen particularly in the PRU. During the staff focus group in February 2020, involving both teachers and TAs (Transcript 3), there was considerable hesitation in discussing AAS as a theory but staff were comfortable describing relational approaches. Following the management initiative to promote trauma-informed approaches over the following year this changed significantly. Thus, in this instance, there is a clear movement towards a theoretical understanding. This would not of itself imply a transformational approach, in a Freirean sense, but when linked with the clear dimension of social critique expressed by many of the PRU respondents such a case can be made.

This was less clear in the Primary school, where there had been some movement in terms of understanding of behaviour and emotion coaching, but the theoretical model was based on Christian theology, rather than models of social inequality. In the secondary school there was a wider social analysis, which related AAS to inequality, but arguably practice had not yet caught up with this, to the extent to which it might be seen as transformational. Moreover, the tensions with local community politics observed during the fieldwork period might suggest that the school was balancing its role as a performative upholder of the status quo – ie normative values –with its desire to challenge these to promote the interests of its students.

Who decides – top-down or bottom up?

Another perspective is the extent to which AAS initiatives are experienced as ‘top down’ management impositions, which would imply that these are a form of performative social control, or as ‘bottom up’ approaches which respond to concerns from staff. This latter would indicate that staff are able to make a conscious decision as to how they implement AAS, and imply a theoretical understanding and approach which can challenge the prevailing value system.

The quotation from the primary school assistant head in the previous chapter (page 185) encapsulates the way in which all three sites used AAS approaches to support staff relationships with students. While not universally successful, evidence suggests that there had been staff engagement with the initiatives, and managers had used a variety of approaches to secure this. The extent to which this was transformational, however, is questionable. In the primary school, while the processes of EC were in place, they were still in some cases being used to support a normative approach to controlling naughty children. In the secondary school the management process was being used to engage staff buy-in to an approach which was philosophically committed to developing relational practice, but which was being frustrated by apparent inconsistencies in staff adherence to its underlying processes. Further, that ambivalence can be demonstrated through the range of staff responses to a major challenge to the school’s own hegemony, where some

returned to a traditional and normative approach, emphasising their own hierarchical status, while others attempted to use a relational approach to engage with students. Only in the PRU could the top-down model of change adopted by the management team be argued to have been fully internalised by staff.

A similar ambivalence might be seen in approaches to involving parents. This was a key feature of the primary school initiative, although the intended developments were not implemented because of Covid restrictions. Similarly, an attempt formally to involve PRU parents/carers via a Family School project had to be abandoned. Secondary staff saw the initiative as consistent with a general approach to supporting parents, although this was not formalised. All three sites retained practical links with parents, especially those deemed to be vulnerable, throughout the lockdown period, although, again, this appears to have been more normative than transformational.

Another question which arises is that, if staff do have agency to determine their own response, what is the impact if that response essentially reaffirms the dominant value system? An example of this would be the discussion of 'assertive discipline' favoured by some of the longer-established teachers in the primary school. This did not necessarily challenge the overall school management approach, but neither did it suggest any transformative orientation. In the secondary school, the emphasis was on working with staff to encourage "a positive culture of buy-in" (Transcript 16) to the overall management culture. This implicitly fused a liberal/normative view of individual staff agency with an overall transformative management perspective – one manager suggested that a major barrier to AAS was "staff ego" (Transcript 9). This perspective was even stronger in the PRU, where senior managers had set out to transform staff views, taking a much more directive and positive approach, linked to performance management, and, while not denying individual staff agency, suggesting that those who held more traditional views might be more comfortable elsewhere.

There is an apparent contradiction in the notion that a 'top down' approach can, of itself be transformative, rather than a normative control mechanism. However, on all three

sites, staff engaged with the AAS initiative and made it their own. This led to some discernible changes, which could be described as transformations in a conventional sense. The extent to which these changes were influenced by staff embracing alternative value structures is more difficult to determine.

Leadership styles

Most literature on the implementation of AAS (eg Kelly *et al.*, 2020) stresses the key role of the headteacher and establishment leadership team. This may seem paradoxical, given the focus of this thesis on the role and perceptions of classroom practitioners, but as Rose *et al.* (2016b) demonstrate, the lack of senior management support can preclude effective implementation, even at classroom level. Different managerial strategies were identified in each of the three schools, but all three involved clear commitment to the initiative, direct relationship to the core values of the institution and a concern to involve and empower staff and students. Hierarchical relationships with staff were not strongly invoked, although the PRU executive head described an approach which balanced staff ownership and performance management. Similarly, the primary head made it clear that he would not intervene in any incidents unless an attempt had already been made to use EC. Beyond this, however, the approach in all three schools was facilitative, based on formal and informal professional development. Classroom staff in all three schools described using AAS approaches in their classrooms in different ways, while in both the primary school, and the PRU, specific examples were given of teachers' own innovations to support the model. Teachers therefore appeared to have internalised AAS and felt they had the power and authority to implement this in their own way – supporting Sheikh and Bagley's (2018) contentions. This does not mean that all classroom innovations were transformative, or even necessarily going beyond the 'caring' paradigm (Scales *et al.*, 2020). However, this does challenge the notion of teacher powerlessness against an imposed hierarchical norm.

These different leadership styles might be seen as encapsulating Berlin's (1969) two concepts of liberty, with the primary school endorsing a more individual 'negative' and

the PRU, and the secondary school, a more collectivist 'positive' position. In the primary school staff chose individually whether or not to engage, subject to the organisational and practical constraints of the school, and their own experience, whereas in the PRU staff were led towards an engagement which has been determined by the head as representing the 'collective will' and the democratically-determined shared values of the MAT (Rousseau, 1762/1968). Similarly, the leadership team in the secondary school were consciously attempting to affect the shared culture within the school in order to promote individual staff buy-in to the new arrangement. These two approaches might be seen as representing different value systems, even though the goal appears similar. Crucially, in the primary school, it can be argued that existing hegemony was maintained because there was no ultimate challenge to existing norms, whereas in the PRU – despite a more apparently top down approach – and in the secondary school, there was a conscious attempt to create a new set of norms.

More prosaically, however, it may be that at least some of this difference relates to individual personality and experience of the individuals involved. The primary head was in his first headship, with a staff, many of whom were older, well-established teachers at the school. By contrast the PRU Executive Headteacher was an experienced head, managing several different establishments, who was brought in by the MAT to stabilise and improve the PRU, following the imposition of Special Measures by Ofsted (Ofsted, 2018b). The secondary head – who had previously held several different management roles within the school - had adopted an avowedly distributive approach to management, but it was notable that staff at all levels saw her leadership as crucial, particularly at times of difficulty. Thus it may be the different subjective experience and self-awareness of the different actors which lead to apparently different approaches, despite considerable overlap in objective understanding of AAS.

Another perspective may be to consider the hierarchical position of the head him or herself in the maintenance of hegemonic values. Heads are expected to act in certain ways to maintain social hierarchy. All three of these heads were behaving correctly in accordance with that social expectation, albeit that the different nature of their

institutions may mean that it is easier for the headteacher of a PRU to espouse more 'alternative' approaches. Nonetheless, this should not be exaggerated, given the oversight of Ofsted, potential intervention by the Secretary of State in all schools, and DfE policy-makers continuing to press for mainstream approaches in Alternative Provision (see Parker and Levinson, 2018). The question remains, therefore, as to the extent to which an individual head and school can develop a truly alternative approach.

The obverse of these arguments is, of course, the extent to which subordinate groups – front line staff, children and young people, parents/carers - are able to contribute to and gain ownership of the initiative. Taylor (2007) argues that increasingly performative management approaches have limited the scope for teachers to interpret top-down policies in their own way, whereas Troman (2008) indicates that teachers nonetheless do make operational decisions in the light of their own values. This latter view is reinforced by Sheikh and Bagley (2018) who suggest that such decisions are strongly influenced by the level of trust which exists between teachers and managers. This appears to be reflected in the discourses of frontline staff on all three sites, which might indicate an acceptance - and at times ownership – of the approach.

Perryman *et al.* (2017) caution against an uncritical assumption that the acceptance by staff of a top-down policy implicitly makes that policy a radical bottom-up challenge. Rather, they suggest, like Ecclestone (2017), that the internal processes by which such policies come to be owned – eg reflective practice – have been subverted, and that their underlying value structure is that of the neoliberal state. However, this study demonstrates in the case of the primary school a distinction between the uncritical adoption by some teachers of certain aspects of EC - eg as a way of controlling unruly behaviour - without necessarily internalising its wider implications, and the critical engagement with the concept by other teachers and TAs. Indeed, the TAs perceived EC as enhancing their role and position in the school. In the PRU the approach was adopted by the primary team as complementing their existing practice, whereas the secondary team initially retained a critical distance, based to some extent on lack of confidence with the new senior management team, while adopting those elements which supported their

practice. As confidence grew over time a more consistent understanding appears to have developed across the whole team. In the secondary school this is more difficult to judge, but on the more limited evidence available it appears that senior staff were building on existing positive relationships to create a wider ownership of AAS practice and approaches, following the disruption of the Covid period.

The very nuanced and inconsistent nature of frontline staff engagement or otherwise with AAS approaches, and the changes over time which have been observed, particularly in the first two schools, tend to challenge the assumptions of Perryman *et al.* (2017) and Ecclestone (2017), which present staff as a single entity in taking a position. Rather, the evidence on all three sites suggests that individuals are critically evaluating and reacting to initiatives in line with their own experience, as suggested by Sheikh and Bagley (2018), and Troman (2008). Thus, they are modifying their shared objective view of the world in the light of their own subjective experience, and in the process contributing to a new normative/evaluative set of values, a process which is more akin to the notions of 'praxis' and 'conscientisation' (Freire, 1972).

The role of theory

This relates further to the underlying issue as to whether actors need to have a full theoretical understanding of AAS, and/or related social theory, for changes to be transformative. If the object of the exercise is simply to keep children quiet and happy in the classroom there is arguably no need for this, as it implies an unquestioning acceptance of dominant social norms. There is an argument that AAS can be a way of 'cooling out' (Clark, 1960) difficult individuals, ie making them comfortable within their recognised deviant role, without impacting on the overall power relationships in the institution or in society as a whole. However, if the object is to empower children and give them agency in their present and future lives, further questions emerge. If a TA, for example, is consciously working with children to improve their capacity for self-determination, does it matter whether or not she is aware of wider inequalities in the social structure and is consciously attempting to empower the child to challenge them?

To what extent are the objective understanding of social realities, the creation of a normative/evaluative framework which values children's active participation and the active support of children's subjective self-awareness important? From a perspective derived from both Freire (1972) and Habermas (1978), it is this combination of practical activity and theory – 'praxis' – which makes the process transformative, whereas neo-Foucauldian writers such as Perryman *et al.* (2017) and Ecclestone (2017) argue this is merely a further manifestation of 'soft' social control. In some ways this discussion reflects the debate between action research and critical ethnography, as to the extent to which researchers can impose an externally-derived critical view on the practical insights and activities of the actors involved, against Madison's (2010) concept of 'radical activism'.

Who is it for – is it universal or targeted?

The universal/targeted debate is at the heart of the question as to the transformative nature, or otherwise, of AAS. If it is transformational it needs to be for everyone, to have a collective focus and consciously to challenge dominant norms. Conversely a targeted approach implies a medicalised intervention based on individual pathology, identifying individuals who have something wrong with them and need curing. Senior managers on all three sites, and classroom practitioners in the PRU and Secondary school, clearly articulated the former view. Primary school TAs, too, although supporting individual children as part of their role, were sceptical about formal categorisations of behaviour and SEND, recognising the impact of inequalities outside the school, an issue which was also addressed by respondents on the other two sites. There was some divergence of opinion among primary school teachers who were more comfortable in discussing EC than AAS. Although EC is promoted as a universal approach (Gilbert *et al.*, 2021), it appears to have been appropriated by some primary school teachers as a targeted therapy for individual behaviour, and, potentially, therefore, a mechanism of 'soft' social control.

A further aspect of the universal/targeted debate can be seen in the notion of withdrawal units and in-school exclusion. Partridge *et al.* (2020) distinguish between units whose primary function is punishment for infringing school rules – arguably a behaviourist and normative approach – and those which provide psychosocial support for individuals who find it difficult to cope full time with school, with a view to developing their capacity and resilience. Several of the primary school respondents - both TAs and teachers - spoke warmly of the nurture group provision which was being developed, while the use of off-site activities was firmly established at the PRU, even during lockdown. In the secondary school, too, the assistant head for behaviour explained that the role of the existing student support centre was being reconsidered in the light of lockdown experience. In other words the emphasis was on finding appropriate provision for every individual, rather than an imposed therapy.

All three sites were reconsidering the role of school exclusions. Here there is a tension in government policy between a performative/normative view derived from youth justice that exclusions have a social cost and should be monitored (Arnez and Condry, 2021), and a view that exclusions might be used, where necessary, in a more creative way (Timpson, 2019; Partridge *et al.*, 2020). The primary school took a more conventional, normative approach, whereby exclusions were seen as a failure within the current performative culture, and teachers appeared embarrassed in describing a recent short-term exclusion. By contrast the secondary school was investigating alternative strategies to exclusion. The PRU had a tradition of using short-term exclusions as a way of enabling young people to calm down and renegotiate their relationship with the centre. This approach had been reinforced by the trauma-informed initiative, which had led to fewer staff calling for punitive expulsions for specific instances of misbehaviour, and a greater focus on helping students to cope on site. This change of emphasis, from individualised pathology to a more collective and social approach to removing barriers which prevent young people from operating effectively on a school site, is arguably a counterbalance to neoliberal ideological approaches, a view, which was also articulated by the head and MAT CEO of the primary school.

Another important aspect of this change in emphasis is the role of learning, or academic challenge, as opposed to merely being 'caring' (Scales *et al.*, 2020). The primary school assistant head described this as a change in his own perception of EC, as being for all students, including those who were behaving but not attaining to their full ability, while all PRU respondents emphasised the importance of achievement. Similarly, all four secondary school respondents saw behaviour for learning as a high priority. These views significantly challenge Ecclestone and Hayes' (2009) assertion that 'therapeutic education' has undermined learning *per se*. Rather they support Spratt's (2016) suggestion that it is the language of education – 'flourishing' – which supports young people's emotional wellbeing, as opposed to more limited and arguably targeted approaches based on physical health, psychology or social work. The transformational aspect is the acceptance that young people have agency and are capable of improving their own behaviour, rather than being subject to a medicalised intervention to make them conform to conventional norms. While teachers may adopt the techniques of EC to support an individualised, or targeted, approach, this is not the intention of the model, although the notion that it can be subverted in this way does support Ecclestone's (2017) views. However, where this is linked to a whole-school approach which recognises the inequalities faced by certain groups within the social structure, and focusses on empowering young people to achieve, the challenge to the existing order is clear.

Benefits/disbenefits

There is a range of potential beneficiaries of AAS approaches, both institutional (MATs and schools) and individual (heads, teachers, TAs/LSAs, students, and parents/carers). There are some implications for wider communities, especially disadvantaged groups, although these are not discussed in detail in this thesis. Similarly, there is an important caveat, in that, because of the Covid restrictions to the research, the perceptions reported are exclusively those of staff, which would need to be set against those of less powerful groups – students and parents/carers.

The specific benefits identified were reputational gain for MATs and schools, for headteachers, greater buy-in from staff of overall school values, a lessening of demands for crisis management and greater consistency of approach from staff. For staff, advantages included quieter, more manageable classrooms, an increased focus on learning, and more confidence in their ability to manage difficult situations. Unlike other studies such as Rose *et al.* (2019) and Harrison (2022) there was less direct reference from respondents to individual staff self-awareness, although three primary school teachers mentioned using EC with their own children (Transcripts 2 and 14), and the PRU Executive Head suggested that teachers who did not have the necessary level of trauma awareness would be more likely to struggle generally (Transcript 4). Similarly, a number of secondary school respondents pointed to negative staff attitudes as a potential barrier to effective AAS implementation. Students, too, were seen to have benefitted, in terms of their learning, ability to operate in the classroom, and their understanding of their own behaviour. Benefits to parents/carers were seen to be somewhat more nuanced. There was some evidence of improved relationships at home, both in the primary school and the PRU, although the mainstream schools suggested that there was a distinction between those who did and did not engage with the school. Engagement with more disadvantaged families had directly increased as a result of lockdown on all three sites, reflecting findings from earlier studies (eg Macer *et al.*, 2011; Moss *et al.*, 2020; Strachan, 2021) that such families may be happier to engage remotely with services, on their own terms, although only in the PRU was this related directly to the AAS initiatives.

Thus, some change can be observed for pupils, staff and parents/carers. For pupils these changes are potentially transformative – in the sense of altering their life chances – but only in the PRU can it be argued that AAS was being fully implemented. The question then becomes the extent to which AAS values have challenged or replaced normative values on the other sites. Subjective responses from individual senior managers in the primary and secondary schools gave figures of fifty and thirty per cent respectively for the internalisation of AAS approaches by staff. While there is no statistical validity to either figure it is the perception which is important. In the primary school there were clearly expressed contrary views, and, while increasingly sympathetic to the new EC/behaviour

strategy, the assistant head's comments may imply a targeted, as opposed to a universal, approach. Secondary school respondents, while all articulating a critical AAS-informed view, accepted that this was not necessarily shared by all staff. With regard to parents/carers, only the PRU appeared to demonstrate a critical engagement which took into account parents' norms and values; although actively seeking to engage with parents, the primary school appeared to do so in terms of its own normative value structure, and, while the secondary school did recognise issues of class, gender and race in seeking to be supportive, it faced challenges in seeking to do this beyond the performative and normative expectations of a secondary school in a neoliberal economy.

Empowerment/disempowerment

A further aspect is the empowerment or otherwise of the different groups affected. The adoption of AAS approaches can empower a MAT, as a way of expressing its own values. The neoliberal 'freedoms' for MATs, as independent commercial companies, to express their values, can allow for apparently critical approaches, although it is arguable that the two MATs in this study both have rationales which are acceptable in terms of the dominant discourse – one because it has a religious foundation, and the other because it deals with excluded children who are otherwise a threat to society. The secondary school is a Single Academy Trust (SAT) and, although proud of its independent feminist traditions, is vulnerable to performative scrutiny if it departs too far from acceptable norms. Internally, heads of establishment and senior managers can also be empowered by undertaking AAS initiatives, in terms of supporting new, whole school approaches, developing staff competences and, more pragmatically, in managing potential discontent. This latter is not necessarily negative; in both of the mainstream schools there were examples of creative strategies to achieve staff engagement, and to empower them via the AAS project, while, in the PRU, staff appeared increasingly to support the MAT and local management values.

There is thus evidence that AAS was associated with support and challenge for staff, and that this challenge included a recognition of the barriers and inequalities faced by young

people, at least in the secondary school and the PRU. In the primary school this was more muted, but inequalities were recognised, and the AAS approach was seen as a way of addressing these. The counter-argument to this analysis is that of Perryman *et al.* (2017), which implies that such reflective empowerment for staff is largely illusory, and merely ensures they police themselves, within a neoliberal framework. However, the tensions for individual schools in having to come to terms with that performative framework, and the way in which individual staff were seen to have agency to define their own response, would seem to be reflect Sheikh and Bagley's (2018), and Troman's (2008) observations, that teachers do develop their own approaches. Not every teacher, therefore, is necessarily developing a transformative approach, but for many the criteria of 'conscientisation' (Freire, 1972) are being met.

The issues are somewhat different for students and for parents/carers, and it is a major limitation of this research that it has not included their direct voice. However, here again, respondents on all three sites had a strong discourse of empowerment for pupils as a key element of AAS, reflecting Scales *et al.*'s (2020) distinction between caring and challenging strategies. In the primary school efforts were made to engage pupils via assemblies, and some class teachers worked with their students to develop their own EC approaches and scripts. The MAT CEO described an event in another school, where children with SEND had given an assembly to explain to their peers the hidden barriers which they faced (Transcript 10). It is arguable that such approaches are easier, and less challenging to the status quo, in a primary school. In the secondary school, a direct challenge from pupils to its authority had been seen as highly disruptive and had led to a return to hierarchical approaches by some staff.

All three school leadership teams expressed a commitment to working with parents, but only in the PRU was this articulated as an empowerment, rather than a 'caring', model. Similarly, while there was reference to working with different communities in all three schools, for the mainstream schools this again appeared to be a 'caring' rather than empowering model. Two PRU senior staff referred to engagement with more marginalised parents and GRT communities in a way which was more aligned with an

empowerment model. The only reference to the community as a whole came in the secondary school, reflecting a concern for the school's reputation, rather than wider public engagement or consideration of the democratic deficit (See below).

Segmentation issues – race, class and gender

Carspecken (1996) indicates the need to place critical ethnographic analyses within the context of wider social theory. This study has taken an approach based on Habermas (1978), the neo-Marxist structuralist position of Bowles and Gintis (1976) and the post-structuralist tradition of Foucault (1977a), counterposing these with Freire's notion of 'conscientisation', as well as later critiques. For Bowles and Gintis, and for Freire, issues of social class are central to this analysis, although later critiques of Freire, such as Apple (1988) and Sanders (2020), indicate the importance of gender and race.

These issues are significant for a key question of this thesis: the extent to which the practices associated with AAS are matched with a theoretical understanding of the wider social context, and the consequent transformation or otherwise which this brings about. Given the critical theoretical assumptions of this study, an understanding by those involved of the impact of class and other inequalities is important. There is clear evidence of a change in practice in the primary school, and a change in attitude on the part of some staff, even though this is not matched by a full articulation of theoretical understanding. In the PRU there is evidence of the development of a common theoretical understanding, which supports and enhances existing practice with students, and is linked with a subjective understanding of the issues and inequalities which they face. This understanding appears to have coincided with an improvement in trust of the management hierarchy, and staff identification with the norms and values of the organisation. Such a growth in trust might be identified by some postmodernists, such as Perryman *et al.* (2017), as a form of 'soft' social control within an institution which seeks to manage and 'cool out' (Clark, 1960) potentially disruptive members of society. However, this is at odds with the way in which senior members of staff, including the

CEO, specifically challenged the social inequalities faced by the students, and with the aim of empowering them to have their own voice.

By contrast, although secondary school staff had a much clearer model of social inequality, and saw AAS as supporting and empowering young people, families and communities, the evidence suggests that it had not been as strongly transformational here. This may reflect the relatively short timescale of fieldwork undertaken at the school (6 months as compared with 18 months on the other two sites), and the disruption of the Covid pandemic. It could also be argued that many of the principles of AAS, such as restorative practice, were already established on the site and therefore AAS would be merely enhancing existing practice. Nonetheless, a number of respondents expressed reservations as to the extent to which AAS understanding had been embedded across the whole staff. This may in turn reflect the size and complexity of a secondary school, which makes the implementation of whole school approaches more difficult (Wetz, 2009). This might be seen as comparable with the primary school, where some transformation of approach could be seen, but was not yet necessarily consistent. Moreover, although challenging inequality *per se* was much more a feature of the secondary school ethos than in the primary school, this was not necessarily linked with AAS approaches. Again, this may be related to the social position of mainstream schools, where ‘acceptable’ discourses, such as ‘equalities’, are permitted, but ‘political’ discourses, which challenge the status quo, are not - see *Guidance on political impartiality in schools*, (DfE, 2022c). Here we have to consider whether the transformational aspects of AAS are more significant at an individual teacher or classroom level, or whether a wider theoretical understanding is needed to meet Freire’s (1972) criterion of ‘conscientisation’.

The issue of race – which Stern *et al.* (2021) argue has been neglected in attachment discussions – was not significantly addressed in the primary school. Both the PRU MAT CEO and former head described engagement with GRT communities and noted in passing the rising proportion of BME students, but this was not related to AAS. Secondary school respondents acknowledged issues of identity and family history in this context, and the complex interplay of race, class and attachment, but did not relate this to any wider

transformational issues, beyond the school's general anti-racist stance. Similarly, there was a relative lack of critical perspective among participants around gender and AAS. In the PRU one teacher suggested that mainstream schools were more likely to intervene earlier with girls around issues of emotion and mental health, and the CEO challenged received stereotypes about "boys acted out, girls acted in" (Transcript 13). Two of the secondary school respondents, who had studied attachment theory within academic courses, were sceptical of feminist critiques of AAS as being essentially patriarchal (Duschinsky, 2020). While all the secondary school teachers were concerned to challenge stereotypes and expectations of girls' performance they did not relate this in any detail to their AAS approach. By contrast, two secondary school teachers and the PRU MAT CEO related the supportive ethos of AAS approaches to enabling young people safely to explore gender and non-binary identities in the school context. Further research would be required to establish the extent to which AAS perspectives can be seen as transformative in the area of race and gender, as opposed to reproducing normative stereotypes.

Wider issues of power and authority

Another underlying theme has been as to where power and authority lie in determining responses to AAS. Government policy has been ambivalent, and it could be argued that this provides a form of vacuum, whereby schools and teachers can choose their own approach. However, this needs to be set against the overall performative framework of neoliberal control, policed by the Ofsted inspection framework (Ofsted, 2021a and b; Simpson, 2021b), thus supporting the views of Ecclestone (2017) and Perryman *et al.* (2017) that this supposed reflective autonomy is illusory, actually enabling the social system to adapt and mitigate threats to its continuation. The MAT CEO's participation in a DfE working group, and his positive comments about the then children's minister (Transcript 13) are a case in point.

Intermediate bodies – the role of the local authority

Structures of governance and management for schools in England are mandated by the UK government. Although the ultimate responsibility for securing children's education in a geographical area lies with the local authority, under the Children Act (2004), the Coalition and Conservative governments have since 2010 pursued policies of increasing school independence from local authority control via 'academy' status (Academies Act, 2010). This has been particularly the case for schools found by to be underperforming, where the Education and Adoption Act (2016) empowered the Secretary of State to require individual schools to become part of a multi-academy trust (MAT), although 'successful' schools were allowed to maintain their single academy trust (SAT) status. In October 2021 39% of schools, with 52% of students, were academies (gov.uk, 2021), of which 80% were in MATs (NGA, 2021). All three schools in this particular study were academies. Two – the primary school and the PRU - were part of MATs, while the secondary school was a SAT.

In these circumstances the leadership role of the local authority is seriously weakened. It necessarily has to prioritise its existing statutory requirements, while offering additional services on a commercial basis. Some local authorities such as Derbyshire (Kelly and Watt, undated) and Brighton and Hove (Ahmed, 2018) have offered specific advice to schools on AAS approaches, but it is worth noting that the majority of those (including these two examples) have done so under the aegis of the virtual school for children requiring social work support, which attracts separate central government funding, or, to a more limited extent, the educational psychology service. In Trivedi's (2022) study of 26 local authority AAS training schemes 18 of the 29 respondents were from virtual schools and 11 from education psychology services. The DfE itself refers to the importance of the role of the virtual school in developing AAS across all schools as part of its guidance on the extended role of the virtual head (DfE, 2021a). Again, it is significant that this is still posed in terms of a targeted role towards children with social workers, although the document disingenuously points out elsewhere that 98% of maintained schools have eligible children on roll (*ibid.*: 8). While Barnes (2017) attempts to make a case for the role of the

local authority in terms of strategy and local accountability, the 2022 White Paper (DfE, 2022d) further emphasises this targeted, rather than ultimately strategic, role.

The declining role and influence of the local authority illustrates both the 'democratic deficit', whereby local people and communities lose ownership and control of education in their area (see Ranson and Stewart, 1994; Säfström and Månsson, 2022), and the practical lack of efficacy from the local authority even where it wishes to promote a particular approach. In these circumstances it is not surprising to find the two mainstream schools taking a somewhat selective approach to local authority services and support, while respondents in the PRU saw the relationship in more conflictual terms.

Multi-academy Trusts

By contrast, this research has revealed the important role of the Multi-academy Trust (MAT) in influencing developments. While much of the earlier critical literature in this area focussed on the major academy chains, many of which were established by commercial entrepreneurs on neoliberal principles (Chapman, 2013), more recent research (Riddell, 2019) has demonstrated that many MATs are relatively small, representing local clusters of schools, and might be seen, to some extent, to have compensated for the democratic deficit mentioned above. Unlike a local authority school or a SAT, where each school is notionally autonomous, a MAT has management control of its schools and can direct their activities. While a significant proportion of major academy chains are committed to behaviourist, rather than AAS, approaches (see Ark Academy, 2020), this means that, where a MAT decides to prioritise AAS, it is in a much stronger position than the local authority, to influence developments in its own schools.

The importance of this analysis is that it brings into clear focus the social forces underlying the implementation of AAS. From a government policy perspective there is either a prescriptive top-down view that AAS is a way of solving a particular social problem – the underachievement of children with links to social care – or a view that implementation of policy in schools is a matter for the individual MAT. These might

equate respectively to the paternalist neoconservative and neoliberal strands in Conservative thinking identified by Bailey and Ball (2016). In turn this would justify the scepticism of postmodernist and Foucauldian thinkers such as Ecclestone (2017) who present attachment-related ideas as merely a 'soft' form of social control. This might arguably be the case in the primary school where the MAT's values are clearly set within an individualistic and Church of England normative framework. However, even here, the way in which those values are articulated in the semi-autonomous context of the primary school, from the point of view of the headteacher, is clearly an empowerment model, even though some staff still see this in limited terms of classroom control.

The PRU MAT provides another challenge to this view. While, structurally, the MAT sits comfortably within the governance framework which has developed since 2010, and the CEO is an active participant in government policy forums, its values question the way in which social inequalities affect its students, and see an understanding of 'brain science' as a way of empowering students and their families (page 190). This approach appeared to be well embedded at all levels of the organisation. Interestingly, the CEO challenged the paternalistic aspects of neoconservative thinking, but embraced the opportunities afforded by neoliberal government policy to develop an alternative approach, and to remove the constraints of operating within a local authority framework. Thus, the MAT cannot be seen simplistically as a neoliberal constraint on AAS developments, or merely replicating a paternalistic or top-down interpretation which does nothing to transform the understanding, school structures and individual life chances of those involved. There are clear contradictions which can be identified: between the MAT as a creature of the neoliberal status quo and as an organisation which has the freedom to challenge it because of its supposed autonomy; and between the MAT as a performative managerial structure, and as a devolved framework which can promote change. These contradictions provide spaces within which alternative approaches can be developed at MAT, school and classroom level. While these changes may be inconsistent, that inconsistency illuminates the agency which school leaders and frontline staff have to develop their own interpretations of policy. Not all changes are necessarily transformational, but the MAT framework has the potential to facilitate this.

A different argument might apply in the case of the secondary school. As a SAT it has some autonomy to articulate its values and approach, and the development of AAS was seen as part of a general approach to empowering and supporting students and staff. However, this autonomy is vulnerable to challenge if it is seen to be threatening the status quo, as this might result in the imposition of performative sanctions in the form of Ofsted judgments or even requirements to join a MAT (Education and Adoption Act, 2016). Thus, an internal challenge from students and some local communities had consequences, both in terms of individual staff feeling threatened, and in managers fearing that the adverse publicity could lead to the imposition of a new governance structure which was much less aligned with AAS approaches, demonstrating the fragile nature of such perceived autonomy.

The impact of Covid

The Covid pandemic was a major influence, both on the research process and on the three schools. It restricted research access to sites and individuals, and necessitated significant changes in methodology (see Chapter 3 and Appendix 6). Its impact on schools was profound, in terms of attitudes to children's wellbeing in general and AAS in particular, at policy, school and classroom level. Respondents on all three sites highlighted the way in which the lockdowns had disrupted learning, highlighted inequalities, reduced capacity for AAS implementation and increased pressures on staff, students and families. At the same time, they indicated positive benefits brought by the lockdowns, such as improving behaviour management within the classroom, and the opportunity to reflect on wider priorities. John and Marie, as institutional heads, both saw a direct link between AAS and managing the challenges of Covid.

In policy terms, DfE initially adopted relationship-based approaches such as the 'Recovery Curriculum' (Carpenter and Carpenter, 2020) but as the pandemic continued into 2021 focussed more on 'lost learning' (Simpson, 2021a). As early as April 2021 the then Secretary of State, Gavin Williamson, was signalling a return to traditional classroom practice (Williamson, 2021). However, DfE advice continued to be confused. Despite the

promotion of AAS in its guidance on virtual heads' role, published on 16 June 2021 (DfE, 2021a), a consultation on Behaviour Management in Schools, published on 29 June (DfE, 2021b) requesting schools' reflections on the impact of Covid, adopted a behaviourist approach based entirely on Bennett (2017). A similar contradiction can be observed in the Guidance on Attendance (DfE, 2022a) and the further consultation on Behaviour (DfE, 2022b), which again reasserted Bennett's (2017) approach.

Some commentators such as Kerslake *et al.* (2020) have suggested that the pandemic itself had led to 'radical uncertainty', or paradigm change, across the globe. If AAS approaches had been systematically prioritised within government policy, the neo-Foucauldian argument that this is merely part of a general form of 'soft' social control would have some merit. However, the very contradictions in government policy, in merely presenting Covid as an aberration before a return to the old 'normal,' do support the general argument of this thesis that the adoption of AAS-based approaches can represent a challenge to the status quo and therefore can be transformational. It may be more accurate to perceive Covid as a 'moral panic', in Cohen's (2011) terms – a temporary aberration which reveals social inequalities, but which does not cause any lasting change to the status quo.

Mental health

The final area which has emerged, and which is particularly relevant to the Covid debate, is that of mental health. As outlined in Chapter 2, concerns over children's mental health are often counterposed against traditional behaviourist discourses in understanding government policy towards AAS (see Parker and Levinson, 2018). While mental health needs were only mentioned in passing by primary school respondents, both PRU and secondary respondents related these directly to AAS approaches for students – in the case of the secondary school several respondents also mentioned concerns for staff and parents/carers. PRU respondents perceived these developments as reflecting longer-term social changes, whereas secondary school respondents related them more directly to the impact of Covid. However, no respondents at any of the three schools discussed mental

health issues in terms of individual pathology, but more as a wider social issue which needed to be addressed. With the possible exception of the primary school, whose values might be seen as being aligned with a normative church-based ethos, this more critical perspective fits better with a transformative approach, particularly in challenging prevailing assumptions in government policy which see mental health in terms of a medical model of illness and targeted treatment (Parker and Levinson, 2018; DoH/DfE, 2017).

General conclusions

Implications for schools

This discussion suggests that AAS can be transformational at different levels – for the individual student, practitioner, classroom, the whole school, or even the MAT. It has the potential to challenge the social structure, but this challenge is not always present, or consistent. Perceptions and impact vary between sites and according to hierarchical position, and there is a need to distinguish between ‘caring’ approaches (Scales *et al.* 2020) – which do not necessarily imply any challenge either to the individual or the status quo and may represent a form of patronising social control – and approaches which challenge the individual to progress to the best of their ability. These tensions reflect some contradictions in neoliberal ideology, as suggested by Bailey and Ball (2016). Taking this further, while AAS can be a ‘soft’ form of social control, as Ecclestone (2017) suggests, it can also be used to subvert this control.

There is, moreover, a need to avoid simplistic equations and stereotypes. For example, individual teachers can use AAS approaches in isolation in their own classroom and practice, but they are more likely to have a transformative effect if they are adopted across the whole school. Similarly, there is a paradox whereby hierarchical leadership is needed to promote whole school approaches which can challenge the status quo, as described in all three research sites. The way in which this leadership is provided can vary; some of this will depend on the particular context, staffing structure and

personalities in a particular school. Staff engagement and internalisation of AAS approaches is vital, but this research draws on Berlin's (1969) two concepts of liberty to draw a distinction between 'negative', or liberal, 'opting in' management approaches, and 'positive' strategies, whereby there is an expectation that individuals will conform with a collective approach which has been developed through a consultative process. This concept of agency – particularly teacher agency - is important, and there is an issue around teacher 'professionalism' which might be seen in traditional terms (Dewey 1938/1997) as representing a degree of objectivity and independence. However, as Whitty (2006), points out, this is itself an ideological construct, and the discourse around teacher professionalism since 2011 has been bounded by a statutory definition (DfE, 2011) written to support a particular ideological perspective. Thus, the meaning of 'professionalism' in some of the statements by primary school teachers appears to be less about academic freedom and agency, and more about reproducing the status quo.

Central to the relationship between AAS, transformation and social control is the distinction between universal and targeted approaches, or between social models which seek to support individuals by removing barriers to participation, and medical models which imply that deviation from a socially constructed norm implies some form of deficit, or individual pathology. In the classroom this leads to an emphasis on learning as opposed to control – in stark contrast to current DfE advice to new teachers (DfE, 2021c) - and a focus on inclusion, as opposed to exclusion. This does not mean the abandonment of boundaries and sanctions where appropriate, but that their use should be appropriate, proportionate and positively applied wherever possible. A further element of this discussion is the assumption by a number of critics, such as Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) or Furedi (2014) that AAS approaches are 'taught' in the form of didactic classroom lessons. While there is some level of classroom discussion via PSHE, all three schools in this study indicate that most of their AAS development came from whole school approaches, or 'in the moment' reactions to particular incidents, thereby challenging this essentially hierarchical approach.

Another central issue in this discussion is the role of theoretical understanding. Although conventional articulations of 'praxis' would suggest that actors need a wider social understanding effectively to make the AAS approach transformative, the evidence suggests that, on these sites, different understandings can have some transformative effects, at least on pupils' life chances, or even on whole-school approaches. Thus, the primary school TAs' perspective can make a significant difference for individual children, while the Christian perspective of the primary school MAT, rejecting consumerist values in favour of a focus on the whole child, has promoted a transformation of whole school behaviour support. Conversely, although all four secondary school respondents articulated a clear theoretical position in terms of AAS and wider society, they accept that this has yet to be fully realised in terms of practice. Only in the PRU have these criteria been fully met.

Implications for wider policy issues

There is a question as to whether the underlying apparent confusions and contradictions in government policy allow space in which individuals and/or other parts of the social system can make their own interpretations and develop their own approaches. This reflects the debate between Bailey and Ball (2016), who argue that there is an underlying logic in neoliberal policy, regardless of such apparent inconsistencies, and Ecclestone (2017), who suggests that such inconsistencies do not matter, because public policy has been marginalised to the point of being immaterial, and only market forces are at play. Ecclestone proposes that the emphasis on vulnerabilities, including specifically attachment, and even the wider challenges to social equity which are apparently revealed, are co-opted into an esoteric argument which merely obscures this fundamental reality. A case in point is the role of the local authority, which has been marginalised to the point of policing central policy, including being given a specific role in developing AAS approaches (DfE, 2001a). This thesis suggests that schools themselves are adopting sophisticated approaches to accessing and purchasing local authority services. This tends to support LeGrand and Bartlett's (1993), and Säfström and Månsson's (2022) contention that schools are now operating within a neoliberal market framework, but this

in itself indicates the possibility that individual schools do have agency to challenge the fundamental assumptions which underlie this framework.

This notion of parity of esteem between schools and institutions like the local authority, which might have been seen as part of the hierarchy of the post-war liberal state, is even stronger in the case of MATs. The PRU MAT saw its relationship with local authorities in conflictual terms, and its CEO was dealing directly with central government on policy issues. The primary school MAT CEO presented differences in policy across several local authorities as a context within which the MAT had to operate in order to pursue its own aims. The MAT has considerable latitude to determine its own priorities, and to direct their implementation in its schools. This means that it can materially affect practice, and arguably thinking, in its institutions, and the only constraint on this is the performative (Ofsted) and business (Regional School Commissioners) models of the DfE. The question then becomes as to whether there is a logical inconsistency in an institution which is a creature of the new neoliberal order in education espousing an approach – AAS - which effectively challenges this. According to Ecclestone (2017) this challenge is illusory, but, taking Bailey and Ball's (2016) approach, and the evidence of this research that actors at all levels are making conscious, informed and different decisions, the possibility remains that AAS can challenge the overall thrust of the neoliberal approach.

The situation for schools which are Single Academy Trusts (SATs) is somewhat different. Although the autonomous institution is a neoliberal ideological construct – as outlined in *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010) – successive Secretaries of State have struggled with ways of controlling academies which are 'failing', in terms of performance, of financial management or of ideology, as in the Birmingham 'Trojan Horse' events (Holmwood and O'Toole, 2018). Although SATs, like MATs, are routinely subject to business monitoring by the Regional Schools Commissioners, they are also much more vulnerable to other forms of performance management, especially Ofsted, backed by the power of the Secretary of State to direct their incorporation into a MAT. Thus, even where the development of AAS is seen as compatible with the school's overall aims, this may only be where this development is not seen to present a challenge to the status quo.

External events may mean that that the school finds itself forced into a MAT more aligned to the dominant value structure, leading SATs to police themselves to avoid this eventuality, and, possibly, to undermine the potential for truly transformative approaches.

The challenges of Covid materially affected the processes and content of research, impacting directly on government policy and on the experience of schools. However, while both commentators and teachers hailed the pandemic as an opportunity to review and re-set agendas, the notion that this has created a new paradigm in education has been firmly opposed in government policy, in favour of an emphasis on 'catch up' learning, behaviourist strategies, and a return to the previous status quo. Mental health, which was a feature of much of the literature on Covid, and which was highlighted by respondents in the PRU and the secondary school, has not been reflected to the same extent in government policy literature, although it is mentioned in passing in the Ofsted Chief Inspector's Report (Ofsted, 2021c) and some additional training has now been commissioned (DfE, 2021e). This issue can be seen as a proxy for the extent to which government policy makers are willing to engage with wider issues of relational practice in schools and thereby illustrates some of the key current ideological elements of the neoliberal state. In the model of neoliberal polity articulated by Ecclestone (2017) the Covid pandemic and issues of mental health are mere aberrations best dealt with via the market and the voluntary sector, not the core business of government. However, taking Bailey and Ball's (2016) interpretation, these challenges illustrate the tensions between a neoconservative interventionist approach, and a purist *laissez faire* model. Inside these contradictions, it can be argued, even within government policy, there is scope to develop an alternative and potentially transformative approach.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

The implications of this research

Limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research

Contribution to knowledge

Closing reflections

The implications of this research

Running through this thesis has been the issue as to whether AAS approaches in schools have the potential to transform the educational process, and children's lives, or whether they are simply a 'soft' form of social control. The core research questions were:

- What do we mean by 'Attachment Aware Schools' (AAS)?
- How is AAS perceived, enacted and resisted by different actors at different levels?
- Who benefits - why, when and where?
- What does this tell us about social structures, inequalities and policy enactment at a wider level?

Chapter 2 and Appendix 3 consider the academic and policy context, while Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical, methodological and practical considerations involved in the research. The outcomes of the empirical research outlined in Chapter 4 and Appendix 5 are discussed in Chapter 5, which considers their implications for the research question itself, and for wider issues of power relationships, inequality, personal agency and the potential for change across society as a whole.

Chapter 5 concludes that the implementation of AAS approaches is having an effect; that they can be transformational, at different levels, for children, teachers and schools; and that these changes have the potential to challenge existing social structures. However, they are not consistently applied or understood; not all staff are convinced by the

approaches and there may be a range of interpretations and strategies adopted at different levels, and by different individuals, in different schools. In particular, there is a distinction to be drawn between 'universal' approaches which seek to empower all students, and 'targeted' approaches, which identify certain individuals, groups, families or communities as requiring remedial treatment. More widely, we need to distinguish between approaches which are merely 'caring' – and may effectively disempower already disadvantaged groups – and those which seek to empower individuals to succeed in their own terms.

Further, while it can be argued that the individual practitioner can be effective in his/her own classroom, the evidence demonstrates that changes are more effective when led and supported on a whole-school and indeed whole-MAT basis. This leads to a paradox of leadership, whereby leaders need to engage individual members of staff in owning the initiative. Each site took a different strategy, depending on the type, context and history of the school, the patterns of existing relationships with staff, students, parents/carers and the local community, and the leadership style of the headteacher and senior managers. Two broad approaches could be identified, using Berlin's (1969) two concepts of liberty: a 'positive' approach, emphasising prior consultation and staff engagement with the core principles of the organisation, underpinned with performance management; and a 'negative' approach, emphasising staff training, opting in to the initiative and management support. In this particular, limited, study it appeared that the positive approach had secured a greater level of staff commitment, but this would need to be validated with a wider number of staff and schools.

Related to this was the issue of actual consistency and understanding of practice at practitioner level. Some junior staff at the beginning of the fieldwork period, notably primary school TAs and PRU secondary staff, were able to describe sophisticated relational approaches, but claimed not to understand the theoretical underpinnings. This was addressed during the research, in the primary school via a MAT-led behaviour policy initiative, and in the PRU through the direct intervention of and informal CPD provided by the Executive Head. In both cases there was evidence of increased staff understanding.

Two secondary school respondents, by contrast, expressed concerns that consistency of practice – and, by implication, understanding – had deteriorated as a result of the Covid lockdown. This leads to the issue as to whether action without understanding – ‘activism,’ in Freire’s (1972) terms – can be seen as transformational or, indeed, whether, as Perryman *et al.* (2017) suggest, ‘reflection’ in itself has been coopted by the neoliberal state. This thesis rejects that latter proposition, taking a pragmatic approach based on Madison (2005). While action without reflection cannot be seen to be transformational, where that reflection is related to wider social change – albeit without a precise Freirean political analysis – it does appear to meet that definition.

More broadly, there appears to be considerable ambivalence in policy terms towards the notion of AAS. While attachment-based approaches have been promoted by some Conservative politicians, particularly in the context of early intervention (Leadsom, 2021), children in care (APPG, 2012) and school exclusions (Timpson, 2019), there remains considerable hostility to the notion, as representing a dangerous undermining of neoliberal assumptions (Malik, 2013). This ambivalence can be seen in apparently contradictory policy documentation (eg DfE, 2022a, on school attendance and DfE, 2022b on behaviour and exclusions) and may be related to assumptions about the need to target interventions to reduce social challenge, against performative controls on universal institutions such as schools. Bailey and Ball (2016) suggest that this reflects the tension between neoconservative interventionist ‘one nation’ and neoliberal market-driven approaches within the Conservative Party. This leads to the question as to whether AAS is of itself a challenge to neoliberal assumptions and values or whether, as Ecclestone (2017) proposes, it has been co-opted as an illusory and irrelevant debate, which merely obfuscates the monolithic hegemony of the status quo. If Ecclestone’s argument is accepted, it follows that AAS cannot be transformative. However, taking Bailey and Ball’s analysis, it does appear that there is space within those contradictory policies for an alternative strategy to emerge; combining this with Freire’s and Madison’s insights, there is scope for social change; while Sheikh and Bagley (2018) and Troman (2008) provide compelling evidence – supported by these research findings – for continuing teacher agency.

These contradictions are further apparent in the findings which have emerged over the role of 'intermediate agencies' in the context of AAS. Local authorities, which would traditionally have taken on the role of local policy development and promotion, have been largely marginalised under the neoliberal economic and policy developments of the 2010s. Significantly, most of the AAS policy development which has taken place at this level has been led by virtual schools, and the policy requirement to ensure schools were attachment aware was made in the guidance to virtual school heads on the extension of their role to all children with a social worker - a targeted approach. The two mainstream schools in this research had adopted a 'pick and mix' approach to local authority services. The PRU had an adversarial relationship, and only the primary school made any reference to the virtual school. By contrast, the two schools which were part of MATs were highly appreciative of the support which they received – one respondent suggested that the initiative might not have been successful without this (Transcript 14).

MATs themselves are very much part of the neoliberal project, and were created on a private sector company model to manage the new framework of academies, post 2010. However, this model implied a light touch governance, based on financial and academic performance, which, in private sector discourse, emphasised company values. This leads to a contradiction whereby, provided it meets its performance expectations, a MAT is free to develop its own value structures. While many MATs have adopted highly normative policies, especially to discipline (Ark Academy, 2020), the MATs in this study had adopted approaches which might be seen to be challenging these, whether from a religious or from a social perspective. By contrast, as a Single Academy Trust (SAT), the secondary school had developed its own value structures along feminist, anti-racist and relational principles. However, faced with an external challenge, there was no infrastructure of support beyond the school itself, and thus the school had to manage these pressures, with the threat that they might provoke performative interventions from DfE and Ofsted, with potential loss of autonomy and forced incorporation into a MAT which did not share these values. Thus, while it is possible for a MAT or SAT school to

adopt alternative or transformative approaches, the position of the SAT school may be more fragile.

This research took place during the period of Covid lockdown. The practical and methodological consequences of this are discussed in detail in Chapter 3 and Appendix 6. The pandemic had profound consequences for schools, not simply in organisational terms, but in surfacing issues such as inequalities, challenges to learning, relationships with parents and support for young people with difficulties. The notion of the 'Recovery Curriculum' (Carpenter and Carpenter, 2020), and the role which AAS approaches could play in supporting this became foregrounded, even in government advice (DfE, 2020b), leading some to suggest that a paradigm change, akin to the Beveridge Report (1943), had taken place (Kerslake *et al.*, 2020). However, while the evidence in this study demonstrates significant reflection and re-evaluation of priorities at school level, most government pronouncements from 2021 have tended towards a 'business as usual' attitude, containing the 'problem' and reasserting traditional normative approaches (eg Williamson, 2021). This thesis concludes that these should be seen more in terms of a 'moral panic' (Cohen, 2011), whereby neoliberal hegemony is reasserted. Nonetheless some small growth points, such as the empowerment of teachers using relational approaches to manage classes in Covid bubbles, or better use of social media to interact with less confident parents, may still lead to transformative outcomes, while continuing ambivalence in government discourse may indicate some space within which alternative approaches may emerge.

A major issue which has emerged post-Covid has been that of mental health for children and young people. This was not new; as outlined in Chapter 2 it was a recurring theme in Select Committee reports from 2014 onwards, and the Secretary of State's response to the 2017 Bennett Report on behaviour (DfE, 2017a) included a parallel commitment to address mental health in schools. The Green Paper which emerged in December 2017 was heavily criticised for its lack of ambition, and many of its proposals have taken considerable time to be implemented: mental health leads training, a core feature of the proposals, is not scheduled to be completed until 2025 (DfE, 2021e). Numerous reports

have outlined the impact of Covid on and growing inequalities in children's mental health (Children's Commissioner, 2020; Marmot, 2020; McCluskey *et al.*, 2021), confirming accounts from respondents in this study. However, despite a reference to this in the Ofsted Chief Inspector's Report (Ofsted, 2021) and the joint publication with Public Health England of updated guidance on mental health in schools in September 2021 (Public Health England and DfE, 2021), the issue was not given the same priority as catch up tuition (Simpson, 2021b).

This further illustrates a gap in neoliberal thinking; while some policy makers have adopted a discourse about vulnerability, their focus has been on normative and performative matters such as classroom behaviour and examination results (Williamson, 2021). Engagement with individual children's feelings and subjective experience is not part of that conception of education, although managing and 'curing' individual pathologies may need to be addressed through other professionals such as psychologists and social workers. That flies in the face of everyday classroom experience, where any child – or adult - can have a bad day, which can be managed by an adequately trained and supported practitioner. Some individuals may need additional support within the school, or provided by external agencies, but this support may not be available, partly because of resources, and partly because of cultural attitudes within schools, or across those agencies. This research has identified a number of different attitudes, ranging from traditional professional and normative approaches which tend to support the status quo, to those which specifically call for social change. Moreover, respondents identified inequalities in access to services, related to social class, ethnicity, ability to 'work the system', and fear of inappropriate external intervention. AAS is not a panacea, nor even necessarily a transformative approach in itself. However, revealing these contradictions, and promoting AAS approaches as an alternative way forward, demonstrates the agency of, and supports, individual practitioners and schools. It can, itself, constitute a form of cultural resistance (Duncombe, 2007; Foucault, 1977b; Gilroy, 1982).

Contribution to knowledge

This research has challenged conventional assumptions about Attachment Aware Schools (AAS) in a number of ways. In terms of methodology it has adopted a critical, rather than a psychological, statistical or mixed methods approach, which has tended to be the norm in this field. In taking this approach, within a critical ethnographic framework, it has combined elements of both Freire's (1972) notion of 'conscientisation' and Madison's (2010) concept of 'activism' to create an analytical framework as to the meanings applied by respondents, and to address the key research question as to whether AAS is essentially transformative or normative in its effects. Unlike other studies, it considers in detail the impact of different school organisation, management processes, hierarchy and professional identities on these perceptions, as well as the particular profile, context of, community perspectives and other external pressures on the individual school.

A particular issue identified in this research, but little acknowledged elsewhere, has been the importance of the Multi-academy Trust (MAT) in promoting AAS approaches. This is linked to the ambivalent position of the MAT itself, as a vehicle for school governance within a neoliberal framework, but notionally 'free' to develop its own value structures. In turn, this can be contrasted with schools which are Single Academy Trusts (SATs), again, notionally autonomous, but highly vulnerable to external and performative pressures, with the ultimate sanction of potential incorporation into a MAT which does not share those values.

Most research into AAS has tended to concentrate on implementation within individual schools, although Nash and Trivedi (2022) and Trivedi (2022) have reported on local authority-wide training schemes. However, the impact of local authorities in the three schools in this study was limited, compared with the MATs, with one having a strongly adversarial relationship with its authority. By contrast two of the schools discussed links with wider statutory services, especially health.

The relationship of AAS *per se* to broader social issues is very little researched; this thesis has placed AAS developments in a wider context of professional and societal changes, as well as the development of government policies in health, social care, education and youth justice. It indicates the apparent inconsistencies within government policy and discusses whether they reflect a single neoliberal approach, as Ecclestone (2017) suggests, or a more nuanced situation within which those very contradictions give scope and agency for change. It also considers the polarity within neoliberal thinking which promotes a medicalised, or deficit, model for those who are seen to be inadequate, while 'normal' children are to be socialised through performative institutions which impose didactic teaching methods and sanctions-based discipline.

Another unique aspect of the research is in its treatment of the Covid Pandemic, which it considers in terms of its impact on the research process, on schools and on policy development. A number of studies have addressed the former issue, while numerous surveys have considered the macro-impact of the pandemic on different aspects of society. A smaller number of focussed studies have investigated its effects on specific groups of young people and schools. This thesis compares these studies with the impacts on this particular research process, on the implementation of AAS in the schools in the sample, and on the wider implications for government policy. It considers the suggestion that Covid itself has led to a paradigm change in English education, but concludes that its overall effect in policy terms has been more akin to a 'moral panic' (Cohen, 2011), albeit that it has had more lasting impacts in schools.

Parallel to this has been the issue of mental health in schools. As indicated above, this had been emerging as a debate from the mid-2010s, and gained a high profile in the Covid recovery debates of 2020/2021. However, this debate has tended to be expressed as addressing a deficit model of mental illness in schools, rather than whole school approaches to wellbeing. This thesis suggests that the latter approach is closely aligned with AAS, and is a key indicator of AAS effectiveness.

Limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research

The Covid pandemic has to some extent constrained the parameters for this research. There are broader implications in terms of the scope of the research data and the wider social context. The original research design envisaged parallel action research projects in two different schools, with widespread involvement of staff, students and parents/carers, and a programme of focus groups to co-create knowledge. This immersive methodology was no longer available with the advent of the pandemic and an ethnographic approach was adopted, which could retain the critical theoretical perspective of the original design, while enabling rich points of cultural knowledge (Agar, 1994, quoted in Arthur *et al.* 2012) to be identified via semi-structured interviews. However, the lockdowns also reduced the opportunity for the researcher to be present, and to make personal observations on site, other than those which had been made during the first two months of fieldwork. This means that much of the discussion is dependent on information and inference drawn from respondents. Similarly, this meant that the researcher was more reliant on gatekeepers, who in turn were concerned to reduce pressures on staff; several requests to contact individuals during the pandemic, in both of the mainstream schools, were politely refused.

A positive consequence of this more flexible approach was that it enabled modifications of the data-gathering process to take place after the first phase of fieldwork (February - June 2020), and in particular to include a secondary school as a comparator site. This was not a direct comparison with the other two sites; although the model of AAS being developed was consistent, the initial training of and presentation to staff had been undertaken by an external trainer, rather than by the researcher, as on the other two sites. While the researcher had been invited by the headteachers to work with the two original sites, his involvement with the third site was negotiated with the headteacher via a family member who was on the senior leadership team, and he did not have the same direct involvement with staff as a whole. In this latter case, therefore, all interpretations were from semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with individual respondents, rather than personal visits to or observations of the school. Some

management protectiveness reduced the opportunity to involve junior members of staff, and it would have been helpful to test out assumptions about the level of staff engagement with a wider group. A longer timescale for fieldwork and the opportunity for onsite observations would have enabled more evidence to emerge as to the extent to which changes identified had become embedded.

The constraints outlined above also meant that the original intention of drawing views directly from students and parents/carers had to be abandoned, leading to a re-focussing of the research on staff perspectives – MAT CEOs, heads, teachers and TA/LSAs. While these are important in their own right, it means that there was no opportunity to contrast received views from staff with the voices of these latter groups nor, by extension, to consider the views of wider communities. Similarly, some potential issues emerged from the interviews, of language and register (Agha, 2005), and their implications for relationships between staff, students and families identifying with different class and ethnic groups. These appeared to be reflected in the limited onsite observations prior to March 2020 but no firm conclusions could be drawn. In a study which seeks to establish the importance of AAS for changes in society as a whole, such perspectives are important, and this would need to be a significant area in any further research.

Although the research did surface some intersectional issues, particularly with regard to social class, one particular area which requires further investigation is the relationship between race, migration and attachment. Arnold's (2012) research is a notable exception in drawing together specific family attachment histories with the cultural and political experience of particular migrant groups but, as Stern *et al.* (2021b) indicate, little work has been undertaken to explore the links between attachment, class, race and gender. This research touched on, but did not fully explore, issues of gender, in terms of young women's experience in schools. Some respondents did discuss the experience of LGBT and non-binary students, including transition to new gender identities. It would be important to establish through further research, the extent to which relational approaches such as AAS actually facilitate more transformational perspectives such as

feminism or queer theory (Butler, 1990), or whether, as Spratt (2016) suggests, they may be co-opted to normalise and control otherwise challenging identities.

The original research design additionally envisaged a small number of semi-structured interviews with policy makers - politicians and administrators – at both national and local government level, to seek their understanding of AAS in policy formation. Such an interview programme proved impossible, given the Covid lockdown, while the first phase of data gathering suggested that this would not necessarily add significantly to perspectives which could be gained from policy documents themselves. This was reinforced by the new focus on practitioners, rather than wider community perspectives. However, the first data phase also indicated the new role and importance of multi-academy trusts (MATs) in AAS developments, and the interview programme was expanded to include the CEOs of the two trusts involved. While these interviews (Transcripts 10 and 13) illuminated perspectives on AAS within the two MATs, further research would be desirable, with a much broader range of MATs, Single Academy Trusts (SATs) and local authority schools, to establish the wider impact of MATs in this field and, again, to explore the extent to which the MAT is in itself a potential source of challenge, or an agent of neoliberal control.

The discussion in this thesis has touched on a number of matters with regard to exclusion, both in the broader social sense, as an antithesis to inclusion, and in the legal sense of children being removed from schools; as well as issues related to mental health and wellbeing. While the thesis does not attempt to explore the detailed psychological or social care literature in these fields, further research would be desirable to investigate national and local governmental perspectives on AAS and exclusions, particularly in terms of policy impact on actual classroom practice.

Further, the thesis has suggested that the overall marketisation of school-based education described by Le Grand and Bartlett (1993) continued unabated through governments of different political persuasions (Säfström and Månsson, 2022). The notion of an integrated 'Children's agenda', first adumbrated in *Every Child Matters* (HM

Treasury, 2003) and legislated via the Children Act, (2004) appeared to conflict with neoliberal marketisation approaches (Simon and Ward, 2010). This led to a somewhat confused situation under New Labour, where a child empowerment discourse (Aynsley-Green, 2010) flourished alongside a promotion of school autonomy. After 2010 this became atomised into a range of different approaches (UK Government, 2021), giving rise to a social care-orientated, targeted approach to AAS (DfE, 2021a), alongside a normative and performative promotion of school discipline. This would indicate a social control, rather than an empowerment, model. The issue then becomes - as with AAS itself - whether the idea of a child-centred policy agenda is of itself transformative, or if this is co-opted into a wider framework of 'soft' social control, a broader area of research which could be developed from this present work.

Closing reflections

In the final analysis, the study finds that AAS *can* transform the lives and life chances of individuals, the practice and orientation of teachers and the overall ethos of the individual school, particularly where such approaches are internalised within the school culture and there is an explicit management perspective which promotes this. It can change the orientation of government policy from top-down, deterministic or behaviourist approaches to those which empower teachers and relationships in the classroom. However, the impact of these changes should not be exaggerated. They can be limited, either by a school/MAT culture which opposes AAS, or which continues to promote essentially normative values while articulating AAS approaches, or by an external performative culture, policed by organisations such as Ofsted. Any policy shifts will take place within the overall context of a neoliberal society, polity and value structure. It is only when the inequalities which underlie policy and practice within that culture are addressed that a true transformation can be made. AAS can be a factor within that change, but the change needs to be conscious and substantive.

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Appendix 1: List of focus group and interview transcripts

Transcript	Date	Exercise	Medium	Who
1	10/02/2020	Focus Group	Face to face	Primary School TAs and SENCO: 'Carly', 'Marianne', 'Anna', 'Sylvia'
2	10/02/2020	Focus Group	Face to face	Primary School Teachers and Assistant Head 'Henry'
3	27/02/2020	Focus Group	Face to face	PRU Staff – secondary age-range. Included 'Guy' and 'Chaz'
4	27/02/2020	Interview	Face to face	'Marie' – PRU Executive head
5	03/06/2020	Interview	Zoom	'Chaz' – Former PRU head
6	10/06/2020	Interview	Zoom	'Olivia' – PRU Senior Teacher
7	22/06/2020	Interview	Telephone	'John' – Primary School Head
8	03/01/2021	Interview	Telephone	'Mollie' – Secondary school assistant head (Achievement)
9	05/02/2021	Interview	Telephone	'Frances' - Secondary school assistant head (Behaviour)
10	15/02/2021	Interview	Google meet	'Pete' – Primary school MAT CEO
11	17/02/2021	Follow-up Interview	MS teams	'Guy' – PRU classroom teacher
12	17/02/2021	Interview	Telephone	'Carole' Secondary school assistant head (Teaching and Learning)
13	22/02/2021	Interview	MS teams	'Dave' – PRU MAT CEO
14	18/03/2021	Follow-up Interview	Telephone	'Henry' – Primary School Assistant Head
15	27/04/2021	Interview	Telephone	'Jo' Secondary school classroom teacher
16	01/06/2021	Follow-up Interview	Face to face	'Mollie' – Secondary school assistant head (Achievement)

Appendix 2: School profiles

Primary School

The primary school is a smaller than average primary school (168 pupils, against a local authority average of 188 (Medland, 2017) and a national average of 282 (DfE, 2020), situated in the Western outskirts of a market town in the South West of England. The town has expanded considerably in the past few decades, with good commuter train and motorway links to London. The original expansion of the town in the 1970s and 1980s was in the neighbourhood of the school, but more recent developments have been to the East of the town. This has led to a situation in which, as the area matures, the established primary schools are all facing reductions in demand for places – in 2002 the school had 255 pupils on roll (Ofsted, 2002b).

The school was rated as Good by Ofsted at its last inspection in April 2017. Its overall KS2 performance in 2019 was rated by DfE as average, although there are some statistical improvements shown between 2017 and 2019, and its expected overall standards in Reading, Writing and Mathematics are higher than both local authority and national figures (DfE, 2020). There are slightly more girls than boys on roll (53.6% compared with 46.4%). It has a higher proportion of pupils with Education, Health and Social Care plans than the national average (4.8% compared with 2.0% nationally) and more children receiving SEN support (13.7% compared with 12.6%). By contrast it has significantly fewer children with English as an Additional Language (3.6% compared with 20.9%) and fewer children receiving free school meals (11.9% compared with 20.5%) (DfE, 2022).

The school shares its site with a church and community centre built at the same time in the 1960s and was a Voluntary Aided Church of England School until its governing body converted to academy status under the Diocesan Multi Academy Trust (MAT), from September 2014. This was partly in response to the growing financial pressures from the reductions in numbers, but also a principled decision to align itself with values of the Trust (Ofsted, 2017). The present headteacher has been in post since September 2015.

Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)

The PRU is situated in an industrial and trading estate on the outskirts of a small city in the South West of England. The Unit has good transport links and is in the vicinity of a local train station. As a PRU it receives requests for placements from across the whole local authority area, although the majority of its students come from the city. At the time of the 2019 pupil census (January 2019) it had 80 pupils on roll, against a notional capacity of 70 places (DfE, 2020), although actual numbers fluctuate as placements begin and end (Transcripts 3 and 6) and not all students attend on a full-time basis (Transcript 11). In January 2022 28 students were recorded on roll (DfE, 2022) Despite these fluctuations the proportion of male to female students has remained consistently around 3 to 1 over the past few years. In 2019 43.8% of students were receiving free school meals, and in 2022, 42.9%, as opposed to 35.3% in 2017 (DfE, 2020; 2022).

The PRU was originally established by the local authority in 1995 for 15-16 year-olds (Key Stage 4) who had been excluded or were in danger of exclusion. It was housed on a number of different sites until an Ofsted report in 2002 (Ofsted, 2002) expressed concerns about the quality of its accommodation, at which point it was moved into a former secondary school building. The local authority subsequently amalgamated a number of units in different geographical locations, covering different age ranges. In 2013 the new organisation was moved to its current purpose-built location on an industrial estate, catering for the whole age range of 4-16 year-olds. Following an adverse Ofsted report in 2014 (Ofsted, 2014) the management and governance of the Unit was outsourced to a MAT run by national charity. In February 2018, when this organisation collapsed, a local MAT was brought in to provide interim management arrangements. An Ofsted inspection in July of that year expressed serious concerns about safety at the unit, and placed it in Special Measures (Ofsted, 2018). The unit reopened as a fresh start academy in November 2018, under the governance of another local MAT, with specific expertise in this area. The current executive headteacher has been in post since 2019.

Secondary school

The secondary school is larger than the England average of 986 (DfE, 2021) with a capacity of 1185 and 1212 pupils on roll in January 2022. It is situated in a local authority borough in Inner London, which was classed in the latest (2019) Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) as the 22nd most deprived local authority in England. This compares with being classed as 11th in the 2015 IMD and 2nd in 2010. 11% of its neighbourhoods are in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods nationally. There are particular issues with child poverty in the area. In 2017 the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) was 27.7%, compared with national and London averages of 17%, placing the authority as the fourth most deprived in London (Local authority, 2019). While this figure had improved to 25% by 2019, reflecting in the overall IMD placement (Local authority, 2019), it nonetheless reflects the range of inequality across the borough – a point which was made very strongly by all respondents from the school. This is further reinforced by the statistic that 25% of school places in the borough were in private schools, compared with an average of 5% in surrounding authorities, with the exception of the City of London, with 90%, reflecting the lack of maintained schools and the preponderance of high-status independent schools in that particular local authority (Mayor of London, 2019).

There is a high proportion of ethnic minority groups in the borough, compared with national figures, with lower White and Asian populations and higher Black and Mixed populations than the London average – see table below

Table 1: Ethnic breakdown of Secondary School Local Authority population

Ethnic Group	Local authority %	London %	England %
White	51	59	84
Asian	11	18	8
Black	22	11	3
Mixed	15	10	4

Office for National Statistics (2018), quoted in Local Authority (2019)

The school was first established in 1906 and moved to its present site in 1916. The site was significantly refurbished under the New Labour 'Building Schools for the Future' scheme and includes a nineteenth century portico – now a learning centre – which is a protected building of considerable local historical interest (school website, 2021). Its predecessor school was rated as 'very good' by Ofsted in 2005 and 'outstanding' in 2008. It converted to academy status in 2011 and was again rated as 'outstanding' at its last inspection (Ofsted, 2013). In 2019, the last year for which performance data is available, it was rated as well above average (0.72%) in its Progress 8 GCSE score and above average in its A level and post 18 qualifications scores (+ 0.23 and + 0.2 respectively). In all cases it exceeded both local authority and national scores (DfE, 2020). In January 2022 there were relatively fewer students with EHC Plans (1.3% against a national average of 2.0%) but identified Special Needs figures were slightly above average (11.7% against 11.5% nationally), although these may be distorted by a reluctance in some communities to identify needs (see Transcript 9). By contrast, 39.5 % of students' first language was not English, compared with 17.2% nationally, and in 2022 31.8% were entitled to free school meals, against 23.7% nationally (DfE, 2022).

The school caters exclusively for girls and prides itself on its positive feminist ethos, having fought off an attempt by the local authority to impose co-education on the site between 1997 and 1998 (school website, 2021). In its 115 years of existence it has had only eight headteachers, all female, including the present headteacher, who took up her post in 2016, having previously worked in a senior pastoral role at the school. It is popular with both wealthier residents of the borough, and with a number of different ethnic minority communities, who appreciate its single sex status, and is always oversubscribed (Transcript 12).

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Ofsted (2017) Primary School Inspection Report 25 April 2017

Ofsted (2018) PRU Inspection Report 4-5 July 2018

Secondary School website (2021) accessed 14 July 2021

Appendix 3: Government Policy Schedule

The documents included in this commentary include relevant primary legislation, parliamentary and government reports. It excludes reports by other bodies such as the Children's Commissioner, or the Centre for Social Justice, which are referenced in the main body of the thesis.

1998

Crime and Disorder Act 1998 c 37. Provided a new framework for Youth Justice, based on local partnerships – multi-agency 'Youth Offending teams' - overseen by the local authority. In many areas these teams provided a basis for developing 'restorative approaches' which have been influential in later AAS developments.

School Standards and Framework Act 1998 c 31. Provided a new framework for partnership between local authorities and schools, based on school improvement. However, this was increasingly undermined by later legislation, notably the Education Acts of 2002 and 2006.

2000

Learning and Skills Act (2000) c 21. Although intended to provide a framework for developing and expanding technical education, this included the notion of independent 'city academies' – themselves derived from the City Technology Colleges in the Conservative Education Reform Act (1988) c 40 – which became the basis for the academisation agenda in 2010.

2002

Education Act (2002) c32. Implemented a range of measures supporting the financing and governance of schools, emphasising their autonomy and self-governing status.

2003

Laming, H. (2003) The Victoria Climbié Inquiry. This report consolidated a range of popular and policy responses to an issue which had challenged the legitimacy of the New Labour approach, leading to the *Every Child Matters* programme, which dominated the political agenda with regard to children until the end of the decade.

HM Treasury (2003). Every Child Matters. This Green Paper set the framework for the new integrated government approach to supporting children and young people, based on the Laming Report and implemented via the Children Act (2004).

2004

Children Act (2004) c 31. established a framework for supporting children and young people, based on local partnerships, and setting out five key outcomes. However, the new statutory framework of Children's Services Departments, which replaced local education authorities, had the unforeseen consequence of undermining relationships between schools, local authorities and other services. Schools, unlike other statutory organisations, were not

required to cooperate with the arrangements, and the continuing emphasis on academic standards, monitored by Ofsted inspections, further reinforced this division.

2005

DfES (2005a) White Paper: Higher Standards, Better Schools for All, More choice for parents and pupils. Reinforced the New Labour market-driven approach to school improvement, which was implemented via the Education and Inspection Act (2006).

Steer (2005). Learning behaviour: The Report of The Practitioners' Group on School Behaviour and Discipline. The emphasis on headteacher autonomy and control of schools led to the establishment of a school-led approach to behaviour and discipline, under Sir Alan Steer. Steer took a collaborative and relationships-based approach, in stark contrast to later 'experts' - see Taylor (2011) and Bennett (2016; 2017) - which was more in tune with the *Every Child Matters* agenda.

2006

Education and Inspection Act (2006) c 40. This further established the New Labour, market driven approach to schools. However, a clause was also inserted giving a statutory basis for local authority youth services - an issue which has emerged recently in the context of implementing AAS approaches (Simpson, 2022).

2007

DCSF (2007a) Social and emotional aspects of learning for schools (SEAL). SEAL was presented as a key element in linking school-based learning with wider issues of emotional and mental health. The programme was discontinued by the Coalition Government in 2011. While popular with teachers, later evaluations of the scheme suggested that it was the whole school commitment to supporting young people, rather than the programme itself, which made a difference (Banerjee *et al.*, 2014; Humphrey *et al.*, 2013)

DCSF (2007b) White Paper: Care Matters: Time for Change. This paper put forward two concepts which have been highly influential in the development of AAS: children in care councils and the role of the virtual school head. The notion of empowerment of children in care via in care councils was an important element of the *In Care, In School* project, which led to the BSU AAS programme, while virtual school heads have been instrumental in supporting and further developing the concept at national level (ARC, 2021).

2008

Scottish Government (2008) Getting it right for every child - 'Girfec'. The 'Girfec' programme laid the basis for the explicit promotion of AAS approaches in Scottish schools from 2012 (see Furnival *et al.*, 2012).

2009

Steer (2009) Learning Behaviour: LESSONS LEARNED A review of behaviour standards and practices in our schools. The second Steer report further reinforced the value of relationships-based approaches to behaviour management and the need for local

cooperative arrangements between schools via Behaviour Support Partnerships. Support for these partnerships was discontinued by the Coalition Government.

Laming, H. (2009) *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report*. Laming's second report, while concluding that some progress had been made, indicated the need for considerable improvements in children's services. This reinforced disillusionment with the New Labour agenda and made the more targeted 'Big Society' approaches of 'Compassionate Conservatism' (Simon, 2017) appear more realistic and reasonable.

2010

House of Commons (2010) Debate C1 WH 26 October 2010 Andrea Leadsom. This is the first recorded example of the discussion of the importance of childhood attachment in Parliament. However, Duschinsky et al (2015) suggest that this also represents the co-option of attachment to support a deficit view of disadvantaged families.

Field F (2010) *The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults*. Again, it can be suggested that this report, by a Labour MP on behalf of the Coalition Government, represents a deficit model of poverty and attachment relationships.

Academies Act (2010) c32. This was the Act which promoted academy status for schools, which many commentators (eg McClusky et al, 2016) suggest, has led directly to reduced levels of tolerance and increased stress for children in schools.

DfE (2010). *White Paper: The Importance of Teaching*. This White Paper, enacted in the Education Act (2011), gave a clear view of teaching as the transmission of knowledge, as opposed to a relational approach to children.

2011

Education Act (2011) c21. This enacted the proposals in *The Importance of Teaching*, linked with:

Taylor, C. (2011). *Getting the simple things right: Charlie Taylor's behaviour checklists*. A clearly behaviourist 'sanctions and rewards' model published as guidance by DfE.

DfE (2011) *Teachers' Standards Guidance for school leaders, school staff and governing bodies*. This again gave a highly performative and partial definition of teaching as a professional activity.

Allen G (2011) *Early Intervention: The Next Steps*. This was another report by a Labour MP, arguably supporting a deficit model of poverty. The cover is a now-discredited comparative photograph of scans of two three-year old brains (Woolgar and Simmonds, 2019).

2012

Taylor (2012). Improving Alternative Provision. This DfE report, authored by Charlie Taylor, marked the first step in bringing alternative provision into line with other educational establishments.

All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (2012) Education Matters in Care. By contrast, this report, chaired by Edward Timpson MP, made a clear case for adopting whole school attachment-based approaches in order to support children in care.

Scottish Government (2012) Common Core of Skills, Knowledge and Understanding and Values for the “Children’s Workforce” In Scotland. This implemented the proposals by Furnival et al (2012) for attachment-based approaches in all Scottish schools.

2013

Timpson, E. (2013) Virtual school heads: making them a statutory requirement. This speech, by the newly-appointed Junior Minister for Children, to the National Virtual Headteachers’ Conference, underlined his personal commitment to pursuing AAS approaches, as well as the policy commitment to make the Virtual School Head (VSH) role statutory.

DfE (2013) Alternative provision. This gave guidance on implementing the Taylor Report recommendations.

2014

Children and Families Act (2014) c.6 . This act gave effect to the statutory requirement for the VSH role, as well as making a number of reforms in the area of Special Educational Needs.

Home Office (2014). Multi agency working and information sharing project. Despite reluctance to engage from the DfE, the Home Office recognised the need for greater levels of joined up working across statutory services, particularly in areas of acute need. It is perhaps significant that the one reference to ACES in the *Draft Guidance on Behaviour in Schools* (DfE, 2022b) is a link to a training pack on the Home Office website, initiated by the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner (Home Office, 2022).

House of Commons (2014) Health Committee: Children’s and adolescents’ mental health and CAMHS’. The Health Committee took a similar view, calling for awareness of mental health issues and child development to be a mandatory part of initial teacher training and continuing professional development. However, the DfE took a very different view (see below).

DfE (2014a) National Curriculum. This established the new ‘streamlined’ National Curriculum, promoting ‘British’ values, as proposed in *The Importance of Teaching*.

DfE, (2014b) Promoting fundamental British values as part of SMSC in schools.

Following the principles outlined in *The Importance of Teaching*, this guidance gave a definition of 'British' values, which could be argued to be highly normative.

DfE (2014c) Combined cadet forces in state-funded schools: staff perspectives. Again, one feature of this approach was the promotion of a view that military relationships and discipline would improve behaviour in schools, although in practice this view did not reflect that of teachers with military experience (See Parker *et al*, 2016).

2015

House of Commons (2015). Health Committee: Children's and adolescents' mental health and CAMHS: Government Response. Dismissive response by DfE, stating that responsibility for training programmes was a matter for individual schools.

DfE (2015) Children outside mainstream education. Policy paper. This put forward further programmes constraining alternative provision to deliver mainstream approaches to organisation, curriculum and discipline.

Carter, A. (2015) Carter Review of Initial Teacher Training. This interim review largely reasserted the approaches outlined in *The Importance of Teaching*. However, it did acknowledge the need for trainee teachers to understand issues of child development, which provided the basis for later proposals on wellbeing, mental health and attachment.

DoH (2015) 'Future in mind'. While this confused the provision of teaching programmes with whole school approaches, the document emphasised the importance of promoting mental health and wellbeing, and made specific reference to parent-child attachment.

DfE and DoH (2015) Statutory guidance on promoting the health and well-being of looked after children. This made specific reference to attachment aware schools and included a link (no longer active) to the Bath Spa University web pages.

NICE (2015) Guidelines on Children's attachment: attachment in children and young people who are adopted from care, in care or at high risk of going into care. Although reflecting a largely medical perspective, the guidelines emphasised the importance of children's attachment experience at school and the need for further research in this field.

2016

Education and Adoption Act (2016) c6. Despite its title this was mainly about increasing power for the Secretary of State to intervene and impose academisation on schools. However, the one clause on adoption reflected a new priority at government level, which led to further legislation the following year, recognising the impact of childhood trauma and attachment issues on adoptees, and extending the role of the VSH to supporting them.

DfE (2016a) White Paper: Educational Excellence Everywhere. This was published alongside the DfE Strategy 2015-2020 and included the policy objective of making every

school an academy by 2022. It was quietly dropped by the new Secretary of State, Justine Greening following opposition from local interest groups and Conservative shire councils.

DfE (2016b) DfE Strategy 2015-2020. A summary of the DfE strategy was also published as an appendix to the White Paper. Of 12 'delivery priorities', 7 were concerned with the organisation, curriculum and funding of schools and only one (11b) mentioned support for children's mental health, although a whole priority was given to 'Build character and resilience'.

DfE (2016c) Advice for school staff on mental health and behaviour in schools. By contrast with the stated overall DfE strategy, this made specific reference to attachment awareness as an important issue.

House of Commons (2016) The mental health and well-being of looked-after children: Report of the Education Committee. This included a witness session which made specific reference to the work undertaken by Bath Spa University and other colleagues, on AAS approaches.

DfE (2016b) Core Framework for Initial Teacher Training. This included attachment awareness as a core part of the programme for trainee teachers. However, the separate attached report on behaviour (Bennett, 2016) made very different proposals (see below).

Bennett, T. (2016) Developing behaviour management content for initial teacher training (ITT). Published as part of the DfE documentation on initial teacher training, this promoted sanctions and rewards, and zero tolerance approaches, illustrating the continuing ambivalence of DfE policy in this area.

Public Health England (2016) Improving the mental health of children and young people in England. This identified secure attachment as the most important protective factor for children, and called for schools to have a positive climate that enhanced belonging and connectedness, an 'open door' policy for children to raise problems and a whole school approach to promoting good mental health.

2017

Children and Social Work Act (2017) c16. This extended VSH responsibility to include adopted children, recognising the long-term effects of childhood trauma and attachment issues.

House of Commons (2017a) Report of the Education Committee: Multi-academy Trusts. This criticised the lack of 'downward accountability', inspection, and evidence for success of MATs, and called for a much clearer framework for expanding, supporting and improving MAT performance.

House of Commons (2017b) Joint Report of the Education and Health Committees Children and young people's mental health — the role of education. This stated that all teachers should be trained to recognise mental health issues, and that senior leadership

must embed well-being throughout the whole culture and provision of the school. The report also pointed out that 'Promoting attainment and well-being is not a 'zero-sum activity' and that 'good schools do both'.

DfE (2017a) Supporting Mental Health in Schools and Colleges. This research report indicated a need for a shared vision for mental health, strong leadership, trusting relationships and high-quality training in schools.

Bennett, T. (2017). Creating a Culture: How school leaders can optimise better behaviour. This report summarised Bennett's largely behaviourist views and has formed the basis of subsequent DfE policy documentation on discipline and behaviour.

DfE(2017a). Government response letter to Tom Bennet's behaviour in schools review. The Secretary of State's response to Bennett was more cautious, balancing his approach with a commitment to address issues of children's mental health and wellbeing.

DoH and DfE (2017). Green Paper: Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision. Although trailed as a significant development, the Green Paper was generally seen as unambitious and underfunded (see parliamentary report below). It coincided with the intense political focus on Brexit, followed by Covid, and many of its proposals took several years to emerge. For example, details of senior mental health lead training were not published until June 2021.

2018

House of Commons (2018a) Education and Health and Social Care Committees Joint Report: The Government's Green Paper on mental health: failing a generation. This provided a highly critical commentary on the Green Paper and the perceived failure of the Government effectively to implement this. However, in the political vacuum caused by Brexit, a number of parallel developments took place.

DfE (2018a) Creating opportunity for all: our vision for alternative provision. This further reinforced the role of alternative provision, although the tone was less stridently towards structural reform and more focussed on supporting individual children.

All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Prevention of Adverse Childhood Experiences (2018). This cross-party group was established, initially with Andrea Leadsom as Chair.

All Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood (2018) The Impact of Social and Economic Inequalities on Children's Health. Although not referencing attachment *per se*, the report made significant references to ACES and to mental health.

DfE (2018b) Mental health and behaviour in schools: Guidance. This made specific reference to ACES, and to attachment issues, acknowledging the input *inter alia* of the Attachment Research Community.

House of Commons (2018b) Education Committee: Forgotten children: alternative provision and the scandal of ever-increasing exclusions. This highlighted concerns which were being raised by a number of academic and independent reports, including the Children's Commissioner (2012; 2013; 2019) about the impacts on children of some disciplinary practices and illegal procedures being used in schools.

Ofsted (2018) Off-rolling: using data to see a fuller picture. This report provided evidence to support allegations of illegal practice by a number of schools in removing disadvantaged students from their rolls to improve overall performance scores.

2019

Timpson, E. (2019). Timpson Review of School Exclusion. The review was commissioned following concerns raised by the Race Disparity Unit about the disproportionate levels of exclusions faced by children from ethnic minorities, with SEND, or in contact with social workers. The review and associated reports confirmed these disparities, inconsistencies of implementation and, in some cases, illegal practice by schools. It made 30 recommendations for government action.

DfE (2019a) The Timpson Review of School Exclusion: Government Response. The government provided a detailed response to the Timpson recommendations, promising revised guidance and new accountabilities for schools. However, it balanced this with its commitment to 'crack down on poor behaviour' under the leadership of Tom Bennett. To date the 2017 DfE Guidance on Exclusions has not been revised, other than to allow for virtual hearings during the Covid Lockdowns, although a consultation was launched in February 2022 (DfE, 2022b).

DfE (2019b) ITT Core Content Framework. This removed direct references to attachment theory and conflated SEND, disadvantage and mental health. It was published alongside the trainee teacher behavioural toolkit.

DfE (2019c) the trainee teacher behavioural toolkit: a summary. This was essentially a summary of the Bennett (2016; 2017) behaviour guidance, based on zero tolerance, sanctions and rewards.

DfE (2019d) Character Education Framework Guidance. This further reinforced government policy on Character Education as the basis for mental health and wellbeing in schools.

2020

All Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood (2020) Wellbeing and Nurture: Physical and Emotional Security in Childhood. This strongly promoted issues of attachment and mental health for young children and parents.

DfE (2020a) Guidance for full opening of schools. This covered a range of issues, including a link to Recovery Curriculum training.

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DfE (2020b) Behaviour and discipline in schools. This Reproduced earlier guidance on behaviour, including the Charlie Taylor checklist, with an additional ‘reopening checklist.’ The ‘reopening checklist’ had one isolated reference to mental health.

Public Health Scotland (2020) Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). This formally acknowledged the role of ACEs in understanding childhood trauma in Scotland.

Scottish Government (2020) Support for Learning: All Our Children and All Their Potential. This emphasised the important role of relationships in learning.

2021

Leadsom, A. (2021) The best start for life, a vision for the first 1001 days. While in many ways showcasing then-current Conservative government priorities, this report referenced the central role of attachment in children’s development.

All Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood (2021) The Covid Generation: A Mental Health Pandemic in The Making. This referenced both attachment and trauma issues in stressing the mental health impacts of the pandemic for children.

DfE (2021a) Promoting the education of children with a social worker: Virtual School Head role extension. This non-statutory guidance extended the VSH role to cover all children in contact with a social worker and included a requirement to make all schools attachment aware.

DfE (2021b) Call for evidence: Behaviour management strategies, in-school units, and managed moves. Although ostensibly a consultation asking for examples of good practice in the light of Covid lockdown experience, the tone of the document was unashamedly supportive of the Bennett agenda, with no reference to relationships, attachment, or trauma, and only five to mental health, limited to particular circumstances.

DfE (2021c) Initial teacher training (ITT) market review: recommendations: Government response. Again, this document had no reference to relationships, other than inter-institutional relationships, or to the provision of training or support on attachment or trauma issues for aspiring teachers. The single reference to mental health was in an arguably deficit model of providing access to academic or pastoral support for trainees.

DfE (2021e) Promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges. This included details of the proposed Senior Mental Health Lead Training, first proposed in the 2017 Green Paper.

DfE (2021g) Statutory guidance: School suspensions and permanent exclusions. See Timpson (2019) above. To date this is merely a minor update of the 2017 document, including the 2020 Coronavirus regulations and allowing for virtual hearings.

Public Health England and DfE (2021) Promoting children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing: A whole school or college approach. While addressing issues of

mental health and relationships there are only limited references to attachment and trauma.

2022

DfE (2022a) School attendance – guidance for schools. The main guidance issued in January, is based on the 2018 document, which was updated to include provisions on Coronavirus in 2020. However, a further addendum on the DfE website - *Improving school attendance: support for schools and local authorities* - adopts a softer tone, with references to relationships, dignity, mutual respect, communication with parents and the role of the school as a place of safety.

DfE (2022b) Consultation on Revised Behaviour in Schools Guidance and Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Guidance. In contrast with the guidance on attendance issued the previous month this consultation repeated the strongly behaviourist messages of the 2021 consultation document. It further included possible revisions, mainly technical, to the procedures for school suspensions and exclusions.

All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (2022)

Spotlight Inquiry. This indicated the need to support the ability of children in care to form trusting relationships, to avoid stigma and to develop their own identities. It emphasised the role of local authorities, as corporate parents, links with communities, and the need for all professionals, including teachers, to receive appropriate training.

DfE (2022c) Guidance: Political impartiality in schools. This guidance was intended to clarify existing legislation and guidance, especially in terms of prohibiting the promotion of partisan political views and ensuring the balanced presentation of opposing views on political issues. It also covers political activity involving external organisations. The document states that: ‘nothing in this guidance limits schools’ freedom to teach about sensitive, challenging, and controversial political issues, as they consider appropriate and necessary’. However, this does little to support schools in difficult local circumstances, other than to reassert the very normative values that communities may be challenging.

DfE (2022d) Opportunity for all: Strong schools with great teachers for your child. The White Paper takes as its mantra the notion of ‘a great education and the right support, in the right place, and at the right time’. Under the heading ‘Opportunity for all’ It repeats many of the neoliberal tropes of the Conservative government – support for teachers; emphasis on phonics, testing, and a normative curriculum; all schools to be part of a MAT by 2030. However, it also stresses targeted support for individuals, stating in paragraph 90 that: ‘by looking through the lens of a pupil’s characteristics we sometimes miss the needs of children who do not acquire the label of having a special educational need or disability or being disadvantaged. We need to pivot to a system where all children receive the right support, in the right place, and at the right time based on their need.’

DfE (2022e) SEND Review: Right Support, Right Place, Right Time. The Green Paper builds on the White Paper’s generalised statements about ‘an inclusive education system’ to promote approaches to inclusion, including an enhanced role for local authorities,

health and the monitoring of MAT performance in this area. Unlike previous policy documents in this area, such as *Opportunity for all* (DfE, 2018), it actively promotes the role of alternative provision *per se*, as outlined in Timpson (2019), rather than attempting to constrain it within existing performative frameworks

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Appendix 4: Key groups identified within the research process

The working definitions used for each group were as follows:

Policy makers are those who create the wider context within which AAS developments do or do not take place: politicians, senior civil servants, major third-sector organisations, local authorities and multi-academy trusts. It could be argued that a distinction should be drawn between national and local policy making, as local authorities and multi-academy trusts are sometimes seen merely as implementers of centrally determined policies. However, this may be a false distinction, given that some aspects of education policy are – at least notionally – still determined at local level, and multi-academy trusts operate at range of local, regional and national levels (Barnes, 2017; Riddell, 2019). The CEO of one of the MATs involved in this study, for example, was a member of a national policy working group (Transcript 13).

Intermediate organisations. These are those organisations operating above school level, but not as part of national government, which could support and influence local policy implementation in schools. These might include local authorities, multi-academy trusts or more informal collaborative arrangements. Clear evidence emerged as to the importance of the MAT in promoting AAS approaches, and there was a single reference to the impact of a local collaborative approach (Transcript 9) in the school which was not part of a MAT. Despite DfE insistence on the role of the local authority Virtual School Head in promoting AAS (DfE, 2021), and the existence of several local authority policy statements on AAS (eg Ahmed, 2018; Kelly and Watt, 2019), the evidence of this research is that local authorities are largely seen as irrelevant; school attitudes ranged from a ‘pick and mix’ approach to outright hostility.

Institutional managers control the implementation of policy within a given institution. This includes headteachers and executive headteachers, who may have oversight of several different settings, but who determine policy for specific establishments. It also includes those responsible for the governance of these settings. This will vary from setting to setting – this particular study includes a primary school within a MAT which has devolved responsibility to local level, and therefore the role of the local board in operational decisions concerning the initiative was seen as important (see Transcripts 7 and 11), whereas in the PRU it was the executive head who was leading the local development, even though there was a head of centre in place, and local governance arrangements were at a very fragile stage (see Transcript 4). In the PRU the MAT role was seen as strategic, rather than operational – albeit supportive of developments (Transcript 13) - as was the SAT governing body in the case of the secondary school (Transcript 16).

Senior managers are themselves in an intermediate position, with both management and classroom roles. In all three schools they saw themselves as having responsibility for implementing AAS policy, although arguably the ownership of the policy was stronger in the secondary school and the PRU, while the primary school assistant head saw himself more as an advocate for staff within an overall agreed management approach to which he subscribed by virtue of his hierarchical position (Transcript 14).

Front line staff are those who can determine how AAS operates within a classroom and/or a given group of children/young people. It includes teachers and teaching assistants, but also a wider group such as outreach workers, midday supervisors, other school staff or even school crossing patrols. While there may be scope for discussion as to the relative roles and power of class teachers in determining classroom activity, bounding this group merely to those working in the classroom risks missing the wider ramifications of whole-institution approaches, as instanced in Rose *et al* (2016) and Dingwall and Sebba (2018a and 2018b). Indeed, it may be argued that the teacher's specific leadership role of establishing the teaching programmes for the day is of lesser importance than the whole ethos of the team (see Parker and Levinson 2018 and Transcripts 1, 2 and 3 – staff focus groups).

Children and young people can be varyingly seen as the objects of the AAS intervention, or as having a subjective involvement in this. The AAS literature already cited ranges from approaches which seek specifically to empower children and young people (Parker and Gorman 2013, Rose *et al* 2016a) to top-down assumptions about AAS as a tool to improve behaviour. Hargreaves (1967) indicated the agency that young people have in classrooms in relation to teachers, although Willis (1977) suggested that it is that apparent freedom to misbehave which actually socialises young people to take their place in the social order. More recently Riley (2009) has indicated the complex interaction between children's and teachers' attachment needs in determining classroom behaviour.

Parents and carers may be seen as either remote from or investing in school approaches to AAS. The emotion coaching intervention was originally drawn from parenting models (Gottman 1997), while international developments of the approach such as *Tuning in to Kids* in Australia have tended to retain that perspective (Havighurst *et al*, 2013). Many of the projects described in the main text have attempted to reach out to and empower parents (Parker 2012; Rose *et al*. 2016b), and certainly all three of the research locations in this study had made conscious efforts in this regard (Transcripts 4, 7 and 8). However, here, too, there is some lack of clarity as to whether activity is being done 'to' or 'with' the parents: the primary school SENCO referred to contacting "the parents we need to involve" – implying a top-down value judgment or deficit model of parents – whereas both teachers and TAs spoke very positively of the value of partnership and consistency between parents and classroom practitioners (Transcripts 1 and 2 – Primary school staff focus groups). Similarly, at the primary school it was the parents themselves – admittedly those sufficiently motivated to attend a briefing/training session – who requested a follow up focus group. However, the CEO of the PRU MAT made several references to the need to respect the views and experience of parents, particularly those in the most disadvantaged circumstances (Transcript 13); conversely several respondents referred to the disproportionate influence, eg for SEND resources, exercised by wealthier, more articulate parents. (Transcripts 1 and 9).

Some critics of attachment theory, especially those adopting feminist or ethnic minority perspectives, have suggested that the theory itself can be distorted to imply a deficit model for parents, especially mothers and those from ethnic minorities (Arnold, 2012;

Duschinsky *et al.*, 2015; Smith *et al.*, 2017). However, there is considerable evidence that some parents of children with identified needs will seek to act as advocates for their children and are keen to identify and work with schools which have adopted AAS approaches, as these are seen as being much more child-friendly (eg Booth and Ainscow, 2011). For example, emails from parents to the Bath Spa University Attachment Aware Schools Website were almost exclusively seeking advice on identifying local schools which had adopted AAS approaches. This can be seen in some of the reflections in the primary school teacher focus group (Transcript 2), and in the way in which parents who attended the training and information session at the school were keen to be involved in future focus groups. However, this needs to be treated with some caution, as it is likely that it is the more confident and articulate parents who will engage with school in this way (Curran *et al.*, 2021), and the TA focus group included a discussion of the way in which articulate parents were more successful in accessing better support funding for their children (Transcript 1).

Foster carers are included in this group, as sharing many of the general characteristics of parents/carers (The Fostering Network, 2021). While it might be anticipated that those supporting care-experienced children would find AAS approaches empowering (Cairns and Stanway 2004), the evidence of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Children in Care (APPG, 2012) suggested that foster carers sometimes felt patronised and ignored by local authorities, and were unable to make their voices heard. Similarly, Cameron *et al.* (2015) pointed to the gap in understanding, and lack of empowerment, between some foster carers and schools. These difficulties often related to the perceived social class and negative school experience of foster carers (Cameron *et al.*, 2015). By contrast, Bentley (2013) describes the positive and empowering impact of foster carers whose values are attuned to those of the school. As with parents in general it may well be the foster carers who are most attuned to the values of the school itself who are most likely to be heard; a senior manager in the PRU stated:

We had a lovely feedback, actually, from a new carer for one of our young people... she's obviously very highly trained as a foster carer as well in trauma-informed and attachment-informed.

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This would suggest, again, that potentially challenging aspects of AAS are 'de-politicised' (Holmes and Smyth, 2011) or 'domesticated' (Madison, 2005) by being included in a professional, rather than a political discourse

Community can be used in a number of different ways and is a major concept in both PAR and critical ethnography (see Whyte, 1993; Levinson, 2017; Canlas and Karpudewan, 2020). It can be used in the singular to apply to society, or the polity, as whole, or to refer to a particular geographical area. In the plural it can be used to refer to neighbourhoods, communities of interest, to communities of practice (Wenger, 1999) or to specific social ethnic minorities. Participants in this research tended on the whole to refer to the latter, particularly to a range of communities in inner city areas and to GRT communities in rural areas. There was relatively little reference to community in either sense in the primary

school, and in the secondary school, while the majority of references were to specific communities, one assistant head did refer to 'the community' as a whole in explaining some of the reputational pressures faced by the school (Transcript 8). Thus, a recognition of constraints and barriers for specific communities might be associated with a more transformational orientations, whereas an undifferentiated concept of 'community' as a whole – despite the association of the word with radical approaches to community action and PAR (eg Alinsky, 1971) – may actually imply a normative acceptance of dominant values.

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Appendix 5: Literature review keywords exercise

A key words analysis of the focus group and interview transcripts was also undertaken, in order to establish the congruence or otherwise of participants' understanding and practice with concepts emerging from the literature review (see tables below). This tended to reinforce the emphasis given to issues of behaviour across all three sites, although there was some inconsistency between its use between MAT CEOs and senior managers on the one hand, and teachers and classroom staff on the other (138 against 47 references – Table 3.1). Concepts of attachment were reasonably well-understood, although they appear to be articulated more frequently among secondary school colleagues (83 against 25 references each in primary and PRU (Table 2.1).

Contrary to what might have been expected from Watson *et al.* (2012), there appeared to be little reference to wellbeing, other than in the secondary school context, with only two references to early intervention, again, both in the secondary school. Emotion coaching was mentioned mainly on the primary school site (32 references, compared with three and one respectively in the PRU and secondary school – Table 2.1), although respondents on all three sites mentioned the role of children's emotions. Neuroscience and brain development were touched on in the primary school (2 references – Table 2.1) but more developed in the PRU (13 references) and not mentioned at all in the secondary school. Issues of learning, but not learning theory *per se*, were pursued across all three sites. Teacher attachment styles were mentioned by only two respondents, the PRU MAT CEO and a secondary school assistant head, although the impact of teachers themselves was consistently addressed across all three sites and all occupational groups (Table 1.1). Significantly, taking into account Ecclestone's (2017) article on 'vulnerabilities', the words 'vulnerable' and 'vulnerability' were not used at all within the primary school itself, although they appeared three times with the MAT CEO. They were used by different staff within the PRU and secondary school eight and seven times respectively (Table 2.1). There was relatively little reference to social care within the primary and secondary schools (two and three references respectively) but ten references in the PRU context, which may reflect its student cohort.

Similarly, while there was only one reference to mental health among the primary school respondents, the PRU and secondary school had 5 and 12 respectively, again reflecting the student cohorts, but also heightened concerns about adolescent girls' mental health post-Covid (Table 2.1). Adverse childhood experiences (ACES) were referenced by one respondent on each site but did not otherwise appear to have had a major impact. Restorative approaches were mentioned on all three sites but were only seen to have a major impact in the secondary school – 4, 5 and 12 references respectively. Exclusion was mentioned on both mainstream sites, but was only referenced significantly in the PRU (27 times compared with 3 and 2 respectively) – not surprisingly, as the majority of its students have been excluded from mainstream schools. All three sites were concerned with student engagement. Attendance *per se*, although having a similar level of overall response as engagement, appeared to be of lesser importance in the primary school than in the secondary school and PRU (2, 18 and 16 references – table 2.1) perhaps reflecting its relatively better socio-economic context. There was a clear hierarchical differentiation

between CEOs/heads (14 references – Table 3.1), senior managers (20 references) and classroom teachers (2 references). TAs did not mention attendance as an issue. Training and CPD were given a high priority across all sites and staff groups, although this was significantly stronger in the two mainstream schools, perhaps because the PRU relied more on informal internal training than on formalised sessions with external facilitators. By contrast, no reference was made to initial teacher training. Similarly, there was no reference to Character Education, despite this being presented by both DfE (2019) and Ofsted (2019) as central to both mental health and engagement agendas. The Recovery Curriculum *per se* was mentioned only in the primary school context, although one secondary school assistant head described the PSHE programme which had been put into place in September to support students, post-lockdown.

Thus, overall, school discourses broadly reflected the policy debates over attachment-related issues outlined in the literature review. There were some differences between sites and between different occupational groups. Some of these related to different emphases eg over the relative roles of emotion coaching and restorative approaches, or over the importance accorded to neuroscience/brain development. Others related to specialist perspectives, which were less familiar to all classroom teachers, such as ACES or the Recovery Curriculum. The relatively low level of references to vulnerability, mental health, social care and early intervention may indicate that teachers are more inclined towards universal solutions, working with young people in the school context, rather than referring on to more targeted services. By contrast with the findings of, for example, Harrison (2022) and Rose *et al.* (2019), only more senior staff (CEOs, heads and senior teachers) referred to attachment and emotional needs of staff. Similarly, while there was a clear commitment to and support for training for existing teachers, this was not carried through into any wider concept of initial teacher education; only the Primary school MAT CEO made a reference, in passing, to working with trainee teachers. The lack of reference to character education, implied that respondents were unaware of, or saw this policy as irrelevant. This range of interpretations tends to support the views of Sheikh and Bagley (2018), and Troman (2008), who suggest that, far from replicating dominant ideological discourses, school staff at all levels are selective and discerning in the way that they implement policies.

A similar exercise was undertaken to examine whether responses reflected the existing critiques of AAS approaches outlined in the literature review. There was no reference to 'zero sum' approaches to wellbeing against learning, nor any critique of 'neuromyths'. Indeed, as already noted, 'brain science' was seen uncritically as a strong feature of the PRU development (see table 1.2). The limited references to psychology on all three sites were specific to the role of educational psychologists and, similarly, the word 'therapy' was used in context of specific therapies, such as speech and language therapy, in the PRU and secondary school, rather than as a generic term, challenging Ecclestone and Hayes' (2009) assumptions about the prevalence of 'therapeutic education' in English schools (Table 2.2). It is interesting to contrast this with Graner and Pfeiffer (2021), who suggest that the 'therapeutic environment' is central to improving learning, particularly for traumatised children. There were no references to challenges from the academic left over AAS; indeed, two assistant heads in the secondary school explicitly rejected the

feminist critique of patriarchal values in attachment theory. There were fewer references to social class in the primary school and PRU than in the secondary school, although the PRU MAT CEO was quite explicit about the need for action to address social inequalities (Table 1.2). There were only two references to issues of race and ethnicity in the primary school, and seven in the PRU – reflecting their geographical location - as against 19 in the secondary school. Similarly, the word ‘gender’ was used only twice by primary school respondents, but seven times in the PRU and 15 in the secondary school (Table 2.2). Respondents in these latter two sites also related gender issues to wider aspects of LGBT and non-binary identities. Finally, with one exception, all interviews which took place after February 2020 made reference to Covid. The exception was the former head of the PRU, who was unable to access the centre during lockdown (Table 1.2)

This analysis is based on a limited number of key words used by participants in the focus groups and interviews, and thus does not provide a qualitative approach to understanding actors’ perceptions of the issues. However, it does illustrate the extent to which those views, and the ways in which they are articulated, did or do not reflect the prevailing policy assumptions and academic discourses identified in the literature review.

Tables:

Table A5 1.1 Priority of issues, by respondent interview – original issues

Table A5 1.2 Priority of issues, by respondent interview – critiques

Table A5 2.1 Priority of issues, by site – original issues

Table A5 2.2 Priority of issues, by site – critiques

Table A5 3.1 Priority of issues, by role – original issues

Table A5 3.2 Priority of issues, by role – critiques

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Table A5 1.1 Priority of issues, by respondent interview – original issues

Respondent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Tot
Behaviour	4	13	2	1	3	1 1	4	1 7	25	4	20	31	16	34	8	12	205
Attachment	1	2	2	7	5	8	5	1 8	7	17	-	35	5	-	3	20	135
Teacher	18	2	2	2	16	7	9	4	12	4	10	10	6	9	14	2	127
Training	9	4		4			2	6	23	8	4	17	4	15	2	2	100
Emotion	3	16	2	8	-	8	1 6	4	4	-	5	1	2	16	-	5	90
Learning		1	3	7	2	1	6	4	8	14		13	1	3	11	8	82
Attendance				6	1	2	1	6	5	1	1	4	6	2	1	2	38
Engagement		1		4		4		2	3	8	6			4	2	3	37
Emotion coaching		6		3			1 1	1						15			36
Exclusion		1	1	3	9	1			1	1	4	1	10	1			33
Restorative				1		1		1 0	4		3	3		4		5	31
Vulnerability								1		3	7		1		6		18
Mental health						1		2	7	1	1		3			3	18
Social care/worker						7			3		2		1				13
Brain				1			1				8		3	1			13
Wellbeing								2	4			1				5	12
CPD			1				1		1	4						2	9
Social media		1		1								1			2	1	6
Teacher attachment	2												1			5	8
ACES						2			3				1				6
Recovery curriculum							2			1							3
Early intervention									2								2
Neuroscience	1	1		1													3
Socialisation															1	1	2
ITE											1						1
Character education																	0

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Table A5 1.2 Priority of issues, by respondent interview – critiques

Respondent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Tot
Covid						3		21	6	4	4	9	6		5	11	69
Class								2	4	1	5	3	2	1	1	6	25
Girls								5	1			4	6		5	5	26
Policy				1				9	1				5	5	1	1	23
Gender				1	1			5	1		4		1	1	7	2	23
Race					1			8	3	1	1	1	1		2	2	20
Social distance	1												2	14			17
Research					6		1		3	1		2		1			14
Boys		2										2	5				9
Ethnicity					1			1				2	3				7
Social action													1	5			6
Psychology						1	1		1			1			1		5
Therapy				1	1				1						1		4
Academic left														4			4
Scientific approach				1									2				3
Culture								1						2			3
Trade-off																	0
Neuromyths																	0

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Table A5 2.1 Priority of issues, by site – original issues

Site	Primary School	PRU	Secondary School
Attachment	25	25	83
Behaviour	59	51	93
Wellbeing			12
Early intervention			2
Emotion	51	23	14
Emotion coaching	32	3	1
Neuroscience	1	1	
Brain	1	12	
Learning	24	11	44
Teacher	42	41	42
Teacher attachment		1	5
Vulnerability	3	8	7
Social care/worker	2	10	3
Social media	2	1	4
Socialisation			2
Mental health	1	5	12
ACES		3	3
Restorative	4	5	22
Exclusion	3	27	2
Engagement	13	14	10
Training	38	12	50
CPD	5		3
ITE	1		
Character education			
Recovery curriculum	3		
Attendance	2	16	18

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Table A5 2.2 Priority of issues, by site – critiques

Site	Primary School	PRU	Secondary School
Research	3	6	5
Trade-off			
Neuromyths			
Scientific approach		3	
Psychology	1	1	3
Therapy		2	2
Academic left			
Policy	4	6	12
Class	7	7	16
Race	2	3	16
Ethnicity		4	
Culture			
Gender	2	7	
Boys	3	5	
Girls		6	
Social action		1	
Covid	9	13	52
Social distance		2	

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Table A5 3.1 Priority of issues, by role – original issues

Role	CEOs	Heads	Management team	Teachers	TAs
Attachment	22	12	93	7	1
Behaviour	20	5	133	43	4
Wellbeing			12		
Early intervention			2		
Emotion	2	16	38	23	3
Emotion coaching		19	16	6	
Neuroscience		3		1	
Brain	3	2		8	
Learning	15	7	39	15	
Teacher	10	16	60	28	18
Teacher attachment	1	2	5		
Vulnerability	4		1	13	
Social care/worker	1		10	2	2
Social media			2	3	1
Socialisation		1	1	1	
Mental health	4		13	1	
ACES	1		5		
Restorative			27	3	
Exclusion	11	1	13	6	
Engagement	8	3	16	9	
Training	12	6	63	10	9
CPD	4	5	3	1	
ITE	1				
Character education					
Recovery curriculum	1	2			
Attendance	7	7	20	2	

Table A5 3.2 Priority of issues, by role – critiques

Role	CEOs	Heads	Management team	Teachers	TAs
Research	1	1	12		
Trade-off					
Neuromyths					
Scientific approach	2	1			
Psychology		1	3	1	
Therapy		2	2	1	
Academic left					
Policy	5	1	15	1	
Class	3		20	6	1
Race	2		16	3	
Ethnicity	3		4		
Culture			1		
Gender	1	1	11	11	
Boys	5		3	2	
Girls	6		15	5	
Social action	1				
Covid	10		55	9	
Social distance	2				

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Appendix 6: Teacher Perceptions, Government Policy and Attachment Research in the Time of Covid: Living through a paradigm change?

Draft of an unpublished article.

Abstract

This paper considers the impact of the Covid Pandemic on research, schools and government policy. Based on the researcher's experience of undertaking PhD fieldwork between January 2020 and June 2021, it examines the practical, theoretical and methodological implications for research, alongside the changing perceptions of school staff, and the inconsistencies of government advice, particularly with regard to children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. This is a key element of the research, which considers whether schools adopting attachment and trauma-aware approaches to students is truly transformational, or merely a soft form of social control within a neoliberal framework. The notion of transformation, or paradigm change, has also been applied by some writers on Covid impact, in its exposure of fundamental social inequalities, the inadequacy of performative cultures and the lack of acknowledgment of pupil, staff and parent/carer emotional needs in schools. Drawing on a range of studies from across the world, as well as the empirical research data, the researcher urges caution in making such interpretations, suggesting that there is tension at all levels between a 'business-as-usual' and a 'transformational' approach. Nonetheless there appears to be clear evidence of change in teacher attitudes, classroom and school practice, as a result of the pandemic, which may ultimately provide a basis for a more permanent system-wide change, albeit that its effects are currently more limited.

Keywords

Covid Pandemic, Research, Policy, Attachment, Trauma, Mental Health, Paradigm Change

Introduction

The Covid pandemic has affected academic research, and schools, in a number of ways. Simple practicalities, such as access to schools and their communities for researchers, and the pressure of external events, have affected the types of research which can be undertaken, and the way in which they can be reported. Moreover, the timescales and uncertainties within which the pandemic has taken place have themselves affected the perceptions of researchers, colleagues in schools and people in wider society, leading many to question whether we are actually seeing a paradigm change in ways in which we see and experience the world:

COVID-19 has turned the world upside down, accelerating trends which were already latent or in progress, and inverting normal assumptions... It has added another dimension to the radical uncertainty that is faced at all levels of society - the familial, the firm, the community, the nation and globally

Kerslake et al. (2020)

It's massive. It's impacted the engagement side of things; it impacts the achievement team side of things as well.... Everything, even if the students have an issue with something else, a lot of the issues stem from Covid.

Assistant Head, Achievement, Secondary School,

This paper argues that this is a somewhat over-simplistic formulation, and that, given the pace of change, it may be more helpful to consider such perceived changes in terms of 'moral panic' (Cohen, 2011). However, there is a potential for the changes in perception which have arisen since Covid to challenge the performative culture of current neoliberal dominant ideology, to expose the contradictions of government policy, and to create a much more pupil-centred approach in schools.

The article examines the impact of the pandemic on both the ontology and the practicalities of the research process, the parallel implications of the government response, and their impact on schools. It is based on a PhD research project which questioned whether the adoption of attachment/trauma aware responses in schools – as developed at Bath Spa University: see Rose *et al.* (2019) - was actually transformative in terms of practice and life outcomes for children, staff and parents/carers, or whether it was merely a soft form of social control (Foucault, 1977), to maintain the hegemony of the neoliberal state. The broad definition of attachment/trauma aware schools was based on that of Bergin and Bergin (2009), which outlines a set of teacher behaviours and school organisation

Teacher Behaviours

7. *Sensitive, warm interactions*
8. *Well-prepared and high expectations*
9. *Autonomy supportive*
10. *Promote prosocial behaviour among students*
11. *Non-coercive discipline*
12. *Relationship-specific interventions*

School Organisation

13. *School-wide interventions*
14. *Extracurricular activities*
15. *Small schools*
16. *Continuity of people and place*
17. *Facilitated transitions*
18. *Decreased transitions*

(Bergin and Bergin, 2009: 162)

It should, however be noted that, following the lines of the Bath Spa University project, the research did not adopt a dogmatic approach, particularly as the purpose of the research was to examine the perspectives of different actors within each school as to their understanding of what attachment/trauma-aware approaches were, and what their

impacts had been. Indeed, the operational model in each school was different, with one school focussing on emotion coaching, another on trauma-informed practice and the third on restorative approaches.

The research was originally proposed and planned as an action research project in 2019, well before the pandemic. A programme of training, semi-structured discussions with focus groups and individuals (see Appendices 1 and 2) was agreed with the first two schools to enable a circle of action and reflection (Altrichter, 2020). However, this proved impossible to implement, following Covid lockdown restrictions, and an alternative methodology and approach were adopted (see below). Ethical approval was obtained from Bath Spa University in January 2020 and fieldwork ran in two phases, from January to June 2020 and from January to June 2021. The research instruments were modified in the light of changing methodology and the learning from the first phase. The data was analysed against the original and some emergent themes, using the critical ethnographic framework propounded by Carspecken (1996), to develop a whole-systems model to address the main research question.

A key underlying theme was the impact of the pandemic itself, and this paper draws together some of the relevant research data with the wider literature on Covid. Its title is not original. It was used, for example, by the Children's Commissioner (2020) in her study '*Children in the time of Covid*'. However, it is worth noting that, in the original novel, *Love in the Time of Cholera* (Marquez, 1989), the illness is merely a fiction used by the elderly lovers to avoid censure by conventional society. In the same way, it could be argued, the Covid pandemic has highlighted the inequalities within our society and education system, the inadequacy of a performative culture which reduces 'success' to a narrow set of examination results, and refuses to acknowledge children's emotional needs (Malik, 2013). The question, though, becomes whether the response to such issues is one of 'getting back to business as usual', making minor cosmetic changes following a period of 'moral panic', or of transforming our approaches to respond to new situations and understandings – a paradigm change (Kuhn, 2012)

This is not to deny the real impacts of the pandemic on research, on children and on schools. In terms of research it has impacted on practicalities: physical access to research sites, access to individuals and to resources such as libraries. It has impacted on the way in which research can be undertaken, particularly with more vulnerable groups, on the methodologies and methods which can be applied, and even on the specific areas and content of the research. The impacts on children, schools and the government policy response are discussed in later sections. A qualitative research ontology had been adopted in this project, based on Habermas (1978), within which it is the shared objective understandings, subjective experience and normative values of those involved in the study that we are trying to understand. Covid has clearly had and continues to have a profound impact on the way they see the world. If we are trying to co-create knowledge we have to take this into account.

Further, Covid itself has impacted on the research process in a number of ways. While all research necessarily is modified as it develops, there is a strong argument that the

changes produced through the pandemic have impacted more than 'normal' research refinement. These two elements are not separate, but interact to produce the final outcome. Moreover, the actual content of the research – questioning whether the adoption of relationship-based attachment and trauma-aware approaches by schools – was merely a normative form of social control (Foucault, 1977; Ecclestone 2017), or could actually empower students and transform practice – was strongly aligned with the issues emerging from Covid. Essentially, in a neoliberal context, is there scope for a transformation of understandings which is as powerful as Kuhn's (2012) notion of paradigm change; or, if not, is there a tactical opportunity to change some practices as a result of recognising the internal contradictions of existing practices and methods? Further, can such changes – albeit limited – be considered transformational in their own right?

Covid and research

Much recent literature on Covid has focussed on medicine and public health, and the diversion of resources from non-Covid projects, such as Yankow and Good (2020) or Academy of Royal Colleges of Medicine (2020); but from an early stage the wider impacts have been considered. In an interesting reflection, published in March 2020, Haleem *et al.* suggest 18 areas that might be involved, although these did not include education *per se*.

A number of publications have considered the impacts of Covid on the research process itself. Owen-Smith (2020) describes the situation in US universities as resulting from long-term state disinvestment from HE, and a slow response from politicians to the emergent issues. This, he suggests, has created a 'perfect storm', whereby Covid impacts all areas of university budgets and resources. In response he calls for a strategic approach to research which challenges '*destructive competition*' whereby the range of fields and topics funded is limited, large scale interdisciplinary research and teaching become more challenging, and the academic research workforce is homogenised – a point which is further developed by Levine *et al.* (2021) and Bick *et al.* (2020) – see below. The alternative, Owen-Smith suggests, is that research becomes

less flexible, less diverse, less comprehensive, more unstable, less prominent on the global stage, and more isolated from the very communities and concerns we may wish for it to serve.

Owen-Smith, 2020: 3

This theme, of the challenge to research which seeks to gain the voice of and to empower the less powerful under Covid and to engage in issues which may not represent the dominant ideology of society, is developed by Strachan (2021). She considers issues of accessibility, methods, confidentiality, gender, potential domestic violence and research data security. She suggests that the current situation could lead to a change in dynamics which empowers the disadvantaged and devolves research activity to local communities, thereby challenging the digital divide and providing more climate-friendly approaches, as principal investigators reduce their travel. Fosci *et al.* (2020) and Ramvilas *et al.* (2021)

indicate the importance of concepts such as open/citizen science in democratising research activity.

Gunel *et al.* (2020) in their '*Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography*' further question traditional views of fieldwork in the light of the pandemic, particularly in terms of researcher positionality, the implied separation of 'field' and 'home', 'gendered and ablist' assumptions about access, and the tendency to perceive those being researched as 'suffering subjects'. They suggest that innovations such as online work have come about to support subjects' rather than researchers' own needs, such as shielding or caring responsibilities. Researchers, they propose, should reconceptualise notions of 'field', 'being there', collecting data, and linear timescales of collection/analysis. Further they should develop new engagements and commitments in the context of a neoliberal economy, labour constraints and 'the shifting political economy of knowledge'.

By patchwork ethnography, we refer to ethnographic processes and protocols designed around short-term field visits, using fragmentary yet rigorous data, and other innovations that resist the fixity, holism, and certainty demanded in the publication process.

Patchwork ethnography refers not to one-time, short, instrumental trips and relationships à la consultants, but rather, to research efforts that maintain the long-term commitments, language proficiency, contextual knowledge, and slow thinking that characterizes so-called traditional fieldwork... while fully attending to how changing living and working conditions are profoundly and irrevocably changing knowledge production.

Gunel *et al.*, 2020

A number of researchers, eg Goldstone (2020), consider the particular position of early career and PhD researchers who are faced with time-limited projects. Bick *et al.* (2020) discuss matters of access with 'hard' and 'soft' barriers such as school closures or refusal by a gatekeeper to allow access to an individual member of staff, as well as the need to make changes in research design:

epistemological choices that are indivisibly linked with... research questions, theories, analysis, and even discipline...

students' struggles in making these choices speak not only to the question **how** qualitative research is possible during pandemic times, but what **kind** of research and **with whom**.

Bick *et al.*, 2020: 7

They further consider the limitations of online methods in terms of accessibility of marginalised groups, maintaining trust, and the practical management of online sessions. At the time of their writing (October 2020) they express concerns about the uncertainties of returning to the field in terms of access, ethics and a lack of clear guidelines.

Levine *et al.* (2021) give concrete examples of the type of pressures and modifications faced by early career researchers:

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I actually had just solidified a future partnership with a middle school right as it happened. Like, we were having our final meeting the week that everything locked down and obviously, you know, I tried reaching out, but I also understand their whole focus is getting their kids online and getting their families online...

I was going to go into two schools, two early childcare centers to collect data, but now with the closure and everything kind of changing in those regards and us not knowing, the kind of uncertainty, I'm going to a more theoretical dissertation...

But I've really had to ... rethink research projects that I had started. . . we really have . . . limited ways of connecting with and understanding the experiences of communities of color, particularly from low-income backgrounds... So, the research that we've been able to do ... we recognize we're now doing research with more privileged populations.

Levine et al., 2021; 8-9

Research Methodology

These considerations of access and methodology were all relevant to the development of the research project. It may be helpful consider its chronology alongside the unfolding of the Covid pandemic.

2019	Research project	Covid Pandemic
July	Research proposal submitted	Irrelevant
August	Initial contacts with first two sites	
September		
October		
November		
December	Ethical approval granted	
2020		
January	Focus groups on first two sites (PRU	Concerns growing but no
February	and primary school)	immediate impact on schools anticipated
March	Physical access to sites ceases	'Managing the crisis' – schools
April	Methodology revised	closed to all but vulnerable and
May	Some online/telephone data	children of key workers
June	collection	Limited returns to school
July	<i>Initial Preliminary Reconstructive</i>	DfE adopts 'Recovery Curriculum'
August	<i>Analysis – PRA (Carspecken, 1996)</i> <i>drafted</i>	
September	Methodology further revised in	'Managing the return'
October	light of continuing inability to	
November	access physical sites	
December	Secondary school site adopted (online/telephone only)	

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2021

January	Secondary school interviews begin	'Getting serious' - second school lockdown and return
February	MAT CEO and PRU follow-up interviews	
March	Primary follow-up and continuing	'Planning for the long term' – significant inconsistencies in DfE policy and advice
April	secondary school interviews	
May	<i>Secondary school/ MAT PRAs drafted</i>	
June	Secondary follow-up interview	

As indicated above, access issues can be seen in 'hard' terms, of access to research sites, but also in 'softer' terms, of access to people and information. Fieldwork began in January 2020 on two sites, a primary school in a relatively affluent suburb of a market town, and a 4-16 Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) situated in an industrial estate on the outskirts of a small city. Access was not at the time an issue as both schools had approached the researcher asking for assistance in developing attachment- and trauma-aware approaches. The methodology initially adopted, reflecting the critical theoretical and qualitative perspectives outlined in the introduction, was that of action research (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010). This approach is presented as both democratic and action-orientated (Eisenhart, 2019) and was intended to capture the perspectives of participants and to enable dialogue on the extent of change arising from the initiative as a whole. The original research consisted of a programme of training and a regular programme of focus group sessions with the researcher, agreed with managers on the two sites. These were to be supplemented with semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders agreed with each school (initially including staff, students and parents/carers) and with policy opinion-formers in the wider community.

The initial impact of the pandemic was to prevent physical access to the sites. This meant that the proposed intensive action research methodology was no longer feasible, using a circle of action and reflection model (Altrichter, 2020). An alternative methodology was therefore developed during the Spring and Summer, which could retain the integrity, focus and theoretical perspective of the original research model. Critical ethnography, as outlined by Carspecken (1996), combined a focus on cultural awareness with a commitment to challenging structural inequalities (Eisenhart, 2019). While this represented a more reflective, rather than an action-orientated approach, Carspecken's (1996) five stages of research gave a structure which was much more suited to a more *ad hoc* approach, while retaining a rigorous analytical framework. This enabled data which had already been collected to be incorporated into a wider analysis of actors' understanding of developments on each site. A small number of additional online and telephone semi-structured interviews took place which, added to the earlier staff focus groups and limited observational data from the researcher, enabled a preliminary reconstructive analysis to be drafted for each site, which was tested out in the later fieldwork phase. However, in the case of the primary school, these were limited by the headteacher's concern to protect his staff – several requests to contact a particular member of staff, who had raised some interesting issues in the focus group and who was at home shielding, were politely refused. These analyses also raised further questions

around issues of social segmentation – the role of issues such as class, race and gender in relationship to attachment-based approaches – wider issues of leadership and governance in implementing attachment/trauma-aware approaches, and strongly suggested the need to consider the relevance of these approaches to mainstream secondary schools. While the initial lockdown had clearly impacted on schools and on the perceived value of attachment-based approaches, the levels of reported concern were lower than in the later phases of the research, a finding which replicates that of ImpactEd (2021) – see the discussion below.

During the Autumn Term 2020 it became apparent that further physical access to the school sites was unlikely to be feasible, and that – despite an initial meeting/training session with parents on the primary school site in September 2019 – it was unlikely to be possible to arrange parent and student focus groups within a realistic timescale. Furthermore, difficulties in contacting key policy makers were exacerbated by lockdown pressures. It was therefore decided to concentrate on policy documents themselves. By contrast, the preliminary analysis on the first two sites had indicated the important leadership role of the two Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) involved. Online interviews were therefore secured with the CEOs of the two MATs. The involvement of a secondary school had been considered at the planning stage, but had not been taken forward because of the difficulty in accessing and replicating the action research methodology in that context. The greater flexibility offered by the critical ethnographic methodology and the use of online/telephone access meant that this was now possible. A single-sex secondary school in a large inner-city area was identified, forming a contrast in terms of social class, ethnicity and gender balance with the two other more rural and suburban sites. While it was not possible to undertake face-to-face training with the secondary school, the school had – of its own initiative and unconnected with the research project – commissioned a partner organisation with whom attachment training materials had been developed by the Bath Spa University team, and thus there was considerable fidelity to and understanding of the model being promoted on the other two sites. A second phase of data collection took place with the secondary school and MAT CEOs, with follow up interviews with teachers from both initial sites, between January and April 2021. Here, again, there were issues of access, as the main contact with the school, an Assistant Headteacher, was reluctant to put pressure on more junior staff, and it took several weeks of persuasion to secure an interview with a classroom teacher. In June a further follow-up interview took place with that individual, whose first interview had taken place in January.

It could be argued that the modification of methodology from the action research to the Carspecken model of critical ethnography did meet the criterion of fidelity to the qualitative critical theoretical approach originally adopted. However, there was a continuing need to adapt this, and in particular the move from the more interactive method of focus groups to individual interviews. Several different online platforms were used for the latter, depending on individual access and systems. In some cases school internet filters did not allow access and telephone interviews took place. Following the easing of the second lockdown in June 2021, the final interview took place on a face-to-face basis. While there may be an argument that different technologies lead to different

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interview outcomes, this did not appear to be the case as in every instance the researcher was making detailed handwritten notes and did not seek to make eye contact – albeit virtual – with the respondents. Indeed, Hine argues that the main criterion for use of alternative technologies should be *'fitness for a purpose... without relying on canonical versions of what methodologies should be'* (Hine, 2007: 652).

Two further considerations emerged during the research period. First was the very different discourse on Covid which emerged during the first fieldwork period (January to June 2020) and the second (January to June 2021). It became important to situate respondents' views within the broader chronological and policy context. Second, while the first data analysis had pointed to the importance of securing pupil and parent/carer views, the practical difficulties in achieving this in any meaningful sense, as outlined above, were insurmountable. Although it was likely that some proxy views on their perspectives might emerge from school staff, these would not be valid in terms of the overall theoretical approach, and the research title was modified to reflect this new focus: *Teacher Perceptions of Attachment Aware Approaches in Schools - Normative or transformative?*

Covid impacts on children and schools

Within the schools, four distinct Covid phases can be identified. During the initial period of lockdown in March 2020 it was the management of the crisis which was paramount. The United Nations theme *'We're all in this together'* (Guterres, 2020), and Carpenter and Carpenter's (2020) work on the Recovery Curriculum – which specifically motioned emergent attachment issues - were taken up by the DfE to support its guidelines on school return (DfE, 2020). Moss *et al.* (2020), while recognising the inequalities which emerged at that time, emphasised positive aspects such as teachers' concerns for the social and emotional needs of children and families, and their better understanding of their local communities. This was reflected, too, in the initial data analysis:

The time I normally hear from parents is either when they are struggling at home and are looking for support, or through the surveys that we've done... it seemed to have a quite a big impact for the families that appreciated *it*.

Headteacher, Primary School

A lot of our parents have communicated how different their child is going into lockdown and maintaining their behaviour and attitude during lockdown.

Senior Teacher, PRU

As the Summer wore on, a more cautious, albeit still positive, aspect began to be apparent:

from emails that I'm getting from parents I've picked up that children that maybe weren't struggling six weeks ago are beginning to struggle during lockdown, if they're not returning to school and seeing their friends... I think that emotion

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coaching will fit really well within that Recovery Curriculum, which is very much focussing on the children's needs and emotions, as they return to school.

Headteacher, Primary School

If ever we needed an attachment aware school which demonstrates trauma-informed practice it's when we re-open

Executive Headteacher, PRU

During the second phase, managing the initial return to school, further fieldwork was not possible, as school-based staff grappled with new pressures and priorities. As outlined above, this also necessitated a further review of research priorities. Staff reported issues in later interviews:

I'd say everything is put on pause, really, for Covid. So, in terms of the training – we actually had some staff training [on attachment awareness] in November, which was really good, but again, what we've done with that training is quite limited.

Assistant Headteacher (Behaviour), Secondary School

... people who have a natural career progression in pastoral base support, teaching or whatever it is, they've naturally gravitated towards the training a lot more than others... I think that's because the teaching staff have just been so focussed on being able to learn how to teach remotely.

Assistant Headteacher (Teaching and Learning), Secondary School

National research was already demonstrating the wider impact of the Covid pandemic on children, their families and their learning. The Children's Commissioner (2020) in October, and Marmot *et al.* (2020) in December highlighted the amplification of inequalities in areas such as early years, access to learning resources, examination grading systems, child and parent mental health, and Special Educational Needs and Disability, and rising concerns about mental trauma among young people.

At the turn of the year schools had to face the implications of a second lockdown. Research by the British Academy (2021), the Social Mobility Commission (2021) and individual reports by the ESRC (UK Research and Innovation, 2021) reinforced earlier findings as to widening Covid-related inequalities, and examined specific pressures on parents, carers and wider communities. The Public Accounts Committee (House of Commons, 2021) and the Education Policy Institute (2021) both stressed the unequal treatment of disadvantaged children in lockdown. ImpactEd (2021) in February suggested that, although pupil wellbeing was stable during the first period of remote teaching, challenges with remote learning were felt more strongly by pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 experienced challenges with motivation for learning, while girls in particular experienced anxiety about returning to school. Schools, too identified concerns about 'lost' children: those pupils who had struggled the most during lockdown were not always those previously identified as vulnerable.

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These issues were reflected in the interviews in the secondary school:

.... for one kid in particular, she had an online lesson with me... Someone was playing music so loud, to obviously drown out the lesson that was going on, and there was a child screaming in the background. My heart just broke because this child was so engaged in the lesson and desperate... for me not to know that is how she was experiencing the learning.

Class teacher

.... there's just the gap in terms of achievement... basically the gap between those who could access online learning, those who've got support at home and resources, and those who don't, is huge... It's frustrating because our current year 11 cohort was the first time in years when there's not as big a gap between Caribbean heritage and Black African students and other students, but I just hope that Covid doesn't draw that further apart.

Assistant Headteacher (Achievement)

something that... we're dealing with since Covid... some of our more able and talented girls who we wouldn't really have any concerns about, being really anxious. The anxiety is manifesting in eating disorders, sleeping, it's affected performance in class.

Assistant Headteacher (Teaching and Learning)

Mental health amongst parents has definitely declined since the pandemic as well.

Assistant Headteacher (Achievement)

I think we will be having to deal with the aftermath of this for quite a few years to come... I think where there are vulnerable students that might be easier to recognise but I think it's going to be really hard.

Class Teacher

Not all the learning from Covid had necessarily been negative:

I think you could talk about all the really awful things that have happened with Covid, but I think it's important that we try to do this as a school, to really think about taking some of the positives that we can have.

Assistant Headteacher (Teaching and Learning)

.... something that's been a massive difference... when they demonstrated some high-end behaviour we've called a meeting with the services... and not excluded them. So we've kept them in school whereas previously we would have had them off site straight away.

Assistant Headteacher (Behaviour)

.... we were open of course. But there was a part of me, I have to be honest, that saw some of these children thrive and thought 'hold on a minute – everything

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we've been doing, and all we had to do was send them home for a couple of months and it would have been better'.

CEO, PRU MAT

The fourth phase illustrates the contradictions and dilemmas at the heart of government policy, and highlights the issue as to whether Covid represents a mere aberration, or a fundamental paradigm change. There was an apparent shift in emphasis within the Department for Education, from an endorsement of the Recovery Curriculum in July 2020 to the appointment of Sir Kevan Collins as Recovery Tsar in February 2021 (Simpson, 2021a). This coincided with reports from the Education Endowment Fund (2021), the Institute for Fiscal Studies (Cattan *et al.*, 2021) and the Sutton Trust (2021) all of which emphasised the notion of 'lost learning' and the need for catch-up tutoring, rather than children's emotional and mental health needs; the latter report, for example, mentioned the mental health and wellbeing of teachers, but not pupils. It was not until Collins had been in post for several weeks that children's emotional needs were mentioned (Simpson, 2021b). Similarly, Gavin Williamson, as Secretary of State, made clear his own views about a return to 'normal' at the beginning of April 2021:

Although remote learning was a tremendous success in terms of enabling children to carry on with their lessons from home, the lack of regular structure and discipline will inevitably have had an effect on their behaviour. I know that parents understand the need for greater discipline in school. They would expect children to be in orderly rows or groups, listening to a teacher who didn't have to shout to be heard.

Williamson, 7 April 2021 (cited in Simpson, 2021c)

It is interesting to compare this statement with the DfE Guidance on the extended role of virtual headteachers, published on 16 June 2021, which states that they should:

ensure that education settings understand the impact that issues such as trauma and attachment difficulties and other mental health issues can have on children with a social worker and are "attachment aware".

DfE, 2021a, p18

This guidance, again, appears to be in conflict with the subsequent Call for Evidence on Behaviour (DfE, 2021b), which seeks to update the existing 2016 guidance in the light of experience of Covid. This was published on 29 June 2021, and makes no reference to 'relationships', 'attachment' or 'trauma', adopting an approach based entirely on the Bennett (2017) report (for a critique of this see Parker and Levinson, 2018). There is one reference to wellbeing in a question about the effectiveness of '*in-school behavioural units*', and four to mental health, three of which are in the context of managed moves and the fourth of SEN and disability. These views are in stark contrast to those expressed by respondents in the research:

Covid changed everything.

Assistant Head, Primary School

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I think September's going to be the hardest point for us. The end of this year, we're anticipating it being a kind of welcome back and getting everybody there and still doing that recovery part... I think we're going to see some of those issues, particularly as children come back after the Summer break.

CEO, Church MAT

I had no idea it would go on as long as it did, obviously, but for me it was always about 'let's position ourselves as doing this as a marathon'. Because my experience of working with our young people and their families... is that nothing good happens overnight.

CEO, PRU MAT

We're actually at the moment doing a legacy of Covid reflection as a leadership team, about what we want to keep, what we want to improve... what we want to stop because Covid's told us we can stop it, and what do we want to start doing that we didn't do before? It's massive ... it feeds into everything now.

Assistant Head (Achievement) Secondary School

Conclusion: business as normal or paradigm change?

The question in this paper is whether the Covid lockdown, as in the initial quotation, has had a fundamental impact on practice in schools; whether it represents a 'paradigm effect' equivalent to the Beveridge Report (1942) and the post-war settlement; or whether it should be seen as a short-term moral panic, to be managed out both in policy terms, and in school practice. Has the exposure of issues – inequalities, mental health and wellbeing, the nature of education and learning – had any lasting effect, or has Covid simply been assimilated as the new normal? The same Assistant Head had some interesting views in a follow-up interview.

We haven't had many positive Covid cases... but that's now just part of the furniture, standard procedure...

Assistant Head, (Achievement), Secondary School,

Moreover, she suggested, some of the responses to the pandemic might have gone too far:

We need a balance between attachment and listening to our students and recognising how they're feeling, but also putting some boundaries in place. I don't think the two are separate, but I think... we've almost gone too far the other way without putting clear structures in place when behaviour issues arise in the first place.

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However, the majority of respondents, as illustrated above, did feel the pandemic had had positive effects on relationships in the schools, and on the development of attachment/trauma-aware approaches:

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I think that Covid somehow has provided an opportunity for people to stop and actually listen and feel and kind of almost think about what is really important.

Assistant Head (Teaching and Learning) Secondary School

.... what went even better was the thought, diligence and care and love that so many of the staff, so many of my colleagues, put into how we would then meet [children's] needs.

CEO, PRU MAT

These reflections form an interesting contrast to the studiously neutral tone adopted by the new Secretary of State for Education on 15 September 2021:

I look forward to following through on this government's commitment to level up schools across the country, ensuring that every child receives the education they need to fulfil their potential.

Zahawi, 15 September 2021, quoted in Simpson (2021d)

In summary, the evidence from this research is that, for some schools and individuals, the effect of the Covid pandemic has been transformative, and that this learning will contribute to the ongoing development of attachment- and trauma-informed practice at a local level, and possibly influence more general, system-wide change. There will be considerable scope for further research, on the longer-term impact of Covid on schools, on education policy and on the research process itself. However, as implied in the quotation above, the extent to which this may be seen as a paradigm change, particularly at policy level, is rather more problematic. Like the lovers in Marques's (1989) novel, it may be that the myth of Covid may be more effective in raising awareness and enabling these changes to take place at a local level than to promote the wholesale transformation of a society still wedded to a particular neoliberal polity.

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