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# **Doing the *Rights* Thing:**

an Ethnography of a Dominant Discourse of  
Rights in a Primary School in England.

Rebecca Webb

Thesis submitted for PhD examination

at the University of Sussex

June 2014

## Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not, and will not be, submitted in whole or part to another university for the award of any other degree. The thesis cites three texts that I have authored: two on my own; and the other one with a colleague. The first of these is a journal article in *Ethics and Social Welfare* (2012); the second is a chapter in an NCRM publication; and the other is a chapter (in press) for a Sage Handbook of Learning. The thesis also makes reference to work I wrote as part of two different MSc taught courses completed during the academic year 2010-2011.

Signature.....

## Acknowledgements

I had very little idea what I was doing when I took this on. Fortunately, I suspect, neither did my friends and family. We all know now, don't we? Thank-you, thank-you a million times, Mum, Robin, Joe, Grace, Lily and Joséphine for allowing me to behave outrageously as though I was the centre of the universe when I found it all just *so, so* hard. You ARE the Centre of *My* Universe. But I think one 'Dr.' in the family might be enough...

Valerie, I remember the day we struck a chord and it wasn't the first time we met. What swung it, for me, was the discovery of our mutual delight in the absurd. After reading my piece on Meeting Judith Butler at the Bus Stop and pronouncing that I 'could write', you launched into your One Woman impromptu impersonation of Cilla Black interviewing Michel Foucault. How could I not have enjoyed my supervisory sessions with you after that? Each one for me has been a mental work-out as though in training to run a marathon in serious jogging mode and not dressed as a hippopotamus. I have experienced the pain and exhilaration and the sheer joy of your wicked intelligence and generous friendship and your acute supervisory skills in gently guiding me to learn in the best way I can. I'm glad this is only the beginning.

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But my final thanks must go to all those at Top Hill Primary (support staff, managers and leaders, children, teachers, parents and carers and visitors to the school) who welcomed me, and who contributed to and animated this research in so many different ways.

## Summary

### UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Rebecca Webb, Doctor of Philosophy

'Doing the *Rights* Thing: an Ethnography of a Dominant Discourse of Rights  
in a Primary School in England.

This thesis is the product of qualitative ethnographic research conducted over ten months. It considers the implications of adopting a dominant discourse of 'Rights' as a framework for guiding both the policy and practices of a large state primary school in England. More than this, it interrogates how 'Rights' (and 'Respect' with which it is conventionally coupled) link to, and inform, subordinate discourses of 'Equality' and 'Diversity'. Guided by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 'Rights Respecting Schools' (RRS) initiative, these four values of rights; respect; equality; and diversity are highlighted as pivotal in shaping the lived experiences of everyday schooling amongst children, parents, teachers, support and ancillary staff.

My work involves applying theorizations of post-structuralism to problematize these values within this environment. I operationalize discourse analysis to make sense of my ethnographic data in a manner which I attribute to Laws (2011). I do this, in order to scrutinise some everyday occurrences of school life, acknowledging that they can be understood in many different ways, 'all and none of which can be seen as 'true'' (Laws, 2011, p.15). Like Laws, I acknowledge that what I wish to achieve is a way of reading aspects of school life and what goes on there, in new and different ways in order to see things what may have been overlooked or taken-for-granted previously. The purpose of my research is 'not to unravel and find a truth or even many truths'. It is 'to trouble, to deconstruct the operations of dominant discourses' (Laws, 2011, p.15) in order to generate new ways of *seeing*, *being* and *understanding*. Applying a range of theoretical lenses enables me to strike a note of caution concerning the all too appealing and apparently transparent quality of rights, respect, equality and diversity within the institution of the school.

My reading of these rights discourses suggests that the RRS policy text shapes school practices, in very particular ways. Some school subjects describe these as productive of an 'ethos' that is: 'happy', 'carefree' and 'joyful'. Such positive accolades are attributable to a schooling

genealogy that long pre-dates the introduction of the RRS. The rights discourses tend to promote a regulative, procedural rationale of a 'consensus' (Rancière, 2004) of schooling. This works to produce an idea of 'common sense' value (Hall and O'Shea, 2013). It cloaks difficulties and contradictions implicit within fundamental assertions of 'rights', especially foreclosing any claim of them as inherently 'political', despite protestations of their power to 'transform'. Disjuncture, diversity and difference are difficult to deal with institutionally. The discourses produce particular regimes of truth which means that certain ways of doing and saying can be ruled in, and others out. Expectations of the enactment of a 'Ubiquitous Rights Respecting' school subject (as either adult or child) are demanding and contradictory, whilst, at the same time, the constitution of the 'Rights Respecting Citizen' is imagined as: either, 'adult' who is already 'prefigured'; or, 'child' who is, 'Yet-To-Be'.

However, the performative qualities of the rights, respect, equality and diversity discourses present moments of 'dissensus' (Rancière, *ibid*) which leave traces. I suggest that these generate the possibilities for a (re)imagining of 'common sense' refracted as 'good sense' (Hall and O'Shea, *ibid*) that offer, not (another) manifesto for democratic schooling, but sources of insight which may enrich attempts to use initiatives like RRS as schools' guiding frameworks.

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## Chapter 1: Introducing my Research

### Introduction

This thesis is the consequence of qualitative ethnographic research carried out over a period of ten months. It considers the implications of adopting a dominant discourse of rights as a framework for guiding the policy and practices of a large state primary school, Top Hill Primary, in England. More than this, however, it interrogates the ways in which notions of rights (and respect with which it has become coupled) link to, and inform, subordinate discourses of equality and diversity within the school, and to what end. These four values (which I refer to in short-hand form as rights discourses) are highlighted as important in shaping the experience of everyday schooling by many members of the school community. The rights discourses are embedded in a UNICEF 'Rights Respecting Schools' initiative<sup>1</sup> (RRS) which provides an overarching institutional framework for what goes on.

My research involves applying theorisations of post-structuralism in developing understandings of the values of rights; respect; equality and diversity within this environment. As I describe in my written feedback to my research school<sup>2</sup>, I operationalise 'discourse analysis' to make sense of my ethnographic data in a manner which I attribute to Laws (2011). I do this, 'in order to scrutinise the everyday occurrences of school life, acknowledging that they can be understood in many different ways, all and none of which can be seen as 'true' (Laws, 2011, p.15). Like Laws, I acknowledge that I wish to achieve a new and different way of 'reading' the school and what goes on there in order to see things that may have been overlooked or taken for granted previously. As Laws describes in relation to her own work: 'The purpose of analysing the data is not to unravel and find a truth or even many truths. It is to trouble, to deconstruct the operations of dominant discourses on our everyday lives' (Laws, 2011, p.15). I do this in a contexts in which other discourses traditionally prevail, in order to generate new ways of seeing, being and understanding. I utilise a range of post-structural lenses which challenge the apparently transparent quality of rights values within Top Hill

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 2 for a detailed analysis of the genealogy, scope and ambition of this document.

<sup>2</sup> The Rights Respecting School (RRS) initiative is an award developed by UNICEF to put children's rights at the heart of schools' policies and practices (see Chapter 2 for a detailed analysis of this policy)

Primary. As Ahmed (2012) suggests with regard to the application of the term diversity within the context of higher education institutions, 'we want to be cautious about the appealing nature of [the use of such terms] and ask whether the ease of [their] incorporation... is a sign of the loss of [their] critical edge' (2012, p.1).

## **Section 1: Key Terms**

### **Discourse**

In this thesis text, discourse is not just a 'theme'. It is that which links 'language and social life' (Dunne, Pryor and Yates, 2005, p.93) and it comes to form and govern the shape and feel of social experiences. However, it is *more than* this, for it concerns the ways in which language and social life become 'mutually constitutive' (Dunne, Pryor et al, ibid) so that discourse itself is as much about creating the speaker as vice-versa. Discourse, in this conceptualization, allows for the analysis of the institutional viewpoints and the positions from which people speak, and the power relations these allow and presuppose. The framework that I adopt suggests that research subjects themselves are a dynamic of the internal machinations of discourse so that 'boundaries' between speaker and spoken and subject and object are continually and dynamically reforming within the warp and weft of the fabric of the social. MacLure (2003) describes this as an enfolding and entrapping of the research subject within a relationship with the real world so that text, discourse and society are constantly being re-spun within a metaphorically 'textual' fabric (MacLure, ibid, p.4).

### **Reflexivity**

I wish to think about these rights values and the attendant values in relation to the inter-related practices, processes, actions and meaning-making in a way that acknowledges how I am minutely implicated in the 'sense-making' process, as author/researcher. This requires considerable reflexivity defined as the social aspect of the construction of knowledge. This requires an overt consciousness of myself and my position in this research and the implications of this for the knowledge I am producing. It means attuning my empiricism to the way my research practices (both analytic and literary) will *always* work to conceal value positions that need to be examined. For Dunne, Pryor and Yates (2005, p.22) reflexivity is:

*'...something that inheres in social action and plays over our experience in such a way as to enables us constantly to revise our apprehension of ourselves and the world... '*

## Post-structuralism

My research broadly occupies a post-structural theoretical position. I keep company with a 'bundle' of theorisations that shape an approach that allows me to burrow into the concepts of rights, respect, equality and diversity. I draw on Lather's work (2007) to conjure an image of post-structural theories contained within post-modernism as a movement that is associated with ideas emerging during the second half of the twentieth century. These ideas are related to a crisis in confidence in western conceptual systems borne out of recognition of the limits of Enlightenment and Modern rationalities. I use post-modernism as a philosophical and cultural term condensing a profound series of transitions from modernity to what can be regarded as post-modern. It is these transitions from the modern to the post-modern that allow me to reconceptualise 'how identity, the subject (self), power, and difference' can be thought about (Robin and Jones Diaz, 2006, p.15) in this research.

I posit post-structuralism as the working of academic theory within the folds of the post-modern. For me, post-structuralism contests, but does *not* dismiss, the limits of the bases of structural theories, or, indeed of 'modern' Enlightenment concerns. I situate myself within a post-structural paradigm, recognising my own investments in the texts I construct. I do this to de-totalise the voice of Science by reflecting a variety of subject positions from which ordinary people speak knowledgeably about their worlds. Framing post-structuralism in the context of my ethnography in this way draws on a multiplicity of 'voices' from the field – those of adults (teachers, teaching assistants, school leaders and managers, school visitors and former parents and members of staff), and those of children, – junior-aged pupils in the school.

To this end, the rich and multi-layered definition of post-structuralism by Kenway, Willis, Blackmore and Rennie (1994, p.189) usefully describes my theoretical ambition:

*'Post-structuralism is a term applied to a very loosely connected set of ideas about meaning, the way in which meanings are struggled over and produced, the way it circulates among us, the impact it has on human subjects, and finally the connections between meaning and power. For post-structuralists, meaning is not fixed in language, in other cultural symbols or in consistent power relations. It shifts as different linguistic, institutional, cultural and social factors come together in various ways. Meaning is influenced by and influences shifting patterns of power...it constitutes the human subjectivity which is...regarded as shifting, multi-faceted and contradictory'.*

## Feminism and Post-structuralism

Embedded within my post-structural approach is a feminist sensibility which makes possible the visibility of some of the multiple discourses in which I, and other research participants, are ‘inevitably and contradictorily caught-up’, including discourses of gender (Davies, 1994, p.2). I don’t elevate ‘gender’ as a singular unit of study throughout this thesis. However, I do invite feminist post-structural theorists, Judith Butler especially, to infuse my empirical materials with a particular interrogatory lens. This makes it possible for me to challenge some liberal humanist presumptions of the rights discourses that position us, individually, as architects of our own destinies striving to recognise, and to impose, our own unitary and non-contradictory identities as ‘positive’ and ‘improving’ forces on those around us. Instead, I engage with a feminist post-structural turn which embraces the subjectivity of the individual as made possible through the discourses s/he has access to, through their ‘life history of being in the world’ (Davies, *ibid*, p.3). I presume subjectivities that are ‘shifting, fragmented, multi-faceted and contradictory’, in which, as research participants, we co-exist within different sets of power relations in a multitude of contexts within Top Hill Primary.

Feminist post-structural approaches allow me to do two things. Firstly, I can acknowledge this work as a feminist project in which partial narratives of my own accounts of myself prior to, and during, this enterprise intrude into my sense-making of the research process and the account that I offer as I turn my experiences into text. As Ahmed acknowledges (2012), feminist theory has generated a wide range of knowledge of gendering as a social process. Secondly, feminist post-structural theorisations offer me critical insights into the ‘mechanisms of power’ and the way in which ‘power can be *redone* at the moment it is imagined as *undone*’ (Ahmed, 2012, p.13, original italicised). This provides me with tools for reflexively engaging with the way in which power relations meet and intersect, especially in relation to gender and class, for example, as ‘strands’ within my conceptualisations of the four rights values.

These enabling devices of post-structural feminism are particularly important in the context of this study which concerns itself with a set of terms that can appear as ‘obvious’ within the setting of a ‘*care-free*’, ‘*nurturing*’, ‘*happy*’,<sup>3</sup> liberal-minded, twenty-first century primary school. This means that my research questions the ways in which the different intersections of the ‘equality strands’, such as gender, class, and low-ability, for example, meet and become

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<sup>3</sup> These were all terms that appeared in interviews with adults and children alike to describe the ethos of the school.

experienced in practice by different bodies as part of the values-making of the 'ethos' of the school. These demand that discourses of rights are not accepted as straightforward and unproblematic, even within such a benign setting. The 'happy' language and behaviours of rights values can all too easily render some differences, such as gender, less visible, just as soon as others, such as Special Needs (see Chapter 5, for example), are brought into view and held up under the full glare of celebratory scrutiny.

For Ahmed (2012, p.14), attention to the 'process' by which intersectional points come into view and then recede (an ebb and flow of blurring and obscuring), is about 'actually making a point' about the political integrity of such work. She suggests that 'there is [valuable] labour in attending to what recedes from view' (ibid, p.14). It is this attention, and process of labouring, that I undertake as part of a data gathering and representation process, 'making and unmaking' an 'assemblage' of 'something new' (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, p.1).

I would not wish to suggest that the post-structural and post-structural feminist philosophers that I draw upon speak with one voice (or, indeed, necessarily regard themselves as a part of one united/unified band). Indeed, they display various political and philosophical convictions that are distinctive (see Chapter 2: Section 2) which develop and continue a conversation about the nature of rights and the extent to which these can, or should, be represented within universalised and foundational forms within democratic schooling projects.

## **Section 2: Finding and Framing The Questions**

### **Formulating Questions (and Answers)**

So, this project investigates just what a discourse of rights does by considering what such a discourse denies. Drawing upon the ideas of post-structuralism means that I have been able to pose the following question that explicitly connects meaning-making, power, language, culture and human subjectivity to inform and underpin my research:

*How, when, where and why are discourses of rights and respect and equality and diversity constituted as a dynamic of practices and performances of schooling, and with what effects?*

I begin to explore different ideas of rights in the following chapter when I ask, 'Where Do Rights Come From?' I use a post-structural paradigm to interrogate the ways in which the terms of rights and respect and equality and diversity can be understood. This allows me, in the following chapters, to tease out the assumptions concealed within the policy, practice and

commonplace usage of the concepts in the day to day life of the school during the time I am researching within it. The overarching research question leads me into a myriad of further questions that I pose throughout the analytic and interpretive chapters (4, 5, 6) in particular. These more specific questions focus upon the 'ethos' of the school and the way in which this constitutes, and is constituted by, the rights discourses; the subjects formed by and informing the discourses; and the implications of both for citizenship and the citizens that are to be produced as part this democratic schooling project. In my concluding chapter ( Chapter 7) I ask further questions about what might be said of the RRS initiative by way of declaring it as 'not political'. This leads me to (re) imagine the possibilities of rights discourses as a facet of a project of democratic schooling.

### **Why this Particular Set of Questions and not Others?**

It would perhaps be most honest to say that I did not set out with this research question in mind when I first trod the stony path of 'becoming a researcher'. Moreover, I had not formulated this question when I first entered Top Hill Primary (see Chapter 3)). Indeed, assertions of 'setting out', hand in glove with 'sets of questions', have the all too easy veneer of a legitimacy and purposefulness that don't sit easily with my experience of dis/entangling myself from within the mesh of 'finding a focus'. However, a day did come, after I had been in my research school for several months, when 'rights' as the prism through which so many of the human micro-political processes and practices seemed to be refracted, caused me to note:

*Rights – they appear everywhere, both concretely, as well as, somehow, floating in the ether – not so much on their own – but coupled with 'respect', dressed up as 'responsibility': they're on the walls in UNICEF brightly coloured poster form; as 'home-made' school charters on the walls of corridors, classrooms, hallways, outside in the playground, on newsletters home, reminders of what can be expected ('you have the right to be heard, and 'you have the right to work' (and you have the responsibility to listen'...'and to let others get on with their work'...); in passing remarks between teachers and pupils, 'remember, it's lovely that we have the right to go out into the sunshine to play, but we have the responsibility not to disturb other children inside...' They feel invested in, by many, and in such a range of spaces within the school. They are a garment, not so much worn lightly, as with a mark of distinction...they are asking to be recognised and valorised. This is Top Hill Primary saying, 'Hey, this is what we're about...sit up and take notice'...Rebecca's notes, October 2011*



By the time I had made this note, I had found myself reflecting upon the ways in which an overarching discourse of rights was 'calling out' to frame the excitements, tensions, complexities, contradictions and the messiness of the 'ethos making' of school life, especially for an ethnographer researcher, with the time and scope to watch and listen, to step both in and out and to 'join in'. This initial engagement with rights discourses in my Top Hill Primary is one that I unpick further in Chapter 3.

### **Early Readings of the Literature**

My reading of much of the research literature as a way of informing questions I wished to ask took me in a variety of directions. On the one hand, was a body of literature directly concerned with 'rights' in schools and other sites of compulsory education and which emerges from a liberal, modernist tradition, championing the individual within a universalistic framework of rights (see Chapter 2; Section 3). It emphasises more functionalist 'impact'-orientated research of an evidence-based nature, built upon an understanding that should a 'rights-based approach' be undertaken with appropriate rigour, the benefits are demonstrable and incontrovertible: 'the ethos created demonstrates to children the inclusiveness of a rights-respecting school and paves the way to participation in the life of the community'<sup>4</sup>. This literature refers to localised contexts in England (Covell and Howe, 2007; Covell, Howe, Polegato, 2011); in the UK more generally (Sebba and Robinson, 2010, Ofsted, 2010) and Europe wide (De Costa, Borodankova et al., 2012). This foundational discourse champions rational, explicit, systematised knowledge, critical autonomy and established value hierarchies of a normative nature. It assumes an unproblematic symbiotic relationship between the ideals of democratic citizenship and assertions of rights, as well as the functions and purposes of state schooling.

There is also a wide range of school-based research which problematises these assumptions. It challenges 'impact' based research (see Chapter 2, Section 3, and especially, Arnot, 2006; Cole, 2012; Gordon, Holland and Lahelma, 2000; Moos-Mithra, 2005; Osler, 2009; Osler and Starkey, 2003). While this research teases out contradictions and taken-for-granted 'normalisations' about sameness and difference, it also focuses more broadly upon conceptualisations of 'citizenship' and the formation of citizen subjectivities and the way in which citizenship

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<sup>4</sup> See [www.beraconference.co.uk/2010/downloads/.../BERA2010\\_0306.pdf](http://www.beraconference.co.uk/2010/downloads/.../BERA2010_0306.pdf) accessed September 2012

adheres to, and informs discourses of rights. It is this body of research I engage with particularly in Chapter 2 as shaping my own ethnographic engagements in Top Hill Primary.

This spectrum of engagement with the research literature enabled me to apply my developing understandings of post-structural theorisations and methodologies (see Chapter 3) and to ask questions of the rights discourses in Top Hill Primary. I was encouraged in this by my reading of Laws' (2012) deconstructivist research which she conducted ethnographically within her own 'Special School'. She interrogates the categories of 'the mad', 'the sad' and 'the bad', and which I deemed her to have approached with such reflexive integrity. Serendipitously, my engagement with her work brought me into email contact with her which led to her proffering a fascinating insight into the 'origins of 'rights' and 'responsibilities' as a binary construct:

*'The story of rights and responsibilities goes back to when I was in an ... education department as an advisor developing child protection education materials in the late eighties...we had been writing materials on 'the right to be safe', etc and at a meeting our legal branch guy said we weren't allowed to talk about 'rights' as the department could then be legally responsible if schools failed to ensure 'rights'. We went away to think about it as all the child protection education across the world was based on 'rights'. At the next meeting I asked if we could talk about rights and responsibilities (coming from a behaviour management field we had begun to merge the two together) so legal bod went away, thought about it and came back and said we could. I don't for a minute think I came up with the idea but our child protection materials were the first materials in Australia that paired them – all to ensure the 'legal' discourse!! Later on in child protection education it proved to be a good thing when talking with parents who were concerned that teaching their children about their 'rights' might give them permission to misbehave – we always had the comeback in training that yes children had rights but they also have responsibilities etc, etc which calmed parents down. I look at how easily the two are now paired and think about the reasons we paired them – to make sure the education department wasn't sued and at the same time to placate parents who didn't want their children to have rights – and I have to smile'.*

Cath's correspondence with Rebecca during 2012

Cath's remarks are deliberately light-hearted and are, to some degree, flippant, in nature concerning the seemingly 'easy' bed-fellows of 'rights' and 'responsibilities'. However, the remarks do function to illustrate the importance of paying attention, as Popkewitz (1998)

suggests, to the ‘historical specificity’ of the questions that we have ‘about schooling and inequality’ (1998, p.5). They demonstrate, for example, just how such a ‘coupling’ of rights and respect/responsibilities becomes generated as a mechanism for coping with anxieties of power so that it ‘traps it’ back to the individual, rather than to the society that produced it.

My own research questions recognise the professional seriousness accorded to the RRS project under construction in Top Hill Primary by all those connected with directing and shaping it and they allow for the giving of a voice to a wide range of actors. For many of the key players within the school, a rights ‘ethos’ is about developing an inclusive society within – and importantly beyond the school – in which all play their part democratically, through which, all can be accorded the rights of that democracy. As the head teacher said himself about the RRS agenda:

*‘It comes from your conviction of what on earth you think you are doing here [as an educator] in the first place...We are privileged to be part of shaping young people. It is about sending messages into a future we won’t see...it’s about a set of core beliefs...and core values. It’s not about ‘let’s sit down and write a Vision Statement’...it’s grown out of what was already there. From Rebecca’s interview with the head teacher’, taken from interview, April 2012*

The questions that I have selected to shape my research are designed to move beyond an analysis of ‘judgements’ of success, of Top Hill Primary’s RRS project. They are constructed to challenge me to think about the way that expert knowledge (as that alluded to by Laws, concerning rights and responsibilities) fashions all our thinking, so that this is not only about knowledge, but also about power and the effects of power and how these work together to apparently construct a ‘truth’. The questions that I have interrogate the ‘truth telling’ entailed as part of a process of schooling. They are, necessarily, political, for they are about destabilising:

*‘reigning forms of reasoning through enquiring into how the objects of schooling are constructed’ in order to poke and prod at ‘categories, to open up potential space for alternative practices that [can all too easily] be silenced in the available common senses’. (Popkewitz, 1998, p.7)*

For this reason, I give attention to ‘the political’ and ‘politics’ and the relationship of both to discourses of rights as constituted within schooling practices. This means that I construct these ideas as *more than* an awareness and knowledge of structures that govern within the democratic system of the UK. Rather, I address the way in which ‘politics’ and ‘the political’ are implicated in the processes of democratisation and also of subjectification’ so that they

‘become potentially expansive and contested categories’ (Webb and Crossouard, 2014, in press). This is important for it enables me to interrogate, firstly, the way in which the messiness and nuance of ‘the political’ performs as a thread within my data (see Chapters 6 and 7, in particular). Secondly, I am able to give attention to the inherent quality of rights as abstract political and philosophical concepts, and the way in which these have been variously constructed and challenged historically, whilst remaining highly contested (see Chapter 2). I do this to provide a rich and ‘thick’ contextualisation for my analysis of discourses of rights as socially realised practices in subsequent chapters. Thirdly, however, I also devote some attention to generating understandings of more concrete political ‘contexts’ of various kinds, from the micro of the school itself and its immediate environs (Chapter 3) to the macro of the national political arena (Chapter 2). Indeed, I set the scene, briefly and at the end of this chapter, for the next chapter, by providing a summary of the contemporary national political context of the current UK coalition government. It is against and within this national political arena that Top Hill Primary performs its own RRS agenda.

### **Where am I in this Research?**

Importantly for me, the questions I pose ‘allow me in’. When I began this PhD, I had been working within the field of education for twenty years, or so, in different capacities: as a primary teacher; specialist music, English and drama teacher; school leader; English as an Additional Language specialist and advisor; and, most recently, as a Local Authority advisor for ‘Inclusion, Equality, Diversity and Achievement’. I stopped paid work to take up my PhD studies full-time. I had undertaken an MA in Education, part-time, specialising in Race Equality and English as an Additional Language a few years previously, and I had been inspired by the experience. I secretly harboured the desire to ‘do’ a doctorate, in order, as I used to tell my friends and family, ‘to stop bullshitting’ and ‘to find out how it should all *really* be done’. My MA thesis, undertaken with a group of women and children of Welsh-Sylheti heritage (as part of a Family Learning project, attached to a large South Wales primary school), had been a piece of critical action research. It had started with grand claims concerning ‘transformative’ practice within the group, and had become as much an:

*‘...examination of the inadequacies of the original ethical framework [of the research] in the light of my deeper knowledge of the complex power relations at work in the group, and my own subjective understandings of those processes.’*

Rebecca Webb (2005, p.3)

Thinking back over my years of professional practice, so much of what has shaped my interests and the direction in which my working life has developed, has been an intense, rather passionate and possibly, poorly-conceived belief, in the way that I have felt that education *can* and *should* 'take the side' of those with less power than others, in order to 'redress' some imbalance of life experiences and opportunities. I have felt this as one, herself, who has been the beneficiary of educational privilege and opportunity. The question, more particularly for me, has been how should I play a part (in whatever particular capacity I have happened to be in at the time). I've very often felt frustrated and thwarted, of course, by my own incapacity/inability and 'the system' for failing to 'deliver'. Making sense of the glib, and rather vulgarly articulated, desire to undertake a doctorate to 'stop bullshitting' has a lot to do with the *personal* wanting to understand better. That is, why passion, desire, interest, energy, enthusiasm, interest, and belief seem, well, so often just 'not enough' to effect and alter educational inequalities.

So, this is as much about me having the opportunity to develop the reflexive 'equipment' to consider my practice and 'being' (with my attendant interests as described above), as it has to do with my desire to clothe myself in the 'garb' befitting a social science researcher (not, of course, that I presume that these are mutually exclusive). My engagement with theorisations has therefore become personal (see Chapter 3 for an expansion of these reflections as a facet of methodology). It has moved me on from the 'certainties' and comforts of much feminist standpoint theory (as a white, middle-class young woman whose political consciousnesses and appetites were whetted and awakened within the political maelstrom of 1980s 'Thatcherite' politics); to the more unsettling, deconstructive arenas of feminist post-structuralism.

I look at my 'certain' engagements which had been concerned with the seeking of an 'essentialism' (Hey, 2000, p.165) where the 'personal as political' offered a vision which looked to a societal transformation that seemed so straightforward should 'we' all show sufficient energy and 'will', in ways that now seem somewhat naive. And yet, I regret that loss of naivety. It is personally painful. But, I constantly remind myself that my current engagement with post-structural theorisations does not 'demand' the abandonment of personal and political engagement. Indeed, Butler (1993) has suggested that calling such a presupposition of materialism into question 'is not the same as doing away with it' (ibid, p.201) while Morgan, editing Butler's extract in *The Feminist History Reader* (2006, p.197), proposes that a more discursively constituted subject 'might well enable an *enhanced* sense of agency'. So, it remains a moot point as to whether, or not, I am able to 'bullshit' more, or less, as a result of

this PhD process, but, I am reassured that I can perhaps expand my sense of ‘who and what it is that I might be’.

### **How Did the Research Come About?**

Reflecting on the genesis of this text is important for me. It is both tied up with the way in which I see myself within it, and with the way I *feel* about the research and my expectations of how it might contribute to saying something of original worth. I have already mentioned how, once I had actually begun my ethnographic research at Top Hill Primary, rights *emerged* as a focus. Here, however, I trace particular ‘departure’ and arrival’ points in the generation of my research, as I sought to define it in the period leading up to the generation of my ‘research proposal’. This feels important, not so much for the questions I formulate, per se (for these have metamorphosed several times since beginning this endeavour), but for the way that I have come to adopt particular epistemological and ontological positions that I *feel that I can wear* and that make sense to me, not only as research themes and questions with their own internal logic, but as ‘political’ positions with which I can live.

### ***Departure***

On first completing an initial application for entry into the academy, the title of which was *Creating a Climate of Controversy in the Classroom: how Teachers Enable Pupils Aged 9 to 11 to Develop the Political Literacy to Question and Challenge Elements of their own Lives*, I had a strong sense of having erected a carefully constructed scaffold with a secure platform from where I could expound: I had identified an issue. It began from the premise that many teachers of pupils aged 9 to 11 approach the teaching of controversial issues superficially and in a way that promotes the critical analysis and political engagement of neither teacher nor pupil. My understanding and definition of political literacy I had taken from Crick (2000, p.61):

*‘political literacy is to have learnt what the main political disputes are about...political literacy is a compound of knowledge, skills, and attitudes’.*

Political Literacy formed one of the three strands that became part of the UK Citizenship education programme. The definition itself seemed clear and unproblematic, within the structure of a body of knowledge on ‘Citizenship’ with which I felt I had become familiar as teacher and advisor.

My sense that more research needed to be done had grown out of a reading of a body of literature that fell within the modernist tradition (Claire, 2001; Claire and Holden, 2007; Richardson, 1986), which recognised that children share many of the insecurities and

puzzlements of adults about aspects of their everyday lives related to the social and the political. This was further borne out by my personal experiences of working alongside other teachers.

I recognised that, as a piece of research, the exploration of ‘*how*’ to support and enable teachers to develop more critical, enquiring pedagogies that addressed the controversial would generate contradictions and juxtapositions that would enable me to develop a fruitful line of enquiry. My apparently secure platform enabled me to constitute myself as an integral dynamic of the research. I would be part of the script in a qualitative ‘human-as-instrument’ (Maykut and Morehouse, 2000) capacity, drawing upon my areas of expertise, tacit knowledge as both participant and researcher, and a history of shared working with colleagues who trusted me and whom I trusted. It seemed to fit into a theoretical framework of my conceptualisations of possessive power (Clegg, 1975) of which I felt I had some knowledge and understanding having used such theoretical constructs to inform my critical, feminist action-research MA<sup>5</sup>. For although my context had changed, I felt that all that was required was to bolster my existing platform of knowledge: I needed to relocate my research in schools in a part of England, and read and write more about what I understood that I already knew.

I asserted that my research would fit ‘into an action research paradigm initially, involving a cyclical process of planning, action, observation and reflection in which I will adopt the role of teacher-advisor-researcher (Kemmis, 1998) through the prism of a feminist perspective’. I did recognise a degree of flexibility and reflexivity that would be required of me:

*I will be much involved with an ethnographic process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture and individuals) that is based upon my own experience (Pink, ibid)’. I will develop a ‘Professional Learning Community’ of interested teachers where our ‘shared social practices’ will expand the action research to occupy ‘a more critical’ space with the aim of ‘developing challenging, critical and transformative practice (Pollard, 2003)’. Notes taken from Rebecca’s initial application to the academy<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> My Masters dissertation became, however, increasingly replete with ‘post-structural angst’ as one of the examiners noted as I problematised the assumptions of the power relations of those implicated in the action research.

<sup>6</sup> This was part of the short 3000 application that I made in order to be accepted for a PhD place in 2010

### ***Arrival***

This idea generated a range of research questions which focused upon the mechanics of improving existing pedagogies and in enhancing teacher awareness of their need to critique and challenge their own assumed knowledge base in order to become more reflective about their educational practice. They were to generate a co-constructed range of interventions within the classroom with a group of teachers and would form the basis for reflective journals. These were to be kept by teachers and pupils charting their development in understandings and ideas in order to generate ideas for action, both within the classroom and without. It was these journals that we would jointly interrogate. These methods were commensurate with an action-research framework.

### ***Departure***

I began reading more which meant that I began inhabiting the bumpy terrain of reflexively acquiring 'new knowledge', leading me to 'alter my understanding of 'myself 'and the world' (Dunne et al., *ibid*, p.20). I realised that I was beginning to reorganise and challenge my understanding of 'the real'. At the time, I noted that this was, *'both exciting and terrifying for it led to the collapse of what felt like safe assumptions about me, my knowledge and competencies, and my area of study'*<sup>7</sup>. I had felt that I was able and prepared to challenge my knowledge and ways of seeing the world through undertaking further research. However, I had not fully engaged with the extent to which this would require me to hold up a mirror to so much of what I had undertaken boldly and assertively as 'exemplary practice' before. Nonetheless, I recognised, equally, that until I did so, I would not be able to develop intellectually. I went through a process of interrogating my methodological assumptions considering: epistemology and ontology; issues of practical significance; micro and macro political concerns; and ethics (*ibid*, p.167) sensing that I was moving into research terrain that was 'dynamic, contingent, dialogic, and context specific' (*ibid*, p.166).

As I began to better understand epistemology as theories about the nature of knowledge, including self-knowledge, 'common sense' knowledge, everyday knowledge, wisdom and science (Delanty, 2005) and ontology, as theories concerning the nature of the real and our claims to 'know' this (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007), I began asking myself exactly what

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<sup>7</sup> Taken from a journal I began keeping at the time during 2010 and 2011



the epistemological and ontological positions of my original focus had been, and whether they were consistent within an implicit broader methodological framework. I began wondering, also, what would happen if these positions shifted. I was comforted and supported in this painful enterprise by my readings of feminist theorists from a range of traditions: MacLure encouraged me to engage with 'difference, distance and paradox' (2003, p.166) in the process of creating meaning, being and reality; Lather (2007) reminded me that 'getting lost' is a productive process in unassuming 'naive realism and transparent language' (Lather, *ibid*, p.9); and Olesen (2005) encouraged me to tell a story (about locating a focus) that is as much about a process as an outcome.

I used the table below to help me re-conceptualise aspects of my methodological thinking as my positions shifted:

<u>Then</u>	<u>And Later</u>
<p>Exploring and developing teacher/pupil understandings of the political in curriculum so controversy regarded as constructive and essential component of developing deeper understandings of political issues.</p> <p>IMPLIED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: feminist critical theory with a transformative action research methodology</p> <p><i>Implied epistemology took core concepts and frame of reference as unproblematic: Terms 'teacher', 'pupil' not considered as contested constructs, although framework did make assumption that inequalities in power are regularly imposed upon unequal participants. Notions of 'controversy' was understood and defined within parameters that did not allow for more extended discourse around who decides and what should count as controversial and in what situations and why.</i></p> <p><i>Nonetheless, it did assume a subjectivist approach to social science with an anti-positivist epistemology where:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Three kinds of knowledge interests: control; understanding; emancipation (Freire, 1970)</i></li> <li>• <i>Knowledge is constituted by its object as well as constituting it (Delanty, 2005):</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Not all knowledge is included in the curriculum</i></li> <li>• <i>The curriculum is a selection of what is deemed to be worthwhile knowledge</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Deconstructing and understanding better the range of discourses explicit and implicit in exploration of politics of the curriculum.</p> <p>THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: feminist post-structural approach with a participative ethnographic research methodology</p> <p><i>Epistemology more overtly developed.</i></p> <p><i>Explicitly raising the questions of knowledge:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Move beyond deduction/induction as constructing knowledge</i></li> <li>• <i>Conditions mediated by the presence of hierarchies, power, and control by individuals in the multiple meanings of language (Cresswell, 2003, p.25)</i></li> <li>• <i>Knowledge of the social world is relative. There will be different textual accounts of different experiences (Bryman, 2000, p.469),</i></li> <li>• <i>Questions – whose knowledge? Where from and how obtained? By whom, from whom and for what purpose? (Olesen, 2005)</i></li> <li>• <i>Recognises tacit knowledge – (Maykut and Morehouse, 2000, p.31)</i></li> <li>• <i>Personal tolerance of ambiguity (ibid, p.34)</i></li> <li>• <i>Knowledge a product of dialogicality and tension</i></li> <li>• <i>Researcher implicated in the construction of knowledge through the stance that she</i></li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The justification for that selection reveals ideologies and power in decision making in the wider society and through the curriculum</i></li> <li>• <i>The curriculum is an ideological selection from a range of possible knowledges</i></li> <li>• <i>Knowledge and its selection is neither neutral or innocent (Cohen, Manion et al, 2007)</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Implied ontology – suggesting:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>reality is subjective, result of my own cognition; created in my own mind. Assumed my presence as researcher to be integral to the events being investigated</i></li> <li>• <i>Assumed reflexivity as a researcher would inform and reform constantly my understanding of my ontological position (Dunne et al., ibid)</i></li> <li>• <i>Reality is essentially contradictory and incomplete</i></li> <li>• <i>Desire to understand better, and where-ever possible transform (through praxis) the underlying structures/aspects of social life (Cresswell 2003, p.27)</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>assumes in relation to the observed and through the ways in which an account is transmitted in the form of a text.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Recognising androcentric (where women are passive objects rather than subjects of history; and are acted upon rather than social actors)and gynopic (where women are invisible)constructions of knowledge (May, 2001)</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Ontology more clearly developed:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Any given account is only one way of many possible ways of making sense of social reality with a shifting, emergent property that is the property of an individual's construction (Bryman, ibid, p.20)</i></li> <li>• <i>Being comfortable with uncertainty (implicit in this is the question of how we can ever know or capture the social reality that belongs to others?)(Bryman,ibid, p.469)</i></li> <li>• <i>Adopting of feminist position postulated on the premise that it cannot be value-free – 'conscious partiality' (Bryman ibid, p.23)</i></li> <li>• <i>Understanding gender as a social construct</i></li> <li>• <i>'indwelling' – reflective and reflexive, especially as a Feminist 'insider'</i></li> <li>• <i>Both researcher and participant/s positioned by virtue of history and context (Olesen ibid, p.248)</i></li> </ul>
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It is the shift to the 'And Later' frame of the table above that set off the 'fire-crackers' that have ignited (in the good moments) the thinking that has inspired this subsequent thesis text.

### Section 3: A National Political Context

In this final section, I give a 'flavour' of a UK national and political scene in which I experienced 'rights', in their multifarious configurations, as bandied in various and contradictory contexts as a backdrop to my time in Top Hill Primary:

*It's been an ordinary, wet, dark November day but I'm struck by the way in which 'rights' have suffused the very ether of the 'public' arena in various guises...there's been a great confrontation – covered in the media – between The Con-Dems and the European Court Of Human Rights, over the rights of some prisoners in the UK to be allowed to vote...I walk past the TUC headquarters in B... and I'm struck by the sight of a red poster covering one side of the building*

*invoking 'Your right to work!'...I return to the station at V...: there's an argument to one side of the concourse between a harassed member of the public and a bartender. Harassed member of public is telling bartender in no uncertain terms (who is refusing her entry into the bar) that she has 'f...cking rights, you know' – delivered at great volume and not particularly in a manner (rightful or respectful) conducive to congenial outcomes...a community police officer is making her way across the crowded concourse, towards the contretemps...' Rebecca's memo-to-self, November 2012*

I began my fieldwork in September 2011 when the Coalition<sup>8</sup> government had been in power for almost a year and a half. Early on in the life of the new government (and especially in a period leading up to the General Election on May 6th, 2010), the Conservatives had made much of the 'Big Society'. This – described as 'a massive transfer of power from Whitehall to local communities' by the Conservative website<sup>9</sup> – was designed, not only to set the Coalition apart from the previous New Labour government (see Chapter 2), but also to show them as more concerned with issues of social justice than previous Conservative administrations, especially that of Prime Minister Thatcher (from the 1980s). This meant stressing, on the one hand, in contrast to Thatcher, the importance to be placed on 'society'; and, on the other, in contrast to New Labour, the disconnection of the Coalition from a belief in the role of the state in 'shaping' society and setting the social justice remit. The 'Big Society' ideal was, however, to also build upon ideals of self-regulation; self-construction and self-assertion.

Barker (2012) suggests that the election of Coalition presented new possibilities for a nation which had become inured in a heavily bureaucratised state approach to government since the end of the 1980s. This vision of localised and active decision making was to enable the participation and engagement of individuals in the shaping of local democracy and the generation of its moral climate. However, by the time I began my field work, a focus upon 'community, social values [with] a shifting of the locus of economic control from government and big business to local level' (Lingard and Sellar, 2012, p.44) was being treated with a

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<sup>8</sup> Government made up of Conservative and Liberal Democrats elected in May 2010 with Conservative Prime Minister, Cameron

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.conservatives.com/Policy/Where\\_we\\_stand/Big\\_Society.aspx](http://www.conservatives.com/Policy/Where_we_stand/Big_Society.aspx), accessed 11.01.13

degree of scepticism<sup>11</sup> as both an expression of intent and as not matching up with the lived experience of many.

Increasingly, the rhetoric of the 'Big Society' was replaced by that rhetoric of 'the common-sense of austerity'. This new framing generated its own popular logic that required an acceptance of what Lingaard and Sellar termed 'a post-ideological' supposition, that there really 'is no alternative' to the 'rolling back of the state' (2012, p.460). This initially focused upon the havoc wrought by the collapse of a globalised banking system and its implications for the lives of 'ordinary citizens'. More latterly, it centred upon the 'profligacy' and irresponsibility of previous national governments, especially that of New Labour in supporting state structures that could be 'ill afforded'. The TUC poster (see above) captures something of the frustrations of workers resulting from contractions in the jobs market following the downturn of the global economy. Cameron has justified a diminution in public service funding, for example, suggesting that governmental reforms are 'not about ideology' [but rather] they are about people's lives' (Cameron, quoted in *The Guardian*, 18.01.11).

In terms of the national education policy of the Coalition government, Barker (2010) has stressed that ideology *does* lie at the fore-front of educational reforms which, he suggests, represent something of an evolution of New Labour's 'Third Way' (see Chapter Two). The Education Secretary, Gove, has stressed that such reforms are necessary 'for those of us who believe in social justice...'<sup>12</sup> However, as Lingaard and Sellar (2012, p.54) posit with reference to Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010, 'market driven polities, such as those championed by the Con Dems (Coalition), promote greater social inequality than those in which there is a more interventionist and redistributive state'. Concerns have been expressed by children's rights charities<sup>13</sup> relating to governmental priorities expressed within the recent Education White Paper<sup>14</sup> in transforming teaching in state schools. The priorities assume a functional model of teacher authority, discipline and power, as a necessary prerequisite to improvements in individual pupil attainment which it is suggested, will erode structural societal inequalities

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-20931121> Accessed 11.01.13

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-20931121> Accessed 11.01.13

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/may/10/michael-gove-public-school-domination> accessed 18.01.13

<sup>13</sup> See <http://crae.org.uk/news-and-events/news/school-discipline-reform-plans-threaten-childrens-rights.html> accessed 13.01.13

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/toolsandinitiatives/schoolswhitepaper/b0068570/the-importance-of-teaching> accessed 15.01.2013

between pupils in different types of schools. Some 'rights' charities and lobby groups have expressed nervousness with the Government's apparent disregard of rights as set down in the European Convention on the Rights of the Child (see Chapter 2) as part of these schooling reforms. Indeed, the review of the National Curriculum has involved an archiving of all previous citizenship materials for schools along with the DfE<sup>15</sup> website.

Any ideas for the future of democratic schooling need also to be viewed within a broader context of governmental attitudes to 'rights' in which high profile debates over prisoners' rights, for example, have been discussed within the context of 'civic' rather than 'human' rights; national versus supranational democracy and 'who decides'; and the nature of democracy itself<sup>16</sup>. On the one hand the Conservative element could be expressed as demonstrating antipathy to the 'rights industry' of the European Court, while the Liberal Democrats could be described as demonstrating an enthusiasm for 'All Things European'<sup>17</sup>. Gedalof (2013, p.118) also asserts that the Coalition is revisiting the role of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission with a view to exercising its own 'national' credentials to make decisions, which align with the desires expressed by some Conservatives to introduce a British Bill Of Rights to in place of European 'rights' dictats<sup>18</sup>. Gedalof suggests that the Coalition is 'radically turning around the equalities agenda through its 'massive public spending cuts' (2013, *ibid*). She points to the Prime Minister asserting that that Equality Impact Assessments<sup>19</sup> (which schools have been encouraged to conduct by Local Authorities in England) get in the way of the delivery of fast, efficient and slick business. She suggests that such statements do have a populist logic, but she fears that such actions will do 'even more [than the policies of New Labour] to increase inequality' (Gedalof, 2013, p.118). The cumulative effect of this broader context for my ethnography is overlain with the present government's ambiguity, firstly, towards the purposes of public schooling itself; and secondly, towards ideas of the role of human rights as a backbone to societal values.

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<sup>15</sup> Department for Education

<sup>16</sup> 'Today', Radio4, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid\\_9771000/9771965.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9771000/9771965.stm) accessed 22.11.12

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/aug/25/nick-clegg-human-rights-laws> accessed 18.01.2013

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/9803198/Consider-changing-the-law-to-defend-the-right-to-wear-crosses-says-Pickles.html> accessed 18.01.2013

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2012/nov/19/cameron-axe-equality-assessments> accessed 19.01.2013

## Conclusion

This chapter has introduced my research: describing and contextualising the concerns of this thesis which is about the way in which ideas of discourses of rights become constructed and constituted as discourses of schooling. It introduces my ethnographic approach which traces the way in which rights discourses are performed and practised as a dimension of the everyday experiences of school for a range of subjects. I construct a logic for my particular theoretical 'gaze' which draws upon post-structuralism and post-structural feminism to enable me to trouble the assemblages that I produce. I set out, too, my research question, suggesting how this has spawned other connected questions which guide me through the construction of this text.

I go on to 'write myself in' by drawing upon aspects of my own autobiography. I link these aspects to the ways in which I have been able to reflexively engage with aspects of my professional autobiography in a way that has informed and shaped what it is that I have set out to discover as a researcher. I have touched on the way in which this text is one dimension of a doctoral experience that has borne me into epistemological and ontological territories in which I had only previously dabbled. I end the chapter by painting one picture of a macro-political context for the thesis. I do this by way of providing something of a portal for my next chapter. Chapter 2 takes a genealogical approach to exploring rights more generally and specifically within schooling contexts by asking and responding to the question of, *'Where Do Rights Come From?'*

## Chapter 2: Where Do Rights Come From?

*'I'm caught in a painful place: that is, between my ambition to 'do' this chapter differently (such that I avoid a 'grand narrative' approach to 'rights', which presupposes by its very structure, the monocausal and essentialist), and my ability to shape it in such a way that it does the 'work' that I require of it, and which presents a logic of enquiry that works with, rather than against, the expectation of my readers. If this chapter were a manikin, we could say that my first attempt at dressing it hadn't created the 'look' that I had desired. On the contrary, the effect was of the ideas having been rather 'chucked together' such that the reader was left suspecting that the underclothes were altogether missing. This time I'm starting with those undergarments and I'm dressing that manikin for winter. Nonetheless, I hope that the overall effect is more than one of just being sensibly 'clad'. Rebecca's memo-to-self (see Chapter 3, Section 3: Methodology as Representation)*

### Introduction

As Chapter 1 has suggested, invocations of different ideas of rights surround us in the formal and informal arena of everyday life. They are debated, politely, on the 'Today' programme of Radio 4, or invoked, angrily, on the station concourse. This begs the question of just how rights have become so central to the sense making, processing and shaping of day-to-day experiences. This includes, of course, Top Hill primary school, where the very act of decreeing 'We are a Rights Respecting School' becomes a bold statement of belief in how we are/can be/should be in the world. This adoption of a framework of rights and respect, along with other schools in the UK (Covell, 2010; Sebba & Robinson, 2010) is based on the documentation produced by the United Nations Children's Fund<sup>20</sup> in the UK (UNICEF UK) which has generated the 'Rights Respecting School' (RRS) initiative. This leads to a national award at either a Level 1

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<sup>20</sup> The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is an intergovernmental organisation which relied on funding from voluntary private donors. It was set up in 1946 by the United Nations Convention to provide emergency care and food for children devastated by the effects of World war 11. UNICEF is the arm of UNICEF internationally.

or Level 2 ‘which recognises achievement in putting the Convention<sup>21</sup> (CRC) at the heart of a school’s planning, policies, practice and ethos’.<sup>22</sup> However, as we have seen from Chapter One, the contemporary national, political context set by the present administration, appears to have something of an uneasy and maverick relationship to the promotion of rights generally, and within schools more particularly.

The purpose of this chapter is to set the enactment of rights within a wider historical, philosophical and socio-political context. As the opening memo suggests, I have struggled with the methodology of writing such a chapter. My ambition has been to trace the contestations of complexity within various accounts and perspectives in a way that is necessarily compressed but not reductive. I have settled upon a form of representation that traces a genealogy of rights that moves from the ‘broad landscape’ of the historiography of rights and their association to ideas of citizenship within western philosophy, to a more ‘intimate portrait’ of rights as conceptualised within the RRS documentation, as a way of framing the analysis of my research, such that it ‘drills down into’ a range of competing discourses that emerge within subsequent chapters.

The chapter begins with Section 1 (A Genealogy of ‘Rights’ and ‘Citizenship’), the purpose of which is to lay the ground, to set out the contemporary terrain of the ‘Big Ideas’, in order to clarify some ‘higher order’ principles (Benhabib, Butler et al, 1995, p.3).

*I have been to the clothes rail and hand-picked the well-known brands of clothing with which to dress that manikin. Rebecca’s memo-to-self (ibid).*

The text in this section is necessarily partial and highly selective comprising examples chosen to frame key areas variously declared as central to an understanding of a contemporary discourse of rights. It traces the relationship of rights as connected to the place and purpose of ‘citizenship’ as a thread within discourses and practices of democracy, and in particular, ‘democratic’ state educational provision in England in the late 1990s and early 2000s. It was in this period that the RRS was first adopted by schools at a time in which Fielding and Moss (2011, p.22) identify the political forces creating the climate for education as ‘deeply

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<sup>21</sup> The United Nations Convention On The Rights Of The Child (‘CRC’) came into being in 1989. It is universally recognised and at a base level safeguards human rights against governmental abuses of power.

<sup>22</sup> UNICEF leaflet, 2009, and [www.unicef.org.uk/Education/Rights-Respecting-Schools-Award/Childrens-rights/](http://www.unicef.org.uk/Education/Rights-Respecting-Schools-Award/Childrens-rights/)



suspicious of anything public' so that the system favours a depoliticisation of state, educational provision with a focus on individual rights and constitutional liberties'.

In Section 2 ('Speaking Back'), I discuss a series of feminist and post-modern interrogations of the idea of 'rights' that de-centre the inheritance of western male-centric rationality as a founding logic. I draw upon the some conversations captured in 'Feminist Contentions' (1995) between Benhabib and Butler supplemented by Ahmed (1998) and Rancière (2004) as a way of 'speaking back' to the narrative that precedes it. This 'speaking back' is concerned with power and knowledge: how it is to be variously recognised; who gets to hold it and with what legitimacy and to what effect. It constructs a critique of citizenship and rights as a *modernist* project in order to re-imagine what they might allow as a *political* project. Such a re-imagining requires asking questions about the formation of the subject. Who is s/he? How does she become known, and recognised? What of her agency and political motivations? It allows for the exploration of sameness; difference; recognition; the private and the public; and assumptions of a priori subject formation, as these relate to claims to citizenship and to 'the right to have rights' (Bellamy, 2008). The arguments I put forward capture the tensions between 'sameness' and 'difference'. By sameness, I mean, ideas of belonging, 'all-in-this-together': an identity or shared group characteristics (within a particular community, or nation state, or as a subject of 'universal' rights). By difference, I refer to possibilities for a *more-than* response to democratic politics as that should seek to engage with a multiplicity of voices as well as the complexities of power relations (Mouffe, 2000).

Section 3 explores literature taken from a range of academic traditions, including educational practice and cognition, cultural studies and sociology. I have selected texts that are primarily concerned with the ways in which rights and citizenship are interpreted and implemented within UK schooling contexts today; or that pertain to conceptualisations of rights within institutional contexts. I use three key liberal 'lenses' of the legal and political; the universal; and the normative, extracted from a modernist, 'Marshallian' (Marshall, 1950) discourse of rights, upon which much of the literature is premised, to do two things.

The first of these is concerned with examining what the literature has to say about the potential of a liberal-democratic tradition of rights and citizenship which assumes the rationalist, humanist subject, according the 'same' social value to each human subject (for example, Claire & Holden, 2007; Cogan and Derricott, 2000; Howe and Covell, 2009; Hicks & Holden, 2007; McCowan, 2012; Oulton, Day, et al, 2004; Osler and Starkey, 2005; Sebba & Robinson, 2010). And the second, is to draw on feminist, post-modern or 'difference-centred'

texts which challenge a hegemonic discourse of rights and citizenship, troubling away at representations of 'difference' and 'Otherness'. These critical texts question ways in which claims to rights and citizenship can get played out within contemporary schooling contexts (for example, Arnot, 2006; Biesta, 2011; Cole, 2012; Devine, 2002; Gordon, Holland and Lahelma, 2000; Lister, 1997; Moosa-Mitha, 2005).

The fourth and final section of the chapter sets the analytical lens to 'high resolution' in order to interrogate the RRS texts using a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. Within the context of Top Hill Primary these texts are pivotal. They are *assumed* in the construction and the enactment of a range of policies and practices that have a performative<sup>23</sup> dynamic and realised as part of the everyday lived experiences of schooling. I locate a discourse analysis of rights within the school using the conceptualisations, theorisations and ideas that I have explored in Sections 1, 2 and 3 of the chapter.

Consequently, I identify a range of dominant and subordinate discourses which make explicit conceptualisations of power and knowledge (which I construct as a '*Seeing*') and subjectivity (which I construct as a '*Being*'), borrowing from Parker (1992). I do this in order to examine particular constructions of 'objects' and 'subjects' such that they bring into being 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1969, p.49). These are necessarily shaped by: first, the centrality of my own reflexivity in a reading of the material; and, second, the 'ideological, political and permeated with values' assumptions (Schwandt, 2000, p.198) within the architecture and construction of the RRS texts themselves. The RRS, by its very nature, produces, and can only produce, truths that are partial and that are 'situated': 'produced by and for particular interests, in particular circumstances, at particular times', (MacLure, 2003, p.175). It is this enactment of discourses of rights that lies at the heart of this thesis.

## **Section 1: A Genealogy of 'Rights' and 'Citizenship'**

The idea of tracing a genealogy of 'rights' is taken from Foucault (1969). In this context, I use it to consider the ways in which knowledge and power and ideas of the subject are reconfigured and re-imagined in different historical and socio-cultural contexts. Importantly, this approach

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<sup>23</sup> I use 'performative' to mean 'that which gets done'. However, I also mean more than this to refer to institutional actions, in a more Butlerian sense (1997) to explore the way in which actions and identities both get done (and undone) within discourse, shaped by power relations.

questions the assumptions of the origins and clear linear progression of rights. It stresses discontinuities, interruptions and contingencies. It is in this spirit that I seek out the external conditions that *precede* the existence of the RRS texts. As Threadgold (2000, p.46 in MacLure, 2003, p.178) suggests, 'we should explore the conditions of [the texts'] possibility. Just how it is possible to know that, to think that, to say that – these are the questions we should be asking'. I use Bellamy's summary (2008) of the normative, empirical and sociological 'Big ideas' as he concentrates on 'those theories that feature most prominently in contemporary debates' (Bellamy, 2008, p.28). He draws on the ideas of the historian J.G.A. Pocock in order to set out the 'classic' models of 'Citizenship' within Greece and Rome. He then uses empirical evidence to highlight a shift from citizenship as 'equal legal status' to ideas of 'human rights' (Bellamy, 2008, p.38), explicating the Enlightenment Social Contract theorists, Hobbes and Locke as examples. He finishes by exploring ideas of 'modern democracy' by focusing on the work of the sociologist, T.H. Marshall, considering the tensions and contradictions within ideas of 'citizenship' and 'rights'. I use the work of Lewis (ed, 2004), Osler and Starkey (1996, 2003, 2005, 2010) and Starkey (2008) and Osler (2009) to set out the interplay of rights and citizenship within the UK context in which the education system has been variously required to play its part, before I go on to address feminist and post-structural responses. The key features of Pocock's historiography were that: the Greek model (and its Roman Republican variants) of citizenship, attributed to Aristotle, purported to view the equality of *all* citizens as rulers and the makers of law. It stressed *participation* as its defining element where political citizens were freed from the 'burdens of economic and social life, in a realm in which the public and the private were kept distinct'. 'All' citizens actually meant men as subjects over twenty, known Athenians, patriarchs of households, and warriors. Women were not subjects and could, therefore not be citizens. Pocock reports that Aristotle recognised that for civic virtues to flourish within such a state it needed to be small enough for all to have a sense of belonging to the one city state where all citizens could subscribe to an agreed form of public, social justice. Such a City State aspired to 'concord' and 'sameness', where an ideal of citizenship as classless and expressing a sense of 'belonging' prevailed becoming integral to the identity of what it meant to be part of the *polis* of the citizen.

By contrast, Bellamy suggests that Pocock identifies the latter Roman Republic and Imperial Roman model of citizenship as one in which the view of equality concerned equality *under* law. This was born out of, and dependent upon, class discord and a struggle between the *Plebeians* and the wealthier and much more powerful Senate. As the Roman Empire expanded, changes to the Roman model of citizenship occurred. This meant that those conquered continued to

be governed in local, traditional ways, while at the same time being required to adhere to a 'legal' form of citizenship (*civitas sine suffragio* – citizenship without the vote, Bellamy, 2008, p.38) imposed from Rome. Importantly, this meant that the scope of Roman law exceeded the boundaries of the different political entities such that the citizens became subjects of the law's empire, ruled by it, rather than ruling themselves, as in the 'ideals' of the Greek and early Roman Republic models.

Bellamy suggests that the notion of the source of law as 'beyond the will of any human agency' (ibid, p.40) were conceived within a period Lather (1991, p.161-162) describes as the 'Pre Modern'<sup>24</sup>. The ideas that were shaped in this period can be traced from the Roman Empire when the separation developed between political engagement of the citizenry and overarching laws which governed them. 'Fundamental law' as a 'form of authority and legitimate knowledge' (Lather, ibid) – often referred to as 'natural law' – is supposed to bind everyone, be they monarchs or the populace at large, and can be thought of as superseding any human ordained law making. Within the context of the overarching question posed at the start of the chapter, 'where do rights come from?', Bellamy (ibid, p.40) suggests that it is these conceptualisations of fundamental, 'natural' law that have come to form the bedrock of the legitimacy of humans rights law and rights-based conceptions of citizenship that hold precedence today. He suggests that its great problematic has always been that it has to be interpreted and implemented through the rule of persons which makes it 'highly partial and fallible' (ibid, p.40) such that power is always located within one centre of influence.

The idea of the 'Social Contract' (Bellamy, ibid, p.41) which developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and which became central to liberal conceptions of the 'Modern' state (Lather, 1991), attempted to marry threads of the ideals of Greek and Roman republican citizenry with those that had held sway in the Pre-Modern period. The Social Contract set out to unite the political ideal of the equality of 'virtuous' citizens (prepared to 'uphold public interest') with the legal ideal of individuals as rights bearers who pursue their private interests protected by law. However, Bellamy points out that the ideal of a Social Contract was

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<sup>24</sup> Broadly speaking this was a period up to the late seventeenth century in Western Europe which Lather characterises as being one in which: forms of knowledge were legitimised through the sacred and divinely sanctioned; notions of the individual were God-given and destined; the material base of the economy was feudal and the view of history was one that was divinely ordered. There was a commitment to that which was fixed and enduring.

understood very differently by Enlightenment<sup>25</sup> philosophers. So for example, Hobbes believed that humans were likely to pursue self-interest aggressively and, therefore, a benevolent state was required to give protection to all to temper the selfish desires of individual subjects. Locke, on the other hand, saw any state power as a necessary evil that needed to be tempered such that individuals would only consent to a minimal 'higher law' (Bellamy, *ibid*, p.42). Bellamy suggests that both the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789 were attempts to resolve the mediation of the dualism between the public political citizen ('The people' or 'the Nation') and the private 'legal' citizen (subject of the law and possessor of fundamental 'rights' to liberty, property and the 'pursuit of happiness').

The Republican ideals of political participation (in which liberty is the product of the laws that citizens have helped create and shape) and the Liberal ideas of fundamental law and 'natural' rights, have developed an inter-play which has bound them together with the growth of nation states in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. This 'story' of the growth of nation states is one of a form of citizenship concerned with linking 'political participation and rights with membership of a national democratic political community' (Bellamy, *ibid*, p.44). It is one taken up by the sociologist, T.H. Marshall (1950). He wrote what has become a 'standard' history of the development of citizenship since the Enlightenment, premised upon humanist<sup>26</sup> principles of individual reason; scientific liberal democracy and the state as ideological apparatus. For him, the history of the growth of Western democracies is concerned with the inter-related processes of state building, commerce, the growth of industry and the construction of a national state consciousness. He understood citizenship as a universal and abstract construct which involved a structural tripartite model (Lewis, ed, 2004, p.9) of civil rights (enabling the acquisition of wealth); political rights (participating in the public sphere to contest inequalities); and social rights (ensuring everyone's access to material and symbolic goods). For Marshall, writing in the middle of the twentieth century, the growth of social welfare was an optimistic example of the way in which the three 'hyphenated' dynamics of citizenship (namely democracy, welfare and

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<sup>25</sup> The Enlightenment can be characterised as the period in which reason was elevated in the western tradition of thought, especially as this related to the natural sciences leading to an 'intellectual revolution' of the eighteenth century.

<sup>26</sup> Lather (1991, p.61-62) characterises humanist principles as those of the autonomous individual who is self-directed possessive of natural rights which they can control and shape – an individual who is fully conscious and who refuses to accept limits, minded of their socio-political credentials.

capitalism) could effectively jostle and compete so that those with least power were enmeshed within the generation of a virtuous circle of winning concessions from those with most power in their fight to be treated with equal concern and respect. Bellamy (2008, p.49) suggests that Marshall regarded legal citizenship as constantly altering to encompass the demands of new groups through the formal and informal exercising of the political participative rights of citizens. In Marshall's view, concessions would accrue for such individuals because the ruling classes depended upon the voluntary co-operation of the democratically ruled for their authority. The UK promised to produce an individually liberal citizenry where the exercising of rights alongside the recognition of mutuality and responsibility would constantly reinvent an understanding of the 'common good'. The state was assumed but not mentioned in Marshall's definition, which opened it up to other political communities, both smaller and larger (Yuval-Davies, 2011).

Marshall was writing against the backdrop of the Universal Declaration which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly following the global atrocities of the First and Second World wars. Those tasked with framing the Declaration hoped to establish that states, and those who governed them, could be expected to be held to account on a world stage for acting on behalf of universally agreed international human rights standards which were considered as fundamental and indivisible. These were premised upon normative ideas of individuals possessed of moral rights (to civil, political, social economic and cultural protection) which should be enshrined within regional, or state, conventions (Hynes, Lamb, Short, et al, 2012 p.788). Lewis (ed, 2004) has characterised the post second world war period within the UK as more fractured and complex than the structural approach of Marshall suggested. She characterises it as a period in which the welfare state constructed an overtly contractual relationship of rights and responsibilities between individuals and the state.

Mass migration into the UK (Miles, 1993), global capital flows and strategies of transnational corporations posed challenges to ideas of national identity and sovereignty in ways that were unprecedented (Lewis, ed, 2004) and thus unforeseen by Marshall. The shifting and unsettling terrain of the nation state has been increasingly characterised by struggles over effective membership and entitlement to the services of the state and for recognition for those who cannot/will not slip into a more straightforward universalist paradigm of 'sameness' and spiralling 'equal opportunity' imagined by Marshall.

Within the schooling system of the 1980s and 1990s, in England, citizenship was premised upon the imagined universal, individualised, 'good citizen' which for Cesarani and Fulbrook

(1996) was a 'code for the white citizen' and one in which the nuclear family was to be the centre for teaching about citizenship (ibid, p.70). This had followed a brief period in the 1960s in which an 'identity politics' which generated social categories of the subject; such as race, class, gender (Robinson and Jones Diaz, 2006, p.182) had, for the first time allowed the emergence of ideas that antagonised concepts of 'justice, citizenship and nationhood' instituting a form of political reflexivity which asserted ideas of 'difference' and 'recognition' (McLaughlin, Phillimore and Richardson, eds, 2011, p.2). Nonetheless, these ideas were not formally taken up within the schooling system. The New Labour government of the late 1990s and early 2000s adopted a vision of citizenship with moral and ethical dimensions (Osler and Starkey, 2005), in the vein of Marshall. These were overlaid on a heightened individualism of the Thatcher/Major eras<sup>27</sup> which Apple (2005, p.20) has described as an ideological block of neoliberalism and neoconservatism coming together to form a 'new alliance that [exerted] leadership in educational policies and reforms'. In the view of Harvey (2005, p.82) the effect of this dualism has been to show a concern for 'order as an answer to the chaos of individual interests' combined with an 'overweening morality as the necessary social glue' to hold together a national sense of identity.

The New Labour government<sup>28</sup> aspired to achieve what it hoped would be the 'politics of the common good in which citizenship' was to be 'a collective political effort in the context of social justice' (Davies, Gregory et al, 1999, p.21). The aspirations of New Labour were played out in the state education system, which were to herald an era where 'the ethos, organisation, structures and daily practices of schools [will] have a considerable impact on the effectiveness of citizenship education' (Crick Report, 1998, p.23). This resulted in the introduction of Citizenship Education as a statutory subject in schools in 2002. The aspirations of the programme were to reflect New Labour's desire for a new style of government, a Third Way (a middle ground between Old Labour and a New Right) in which broad based capitalism would offer wide ranging benefits and opportunities for everyone. In a speech soon after his election victory, Blair declared:

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<sup>27</sup> Thatcher was Conservative Prime Minister between 1979 and 1990; and Major followed on as Conservative Prime Minister from 1990 to 1997.

<sup>28</sup> New Labour with Blair (1997 to 2007) and then Brown as Prime Minister (2007 to 2010) was in power between 1997 to 2010.

*'Our task today is not to fight old battles but to show there is a third way, a way of marrying together an open, competitive and successful economy with a just, decent, humane society'* (Blair, 1997, in Driver and Martell, 2000, p.148).

Osler (2009) and Starkey (2008) have documented the shifting terrain of education and the ways in which schools and schooling systems were required to respond to the changing political discourses of citizenship and rights over the last ten years or so. They have identified that the language of citizenship within schools became concerned with social and community integration goals (a language of 'social cohesion') in the early 2000s following the Cattle Report<sup>29</sup> (Yuval-Davies, 2011). Osler suggests that a crisis about the role and place of multi-cultural education as a component of citizenship education meant, for example that, ten years after the Macpherson Report<sup>30</sup>, there remained evidence within 'key institutions [including schools] of widespread denial of the impact of institutional racism' (Rollock, 2009, quoted in Osler, *ibid*, p.3) compounded by a failure to incorporate the work of Parekh<sup>31</sup> (2000) in schools, which recommended 'teaching and understanding the complexities and alternative perspectives of history' in order to acknowledge that 'democracy needs diversity' (Osler, *ibid*, p.6).

Both Osler and Starkey suggest that a reworked citizenship curriculum in 2007 was also symptomatic of key political discourses embedded within the scope and purposes of citizenship education. Osler has characterised one such political discourse as that of 'patriotism and shared values' (2009, p.7). She suggests that a focus on this grew out of national anxieties to do with security and the prevention of terrorism which had come to overlay a discourse of 'cohesion' as a concern for order. This became translated into a

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<sup>29</sup> The Independent Community Cohesion Review Team reported in 2001 after riots in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in the UK. The Cattle Report gave a national overview of the state of race and community relations, drawing attention to polarised and segregated communities

<sup>30</sup> Inquiry led by Macpherson into death of Stephen Lawrence which identified endemic institutional racism in the Metropolitan Police force and made recommendations for addressing this in the police force and within other public institutions including state schools

<sup>31</sup> The Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain was set up by Runnymede in January 1998 and led by Lord Bhikhu Parekh. It was made up of 23 distinguished individuals drawn from many community backgrounds and different walks of life, and with a long record of active academic and practical engagement with race-related issues in Britain and elsewhere. The commission's remit was to analyse the current state of multi-ethnic Britain and propose ways of countering racial discrimination and disadvantage, making Britain a confident and vibrant multicultural society at ease with its rich diversity.



requirement for schools to promote 'community cohesion' as part of the Education and Inspections Act, 2006, which she regards as having placed an over-riding emphasis on defining 'nation' in simplistic terms focusing on commonalities, rather than recognising differences.

Paradoxically, a broader focus upon 'human rights' became more marked as a dimension of a political discourse with the involvement of the UK in the wars in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq where it 'became a signifier of British belonging for its citizens but also its mission in the world' (Yuval-Davies, 2011, p.33). And it was during this period that UNICEF UK first proposed and produced its ideas for a voluntary take up of a human rights award (the RRS) for any schools throughout the UK. Nonetheless, this period was also equally characterised by the suspension of some human rights legislation and a growing political struggle to suspend more (Yuval-Davies, 2011) with the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government coming to power in 2010.

For Starkey, (2009, p.5), the explicit commitments to democracy and human rights inherent within the CRC should have become 'the core transmission model of a citizenship education' in UK schooling contexts at this time so that pupils could be challenged to focus as much on the politics of difference as on ideas of sense of 'belonging'. Fielding and Moss (2011) agree, suggesting that citizenship education should not so much be a 'subject to be taught' but rather a '[political] practice to be learnt by doing' as a key dimension of schooling (ibid, p.59). However, the future of rights and citizenship education, in any guise, under the Conservative/Coalition government currently hangs in the balance with the archiving of all citizenship educational resources on government websites<sup>32</sup>. Blunkett, a former New Labour education secretary<sup>33</sup> has recently made a plea in the House of Commons for citizenship education to be accorded a status in a revised curriculum:<sup>34</sup>

*'If young people are turned off from the whole idea of public engagement – not just standing for a council seat or this place, but being engaged in campaigns and*

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<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100612050234/http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/scheme/s3/subjects/?view=get> accessed April 11 2014

<sup>33</sup> Blunkett became Education and Employment secretary in the New Labour government between 1997 and 2001 after which he was promoted to Home Secretary until 2005

<sup>34</sup> Revised National Curriculum for all state schools to be introduced from 2014 in England

*activities that we would all see as crucial dynamics in a living civil society – we will lose them.’ Blunkett, (‘Democratic Life’ blog post, March 7<sup>th</sup> 2014<sup>35</sup>)*

Where rights and citizenship education in schools goes next will depend on the outcomes of the current review of the National Curriculum in England.

Section 1 has adopted a framework, in part adapted from Bellamy (2008) to consider a genealogy of citizenship and rights beginning with the classical era of the Greek and Roman Republics. This period was characterised by dominant conceptualisations of citizenship and rights which were linked to the promotion of equality as belonging and sameness, developed within a public sphere of duty. By contrast, Bellamy’s account of Imperial Rome was marked by the development of ideas of legal entitlement as distinct from political participation, accompanied by the separation of notions of a public and private sphere of citizenship. What Lather (1991) has termed the ‘Pre-Modern’ period has been variously understood as marked by a translation of legal entitlement into ideas of ‘fundamental’ law in which knowledge became imbued with a legitimacy from a sacred, ‘higher’ being to subjects who were god-given and ‘destined’ (Lather, *ibid*). It was the ‘Social Contract’ of the early, ‘enlightened’ Modern period that challenged this assumed divine sanctioned consensus (Lather, 1991). This idea attempted to bind the ‘belonging’ of Greek and Roman Republic ideals with the legal citizenry of Imperial Rome to guarantee certain positive or institutional rights connected with the private sphere, at a time in which legitimate knowledge shifted from the divine to the secular and the ‘scientific’ of the archetypal liberal democracy (Lather, *ibid*). Over the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the idea developed of the autonomous individual with self-directed ‘natural rights’ and with the potential to shape his (it was usually his) own destiny.

The universal, moral, normative rights of Marshall’s mid-twentieth century socio-political vision were concerned with institutional rights (in a given political entity) to secure a civil, political, social-economic and cultural citizenry within western democracies. Marshall’s vision informed a liberal, ideological discourse of a nation state apparatus in which welfare and progress were to be assumed. Growing out of this, the recent history of citizenship and rights education in the UK schooling system has been primarily one concerned with ‘belonging’ as

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<sup>35</sup> <http://www.democraticlife.org.uk/2014/03/07/blunkett-gove-must-address-citizenships-status-in-the-curriculum-before-it-is-too-late/> accessed April 8 2014

part of a nation state. However, even these somewhat limited conceptualisations of citizenship in English schools seem fragile and the future of citizenship education uncertain as the Government conducts a review of the National Curriculum, the outcome of which will shape state schooling in the near future.

## **Section 2: Speaking Back**

Since the 1970s feminist and post-modern theorists have questioned and critiqued both the republican and the liberal conceptualisations of rights (as they come to be translated into everyday lived experiences) and the philosophical tenets on which these are premised. Through their various positionings, the philosophers that I draw upon below acknowledge rights as historically conjured which, by their very definition, become constructed along exclusionary and partial lines, productive of category demarcation, where some belong and others don't/won't/can't. The writers address questions of rights discourses as those which concern themselves with demarcated stratified groups where the 'rights' are exclusive to some and not others. Some authors 'refuse' unproblematic legal, universal and normative discourses of rights and citizenship and in this refusal attempt to make visible the creation of a hierarchy of social groups. Some acknowledge a feminist discourse of rights as a political project to do with identity claims and belonging, while others attend to a post-modern discourse of rights which champions the acknowledgements of 'difference'.

In 'Feminist Contentions', Benhabib (1995) defends a feminism rooted in political theory which engages with liberal and republican political philosophies on their own terms in order to champion rational consensus to assert a moral dimension to liberalism. However, as part of the conversation she expounds in this text, she makes clear her belief that feminists should reject western philosophical notions of a transcendent, abstract subject, a universal self, free from any sorts of contingencies and differences. She suggests that those with sympathies with feminist methodologies and theorisations should not allow liberal thinking to ignore the embeddedness of all subjects within history and culture. In this respect, she welcomes challenges to notions of unitary and linear models of history, such as those of Pocock and Marshall, which offer a monocausal account of history.

However, she also rejects the 'strong' framing of many post-modern arguments which she sees as offering up a 'quietistic' stance, which undermines the possibility of political challenge. In this regard, she rejects 'strong' formulations of the 'death of man, death of history and death of metaphysics' of the Enlightenment. Crucially, in a previous text, she suggests that the use of

such terms as 'difference', 'otherness', heterogeneity', while helpful in questioning the contemporary democratic communities, does not:

*'...indicate where the line is to be drawn between forms of difference which foster democracy and forms of difference which reflect anti-democratic aspirations'*  
(Benhabib, 1994, p.3)

For Benhabib the philosophical and political question becomes about how to articulate a normative, cosmopolitan republicanism which is also about political engagement in a globalised fractured and fragmented world. She suggests that we should strive for universalism that transcends what she describes as the 'self-centred narcissism of nations' (Benhabib, 1995, p.21) so that they can recognise the 'rights of others like them' (ibid). For her it is important to respect the rules of constitutional conventions and discussion in order to be able to challenge 'the very meaning, scope and legitimacy of rights' (ibid, p.22) and to look for the prerequisites to an emancipatory form of politics.

As a response to Benhabib in 'Feminist Contentions' (1995), Butler constructs her philosophical arguments in such a way as to question the very foundations of questions concerning the limits of democracy and rights such as the ones posed by Benhabib. Her interest lies in examining the ways in which philosophy is laid down through challenging assumptions of power, subjectivity, and human agency. In relation to power, an important issue for her concerns the way in which it inhabits the very conceptual apparatus that generates and constructs frameworks in such a way that it becomes accepted as a norm and is read at face value. Her philosophical stance concerns the implications of asserting *any* foundational position such as that of Benhabib which is in danger of shielding exclusions that become instituted.

Butler's concerns with power are such that she is wary of *any* discursive move that unwittingly puts any forms of democracy beyond question. In terms of subjectivity she questions the quality of liberal and republican philosophies in which the subject is constructed as clearly assumed and taken for granted. For her this can mean that sight can be lost of just how the subject is 'constituted by the very position it claims to possess' (Benhabib, Butler et al, 1995, p.5). Butler's interest lies in asking who gets to become the subject in different formulations of the liberal and republican perspectives and what this means in terms of who becomes excluded. She feels that the category of 'woman', for example, within feminist philosophical terms can too easily be constructed such that it begs the question of who has been un/mis-

represented. She asserts therefore that any category must be left as an open site of permanent contestation.

Beyond the conversation between Benhabib, Butler<sup>36</sup> in 'Feminist Contentions', Ahmed (1998) has addressed the question of rights and how they can be understood in feminist and post-modern philosophical terms. For her, the challenge is to circumnavigate what she regards as the danger of the binary of feminist theorisations linked to 'practice,' and post-modern theorisations which are rather associated with abstractions. She thinks this a false dichotomy which undermines the importance of theory in the 'formulation [and reinforcement] of political and strategic decisions' (Ahmed, 1998, p.24). Rights are the 'centre-piece of modernity', emanating from the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man' of the French Revolution of 1798, which represents a sovereignty of 'the people' in attempting to resolve the dualism of the 'private' legal and the 'public' political citizen. Rights can never simply be 'overcome' by theoretical engagement or 'held in place' through practical struggle. Rather, there is merit in feminism's call to challenge power relations in historically specific moments, while also 'destabilising both modern and post-modern conceptions of rights' (Ahmed, 1998, p.43). Ahmed regards claims for rights as requiring differentiation and embodiment through specific demands of action groups in particular contexts at particular moments in time and space in order that effective claims are made.

So far, then, I have examined three 'Speaking Back' positions which have explored the philosophical tensions inherent within modern conceptualisations of rights and citizenship. These have encompassed Benhabib's voice of rational consensus (albeit one that is also concerned with the political engagement and rights of those in danger of exclusion) and Butler's challenge of anti-foundationalism which makes her wary of *any* discursive move that puts forms of democracy beyond question. Ahmed's plea is for feminist and post-modern positions to work in tandem in order that rights claims can both be queried and acted upon. It is my engagements with these 'conversations' that have helped me develop and sustain a reflexive critical engagement with my empirical research. Butler has emerged, especially, as 'help-mate' in my grappling with the contingencies of the formation of being/becoming 'rights subjects' in Top Hill Primary (see Chapter 5, in particular).

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<sup>36</sup> The 'conversation' also includes both Cornell and Fraser whose positions I have not drawn upon in this research and who I have therefore not included in my reporting of 'the conversation'

Lastly, in this section, I wish to turn to two other political philosophers of the post-modern with whom I have come to engage in my 'thinking with' posture as I interrogate my data (see Chapter 3). The first of these theorists is Rancière who I first encountered in my reading of his 2004 paper entitled, 'Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?' which I found difficult and tantalising. Rancière concerns himself with what he sees as the failure of the liberal democratic modernist 'rights' discourse premised upon an 'irresistible movement leading to a peaceful post-historical world where global democracy would match the global market economy' (Rancière, 2004, p.297). He proposes a need to re-think the principles underlying conceptualisations of democratic politics in light of the shattering of their presumptions in the years since the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 as the:

*Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family [which] is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world' (United Nations text, 1948)*

In an echo of Ahmed, Rancière is troubled by the 'abstraction' of 'Man' in the Rights of Man which he questions in two ways. He is concerned that 'Man', increasingly, has come to represent no more than the right to have the rights of citizens, constructed by, and aligned along, national state lines. He draws on the work of Arendt. He asks how it is that she generates notions of public and private realms which separate rights as either pertaining only to a public political sphere, or to a private life. Rancière challenges the construction of the private space as a place that cannot facilitate public action or speech (so that rights become reduced to the form of bare physiological life, incapable of any political dimension). He quotes Arendt:

*Either the rights of the citizen are the rights of man – but the rights of man are the rights of the unpoliticised person; they are the rights of those who have no rights, which amounts to nothing – or the rights of man are the rights of the citizen, the rights attached to the very fact of being a citizen of such or such a constitutional state. This means that they are the rights of those who have rights, which amounts to a tautology' (Arendt, 1951, p.294, quoted in Rancière, 2004, p.302)*

For Rancière this is a desperate position and one which posits a stark choice between either a depoliticisation of those who cannot identify their rights or the politicisation of citizens within a nation state who may misconceive of their requirement to take action (especially on behalf

of those who cannot identify their rights). For Rancière the only way of overcoming this double bind is to assert that by virtue of being human the individual *is* political and *is* qualified to participate in politics so that 'rights' become about the *process* of contesting the very nature of rights (within any sphere whether private or public): social struggles become the core of political struggles *for* human rights.

*'The Rights of Man are 'the rights of the demos, conceived as the generic name of the political subjects who enact, in specific scenes of dissensus...there is no man of the Rights of Man...'* (Rancière, 2004, p.305)

The importance of 'rights' lies, therefore, for Rancière in this philosophical 'dissensual' quality which makes them crucially about *politics as process* and not as a sphere that is there to be 'won' once and for all. Dissensus involves a paradoxical contestation of what it is to be human and to be political in a space of constant seeking of how to live as human through a seeking for equality. Consensus, which Rancière associates with the failed project of modernism is the antithesis of dissensus and to be avoided, with its allure of the exorcising of politics and of 'closing a gap' which he believes diminishes what it means to be human:

*'...consensus is the reduction of democracy to the way of life of a society, to its ethos – meaning by this word both the abode of a group and its lifestyle'.*  
(Rancière , 2004, p.306)

In an intellectual sphere not dissimilar to Rancière, Mouffe (2000) also contests the possibility of achieving a 'circumscription of a domain that would not be subject to the pluralism of values and where a consensus without exclusion could be established' (ibid, p.7). Mouffe suggests that any search for democratic forms of politics that seek out rational solutions can become a constraint upon political debate and the open contestation of discourses of rights. Like Butler, also, she regards power as constitutive of social relations, (ibid, p.13) and, like Butler and Rancière, Mouffe takes issue with the premise of rational democratic principles as a priori to the formation of the subject as the bearer of natural rights (ibid, p.10). In particular, Mouffe, posits the crucial role of passions and emotions in securing democratic values, suggesting rather that it is rational consensus that 'entails the fantasy' of our escape from 'our human form of life' (ibid, p.12).

The significance of the work of Butler and Rancière for me lies in their different but radical commitments to process and the performative functions of language. And equally, the work of

both Rancière and Mouffe develops a significance for the way it challenges the manner in which ‘the ‘essence’ of democratic politics can be captured as a particular order’ (Biesta, 2011, p.141). Rancière and Mouffe focus on the way in which ‘democratic subjectivity is engendered through engagements in always under-determined political processes’ (ibid). Biesta suggests that their interests are for ‘human togetherness’ (ibid) in a way that demands the scrutiny of discourses of rights, and the social exclusions they can always engender. The work of Butler, Rancière and Mouffe has taken on a particular significance for me as I have sought to make sense of ‘the political’ of the RRS initiative in what I have read into the everyday doing of my research school (see Chapter 6 and 7 especially).

### **Section 3: Exploring the Literature**

This section considers the ways in which the philosophical ideas explored in Sections 1 and 2 are taken up and interpreted by writers from a range of academic paradigms. All have concerns with citizenship and discourses of rights and with the ways in which rights can be thought about in institutional contexts. Broadly speaking, the literature is divided between two paradigms: one that assumes a liberal orientation of rights to explore the best that can be realised within contemporary UK schooling contexts; and another that captures feminist and post-modernist perspectives (‘difference-based theorisations’) that antagonise liberal principles. I have grouped this range of philosophical ideas into: the legal and political; the universal; and the normative.

#### **The legal and Political**

Much of the recent literature about citizenship and rights in schools assumes a liberal, modernist approach founded upon Marshalls’ optimistic, progressive view of western democratic societies. Where once children were regarded as mere ‘objects’ of law, it ‘celebrates’ the CRC (see Section One) as ‘enabling’ children in new ways. It suggests that the CRC is generative of thinking differently about children, childhood and the ‘status’ of children in *being* citizens with rights, according them some political and participative agency and power in institutions within society (Claire and Holden, 2007; Howe and Covell, 2007; Covell, Howe and Polegato, 2011; Devine, 2002; McGowan, 2012; Osler, 2000a; Osler and Starkey, 2005). Even, Osler and Starkey (2005), critical of so many of the citizenship initiatives instituted by New Labour, stress that what differentiates the legal discourse of the CRC from the United



Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)<sup>37</sup>, is the fact that it allows for children as having 'entitlements to rights of provision' (ibid, p.53), but that they also have participatory rights in ways that recognise them as 'citizens with political rights' (ibid, p.53). For Devine (2002) this means acknowledging the competency of children and making a commitment to include their 'voice' on all matters of relevance to them.

Osler and Starkey (2005) stress their optimism in the CRC, seeing it as a new dynamic of the law for the way in which it holds institutional rights (enshrined within citizenship rights of national governments) to account on the international stage, for the treatment of 'all' children. They define the human rights accorded by the CRC as 'ensuring the equality of all individuals before the law and in respect of their rights to dignity and to the fundamental freedoms...which constitute the bulwark against arbitrary actions by the state or its agents acting out of prejudice and malice' (Osler and Starkey, 2010, p.4). Howe and Covell goes further in their exposition and celebration of this formulation of the discourse. They underline that in ratifying the CRC, all governments, including that of the UK, are signing up not only to ensuring that children's rights are secured but are making a broader political statement about 'equipping and empowering them [children] to exercise their rights like other members of society' (2007, p.19).

And for Verhellen, it is the participatory nature of the CRC that lends its power as a legal tool (in Osler, ed, 2000a, p.35) for children as citizens who are to be universally recognised. He suggests that the 'comprehensiveness', 'binding nature' and 'universal ratification' of the CRC mean it has the potential to 'challenge the world with a new geo-political social contract' (2000, p.36). For McCowan (2012) it is what he calls the 'status-based' character of the CRC that is significant and important in defining its power to shift perceptions of children so they are recognised as participatory and political citizens. By status-based he means a recognition of the CRC, which makes certain moral duties essentially independent of consequences (2012, p.69) in ways that can be traced back to Imperial Rome and the Social Contract (see Section One). He suggests that the status based nature of the CRC accords a full set of human rights to children in such a way that rights within education becomes indivisible from other human rights accorded to other groups of citizens. It is this discourse of the abstract, indivisibility of

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<sup>37</sup> The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was sanctioned in 1948. Of the 30 articles, the first 20 are broadly civil rights, Article 21 consolidates political rights and Articles 22-30 are essentially social rights. However, for rights to be endorsed there has to be a legal system in place to uphold any enforcement of these rights.

human rights which is particularly emphasised as a positive attribute of the CRC by Verhellen (2000).

However, for those with interests in feminist, post-modern and 'difference-based' theorisations (a term adopted by Moosa-Mitha, 2005), a status based view of the legal discourse is not straightforward. For her (*ibid*), the declaration of children's rights in the abstract does not necessarily accord children agency, with the potential to transform *their* citizenship into an 'active' process – one concerned with gaining a sense of the self in a range of multiple relationships with others. She suggests that liberal models of citizenship, rights and equality, presume 'participation' as attainable by virtue of declaring it: performative by sheer force of enunciation. Drawing on the works of other 'difference-based' theorists, such as of Yuval-Davies and Werbner (1999) and Phelan (2001), she proposes a more reflexive approach to an examination of legal discourses of rights. She posits that a sense of agency should be accorded to children allowing for their participation against powerful 'others', leading to the achievement of some rights, the gaining of greater self-confidence and the further politicisation of children struggling for rights (2005, p.375). For her (*ibid*, p.373) and for Lister (1997), the CRC can all too easily be interpreted in a narrow sense, where children's participation in only certain types of activities is considered to be citizenship (see Chapter 6), and where the public and private realms of children's lives remain as unproblematised binaries. In her view, this unchallenging reading of the legal discourse of the CRC denies the potency of 'childhood' as a site of political struggle where differential power relationships operate and become recognised and articulated.

Osler and Starkey (2005) remind us that for all its generative potential, the CRC provides only a set of 'principles and standards' for rights for each nation state (*ibid*, p.53). They stress that, although legal binding, individual governments have to ensure that their own legislation is enacted to meet the 'requirements' of the CRC. They believe that the net effect of this can be to remove any sense of political agency for children, as participants, in practice, where participation is assumed rather than realised. This is a theme developed by Ahmed (2012) in her work, in a different (higher education) context, in which she examines the performative quality of equality and diversity policies where she suggests that their bureaucratic function can be to block the very enactment of a political agency they are said to announce.

Arnot (2006) takes issue with the fixed interpretation of the legal discourse of children's rights in English schools, and sees that it is the individualisation of participation as part of a neoliberal political discourse. She is troubled by the inconsistencies of expectations and by the

arbitrary nature of the granting of power in some discursive contexts and not others. She cites the example of children in schools expected to assess and evaluate their own learning and to improve their performance. She calls them, 'clients or patients in charge of their own treatment' (2006, p.73), but not expected to take control of the nature of learning and its processes. She believes that this cannot be linked with a strong sense of civic agency within the minds of children. Indeed, she suggests that the movement from pupil to citizen (with participatory rights) might actually mean the loss of agency and therefore participation within the current political climate, for such movement creates a mere illusion of power. In this way, rather than being generative or enabling, the naming of 'citizen' becomes a mechanism for surveillance and regulation within the institution of schooling.

This leads Arnot to conclude that rather than promoting higher levels of reflexive subjectivity for children as *beings* with agency, participation can mean that they become incorporated in a project of social control (Arnot, 2006, p.75). Like Cole (2012), she, goes as far as to suggest that initiatives such as the RRS make assumptions about participation, concerning how children should participate and with what effect. She calls this the formulation of the 'good citizen' (as malleable and compliant), as opposed to the critical or protesting citizen, where the goals are not those of challenging social inequality and of promoting egalitarianism as a democratic end. Instead, she suggests that the practical manifestation of the legal discourse of rights can all too easily become concerned with 'the independent self-managing learner' for the 'reproduction rather than the erasure of social inequalities' (Arnot, 2006, p.84). For McLaughlin, Phillimore, et al (2012) what Arnot is highlighting is the emphasis on individual freedoms and rights as part of the contemporary model of governmentality in which the focus becomes as much upon self-surveillance and regulation as opposed to state control and intervention. This is a theme that permeates the analysis of my assemblage of data in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7.

### **The Universal**

For both Osler and Starkey (2005) and McGowan (2011), the universalising principle of the liberal rights discourse is an appealing one, based as they see it on international agreements, adhering to a coherent conceptual base in ways that are (not uncritically) championed philosophically by Benhabib (1995 - see Section 2). For them, an approach to a universalising rights discourse should be adopted within schools. In tracing further connections and continuities, Osler and Starkey (2005, pp.19-20) cite the educational writing of Dewey ([1916], 2002) as drawing upon the universalising principles of Enlightenment philosophy as the 'basis

for the development of a consciousness of the interconnectedness of humanity' (ibid, p.19). They suggest that Dewey strongly advocated a foundational view of the promotion of rights and political democracy within state schooling. Dewey's adherence to liberalising, Enlightenment principles had grown out of his belief in the domination of the nationalising powers of central European nation states in the nineteenth century (heavily influenced by the power of German nationalism) which had taken control of education. Schools had had to 'show loyalty to the state and promote patriotism' and this had had the effect that 'visions of citizenship had become dangerously limited to nationalist agendas' (ibid, p.19). For Dewey, a shift in power away from an elite, so that it could be shared democratically according to Enlightenment principles, meant that schools could become instrumental in providing all pupils with 'social attitudes, skills and dispositions that allow them to formulate and achieve their collective ends by confronting shared problems and common concerns' (Carr and Harnett, 1996, p.63).

At its best, it is this universalising rights discourse that Osler and Starkey characterise as productive of a 'cosmopolitan citizenship' which they view as 'celebrating human diversity', premised upon humans as *being* 'equal in dignity and rights' with *equal* entitlement to consideration and rights that is not constrained by an adherence to nationalistic citizenship principles, in the vein of Dewey and as taken up by Marshall. In this context, liberalism takes on a characteristic such that *regardless* of difference what actors seek is 'recognition as equal and similar citizens', with the same rights to live 'ordinary lives' (McLaughlin, Phillimore et al, eds., 2011, p.7). Osler and Starkey characterise this as a 'way of thinking, feeling and acting' as a citizen (ibid, p.24) which they champion in their research in rights and schooling as transgressing borders pre-defined by economic, social and cultural borders. It is these cosmopolitan, universal (or 'global', as she describes them) principles that Howe and Covell (2007) regard as enabling of the 'active practice of participation and the exercise of rights and responsibilities' (2007, p.74). In Howe and Covell's research, they call this an 'identification' (which they conceive of in naturalistic terms as pertaining to *every* child regardless of their different socio-cultural circumstances, ethnicity, gender or class) and suggests that without it children are likely to become either 'passive' or 'negative' and trapped within the limited scope of their own communities (2007, p.75).

Various other researchers suggest the 'beneficial effects' of 'the universal' for the health and motivation of the individual in ways that feed into a conceptualisation of the individual as 'freed' from any sort of broader social, political or cultural constitution or subjection. Ryan

and Deci (2000) attribute the recognition of such benefits to Dewey ([1916], 2002), as articulated in self-determination theory, which acknowledges that innate psychological needs, including the need for some self-direction, are the basis for self-regulation and motivation. Helwig, Arnold, Tan, & Boyd (2003) claim that their empirical data suggest that a sense of self-determination is a universal developmental need. They make the link with a conceptualisation of participation as expected to increase intrinsic motivation school engagement. Covell, McNeil and Howe (2009) make this claim for 'Rights-Respecting' Schools. They state, however, that the schools they have been researching are differentiated by the fact that participation occurs in an environment in which the children are explicitly taught that they do have rights and the nature of these rights. Learning becomes about identifying one's own rights, which builds an internalised sense of value and self-esteem.

As a feminist researcher, Lister (2003) speaks from a position of identity politics, reminiscent of political movements of the 1960s, and 1970s, which can be associated with a demand that citizenship rights should incorporate 'difference, but a difference that is articulated as 'essential'. This endorses the hopes of the promotion of cosmopolitan citizenship as a means of securing human rights, especially the rights of women (who are deemed to have different ethical and moral values from men) and which deserve greater recognition in a public sphere. Lister suggests that it is this discourse that aids feminist interventions which voice 'human rights as women's rights'. She points to the 1993 Declaration of the UN Vienna World Conference on Human Rights that stated that 'the human rights of women and of girl children are inalienable, integral and an indivisible part of universal human rights' as an important status-based universalising principle.

However, Arnot (2006) fractures this unified and unifying discourse of identity politics by suggesting that it can become merely a rhetorical device. For her, the cosmopolitan principle can too easily be associated with a globalising and individualising discourse imposing effects in the opposite direction. This means that it can re-enforce nationalist identities and conservative hierarchical social orders (2006) by generating stereotypes. Biesta (2011, p.451) raises concerns about promoting notions of cosmopolitan citizenship uncritically within schools as presenting 'globalisation as an already arrived at entity' so that an 'official take' on a globalised world is actually a localised feature of many modern western countries that perhaps seeks to transcend or 'occlude' other alternative anti or non-global perspectives'.

For Elliott (2007) the universalising principle is predominantly concerned with a 'triumph' of the individual as the product of an Enlightenment project. He takes issue with an all too

straightforward rational, functional and evolutionary account of the development of human rights which does not account for the ‘tremendous expansion of the [rights] ideology’ in recent years (2007, p.343). He likens the inviolability of the modern rights discourse to that of the power of the apostolic mission of Christianity reminiscent of a pre-modern era in which knowledge is accorded through a divinely sanctioned consensus. He regards the human rights movement as perceiving no boundaries to its activity of securing temporal salvation for each and every individual regardless of race, gender, nationality, religious affiliation or sexual preference. For him, this is reminiscent of the Christian notion of the soul: human rights are deemed to be inherent in every person as fundamental, ontological features. This means that Elliott does not so much see a universalising, cosmopolitan discourse of rights as presenting new ways of challenging the institutional rights of nation states or the ascendancy of an individualising discourse of rights, but quite the reverse: he sees it as expanding a modernist rights discourse into new territories as globalised consensus.

### **The Normative**

According to many researchers, children’s historical place in modern western societies has been such that their normative<sup>38</sup>, taken-for-granted positioning in relation to adults has remained unchallenged (James, Jenks et al., 1998, Osler, 2000a, Cole, 2012, Starkey, 2008), despite the constitutional and legal changes in their position. Moosa-Mitha (2005) believes this to be a product of the globalised, overarching Enlightenment discourse of rights. Devine (2002), in agreement with this, argues that despite the rhetoric of the legal and universalising discourses, a change in the subject positions of children will only come about by challenging their structural positioning in relation to adults within society (Devine, 2002, p.305). Delanty (2000) and Miller (2000) also take issue with the normative assumptions of children as participating subjects, critiquing Marshall (1950) for failing to attend to gender or ethnicity in his analyses of what meaningful participation within a democratic state might look like for children.

Within predominant accounts of rights, Moosa-Mitha (2005) suggests that the norm presented is (by default) one of an almost disembodied being in which a citizen’s ethnicity, gender, age, psychological and emotional characteristics are ignored or considered irrelevant in the face of

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<sup>38</sup> That is principles that ‘should or ‘ought’ to be configured and understood in particular ways eliding any possible differences or disagreement about their underlying values.

an over-riding need to articulate an individualised 'freedom' discourse reminiscent of Locke (see Section One). She suggests, however, that difference-based theorisations pose the question of who or what gets to frame 'the boundaries of belonging' (McLaughlin, Phillimore et al, eds., 2012, p.4) so that norms are questioned. For McLaughlin and Phillimore (ibid) contemporary, complex societies can produce 'communities' that 'feel' defensive in ways that produce misunderstandings of 'strangers' (i.e. those who are perceived as 'not the norm'). This can result in further marginalisation. Ahmed suggests (2000) that the norm (the middle-class, the white, the heterosexual, the adult) retain the power and privilege of belonging such that they are able to 'deny, reject, accept or name the stranger' (Ahmed, 2000, p.6). It becomes important therefore, to construct citizenship as occupying multiple subject positions in which the intersections of class, ethnicity *and* gender, for example, can become recognised. This conception undermines the idea of a singular set of rights attributable to all as if they comprise an undifferentiated singular category.

Moosa-Mitha (2005) and Arnot (2006), suggests that an Enlightenment discourse of rights can only ever construct children in one dimension, as rights bearers who are perceived, and perceive themselves, as autonomous and individuated in their decision making capacities. Moosa-Mitha (2005, p378) suggests that the effect of this is to 'essentialise' children as having just a singular difference to adults in a way that mask any intersectionalities of ethnicity, gender or class, for example. Minnow (1996) also questions the normative, highlighting the example of 'competencies' within an individualising children's rights discourse which are premised upon a psychologised child development model. She suggests that competencies are not always 'knowable entities' and often reflect adults' ideas of what children know and need, rather than what the child may/may not actually need. Hughes (1996) believes that children's agency is not always recognised within a normative discourse because they are not constructed as having the authority or the 'authorial presence' (p.46) where their views or presence is taken seriously. O'Neil (1996) equates normative views of children's participation with the discourse of the 'responsible self' which does not really challenge whether children do, or should have, the same obligations or responsibilities of participation as do adults. Indeed, controversially, O'Neil goes further. She rejects the use of a rights-based approach in school with children suggesting that as true 'dependants' children are in a different position to other oppressed groups struggling for their rights. She believes that children's true dependency means they have neither the power nor the ability to retain such responsibilities.

Difference-based theorists endeavour to move beyond the normative assumptions that boundary the conceptualisations of rights in the ways that cause O'Neil, for example, to suggest that they are irrelevant to children. This perspective sees the child, not as the normative responsible or virtuous self, but as an active self, one that has agency and one that has an existence in 'real time' rather than one that prepares her/himself for some future adult destiny. The logic of this theorisation is that children may not be responsible for the way the world is, or have the same psychological make-up as adults but that they certainly do interact with, and hold views on, different social conditions and situations that affect them. Moosa-Mitha also recognises the multi-dimensional and dialogic character of children's relationships with other children and adults, in their range of multiple positionings in society. For her the implication of this is that it is not enough for children to have a 'voice' but rather to be heard (2005, p.381) and to have a presence in society within the specific socio-historical context in which they might encounter barriers to participation.

Within the institutions of the state and family, difference-based theorists view normative assumptions of wider society as constructing rights discourses in ways that become performed within schooling contexts. According to Moosa-Mitha, this means that parental autonomy becomes the mediating point in determining children's equality rights above the intervention of the state even when some parents palpably show evidence of not fulfilling their obligations to their children. Covell and Howe (2001), however, consider the space of the family as distinct and special defining children's equality rights in a way that stress children's needs for 'protection' which implies and requires the interest and intervention of the state, where necessary (such that notions of 'protection' are invariably defined within normative parameters). Feminist theorists (Ruddick, 1982, Pateman, 1992) also argue that the family as an institution can generate normative assumptions of attitude and behaviour that are gendered and adultist, resulting in some children and women having fewer rights than fathers. Both feminists and difference-based theorists challenge the normative assumptions of the family as a separate and private space where only legally defined 'norms' of 'harm' count as being significant enough for intervention by the state. Cole (2012) cites child poverty, for example, as being as potentially harmful as any other normative construction of emotional abuse, without children having any recourse to equality rights to be protected from this.

For Arnot (2006) possessive individualising norms that are generated as part of a liberal rights discourse mean that the 'images, voices and practices' that a school projects may mean that working class children find it difficult, for example, to recognise themselves in schooling 'rights'



discourses. Like Moosa-Mitha (2005), Gordon, Lahelma and Holland (2000), and Arnot (2006) identify the notion of the 'abstract pupil' (and by extension) the 'abstract rightful citizen' (Arnot, 2006, p.81) that goes unchallenged in the school environ. On the way in which male and female teachers taught aspects of citizenship, Arnot (2006) found that male teachers stressed a duty-based citizenship discourse with roots in a Greek and Roman Republic sense of civic duty while women focused upon a 'morality discourse' (ibid, p.81) with synergies to Marshall's vision of a modern citizenship. This emphasised an ethics of care and community involvement with links to feminist theorisations of identity and belonging. These gendered discourses remained unscrutinised in the school in terms of their implications for understanding or conceptualising citizenship rights. Arnot (2006) is critical of the way in which normative constructions of rights in schools means their de-politicisation within the scope of such documents as the RRS initiative. Not only does she feel that this renders the notion of 'participation' as lacking in meaning but it also does not allow for the addressing of human rights abuses, for example. This, she suggests, requires 'politicisation' in order to face up to 'real but hidden' violence (including that of gender violence), within private and public spheres in different global contexts.

This third section of this chapter has explored literature taken from a liberal paradigm of rights, which champions the potential of rights discourses within schooling contexts: this literature values the national and international legal contexts of rights, particularly that of the CRC which asserts the rights of children to participate and express views and opinions about themselves privately as individuals and publicly as political agents with power accorded to them in ways that, these authors suggest, were not previously possible. It also celebrates the abstract universalising principles and normativity of rights such that all are given equal worth and recognition in ways that are commensurate with Marshall's vision of a progressive development of rights. Set against this, a body of literature has been presented that challenges some of the assumptions of this modernist discourse. It questions the very premise of 'asserting' rights in the abstract without interrogating the situated, cultural and institutional contexts of their generation, experience and constitution. Furthermore, it challenges the underpinnings of a liberal philosophy that denies the ways in which 'difference' and 'strangeness' can be variously apprehended, recognised, accommodated and championed as a dynamic of a *process* of the messy business of democracy.

## Section 4: The UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Initiative (RRS)

Section 4 engages with the RRS initiative, as a paper document and website (hereafter referred to as ‘the texts’) upon which the policies, practices and everyday experiences of my research school are premised. So far, I have sought out some of the external conditions that have preceded the existence of this text to generate a genealogical approach to analysis, which does not assume ‘neat’ philosophical origins and clear linear progressions of ideas and events (although as my ‘Memo to Self’ at the start of this chapter, indicated that I have struggled with how to best represent this). Instead, I have identified different threads; exposing and exploring conceptual territories, their originating authors and stances that have emphasised discontinuities, interruptions, and contingencies. I pick these threads up in this section. It begins by describing the RRS leaflet and the way in which it relates to, and interconnects with, its website, in order to give a flavour of its scope and ambition. I go on to analyse aspects of both texts using a structure adapted from MacLure (2003) which focuses upon the way in which power and knowledge, within a broadly post-structural and Foucauldian paradigm, are made visible through ‘*Seeing*’; and subjectivities, through ‘*Being*’. Such an approach reveals the RRS initiative as a text constituted to ‘cope’ with the anxieties of power in transnational contexts in which tensions and concerns about knowledge/power (where it is located; and who holds it) have proliferated as ‘rights’ have been hailed variously as friend and foe. It suggests that the RRS works to generate ‘consensus’ in a way that cloaks the difficulties and contradictions implicit within any universalist assertion of rights, particularly foreclosing them as inherently ‘political’.

The introductory home page to the RRS makes reference to the comprehensiveness of the CRC ‘*enshrining children’s rights in international law*’ and to the ‘*universal principles*’ and ‘*standards*’ that are applicable worldwide. It draws attention to five key provisions of the CRC, namely – the ‘*right to a childhood*’; ‘*to an education*’; ‘*to be healthy*’; ‘*to be treated fairly*’; and ‘*to be heard*’. The RRS summary asserts that ‘*these rights are what a child needs to survive, grow, participate and fulfil their potential*’. It goes on to state that ‘*they apply equally to every child, regardless of who they are, or where they are from*’. From here, under a subheading of, ‘*What is the Rights Respecting Schools Award?*’ it generates four bullets:

- ‘leading and managing a rights respecting school’;
- ‘teaching and learning about the convention’;
- ‘creating and managing a rights-respecting ethos’;

- ‘empowering children and young people to become active citizens and learners’.

The texts make clear that UNICEF is a charity. It does not receive funding from either national or international governmental budgets but from ‘*voluntary contributions*’, which means that it asks institutions that take up the RRS to pay for its services under an ‘*equitable charging structure*’. The texts also suggest that the implementation of it as an award has many benefits for educational establishments by providing a ‘*coherent values framework*’ that also ‘*shapes the ethos of the school*’. It stresses that the RRS initiative has appeal for ‘*children and young people*’ and ‘*school leaders, teachers and other adults working in schools*’ alike. For children and young people, this relates to the way in which they learn that ‘*all children matter*’ and that they ‘*have the same rights from birth*’ and that ‘*rights*’ apply not only in school but ‘*everywhere at all times*’ which generates a ‘*moral framework*’ which is ‘*compatible with their own faith and beliefs*’. This, the texts assert, leads to ‘*rights-respecting behaviour*’. For adults, the RRS purports to ‘*provide a set of relationships*’; a ‘*climate for learning*’; strengthening ‘*empowerment, well-being and achievement for children*’ facilitating children in being able to develop a ‘*strong sense of community*’ and recognition for the ‘*need for global justice*’. The award relies upon a ‘*school self-evaluation process*’, the meeting of ‘*standards*’; and ‘*external assessment*’ which, following the successful meeting of the ‘*standards*’ results in the issuing of a certificate. The first level is expected to take between 12 and 18 months to implement. To achieve it, a school has to have made ‘*good progress so that values and principles of CRC are becoming embedded in the life of the school*’. The second level is expected to take an additional 12 to 18 months to complete. This ‘*full award*’ is supposed to recognise that ‘*rights-respecting principles are as fully embedded in the school’s planning, policies, practice and ethos as can be realistically and reasonably expected*’.

### **RRS Initiative as Discourse**

The RRS texts work to construct a particular reality. They constitute their own ‘regime of truth’ which Foucault describes as that which gets taken as a ‘general politics’ of truth, the type of discourse that is accepted within a given society or governmental structure at any one time (Foucault, 1980). They also accord a certain recognised status to ‘those’ (in this case those charged with the responsibility of formulating the RRS initiative, and others referred to within the documents) who say what counts and who make things happen. The construction of the texts generates their own internal logic so that certain ways of ‘doing’ and ‘saying’ can be ruled in and others ruled out. They produce the particular words and phrases described in the previous section, such as: ‘The Rights Respecting Schools Award’. The discourses work to

present certain ways of *seeing* the world through the construction of knowledge and *being* in the world through the production of particular subject positions (Parker, 1992) which I explore below and which are taken up as themes of analysis especially in Chapter 5.

### *Seeing*

The language, structure and form of the texts is premised upon a 'common-sense' discourse in terms of presenting no-nonsense truisms about how to be in the world for teachers, head teachers and those who work with children (it *'offers schools a strong framework for pupil participation which is based on the rights of the child'*) and about educational practice (for the RRS initiative will improve the *'climate for learning and academic standards'*). One of the ways in which this is achieved is through the setting up of binary oppositions, which Derrida suggests (1998) reflects a way of thinking within liberal, Enlightenment philosophies which is long-established and deeply enduring. Within a binary logic one core principle may become privileged and set against another (which is perhaps less positive, less significant or less straightforward), or two concepts may become conjoined in such a way as to suggest that they cannot be separated. The dichotomy of 'children and young people' and 'adults' in the texts can work in one of two ways. On the one hand, it can work to suggest that children are 'not yet adults' – the 'yet-to-be formed'. On the other hand, with a focus on children's rights at the core of the texts, it can read as though it is the adults themselves who are 'less-than', less deserving of attention, perhaps, in order to rectify a previous, perceived imbalance of privilege and power.

Likewise, the placing of 'rights' and 'respect' alongside one another is highly suggestive of the 'contractual' obligations of one with the other in a way that implies that 'rights' cannot/should not be accorded without a demonstration of 'respect'. This can be traced back to the discourse constructions of Marshall. The implications of 'rights' and 'responsibilities' is as a bland de-politicising device' according to Osler and Starkey (2005, p.155). For Fielding and Moss (2011, p.21) the 'depoliticising device' (of which the RRS initiative becomes a component), is of itself *political* which they characterise as 'an apparent contradiction': a binary of a 'choice and diversity' versus a 'control and standardisation' rhetoric. In this way 'rights' become conflated with an individualising rhetoric of 'choice and diversity', while 'responsibilities' becomes commensurate with a collective 'control and standardisation' register, in a manner that is not easily reconcilable. It could be suggested that wrestling two such opposing terms together shows the ideological work the binaries are required to perform.

Equally, the expression on the front cover of the RRS leaflet, *'Denying child rights is wrong...Put it right,'* sets up a binary of the 'right' and the 'wrong' and plays to the logic of the RRS initiative as the given and natural way to do things. This recalls Elliott's analysis of the globalised, enlightenment rights discourse as of a piece with a Christian ethics of morality re-enacted and re-articulated in a voice that could be heard as that of 'strict no-nonsense' (see Section Three). At one and the same time, however, it also clearly represents another trope of a 'common sense', which justifies the depoliticising of the political (Fielding and Moss, 2011): after all, who would want things done the 'wrong' way? Brown (1993) fiercely criticises the way in which an individualising politics can have the effect of 'fixing' identity (the 'right' identity or the 'wrong' identity, for example) so that that it can never be 'unfixed' or re-imagined. For her, the effect of this is to generate a contradictory logic in which people can become 'unfree' (Brown, 1995, p.66) where rights are premised as claims to recognise 'wounds' (Brown, 1993). This might mean being included as gay people; or as a minority group, for example, closing off opportunities (now and for the future) to re-articulate subjectivities in different, yet to be imagined ways.

The texts are also inextricably linked to the acceptance of a *range* of institutions. As part of this, discourses work to 'organise' and 'regulate' practices (Willig, 2001, p.107). In the RRS initiative these are represented through reference to an overarching legal system, the school, and the impact of both on their interconnectedness with ideas of a wider community. The legal discourse refers to *'children's rights in international law'*. It generalises its power to potentially 'morally' regulate all educational institutions, asserting its universal legitimacy in ways reminiscent of Marshallian discourses of rights. Reminders of this legal discourse pepper the texts with references to *'the Convention'* and to the term *'the right'* which has a specific definition in law<sup>39</sup> in the context of children's rights, but which is far more complex and problematic as we have explored in sections One, Two and Three.

The constitution of the RRS texts aims to disguise or deny the contradictions between dominant and subordinate discourses, and thus to obfuscate the instabilities inherent in the texts' wider claims. An analysis informed by deconstruction aims to expose the dilemmatic nature of such texts. For example, the institutions of education within the RRS are referenced by way of *'formal education'* and *'the school'*, as well as a range of *'settings'*, be they *'Early*

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<sup>39</sup> As set out in the 54 articles of the United Nations on the Conventions of the Rights of the Child

*Years, Primary Secondary, Special Needs* or *Pupil Referral Units*'. This produces a wide range of dominant and subordinate schooling discourses which Fielding and Moss describe as set out in 'techno-managerial' language envisioning education as an 'economic commodity'; is a 'production process'; which is a site of 'technical practice'...'governed by a means/end logic' (Fielding and Moss, 2011, p.23-24).

One subordinate discourse can be identified as connected with school effectiveness (Teddle and Reynolds, 2000) and is captured in the language of the *'school self-evaluation process'*; and of measuring progress through the achievement of the RRS initiative, and by way of reference to *'school improvement'*. Another is focused upon the empowerment of children and young people (Hopkins, 2001) in which the dislocations of 'power' that this presumes is presented as entirely unproblematic. The texts tell readers, for example, that the award is about: *'empowering children and young people to become active citizens and learners'*. Another subordinate discourse is connected to notions of 'partnership' and 'inter-connectedness' (Patrikakou, Weissberg et al., 2005) as these operate to link the school to the wider context of the *'strong sense of community'*, suggesting that children have rights *'everywhere at all times'* by way of proposing what they will develop *'more positive attitudes towards diversity in society'*. And, finally, another is about managing and controlling behaviour: what MacLure, Jones et al. (2012, p.447) term, the discourse of the 'proper child' in school. The documents tell us that one of the aims of the RRS is to lead to *'improved behaviour'* and *'improved self-esteem and well-being'*.

The presentation of this range of subordinate discourses is such that they are constructed as both desirable and self-evident, in ways that neatly mask a range of entirely different objects – empowerment; building community; diversity; and behaviour (each with its own repertoire of dilemmas), so that these matters of contestation are rendered as if sorted rather than debated or debatable. The effect is to evoke what Edelman (1979) refers to as a 'condensation symbol' such that the RRS becomes associated in all our minds with all that is efficacious, desirable and attainable as part of the ethos of schooling in a way that we all assume tacitly, so that it can become 'all things to all of us' as part of our imaginaries: this is the RRS initiative presented as suturing over the difficulties that its obviousness deletes. We could say that the RRS initiative becomes about symbolic action that evokes particular emotions about schooling through which we are all granted permission to feel 'good' about the institution and its ethos.

Implicit within the texts, too, are assumptions concerning the discipline of teaching and learning which becomes productive of its own discourse. This means that a pedagogy of

teaching as professional practice is assumed and becomes presumed in particular ways. The pedagogic discourse touches on 'how to do practise'. This can be found, for example, in the way in which the texts describe: '*leading and managing a rights-respecting school*'; '*teaching and learning about the convention*'; and '*creating and managing a rights-respecting ethos*'. Instrumentalist assumptions which are premised upon rights as being 'justified on the basis of the positive consequences that will accrue to [all] individuals and society' (McGowan, 2012, p.69) infuse the pedagogic discourse that produces references to two different '*levels*'. The vocabularies of these levels feed into the techno-managerial 'jargon' that Fielding and Moss reference, suggesting that they transform 'what were complex, interpersonal processes of teaching, learning...into a set of standardised and measurable products' (Ball, 2007, p.186, in Fielding and Moss, 2011, p.24). Achieving the different '*levels*' in the RRS initiative is dependent upon meeting various '*standards*' and '*external assessments*' ends to which the RRS document construes schools aspirations, described in the previous section. These achievements become materialised by the granting of certificates to the institution. Popularly, as in the case of my research site, these certificates become marks of ranking and status and are displayed in public areas for all to admire.

The pedagogic register of the RRS texts produce that which is both normative and universal. These strong threads of the dominant discourse generate the examples described in the previous section, 'The Rights Respecting Schools Award'. There are allusions to, '*universal principles*'; assertions of both rights to: '*an education*'; '*be healthy*'; '*be treated fairly*'; '*be heard*'; and to '*all children*' mattering and having '*the same rights from birth*'. These are also strongly reproduced in the claims for the RRS initiative in the leaflet of '*the bringing about of more positive attitudes towards diversity in society and the reduction of prejudice*' and in its claims that it will institute a '*coherent values framework*'. All this has the effect of delineating '*Children and young people*' and '*adults*' as essentialised: Children/young people and adults are conjured as definitive categories without reference to other, or intersecting aspects of their identity (in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, for example) which I take up further in the following section, 'Being'.

This essentialising dimension of the discourse relies heavily upon on conceptualisations of 'technologies of self' which Gore (1993) describes as Foucault's way of formulating a distinction between technologies that are socially imposed by an external disciplining force, and those which become internally constructed and generated as individual acts of 'morality' (Gore, *ibid*, p.55). This means that the RRS framework is premised upon children learning to

manage themselves 'rightfully' in public spaces (demonstrating '*rights-respecting behaviour*'), not only in school, but also '*everywhere at all times*' through a '*moral framework*' which is '*compatible with their own faith and beliefs*'. Foucault describes this act of governmentality, which is exercised through the invisibility of the technologies of self, as structuring 'the possible field of the action of others' (1983, p.221), in other words, ensuring that we all manage and structure one another's behaviours. This will be 'exercised' when, or as, the children and young people become, or recognise themselves as '*active citizens*' in such a way that 'governing' will guide and shape the conditions of possibility generated by the RRS texts.

### ***Being***

The dominant discourses within the RRS initiative do two things. They facilitate the seeing of ways of constructing what is to be valued as knowledge (see above) and they construct particular subject positions which say something about ways of *being*, in the world: who it is that becomes constructed as a subject and how and with what effect. The RRS texts refer to a range of subjects: '*children and young people*', '*leaders, teachers and other adults working in school*'; and '*parents*'. Certainly, they construct these as groups of autonomous individuals in liberal humanist terms, possessive of agency to act with varying degrees of freedom. Once again this plays on a binary of 'sameness' and 'difference', especially in terms of the 'child' and 'adult'. In their declared subject position children could be constructed as those in need of protection and correction by virtue of the 'adult' agent who will act and who will enact on their behalf (so that '*they understand that they share the same rights as every child, which leads to rights-respecting behaviour*'). The sub-heading on the front page of the RRS leaflet is not only constructed as a binary but it is also concerned with autonomous individuals. It is both declarative, 'Denying child rights is wrong' but also imperative: 'Put it right!' It assumes that the powerful subject can and will behave with some degree of mastery. The declarative and imperative tone places such individuals at the centre of the action and requires (nay demands) them to act.

The texts generate a range of categories to which different subject positions are required to adhere. The first of these could be identified is that of 'the expert'. Certainly this categorisation applies to those with power to direct and shape the law that frames the documents; the constructors of the texts themselves; and the educational 'experts' that bring into popular parlance the terminology used within the texts, such as, '*well-being*' and '*empowerment*' and '*school improvement*' and '*participation*'. However, it also presumes that by virtue of adopting a 'rights' and 'respect' framework schools will '*empower*' children and



young people to be enabled to become experts themselves such that they will be able to *'develop a strong sense of community'* and *'act for global justice'*. However, it is the adult (teacher, parent, school helper, for example), in a second category position, as *'facilitator/enabler'*, who is to direct *'young people'* as to how they should subject themselves. *'Children and young people'* are to be *'more engaged in discussing, planning and reviewing their own learning'* and *'children and young people'* can *'support' ... 'global justice'*. In this way, the 'expert' text constructors present adult facilitators/enablers as liberating children and young people. This is presented as progressive and inevitable in rationalistic, humanist terms, in a way that presumes that individuals will take action (indeed, can take action in a way that they freely 'choose,') independent of the way in which they are constituted through discourse (Davies, 2006, p.430).

*'Children and young people'* are also subjected as learners (a third category) and novices (a fourth category), required to acquire skills, learning dispositions and moral accomplishments that will be delivered by adults who are presumed to have the power to decide what kind of subject to be (*'teachers'* of the Convention; leaders of a *'rights-respecting school'*; creators and maintainers of a *'rights-respecting ethos'*; empowerers of *'children and young people'*);). This means that the subject position of the adult as a *'teacher'* (a fifth category) which suggests a power that is central, is to be, as often as not, offset by the de-centred power of the *'facilitator'* such that they are to be only defined in terms of what the RRS initiative will enable for children. They are to: *'provide a set of relationships'*; and a *'climate for learning'* for example. Subjected as learners, children are frequently positioned in the texts through a psychological framework (*'these rights are what a child needs to survive, grow, participate and fulfil their potential'*) where 'education [is to be] oriented towards children's interests, needs and developmental growth and informed by an idea of child development' (Burman, 1994). As we saw in Section 3, the psychologised child developmental mode of address is presumed within much of the literature which assumes an agentic, individualised, subject. This is premised upon a child-centred approach to the facilitation of learning where the RRS initiative becomes concerned with the external realisation of inner potential (another binary, this time implied). In this context the role of the teacher (as facilitator) is to create the appropriate learning environment in which the teacher is endlessly flexible and yet discreetly directive.

The illumination of these demands on subjects is captured within Foucault's definition of governmentality which can also be described as the 'way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed' (1994, p.341). However, the power of 'experts' to instruct

(through the construction of the RRS initiative) and the powers of those called upon to act on behalf of them (as teachers/facilitators) de-emphasises an overt 'governing of subjects' (Davies, 2006, p.430). Instead, it emphasises the role of the autonomous individual 'constituted as central to the educational enterprise' (Davies, *ibid*), within discourse such that they self-survey, recognised by others as seemingly agentic. The constructed nature of the RRS texts works to reveal particular subject positions as 'truths', in a way that brings them into *being* with apparent ease and transparency to suggest that, for example: '*they [rights] apply equally to every child, regardless of who they are, or where they are from*'. However, as Arnot (2006) suggested this may, in effect, act as a mechanism of social control in a way that disables any meaningful collective agency.

The slippery terrain of the various child/adult subject positions is demanding, and contradictory: in the case of adults, for example, can one be, at one and the same time, both teacher and facilitator without some degree of reflexivity and awareness of the tensions and contradictions of the demands of such subject positions? Crucially, the texts do not give any guidance here. As we saw in Section 2, Butler's 'troubling' of the subject and her/his agency means that deconstructing 'the multiple positions in which we are each inevitably and contradictorily caught up' (Davies, 1994, p.2) becomes central in a project concerned with the unmasking of the discourse of rights and their subjects (and what these therefore presume of responsibility, equality and diversity) within my own analysis of the empirical data. We could say that the symbolic 'condensation' (Edelman, 1979) qualities of the RRS initiative operate to conceal power differentials in the various subject positions to be held at one and the same time by either children or adults. And, this is before we have even taken into consideration the problematic of the binary categories of 'children' and 'adults'.

This section has explored the ways in which the texts of the RRS initiative work to produce a 'thought-system' (Sarup, 1988, p.40) which generates a particular 'truth' about how to assert a particular knowledge/power claim (how it is to be 'seen' and by whom and in what ways) – a discursive formation of rights and respect within schooling contexts. It lays the 'unimpeachable ground upon which a whole hierarchy of meanings may be constructed' (Sarup, *ibid*).

## Conclusion

This chapter has experienced a *difficult birth*. I have struggled to construct it in such a way that it does not present a straightforward historical account of the emergence of the abstract

modern rights discourse. I have done this in order to challenge the framing of an understanding of rights within Top Hill Primary, as that which *must* be taken for granted as the starting point of any account of rights and citizenship. In deciding, however, in Section 1, to *'begin with the undergarments of an accepted, simplified narrative history of rights, in order to ensure that 'my' manikin is sensibly clad for winter'*, I have endeavoured not to assume too much: that is, that the modernist discourse of rights and what and whom it constitutes can only be engaged with on its own terms. For this reason, Section 2 sets up a 'conversation' between philosophers speaking ('back') from a range of feminist and post-modern theoretical positions to the received wisdom of the rights discourse of Section 1. The purpose of this is to allow for the 'opening up' of the 'space' in which tensions around sameness and difference can be variously recognised as part of a process of democracy such that the messiness of political dissension becomes an integral dynamic of the contesting of rights. I take the philosophical contentions I have explored here, forward in subsequent chapters to develop a 'conversation' in the context of my own data not least in the space between a Foucault genealogical analysis and how subjects occupy/refute/refuse/subvert the dominant discursive places assigned to them. Section 3 endeavours to 'conjoin' Sections 1 and 2 by exploring a range of literature linked to contemporary schooling contexts in the UK, in order to consider the ways in which the genealogy of rights is variously spoken of or represented within schooling discourses. Section 4 focuses explicitly upon the RRS initiative utilising a broadly Foucauldian Discourse Analysis through a process of deconstruction. It is the RRS text that shapes the rights discourses of the policies and practices of Top Hill Primary. The rights discourses provide the pivot for my engagement with the ethnographic materials that I generate.

## Chapter 3: Methodology – Straw, Sticks and Bricks

*X111 - Are these facts?/ Are these moments or memories?/ Generations tangled in love in the family album/ caught smiling, sitting in sand by the pier, leaning/ from an open window, a wedding bouquet that drapes/ all the way from the sweetheart neckline to white satin shoes./ The house on the beach with an outside toilet, a blue canvas sunbed, a silver Cortina./ Her father's black hair fallen onto his face./ Or is this just part of the picture?/ Like the jigsaw that sat spread out/ on the table all the week: too many pieces of sky./ Behind her, the shadow of the dunes. There's something beyond the frame that is not/ peace of mind.* Lasky, K (2006)

*'Questions about research method are always questions about significance and value: some essential relation to 'being-in-the-world'. Such questions cannot help but therefore touch upon 'metaphysics'... 'There can be no form of method - process, procedure - that can neutralize its own relation to its (mode of engaging with) object(s). Just as there can be no method that disengages the subject from its practices...' Peim, N. (2009) p.245/246*

### Introduction

This chapter explores aspects of my methodological approach. I borrow from Dunne, Pryor and Yates (2005, p.167) the idea of an 'elastic plane'. It is more than an event: a means of applying a 'method' as though a 'craft' (Peim, 2009, p. 237); adhering to it as to a recipe; accumulating 'data' (to be produced, interpreted and reported upon sequentially). Rather, it is necessarily connected to questions 'concerning ideas about how things are' (Peim, 2009, p.237): part of a fluid process of theorising my research. In this way, it is consistent with the feminist and post-structural theorisations that I have set out in Chapter 1. Indeed, it is the fluidity that I mentioned in my first chapter, when I describe 'finding a focus' for my research at its earliest stages, as part of an engagement with different epistemologies and ontologies until I 'slither' into a position that feels 'comfortable enough'. This view of methodology acknowledges the idea of social research as that which elides; shifts; and changes shape at different stages and as constituted within discourse. Methodology takes on an organic quality that allows for re/theorisation as an internal dynamic of the reiterative process of research itself. It is this that Dunne, et al. refer to as 'mimetic': part of a 'process of mediation between the world of the subject, the researcher and the reader; and acknowledging all three

‘characters’ in the research process’ (2005, p.58). I engage with this methodological process in this chapter.

My approach can be imagined as having tentacular arms that variously extend and retract at different stages of the research. I have previously considered three of these: those of epistemology; ontology; and the generating of a macro-political context for this research, in Chapters 1 and 2. This does not mean that the issues of epistemology, ontology and political contexts are ever finally settled. However, it does mean that my present focus in this chapter is rather upon additional flexible arms of methodology which include the ethnographic orientation of my research; its micro-politics of place and space; what Dunne et al. (2005, p.167) refer to as the ‘practical issues’ of methodology; and, it also includes ethical issues that emerge, both in relation to ‘governance’, and as dimensions of on-going researcher experience.

### **Organising the Chapter**

I divide the chapter into three sections: Intentions; Experiences; and Representations. There is some creative tension and therefore some overlap between them. Broadly speaking, nonetheless, the first section relates to the planning of the research conducted in the academy; the next to the empirical stage which takes place in the field; and the last to the analysis and crafting of research as text, away from the field once more. Each section starts with a broad- brush description and analysis of ‘what I did’ at each stage. Constructing these, however, begins to feel a little akin to the attempts to build three places of shelter in the traditional English fairy story of *‘The Three Little Pigs’*: I approach each section with assuredness. I make a structure with the materials I have to hand. But what I discover is that each construction can all too easily be blown away (*‘huff’* and *‘puff’*) by the Big Bad Wolf of reflexivity. As researcher and author, I become both ‘pig’ and ‘wolf’, variously constructing and deconstructing, before moving on to – what I fondly imagine – will be the safety of my next ‘new build’. In practice, these are always ‘botched-up’ jobs: the original ‘straw house’, overlain with twigs, and then cement and bricks, with a question mark forever hanging over the apparent surety of the foundations. Will the whole enterprise just ‘collapse’?

My response, therefore, to the overarching structure of each section is by way of reflexive engagement that allows post-structural theorisations to ‘get in the way’ (MacLure, 2010, p. 277) in the weaving of the ‘fabric’ of my own experiences (ibid, p.278). This enables me to further unsettle the nature of the doing of research (Hodgson and Standish, 2009) and ‘peer’

beyond ‘the still’ I have created, asking myself ‘...*is this just part of the picture?*’ (Lasky, 2006, [my emphasis]). I capture some ‘moments of significance’ that open up my master narrative to scrutiny so that I problematise the too easy certainties and assertions of methodological claims to power and knowledge. I do this by drawing on excerpts from my research memos, notes and documents (some of which I had been required to complete as part of the official doctoral research processes<sup>40</sup>).

In order to manage large amounts of text, I place some, especially those that relate to research methods in appendices at the end of the thesis which I signpost for the reader throughout the chapter.

## **Section 1 Methodology As Intention: the House of Straw?**

### **Coming to Ethnography**

The intention of my school *observer participant ethnography*<sup>41</sup> began from the premise of generating a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) of a naturalistic setting in order to render ‘the familiar strange’ (Barbour, 2008, p.93) and to create ‘richness, texture and detail’ (Ortner, 2006, p.43). As Chapter 1 makes clear, I am, however, aware, from the start, of the partiality of ‘any account’ (however, ‘thick’) and the limitations of my interpretative and analytic capacities as the ethnographer (McLeod and Thomson, 2009, p.83). I signed up to focussing my ethnographic gaze upon research subjects, as ‘meaning-makers’...’ interpreting [our] worlds’ (McLeod and Thomson, 2006, p.81) in order to deconstruct the ‘taken-for -granted’ (including our descriptions, assumptions, judgements and reflections). From the start, this was to require the collection of my own ethnographic observational field notes of what I saw going on around me on a day-to-day basis; the keeping of more reflective journals in which I imagined that I might make notes ‘away from the field’ as and when things occurred to me about my research; and the conducting of some *informal semi-structured interviews as a dimension of more structured forms of data-gathering*<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> Which I reproduce in this chapter in *italics*

<sup>41</sup> Taken from my application for University Ethical Review, 2011

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*

The research subjects were to be made up of a selection of all those who (consensually) came across my path in the ten month period in which I was to be in the school, including children and adults (teachers, the head teacher, senior managers, governors, teaching assistants, lunch-time staff, parents, carers and school visitors). I decided that it was important for me to spend a large part of the academic year in school: primary schools have particularly strong historical rhythms and attachments to patterns of practice, many of which are still connected to Christian festivals of Christmas and Easter. These produce particular ritualistic ways of 'doing' that provide contexts for interpretations and analysis. This awareness would allow me to capture change as it emerged and evolved (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). My field site was to be a large, state primary school in a mixed catchment in a town in England, about which I will say more later in this section.

In making 'the familiar strange', my task was to be concerned with generating ways of looking anew within the 'bounded space' (McLeod and Thomson, 2009, p.80) where both researched and the researcher would 'co-exist'. This would require my gaze to be turned as much upon me as the subject of the study as upon the researched: for we were all to be caught up within the research. I appreciated that it would be difficult to create a 'data set' without regarding myself, as the researcher, as an 'interruption' to what might otherwise be going on. I recognised at this stage that the extent of this - the when, the why and the wherefore, would vary from moment to moment and become as much a characteristic of my own interpretation as it would be of other facets of the research.

Observation of, and participation in, the daily life of the school were to be central tenets of my empirical work, producing insights into routines and practices. However, as McLeod and Thomson acknowledge, the position of the participant observer is always 'ambiguous', encapsulating as it must, a 'tension between distance and immersion, objectivity and subjectivity' (ibid, p.83). I judged that my researcher role would require spending at least three days each week in school, in order to be able to immerse my 'whole' self (Ortner, 2006, p.42) into the life world of the school. My observations, thoughts and reflections would be kept wherever and whenever possible within the three day period. I judged that my dissection and scrutiny of these, in my days away from the field, would not only provide an on-going analysis but would inform a more contingent approach to my participant observation role that was entirely fitting with an ethnography.

How did I imagine I would represent myself as field researcher? Early on, as a part of my 'Research Proposal'<sup>43</sup>, 'Rebecca the Participant Observer' was textually and tentatively assertive: this was me seeking to generate a sense of the feminist post-structural ethnographer. It was about laying down a marker about moving on from the presumed 'certainties' of my previously constituted identities (see Chapter 1) and establishing ways of inhabiting a skin of complexity within the field. I conjured a subjectivity that enabled a location of researcher self through a '*reflexive accommodation of the apparent juxtapositions and contradictions posed by my position as both an 'insider/outsider' within the social world of the school*'<sup>44</sup>. I expanded on the way in which this would enable me to take the advice of Shaw (2007) in order to: '*build relationships with research subjects through spending time in everyday conversations and interactions with them before and while focusing specifically on the research area in hand*'<sup>45</sup>. Shaw makes a case for 'listening to people on their own terms' (2007, p.188) by observing and participating in events before engaging in any type of interview as she feels that this approach elicits 'more revealing' (ibid, p.188) data as informants tend to be more relaxed and less on their guard.

In contrast to my Research Proposal, in my application for Ethical Review I represented myself in a necessarily authoritative researcher and authorial guise that was 'stable' and able to be judged as safely competent within a social scientist tradition. This representation had to accommodate the presumption of me as participant observer standing 'outside' and peering in, ready to 'pounce' and 'extract' (all- seeing, all- knowing) from my empirical research context. My application for Ethical Review represented me, therefore, as within an instrumental relationship of subject and object, as holding a participant observer identity that would dictate: what I would do; the spaces/places I would occupy within the field site; the 'data' I would collect. Throughout this review text I attempted to capture the conundrum and ethical sensitivities of pre-imagining the field and the range of encounters I would have, with whom, and what they would produce (Turner and Webb, 2012).

As part of my 'Research Proposal', I captured what I defined as *Key Practical Issues of My Ethnographic Method and Data Collection* (referred to hereafter as the Matrix), by drawing on

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<sup>43</sup> This is a document that each PhD researcher is required to produce to a 'certain standard' before they move on to their PhD research proper

<sup>44</sup> Taken from my PhD Research Proposal, 2011

<sup>45</sup> Ibid



the work of De Vaus (2001) and Gordon, Holland et al (2000). Although the original questions it set out to explore, where overtaken once I was in the field, the matrix provided me with early 'practice' in finding a fine balance between the abstract and the pragmatic concerns of conducting fieldwork. It felt like a supportive crutch (see Appendix 1) which shored up my feelings of worry - expressing shaky research credentials.

## **Thinking Reflexively: Challenging My Early Intentional Register**

### ***Emerging Anxieties of Researcher Identity***

I capture the emerging anxieties of 'constructing' a viable researcher identity in preparation for entering the field, rather tangentially, in a 'creative' piece of writing composed during 2011. I wrote this reflection (*Rebecca Running for the Bus*, see Appendix 2) for an MSc class, as part of an exercise in which we had been asked to imagine a conversation between our self and a theorist we were engaging as part of the development of our 'academic' identity.

The script I composed barely disguises the uncertainty and insecurity that I felt (still feel....) within the realm of academe such that I expected (expect) at any moment to be seen as who I *really* am: the impostor who's never quite 'getting it' – the running to 'catch-up' and the still being amazed that I don't 'get it'. It assumes a relationship between writing and autobiography (however wildly imagined and desired!) as always connected and iteratively constitutive, as well as valorising, troubling and teasing .

### ***Imagining Place and Space***

Within the Matrix, I dismissed the 'space' and 'place' of my research site in a few lines by way of response to the rhetorical question I posed: '*What Is the Geographical Location?*' by stating that the site of research is: '*a state urban primary school on the outskirts of a city in the southern half of England...[in which]... the school draws children and parents/carers from a range of socio-economic backgrounds within a geographical area within close proximity to the school*'. This said little about the location of the school and hence the geographical 'context' of my ethnography. However, in thinking about 'saying more' I encountered an ethical difficulty: how I might go about this without identifying the site per se.

Ethnographic tradition (Geertz, 1973) stresses the value of illuminating specificities of place and space as a facet of the 'thick description' of ethnography. However, as part of ethical governance, and as a 'situated' ethical commitment to my research subjects, I had/have

undertaken to ensure the anonymity of my research and my research subjects. Honouring this, therefore, depended/s upon my representation of all participants such that 'a reader' would be unable to identify the school; particular subjects; or its specific location. As Gordon, Holland et al (2000) acknowledge, the tension is between providing, 'enough information to give contextual life to the data, and too much which may identify the school' (ibid, p.63). For the purposes of mediating this [apparent] irreconcilability, I therefore borrow, rather incongruously, from the exposition of Affleck<sup>46</sup> in his public discussion of his film 'Argo', in which he subscribes to a mode of 'truth telling' that does not commit him to 'absolute fealty'. Rather, he is mindful of presenting, nonetheless, an '*essence* of truth' ('the poet's truth') in which the creation of an overarching impression is what he is seeking in the generation of a picture. For me, in my own entirely different context, this Affleck mode of 'truth telling' means that I fictionalise 'factual' aspects of my text, where I judge necessary. This has applied to my depictions of aspects of 'space' and 'place', in my 'scene setting' for my ethnography for example. I have tried to generate a 'sense' of the research site and to 'take the reader with me' along the imaginary that I construct.

Such a 'confessional' rather suggests that, had not my ethical commitment required me to do so, I would have imagined myself to be serving up pure, unsullied cultural and historical truth. This is clearly not the case. As Clifford and Marcus (eds., 1986, p.7) suggests, 'all constructed truths are made possible by powerful 'lies' of exclusion and rhetorical representation'. This rather echoes Rancière's assertion made by Pelletier (2009) of the 'poetics and aesthetics' of science, in which all accounts of [social] scientists are constituted within particular 'ideological orders' such that that some 'truths' can be claimed but not others.

I, therefore, draw next upon several excerpts from my early field notes and research journals, which created my sense of an area around the school, which I reproduce below. I have fictionalised details that I have judged will not detract from my creation of a scene: a 'backdrop', against which the empirical ethnographic analysis can be engaged with in subsequent chapters. And of course, I have found that they have become more than mere context: they inhabited me and my 'sense-making' of the school in such a way that they re-emerge and constitute my subsequent sense-making of the school and my textual representations of them in later chapters. I take comfort from MacLure, when she reminds me

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<sup>46</sup> Ben Affleck discussing the decisions he made in the making of the film *Argo* on the 'Today' programme on Radio 4 on 22.02.2013. [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01qnt5p](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01qnt5p) Accessed 22.02.13

that I 'have to acknowledge the minute entanglement of 'data and researcher' because, as she suggests, 'we and the data do not pre-exist one another' (MacLure, 2013, p. 229). So the notes below give my 'take' on the places and spaces that I passed through, as part of one of my earliest visits to the school. They attest to the sense that I had/have – and that I explore in granular detail in subsequent chapters - of this as a 'space' and 'place' of suburban 'politeness' and suitably 'polished' veneer. Many research subjects 'name', expand upon and embellish these descriptions, and these accounts form an important part of my empirical data in Chapter 4.

#### Encounter with Place: Arrival

*Arrive by train with bike and emerge into brilliant sunshine, gentle incline downhill skirting 'historical' town centre...climbing again and onto wide tree-lined street; epitome of English suburban life – women pruning roses, chatting over the hedge; elderly gentleman walking his dog ('Good afternoon'); three middle-aged women strolling together ('I haven't been able to sleep properly for seven years...')... impressions of translucent greenery and well-tended gardens, and light and tranquillity... slide onto a side road leading on up to the school. Unprepossessing entrance: possibly built post-Second World War – low-slung single-storey buildings, with air of 'progressive, welfare-reformist' design – large metal rimmed windows peering like large rimmed spectacles; spacious, verdant: mixed deciduous mature/semi-mature trees and hedges; large school field – All peering, with some command, down over the town...Rebecca's notes, June 2011*

#### Encounter with Place: Departure

Leave school by car park entrance this time (so many car park spaces, so many cars...) and push bike along narrow alleyway with chain link fence on either side – leads to blocks of three-storey flats (1960s?) with air of tidy utilitarian municipality about them. There's a communal play area in the centre with a large sandpit, several young women and men outside, sitting watching, talking, smoking – young children playing; children's bikes, washing, plants on the narrow balconies running in front of some flats. Sun not penetrating – or is that just the time of day? Feel weirdly out of place – realise that you don't walk this way unless you have to come this way. I have the sense of the voyeur. Speed up – wait to cross busy road (v. awkward bend in road – no public crossing place) – Take 'life in hands' and 'dash' across and on down towards the station. Rebecca's notes, June 2011

### Some Early Experiences of Space – Whose Space?

*Struck by waiting parents/carers/friends in the playground – watched for several weeks now... One group – predominantly young women (some v. young – teenagers?), with couple of young men, and several older women (their mothers?), buggies, babies, dummies, grouped apart by 'Infant Entrance', sit along edge of low dahlia border, together – to me, seem quite separate – 'obvious' (?) markers of 'class' – hoop earrings, tracks suits, sleeveless 'T' shirts, tattoos on upper arms neck; women with hair scrapped back, tied. Contrasts to 'svelte' 'Monsoon'; 'White Stuff'; 'Much Loved Vintage' women (many with 'Much Loved Vintage' babies and toddlers) 'occupying' central areas of playground, standing, men too, holding young hands, dogs on leads. Double doors burst open, children 'surge' – excited, talkative, energetic, happy – swirl around the playground gradually fix themselves to adults, buggies, dogs, scooters...I worm past into the brightly decorated 'Reception': 'Welcome To Our Rights Respecting School'. There is a contented and relaxed 'buzz' – many adults and children collect around the 'Information Zone', chatting positively, assuredly and kindly... the Receptionist is laughing, engaged, attentive... there's a hum from a vacuum – the cleaners are at work; a photocopier whirrs. Voices – 'Superb dinner party, Felicity – our turn next...'; '... Dance Club – what do we owe this week?'...'when is it that Chess Club begins, I'm so sorry...'; 'Am I up to date with lunch money?'...'it's the second coat/pair of gym shoes we've lost this term....' Rebecca's notes, September 2011*

These notes suggest a general 'feel' I had for my sense of the space and place but more than this they attested to the 'contrasts' that I picked up: not only in the setting of the school, depending on which way I entered or left it; but also in terms of what I read as class signifiers of the adults waiting outside for their children to emerge from school. And, what I realise now, when I re-read these notes, is that what I don't represent in them is retained nonetheless, in my sub-conscious, to be entertained, again. This occurs particularly when I find myself more analytically submerged within theory in making sense of the empirical data inside the school within the context of my re-defined research focus, and indeed when I come to re-iteratively engage with the writing of my empirical data into research thesis text (see Section 3).

## *Access*

In the Matrix I made cursory reference to the ‘how, whys or wherefores’ of gaining access to my research site. Even so, by the time I reached the point of asking whether I might conduct research in Top Hill Primary, access to the ‘right’ field site was an issue that had long concerned me. I had wanted to be situated within a school that was large enough to employ a range of staff; that drew on a ‘mixed catchment’; and that had made a ‘commitment’ in some shape or form to ‘values’ education above and beyond a focus on ‘driving up standards’. I also wanted to be in a position to be able to ‘give back’ something by way of reciprocity to any school that took me on, as a volunteer in one capacity or another. I had moved to a new area to undertake this PhD and I had no pre-existing links to schools. I realised from my professional background, that any assumptions on my part that gaining access would be straightforward, would be naïve. After all, any school would want to have a sense of what it might gain from having me around for some time. Building relationships would be the key.

In the early summer of 2011, a colleague made overtures to Top Hill Primary on my behalf and I was drawn into the process of negotiating access. During these early stages, my own researcher sense of ‘disablement’ was in marked contrast to the tone of the Ethical Review process which seemed premised entirely upon holding my ‘predatory’ power as a researcher in check (Turner and Webb, 2012, p.8). After emails back and forth between the head teacher and me, an initial meeting was agreed. When this took place a month or so later it was relaxed and upbeat. However, the head teacher informed me that any research could only proceed with the full agreement of the junior teachers. I felt at one and the same time both highly impressed by his integrity and hugely challenged by what this might entail. I felt powerless. I was the *Rebecca Running for the Bus* all over again, confused by this new world into which I had ‘voluntarily’ plunged myself, and which I had been used to experiencing only through the prism of my prior ‘status’, and assertive middle class parenthood. How was I to account for myself in front of practising teachers when I felt such a novice as a researcher? This would require some ‘authoritative posturing’ about which I felt embarrassed and which I did not relish. I had a sense that ‘my own kind’ (teachers) would soon sniff me out and declare, ‘Hey you get back in your box...Enough of this silly game-playing’.

My meeting – when it happened – with a large group of teachers was a nerve-racking affair. It occurred at the end of a school day, when the teachers must all have wanted to get home. Instead they were ‘invited’ to meet me:

*After a while I am asked to sit in the staffroom...eventually (a long time – I wait for an hour) the room fills with teachers and there are apologies (for their previous meeting ran on...). Introductions begin. We sit around the room with all eyes drilling into me...I try to explain the research – saying something about ‘meaning-making’, ‘curriculum’ and ‘values’ (I was too squeamish to use the word ‘politics’). One young teacher looks mightily suspicious, and unconvinced. I’m probably talking gibberish... we discuss participant observation and what this means in practice. Several teachers rightly push me on this – what would I do and where would I do it and who would I be looking at? I’m at pains to point out that the particulars of where and what I might do can be negotiated with them once they’ve had time to consider whether they’re happy to take me...that my research is not about making judgements about them personally. I’m at pains to point out that I’m keen to represent myself as a ‘researcher-learner’.... It’s agreed that they will get back to me via the head teacher ...*

*I leave feeling as though I’ve undergone an interview for ‘Going Into Service’ and failed miserably...I imagine the teachers discussing me after I’ve left, wondering why I didn’t get myself a ‘proper’ job. I feel they are right to wonder...what the hell am I doing? I had a good job and I gave it up to do this...I recall in my early teaching days laughing with colleagues about those who used to come in to school, as inspectors, researchers or advisors as those who just couldn’t ‘bear the heat’... And here I was finding this all just a bit too hot to handle. Rebecca’s-notes, July 2011.*

The head teacher wrote to let me know that I could start in the autumn term. This was to be on the basis that I spent some time each week with teachers and their classes of older juniors. In practice the details of this were agreed after the summer holiday just before I was due to begin my fieldwork. This agreement was secured on the basis that a couple of hours each week would be spent by me supporting ‘group’ literacy and numeracy sessions (as a way of me ‘giving something back’ to the school), leaving me with a morning and afternoon to participate/observe in either one of these classes. I would be ‘free’ to be out and about in communal areas of the school for the remainder of my week; in a way that would require ongoing negotiation, discussion and explanation (but with whom?). As I discuss further in the next section, I experienced a profound sense of deflation. How would I do this and *what* did it mean that I would now be researching?

This was my House of Straw: my 'intentional' methodology quickly assuming a more challenging materiality. Once I started in the autumn term, it soon became clear that spending a great deal of time in a variety of classrooms as and when I might decree was logistically problematic. I needed to wait to be told which teachers '*might be happy to have me, and when, depending on what is going on*' (as the one of the senior leaders explained). I remarked in my research diary that this was entirely understandable:

*...This [my research] is a 'tiny' dimension of the work of a large [500 pupils plus] primary school: why would my presence and my requirements as a 'researcher' really be uppermost in anyone's thoughts? Come on, Rebecca, this is good for you...* Rebecca's notes, July 2011

I had noted, however, in relation to '*the focus*' of my research on the Matrix, that this would be an aspect of the research process that would require '*on-going, negotiated 'open' access to the educational space to allow for an engagement with a variety of participants and discourses (official, semi-official, unofficial, 'expert', 'non-expert', planned, chance) concerning the co-construction of political understanding within the curriculum*'. How little I appreciated the extent to which this would not only be an on-going facet of my ethnography once I was in the school, but that it would, necessarily, alter the research quite substantially once I was there. Ideas of access and negotiation made far more sense to me once I was in the field. I began to regard them as a facet of the situated ethics of ethnography, entwined with the building and maintaining of human understandings, and 'trust', in which any universal principles must – necessarily – be mediated by 'specific and local to particular practices' (Simons and Usher, 2000, p.2). Once beyond this initial phase, I also understood them as so much more than 'compliance', shaped by a set of ethical guidelines that pertained to an 'intentional' stage of a qualitative research process.

## **Section 2 – Methodology As Experience: the House Of Sticks?**

### **Constituting the field; refining my focus, and engaging empirically**

Once I was on the site I was able to agree a weekly timetable on a slightly more ad hoc basis. The class teacher was friendly and amenable but understandably clear about her own parameters and the degree of intrusion that she was prepared to tolerate. Over the first few weeks, I moved around and into: the staffroom (at break times, especially); the reception area; discrete meeting rooms (when invited to join meetings or to have conversations with members

of staff); activity areas where children were involved in communal activities such as model-making, art activities, playing structured games, or experiencing 'Golden Time'<sup>47</sup>; the lunch hall and to the assembly hall (for singing, dance, play rehearsals, and for assemblies); the library; the playground and playing field; and other outside areas where parents and carers congregated to collect their children (where I seemed to be able to mingle and watch without feeling 'too predatory', especially if I could find a teacher/teaching assistant to join).

As I spent longer in the school, I was invited by other members of staff to join them for sessions within their own classrooms, which they felt, might be pertinent to my research. I had agreed to meet with the head-teacher each month in his office to have a conversation about the research. I used this as an opportunity to ask permission to spend time in parts of the school that I had not yet visited. I also used the meetings as a way of accounting for myself. They were often the catalyst for me drawing up schedules and plans and timetables that increased my sense of control over what I was doing (see example of 'Plan of Research Action', Appendix 3). These changed constantly but they made me feel better.

In the early days, when I left the 'safety' of the classroom and emerged into the empty corridors of the school, I longed to be given a task (sorting the 'Lost Property' box, for example, would have been fine) in order that I might have something to do. Many of my earliest 'jottings' capture my rather desperate attempts to make sense of what it was that I was there for. But, in *'just hanging around'* (as seemingly *'aimless'* and personally painful as this felt at the time) not knowing what to do, I constructed what it was that I could do: these *'dread'* periods were the cumulative catalyst that enabled me to re/define my substantial focus away from the specifics of the politics of curriculum and into the sphere of schooling 'values'. I began to redesign my research focus to reflect this 'shift' (see 'Research Design' Appendix 4). I tried to represent this in such a way that the fundamental research processes for which I had received 'ethical clearance' were not dislodged. This meant – crucially – ensuring similar levels and types of engagement with adults and the junior-aged children in and around the school, and a commitment to a similar post-structural contingent gaze as expressed in my Research Proposal.

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<sup>47</sup> A period of 'free time' for the children to choose their own activities, which were normally craft or 'play' orientated, normally taking place on a Friday afternoon



Once I had abandoned my idea of focusing upon the curriculum to construct the subject of my research, (due, primarily, to the fact that I was not able to negotiate enough time with children and their teachers in more formal learning contexts), I became increasingly aware of the 'rights' framing agenda of the school that I described in Chapter 1. Senior leaders, particularly, would point out with a passion and pride: '*We Are A Rights Respecting School*'. I felt this rather thrust upon me, and I initially resisted it as my prime focus. It was not a subtle agenda. I was suspicious. However, over the first six weeks or so, the rights discourses became a part of my on-going ethnographic attempt to place 'specific encounters, events and understandings into more meaningful context[s]' (Tedlock, in Denzin and Lincoln, eds., 2003, p.165) and I grew increasingly curious about the plethora of their functions and roles. In particular, I wondered how all the different constituent groups within the school made some sense of them, and became constituted by them within discourse. I gradually re-framed my initial Research Design to focus explicitly upon discourses of rights as way of viewing the school. I noticed how rights and respect were required to apparently elide (seamlessly?), with a central focus also upon ideas of equality and diversity. There was to be an 'Equality and Diversity' school theme for the autumn term. The co-ordinator of this work was one of the first school leaders to introduce herself to me once I began moving around the school more freely. I found her engaging, and enthusiastic. In those first few months, too, as I looked back over my earlier notes, taken before the summer in a meeting with the head teacher, 'values' emerge almost forcibly in my recollections of what was discussed:

*He talks a lot about a holistic approach to educating the whole child – about 'respect' and 'listening'. He draws attention to something called a 'School Agreement'....He understands instantly what I mean about locating 'values' at a time of political change...He readily locates himself within a liberal tradition of education as being about a process of developing well-rounded individuals. He says he feels challenged by Gove's interpretation of teaching...'We'll keep doing what we've been doing and developing our vision as long as we continue to get the results we get – really who can challenge us then?', I think he says – certainly something to this effect. Rebecca's notes, June 2011*

I began to recognise the 'School Agreement' on display boards wherever I went around the school – in the staffroom, in classrooms, in corridors, in passageways and in the playground:

*'We All Have The Right: to be listened to; to learn and play; to have healthy food; to be safe and well cared for; to be treated fairly and with respect; to be helped to*

be the best we can. We All Have The Responsibility: to listen to others; to let others play and learn; to make healthy choices; to take care of everyone; to be fair, kind, and respectful; to try and to encourage others.’ Rebecca’s notes, September, 2011

I saw UNICEF RRS posters in entrance halls and UNICEF RRS leaflets on tables and on shelves in corridors and passageways and on public notice boards. There were large display boards in each of the classrooms prepared for the theme of equality and diversity. In the weekly newsletter for families, there was a reminder of how parents/carers could support and reinforce the *‘language of rights and respect’*.

I reframed my research in order that I would embrace the discourses of rights as presented to me in those early weeks: I was going to pay attention to all four values so that they were the central tenet of my overarching research question and tangential questions (see Chapter 1). All this meant that within the trope of ‘embodied researcher’ I had begun, and would continue, to grapple with the ‘biographical and cultural context of the ethnographer’s gaze’ as well as ‘the ethnographer’s own responses and feelings’ (McLeod and Thomson, 2009, p.89). I was rebuilding my house – this time with the slightly more substantial material of sticks. Although, it becomes hard to bring to mind now whether this ever was, indeed, a complete ‘rebuild’ or more of a ‘botched-up job’ (house renovation is *always* so traumatic). Either way, it meant that I had begun to sculpt my empirical focus neither purely deductively, as a consequence of declaring a priori, per se, or, inductively, by virtue of occupying the field, but, instead, abductively (Delanty, 2005). By this I mean utilising my post-structural methodological/ethical (Simons and Usher, 2000, p.163) commitment to the process of holding open a deconstructive space of interpretation for as long as I possibly could.

The reframing of my research, then, relied upon chance (it was not going to be possible for me to spend as much time within the classroom as I had imagined at my ‘intentional’ stage); my ongoing personal interest and researcher identity (my constructions and understandings of meanings of *‘values, ‘purposes’* and *‘the political’* were to remain a constant); and a making sense of ideas of the social (I would continue to ask myself – over time and in different spaces – *‘what is it that frames the meaning-making of the school for different subjects?’*)<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> All ideas and questions that I address in my original Research Proposal

In a recent article I wrote (Webb, 2014), which addressed the question of ‘What *Is* Data?’, I undertook a description of my empirical collection process, asking not only what it was but also how it might be characterised. I suggested in this that in some straightforward sense it was unproblematic. My data were made up of *‘hand-written and furiously scribbled field notes’*; and *‘some loosely structured, informal interviews’* – fifteen or so, digitally recorded and then transcribed by me. In a separate document, *‘Summary of fieldwork to December, 2011’*, (attached as Appendix 5) I have represented my methods for capturing data, summarized over a period of nine weeks. The document discusses how I developed a system of observational field notes, formatted into three parts: *‘In the first column I jot down what is going on or what I have remembered is going on. I then have two further columns for reflections and analysis – [the] first is for immediate thoughts/reflections and the second [is] for subsequent thoughts or for slightly ‘larger ideas’ or links that I wish to follow up later or to cross reference with my journals or with what I am reading or listening to on the internet’*.

In writing field notes I also began to develop the habit of breaking my time in the school into ‘chunks’ so that I either participated and observed wholeheartedly in what was going on around me, or I took myself off to write and reflect. I found an almost ‘secretive’ writing nook which afforded me great pleasure: it offered a degree of seclusion – it was just off a busy thoroughfare through the school – while at the same time, providing a panoramic, panoptic vista, overlooking as it did a large and much frequented outdoor play area immediately adjacent to the school building. This meant that, as part of this experience stage of the research process, these were periods of either rather intense, or – occasionally – luxuriously relaxed, ‘data generation’ (depending on the pace of my fieldwork schedule for the day). These formed into moments of urgent recall, intermingled and juxtaposed with opportunities for uninterrupted and rather ‘illicit’ observation and musing, in which I could, occasionally, loosen a rather random train of thought. And in the second instance and very much connected to the first, I have always had an acute awareness of the ‘artifice’ of this data: for as Holland and Thomson (2003, p. 239) have highlighted, it is this very particular ‘research process’ that becomes an ‘integral element of the data set’ freighted as it is with the intense emotionality of the experience.

My interview data was generated in the latter period of my field experience, and grew, predominantly, out of the relationships that I had built up over the preceding months. I discussed conducting informal interviews with those I met early on, informing potential participants that I would word the interviews in such a way as to be openly ‘invitational’.

Often, as we discussed the ethical frameworks for these interviews (in the staff room for example) there would much hilarity about the ways in which I might 'fictionalise' the identities of participants, with some wonderfully funny and absurd suggestions forthcoming. I tried to build up a dossier of possible questions that I might ask. I shared these with the head teacher and other senior managers and responded to their suggestions. In practice, when I came to interview the adults who had given consent, I would often begin with an open-ended question such as 'tell me something about you...what you think the school does well... the Rights Respecting initiative in the school' and this would often be enough for participants to talk without me needing to say much else: smiles, nods and affirmative body language seemed to do the rest, even when interviews had to take place in unlikely settings. I recall one rainy morning when I moved with one parent from corner to corner of the crowded junior department building looking for somewhere to conduct our interview. We found ourselves finally in a cloakroom, perched on a bench below wet coats and gym bags. Good will and humour were always integral ingredients of these experiences.

Occasionally, some adults would ask for the questions in advance of the scheduled interview so that they could give them some thought before speaking to me. I was happy to do this and was touched by the seriousness with which participants engaged with my enterprise. After all, I was all too aware of taking up the time of busy people. The interviews I conducted with the children grew out of an 'audit' that I had agreed to conduct for the Equality and Diversity co-ordinator which I fed back to her as part of her instrumental assessment of the framework she carried out so that the school could apply for their UNICEF Level 2 RRS award. These interviews involved three different groups of children with about eight in each group. The children's own class teachers selected volunteers to take part in these interviews. In accordance with the values of the RRS initiative, they were asked to select a range of different children. I began each session I had with the groups of children by reinforcing the voluntary dimension of the interaction, stressing that they could tell me if they wanted to pull out at any point. In practice, those who took part seemed to enjoy themselves far too much to go back to their classes and it was often difficult to draw the sessions to a close. The children were always gleeful and excited to hear their interviews played back to them afterwards and they took a great deal of delight in trying to identify who had said what.

### **Thinking Reflexively: Some Ethnographic 'Angst' of 'Being There'**

In the representation of my fieldwork experience thus far, my House of Sticks structure appears to have held together pretty well. However, its steadfastness is illusory, and the

configuration of sticks rickety and insubstantial, especially when poked and prodded. It says little about my fieldwork experience as occasionally lonely and fraught with difficulties that I hadn't foreseen. Often away from the site, I would be wracked by worries about how I was representing myself, the research, and whether or not what I was doing would enable me to have anything worthwhile to assert as worthy of a PhD. I felt so far away from the bold intentional academic language of my Research Proposal and particularly my Ethical Review: did 'discourse' and 'epistemology' and 'ontology' really have *any* connection with anything I was doing in the school? In the moment-by-moment of the everyday, I found it difficult and emotionally draining to challenge the binary of the academy as a place for *thinking* and the school as a place for *getting on* and *doing*.

I also found being without a role not only unsettling but sometimes personally upsetting. Despite the fact that I had 'introduced' myself in a school assembly (which I will return to below), and had displayed posters describing myself and my research around the school, many people didn't know me and therefore didn't 'care' about me (why should they?). I was unsure as to whether I should be constantly trying to introduce myself to those I met for the first time: was the onus on me to put others at their ease, or vice-versa? When I did introduce myself, I did not necessarily feel that I had furthered the cause of my research. Achieving 'rapport' within ethnographic research is often documented as not only desirable, but straightforward. It is frequently connected with dispositions of behaviour to be adopted, characterised by openness, respect, 'clarity of communication' and the production of 'shared information' (Reinharz, 1992, p.267) and the 'impeccable credentials about equalising relations' (Hey, 2000, p.173).

I took comfort from the work of Hey (2000), however, who strongly refutes a view of rapport as so obviously easily achieved or as always desirable. On a purely practical level she suggests that any actions to achieve it within participatory observation or within interview situations can be both 'socially and intellectually exhausting' (ibid, p.175), a detail, which had seemed to be missing from much of the 'methods' literature I had perused. She acknowledges it as the basis for developing and sustaining 'interpersonal meaning making' which necessarily adheres to, and builds upon, prior experience. However, she regards it as a post-structural process which is, 'always on the edge of destabilising': messy in the way that it is made up of 'momentary connections' as well as disconnections which rupture and break. This was a reassurance to me. It meant that it was okay for me to keep stuffing the sticks back into the wobbly edifice I was trying to construct. Rapport became a *process* which concerned the

building of ‘networks of meaning’ (ibid, p.170) in which, as the researcher, I would strive to gain partial recognitions and understandings in tandem with other research participants. Whether or not this happened in practice depended on how I felt at any particular time: sometimes I managed some sort of ‘rapport’, sometimes I didn’t. Over the weeks and months, I lived ethnography as ‘moment-by-moment’ ethical encounter (Simons and Usher, 2000) which was about the experiencing of ethics as a *dynamic* of institutional practice, variously chaotic, contradictory, physically and emotionally charged. Yet, it became easier the more I did it, and the longer I was there. Ultimately it began to feel productive and I was able to make it work for me as I began to textually ‘take some control’ of representing my research (see Section 3 of this chapter).

With time away from the field and back in the academy for a day or so each week, I gradually set some anxiety to one side, and engaged once more with theory such that I began to develop some confidence to allow it to permeate my growing body of empirical scribbles. I found that I relished extracting from theory to think with data (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012), such that I began threading it through the vignettes of ethnographic representations that I was beginning to make. This process was supported by opportunities to share emerging ideas and ‘sense making’ back in the academy. I develop my sense of the value I gain from the temporal dimension of the analytics of my empirical data further in the final section of this chapter.

Opportunities to embrace data collection and analysis, bumped along concurrently with my own ease (or lack of it) in shaping my participant observer subjectivity. They fed and informed one another but they did not erase my researcher identity anxieties. Haunted by some previous ‘self’ and the cloak of certainty I felt this should provide, I always *yearned* for a consistent *researcher identity* such that I might be ‘recognised’ as such. I was delighted towards the end of my field work to be pointed at, eagerly, by one eight year old for the benefit of her mother (as I climbed onto my bicycle outside the school): ‘There look!’ she declared excitedly, ‘She’s our ‘Cycling Searcher’ (which I interpreted as our ‘Cycling Researcher’). Very early on, I felt that I could help myself to ‘fix’ a researcher identity by conducting a whole school assembly to describe my ethnography to adults and children alike, in a way that would be ethically consistent with the commitments to ‘transparency’ I had

made as part of Ethical Review<sup>49</sup>. The head agreed. He must have thought that I had ‘mug’ written on my forehead.

I developed ‘a public performance’. It took me ages. I rehearsed at home and in front of my own grown up kids. I timed myself. This had to be slick. I would ‘dress up’ in such a way that I would ‘transform’ myself with various different (rather stereotypical) ‘researcher’ guises as a way of posing questions to the children which – I imagined – would lead them to be curious about me and my role. I wanted to establish practical ways of developing research relationships with children that engaged with their lives and which addressed questions that had some resonance for them, (Christensen, 2004). The purpose of my ‘display’ was, therefore, two-fold: to sign post to adult ‘gatekeepers’ that I was someone they could have some confidence in around children; and, to, enable the children to begin to recognise me as ‘Rebecca the Researcher’. When eating lunch at a playground bench later that day, a curious group of girls approached me coyly, with the question of, ‘what is *an a-ne-oth-raf-ar* again?’ (Or, ‘what is an ethnographer again?’) This – at least - felt some (small) justification for the lengths I went, as it turned out, to thoroughly humiliate myself:

*How did it happen? How could I have managed to end up standing on the stage in my bra and jogging bottoms?...To think I'd planned this so meticulously...It started okay...I took to the stage...dressing up in different costumes so the children could guess what type of researcher I might be...they interacted well....hands up....making great suggestions....I used a range of ‘researcher’ guises (wigs, costumes, various artefacts) so that I appeared as an ‘official’ inspector; bird watcher; and then surgeon...Caused a kafuffle when I put on a green wig – was like lighting a ‘touch paper’ – they all EXPLODED into life and I was in crisis – ‘What is my role? – Do I shift key into Stern Headmistress or do I carry on?’ I carry on...but as I lift the surgeon’s ‘top’ over my head I feel flesh – I’ve managed to lift my ‘T’ shirt too, and it’s too late to do anything about it. I’m standing in front of hundreds of children and their teachers in my underclothes. I spin away, hurriedly putting on ‘my own clothes’ and turn back...I say boldly, ‘This Is The Sort Of Researcher I Am – ‘REBECCA THE RESEARCHER’ ‘...I suggest they call me ‘Rebecca’ and I tell them I’m*

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<sup>49</sup> As part of my Ethical Review, I go to various lengths to alert all those within the school community of my presence and my role: : this includes – posters (around the school); flyers to parents/carers; letters to parents/carers of children with whom I come into direct contact, asking them to get in touch if they have any queries; information in newsletters that go home to all families.

*doing research that's different to other sorts of researchers I've dressed up as...I explain I will be in school for some time in all sorts of places (get them to suggest where...) and that I'm an E-TH-NO-GRAPH-ER...Explain job of an ethnographer is to watch, listen, have conversations, and join in and that I'll be doing a lot of writing and need their help (they suggest how...). I suggest that research like this is important because it can help us to see and think about all sorts of things we might otherwise miss. At the end I ask some older children to come up and spell out 'E-TH-NO-GRAPH-ER' using letters I've prepared – the activity is too difficult...it takes ages... just want to disappear into a deep hole...I've lost my knack... Crap researcher, crap teacher. Rebecca's notes, September 2011*

Not only do I feel a 'shame' in my 'mis'performing, I subsequently recalled the panic I experienced concerning the illusory quality of the *power* of the 'actor' on the stage. After all, my 'Rebecca the Researcher' act presumed a 'chumminess' to be fostered with children, especially. And yet, as mayhem broke out in the assembly hall when I put on *that* wig, I had to decide whether I had an ethical 'duty of care' to assert some control (the children were going 'wild'), or whether I could 'pass' and expect a member of staff to step in to crowd control. I resisted doing the 'authority' bit but it felt that it came at an emotionally terrifying price. I'd never done that before in school.

On another occasion, in the first couple of weeks, I felt compromised as to how to pose consistently as Rebecca the Researcher. This particular incident occurred before I had begun to take on any formal reciprocal and participative duties. I felt I became a 'stranger to myself' (Bauman, 1993). I was 'caught short' as self-declared ethnographic researcher which led me – once more – to question how I would I ever be able to sustain a researcher identity:

*I am observing the children in the classroom as they clear away their work and prepare to line up by the classroom door to go to 'Singing Practice' in the hall. Suddenly, the children's teacher is no longer in the room. I don't know why. I wait and I watch. The children became noisier. They are clearly confused by what is going on. They move out of the semblance of a line that they had created to peer around the classroom door. A teaching assistant appears and says their teacher is sick and is going home and that the school office is frantically trying to get hold of a supply teacher. What should I do? I am a teacher. I know the children a little. I know what they are expected to do. I could step in. I could perform the role. But I don't. I keep quiet. I say nothing for I am 'Rebecca the Researcher' – the*



*ethnographer, so painstakingly exposed for all to view through letters, posters, and 'my assembly'. Ms Webb The Teacher is to be a stranger in this paradigm. If she trespasses into this terrain, how will her researcher identity retain its integrity and legitimacy? What if she swerves from the course so early in the race?*  
Rebecca's notes, October 2011

The children proceeded to 'Singing Practice' and a supply teacher appeared. At the time, I felt guilty and bewildered about 'who' and 'how' to be that day... The grateful 'supply' saw me, understandably as a familiar and useful pair of hands: nothing strange in that. I further noted in my journal that:

*I find that I cannot remain detached from the hubbub of a situation that requires any adults in the room to jump to and 'do'. I became at once both a non-researcher and a non-teacher: a confused muddle of arm-folding and frowns and standing up and moving around dithering between a role of one with some sense of control and power and no role at all. I feel a guilt-ridden and moral need to demonstrate some fellowship/camaraderie to and with the nice supply. After all there are so many questions to which I know the answers – concerning routines; expectations; where things are kept; structures of groupings, etc. And so, what of the children?...What do they do to make of my extraordinary teacherly facial contortions, mannerisms, and voice modulations, so well-rehearsed over many years....and suddenly thrust, uninvited, under their noses? Well, they don't seem that surprised ('Huh! We knew all along!'). Perhaps my sense of carving out a 'Rebecca the Researcher' embodiment is illusory, something that only I can imagine as pertaining to some notion of what might constitute the 'authentic' within such a role.* Rebecca's notes, October 2011

In my Participant Observer role, I did, gradually, work out ways to wear my 'mantel' a little more lightly and less intensely than in the above angst-ridden extracts so that I came to see the ethnographic researcher part as one of constant, multiple strange encounters which test the bounds of the stability of a researcher identity. Over the following weeks and months, I discovered that taking on a range of duties – not just those of the teaching assistant I described earlier - but the miscellaneous tasks of a range of adults: 'playground duty'; stacking chairs away after assembly; helping to put up displays of work; clearing the kitchen in the staff room; tidying and sorting; chatting to children in the playground and joining in with some of their playground games if they really did seem amenable, meant that I found a way 'to be'

while having the opportunity to watch and listen. In this way I submitted to my own internally imposed set of sanctions about how it was that I could 'master' my role, living out a 'paradoxical simultaneity that constituted the ambivalence of subjection' (Butler, 1995, p.45-46). Nonetheless, within this realm, I was still 'caught short' at times. One day, for example, after having been in the school for over a term, I returned to school after the Christmas break and the teacher with whom I spend most time declared kindly that we *must* find some time for me to conduct my research...My journal notes express my dismay:

*Ahh, what does George think I've been doing! I know that I rarely sit and take notes in the classroom – I've long abandoned that: it's so uncomfortable – takes me back to the 'Inspector' of the Assembly that I declared I wasn't – but I do write (frantically) in other places round the school away from an all too public gaze – George knows that, and we talk and discuss my observations and thoughts...But what does this mean for my ethical legitimacy – all that stuff which presumes that everyone is clear about my role...? Once again, I feel that I'm just pretending to do this properly but not.* Rebecca's notes, January 2012

My sense of 'failure' here is adeptly captured by Ahmed's expression of subjection as that which is concerned with relationships *between* subjects (albeit, often 'imaginary') and that is, nonetheless, far from straightforward. It entails the constant risk that the 'hailing' of the subject 'miss[es] its mark' (Ahmed, 1998, p.114). This certainly seemed to have been the case in my efforts to assert my Rebecca the Researcher identity here: I believed the semaphore signals that I was sending out to be loud and well-formed but they were clearly not received that way. Here – once again – was a reminder of working within a process of subjection that is always at least partially fractured. Unfortunately for me, this does not translate into the language of ethical governance very readily. At least on those terms, my efforts towards transparency were dismally negligent so that the spectre of the 'bad' subject haunted me – which Butler suggests (thank-goodness) is always necessarily implicated in the production of the well-formed subject (Butler, 1997).

I did notice, however, that my relationship and my standing with many adult school subjects seemed to alter – quite markedly – once I began conducting interviews. I recorded in my journal that:

*Something has changed. It seems there has been a collective drawing of breath. At last Rebecca is being a Researcher! She is interviewing us...'Has she done you?'*

'Yes, she's done me...Who else is she doing?' 'What did you say about, etc, etc'...

Rebecca's notes, March 2012

Here, at least, I seemed to have achieved some 'temporary fixing' (Ahmed, 1998, p.118) of identity by virtue of producing a digital recorder, a clipboard and a consent form. Such markings of territory are temporary and I found that they do not produce the closure that would allow my researcher subjectivity to 'slide home like a bolt' (Thrift, 2008, p.2). Nonetheless, my new found 'recognition' and mastery meant that I was taken into confidences more readily in situations which required me to make prompt judgements about the ethical imperatives of such encounters. I experienced *frissons* of excitement – these unsolicited 'liaisons' bore, *potentially*, rich 'data' fruits. However, they could not be captured in the same manner as the data from my interview transcripts: all clearly and legitimately signed, sealed and delivered. I wrote cryptic notes to myself (that I found difficult to decipher subsequently) about these occasions). They had the effect of making me feel like some cheap tabloid journalist out for some 'sauce'. Where I felt that I could I 'translated' these into more sanitised records of conversations, ensuring that I adhered to the commitments I'd made within my Ethical Review in which I'd tried to hedge my bets by stating:

*it is not possible to be explicit about every dimension of [my encounters with all research subjects] and the participant observation might involve me in informal conversations... Things they [research subjects] offer may well be of research interest. I will accord these discussions the status of being informal data and 'off the record'. I will use this data in such a way that it will not form a statement which I can assign to an individual, more that it serves the purpose of contextual information. Such contextual information will inform my reflections...* Ethical Review, 2011.

Parting was hard: cards, presents, hugs, notes ('I never met an Offrager Thingy Resurch Persan before. Now I no one and it is you and come bak soon'<sup>50</sup>). It was time to go. I could sense that I was in danger of becoming a fixture and fitting. My final section of this chapter looks beyond the field and takes me back to the academy. It's 'Writing Up Time' in which I am required to

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<sup>50</sup> One of the notes from a nine year old girl written on 'teddy' note paper and surrounded by pink fluorescent hearts....a precious reminder for me of the sheer joy of children which I interpreted as 'I never met an ethnographer researcher before. Now I know what an ethnographer does. Come back soon'

bottle my 'Offrager Thingy Resurch' ('Ethnographer Thingy Research') experience and purport to have something to say.

### **Section 3: Methodology as Representation: the House of Bricks?**

#### **My Various Texts**

I carried much with me away from the field: files of landscape paper observational field notes; neatly typed interview transcripts with copious annotations; my school and home 'journals', both of which had long ceased to retain any material distinction one from the other. They were jam-packed, both, full of random thoughts; ideas; recollections; quotes; cross references and anxious and exuberant outpourings. More than this, however, they met with and slithered alongside the texts that had been simultaneously incubating back in the academy: my precious notes from monthly supervision meetings which I'd intensely transcribed from the recordings my supervisor and I had agreed I could make at each of our 'head to heads'. These represented my serious mental 'work-outs'; putting me through my paces; all part of my academic apprenticeship. More than this, however, my field texts conjoined with other texts of the academy: my first ever publication with a PhD colleague<sup>51</sup>; the opportunities I was given to capture emerging thoughts through 'Research In Progress' seminars in our department; our own annual summer Doctoral Conferences; departmental methodological Reading Groups, workshops and seminars I had started to give for undergraduate and post-graduate students: all facilitated and designed to enable doctoral researchers, such as me, and other faculty members to take seriously the process of 'coming to know'. So, how did I set about representing this 'coming to know' in this final stage? How did I begin to make sense of the mountains of words such that I might form them into a coherent text that would breathe life into the intentions and experiences that I'd had thus far, and yet, finally 'move me in' to my House of Bricks, replete with fine furniture and a 'Welcome Home' (beware the wolf down the chimney)?

MacLure (2010) reminds us of our human need to 'organise' our 'everyday world via sensory-motor schemata' with 'conventionalising structures' (ibid, p.278). I knew that my first task was to re-engage with my empirical outpourings as 'data'. I focussed this task initially on a small-scale 'project' that felt integral, yet contained and 'ground clearing'. I had agreed with my

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<sup>51</sup> Turner and Webb, 2012

research school that once back in the academy I would work with my interview data, especially, to shape a document that they could utilise – in any way they chose – to inform and further prepare for their RRS Level 2 award (see Appendix 6). For me, this was also a facet of my ‘thinking ethically’ (Birch, Miller, Mauthner and Jessop, 2012) throughout the qualitative ethnographic process. I had an acute sense that whatever became of my thesis text once it was written, the project was, at some deep level, ‘for me’. I needed, therefore, to produce something at an early stage that was ‘for the school’. This felt like a fair – if somewhat – sanitised and over-simplified – way of me managing my sense of what it was that I ‘owed’.

Crucially, however, my engagement with this smaller project began to shape my longer-term approach to weaving my empirical materials into text. To this end, I read, and re-read my interview scripts, also listening, once more, to these as digital recordings (in a manner suggested by Hollway, 2009, p.462) such that I worked to reclaim ‘layers of meaning, conveyed in tone, pace, emphasis, flow...’. The text that I produced for the school<sup>52</sup> was animated by my engagement with the interview data in this way. However, it was illuminated further by my post-structural theoretical commitment to think and work abductively. This meant that although, in this document, I provided no direct analytic ‘commentary’ to the vignettes of data that I selected<sup>53</sup>, the shaping of the three ‘sections’ I developed came about through much more than an identification of categories from the interview data themselves: as though these contained some ‘essence’ which I had merely to ‘extract’ in line with some presumed researcher ‘competence’ on my part. Rather, what emerged<sup>54</sup> was influenced by my early deconstruction of the UNICEF RRS policy text (see Chapter 2) where I identified the production of particular knowledge/power systems which presumed certain ways of *seeing* and *being*; the interview data; my journals and field-notes and the infusion of all these with my engagements with theory.

The development of the school document gave rise to the three analytic themes of my thesis, which make up the following three chapters. So, even at this early text-building stage, my

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<sup>52</sup> See Appendix 6. I also produced this text in a more condensed 2 page form for the school which I felt might be more easily shared with a wider group of stakeholders.

<sup>53</sup> I suggested in the text of the document, for example, that it was for those who read it to analyse or interpret it as they so chose

<sup>54</sup> The section in the school document focused upon: : the RRS and ideas of school ethos; what it means to be a school subject, and especially a RRS subject; and, the relationship of the ‘rights’ discourses with wider considerations of community, citizenship and the citizen

sense-making of my empirical data became a product of *multiple* readings of *multiple* texts: what Jackson and Mazzei refer to as 'literary machines', (ibid, 2012, p. 1). This way of working became part of a process that I have employed throughout my analysis and interpretative work – of 'inviting' theory in to 'open up' possibilities for what I might say in the process of the discourse analysis of my data. Importantly, operating thus has afforded me 'glimpses, insights, small chances for action', (MacLure, 2010, p.278) generating 'awkwardnesses' in my engagement with my empirical materials and what I might say about them. I deliberately sought out contradictions and 'tensions' that lay within and between the policy discourse of the RRS document; what participants and school subjects said about the 'rights' discourses, and what I recorded as part of my own ethnographic account of day-to-day practices. Consequently, what becomes worded into research text here is that which held my attention for its incongruence; for its perversity or obstructiveness (MacLure, ibid): these are the snags that have caught the threads of my researcher gaze, demanding some deconstructive tussle in textual form.

Paradoxically, while providing me with a way into the composition of my thesis text, the completion of the school document (perhaps in some deeper more subconscious sense) meant that I could 'break' with the fieldwork stage of the research process. This granted me permission to abandon my House of Sticks in order to immerse myself fully within the text that I now wanted to get on and produce for myself. This was to be one that would really challenge me to confront my own deeply inured [default] desire for 'triumphal' narratives of schooling projects of perfectibility (MacLure, 2010, p.279); so that I might live a little more easily alongside 'disappointment; bafflement, disconcertion ...'(ibid) as also humane and productive. To this end, I worked with my empirical materials once more constructing myself as something of a puppeteer such that it was me – with my analytic tools – that would animate and breathe life into them in textual form. I adopted what Thomson describes as a process of 'slow reading' (Thomson, 2011, p.3) inviting in my own attention to embrace both 'affect (immediate embodied sensations) and emotion (affects that are more mentally processed and personally contextualised)' (ibid, p. 1) as integral to this re-animation representational stage.

This 'embracing' approach was an integral dimension of my reflexive engagement with my data. In the field I had lived with the uneasy early career researcher sense that in focussing my attention in one domain in order to 'capture' my data, I may have been missing something of much greater significance elsewhere. Acknowledging my subjective 'presence' overtly as I worked a thesis text was therefore to be important to me. Post-structural theorisations

enabled this latitude of reflexivity not only in terms of my overarching methodological approach, but also in my entanglements with my empirical material. As Dunne, Pryor et al. (2005, p.22) have suggested, reflexivity is: ‘...*something that [is inherent] in social action and plays over our experience in such a way as to enables us constantly to revise our apprehension of ourselves and the world...*’ This means that the theorisations that I have worked with have encouraged my recognising of the investments in the texts that I have been constructing. I have embraced affects allowing them to ‘weave through the iterative practices of reading and interpreting material’ animating ‘constructions of meaning in [both my] provisional and final texts’ (Thomson, *ibid*, p.1).

The effects of my iterative, ‘slow’ and ‘embracing’ approach to methodology at this stage, meant that once back within the seemingly secure bounds of my House of Bricks, I was drawn to MacLure’s ideas of working with an ‘exemplary method’ (Massumi, 2002, p.17 in MacLure, 2010, p.281) of engaging with my data. I have found these ideas of working with ‘detail’ and a ‘wearying mass of’ ethnographic data as highly ‘productive’ and supportive (*ibid*, p.282). Thinking in this way has enabled me to embrace a range of my written texts, as well as the recollections of the experiential stage of the research that have resided within my own ‘sociological imagination’ (Wright Mills, 1959),, apparently lying dormant, yet calling out for a role in my analytics, interpretations and representations. In the construction of ethnographic vignettes throughout this thesis text I have tried to allow feelings, recollections, sights, sounds and even smells to ‘glimmer’ and ‘glow’; to speed up and slow down, so that they develop and coalesce to generate an almost filmic quality, and appear thus. This has enabled me to appropriate post-structuralist theorists, such as Foucault, as part of an embodied methodological construal of doing a ‘different’ sort of interpretation: one in which ‘discourse analysis’ allows for *more than* language and the way in which this provokes affects. This means that my work embraces the affective dimensions of language and what discourses conjure emotionally in subjects and those most specifically subjected.

I have consciously crafted many vignettes of ethnographic data in the present tense and I show them in the chapters of this thesis text indented and in italics. Very often, they are the product of multiple re-workings of previous ‘provisional’ empirical versions (McLeod and Thomson, 2009). In so crafting them, I have in my mind here some of my favourite (fictional) writing which exploits the illuminative power of shaping ‘moments’ as revelations or epiphanies – an approach developed by James Joyce in the short stories of ‘Dubliners’, and

subsequently taken up by other short story writers. This form of representation feels consistent with my post-structural approach.

I have in mind here Pelletier's explication (2009, p.268) of the methodological power of the writing of Rancière which is shaped by his understandings of poetics and aesthetics. His writing seeks to challenge assumptions of 'techniques of knowing' that can only ever enable the social scientist to extricate herself from 'a position in the social order' and from the 'ideological restrictions' of that order (Pelletier, 2009, p. 268) rather than acknowledge the structures of it that can tame and curtail. Pelletier suggests that Rancière's writing questions even the most reflexive of social scientific writing for not owning up to the difficulties of 'disciplinary identity' (ibid, p.269). For me, this has highlighted the possibilities for transgressing the disciplinary boundaries between social science and the imagination in my own work to open up and 'work the excesses' (ibid) so that these divisions do not close off what it might be possible for me to say especially about the complex relationships of bodies, speech and subjectification (ibid) in my research. To this end, my hope is that this approach serves up a rich ethnography of textual nuance and complexity.

### **Final Reflexive Thoughts: Writing as Methodology and my House of Bricks**

I want to finish this chapter by thinking further about the implications of this House of Bricks stage as 'Writing Up' time. I have come to experience 'writing as methodology' (Richardson, 2010) as both constraint and liberation. The more I write, the more I appreciate that this two-headed beast – constraint/liberation – must co-exist so that these two heads *always* require sustenance in order for the body of the writing beast to thrive. Many of my supervisory sessions have focused – at their heart – upon this representational matter and the tightrope that this requires me to be able to walk to 'manage' my authorial role and the responsibility that comes with this for those who must read my text. Having said that, looking back now from the vantage point of drawing this section to a close, I appreciate just how unprepared I had been for writing as an act – in and of itself – as a way of finding out, as that which can anticipate and acknowledge 'its own un-decidability forthrightly' (Agger, 1991, p. 113). Discovering this has enabled me to think and write in ways that I would never previously have imagined I would be able to do. Equally this has meant that there have been times when I have attempted the impossible (certainly for me) of trying to engage with text in ways that circumnavigate expectations of linearity, rationality and form that have defeated even my patient supervisor.



One such occasion of ‘defeat’ arose early on in the crafting of Chapter 2. I had entertained great ambitions for challenging my understanding of Foucauldian discourse analysis to the utmost. I had decided I would begin the chapter at an ‘end’, rather than a ‘beginning’. This would mean me opening it with a masterful deconstruction of the RRS policy text, revealing its many bifurcations, claims, intersections, and subordinations in order that I could then trace the capillary pathways these generated ‘back’ through history in a series of deft but audacious moves. This is what my supervisor had to say about this experiment once she had waded through my draft:

*Make a note about the aesthetic and the blinking tyrannies of the way your supervisor is used to apprehending ideas. We want things going forward in your next piece of writing – these people are difficult to please [she said referring to herself]. Now we have shone a light on it [the chapter] we have found that it doesn’t do the work that it needs to do yet.* Rebecca’s recording of supervisory session, November 2012

A little further down the line – and with a great deal more ‘craft’ work required on my part, my supervisor was able to declare, ‘*you are no-longer so out at sea: [you are] waving not drowning...*’. This experience exposed an important irony for me that it has taken me some time to apprehend fully. As a researcher and writer, I am learning when, where, and how it is (and is not) possible to walk beyond particular expectations and writing conventions of foundationalism (and to what end), while, also discovering how writing is productive of its own social reality so that, in and of itself, it is a way of finding out (Richardson, 2010).

It has been this ‘writing as a way of finding out’ that has really so excited me, and continues to do so. For writing in a post-structural vein is an inherently creative and active process, one where neither the ‘fixity’ of the House of Bricks is assured, nor my own safety within (beware the supervisory wolf perhaps...). It enables analytic spaces to be kept open; interpretive boundaries to be blurred and reflexive engagements, of mind *and* body, to offer the possibility for alternative representations. This involvement with writing ‘as a way of knowing’ (Richardson, 1994, p.516) permits new ways of reading data; asking questions of them; and conceptualising them. More than this, it lays oneself, as author/researcher, open to ‘writing mastery as letting go’ (Barnacle and Dall ‘Alba, 2013, p.4) in a way that Davies (2006, p.435) suggests must raise the ‘author’s deep investments to full view’. And it requires an appreciation of the vagaries of temporality – as process, as moment, as a ‘backwardness’ and a ‘forwardness’, and as reflection – and the way in which the prism of time in any ethnographic

field work conducted over a period of even just months, must acknowledge its complicity in the thorny question of ‘what *are* my data’ at different stages of the research process and in a variety of contexts.

Certainly, writing with my range of empirical materials in the crafting of thesis text has invited my immersion in the sculpting, etching and ‘chipping away’ at that which I have created, demanding a certain ‘textual plasticity’ (Barthes, 1970, Barnacle and Dall ‘Alba, *ibid*). However, as Ahmed (1998) reminds me – knocking firmly on the door of the Brick House – writing a social science thesis necessarily has its own disciplining discourses and practices which, while they may mean that they offer a ‘simplicity [that] brings false clarity’, they may sometimes mean, likewise, that ‘simplicity does bring clarity’ (*ibid*, p.128). I hear you Sara Ahmed.

## Conclusion

This chapter has taken a view of methodology as *more than* concerned with research methods. Using Peim’s quotation at the start of the chapter, we could say that it subscribes to a notion of methodology as that which is concerned with ‘questions about significance and value’ (Peim, 2009, p.245). To this end, I have sought to build upon the post-structural paradigm by using a methodological framework espoused by Dunne, et al (2005). This treats methodology as a way of conceiving the world, as an imaginary that must stretch throughout the body of the thesis text. With a degree of artificiality that I have acknowledged, I have divided my approach to, and understandings of, methodology into three stages in this chapter, which I have characterised as ‘intentional’ (to do with preparing to enter the field); ‘experiential’ (to do with ‘being there’); and finally, ‘representational’ (to do with the final writing period of the research).

As in Lasky’s poem (2006) at the opening to the chapter, I recognise that my focus upon particular ‘stills’ at each stage means, almost inevitably, that I have missed something of significance taking place ‘beyond the frame’. In order to override some of this artificiality, I have utilised the metaphor of the three houses in the English fairy tale of ‘The Three Little Pigs’. This has enabled me to engage with the way in which each house is only ever a temporary ‘place of safety’ in which to reside as the researcher. I extend the metaphor by suggesting that as I move through the research process, I manage to inhabit – often at one and the same time, and not necessarily sequentially – each dwelling of straw, sticks and bricks. I seek to convey the illusory quality of moving on from one to the other, as a means of securing

greater researcher certainty. I espouse researcher reflexivity as a way of forever remaining alert to the wolf that lurks (even at the chimney pot of any house of bricks).

## Chapter 4: (Un)Doing The Doxa: an Ethnographic Gaze on the Rights Respecting School

*Whenever I have tried to carry out a piece of theoretical work it has been on the basis of my own experience, always in relation to processes that I saw as taking place around me. It is because I thought I could recognise in the things I saw, in the institutions with which I dealt, in my relations with others, cracks, silent shocks, malfunctionings... that I undertook a particular piece of work, a few fragments of autobiography. (Foucault, 1988a, p.156)*

### Introduction

This chapter considers the ways in which the ethos (or 'doxa') of Top Hill Primary and discourses of rights are mutually constituted and with what effects. I am deeply implicated in the sense making of this co-constitution as both an 'I' observed and an 'I' caught up in the cultural array of the school' (Laws, 2011, p.12). For me, this means not just being embedded within the discursive practices of the writing of 'analysis' as researcher/writer, but also wrapped within the discursive practices that shape a spectrum of subjectivities which announce just what it is that I feel I can say. As, I have discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, especially, this is a personal process. I use vignettes of my ethnographic accounts to draw in the voices of other social actors, mindful of my partial, reflexive interpretation of their thoughts, feelings and actions. In authoring this account quite self-consciously, I try to see how the rights and respect and equality and diversity discourses can meet their objects in order to produce them in very particular ways, (such as the displays of children's work we encounter). However, I go beyond this to consider the contradictions of this project across the school, as experienced by a wide range of school actors within a variety of positions, in different spaces and temporalities. It becomes apparent that there is a repertoire of schooling discourses at play, which I explore and which can be in tension with a doxa of the RRS initiative seeking to establish, maintain and promote itself.

This chapter is organised into four sections each of which explores a different aspects of doxa as a manifestation of the discourses of rights. Section 1 begins by tracing an 'ideal' of doxa, through my engaging with field notes and interview data. I discover a myriad of tensions, contradictions and contestations in the way in which the rights discourses and the school doxa are experienced and understood by school subjects. Section 2 follows a doxa of the RRS

initiative into the classroom to discover some effects. Section 3 constructs doxa as object in order to disentangle how the rights discourses are displayed as signs, symbols around the school, especially as they make up one corridor display of children's work on the theme of Equality and Diversity. And finally, Section 4 engages with the doxic manifestations and effects of the common language of rights.

## Section 1: Tracing an 'Ideal' of Doxa...

### Ideal Doxa?

Doxa, Doxa, Everywhere...

*Rights – they appear everywhere, both concretely, as well as, somehow, floating in the ether – not so much on their own – but coupled with 'responsibilities': they're on the walls in UNICEF brightly coloured poster form; as 'home-made' school charters on the walls of corridors, classrooms, hallways; outside in the playground, on newsletters home, reminders of what can be expected ('you have the right to be heard', and 'you have the right to work' and 'you have the responsibility to listen'... 'and to let others get on with their work'...); in passing remarks between teachers and pupils, 'remember, it's lovely that we have the right to go out into the sunshine to play, but we have the responsibility not to disturb other children inside...' They feel invested in, by many, and in such a range of spaces within the school. They are a garment, not so much worn lightly, as with a mark of distinction...they are asking to be recognised and valorised. This is Top Hill Primary saying, 'Hey, this is what we're about...sit up and take notice. Rebecca's notes, July 2011*

I begin with this vignette of data, reproduced from Chapter 1 as illustrative of the way in which rights discourses emerge very early on in my time as a researcher at Top Hill Primary. I reproduce it here because it not only gives a 'flavour' of my sense of the ubiquity of the conceptualisation of the rights discourses, but also because it seems to represent an ideal of the doxa (ethos) which, through my ethnographic gaze, haunts the sites and practices which I encounter during my ten months of field work. In particular, there are expressions contained within it that resonate for me as I engage with my data, and which play through my reading of them, such as : '*rights*'...as '*somehow floating in the ether*'. My gaze invites a latitude of reflexivity. It is '... something that [is inherent] in social action and plays over our experience in

such a way as to enables us constantly to revise our apprehension of ourselves and the world... (Dunne, Pryor et al., 2005, p.22).

In the following vignette, I am very much a part of the constitution of 'institution': the ethnographer with a very particular gaze. It has a strongly auto ethnographic quality to it. It is also bound by the temporal. I recognise my reading of the present through the intra connections of my past, with my present and (possibly) my future. Without the post-structural theorisations that I draw upon, this note would be a challenge to me as a researcher: my job is to 'make the familiar strange' and yet here – seemingly – is the familiar as all too familiar to me. I am, in part, its subject:

*Sunny Doxa Day*

*It's a warm, intensely still September afternoon. I'm sitting writing and looking out of a large, clear window across the school field. This is no ordinary school field; angular, flat and featureless: on the contrary, it is vast and gently undulating, punctuated with a range of established deciduous trees, shrubs and hedges in which the children regularly play. At lunchtime, I'd watched three boys engrossed in a game with Lego 'space' characters, weaving through a beech hedge between the field and the playground on their knees, oblivious, seemingly on some sort of 'mission'. I can see one class of junior pupils outside now under a large spreading Sycamore (possibly?) with books, either lying or sitting. Their teacher is sitting too, legs outstretched, apparently sharing a book with two children. One lone child walks across the playground towards the group, book in hand, gently scuffing dry leaves as she approaches...I turn to listen as two children pass in a nearby corridor humming...it takes me straight back to my primary school days with a sense of the impossibility of retaining this fleeting and intense moment of nostalgic remembrance. I idly wonder whether the children are actually doing any reading and whether it matters...I like the idea of reading outside but I always find I fall asleep but maybe that's age for you... Rebecca's field-notes, September 28<sup>th</sup> 2011*

On the face of it, this note seems to be presenting the '*floating in the ether*' of rights as the already declared: the perfected; the fixed; the essentialised and normative of a discourse of a universalised rights discourse. It has the filmic quality (of vignettes of data that both 'glimmer' and 'glow'...'speed up and slow down' – as suggested by MacLure (2010, p.282) – of an aesthetic, pastoral childhood contentment: humming in the corridor; reading under the trees;

me, re-visiting (momentarily) glimpses of my middle-class, rural, childhood. It seems to tell a timeless tale of happy people. Is there really anything more to be said? Well – yes there is if I am to say more about the familiar being anything more than just the familiar and to gnaw away at the notion of ‘rights...as somehow floating in the ether’...So, I start by drawing upon the work of Ahmed (2012) in defining institution. She does not so much characterise ‘institution’ as sociological object of study: a readily definable entity (in a Durkheimian tradition), but rather, as process or even as effects of processes’ (2012, p. 20). This means that ‘institution’ becomes about attending to the ‘doing’; the ordinary; the everyday: it is a ‘frame’ – as Ahmed suggests – ‘in which things happen or don’t happen’ (2012, p.50). This enables me to think about aspects of this vignette, therefore, with what Aull Davies (1999, p.8) describes as, ‘the collective social dimension of reflexivity’ in which, as the ethnographer, I am seeing, and processing, the enactment of a ritual story that the institution tells itself about what sort of place it is, and what sort of people ‘they’ are (a place in which children hum in corridors, and play in hedgerows, where teachers and pupils together read under trees), in much the same way as the anthropologist, Geertz (1973) suggests that the Balinese cockfight that he witnesses is, ‘a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story that they tell about themselves’ (1973, p.448).

But I wish to press this apparently consensual doxa of institution further in order to seek some possible traction. In order to do this, I draw on the work Atkinson (2011) in which he conceptualises theorisations of Bourdieu in relation to ethos that give some further purchase on these data. Using the structuralist theorisations of Bourdieu, Atkinson (2011, p.343) captures doxa as a contestation and ‘a site of struggle between orthodoxy and heterodoxy’. My research might be framed, then, in this way - as the ‘orthodox’ in terms of those who have a dominant power which enables them to ‘speak for the school’ and author the dominant discourse (the head teacher, governors and senior leaders, for example); and the ‘heterodox’ in the form of those with subordinate powers who ‘speak back’ – perhaps the children; parents; and certainly, the support staff.

Conceptualising ethos in this way, I can sustain a post-structural fluidity of meaning so that ethos is more than the ‘doing’ of a set of ‘taken-for-granted beliefs about the world and existence’. It enables me to see the struggle of the RRS initiative as entailing the opening up of the space between the dominant and the unspeakable...For example, I can trouble the seemingly idyllic tableau of the collective group of readers outside under the tree. I draw upon Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic power relations to do this and wonder what is really going on

out there on the field, beyond my gaze. Who has decided that reading in this way is effective, or even pleasurable? Is everyone equally enabled by, or enamoured with, it? The effect of such symbolic power might be, in this instance, to generate a normative institutional ethos of implied childhood rights that assumes reading; and the great outdoors, to be part of a naturalised, contingent social order accessible by ‘everyone’, regardless of class, background, gender and/or ability. This could render, for any pupils ill at ease (or unfamiliar, with such ‘naturalised’ associations of ‘the pastoral’ and reading), at a disadvantage that may go unrecognised by the orthodoxy. And – we can only wonder at the role of the lone child pacing – at leisure – across the playground (albeit book in hand): is this the struggle of the heterodox in resisting? ...*‘if I take long enough they’ll all have finished by the time I get there...’*(she may think...).

However, as Leask (2012) has noted, Foucault, in his earlier writings (Foucault, 1979a) would have recognised the descriptions of my observations here, as a form of governmentality, in which a rights and respect ethos permeates around, through and between the ‘conducting of conduct’ and the ‘management of life’ (Leask, 2012, p.61). In other words, here is ethos attached to modern powers of surveillance as universal principles of the institution of the school limiting what might be expressed. In this case ethos becomes an ‘invisible intrinsic social control’ (Leask, 2012, p.59) for both me and other subjects of my research.

### **Aesthetic Doxa?**

The focus I place on ‘the aesthetic’ and its effects, in *Sunny Doxa Day*, is something that cropped up time and again in the interviews I conducted with parents and family members when I asked them about ‘rights and respect’, or ‘the feel of the school’, or ‘its values’ and the place of these ideas in the school. This facet of an institutional ethos was often described as possessive of an almost adjectival quality, as though it were an extension of the ‘natural’ physical environment beyond the school. Many of these descriptions focused upon its ‘carefree’, ‘happy’, ‘joyful’, ‘relaxed’ or ‘special’ quality. One parent explained: *‘I came here...and thought about the fact that you walk into the sky in the morning – in the fresh air but most of all I just loved the fact that you had art, sport and music and that it was all on display and in the open’*. One member of staff commented that: *‘the open space is amazing and the use of the space’* and another that, *‘[it’s]... so light. It is light and airy and it isn’t just the position – or at least – where it is geographically then that affects what it is, I suppose – and it is in to making things fun...’* And yet another: *‘Ummm...It is about where the school is, I think...it has a wonderful position. so high and so light. It is light and airy and it isn’t just the*



*position – or at least where it is geographically then that affects what it is, I suppose – and it is into making things fun. Sometimes you do think, gosh – more fun!’* In all these extracts, the natural and learning environments are spoken of, as though they are one, or at least intimately connected. What might this mean?

Certainly, it appears to feed into a dominant discourse of rights as conceptualised as ‘fundamental’ or ‘natural’, the genealogy of which I have discussed in Chapter 2. I refer to Bellamy (2008), setting out ‘natural’ law as the bedrock underpinning the legitimacy of human rights law and rights-based conceptions of citizenship as traceable from pre-modern notions of fundamental rights (ibid, p. 40), but also from Enlightenment ideas of what is ‘natural’ (see Chapter 2). More than this, however, it would seem (as Lentin and Titley, 2011, quoted in Ahmed, 2012, suggest with reference to the term ‘diversity’) that the use of description becomes central to the normative character of what can be spoken of. Descriptions are not value neutral, even if the values are not clear. This means that a rights ‘institutional ethos’ ‘implies a values based project of transformation towards the irreducible and the irrevocable’ (2011, p.11). As well as this, however, it seems suggestive of a discourse of ‘natural’ childhood as one of ‘innocence’ so that the project becomes about sustaining (the illusion of?) an innocent paradisiacal childhood (before ‘the fall’ of secondary school, perhaps?)

### **Doxa as Binary of the Natural and Unnatural**

Nonetheless, although, I identified a strong ‘taste’ of the aesthetic in both *Sunny Doxa Day* and the descriptions of the natural ‘doxa’ qualities of the school given to me by some parents and teachers, there were also many instances in which I sensed the rights discourse (as experienced by some social actors) as something quite different. Far from identifying a consistency in terms of a RRS institutional ethos as ‘natural’, some of my adult interviewees seemed to hint, without actually specifying as such, towards the binary of its ‘unnaturalness’. This was described by way of its *lack* as a discourse of ‘appropriate schooling’ by one parent, who was unhappy about the value system of the school that meant that there was no requirement for a school uniform, suggesting for her, an absence of ‘standards’:

*‘It’s so embarrassing when the kids come out in the papers [local newspaper] for something they’ve done, and they’re a regular scruffy bunch...’*

‘Naturalness’ is challenged, too, in the following description, by a teacher, of the RRS ethos in her interview with me. She says:

*'[It's about] the creativity and trying to allow the children to develop their potential in any way that is right for them – not just maths and literacy but in any and every way – being very carefree... LONG PAUSE... perhaps, sometimes, too carefree actually...'*

Here, she seems to be suggesting – that rather than being 'unnatural', the rights discourses are all too 'natural' – perhaps too natural as 'institutional ethos', jeopardising the competing claims of alternative (and more powerful) discourses of schooling concerned with 'teaching' and 'the assertion of strict discipline', for example? Certainly, I am reminded of the way in which the RRS texts which frame school policy and practice, (explored and deconstructed in Chapter 2) present a range of competing schools discourses: school improvement; behaviour; diversity; empowerment as though these contestations are either settled or were never problematic in the first place.

### **Assertions of Doxa as Desire**

Other interviews with parents, school visitors and some school staff focused on a description of an institutional ethos of rights and respect and equality and diversity as connected with desire, which also – of course – permeates the tone of *Sunny Doxa Day*: the marking out of a liminal space between a 'real' and an 'imagined'. Berlant (2006) describes such desire as 'about a cluster of promises...embedded...in...an institution' which are all connected to optimistic attachments (2006, p.20), but – nonetheless – desires of an essentialised quality: those of a perfected liberal modernism. Many of the interviews I conducted drew on the use of the modal auxiliary verb, 'should' (*'this should be about team building'*; *'this should mean that we involve the children'*; *'this should be about making everyone feel part of a community'*; *this should counter the 'cult of personality'*): highly suggestive of 'the wish', perhaps? It seems to me to mark out what Gedalof (2013) describes as a 'discourse of individualised rights and differences and choice and opportunity'... part of 'a model of citizenship which reinstates 'sameness'' (Gedalof, 2013, p.119). This comes across strongly to me as a dynamic of a dominant humanist discourse in which desire is not only a 'physical quality but [also] a psychic quality' (Davies, 1992, p.62) in which utopian dreams are part of the constituted individualised self, to be championed at every turn, as they are, perhaps, in all such ideological projects.

Ahmed (2012) suggests, in her reflections on the power of the language of equality and diversity within higher education institutional contexts, that such declarations of desire, become constituted, by dint of having been uttered, as 'willing away' forms of 'exclusion'

(and, by association, all things ‘nasty’). In my informal conversations with the head teacher and then in an interview I conducted with him, he was at pains to stress that an institutional rights ethos was much more than a school mission statement: *‘So it was not the traditional ‘let’s sit down and create a vision statement but it more grew out of what was there...’*, suggesting his awareness, perhaps, of the dangers of mere assertions of desire which all too easily become discourses of compliance, with a dissonance between words and actions. However, within shared conversations between me and a couple of school leaders, ethos as both desire *and* possibility surfaces as an alternative construction of the way in which they see the rights discourse, and how this functions as ethos. For example, the head teacher explains to me that the focus upon rights are only made possible in this particular school by the delivery of *‘consistently high Standard Assessment Test scores’* at the end of both Key Stages: a case of a discourse of standards granting permission to pay institutional attention to a ‘different’ (anti/less than-standard?) discourse. This chimes with the aspiration of the RRS texts, closing down difficulty in the name of asserting discourses of rights and respect and equality and diversity. Similarly, the Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator conceives of the future in terms of *desire* when she explains to me that she feels that a RRS discourse enables the *possibility* of *‘generating the citizens of tomorrow (for we can’t do anything about today)’*. It is the doxa that is to be relied upon to conjure the ‘magic of desire’ in all the social actors with a stake in the institution. This is to enable them to become good citizens – not necessarily now – but in the future – in line with a legal and political framing of a discourse of rights, which is both universally optimistic and progressive (as discussed in Chapter 2 and which I take up again in Chapter 6).

### **Doxa as Past, Present and Future...**

In *Sunny Doxa Day* my reflexive engagement with the social conditions within which I find myself writing as ethnographer mean that the evocations ‘refer-back’ (Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 1999, p.95 in Dunne, Pryor et al., 2005, p.22) shaping what it is that I feel I can see (and hear and ‘sense’) at that particular moment, and what it is that this means I can say about it. Something similar arises in many of the interviews that I conduct with parents, visitors and school staff: the juxtaposing threads of temporal continuity and discontinuity run one alongside the other without any apparent awareness by the group of social actors *en masse* of the inherent contradictions posed. The effect of this is that the RRS ethos is seen and described at one and the same time as *‘something that has always been there’* and something that is *‘entirely new’*. Some of my interviewees stress that rights ideals build upon an existing

school ethos, described by one parent (whose children had attended the school in the 1990s) as *'precious'*, hinting at both something of great value yet also fragile; but with something more – maybe something that is *'precious'* by virtue of its elite-ness or exclusivity? – After all, it is in the domain of just *'some of us'* (middle classes) that she uses this descriptor, as she explains below:

*'The fact that middle class educated people did not send their kids to this school then...much...but that was probably a myth...some of us did – the tide has now dramatically changed. Everyone now says...it is a good thing to go there...'*

The current head teacher expressed the hope himself that: *'we have grown an ethos that was already here'* which he suggests had *'lost its way a bit'*, so that *'our decision making is now referenced back to a core set of beliefs...um, and in terms of moving onto the values it embodies that has been quite a clear one, hasn't it?... because the rights and respect framework is such a clear one: we are on a journey'*. The reference to *'journeying'* occurs frequently, where this becomes focused upon the extension and development of rights; whilst the allusion to the *'growing'* of ethos suggests something earthy and organic: all part of the progression and perfectibility project of the ever-evolving discourses of rights. And, these are both, apparently, the same but different to what has gone before but with this apparent contradiction elegantly glazed over. There is much reference, in the course of my time in the school as researcher, by staff, who have been in the school for some years, to *'the way we do things here'* as part of an embedded doxa.

The previous head teacher, who I interviewed, felt that *"rights and respect" was part of what we did...but we never put it in writing...* suggesting that when an action becomes incorporated, it is something that becomes *'natural'* to the institutional ethos. Ahmed refers to this as *'accumulated and sedimented history'* (2012, p.25), in which the talk is that associated with the *'way we do things here'*. But it is something more: it is about memory and mythologising of the past such that it frames and constitutes that which can be spoken of; heard; and acknowledged, and made sense of, within the ethos of the present. This is exemplified further by another member of school staff who has been a part of the school for several years, as she muses on the tacit and historical informality of power relationships between staff and pupils. She stresses in an interview with me that:

*'right from the word go it has been very friendly and had a great 'feel' – you know – everyone knows – we've always had it...the staff room door has always been open to all the children... which I found bizarre when I first came [said laughing]'*.

This assertion that *'we've always had it'* connects the ethos to an unspecified time and value system 'beyond' the here and now of the school, so that it remains taken-for-granted, and yet unspecified, – 'frozen history that that surfaces as nature' (Jacoby, 1975, p.31 in Ahmed, p.25).

But there are references, also, to a *'departure from the past'* which the current head teacher associates in his interview with what he perceived as a rather overbearing sense of surveillance, control and disciplining of pupils (perhaps it is in this regard that he feels that whatever it was that was there before had 'lost its way'). He explains to me that: *'we got rid of the Tannoy system when I arrived as Head, and all the cameras everywhere'*, hinting that he felt the visible manifestations of adult and teacherly power to be incompatible with the RRS agenda which he instituted after his arrival (and, which he believed to be, perhaps, at odds with the free movement of pupils in and out of the staffroom) and which, clearly, made him feel uncomfortable.

I experienced a different 'Othering' of the past in the form of snatches of conversation and comments that I caught during one week in the spring term in 2012 in which the school celebrated its 'Golden Jubilee'. I joined a tour of the school one afternoon. The event, rounded off with tea and cakes served in the school hall by the Year 6 pupils, clearly held a particular poignancy for those with associations with the school over that time. Many of the comments became both the frame and the filter illuminating the present ethos. Some focused on contrasting memories of sitting at separate desks, working quietly as pupils and *'behaving'*; with the perceptions of a greater informality, a more relaxed atmosphere concerned with *'expressing yourself'*, in today's school. One man explained to me that, in his view, this change wasn't necessarily a good thing because *'we always knew when enough was enough...then – and we respected the teachers and the Head...we really did.'* However, a group of five women who'd been at the school in the 1980s described their *'delight'* to me that it was *'still the same place'* with *'the same values of treating everyone fairly'* which they seemed to agree between themselves was something about the *'way things are here – in this town'...**'we all believe in that here...'*

## Doxa as Background and Foreground

It would seem that a rights institutional ethos is both background and foreground. In *Sunny Doxa Day*, the rights discourses are not referenced explicitly, but I am clearly ‘groping’ for them as I seek to make sense of the feel of the place. Certainly, much of the rhetoric concerned with comparisons of the present/past has focused upon a ‘background’ of values – even where the language or ‘slant’ has been deemed as ‘new’. By focusing overtly on the rights discourses, and foregrounding them, what might this mean? Ahmed (2012) would suggest that the requirement to foreground them as constituting ethos would suggest that they are not intrinsic to the ethos of the school. Rather, they have to be introduced, sustained and constantly worked upon in order to contain them as part of institutional discourse and practice, such that they might otherwise disappear. Maybe the decision to have a designated ‘Equality and Diversity’ senior member of staff to lead in this area bears out the necessity of this ‘foregrounding’: ‘when your task is to remove the necessity of your existence, then your existence is necessary for the task’ (Ahmed, 2012, p.23).

One day in early spring, 2012, I was excited to be joining a ‘peer training’ session for a group of Year 6 pupils whose role is ‘*central*’ to the RRS ethos, and to the success of the RRS initiative, according to both the head teacher and the Equality and Diversity senior leader. The job of these Year 6 pupils (who all volunteer for the role) is to act as friend; mediator; counsellor; negotiator in break times on a rota basis during the week for other junior aged pupils. Their supervision and training is overseen by the Equality and Diversity co-ordinator, but much of the training is delivered by a volunteer with relevant children’s rights training. In explaining the purpose of the Year 6 mentors to me, the Equality and Diversity co-ordinator commented that: ‘*It’s all about promoting Pupil Voice and empowerment...so that we listen to pupils...*’

Peer Mentoring...Ask Zoe

*‘I arrive in plenty of time and ask at Reception: ‘Peer mentoring? Not sure...no...haven’t heard...ask Zoe, she’ll know where it’s happening. I go to find Zoe and she says that she has no idea...and that she doesn’t think it’s today – have I checked the staff notice board? I haven’t and so I go back along to the staffroom and check the notice board. Maybe I have the wrong day – damn – it’s not on the board. There is a governor’s meeting, however. Maybe I really do have it wrong. I wander out and bump in to a senior leader and ask her – ‘you mean, ‘Tracy’s Group?’ she says to me. Well – I suppose so, I say... (Tracy is the person who will*

*be training the group). 'Haven't seen her today – perhaps its next week...?'*

*Perhaps it is... Rebecca's notes, March, 2012*

On this occasion, then, certainly, it was hard for me to see how the rights discourses were an intrinsic dynamic of the institutional ethos, such that they were able to chime, seamlessly with the background of the school doxa. Was this, merely, because schools are busy places and there had been carelessness with the arrangements in publicising the event? Or was it because, the peer mentoring as a cornerstone of the *empowerment* discourse of RRS is – well – just not *that* important as a cornerstone of school ethos? Or could it be that – perhaps – viewed by some social actors, it is an irritating distraction from the core purpose of a schooling doxa in which teachers teach and pupils learn? I certainly experienced this moment as the 'everyday' and the 'ordinary' ethos as having become detached from the 'empowering' and the 'participatory' of the peer mentoring rights discourses much referenced within the RRS texts (see Chapter 2). Such an observation begs a question which Ahmed (2012) raises in relation to her research on institutional diversity within higher education contexts: whether a need to 'go looking for it [an ethos of rights and respect]' (in the way that I describe in the extract above), is about acknowledging a 'failure'? This would seem to be a pertinent rhetorical question to consider in relation to the history of an institution with a pride in a 'value system' akin to that of the present school: is there not an apparent paradox in describing it as so much a part of the 'background' whilst having to continue to champion it as the foreground, especially, as in this stance, when the 'foreground' can seem so elusive? Certainly, I had the sense of a great deal of energy having been expended in justifying a RRS doxa as not only historical but also evident and inscribed. Perhaps it is that the elements of the 'sameness' of rights discourses which do not ruffle and disturb the tranquillity of the 'conducting of conduct' become more easily translated into 'background', whereas expressions of 'difference' – which requires the 'grabbing' of some power away from the orthodox to the heterodox within ethos, becomes more challenging and confounding...

## **Section 2: Doxa as Politics of Truth?**

### **Toxic Doxa?**

The '*Grumpy Teacher*' vignette (below), is an ethnographic note written only a few weeks after *Sunny Doxa Day*, through my lens, at least in part, as teacher practitioner, superimposed with a further critical reflexive researcher lens, creating an awkward awareness for me of my positionality within the school, and my sense of the tensions within this (see Chapter 3). I

draw on it here as another example of me trying to make sense of the different accounts of the co-constitution of the rights discourses in conjunction with that of school ethos. Even as I write, I *feel* for the teacher: she's invited me in, and, I'm part of the dynamic of the performance that we mark and that marks us, even as events unfold around us. This is not so much 'rights'...as '*a garment*'... '*worn lightly, as with a mark of distinction*' (see '*Doxa, doxa everywhere*')...but more rights as sackcloth and ashes, a garment that the teacher has to wear and that marks her out as an object of shame: things go wrong and my presence must feel both irritating and humiliating for the teacher. I am part of the disagreements and difficulties and it is uncomfortable to bear.

#### Grumpy Teacher

*There has been some unseasonal depth to the warmth of this autumn day. Teacher Y is waiting. She's not happy. I'm sitting at the back of her classroom. We've agreed that I will observe whilst she talks to her class about their planned forthcoming school trip. The children have been excited all week. Teacher Y wants to get on. She looks at her watch. She folds her arms and fixes her gaze on the door. Some children are late. Class members seem tired: two boys nearest to me rest with heads on outstretched arms on their table and gently flick a tiny ball of paper between them. Another boy, with half an eye on the teacher, tries to deflect it with a plastic ruler from the end of the table. Teacher Y is impatient. She frowns. She sighs audibly. Several children look at her and look at each other. The door opens and two girls come in and she asks why they're late in clipped tones. They say nothing, shrug and sit down. The door opens again and one boy comes in. Teacher Y is now cross...boy looks vaguely surprised by her sharpness, and murmurs... He sits...The door swings open again and two more girls come in laughing. They look hot and dishevelled. The door bangs. It's now 10 minutes after the end of 'Break'. Teacher Y is very cross now. She says she's had enough – her voice rises somewhat – she's tense (boy flicks another paper ball)..She says the late-comers are irresponsible – she asks them to look at The Charter – some children turn to look but not all (not the boys closest to me. One catches my eye – and – flicks the paper ball across the table again). Teacher Y is saying the children have Rights but they also have Responsibilities too – to her. It's not fair on her for them to waste her time, and she's had enough and she has her Rights – Rights not to have to waste time and wait for children who can't be trusted...She's sorry to*



*raise her voice, but...she says she's very disappointed in them...* Rebecca's notes,  
October, 2011

In this vignette my reading of the clement weather is such that it does not appear to produce the same benign effects as in 'Sunny Doxa Day' for me or anyone else involved. In 'Grumpy Teacher', everyone seems tired and some people, especially the 'frazzled' teacher, are cross. Skimming through other field notes, I find they attest to the same particular observation that the '*carefree*' approach to the end of a break time, marked by a lack of alarm bells, signals or 'lining up', leads to irritation at the start of the next lesson. Here is a highly regulated environment which wishes to deny some of the difficulties of the demands of the RRS doxa: gaps and glitches open up and the messiness and the 'real' of the doxa is produced and laid bare. The diversity of human experience and behaviour is acted out at one and the same time as the discourse of rights and respect tries to wrestle it to the ground and throttle it. In this case, it is demonstrated in the demeanour and actions of the teacher, and the apparent boredom of some of the pupils. It seems to me that, far from experiencing the lack of regulation as a 'natural' and 'empowering' facet of a rights discourse, both teacher and pupils feel a frustrating dissonance and contradiction between the ideal and the practice of the doxa. The force of each becomes obstructive: the teacher can't get on with the lesson in which she expects to take control; and some children are bored, and others chastised.

### **The Rights and Respect Charter as Regulation**

In order for the teacher to be able to 'justify' her feelings of aggravation, she references this to the *Rights and Respect Charter* that appears in every classroom and which operates as reminder of institutional ethos. In this moment the language of rights is brought into play and becomes – for me, as the researcher, looking on – imbued with a normative significance and meaning that remains undisclosed. There is, too, something of the exercising of the language of rights and respect as 'a set of disciplinary norms' (Leask, 2012, p. 59). Constructed through this Foucauldian lens (Foucault, 1979a), the teacher has absorbed and interiorised the rights discourses of institutional ethos which, she in turn, imposes upon her charges. The 'toxic doxa' settles (as I note in my reflexive 'afterthoughts' to my field notes at the time) '*in the atmosphere of the room as a heavy stone*': a 'reality' that we must all pretend *not* to notice. It is a particular regime of truth which is produced 'only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular 'effects of power' (Foucault, in Rabinow 1991). Certainly, there seem to be particular rhizomatic, diffuse, capillary and molecular actions and re-actions of power, present here, reminiscent much more of Foucault's later work in which he reinstates biopower

(Leask, 2012, p. 63). There is the dynamic of the relational power of the two adults – me and the teacher: her as practitioner and me – in this instance – as participant observer; there is the tussle between the children and the teacher, and in particular the children who ‘transgress’ in their empowered roles to self-survey and who, therefore, appear late for the start of the lesson. But more than this, is the ‘below the radar’ power of the Paper Flickers, especially the child who catches my eye, and continues to flick...s-l-o-w-l-y-... (*‘Will she squawk?’*, he might well wonder, making the judgement, in a calculated fashion, that I am compromised by the veil of my researcher participant status, and my desire to play the rights and respect game according to the tacit rules.)

So, ‘Grumpy Teacher’ produces effects – luminosities that have contradictions – on me, positioned as the ethnographic researcher, imbued with the sensibilities of my autobiographic ‘others’ (see Chapter 3). The doxa has moral and aesthetic dimensions that animate the discourse: the moment of the paper flicking becomes – possibly – about the moral (the right way to be in the class at that time for both me, the ‘Flicker’, and other social actors implicated in the action); the aesthetic (the right way to be *seen to be* as part of the discourse); and equality. After all, the rhetoric of the rights discourses is that ‘we are all the same’: the dynamics of the teacher needing to lead and of the children to listen, are supposed to be (ideologically) power free. For the Flickers they know that their flicking is – just a bit – but not too disruptive to the discourse (and they can do their little dance of dissent in its shadow). Does the teacher notice? Does she choose to hold onto a pretence of the aesthetic that she seeks to establish once the latecomers are installed, and ignore what she sees? As a group of social actors, we all have a sense of the regime of truth/power that binds us at that particular moment.

### **A Politics of Truth?**

Later in the year, I’m brought back to this moment, in a discussion with a group of Year 5/6 pupils as part of a semi-structured interview. I’ve been asking the youngsters what it means to be a ‘Rights Respecting School’. One pupil proffers the opinion that:

*‘I think Head teacher X is just trying a bit too hard ‘cos we don’t take too much notice [of Rights and Respect]. We don’t listen when she is telling us like when the Inspectors are coming but then when they are here we do behave like ‘cos we do care and we want to do the right thing for the school...’* Year5/6 pupil, part of a group interview with Rebecca

For this reflexive pupil, as for the paper flicking pupils identified in 'Grumpy Teacher', the constant assertion of the ideal of rights and respect appears to be an irritant for them: something of a side show as part of their own considerations and formulation of 'a general politics of truth' (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1991) in which they work out the types of discourses which are accepted and made to function as true, within this school site of multiple and contradictory discourses. What I am witnessing, on both occasions, seem to be micro incidents of resistance embodied in the substantiation of multi-directional power in practice (Foucault, 1981, and 2001 as explored in Leask, 2012, p.68). The surreptitious Paper Flickers, and the bold Year5/6 interlocutor of his own moral code (which does not require the active listening to the dictats of the head teacher on matters of rights and respect) are offering their own critical refusal of the RRS ethos at these embodied moments. This seems to imply that the dominating discourses are not totally subjectivating. Indeed, they are only contingently so as a pragmatic recognition that pupils know the game but 'cheat' without fully disrupting the discourse.

### **Section 3: Doxa As Image And Display**

Towards the end of the autumn term, I am able to join a staff meeting which takes the form of a 'Learning Walk', by way of scrutinising and commenting upon curriculum work undertaken in every class throughout the term. The work has focused upon aspects of equality and diversity and is a dimension of the school achieving the RRS award, 'Level 2'. I've taken part in 'Learning walks' as an assessment task ('triangulating data' and evaluating 'impact') as a LA advisor in the past where my remit has been clear. However, I now feel compromised, uncomfortably positioned as both participant and observer: more illicit voyeur than bona fide ethnographer. After all, I'm interested in this professional activity: looking at the displays; listening to what the teachers have to say about them; and joining in discussions if invited to. However, I'm also conscious of the way in which I am mobilised within this ritual and constituted as part of the action, seeking meaning in the 'feel' of the temporality and spatiality of this moment: the 'mattering' (Ahmed, 2012, p.49) of this institution; and the honing and cultivating of equality and diversity as ethos, and where this may reflexively take my train of thought....

#### **The Learning Walk**

*'The Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator wants to get a sense of how the 'equality and diversity' teaching resources are being used – she's spent a lot of time ensuring that there are plenty of shared teaching resources on the intranet system which can be easily accessed. She tells me that all the teachers have had some*

*training in using them, and that they can ask her questions about them any time. She's explained to me that she's happy to go in and do 'model lessons' if that is what is required. So we walk round and I jot down the themes of the displays: 'I Am Unique' (couple of displays on this theme); 'Respect'; 'Playground Behaviours – 'Being Kind To One Another' 'Everyone Has An Equal Chance'; 'Disabled Or Differently Abled?'; 'Around The Globe – Differences/Similarities; 'Victorians: rich and poor children'; Our Family Tree – Different family- Same Love'; 'Freedom Poems'...And we look; and each teacher talks about her/his class's display. They're all bright and shiny and beautifully assembled and big and bold and all around the public corridors illuminating the place with so many colours; so much light; and so much sparkle. We comment – 'what a lot of work' – and we compliment and we shuffle and we nod and we fold our arms; and we laugh too – collegially and kindly – there won't be any sequins left in the stock cupboard for Christmas! We're impressed with the poems/ the handwriting; we think some of the drawings are 'sweet' and very 'powerful'. The poor little chimney sweeps and street urchins – gosh – they look cold – but, we're careful not to mention 'the 'class' word; We look at the display on 'Choices' and read about what the children aspire 'to be' when they grow up – and there's 'Maggie T' On Top smiling down benevolently. And it's busy – lots of adults picking up children from After School Clubs. We smile and look appropriately professional; they mouth, 'I-o-v-e-l-y' with beams and affirming warmth at the Equality and Diversity All Around. Everyone's worked so hard. We go home...' Rebecca's notes, November 9th, 2011*

*'They [the Equality and Diversity displays] just makes you feel better when you look at them – so bright and cheery and such lovely messages – so humane – you know – 'get on nicely', 'it doesn't matter about differences' – children are so good at that type of thing and they have so much to teach us adults! So much more than words'...It makes me feel better just to see it [the display in the entrance hall] beaming at me every day', as one parent explains enthusiastically to me in our interview. Here is rights and respect and equality and diversity institutional ethos as universal, cuddly toy; as that which takes on a 'reality transcending its members' (Atkinson, 2011, p.342). To me it seems to be doxa accorded anthropomorphic qualities and attributes and recognised in objective form in the signs, symbols and displays around the school making us all feel better.*

Atkinson (2011) suggests that the effect of this can be such that the institutional ethos acquires some sort of ontological reality independent of human action. Here it is 'beaming' at us, generating a collective sense of goodwill making us all feel better. This may – of course – explain the reticence of the Head teacher in 'doing' ethos via a mission statement with the danger of it becoming no more than 'ethos as object', fixed and divorced from the messiness of human interaction with the power to unwittingly 'block' the expression of ethos as lived experience, so that what is rendered visible elides and conceals all that ought to be seen – and confronted.

In the days and weeks following the experience of the Learning Walk, I found myself reflecting on the field notes I'd taken at the time and the comments of parents; on the visual effects and language of the displays themselves; and on the other adornments of the corridors and public spaces inside the school: the UNICEF posters with charming images of contented multi-ethnic children in a range of contexts (exemplifying 'the Right to Play'; 'the Right to be Healthy'; 'the Right to Freedom and Safety') ; the Fair Trade display of flags decorated by the children, advertising a range of foods and other goods; the Rights and Respect School Charters (see Chapters 1 and 3: *'We All Have The Right To...'*; *'We All Have The Responsibility To...'*). But also in the outdoor space – the wealth of meticulous planning and landscaping that has taken place over the years to enhance the aesthetic, natural and play environments; the range of play equipment; the 'All Weather' Rights and Respect signage on the walls around the playground, replicating those inside: all tangible and visible manifestations of a particular institutional ethos. Much of this – I realise – pre-dates, a RRS discourse, and I ponder, once more, what it is that has been 'appropriated' from the past and reconstituted as a 'rights' present, both within the school, but also as a continuation of a world beyond. To what extent, then, is the school a reflection of the town and the particular aesthetic sensibilities that inform and form a 'town doxa', representing those with the power to speak and to be listened to ; and to what extent is it asserting something different and new and challenging received orthodoxies?

More than this, however, I am also acutely aware as reflexive subject (parent and (former) teacher and local authority advisor) of my 'over-familiarity' with the normative discourse of 'the Proper Primary School': the face of which I now gaze upon in the form of these displays. This discourse is represented through material objects and public display: bright, clear, bold colours and lettering; textures; 'naive' artwork, exuding 'individuated specialness'; 'Positivity' and 'Welcoming'. And it is this discourse – with its supplementary subordinate discourses of 'pupil empowerment' and 'community' – that is captured in the images and text of the RRS

which forms the ‘bedrock’ of the RRS ethos (see Chapter 2). But more than this, it constitutes the knowledge which organises the institutional ethos inscribing a ‘certain selectivity in what can be seen, thought, felt and talked about’ (Popkewitz, (1998, p.5) concerning the school.

### **Doxa as Sympathetic Magic and Missionary Zeal?**

Once again, I am struck by power of the binary of background/ foreground: this time as a way of problematising the possible functions of the equality and diversity displays, as (‘beaming’) face of the RRS ethos as object. As background to the day-to-day business of school life, the displays perform the function of ‘virtuous’ wallpaper. This is the discourse of rights as ‘rescue’ (Popkewitz, 1998, p.21), with something of the quality of ‘religious salvation’ translated into the secular, modernist vernacular whereby the norms of equality and diversity produce a ‘composite figure of perfection’ (Popkewitz, 1998, p.21) whose function it might be to just ‘rub off’ on the unsuspecting passer-by, perhaps like sympathetic magic. It is also doxa as object with redemptive qualities in the public space of schooling, with the power – for those sufficiently receptive – to diffuse something of a rather more foregrounded ‘missionary zeal’. Another parent I interview views the equality and diversity displays with some scepticism. He tells me – somewhat wryly – that he finds ‘it’s [the displays]’ *‘missionary zeal’* ...with sequins and pretty drawings’ (by the children that draw the best...) bringing *‘enlightenment’*, rather *‘unsettling’*... *‘After all’*, he asks: *‘what’s it all about: what’s it there for?’* For me, reflexively ‘making sense’ of this rhetorical question, there seems to be the recognition of doxa constructed and imagined as ‘object’, both: connected with an ‘aesthetic world of appearance’ (Ahmed, 2012, p.59); and as a representation of ‘a moral realm of value’ (Ahmed, 2012, p.59), which he finds ‘unsettling’.

### **Doxa As Moral Valuing**

A previous head teacher of the school explains to me that *‘the school has always had a strong moral thread but never religious...and that has been important: we never put it in writing – the ‘RRS’ stuff – but it was part of what we did’*. Certainly, in all the time that I am in the school, I do not witness any form of regular collective worship, although there is some carol singing and ‘nativity’ action in the infant school in the period leading up to Christmas (see my ethnographic notes in Chapter 5). In Chapter 2, I reference Elliott (2007) who does not so much see a focus upon the implicit morality discourse of ‘rights’ as being a departure from a non-secular past, rather, he regards it more as a dimension of what Popkewitz (1998, p.61) would term ‘the folk wisdom of ‘care for’ in the institution of schooling where all aspects of children’s affective and

cognitive development comes under the spotlight, such that the very 'soul' of the individual is regulated. Indeed, Elliott likens a universalising human rights discourse to that of 'the power of the apostolic mission of Christianity reminiscent of a pre-modern era in which knowledge is accorded through a divinely sanctioned consensus' (2007, p.373). These displays as background wallpaper – for me – and perhaps for the parent who finds them 'rather unsettling' – presume a moral valuing.

In the exchange below between a group of Year 5/6 pupils and me, such a discourse emerges. I have asked them about the range of displays in the public entrance hall, and in particular what they think they are there for:

Me: *So, all these new posters that have gone up – the UNICEF and Amnesty posters about 'Rights' – Children's Rights – what's that about, then?*

SILENCE – the group of children look at each other

Me (again): *What's it about – this stuff? (I say, turning and pointing)*

SILENCE...then...

Child O: *Helping each other?*

SILENCE and long pause...

Me: *Anyone want to say anymore?*

Child P: *Making sure that someone is okay if they are upset or not feeling very well...*

SILENCE

Me (smiling encouragingly): *Do you think that that stuff (pointing again and nodding in direction of all the displays) – dealing with being upset, helping, for example, would happen if you weren't a Rights Respecting School?*

Child R: *I think they probably would. 'Cos every school needs to do that because they are vital things 'cos if they are hurt you need to do that...*

PAUSE– less of a dense silence

Me: *What does the RRS stuff do then – the charters, the posters? Why are they up?*

Child O: *To help us remember ...the... the things on it.*

One child nods at me as though he wishes to speak, I acknowledge him

Me: *X, any thoughts?*

Child X : *Well if we break one of the rules we could look to see what we did wrong...*

Child Y: *You might look at the Charter Thing and feel guilty if you hadn't been bothered to help*

Child Z: *You might feel guilty 'cos it's on a poster*

Child P: *If we didn't do those things then it wouldn't be the same...Nobody would really listen or be very friendly.* March, 2012

Initially, there is hesitation and a certain amount of embarrassment on the part of the children: I feel that I've asked something rather stupid, and they look at me as though either I have; or as though they are desperately trying to work out what it is that I've actually asked them. What emerges, however, is both the suggestion that: of course we'd help each other (Child R) – regardless of the imposition of a particular morality discourse; and, then an articulation by the five children (O, X, Y, Z, P), that, the function of the posters and displays, is to act as 'aide memoire'. They are an effect of power. And this power in the form of a secularisation of the moral discourse does not require overt forms of control. Rather 'natural' behaviours, culminating in the suggestion from Child P, that *'things...wouldn't be the same'*, require the internalisation of forms of self-governance which are individuated and become about what is physiologically 'normal' (Popkewitz, 1998) in ways that both discipline and order the children, but never entirely, as I have noted previously. There is always 'a gap'.

### **Doxa as 'Learning Journey'**

And what of the foregrounding work of the displays, especially those that I have drawn attention to in 'The Learning Journey' vignette, which, as a group, we stopped, perused, and discussed as part of our Learning Walk? There is clearly more to be said about these displays beyond their being 'sweet'; 'powerful'; or 'l-o-v-e-l-y'; or for the colour and spectacle they produce in the public spaces of the school. In discussion with the Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator after the 'Learning Walk', she explained to me that each teacher was on their own 'Learning Journey', with the implication that this would mean the production of children's work of variable 'standards' as part of the equality and diversity display. The 'learning journey' metaphor in common educational parlance, is one that I recognise that I have used about myself, on many an occasion. I now find it highly problematic for the underlying assumptions it makes about 'travelling' and about the clarity of destination and arrival. With respect to destination and arrival, it does not address the question of what definitions of equality and diversity are to provide the 'legitimizing discursive structures' (Gedalof, 2013, p.118-119) for antagonising 'rights': which 'rights'; whose 'rights'; when; where; at what time; and why? The work of the children mounted on the display boards, certainly, produces a strong sense of a



(background) moral imperative of schooling referred to above: asserting us/them, *'to be nice to your friends'*; *'not to judge a book by its cover'*; to champion differences within our families and amongst our friends regardless, of colour, creed or sexual orientation; and to celebrate freedom...But, it does not seem to challenge the 'discursive underpinnings' that 'frame what questions can be asked and what answers sought' or 'the relationship of sameness and difference to equality' (Gedalof, 2013, p.118-119). This means, for example, that as a group of professionals, we don't discuss what we all mean by equality and diversity as we study the display boards...perhaps we feel too embarrassed; perhaps the rules of what can be discussed and what can't just aren't sufficiently clear; perhaps we feel challenged by the nature of the 'professional space'? Difference of opinion and difficulty are not comfortably accommodated within the consensual RRS rhetoric as I explore further below. After all, it requires us in *'creating and managing a rights-respecting ethos'* to institute a *'coherent values framework'* without specifying exactly what that or indeed, what it might mean to each of us (see Chapter 2).

I will now focus attention on three of the displays in particular, for which the unifying title of 'Equality and Diversity' gives little away about either journey or destination but which presumes travel along the same, smooth path. The first, entitled, *'Differently Abled' NOT 'Disabled'*, seems to be following a very different road map from the second and third, for it queries the social order: the 'medical' model that positions the disabled as in need of correction. Instead, it presumes to challenge perceptions and mis/information about what it might mean to be 'differently abled' and what – through a focus on a range of 'popular' media figures – this allows and disallows. It focuses upon mental and physical dis/abilities, inviting a querying of the assumption that it is always easiest to 'recognise and ascribe belonging to those similar to us by the way they look, speak, live and construe their values' (McLaughlin, Phillimore, et al. 2011, p.4).

The second, with the title, *'We Can Make It – Equality Of Opportunity'*, asks the children to imagine what/who they would like 'to be' when they grow up, and uses visual images of 'those who have made it' (that is photographs of the last six prime ministers of the UK and popular iconic media figureheads) as illustrations of both 'striving' and 'aspiration'. This 'Everyone A Winner' approach operates by concealing all power structures from view – 'untying 'diversity' from unequal power relations, resituating [it] at the level of notional individuals free to choose and [to] direct their own destinies' (see Mason, 2002, p.90 in Gedalof, 2012). In this way it ignores collective sources of disadvantage and the privilege that some are able to claim

because of the way in which differences are socially and culturally constituted (Mason, 2002, p.93 in Gedalof, 2013).

The third display is that of grimy chimney sweeps, scrawny pick pockets, delicate urchins and suitably ringletted and befrocked young ladies and gents in the *'Victorians: rich and poor'* display. The reflexive 'Memo To Self' that I made after the Learning Walk describes how the 'Othering' (playing on the binary of 'us' and 'them') of the Victorian working class children is presented as both temporally and spatially apart and alien. My note attests to the strong sense I have of the material politics of child poverty as having been judged as worthy of attention, but only insofar as it is exoticised – a 'difference' *then*. Was there – I ask myself – a suggestion of middle class 'normality' (where the middle class Victorian children were depicted in the display in more familiar domestic settings undertaking activities such as eating and learning at a table seated at a chair in a furnished room)? Does this accord with what Lawler describes as an English middle class which is:

*'linked to claims to cultural ownership, morality and modernity that have solidified into middle-classness becoming the 'benchmark of normality against which other groups are measured' (Lawler, 2012, p.56)*

### **A Doxa of Professionalism?**

I could not pick up links made to material politics of the present day or to shared characteristics of experiences of children then and now in the descriptions of the teaching and learning that had informed the display of the Victorian children, in particular. At the time I noted that the teacher alluded to the difficulty of talking about 'class' in an immediate spatial and temporal context (*'we don't talk about...the c...thing...'*), such that her voice dropped and her body language became confidential. In my 'Memo to Self', I wonder why this might be. Why can we not discuss material inequality, and cultural differences and the class manifestations of these, either as teachers/researcher as part of our 'professional' Learning Walk, or with the children as part of the equality and diversity theme of the work? I speculate on the implied theorisation and practice of historical progress and the eradication of material poverty. Is the effect of such discursive work to construct and produce the realities we claim to describe? Why were there no comments from anyone of us as we looked on and listened before moving on to the scrutiny of another display board? Did we collectively have nothing to say or were others (like me) wondering what sort of 'work' a display such as this might actually do? It would seem that the mythologised lives of these imagined Victorian children –

class as heritage – had been granted a cultural recognition and status, such that we were now immunised against a requirement to consider contemporary child poverty and class inequality and the relation of both to Children’s Rights as proclaimed on the bountiful UNICEF posters around us. Does the RRS signage presume an understanding of a ‘sameness’ and a ‘common good’ which obfuscates differences that are there and that cannot be recognised/named, such that the production of universal values results in effectively universalising the ‘particular interests and perspectives of dominant groups’ (Gedalof, 2013, p. 120)? I found what we didn’t say as difficult and troubling as what little we did say.

I am reminded of the reference to the work of Nancy Fraser (1997), quoted in McLaughlin et al. (2012), in which she antagonises the way in which recognition and redistribution can take different directions such that ‘redistribution – seeks to eradicate the sources of group difference – inequality, while the other –recognition – seeks to secure group difference via validation’ (ibid, p.6). Certainly, a discourse of teacher professionalism as made visible through the Learning Walk does not facilitate the exploration of these imponderables, as a dynamic of the staff meeting. Is the effect that contemporary class ‘sameness’ is silenced ‘away’ within the school, for example? Does this mean that ‘complex social locations’ (such as those of Top Hill Primary and the environs from which the pupils are drawn) ‘are obscured and intersecting inequalities...are at risk of being overlooked’, elided by a discourse of professionalism which cannot speak of ‘class’ for example (ibid, p.7)? This is a theme to which I will return in Chapter 5.

#### **Section 4: Doxa as Difficulties with Words**

My observations of the three displays, in particular, suggest that I found the recognition of the institutional ethos of equality and diversity as object, problematic in a similar way to the parent who asks: *‘what’s it all about; what’s it there for?’* The visual images of the normative discourse of equality and diversity renders meanings obscure even as they present a materiality and leave a trace. And similarly the words attached to them. My ethnographic notes from Spring 2012, recall a training day, which the Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator generously hosts and leads for teachers from other local schools. My notes below attest to the difficulty of words. They detail the way in which one visiting teacher asks about definitions of ‘equality’ and ‘diversity’:

Words that slip through the fingers...

*The question of language – of rights and respect and equality and diversity seems to be one that slips through the fingers: occurs – again – today in relation to a question from visiting teacher who asks E and D co-ordinator in training session about definitions. Visiting teacher asks: ‘Whose equality and diversity’ is it that is being promoted in school – after all, it’s not that straightforward, is it? He queries this in genuinely engaged and friendly manner. I sense this is important to him. It is something about identifying ‘the political’ – but he doesn’t say that. I have the sense that what he asks is received as a stupid question. E and D co-ordinator is confused: hasn’t she been talking about it all morning? I feel sorry for her – she’s been generously sharing her resources, having gone above and beyond the ‘call of duty’ as a colleague and professional...but she’s thrown by this one. It’s as though the teacher who asks the question has been speaking a foreign language: it makes no sense apparently. E and D co-ordinator says that ...it’s about not trying to wipe out differences but being united with our own differences in tact’. It sounds like a nice thing to say but I get the sense that that doesn’t really help... In my ‘Memo To Self’ later, I go on to rhetorically ask: Where is the space for the exploration of these complex issues in school? – It’s hard to step outside a dominant discourse, especially if you are the hard-working and dedicated co-ordinator passionately delivering on it? There is a problem with the language of it all and we never take time to ‘pull it apart’. Whenever it is spoken of (to me), it’s explained as a benefit: ‘We all have a common language’ is a refrain I hear. Another thing that is said is: ‘The charters ensure that ‘the language [of ‘rights’ and ‘respect’ and ‘equality’ and ‘diversity’] is embedded in the school’. So? Rebecca’s- notes, Spring 2012*

### **A Common Language**

Ahmed talks about the need to make ‘words [of equality and diversity] comfortable’ (2012, p.65) with a sufficiently shiny but neutral gloss: so that they don’t challenge *too* much, or frighten anyone away. More than this – however – she suggests that the work they must do within an essentialising and normalising discourse is to provide a place of hiding so that they do not demand of us that we ‘think hard thoughts’ (2012, p.65) – as demanded of the harassed E and D co-ordinator by the visiting teacher at the end of a tiring morning. It would seem that the job of the words on the displays: ‘*Equality and Diversity Is Fun*’, ‘*Together We’re Better*’, ‘*Equality And Diversity Around The World*’, ‘*I Have The Right To Be Happy*’ is to create a *feeling* – a particular sense of institutional ethos that disqualifies talk of inequalities (or perhaps even

‘equalities’) in a way that seem to be more about a mode of bogus recognition of difference but only as assimilation; as potentially opening up messy power relations, so that those awkward things we benefit from at another’s expense cannot be talked about. This is language as erasure.

During a break on the training morning, I discuss with the visiting teacher whether he had a particular issue in mind when he posed the query about the slipperiness of the language of equality and diversity. He explains that he’d been thinking about the competing rights and hierarchies of equality that could occur in school life: he discusses a scenario that ‘could arise in any school’, of the competing rights and claims to equal treatment of a same sex family, on the one hand, and a Christian/Islamic family on the other, with fundamentally different views of rights and of the nature of equality in theory and in practice. He says that he’d found the training very helpful because it had made him realise that *‘these words that we use just aren’t that useful sometimes in helping us talk about what we need to think about’*.

Their job is to work as ‘institutional speech act’ (Austin, referenced in Ahmed, 2012, p. 54) such that they are invested with the power to slip between the vernacular and the official with mobility and alacrity in such a way that it becomes part of what we do to say, ‘We all have a common language’ and feel good about this and mean it. In response to a question about the meanings conveyed by the displays, one parent expresses her reaction to the ‘double speak’ of the ‘institutional speech act’:

Parent M

Parent M: *What does it mean to the children, d’you mean – like the words and stuff?*

Me: *Yeh, okay...*

Parent M: *I’m not sure it means that much... [long pause]... Children are pretty accepting of each other anyway most of the time ... um... and I also think that they are - very - NOT accepting of each other at others... So having just a face value way of looking at it - those words and pictures and things - means that it closes things down for discussion instead of opening them up... in my opinion...*

Another parent expresses the difficulties that she has – this time with the words of the UNICEF leaflets and publicity that complement the posters on display:

Parent S

Parent S: *I saw the logo – UNESCO or something – is it? – you know – on the information when it came home and I thought, ‘oh good, that’s nice, that’s important... But probably ‘cos I’m dyslexic I tried to read it but I had a problem with the language – I found it either too simplistic or too big and complex.*

Me: *What was it about?*

Parent S: *The meaning? – I didn’t feel I understood it. I felt rather patronised and I thought, ‘well, isn’t that natural anyway?’*

The comments of Parent M and Parent S, as well as those of the visiting teacher, underline the ‘smoke and mirrors’ effect of the way in which the language and images of rights and respect and equality and diversity (constituted as object) can be recognised as both making sense and no sense at one and the same time. In other words, this is a complex assemblage in which there are important tensions in what these parents note: an unfinishedness, and an incoherence in the assemblage that they are striving to match up to their own prior ideas.

Within a Marshallian conceptualisation of a moral discourse of modernist rights (see Chapter 2) the discourses of both work as background *and* foreground. Not only this, they are at once, ‘new’ (witness the posters and displays) and not new (in the form of enduring ideas of teacher professionalism, perhaps): all ongoing discourses that have been identified as a dynamic of this specific institutional ethos over a period of years. This is captured as ‘natural’ by Parent S, in a way that is suggestive of ‘rights’ in the ‘Enlightenment’ tradition of rights, as referenced earlier in the chapter and mentioned as part of my argument in Chapter 2.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the discourses of rights and respect and equality and diversity as prisms through which ‘the excitements, tensions, complexities, contradictions’ and ‘messiness’ (Chapter 1) of school can be filtered and scrutinised. Firstly, I have traced an ‘ideal’ of doxa as aesthetic and natural; as ‘object’ of desire; as both background and foreground; and, as past, present and future. Consequently, I have acknowledged the way in which the RRS ethos can be conceptualised in a myriad of ways at one and the same time, by a range of actors (some of whom reflexively acknowledge its breadth of anomalies and denials). Secondly, I have explored the limits of the ways in which the discourse of RRS is experienced as an enabling and empowering doxa. This can become experienced as a technology of governmentality, which is a way of ‘maintaining rather than transforming existing organisational values’ (Ahmed, 2012, p.57), albeit with opportunities for micro-incidents of

resistance. Thirdly, I have interrogated the way in which the doxa of the RRS discourse can become constructed as object in the form of images and displays around the school and imbued with values of moral and professional worth. These values can seem to have the effect of eliding over, rather than illuminating concepts of rights and respect and equality and diversity. Finally, I have called into question the function of much of the 'clear' and 'transformative' 'Common Language' of the RRS (see also Chapter 2), designed to support this ethos generation initiative. Gedalof (2013) stresses that the common language of the liberal rights discourses can perform a very particular piece of ideological discursive work. This means that it too easily becomes an 'empty unmarked sign' – the 'contingent product of a particular time and space – culturally embedded and historically specific' (Gedalof, 2013, p.124).

## Chapter 5: How (Not) to be a Rights Respecting Subject in Top Hill Primary

*'There is no making of oneself (poiesis) outside of a mode of subjection (assujettissement) and, hence, no self-making outside of the norms that orchestrate the possible form that a subject may take'. Judith Butler 'In Conversation' with Bronwyn Davies (2008, p.27)*

*'To the extent that I accept that writing and speaking involves the body, involves sitting, or standing, involves breathing, involves hands, then yes, the body is always there in a matter of fact way. There are always opaque ways in which bodies make themselves known in language, but...I actually think we need to respect that about each other, that that opacity is there, as something to be honoured, rather than something to be forcibly exposed'. Judith Butler 'In Conversation' with Bronwyn Davies (2008, p.15)*

### Introduction

This chapter examines what it might mean to be a Rights Respecting Subject in Top Hill Primary. I ask just how the rights agenda animates everyday ways of being both children and adults within the school. Who and what kind of subject is one 'entitled' or 'obliged' to be (MacLure, 2003, p.176) as a dynamic of this discourse? How might I represent some of the possible essentialising and normative effects of the categories of 'child' and 'adult' as they are iterated? What is it that these categories seem to authorise and what is it that they might foreclose? I interrogate and problematise the liberal and humanist assumptions that constitute school subjects as 'autonomous subjects with varying degrees of freedom to choose what kind of person to be' (Davies, 2006, p.425). In particular, I focus upon the child/adult; gendered; classed; and 'vulnerable'/'special needs' differences at stake. As I acknowledge in Chapter 4, I am caught within the very folds of the discourse myself, fellow traveller along with other research participants, with all that this implies for reflexivity. Drawing on the work of several post-structural theorists, and Foucault and Butler, in particular, I explore the ways in which our various identities get 'done (and undone) as reiterative and citational practices within discourse, power relations, historical experiences, cultural practices, and material conditions (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, p.67). I focus, particularly, upon my own ethnographic notes which capture instances played out by a range of actors in the very public arena of the school hall. I use these – as I did in Chapter 4 – to draw in the voices of other research



participants that transport us beyond the bounds of the school hall, into other school spaces and temporalities.

I divide this chapter into three sections: How to be a Child; How to be an Adult; and How to be Children and Adults Together. I recognise the somewhat artificial boundary drawing but I do this in order that I may generate some structure in a chapter in which I have resisted straightforward narrative linkages. This resistance is deliberate: I have wanted to 'showcase' some of the ways in which the linkages between my empirical data; my musings and reflections have coalesced with my developing understandings of post-structural theorisations to shape what I then go on to say.

## Section 1: How to be a Child

Time for Assembly

*'It's time for Assembly. There is always, I've noticed, what can only be described as a degree of organised and relaxed chaos at this juncture of the school day, as the junior children file from their classes. We do this three times a week throughout the school year. The children dribble and jostle into a semblance of a 'line' at the classroom door and then on out into the corridor. There's a general hubbub of animated chatter and small groups of friends: girls; girls and boys; and boy-only groups, jostle to form and reform. It's pretty slow going. There's plenty of time to work on a variety of configurations of 'Who You Are' and 'How You Are' between the classroom and the hall.*

*And as I watch (and sidle myself) over the weeks, and months, beside the crocodile of children, I pick up a scent of what these various corridor choreographies might mean in the moment, in ways that carry import for ways of 'being' at other times and in other spaces around the school. How you get from the classroom to the hall matters.*

*So the teacher is away at the front of the line. With well-judged alacrity, certain boys in their pack – there's no discussion; only the 'sniffing out' of male bravado and camaraderie – weave and manoeuvre their way from the front to the back of the crocodile. It's important work. It involves creating waves (small ones only – this is Top Hill Primary after all) for the laying down of a particular scent of exclusivity. This requires subtlety: well-judged twists and shifts of the torso; 'nudges' of the arms and sweeps of the leg or foot; and the wearing of facial expressions that ensure that no eye contact has to be made with those with whom*

*you do not wish to be associated. It looks fun – for some at least. The idea is to draw just the right amount of attention to yourself and your group without ‘getting caught’. The game is to put as great a distance as possible between you and those in your ‘group’, and the rest of your class. This must be done in such a way that those nearest to you ‘get the message’ and ‘you get away with it’.*

Rebecca’s notes, A N Other Assembly Day

### **‘Being Yourself’**

On the surface, at least, it seems from my ethnographic notes above that the ‘doxic powers’ of rights and respect and equality and diversity (as I explore in Chapter 4), suffuse the very being of the *doing* of the discourse as these children move from their classroom to the assembly hall. When I speak with some teachers and parents about the rights discourses, not only do they characterise the discourse as generative of a certain institutional ethos (see Chapter 4), they also constitute the children as possessive of similar ‘aesthetics’ in an assertion of the way in which the discourse can embody ‘the *empowered and participative*’ child. One senior manager suggests to me that, ‘*Rights and respect means that children at Top Hill Primary are happy and carefree*’. Other teachers consider that the aim of the initiative is to ‘*ensure that they [the children] are ‘full of fun’ and ‘joyful’ and ‘love being at school’*’. Others assert animatedly, likewise, that rights and respect is about: ‘*being child-centred*’; ‘*re-distributing power*’; ‘*challenging boundaries*’; and ‘*asserting Pupil Voice*’. These declarations are made by dedicated school staff and parents responsible for the conceptual and practical design and daily implementation of this initiative. Indeed, these are ‘*the experts*’ to which I refer in Chapter 2 who maintain that children who attend this school are to be liberated from former institutional ways of being subjected. This requires hard work. I can see that it is an ideological project held close to the hearts of all those who have invested much in this. It is a project of re-imagining school as a space in which ‘being’ a child (and a ‘happy’ one at that) is of significance and a matter of some pride. This is about identifying, and giving primacy to, what McNaughton, Hughes et al. (2007) in Kehily, 2009, (p.161-162) describe as the child as ‘social actor’ with valid ideas, views and the right to participate in the shaping of ‘their’ world. So, this isn’t ‘laziness’ that creates a seemingly haphazard way of moving around the school. It is apparently designed to enable children to express themselves as lively, energetic young people with power who are unconstrained by constant adult supervision. Here they are then, *choosing* to ‘joyfully’ (and noisily) ‘*be themselves*’ – in the words of one teacher as she

describes the possibilities of the policy and practices of 'rights and respect' for being a child at Top Hill Primary.

And, as I try to slink along beside the children – nonchalantly – I'm drawn to the authorisation of this version of being a child in this context, but also to what it might 'foreclose'. In my textual construction of this moment, I invite in a focus upon the gyrations of the children, and the group of boys that I have lighted upon, in particular. In Foucauldian terms, we bear witness to the productive effects of power as this circulates through the semblance of 'a line' in which the child subjects are constituted within social and cultural practices as they are played out: around; through; between; and within the children. What is it that we become aware of within this representation? Is this a group of boys showcasing attributes of their rightful and respectful identities (flaunting their *'autonomy'* and taking *'a lead in what they learn and how they learn it'* as one senior manager describes the intrinsic value of 'rights and respect' to me)? Or, is this the group, resisting the category of what could be termed the 'Right (Un) gendered Child', claiming themselves as male and (a little bit) more powerful, than girls and away from the controlling (denied) gaze of a teacher?

### **Mastery and Submission**

In this moment then, the group of boys, as Butler would suggest, both do and do not escape the dominating force of the category of rightful and respectful child and their positioning within it (Butler, 1995, in Benhabib and Butler, et al.). Even on its own foundational terms, the boys, while embracing an apparent 'empowerment' discourse of rights – to do 'their own thing' – appear to disregard their responsibilities. Seemingly, they refuse the rules of the discourse which construct a binary of being granted a right in return for the demonstration of responsibility – a particular form of individuated, conforming comportment which, in popular school parlance, is spoken of as requiring the demonstration of kindness and consideration to others.

Here, then, is the group of boys subverting the category of responsible child, each one asserting himself as master – powerful and independent of the teacher's controlling gaze, and blasé – apparently – as to his effect on other children in the line. But – according to Butler – 'at the heart of becoming a subject is the ambivalence of mastery and submission' which, 'paradoxically, take place simultaneously – not in separate acts, but together in the same moment' (Davies, 2006, p.426). For these boys they must straddle not only the presumptions of normative subjection of the rights discourses, but also, that of the dominating force of

gender categorisation. This places a premium on being recognised as a group of ‘appropriate boys’ (Davies, *ibid*, p 433) such that they must create space between themselves and girls or the ‘wrong’ sort of boys (in this case, boys that seem more at ease in the company of girls). However, assuming this particular trope of masculinity precludes, in that moment, any other ways of ‘being’ male, thus securing the subjection of the boys to its a priori demands and expectations. And, what is more, as the crocodile approaches the assembly hall, its elongated and contorted form adapts, such that gaps in the line dissolve. The ‘maverick’ boys recalibrate as they become aware that the gaze of teaching staff will see them as outliers in the very public access space that is precluded in the linear corridor. Rightfulness and responsibility are performed by us all as we enter the hall so that the boys’ own ‘right’ to do maverick boy is, temporarily, laid to rest.

### **And There’s More to be Said on Gender**

What is not described in my original ethnographic note is the momentary reaction of one child – a girl – as she recognises that it is she – on this occasion – that is the marker in the line, the delineator of the point of separation. This recognition does not seem to be especially revelatory to her: after all this marking out of gendered territories (see Arnot and Dillabough, 2000; Opie and Opie, 1969; Thorne, 1993) goes on all the time in school. She senses something perhaps as she moves forward – the space in the line: she glances back towards the group of boys, realises her role as Unspeakable Other, and, turns back towards the main group moving forward. For a few seconds she is quiet, on her own, head down. She shuffles. She doesn’t look up but she starts to hum, eyes down. She moves her hands, subtly, beside her head and gently sways her body, apparently wrapped within herself. But, ahead, a larger group of girls hums and sways. A connection is made. Nothing has been said. And although not next to them, it seems to me, lurking in the wings, that this does not matter: she reads herself as One Of Them and it’s ‘alright’.

Here is gender in the making as Butler sets out. It as a ‘conception of *social temporality*’, constituted through a series of acts, mediated by power, retaining ‘the *appearance of substance*’ (Butler, 1988, p.520) such that what is generated is the illusion of constructed and fixed identities: those of the group of boys and the lone girl described above. Drawing upon this conceptualisation of gender, I could suggest that the boys and girls here are caught up within ‘performative’ accomplishments which ‘the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief’ (*ibid*, p.520). In this way what emerges are not performances by these subjects per se, but a performativity that

constitutes both the boys and girls so that their reiterative acts through time both 'reproduce *and* contest the developments and origins of stable identity categories' (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, p.67).

And yet, when I discuss rights and responsibilities, and equality and diversity, with teachers and senior managers, we do not speak of gender: its constitution; its possibilities; its difficulties. In an Equality and Diversity Committee meeting (chaired by a school senior manager and attended by me, some teachers and a teaching assistant and a few parents) in the spring, two teachers report on a series of visits made by Year 6 pupils to a local nursing home, where they have clearly demonstrated their participative civic and social citizenry. The Equality and Diversity Group have received a letter from the residents praising the children. It's all gone '*really well*' and '*the school should be proud of the girls*' (we all agree). This is true community engagement. The girls receive 'Rights and Respect' Charter Marks in their classes which chalks up their class tally for the term. Good old girls. They are helping the school to work towards Level 2 of its RRS Award in a way reminiscent of much literature (see Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989; and Bland, 1995, for example) which focuses on the project of women's ideological role in the moral disciplining of male desires and excess through time.

### **Gender as a Non-Performative?**

So why is it that we don't/can't discuss gender? Is there something about the normative ideal of belonging, equality, inclusion and social citizenship that renders 'gender' as problematic? Is it, perhaps, that there is a tacit sense of the role of 'celebration' within the rights discourses that dare not be punctured with a 'yes, but...what about us challenging gendered assumptions of selfless care...empathy...public service... intuition...embodied as fixities of female/feminine identity' as performed by some girls within Top Hill Primary? Is it that we have a sense of our positioning, in our different capacities within the group, as prop to the hard working chair whose time and energy as senior manager and lead on rights and responsibilities must be recognised, such that a 'yes, but' may be rendered as personal criticism? Or is it that we 'take it as read' that we all believe 'gender' to have 'been done and dusted': gender as 'yesterday's story'? After all, as I have explored within Chapter 4, the 'doxic spirit' of the school is one suggestive of relaxed human relations: broadly speaking '*girls and boys get on well together*' (as one parent told me). One way of approaching gender 'difference' and childhood in this particular context, may be to work with Ahmed's conceptualisation of the 'non-performative' (Ahmed, 2012, p.116-117).

In exploring the notion of 'commitments' made to equality and diversity within higher education contexts, Ahmed alights on the ways in which they 'are not simply doing what they are saying' (ibid, p.116). She draws on Butler's conceptualisation of performativity, to which I have referred above, which antagonises ways in which gender identities both get done and undone. Performativity is understood:

*'not as a singular or deliberate 'act', but rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names'* (Butler, 1993, p.2, in Ahmed, 2012, p.116).

So for both the lone girl in the line and for the Year 6 girls who visit the nursing home, what we see in Butlerian terms is gender discursively constructed and played out performatively. This is not just about ways in which the girls experience themselves, individually constituting their own gender, however. It is about ways in which attributes and embodiments become 'problematically assigned to the female gender' (Davies, 1994, p.5) in such a way that is not challenged within our Equality and Diversity meeting, for example. Such everyday occurrences lead Ahmed to question, therefore, the relationship between 'names and effects' (Ahmed, 2012, p.117). Such a questioning is pertinent to the commitments that the Equality and Diversity Group makes to the institutional practices of rights. Gender *is* named by the group in specific contexts. For example, it appears as one of the equality strands that is regularly highlighted to governors, parents, and teachers, and any school visitors, as part of the training that the Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator undertakes for the school community. But in this context we could say that, gender functions all too readily as a non-performative, so that it becomes:

*A 'reiterative and citational practice by which gender does not produce the effects that it names'... 'In the world of the non-performative to name is not to bring into effect'...'so that the failure of the speech act to do what it says is not a failure of intent or circumstance but is actually what the speech act is doing' (Ahmed, 2012, p.117 – where she has italicised in her text, I have underlined).*

This means that a 'commitment' to gender as an equality strand, and as a dynamic of the overarching policy and practice of the rights discourse becomes a way in which it can all too easily be disregarded and *not* be brought into the everyday *doing* of the lives of school girls and boys.

## Vulnerable Children

If a commitment to gender equality appears to retain a 'non-performative' character within the rights discourses, the idea of some children as vulnerable and, therefore, 'different' does not. When I ask the Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator to say something about what 'Rights Respecting Schools' means for being children in the school she tells me:

*'I've always been child-centred and so what has happened since the new Head has been here is we have an Inclusion Team which I am on. In my role...I track all Vulnerable Children... whether it be free school meals or ethnic minority – or whatever – who is on the Vulnerable List – and those children who are not on the list, and are not making progress, because the Vulnerable Groups list comes from the Government and it needs some expanding to those children who are not making progress for one reason or another...'* Taken from Rebecca's Interview with the Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator, March 2012.

Here we see the privileging of a child subject identity category of 'vulnerability' in a way that becomes a 'catch all' for a range of 'differences' which are to be acted upon. 'Vulnerable Children' may or may not include gender-related issues of 'vulnerability', but certainly encompasses (and collapses) other 'differences' whether they be of class, ethnicity, dis/ability, poverty (*'free school meals'*), or sexuality, for example. This is a list which, apparently, expands and contracts to accommodate broader categories of school subjects who may/may not be deemed to be *'making progress'* (where 'differences' appear and are then erased) which makes 'vulnerable' a catch all phrase which can so easily operate to do so much work in the erasure of the unsayable and the political. Captured within this subordinate discourse of 'vulnerability', it becomes possible to trace threads of discourses relating to childhood and the purposes of schooling, both of which produce unwarranted effects.

For the senior manager in the excerpt above, being *'child-centred'* and tracking *'vulnerable children'* appear bound together in her imaginary of a Rights Respecting School in ways that present no inherent contradiction. The importance of being *'child-centred'* is repeated to me often by some senior managers and teachers as an approach to childhood that can only presume my tacit approval. However, when asserted, I sense it in instrumentalist terms: it is 'A Good Thing' which cannot speak of either the difficulties of its enactment, or the paradoxes of its liberal, humanist assumptions so that it sutures over power differences and power/difference issues. So, here we have an approach to *'child-centred'* childhood and

schooling which is overlain with a taken-for-granted discourse of the individualised vulnerable child who is to be brought back into, and included within, the folds of normal development. In this way the vulnerability works to 'privilege a particular model of normality to the extent that it is certain children, who are 'Othered', who become the object of pathologisation discourses' (MacLure, Jones et al. 2012, p.449) in ways that are exemplified in the extract below:

### ***Anger Management Issues***

This incident involves a discussion between me and another teacher (while on 'playground duty') concerning a child who is playing a ball game with a group of other children. The child has several 'differences' (which for reasons of anonymity I do not wish to illuminate further).

*The teacher and I both note how well she is playing and the level of skill that she is demonstrating, as well as the mixed nature of the group (boys and girls, different ethnicities and dis/abilities). The teacher expresses a view that this is 'really good to see' in a child on the Vulnerable Children List with such 'anger management issues' (especially as it is so hard to 'access therapies' now that the services of agencies were not available through the Local Authority due to 'cuts'). I speculate aloud about what it might feel like to be this child within an environment in which most children are clearly very different to her. I also remark that I haven't seen her as angry in the playground. The teacher reminds me that she is angry and that she does have anger management problems and that she's 'a real handful at home' too... Rebecca's notes, February 2012*

This has played on my mind for the way in which it placed such a central focus on the specific 'vulnerable' behaviours of this individual in the playground in ways that seemed to act as a block to alternative ways of conceptualising her ways of 'being', even within the 'liberating' discourse of 'child-centredness'. In this exchange, we could say that her subjectivity is in the process of becoming fixed such that she is perceived as not able to fit a norm and her behaviour is designated as deviant even while it is not. MacLure, Jones et al. (ibid, p.449) suggests that such pathologising discourses are 'central to the formation of the subject' which in Butlerian terms require individual subjects to 'acquire and maintain their status as proper, recognisable subjects under constant apprehension of the threat of becoming the 'bad' subject'. Here we have 'vulnerability' played out as performance then – not by the child herself as a deliberate and intentional act – but constituted and performed in discourse as an 'abnormal' category in the sense that it 'constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to



express' (Butler, 1996, p.380). Here is this child apprehended as 'bad' in such a way that it begs the question of how she may ever be seen as 'good'.

## Section 2: How to be an Adult

Tingle Time Assembly

*So it's your time to lead the School Assembly. This is a Big Deal (in my book at least). It seems to require of you that you do it with all the panache of Bruce Forsyth, without the idiocy – well, perhaps just a little; and with the good humour and bonhomie of the Archetypal Relaxed and Experienced Professional who just LOVES nothing more than standing up in front of two hundred plus seven to eleven year olds on a rainy Tuesday morning in early December. This is you – Strutting Your Stuff, leading Singing Practice for the Christmas concert which is...well...three days away (and counting). But – no problem: everyone LOVES singing at Top Hill Primary. And it's nearly Christmas anyway and it's all Great Fun. Of course – you are reassured – possibly – by teachers and teaching assistants who are there to help you. Some heroically display magnificent Double Chins as they scowl and frown and inflate chests in order to take on the unpopular role of 'Bad Cop' to your 'Good Cop' at the front of the room where – by now – you – as you jig to a souped up version of Jingle Bells, wonder why the projector won't display the words – it did a moment ago. At last – you can begin. The projector has sprung into life and the room is filled with the sound of this year's favourite Christmas song. You ask everyone to stand and sing and you raise your arms and you clap your hands above your head and Everyone Moves and Joins In (we ignore those who aren't 'Everyone'). It's Timeless. It's Christmas and even Mr Y seems to jiggle something (just a little) and to mouth the words to several songs, at least. Some of us get really into it...And we all agree in the staffroom afterwards that we could feel that special Christmas 'Tingle factor' that Mrs Johnson had insisted we display. Isn't Christmas wonderful? Rebecca's notes – A Tingling Christmas Assembly, December 2011*

### 'The Right Sort of Adult': Me, Rebecca the Researcher?

I've entered the hall, alongside the class that I have been with that morning. I can observe an unfolding scene in which the teacher 'in-charge' governs herself as a Rights Respecting Subject in this very public arena such that she 'looks the part'. But I am also concerned with my own

self-making as a researcher, in this moment. I feel that I can't slide onto the floor and sit crossed legged with a class of children as I often do for assembly 'singing practices' of less significance. No-one has said anything but I sense that this is A Big One: all adults are to do the needful (whatever that may be). I judge that I must sit on an adult chair at the side of the hall and play an appropriate adult role. So *who* can I be? I feel very visible. I experience a sudden surge of ethnographer identity 'crisis' reminiscent of the occasion on which I had attempted to introduce myself as a researcher to the whole school community as part of an assembly in my early days in the school (which I discuss in Chapter 3 – 'Oh, how to be *me with integrity*'?). I resolve to 'sink in' to myself – to metaphorically shroud myself in some way – in order that I do not too readily amass and embody the adult personas of those around me, without some resistance, at least: after all there are about fifteen of us in the hall that morning. But I wish also to remain 'alert' to my job: the observation of the process of conducting this assembly with its myriad of tensions and excitements in the frenzy of this build up to Christmas, holding a position of what Dewalt and Dewalt term, 'moderate participation' (2011). This means being 'present' as a researcher but not overly or actively interacting in the research milieu. But I'm all too conscious of my inability to sustain this illusion. I'm suffused by my remembrances of – what seem to me to be – the immutability and timelessness of the English Primary School Christmas (as both school child and then teacher who has been responsible for the 'coordination of all music in the school'). My 'desire' means that I 'surrender to the return to the scene where the object [of Christmas] hovers in its potentialities' (Berlant, 2006, p.20). I am a sucker for the sickly sentimentalism of Christmas.

### **'The Right Sort of Adult': Her, Mrs J., Assembly Leader?**

I look to the front. Here is Mrs J. delivering a master-class in the orchestration of the Rights Respecting assembly. Not only is she giving a 'lesson' in '*leading and managing a rights respecting school*' but she is also modelling appropriate '*rights respecting behaviours*' (see Chapter 2; Section 4) such that she embodies the normative discourses and practices of the rights subject so well. She does a very impressive job of it, actually, because it's not at all easy. It requires behaviours that coalesce to make up the 'right' embodied combination of relaxed, good humour alongside an understated, relaxed yet assertively assured presence that conveys a sense that whoever you are – any one of the two hundred plus bodies in that space at that time – you'll, more or less, play the part required of you (nonetheless believing you do so of your own volition). Here she is – in Butlerian terms – constituted within a performativity that marks her out as a very particular subject in full public view of adults and children conducting

‘singing practice’ in, what seems to me to be, a stressful situation which depends on a thorough rehearsal of this Christmas itinerary to be conducted in a particular way, under particular conditions, within a constrained time frame. She performs as an apparently ‘enabling subject’ – in the words of one senior manager:

*‘something profound about what we believe about the way in which power should be exercised by adults over children’... ‘for The Rights Respecting School initiative at Top Hill Primary is about resisting the power of adults to discipline children’.*

Taken from an interview with Rebecca, April, 2012

I will say more about such apparent ‘resisting’ below, but first I wish to dwell a little further on the constitution of Mrs J. herself. How can we explore what she represents figuratively in that moment? In Foucauldian terms, we could trace the making of her position via what Jones (in Ball (ed), 2010, pp. 55-57) describes as the ‘genealogy of the urban school teacher’ (ibid, p.57). Here she stands in front of a gallery of subjects, master of all she surveys, framed in the patriarchal role of the male, and possibly, sacred, leader: moral bastion of the established order (shades, for me at least, of my old headmaster at my public boarding school, who used to sweep in to lead assembly, be-gowned in Balliol College robes, so that, at a given signal, we all rose in obeisance). Or we could constitute her, as she might have been from the mid-nineteenth century onwards within the reformatory school movement (Jones, ibid, p.64) as the ‘trained teacher who could suffuse the classroom [or in this case, the assembly hall] with a scientific morality and induce an ethical population’ (ibid, p.64).

Jones suggests that ‘it is not difficult’ (ibid) to shift from the constitution of this moral and rather humble persona to that of the ‘good parent’ encapsulated as ‘woman’ as all that is most creditable and efficacious in carrying ‘the family system into the school’ (Stow, 1971, p.19 in Jones, ibid, p.65) in order to imbue it with ‘the loving gaze imbricated in the formation of the normal home and domestic economy’ (Jones, ibid, p.65). Here is Mrs J.: smiling, gesticulating, twisting – now to the projector – turning – now to smile at us; laughing, even – to encourage and not humiliate; in order to will us to her bidding, holding all her proverbial ‘balls’ in the air – just about. In this way, we could extend this Foucauldian ‘take’ to suggest that the particular conditions of power in that assembly hall are, in Butlerian terms, made ‘present in the *acts*’ of the formation of this particular embodied subject, as well as in ‘the *acts*...that follow’ (Butler, 1997, p.14). Here is gender as layered and enfolded within historical, cultural and political practices with material consequences and affects that suffuse this assembly ritual (Jackson &

Mazzei, 2012, pp.73 -84), named and animated as the practices and performances of the Rights Respecting School.

### **‘The Right Sort of Adult’: Them, Teachers in the Assembly Hall?**

So, what might the senior manager have meant by the ‘profundity’ of the rights discourses to ‘*resist the power of adults to discipline children*’ as referenced above? Such an assertion appears to presume an intentionality on the part of Mrs J. to effect ‘realignments’ in power relations as though bestowing a gift upon the children from both her and her colleagues placed around the hall. However, such an assertion would appear to circumnavigate two difficulties. The first of these can be expressed, once again, in Foucauldian terms where we could say that disciplinary technologies have *always* formed a rationale for pedagogic practices since the instigation of common schooling in the 1840s in which the ‘ethical teacher’ guides and transforms the children in her charge (Jones, pp.57 – 77, in Ball (ed), 2010). Certainly, I sense that I read what is going on in the hall that morning in this way. There are disciplinary technologies in circulation as I watch the teachers and teaching assistants around me. I am conscious of a presumed and yet unarticulated code of ‘how to be an adult’ as a dynamic of this tableau of doing and maintaining ‘Rights and Respect’. This is dependent upon the conjuring of an illusion of ‘non-surveillance’, in which any need for the adult disciplining of children appears to have been ‘handed over’ so that that the children enact their own agency, contributing freely and joyfully to this performance of ‘doing Christmas’ at primary school. For this to be effected, some adults take on the embodied persona of ‘low key’ crowd controllers with apparent ease. This does not require vocalisation but it does call upon certain body and facial comportments (see the ethnographic note above). However, what all adults demonstrate particularly, is an alacrity to shift – pretty swiftly – from, (ever-so-tame) Club Bouncer, to enthusiastic audience participator, so that, as I observe, it does become quite difficult to categorise what has taken place as ‘disciplining’ in any recognisable punitive form (as in the movements from scowls and double-chins directed at individual children or small groups of children to the raising of hands above the head to join in with the assembly singing). The second difficulty in the assertion of ‘resistance’ can be considered by returning to Butler for she acknowledges that:

*intentions do exist, that’s not the problem; it’s just that intention is not the ground of discourse...* (Butler and Davies, 2008, p.141 in Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, p.68)

Mrs J. may have very sound intentions, nonetheless, with regard to empowering those in the assembly hall so that they can conduct themselves in relation to others with a greater sense of their own agency. Theorised this way, however, discourse always operates to foreclose what is intended (Jackson & Mazzei, *ibid*, p.68) so that what does take place between those in the hall relies heavily upon a dynamic of *gendered*, adult relationships (all but one adult in the hall that morning is female) constituted within and through social and spatial temporalities. These women are smooth operators: skilled and adept at ‘multi-tasking’ ‘teacherly’ and ‘feminine’ practices of managing and entertaining children this Christmas, as in school Christmases past in large assembly halls, so that they sing and dance, and are happy to make fools of themselves (as we all presumably do that morning) such that it is possible to look on and name this as something ‘new’: a discourse of rights empowerment, in which everyone just ‘does their own thing’ (everyone *jiggles something at least just a little* in the assembly hall that morning). Actually, as I reflect on my own experiences of being a teacher and ‘Doing A Mrs. J’. I recall it as very hard work which relies heavily on a dynamic of a (generous) self-surveillance of one (female gendered) adult, with another.

### **Bodies in Space**

As I sit, elevated, on my chair, angled towards the front, such that I can look over the heads of the children who sit cross legged on the floor in rows (also facing forward) I reflect: how does the spatial configuration of the hall inform the doing of the being of the ‘Rights Respecting Adult’ encouraging her to act upon and govern both herself, and others, that morning (Pike, 2008)? There are twelve to fifteen similar wooden school chairs strategically placed for adults around the walls of the hall. By swivelling in my chair ever so slightly, I have a view of the Year 6 children perched on long benches at the back. Apparently, this is a ‘privilege’ accorded to you once you reach Year 6: you get to sit on a bench rather than on the floor with the younger children. Here are configurations of space that appear to delineate differences in both status and position, which in Foucauldian terms (1979a) are connected to ‘architectural’ compositions of space which seem to bear little relationship to discourses of redistributive power relations. Pike (2010, p.276), drawing on the work of James, Jenks et al., (1998), and Holloway and Valentine (2000), describes such spaces as those which are to be regulated by appropriate adults ‘through a series of socio-spatial practices which seek to (re)produce dominant identities and govern bodies according to a predetermined set of social norms’. Such spatial practices could be read as antithetical to discourses of ‘empowerment’ and appear to emanate, instead, from discourses of ‘childhood’ and ‘the purpose of schooling’

(Devine, 2002, p.309), the genealogies of which can be traced back to late nineteenth and twentieth century programmes of popular schooling (Jones, pp.57-77 in Ball, (ed.), 2010). This means that both spatially and temporally, such discourses appear to conform to a regime of the schoolroom as a space in which the schoolteacher is required to impose her 'commanding presence' upon it, to fix herself as a feature of this 'procrustean machinery' (Jones, p.71, *ibid*).

More than this, however, I am reminded of the lineage of the assembly hall, as a quasi-religious space for 'collective worship': as set out in the Education Reform Act 1988 (Sections 6-13), and reaffirmed in the Education Act 1996 (Sections 375-389) and the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (Sections 69-71), for example<sup>55</sup>. So although I have been informed by the Head (see Chapter 4) that a religious focus to school assembly has not been a feature of Top Hill Primary for twenty five years or more, there is something of a 'normalised' configuration of this space as that which does not challenge the assembly hall as a place of 'worship' of some kind. Indeed, I am reminded of Elliott (2007) writing of the rights discourse as that which is designed to secure temporal salvation for each and every one of us through its increasingly globalised enactment (see Chapters 2 and 4). Certainly, on this morning's evidence, there is something of an insistent evangelical quality to our communal fervour, directed as we are by the 'high priestess' of Christmas, Mrs J. who 'just about' holds 'it' together that morning.

### **Speaking Back: the 'Less-Than-Right' Adult?**

In my own teaching experience – and this seems to be the case similarly at Top Hill Primary – school assembly is, very often, followed swiftly by 'playtime', acknowledging a need for a certain collective 'letting off of steam'. For those adults fortunate enough not to be on 'playground duty' this can mean a swift escape to the staffroom. At Top Hill Primary, many of the playground duties are born by teaching assistants who then take their break once classes reconvene, although each 'duty' session requires the presence, too, of at least one qualified teacher. I spend a lot of time on the playground as a researcher. It is rich ethnographic territory and I get to know many of the assistants, particularly in this way, as we chat to each other and the children, many of whom are relaxed and confident in their 'outdoor' relationships with adults (some of the teaching assistants might claim, *'too confident'*). This

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<sup>55</sup> As set out on the website of the 'Campaign for Real Education', <http://www.cre.org.uk/docs/re.html> accessed November 2013

means that by the time I come to interview many of assistants – towards the end of my eight months in school – the interviews often replicate the style, and some of the content, of early conversations we have had, many of which have taken place outside on damp, wintry days; gloved hands wrapped around steaming beakers of tea; where camaraderie in ‘adversity’ is always strong.

In Chapter 4, we see some of the contradictory ways in which a ‘doxa’ of rights discourses is played out both spatially and temporally. Some of my interviews with teaching assistants demonstrate the complexity of the demands placed on the Rights Respecting Adult Subject. More than this, however, they reveal ways in which the particular status and positioning of the assistant can enable and open up the possibility of their agency in ‘speaking back’ to the discourse in ways that are less possible for other adult school subjects, especially those with responsibilities for leading the instrumental implementation of the policy. So, ironically, those with fewer ‘rights’ can see through the lived realities of the discourses and the price of being ‘responsible.’ I am also ideally placed as the ethnographer who has spent some time in school, joining in with everyday tasks, with an interest in ‘who does what’, to act as a ‘sounding board’. This means that much of what is said to me stems from straightforward questions that I pose – first in conversations – and then in our interviews together, such as: ‘Tell me something about yourself’; ‘tell me something about your role in the school’; or even, ‘tell me something about the Rights Respecting School initiative at Top Hill Primary’.

What these interviews suggest are the perceptions of some interviewees that the performance of the rights discourses do not easily recognise classed and gendered tensions that relate to power relations between adults with different roles and subjectivities within the school.

### **The Devalued Subject?**

Teaching Assistant One (speaking to me as part of an interview):

*‘... lots of these women [teaching assistants] have masses of experience with kids and they do know how to deal with them actually. They really do. And, I suppose, I’m just not sure whether I think it is a good idea to adopt this very professional and detached language and behaviour with them [of the RRS initiative]...I’m really not sure...Is it not good that they [the children] know you are angry? Emotion – that stuff – it somehow has to be missed out. March 2012*

Teaching Assistant Two (speaking to me as part of an interview):

*...Well, it's 'Women's Work'... [She gestures the inverted commas around this phrase using her own hands] – Well, it is all very woolly – who I answer to, and who I talk to about my money and what I should do, when. My fault really, I should ask... When I got the job I asked the senior management member of staff in charge of support staff about how much I got paid and she said, 'I don't know'... You know, it is that sort of thing. I don't know ...it is woolly. I ought to find out. You know, I know I have to do one paid duty but I'm not sure about the others. I just do them. 'Cos what else would I do? I don't want to look into it too much in case I find that I'm not doing it properly.... we don't know if any of us will have a job in 'x' months or if we will have to compete with one another for the same job... and you do get keen parents who will come in and do it for nothing. There are plenty of people round here who would do it for no pay because they have plenty of money. And it is typical women's work, isn't it? We do it for very little. You do feel that you think – gorr – why do I do that for that...? [She laughs...]*

April 2012

The first interview with Teaching Assistant One speaks directly to aspects of the rights and respect agenda, namely, matters relating to aspects of how to deal effectively with children's behaviour and the modelling of 'appropriate' languages and the comportment of the Rights Respecting Subject in so doing. The second interview does not. However, it does convey a sense of the value the interviewee feels is accorded to the role of being a member of the support staff in the school. Both interviewees seem to question – directly and tangentially – central tenets of the rights, respect, equality and diversity discourses.

### **Oiling the Works: the (Necessary) Binary of the 'Other' (Classed) Subject?**

I have a sense – from both interviews with Teaching Assistant One and Two of the sheer hard 'work' required behind the scenes – from them as support acts, as it were, in order that the rights discourse should illuminate and sustain the 'privileged identities' of its subjects (Arnot and Dillabough, 2000) in their 'perfected' forms. As we saw from my earlier ethnographic note of the school assembly, the accomplished performance of the leader became (just about) possible as a consequence of the interplay of power relations between the adults (and children) to generate a tableau of an essentialised ideal of belonging, equality, inclusion and active participation. As Devine explores (2002, p.308), such performances depend on normalising 'Foucauldian' tendencies of discourse (of rights and respect) to delineate 'selves' that are 'normative' against those that are not: the 'empowerment' discourse requires its



relational, disciplinary counterpart in order for it to remain something ‘new’ and ‘liberating’ (and, of course, ‘normal’). This means that the ‘*detached language and behaviour*’ of ‘the professional’ that my first interviewee refers to becomes of value when set against what she herself describes as ‘*emotion...that stuff*’ which must be ‘*missed out*’, residing, as it does apparently, within some support staff (her included, perhaps), representing, as they might do, the ‘non-normative’ of the adult subject who resides ‘outside’ the ‘appropriate’ (rights) discourse. Classed (by virtue of their low status jobs at least in this context) and gendered inscriptions adhere to working class white women, such as these, who are not in charge of reason but nearer the soil and toils of material necessity. We have a sense of this relational, sustaining binary, likewise, from the second interviewee, which is expressed through her concern of not finding out too much about her conditions of service for fear that what she *does* (and perhaps, therefore, *what she is*) might not measure up. It would seem that we have here the inscription of having the wrong disposition and position in an us/them economy of inter-gendered and class relations.

In Bourdieusian terms, what this suggests is the way in which the discourse of rights and respect can be conceptualised as marking out the cultural boundaries of classed subjects, where class is ‘something to be done’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.12) which in the ‘doing’ marks out certain social groupings: that is the classed groupings of some assistants, those who have ‘*masses of experience with kids*’ and who ‘*compete with one another for the same [low-paid] jobs*’, for example. Here, as in Chapter 4, the performativity of the ‘right’ Rights Respecting Subject becomes about being in possession (or not) of symbolic capital, which Lawler ( p.54, quoting Swartz, 1997, p.43, in McLaughlin et al. 2011) describes as – ‘denied capital which conceals ‘the ‘interested’ relations to which it is related’ by giving legitimation to particular embodied ways of doing and being. This means that the RRS initiative could be seen as demonstrating the ‘right manners’ which Lawler again (ibid, p.55) suggests can be ‘broadly defined as systems of codified behaviours’ which are deeply embedded in the learned ‘habitus’ of the individual who has socio-cultural histories, where ‘the ability to carefully improvise the correct form of behaviour may take on a heightened significance’ (Lawler, ibid). This opens up the question of whether the ‘*professional*’ ways of saying and doing the RRS discourse to which the first interviewee refers are indeed little more than legitimatisations of the ‘well-mannered’ middle class subject who holds her emotions in check, who does not raise her voice, and who does not, for example, fling her arms around the miserable child to give her a comforting hug (thereby contravening the ‘*Staying Safe*’ protocols of ‘appropriate touching’ of the RRS).

## Women Doing Women's Work

The issue of blaming oneself (*'my fault really'* and *'I ought to find out'* says Teaching Assistant Two to me) cropped up time and again in more informal conversations with support staff in our conversations on 'playground duty'. The women often reported the way in which some children would speak rudely to them (*'not so much displaying their rights, rather their sense of entitlement'*, as one parent explained it to me after she had helped out at a School /Parent Association evening disco). This means – the assistants explain to me – that when they follow the coded language system of graduated reprimands and sanctions, as set out in the RRS *'Social Development'* (*'Behaviour'*) policy, with the children, they often feel ineffectual and as though they are the 'wrong sort of adult subject'. This suggests that the RRS initiative requires the constitution of the 'illusion of an abiding gendered [classed] self' (Butler, 1988, p.519) that they feel they just can't somehow quite get right.

Pike (2008, p.282, drawing on Lawler, 2002) suggests that working class women often sense their 'lack' in relation to middle class women, especially in the realm of motherhood roles in which 'middle class women are constantly required to distance and distinguish themselves from the working class in a bid to maintain their subjective status'. The net effect of this seems to be demonstrated by the two interviewees who feel devalued in a realm in which their gendered and experienced knowledge of raising children has no place; and where a stereotype of class and poor disciplining becomes implied, (or even mutually constitutive) invoking various moral, and yet unarticulated, assumptions around deficit parenting (Lawler, 2005).

Here is the liberal, humanist discourse of rights made manifest in the Cartesian dualism of mind and body (Pike, 2010). The low status 'body' is to be the domain of the 'mothering' teaching assistants (albeit under the professional and watchful eye of the teaching staff constituted within the discourse of rights) where tacit assumptions abound in relation to the 'innate female qualities' that need no special training for them to be carried out. More than this, however, contained here is the feeling that even these roles are now to be under threat from middle-class women (*'who do it for nothing' ...'because they have plenty of money'*). Hence we hear Teaching Assistant Two describing her experience of her role as *'woolly'*. More than this, however, we pick up a certain pleading (*'And it is typical women's work, isn't it? We do it for very little...'*) for the recognition of classed and gendered identities of subjects required to enact the everyday of the RRS initiative in particular ways.

### Section 3: How to be Rights Respecting Children and Adults Together

Stressy Spring-time Show.

*You wouldn't believe it – that it's spring. Everyone says that. The weather's atrocious. There's still snow on the ground – you know, the slushy stuff that gets in everywhere. The children haven't been outside for days and it shows. They tell me that ALL the teachers are 'stressy' and the teachers tell me that the children are 'IMPOSSIBLE' (and so are some of the teachers – apparently). But now, everyone is in the hall because there's so much to sort out for the Spring Show. This year it's all going to be so much easier because no one is in charge. That's the great thing about Rights and Respect: you can all share. Except that you can't.*

*James is to be the narrator. He's the prince. It will be his job to ride his wooden hobby horse on and off the stage (seamlessly linking each scene of the show which each of the junior classes has rehearsed). James has a wonderful cloak and crown and he also has Special Needs. He's doing a great job. He's remembered his lines and he's coming on and going off the stage at the right moments and his teacher is really, really pleased with him. Thumbs Up to James. And then his crown falls down over his face and it's funny. It's really funny. And Everyone laughs and some children point. James lifts his crown and looks at Everyone laughing and pointing at him, and he laughs at himself and at Everyone laughing at him: he's Mister Funny Man now. James laughs more, and slaps his sides and looks around. It's such a Good Show. James is a really funny boy. The hall is full of laughing children being IMPOSSIBLE. Mrs D. tries to manage James ('Calm down, James, now!', she commands). James lies with his face on the floor. (James' teacher has had to leave the hall because she is so stressed). But she comes back. She's cross: doesn't Mrs D. know the first thing about managing a child such as James with Special Needs? You don't SHOUT at him – she says, hissing through clenched teeth. It's time for us all to calm down now. Mrs. J puts on some soothing Vivaldi and we troop out of the hall, but not before Joel has stuck out his foot so that Grace trips and smashes her face on the low wooden bench by the door. Mrs. J EXPLODES. We fall silent. And we slink back to our classrooms. There won't be many Charter Marks for anyone today. Rebecca's notes, March 2012*

### The Ordinary Imbued with the Extraordinary

Why have I drawn upon this particular ethnographic note as a way in to exploring the 'inter' and 'intra' relationships and connections of the children and adults, and, more particularly, the co-constitution of 'adulthoods' and 'childhoods'? I am all too conscious that my construction of the first two sections of this chapter – namely, 'How To Be A Child' and 'How To Be An Adult' has relied substantially on the setting up of two, seemingly, 'separate' and fixed categories. After all, childhood is about 'generational relationships' (Alanen and Mayall, 2001) and 'children develop largely through their relationships with adults' (Woodhead, in Kehily, ed., 2009, p.24). Clearly, within the institution, the moment-by-moment co-constitution of 'adult' and 'child' is worthy of attention, especially within a Rights Respecting School, the 'remit' of which is to challenge, with a view to subverting to a degree, the assumptions of power and identity categories 'traditionally' accorded to each.

On one level, I am drawn to the 'ordinariness' of the event of the play rehearsal: yet another coming together of the school as an 'assembly', replete – as it is so often – with the everyday tensions of human interactions. And on this 'ordinary' occasion there are particular stresses: the inclement weather and its effects; the phase of the school year (my memories of those 'post-Christmas' months are of coughs and colds and low levels of general tolerance and energy); as well as the sheer volume of 'bodies' in one place (many children are on the stage, while the 'orchestrating' staff are below in the body of the hall). More than this, however, the occasion is overlain with expectation. There is to be a public 'show', which is part of an institutional tradition: many staff talk about how '*we've always done something at this time of year*'. This invests it with an especial 'frisson': so many children and adults buoyed up and excited, with some who really would rather be anywhere but here.

However, I also experience this as 'extraordinary'. I have no participatory role in this. It is easy for me to loiter in the hall and to observe and to stay out of the way such that no-one takes that much notice of Rebecca the Researcher. I feel emotional. I can sense – by sheer dint of 'will' – the effort and energy required to act the 'right' subjectivity on this occasion and to embody a 'doxa' of rights as '*floating in the ether*' (see Chapter 4). And this is a tough call. It requires the adults to not only manage themselves but also to oversee the children in managing themselves appropriately, as they must, likewise, on the evening of the performance. Everyone is to be an '*active citizen*' (see Chapters 2 and 6). All this must be executed with ease and nonchalance, embodying the RRS initiative as '*developing a sense of openness and trust in adult and child relations at all times*', and ensuring that it is about

*'consistency in the relationships of adults and children'*, the head teacher explains to me. This calls for the demonstration of *'commitments'*: to participation; to demonstrating *'the competency'* and *'voice'* of *'all children'* (including that of James) in order to bring about *'more positive attitudes towards diversity in society and the reduction of prejudice'* ( see Chapter 2). In sense, and experience, the sentimental energy of the hope invested in this display of a *'community of human flourishing'* (Fielding and Moss, 2012, p.675): you'd have to have a 'hard heart' not to be transfixed by the 'beauty' of the engineering of this 'safe space'. Fortunately, I have a hanky up my sleeve...

## SHOUTING!

A shout is shocking. This is especially so in Top Hill Primary: it just doesn't happen very often, and it just has towards the end of this rehearsal. It's not supposed to – the co-construction of adulthood and childhood is such that mutual respect is the position of default in the discourses of rights. This means listening to one another with all that this implies for the tone, volume and trajectory of the voice, and the working against a discourse of emotional 'abuse' as a feature of adult-child relations (Jenks, in Kehily, ed, 2009). But I experience this shout – even if somewhat guiltily – as an expression of 'collective relief': the lancing of a dangerously swollen and pustulant boil. It is the communal exhalation of breath. Everyone does it together. We fall silent and we relax and become attentive at one and the same time. In thinking about this, I am reminded of an expression that Ahmed (2012) uses when discussing the implications of 'concealing' institutional 'whiteness' at work in higher education contexts: she suggests that what emerges 'when the rules [in this case of *not* shouting] are relaxed' is that, 'we see the rules' (Ahmed, *ibid*, p.39). At this moment, in Top Hill Primary, we have the re-instatement of disciplinary technologies of schooling with a 'breaking out' of 'teacher' as the 'engineer of behaviour' (Foucault, 1979a, p.294) stepping up to her 'rightful' place to control children's time and space, such that: 'school and schooling is experienced as something 'done' to the children' by adults' (Devine, 2002, p.312). This episode suggests to me something of the anxious and affecting pain of forever 'holding' – that expectation of 'the good mother' (explored in the work of both Klein (1975/1932) and Winnicott (1975/1945). It demands of the (gendered) teacher to always and forever perform her subjectivity such that the intra-relationship of child and adult are suitably 'nurturing'.

### **'These Kids Are Very Powerful'**

But there is possibly more to this 'shout' than its immediate effects of silencing and drilling us as schooled subjects on this particular occasion, as though, transporting us, through time and space to a different sort of educational institution. It does – after all – lance several boils that I sense have been weeping for some time. A theme throughout my time in the school is that of the children's *'attitudes and behaviour'* (identified by MacLure, Jones et al., 2012, in their own ethnographic schools study on 'problem' behaviours, which they identify as 'an enduring and contested issue', p. 448). Indeed, my group interview with some Year 5/6 children suggests not only their attention to the detail of the policy and practice of correcting 'bad' (anti-social) behaviour, but also to the way it is experienced by some of them as neither transparent or 'fair':

Child N: *Yes, and if you do something wrong in the playground it [the Rights and Respect Charter] does tell you...We are all old enough to remember what it was like before. Instead – now – we have this kind of list thing... Before, you'd just have to suffer the consequences...*

Me: *What were they – the consequences?*

Child N: *Detention, minute off 'Golden Time' [an extra period of 'free play' in lesson time normally on a Friday afternoon], a real telling-off, that sort of thing...*

Me: *What happens now, N, if you do something wrong?*

Child N: *You either get a minute off Golden Time or you get a Charter Slip [a commendation that contributes to class commendation which results in a reward for the whole class] and your teacher decides your fate but it's not normally that bad...*

Child Y: *Or you can get a yellow card or a red card. If you've been really bad – red – then you get a letter home about it. But you get a warning before the yellow and red cards. There's six stages – so warning; yellow card; warning and red...but there's lots of different red cards, I think.*

Me: *Does everyone understand it – the system, d'you think?*

Child X: *I don't understand it because it never happens in our class...Well, our teacher just doesn't do it...maybe she doesn't understand it...*

Child P (to X): *Is nobody that bad in your class?*

Child X: *Well, it's because some people have a mental problem...and then they get yellow cards and then when they behave well they always get 'Charter Slips' and*

*then it's just not fair... but they [the children who are deemed to have a 'mental problem'] just misbehave most of the time anyway...*

Child R: *You can also go to 'Time Out' if you get a yellow card or a 'warning'. It's a sort of detention. You go over there to the Sunshine Room and actually it's really nice in there. But before, you used to go to the blue chairs out there in the corridor where you'd sit in a line and then everyone would walk past and see you – lots of laughter from the group.*

Child Z: *It used to be that if you were naughty in the classroom you would be punished in the classroom and then you would have to go out and see the head teacher to explain your bad ways. But like it's all a bit like now some bad children do stuff that they don't care about 'cos no-one really does that much which is bad on the good ones really...well, that's what I think.* Taken from Rebecca's group interview with Year 5/6. April 2012

Similar sentiments (to those above) concerning the way in which RRS subjects *should* behave are expressed by a Teaching Assistant who this time uses the sense of personal threat –and humiliation –that she feels through the 'power that some children display when she is 'on duty' in the playground out of sight of the teacher also on duty:

Teaching Assistant: *There is a power thing too. These kids are very powerful. You know you are in the playground with them on your own and there are no teachers and they know how to be abusive and how to hurt and you're not meant to use your own power back. It is very humiliating at times because they end up shouting at you and you are not supposed to shout back...* Interview with Rebecca, April 2012

From both the comments of these children and this teaching assistant, it seems that the children's sense of their own social positioning in relation to adults is 'an active process' which they 'continually evaluate and monitor' in terms of their 'own behaviour (both practically and discursively) in light of the expectations and the evaluations of others' (Devine, 2002, p.307). The use of such terms as 'good'; 'bad'; 'mental problem' is clearly not the 'common language' of the RRS initiative (see Chapters 2 and 4) or its attendant charter' designed to shape both the languages and the behaviours of all those discursively framed within it. And yet such language appears to have an enduring quality. These terms have histories that are not easily relinquished within everyday language usage. It seems that the children, and maybe some adults, reconstitute them within the frame of many of the broadly social constructivist,

individually focused assumptions ‘derived from developmental psychology, of [what constitutes] a ‘normal developmental course’ (Walkerdine, 1988, in MacLure, Jones et al., 2008, p.4) which go to make up the ‘Social Development Policy’ that seems to form such an integral thread within the discourse of rights and respect. The frustration (and humiliation) expressed by the teaching assistant to me seems bound up within an inherent contradiction in the RRS initiative: she feels threatened by the empowerment discourse of rights and respect which constitutes the children as to be taken seriously within the ‘here and now’ as agentic, self-determining bodies within their own right; and yet, the framework of the ‘Social Development Policy’ she is required to enact, constitutes the children developmentally, as always in the process of being formed. Selfishly, I can’t help feeling relieved that I haven’t been called upon to traverse such tricky terrain. It’s certainly easier to write about it than ‘do’ it, especially when the doing of it is, by and large, undertaken by classed and gendered subjects who feel insecure about the remit of their job; their remuneration and the future of both. It could be said that they are in a perilous position having lost all sanctions and claims of being taken seriously once authoritarian logics have gone away.

### **Jeopardy**

So James is ‘the lead’ in this year’s show. This is the beautiful safe space in the ‘horrible’ where he can feel confident enough to laugh at himself and his whole self is not risked. And yet, on his little wooden hobby horse, he must move along a tightrope. He is required – at one and the same time – to both ‘stick out’ and ‘blend in’. This is not a comfortable or straightforward position for anyone. Ahmed suggests that ‘comfort’ is about a ‘sinking feeling’... ‘bodies that *‘can sink into spaces that extend their shape’* (Ahmed, 2012, p.40 – original italics). James may ‘sink in’ to this rehearsal for a time but this cannot last. He is confused by those around him: the sounds; the instructions; the laughter; the raised voices. James’ version of ‘sinking in’ is to sink to the floor face down (blending in only to stick out all the more). James has been invited to be different. The difference that he’s been asked to display is that of ‘lead’ but what we all see – of course – is the fact that James *is* just ‘different’. But this shouldn’t feel so difficult to execute – surely – for the very point of the liberal discourse of rights and respect is to give ‘voice’ to those who can all too easily be excluded, ‘acknowledging ‘difference’ as the norm, rather than the aberration’ (Devine, 2002, p.304).

But it is difficult. And for those adults – all of whom must embody the relaxed ease of the power sharing of ‘redistributive leadership’ required of them by the rights and respect discourse – they look to me as though they feel anything but ‘comfort’. There is jeopardy in



this enterprise. They wear their bodies taut with tension: when might the balloon go up? How aware is James that it is his body that causes the discomfort that cannot be named and must not be 'recognised'? Does he know that it is on his shoulders that falls the job of 'work[ing] hard to make others comfortable' (Ahmed, *ibid*, p.41)? After all, his position of 'lead stranger' in this enterprise seems to mean that the very act of his inclusion hails it as a 'form of exclusion' (Ahmed, *ibid*, p.43). So, within the discourses of the RRS initiative, it is 'the labelling of difference [that] always carries with it the risk of stigma and reification despite [the] democratising ideologies [of rights and respect and equality and diversity]' (Rapp and Ginsburg, p.169, in McLaughlin et al., ed, 2011).

### **Laughter and Silence**

Before the shouting we have laughter. It is exhilarating. It's infectious. Those adults not already in the hall hear it and open the doors and join in without knowing why, or what it is that we all share. It serves to massage the very subjectivities of those of us in that very public arena. Laughter works on our subjection and enters our psychic life (Davies, 2006, p.426). It moulds and constitutes us momentarily in its warm and cathartic, equalising milk of human kindness. We could say, in Butlerian terms that we are, once more, caught within a paradoxical and simultaneous subjection of mastery and submission which I explore earlier in the chapter in the first section, 'How To Be A Child (Davies, *ibid*). In 'giving up' to this 'externally imposed dominant order' of laughter, Butler suggests that we are not 'marked by a loss of control' but 'paradoxically marked by mastery itself' (Butler, 1995, pp.45-46), that is, until, perhaps, inflecting our collective guffaws, mastery is achieved, and we, once more become subjected, caught reiteratively within the 'lived simultaneity of submission as mastery, and mastery as submission' (Butler, *ibid*).

So, we all do it, this laughing thing, cocooned and formed as we are, as subjects dependent upon powers external to ourselves (Davies, *ibid*) and yet, also, sustained by the 'interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations' (Foucault, 1981, p.94 in Leask, 2012, p.63) which draws upon our 'bodies, movements, desires and forces' (Leask, *ibid*). Expressed in Foucauldian terms, we could suggest that this very act of communal laughter also conceals: for none of us knows what 'lies behind' the general mayhem and hullabaloo that we apparently share, every man, woman and child: whether it be the laughter of generosity, a giving from one unto another; or/and a sincere act of communal relief; or rather, an act of self-preservation, saving us from our embarrassment of ourselves; or individual, 'nasty' acts of ridicule and poison ('Ha! Ha! Look at him!'); or parody; or just sheer terror and a sense of the 'danger' of the scene

within which we are all enmeshed. There's no getting out of it. It binds us in, this micro-flow of power, twisting and turning, back and forth, between and through our collective bodies, taking account of a 'dynamics of power and control', encompassing and constituting the adult-child and child-adult relationships in the room at that moment (Devine, 2002, p.305).

In both Butlerian and Foucauldian terms, therefore, our subjection means that we do not have an existence that is a priori to the acts that form us in the assembly hall. Nonetheless importantly, we *do* have a form of agency. It is within these very acts of constitution, that lie the possibilities of resistance as an 'irreducible opposite' [to power] (Foucault, 1981, pp.95–96, in Leask, p.65). Foucault, especially in his later works, emphasises that this means that 'there is no relationship of power without the means to escape or possible flight' (Foucault, 2001, p.346, in Leask, 2012, p.63). Understood in these terms, at its best, *Stressy Spring-time Show* represents a fleeting moment in discourse of the possibilities for the on-going re-configuration of the inter and intra-relationships of subjects within Top Hill Primary. Here we have an imagining of the institution of the school as a place in which, in the name of rights, political markers of 'how to go' and 'who to be' in the world, are set down.

## Conclusion

This chapter has considered what it might mean to be a Rights Respecting Subject in Top Hill Primary. I have divided this into three sections: How To Be A Child; How To Be An Adult; and How To Be Children And Adults Together, which I have confessed does create some artificiality through its very 'boundary drawing'. Using my own ethnographic field notes as a starting point, I have traced subjects around the school, primarily locating both them – and me – within public spaces of 'hyper' action where many things become possible, reflexively positioning myself to take part (on occasions) but primarily to observe. I have focused upon the way in which it becomes possible to imagine the 'authentic' Rights Respecting Subject in these micro-contexts, drawing in, where appropriate the voices of other school subjects, many of whom, themselves, become reflective and reflexive subjects of the dominant discourse of rights and respect and equality and diversity. As in Chapter 4, I consider the competing discourses that constantly work on us, to mould and shape our very being within the school during my time there. In particular, I have drawn on the work of both Foucault and Butler, to explore the limits of the possibilities of an empowering, participative, self-making Rights Respecting Subject. Nonetheless, I have also explored the way in which both theorists stress 'the subject who acts' and who is involved in 'strategic games between liberties' (Foucault, 2000, p.299, in Leask, *ibid*, p.63) so that – what we have rather is – 'the constituted character of the subject

[who] is the very precondition of its agency' (Butler, 1995, p.46 in Benhabib, Butler et al.), while, still, constituting the subject, even so, as 'a kind of fabrication' (Leask, 2012, p.64).

## Chapter 6: The Doing and Being of 'Rights Respecting Citizenship' at Top Hill Primary

*We have got onto the slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk, so we need friction. Back to the rough ground. Wittgenstein, L. (1958, p. 46e, in Mouffe, 2000, pp.13-14)*

### Introduction

This chapter considers the interplay of the dominant discourses of rights with conceptualisations of 'citizenship' and 'the citizen subject' at Top Hill Primary. I draw on my own interview and ethnographic data to problematise the ways in which 'citizenship' and 'the citizen subject' are asserted, practised and performed by subjects – focusing my gaze on some children in particular. In so doing, I tease apart threads (albeit tangled) – interconnections; contradictions, tensions and ruptures – in order that I might ask might questions of the multifarious evocations of both: the 'doing' of 'citizenship'; and, the 'being' and the 'becoming' of the citizen subject. As in chapters 4 and 5, I think with theory (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012) in order that I might work with, and between, the limits (and limitations of) my 'data', reading them, as ever as – 'partial, incomplete and always in a process of re-telling and re-membling'. I recognise that I must question what I ask of my 'data' and what I privilege in my listening to, and in my 'speaking back' to them (Jackson and Mazzei, *ibid*, ix). In this way, I come to link my questions of 'citizenship' and 'the 'citizen subject' to wider discourses, including those of 'politics' and 'the political', engaging, also, with what it might be possible 'to conceive as 'political' in relation to children' (Philo and Smith, 2013, p.141). I draw on Foucault and Butler to help me think through the way in which the practices of citizenship and the generation of the citizen subject may only ever reproduce dominant identities. I acknowledge that within my research school, 'efforts to shape citizenship are rarely presented as being constraints on agency'...'more typically [they are] presented as modes of empowerment' (Staeheli, Atttoh and Mitchell, 2013, p.103).

I also mobilise theorisations of 'acts of citizenship' (Isin, in Isin and Neilson, eds., 2008). I do this to move beyond 'practices', 'conduct', 'discipline', 'rule', and 'governance' (Isin, *ibid*) and to problematise states of, and movements between, modes of 'active' and 'activist' citizenship (Staeheli, Atttoh et al, 2013). I recognise these categories as somewhat ambiguous and

artificial but, nonetheless, productive for me in considering the implications of ‘agency, the performance of politics, and the way that different actors interpret citizenship...’ (Staeheli, Attoh, et al., *ibid*, p. 95). More than this, I draw on the philosophical work of Rancière, especially, in order to think through the limitations of and possibilities for dissensus in the generation of the ‘citizenship subject’ at Top Hill Primary. What is it about the way in which politics manifests itself here that:

*decomposes and recomposes the relationships between the ways of doing, of being and of saying that define the perceptible organisation of the community[?]*

(Rancière, 1995a, p.40, in Bingham and Biesta, 2010, p.33)

I divide this chapter into three sections: in the first I interrogate data from interviews conducted with adult subjects within the school community, teasing out discourses embedded within their assertions of ‘citizenship’ and ‘the citizen subject’. In the second, I ‘follow’ my own ethnographic data into a ‘formal’ space of schooling citizenship (Gordon, Holland et al., 2000). This is a Student Council meeting to which I have been invited. I reflexively engage with these ‘data’ so that I ‘open up’ some gaps between what has been *asserted* in the interview data and what is *performed* in this particular space. Lastly, I move beyond this ‘formal’ into the ‘semi-official’ site of a focus group interview with Year 5/6 children (referenced previously in Chapter 4). I identify this as a site of possible citizenship *subjectification*, qualitatively different to that of the Student Council. This resonates with me so that I am enabled to posit some tentative conclusions about the inter-relationships of the RRS initiative and ‘citizenship’ and ‘citizen subject’ formation at Top Hill Primary.

## **Section 1: The Hailing of Citizenship and the Citizen Subject**

In the four vignettes of interview ‘data’ I have selected below, the RRS initiative is referenced readily and enthusiastically and is linked to ‘citizenship’. It is identified frequently as a practice of either ‘*good citizenship*’ or even ‘*active citizenship*’. I have a sense of my respondents drawing from a ‘script’ that is at once familiar to them but with which they also feel comfortable. This feeling certainly accords with Biesta’s view that knowledge claims of ‘citizenship’ and ‘the citizenship subject’ are ‘relatively uncontested’ within ‘research’, ‘policy’ and ‘practice’ (Biesta, 2011, p.142). I’m careful not use the terms of ‘*good citizenship*’ or ‘*active citizenship*’ myself. In fact, I choose not to name either ‘citizenship’ or ‘the citizen’, not wishing to foreclose what might be said by my research participants. Rather, my intention is to be invitational: each of the comments below is made to me, therefore, in response to me

positing something along the lines of: *'Tell me something about the Rights Respecting Schools initiative'* or *'Tell me what it [the RRS] means to you...'* or *'Tell me what it [the RRS] might be about at Top Hill Primary...'*

Interview Vignettes:

Equality Co-ordinator: *'I think that within the school community it can happen quite easily... but I want the kids to be able to take this stuff with them when they leave and move on so that they are people who play a role in active citizenship...knowing how to behave appropriately in situations and playing their part...challenging prejudice – that sort of thing'*

Teacher: *"'bout developing 'active citizenship' and promoting 'Children's Voice' which is an investment in a better, brighter future – I think anyway...I mean there's a lot we do to help this – like the Student Council and all the peer mentoring in the playground...it all helps, I think..."*

A.N. Other Senior Leader: *'The RRS award can influence behaviours 'beyond the school gate' (quotation marks indicated by the waving of two fingers by the respondent) – and should be the way in which those growing into adulthood learn about having responsibilities to society – what you give is what you get – you know, all the stuff about growing into a respectable citizen...I mean there is all the human rights legislations anyway...'*

Sports Co-ordinator: *'The children do exemplify a strong sense of values when they play sport against other schools – [they] supported all the other schools in the tournament they just played...; 'they do come across like that [politely] when they are down there [meaning when they are playing sport against other schools]. They like it that people notice that they are – well – good citizens and they know how you should treat people, whether winning or losing...'*

Interviews with Rebecca between February and April 2012

What different ideas of 'citizenship' and 'the citizen subject' are contained within these expressions of avowal to me? I recall my own sense of the zealotry of the evangelist in the enthusiastic and earnest evocations and testaments of these research participants in their enthusiastic responses. There is conviction in these assertions. To what extent do these

‘convictions’ concur with modern, liberal, humanist ideas of ‘good citizenship’ and ‘active citizenship’ which I explore in Chapter 2? What do the expressions of ‘vision’ (and indeed, ‘desire’ – see Chapter 4) imagine of ‘citizenship’ – both in the ways it might be constituted as practice, and, indeed, of the ways in which subjects, in turn, might be constituted by it as a way of ‘being’ and ‘doing’?

### **Asserting ‘Citizenship’ and the ‘Citizen Subject’: A Project of ‘Socialisation’?**

Certainly the comments of the research subjects seem to suggest that it is possible to know the ‘good citizen’ in a way that presumes that one of the tasks of the RRS initiative may indeed be ‘the production of the good citizen’ (Biesta, 2011, p.141) as part of an initiation into ‘citizenship’ as part of a rationalist discourse (*‘it can happen quite easily’*). And it is one that is to be learned in school by the children (*‘We are privileged to be part of shaping young people’* says the head teacher); rather than merely ‘inherited’ through the establishment of ‘supportive and relatively enduring practices and institutions’ (Allman and Beatty, 2004 in Isin, 2008, p.17). Such learning is to be achieved within a context of the legal (*‘I mean there is all the human rights legislations anyway’*); the universal (*‘should be the way in which those growing into adulthood learn about having responsibilities to society’*); and the normative (*‘good citizens’, ‘active citizens’*) of the liberal, humanist, enlightenment project, constructed upon the knowledge presupposition of democratic politics as that which can only ever be executed through order and stability (Biesta, 2011).

In these interviews, a rationalist, learner discourse is asserted in a variety of ways such that it presumes the ‘participation’ of ‘the good citizen’ as a given. I sense something of an instrumentalism in this discourse, especially when one participant suggests: *‘I think that within the school community it can happen quite easily’*. I feel as though I am reading the logic of the discourse as one that assumes the inclusion of ‘all’ as unproblematic; something that too easily collapses ‘difference’. I find myself thinking (*‘which children are we talking about here?’ ‘Who are these children who all ‘exemplify a strong sense of values when they play sport against other schools’?*) I read the inclusive assertion as one that presumes the ‘moulding’ of the nebulous child citizen subject into some form of pre-existing identity, one that is incontestable and that does not demand the challenging ‘of structures and relationships’ (Staeheli, Attouh and Mitchell, 2013, p. 93). As we see in Chapter 5, Butler’s theorisations of performativity pose a challenge to this conception of the unnamed, always-included and assumed *a priori* subject of the ‘good citizen’ discourse. Such theorisations require us to ask questions of the processes by which the ‘stable subject’ (Butler, 1995, p.36 in Butler, Behabib et al.) of ‘good citizenship’ is

formed – processes that appear taken-for-granted in these iterations of the *good citizen*'. I will return to this idea in the second section of this chapter.

Similarly, drawing on Foucault (1991, in Burchell, Gordon et al.) we could say that the child citizen subject is to learn to participate in the practice of '*good*' citizenship as part of prefigured institutional practice, through the 'right' sort of behaviours (in playing sport against other schools for example) and is presumed to establish herself as a self-regulating and self-surveilling 'responsible' subject. In this way, she is to internalise the goals and norms of the school, as part of the state apparatus so that her very construction of herself as a '*good citizen*' becomes a process of Foucauldian governmentality. Within her individualised identity (as one of '*the kids*' in the example of the Equality Co-ordinator; or one of those '*growing into adulthood*' (in the A.N. Other senior manager's vignette) she must begin to learn to identify with, and then internalise, the demands of this '*good citizen*' (see Biesta, 2013, p.8).

Equally, we are made aware of the '*active citizen*' who – we are told – will progress in exemplary ways in order to bring about '*a better and brighter future*'. This is the child citizen subject who will 'Become' ('*growing into adulthood*') – through appropriate tuition and guidance ('*there's a lot we can do to help this*') – in ways consistent with the rationalist discourse that emerges in these vignettes. However, Staeheli, Atttoh and Mitchell (2013, p.90) suggest that liberal theory of the '*active citizen*' depends upon a knowledge construction of children as incapable of attaining autonomy and 'of participating in their own governance due to a moral compass and rationality that are not fully developed' without the guidance of a more knowing 'other'. Viewed in this way, therefore, we are required to assume that the child citizen subject of these extracts can only be envisaged as *appropriately* '*active*' in a way that accords with both their chronology and assumed levels of development and competency. Nonetheless, we know also that much of the rhetoric of the RRS initiative (see Chapter 2) readily depends upon a different knowledge construction of children as unproblematically '*good*' and '*active*'. This invites them to assert '*voice*' and to demonstrate '*empowerment*' and '*participation*' within the institutional context of the school, drawing on a tradition of critical transformatory education 'conceived as that of emancipating students from oppressive practices and structures in the name of social justice and freedom' (Biesta, p.26, in Bingham and Biesta, 2010).

In Foucauldian terms, we could say that the paradoxical 'truth' of the '*active citizen*', who will both grow through adult tuition *and* who will also be free from oppressive interferences, relies upon an assumed separation of knowledge and power. Foucault suggests that there is no



escaping power in discourse: we should abandon ‘the whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can only exist where power relations are suspended’ (Foucault, 1975, p.27 in Biesta, 2013, p. 11). For Foucault this requires the recognition that we are all always operating within power/knowledge configurations that place limitations on our human actions. However, in these interview extracts ‘*active citizenship*’ is asserted as an unproblematic norm and here there is a paradox. On the one hand, there is an assumed power binary of inequality, in which the child citizen is to be reliant upon the adult for guidance for the demonstration of *how* to be both ‘good’ and ‘active’. And, on the other, the ‘*active citizen*’ is also asserted as a free agent (*‘...so that they are people who play a role in active citizenship...knowing how to behave appropriately in situations and playing their part...challenging prejudice – that sort of thing’*) unconstrained by any dependency.

It is also possible to identify a discourse of citizenship and the citizen subject as one of individualised moral ‘duty’. This emerges especially in the interview excerpt of A.N. Other senior manager who asserts that: [the RRS]...*should be the way in which those growing into adulthood learn about having responsibilities to society...all the stuff about growing into a respectable citizen*. Here we seem to have the conflation of two subtly different binaries – that of ‘Rights’ and ‘Respect’ and of ‘Rights’ and ‘Responsibilities’: the one to do with a moral discourse of ‘respect’ and the other to do with ‘responsibility’ in terms of duty. They are referenced here at one and the same time as though the terms are either interchangeable (irreducible?) one with the other, or have a ‘natural’ and automatic synergy which requires no further deconstruction. I realise that I have read, and re-read, this snippet of data on many occasions and that it has taken my supervisor to point out this elision to me. I am shocked by my own carelessness but also by the slipperiness of language. How many times – I ask myself – may I have missed this ‘collapse’ of one term into the other while in my research school, and indeed, as I have referenced them, as though interchangeable, throughout the thesis text? In Chapter 2, I explore how the universalist, status-based nature of the UNCRC itself ‘makes no mention of the responsibilities (or, indeed, ‘respect’) of children’, when it accords a full set of ‘independent’ human rights to children so that ‘rights within education are to be indivisible from other human rights accorded to other groups of citizens’. And yet, here, the discourse of ‘rights’ with /either both responsibility and/or respect has been entirely normalised.

Crucially, it appears, then, that the assertions of these interviewees are suggestive of ‘citizenship’ and the formation of ‘the citizen subject’ as those which are concerned with the way in which ‘newcomers can [always] be inserted into an existing political order’ (Biesta,

2011, p.142): an order that is already honed, connected to an ongoing process of socialisation and identity formation. This requires the requisitioning of particular knowledge claims which assume a humanist detachment and separation of knowledge/power beyond discourse. This has two competing effects that tug in different directions. The first constructs citizenship as a programme of learning (from one to another?) which is always new (so that the child subjects are wholly dependent upon their adult tutors responsible for *'The RRS award [which] can influence behaviours'*). The second positions the everyday usages of language – such as that of the normalising binary of 'rights' and 'respect'/'responsibility' – in ways that suggest that they are not new. Rather, they are deeply embedded instead in what Isin (2008, p.15) describes as 'status and habitus (ways of thought and conduct that are internalised over a relatively long period of time)'. In this way, the assertions of the knowledge claims of the being and doing of 'citizenship' and a 'citizen subject' within the school institution mirrors closely the paradoxes replete in the *'doing of doxa'* that we meet in Chapter 4.

### **The Citizen Subject as 'Yet-To-Be' Consensus**

In all these interviews, 'citizenship' as socialisation is connected with child rather than adult subjects. Indeed, my interviewees seem to attest to 'citizenship' as a 'project' about and for children. They assume constructions of the child subject as an 'adult-in-the-making' (it's about being *'privileged to be part of shaping young people... about sending messages into a future we won't see'* and child subjects as *'growing into adulthood'*). These are 'young people' who will in different 'Yet-To-Be' configurations enact their roles as *'good'* and *'active'* citizens. This suggests the initiation of the 'Yet-To-Be' into the 'Already-Formed': adult subjects as beyond and outside this process of citizenship subjection. And yet this formulation of the citizen subject does not sit easily with the RRS discourse. In Chapter 5, we meet the Ubiquitous Rights Respecting Subject – albeit problematically. Here, in the articulations of some research subjects at least, as well as through some practices and performances in the school, we are made aware that redistributive power relations (between adult and child) are *assumed* not only possible, but also desirable, as integral dynamics of the RRS initiative. We see this – particularly, for example – in the performance of Mrs J. as the 'assembly leader' and 'Rights Respecting Subject' as she takes on the difficult role of the apparently facilitative subject in front of a hall full of adults and children. The dominant discourses of rights are constructed through policy and practice as though for everyone in the school community in the here and now. From what these interview respondents say to me here, 'citizenship', on the other hand, is about the children taking their place in some imagined future.

Such 'Yet-To-Bes' can be read in Rancièrian terms. They rely on their 'slotting in' to the pre-configured '*good citizen*' and '*active citizen*' identities I discuss above. Particularly, however, within Rancièrian terms, the making intelligible and audible of '*children's voice*' in this knowledge construction of citizenship, depends upon what he refers to as the role of the 'Master Explicator' (Rancière, p. 2-3, in Bingham and Biesta, 2010). The purpose of this 'Master Explicator' is to lead, demonstrate and explain to the child citizen subject what it means to have and to do '*voice*' in such a way that full vocalisation of it will only ever take place in some future orientation (*'I want the kids to be able to take this stuff with them when they leave and move on'*). In this way the identity of 'Yet-To-Be Citizen' is 'fixed' as one who is reliant upon on the emancipatory 'gifts' of the more knowing adult subject (Bingham and Biesta, 2010). In this theoretical construction of the 'socialisation conception' of citizenship, then, the identity of the 'Yet-To-Be Citizen' will not be productive of *being* and *becoming* in ways that are qualitatively 'different' to anything in the existing order. And, it means, therefore, that 'participation' and 'voice' can be on no other terms than those of the socialised, and socialising, adult Master Explicator.

Following the logic of this construction, the fixed and essentialised identity of the 'Yet-To-Be-Citizen' can only ever function as a dimension of Rancièrian 'consensus'. As we see in Chapter 2, consensus is neither democratic nor 'political' (as in establishing something new that was not there previously). Rather, it is, instead, merely an order of the 'visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not' (Rancière, 1999, p.29). In this regard, Pelletier (2009, p.69) suggests that Rancière's theorisation of the political subject has much in common with that of Butler's. Butler explains this herself by suggesting that fixing' the 'stable subject' can have the effect of foreclosing 'the domain of the political' (p.36, in Benhabib, Bulter et al., 1995). For her, therefore, the importance of the deconstructive post-structural lens is that it refuses to assume 'the notion of the subject from the start' (ibid), rather, it demands questions about the process of the construction of the subject and the political meanings and consequences of this (ibid) in ways that I explored in Chapter 5.

To conclude this section, we could say that the 'domain' of the '*good*' or '*active*' citizen – both spatially and temporally – is one that is spoken of in these interview vignettes as though it has *already* been designated. As Devine (2002) would suggest these are representations of children as citizens as passive; and upon whom the rights of citizenship are to be bestowed rather than 'struggled over' (Devine, 2002, p.304). This domain has been '*shaped*' and

assigned ‘*core beliefs*’, ‘*core values*’ and ways of being ‘*responsible*’ and ‘*respectable*’. It is articulated as concerned with ‘autonomous subjects of action and responsibility’ (Biesta, 2013, p.6). In universalist terms of progressive, humanist rights, these formulations of prefigured ‘identification’ (which Howe and Covell, 2007, for example, conceives as pertaining to *every* child regardless of their different socio-cultural circumstances, ethnicity, gender or class) could be regarded as being fundamental to the psychological ‘health’ of all children. Equally they could be conceptualised as an insurance against them becoming trapped within the limited scope of their own communities in ways that enable them to become the outward looking ‘*active citizen*’ announced by these interviewees (2007). Certainly, constructed as an ongoing project of socialisation, these formulations of citizenship are about induction. However, in Rancièrian terms, this construction of citizenship and the subject is merely the consensual, reductive ‘closed gap’ that stultifies the emergence of the citizen. It cannot be ‘political’ by dint of not being sufficiently ‘open’ for democratic contestation. In other words it is replete with bodies [adult subjects, in this case] that define ‘the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being and ways of saying’ in which these [other] ‘bodies [the child citizen subjects in this case] are assigned by name to a particular place and task’ (Rancière, 1999, p.29 in Biesta, 2010, p.34).

In the following section, we encounter some of the child citizen subjects as they participate in the doing of a Student Council Meeting – alluded to by one of the interviewees as one of the ways in which the school promotes ‘*active citizenship*’. We meet councillors one lunch time in early spring 2012. The head teacher holds the role of chair person. On this particular occasion he, with the apparent consent of the council members (two children, elected by class mates, and drawn from every class in the school above the age of six) has invited me to attend as an observer. What more can we learn of the citizen subject in this enactment? Who is s/he? And, indeed, does it become possible to conceive of the council meeting as anything other than the practices of people conducting themselves in ways that ‘routinise certain habits in their bodies, develop[ing] certain behaviours and follow[ing] certain rules (Isin, 2008, p.20)? Can we *ever* say that the student council meeting is more than the mere *practice* of socialisation or citizenship as consensus? If so, how might this be?

## **Section 2: Getting On: Just Practising Citizenship As Consensus?**

### **The Student Council Meeting**

*The room has an air of focused attention. I’m a little bit late and I feel embarrassed that the meeting has already begun. I apologise quietly and draw up*

a chair behind the group of councillors who are all seated around a large table in the centre of the rather cramped room. The Chair sits at one end. The meeting is underway and one young boy (possibly 6 or 7 years of age?) is talking seriously and comprehensively about what the 'Peer Mentors' do in the Infant Playground to help those children who are unhappy or who don't seem to be able to play with anyone else. He is expansive with his ideas about what else they might do to help ('make up more games') and what other toys they would like to have in the playground (more things to climb on')...He does draw breath at one point and turns to the child sitting next to him. He asks if she'd like to add anything... (She's tiny – again only 6 or 7 years of age). She shrugs and shakes her head by way of response and carries on with the sandwich she's eating from her lunchbox. He picks up from where he left off...I realise that I'm amazed by the courtesy: no-one interrupts...The small lad is amazingly articulate but he is Banging On and time is running out, surely? What if someone else has anything to add? This is an extraordinarily attentive (respectful?) environment...The head teacher looks at the speaker with rapt concentration. He takes this business seriously. Everyone seems to take this business seriously... (Do they?)...Some older children don't exactly look bored...but they don't look, either, as though they are having a party. But they do 'carry' themselves well: they wear the expressions and comportments of Old Sages in council meetings from times immemorial...Time goes on...I'm a bit bored actually: what an admission...I could have brought a sandwich, perhaps...bother...)

Will there be a response when asked by the Chair for 'Any Other Business'...Yes: an older boy (Year 5/6?) half raises his hand solemnly and assuredly, so that the Chair defers to him – there's the important issue of play equipment for 'Golden Time' on Friday afternoons, he explains, as 'there's not really enough to do...'. He explains that several children have asked him to raise this as an issue because, in particular, they'd like more Lego: some classes seem to have a lot and others very little. Several other older girls have suggestions: could they collect everything together and then divide it up between the classes? Could they store it all together so that everyone knows what's available? Could they have a 'Fun Day' to raise money for more equipment? I'm struck by how well all the councillors, 'take turns', indicating through the Chair that they wish to speak...I realise that the head teacher is taking note of what is said, and reads back the actions to be taken. He

*reminds the children to report back the business of the meeting to their classes. They nod their assent. The Chair says he'll discuss their 'excellent' ideas with 'her staff' and report back at the next meeting...* Rebecca's notes, Student Council Meeting March 2012

So here in these ethnographic notes we have represented – ostensibly – what Biesta might describe as a 'lifting the veil' practice (Biesta, 2010, p.543), whereby the Chair – in the form of the head teacher – explicates and demonstrates (through his performance) particular ways of becoming a citizen, in order to demonstrate 'something to someone to show him he cannot understand it by himself' (Ranciere, 1991, p.6). The head teacher sits at the table but in such a way that he can see everyone and everyone can see him. The room is small and everyone is required to sit closely together. There's no 'wriggle room'. He embodies close, quiet, intense concentration and attention. When he speaks, he speaks with a calm, quiet, low key, 'trust me' authority. The children appear to mirror his embodied behaviours and disposition. As councillors seated around the table – they wear serious dispositions and take on 'respectful' identities as listeners, interlocutors and turn takers. They have internalised their civic lessons well: the Student Council meets every three weeks, or so, which means that this is probably the fourth meeting of the academic year that they have attended. They have had opportunities enough to rehearse these identities.

In Rancièrian terms, we could equate this performance with the parable of a 'world divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones' (Rancière, 1991, p.6). Such a reading would fundamentally challenge the idea of the 'emancipated' child subjects as presumed within the RRS initiative, for example. We might say that the task of the head teacher in this council meeting is to 'make visible what is hidden from those who are 'the object' of the emancipatory endeavours of the ...educator' (Biesta, 2010, p.26), such that the child subjects perform their roles as councillors in ways that do not, and are not required to, challenge pre-ordained routes to 'active citizen' (as invoked in some of the interviews in the previous section). This student council, therefore, could be described as doing no more than working within the confines of a recognised identity.

Drawing on the work of Foucault, we could survey this scene as part of the 'great carceral continuum' (Foucault, 1979a, p.297) of the disciplined institution of the school (which feels especially intense given the confinement of the small room, the tightness of the space, with the head teacher in close proximity to all his pupils such that his gaze can fall upon every single one of the children at one and the same time so that he himself is no more than an 'engineer

of conduct', (Foucault, 1979a, p.294). Nonetheless, the meeting is conducted in a nonchalant manner which still poses as non-surveillance which could therefore be described as deepening social control. Arnot (2006) has observed in her research, for example, how children's participation in particular types of activities – such as this council meeting (which – after all – only directly involves twenty plus children) become constructed as an appropriate citizenship practice, in ways that other institutional school activities do not. She questions this, noting the rather arbitrary nature of the granting of power in some discursive contexts and not others. For her, this cannot be associated with anything other than a 'weak' sense of civic agency within the psyche of child subjects. Indeed, she goes further to suggest that any movement from child subject to citizen in spaces such as this (with bequeathed 'participatory' rights) might actually sanction, the *loss* of agency, generating a mere illusion of power. In this way, participation in this council meeting with the children apparently mimicking behaviours and embodiments of the heteronormative '*Old Sage*' becomes yet one more Foucauldian mechanism of socialisation and regulation within the 'ethos' of the institution of schooling.

### **Or, Constituting 'Acts' of Citizenship?**

However, perhaps it is worth returning, at this juncture, to a comment of the head teacher which I explore in a slightly different context in Chapter 4. This remark – made in an interview – suggests that as long as the school continues to achieve '*consistently high Standard Assessment scores*' - as it has over the last few years – then this grants it 'permission to pay institutional attention to a 'different'...discourse' (see Chapter 4) so that it can circumnavigate the 'standards focused' gaze of the state, in order to embellish its own model of citizenship through the implementation of its RRS initiative. If we take this Student Council meeting as an example of the head teacher's drive and determination to shape a citizenship agenda as somehow tangentially 'at odds' with the dictates of the state, we might describe it therefore as a facet of a counter hegemonic discourse: as more than mere practice, and as something beyond the speaking 'within a recognised mode of the sensible' (Rancière, 2004, p.547). Instead, we might be able to constitute this meeting rather as 'an act' of a conscious nature that is something beyond routinised behaviours, such that something is achieved that would not be otherwise (Isin, 2008, p.17).

Isin asks, 'what *makes* the citizen' (2009, p.383)? For him citizenship is an act of contestation through which subjects become political. In this, we could take the example of the older boy who responds to the query of 'Any Other Business', for example. Returning to Foucault, if we were to draw on his latter works which focus more on the 'biopolitics of the population'

(1981), we could suggest that we see some resistance: an ongoing creation of the subject 'via this strategic and localised' assertion of agency: 'Yes' says the older boy, 'I have something to say and I would like to speak'. This request enables him to exercise his 'student voice' such that he can make clear that there is something that needs attention for the 'good' of those on whose behalf he seemingly speaks. Not only does he speak, when he could have kept quiet (after all, I am impressed by the length of time that the children have been prepared to sit through this meeting) – but he also draws in the constructive voices of some of the other councillors on the issue of classroom resources for 'Golden Time'.

Could this small action be constituted as illustrative of 'what an intelligence can do when it considers itself equal to any other and considers any other equal to itself (Rancière, 2004, p.544)? In fact, in this context, there seems little to 'contest', but we could imagine, in subsequent meetings that the older boy is required to defend this request against more pressing or competing demands, for example, to ensure that a more equitable and purposeful distribution of play equipment is brought about. Therefore, 'citizenship is posited both as a performative act, by subjects who claim the right to have rights, *and* as an institution constituted through those performances' (Bhambra, 2013, p.1). Could we go as far as to say that that is what is going on here? Is this performative in so far as it calls 'something into being which did not exist before, which was not given, not even as an object of cognition or imagination' (Arendt, 1961, p.151)?

### **From 'Active' to 'Activist' Citizen?**

However, for Staeheli, Attoh and Mitchell (2013), the intention of the engagement of these young people in this student council *may be* little more than a 'best practice' replica of a New Labour model of citizenship education designed to create young citizens 'who know what is expected of them and who are engaged with their communities' (Pyckett, 2007; Staeheli, Attoh and Mitchell, 2013, p. 89). After all, the RRS initiative at Top Hill Primary – although implemented for the most part once the Conservative/Liberal Democrat government had come to power in 2010 – was introduced into the school, and formulated (see Chapter 2) towards the end of the 'heyday' of the New Labour government. Pyckett characterises the New Labour period of its introduction as one which 'heralded a change in political emphasis – from the individualism of the [preceding] Conservative years, to the rise of education as social panacea' (2007, p.304). And it is, perhaps, this idealisation of a rights and respect and equality and diversity discourse as 'social panacea' that we have seen weaving as a thread through the 'ethos-making' and 'subject generation' of chapters 4 and 5.



But, crucially for Staeheli, Attoh et al.,(2013), drawing upon Foucault's ideas of 'the subject as counter practice, [as] a node of crafted defiance' (Leask, 2012, p.66) young people do not merely 'receive and act upon their lessons of citizenship' (ibid). Instead, they compare, adapt and challenge these lessons as they meet other 'experiences of daily life' (Staeheli, Attoh et al., 2013, p.89). This they describe as a 'paradox of efforts' to develop 'responsible citizens' [in situations such as this council meeting]. For what they suggest becomes possible through the performative acts of the child subjects in the council meeting, for example, is the possibility for citizen-subjects-in-the-making to develop skills and capabilities to 'challenge' (ibid) so that they *might* go on to 'disrupt the dominant order' (Staeheli, Attoh and Mitchell, 2013, p. 92) in different temporalities and spaces. In other words the well-mannered performances I have captured in this note may counteract a finding of Whitty and Wisby (2007, p 91) that young people, 'often because they are simply not used to being asked for their views ... can be unsure about their right to have a 'voice' and enact agency'. My reading of the council meeting as I capture it in my ethnographic note is that the 'rapt' attention of the head teacher in this situation means that these young people feel that they are taken seriously as those with the power to act. Crucially then, 'active citizen' ideals expressed in the interview excerpts earlier, could be read as having the potential to develop, and, facilitate the embodiment of 'activist' citizenship subjectivities with 'propensities to more readily challenge the status quo' (Staeheli, Attoh and Mitchell, 2013, p.93). However, Staeheli, Attoh and Mitchell are at pains to express that this formulation of 'active' and 'activist' is neither pre-determined, or inherently, 'emancipatory'. Rather, they suggest that:

*'Conceptualising engagement through acts that are variously limited or empowered does not offer a means to read the political intentions or political implications of an act' (ibid, p.94).*

What this might mean, however, is that even as they are 'trained' to practise 'active citizenship' they may gain the skills and acumen to 'engage as activist citizens' (ibid, p.103) because these citizen subjects fail (refuse?) to be moulded or to conform, necessarily, to what is expected. In other words, what the children exhibit in this meeting through their turn-taking, their addressing of their own agenda, their discussion and their solutions to challenges, is the exercising of 'new cultural formations, new relations and new types of subjectivity' (Leask, 2012, p.68). And as Foucault suggests:

*[We] cannot jump outside the situation, and there is no point where you are free from all power relations. But you can always change it...[t]here is always the possibility of changing...' Foucault, 2000, p.167 in Leask, 2012, p.69*

For Staeheli, Attoh and Mitchell (2013), then, the 'outcome of the development of citizens is therefore indeterminate' (ibid). This reading of the possibilities of the Student Council meeting offers us a rather different reading of the politics of citizenship to that put forward by Rancière.

### **The Gendered Activist Citizen Subject?**

However, before engaging further with Rancière and the possibilities for 'dissensual' acts, I would like to focus further on the subjectivities of those constituted within the Student Council meeting by returning to Butler and a politics of difference in order to further think through: who is she: the child citizen subject of the Student Council? In simple terms, we could say she is a he: it is boys who speak and girls who listen. The seven year old performs – at length – with considerable panache, confidence and acumen; the older boy responds to 'Any Other Business' and solicits the reactions of the girls around him who then posit solutions to the problems that he poses... It is boys who constitute the participatory 'voices' of the *active citizen*' (the young girl enjoying her lunchtime sandwich declines the invitation to speak up with a shake of her head and a tight lipped refusal). Here we have 'power forming the subject' (Butler, 1997, p.2) in such a way that it is masculine identities that prefigure the citizen subjectivities of this space so as to constitute them as foundational.

In a process of subject formation, where mutual acts of recognition mean that 'subjects accord each other the status of the viable subject' (Davies, 2006, p.427), the boys encourage, and are encouraged, to speak up and perform a masculinity with which they identify. This is readily apprehended and taken up by the head teacher. However, I'm amused by the behaviour of the seven year old girl who seems to me to enact her agency on her own terms. Perhaps she has to listen to this charming young lad all too often and perhaps – for her – her silence and enjoyment of her lunch and her refusal to speak when so invited are her way of ensuring the accomplishment of herself as a 'recognisable and thus viable subject' (Davies, ibid). Conversely, the two older girls seem to fall into what Butler herself describes as 'temporal modalities' (Butler, 1997, p.14). Firstly, they conform to a modality of gendered behaviour as demure, passive and polite which gives way to the older boy in raising the issue of the play equipment for Golden Time, which is 'always prior, outside of itself, and operative from the

start' (ibid). Then, in responding as gendered 'fixers-of-problems' and 'do-ers', they come up with constructive suggestions of how to solve the problem of the lack of toys. In this way, they move in to a second modality which is the 'willed effect of the subject [so that] subjection is a subordination that the subject brings on itself' (ibid). However, crucially (and as I explored in Chapter 5) within such subjection lies the possibility for 'resistance and opposition'. But, I have to confess that I fail to pick it up here. Nonetheless, using Butler to theorise the micro-workings of power relations within this Student Council meeting has required me to hold open the space of the council meeting with the possibility that I can imagine (just a little) the 'activist' citizen as constitutive of more than just the gendered, male, normative subject.

### **The 'Child-Body Politic'?**

Thus far, I have problematised the knowledge claims of citizenship and the citizen subject by theorising *only* through the prism of my own very particular 'adultist' lens (Philo and Smith, 2013), albeit by drawing upon a range of theorists to aid my deconstructive analysis. If – now – I focus upon just the objects under discussion in the Student Council meeting, what more might I be able to say, that may otherwise have remained occluded from my researcher gaze, concerning citizen subject formation at Top Hill Primary?

I have to confess to being somewhat disappointed by the Student Council meeting. I make reference, in my ethnographic note, to some feelings of, well, tedium ('*Time goes on...I'm a bit bored actually: what an admission...I could have brought a sandwich, perhaps...*'). I remember being concerned, too, as the meeting progressed, that I might not be as effective as the councillors, in what I presumed to be, the 'fixing' of their faces and bodies to express ready and eager interest in the matters in hand. Why this rather strong sense of disappointment? Looking back, I suppose that I had constructed the group and its internal dynamics in a particular way. After all, as an 'official' expression of school citizenship (Gordon, Holland et al., 2000), it had been referenced by many (adults) rather smugly (but also very helpfully and kindly) over coffee in the staff room: '*Have you been to a Student Council Meeting yet?*' I think I'd come to imagine the council as a dynamo of young energy: vibrant; barely contained and containable; chaotic (another 'arm' of the rather random and hectic movement of young bodies around and through the more informal spaces of the school (as I explore in Chapter 5). Yet, it felt removed from this. I experienced it as formal and serious, albeit relaxed, in a way that did not seem to fit snugly with a focus upon a '*carefree*' 'ethos' of '*fun*' which I explore in Chapter 4. I had perhaps imagined, too, that the topics for exploration would have a ready synergy with the 'agenda indicators' that I felt that I had picked up from around the school by

then: items, perhaps, that related to the children's own work exploring matters of equality and diversity (as arrayed on a multitude of display boards in the main school building, which I also discuss in Chapter 4); or questions or debates, even, emerging from both UNICEF and 'home-made' posters and texts around the school directly relating to issues of rights. Instead the agenda items – apparently selected by the councillors themselves and drawn from issues raised by their classmates – were focused upon the immediacy of the children's own affective experiences relating to play times and equipment: outdoor play as raised by the younger child, in the first instance and indoor play by the older, in the second.

Perhaps this is me being caught short. Am I stuck, all too readily within an 'adultism of political theory' (Philo and Smith, 2013, p.138)? Am I wedded, even as I try to deconstruct beyond a too simplistic binary of subconsciously and preconceived assumptions of a binary of 'Big P' (state, nation, institutional organisation) and 'Small P' politics (of identity; and subject formation) without addressing, 'what is *the political*' in relation to children and citizenship formation (as Philo and Smith, 2013, ask themselves)? This may, then, account for my sense of '*boredom*': shaped by the expectations that I bring to the meeting and framed all too readily by my 'constitutive outside' (ibid, p.139). I am confronted with issues that the children raise, and wish to raise, and which are listened to, attended to, and apparently taken seriously, and to be acted upon by the head teacher as a representative of the wider staff body. And, I suppose, they *could* in this reading be constructed in Rancièrian terms as 'emancipatory' insofar as they require the relinquishing of the authority of the head teacher to dictate what it is that should make up the topics for discussion of the council: '*if it's to be play and play equipment, then so be it – it is for the children to speak and claim...*'.

But, I'm unconvinced by this off-shoot in my train of thought, or even by my own degree of self-chastisement in trying to re-think my own 'adultist' perspective through an appeal to the 'Child-Body Politic': '*Remember, Rebecca these are youngsters inhabiting their world in more 'immediate, unmediated and non-cognitive' (Philo and Smith, 2013, p.142) ways than you: you weary, old cynic...*' But, it's just not enough for me, and in the final section of this chapter, '*Acting Up: Doing Citizenship As Dissensus?*' I will explore why. In this section I have pursued a series of logics in order to challenge some presumed orthodoxies of this officially constituted 'doing of citizenship' space (including my own). I have done this, in order to 'get under the skin' of just how it might be possible to think and re-think 'the citizen subject' and the political significance of this by focusing upon a Student Council meeting that I attended at Top Hill Primary.

In this final section, we re-join the Year5/6 children that we have met in both Chapters 4 and 5. The interview with them ranged widely over matters both loosely and more tightly bound under the banner of rights at Top Hill Primary. Here below I reproduce a different section of the interview in which the children are musing on the helpfulness, or otherwise of the range of RRS charters around the school. They have identified a new and more recent one outside the junior toilets. They have – seemingly – strong views on its value which they appear to relish sharing with me. What is it that can be said about the citizen subject as anything other than ‘consensual’ here that I couldn’t say in the last section, despite my best efforts to think with theory? Can I engage with this interview encounter in such a way that I am better able to reflect on my uneasy sense of my final position on the Student Council meeting as somehow, ‘undecided’? And, does it become possible to say anything more about the inter-relationships and connections of the ‘the political’ with citizenship and the discourse of ‘rights’ and respect’ and ‘equality’ and ‘diversity’ at Top Hill Primary?

### **Section 3: Acting Up: Doing Citizenship as Dissensus?**

Somebody Flushed The Charter Down the Toilet...

Child X: *In our school they have got a bit carried away with the charters. Now we have gone over the top. Now they have got carried away because we have a ‘Toilet Charter’. It’s a bit over the top. Nobody looks at it. Everyone just laughs... Several children in the group laugh and look delighted as though they are warming to their theme. They exchange glances...*

Me: *Why?*

Child X: *‘Cos it’s funny – it’s silly...*

Me: *Is this Grown-Ups being ‘silly’?*

Child N: *Yeh, ‘cos we already do it...we know how to go to the toilet!*

Child P: *I heard that somebody flushed the charter down the toilet...*

(Lots of laughter and general glee and some children wriggle off the benches and onto the floor in their delight. I feel a bit anxious about the cacophony and pull the door to).

Child X: *I mean...some of them [the statements on the Toilet Charter] are just so funny ...‘You have a right to feel safe and secure’...it doesn’t really happen so often that you need to put a charter up! What stupid words!*

Child Y: *Yeh, it doesn’t need to be written*

Me: *What would work – what would help if some people do feel that their privacy isn't respected?*

Child Y: *Not really one that is written like that. It sounds like a joke but they – the teachers – mean it to be really serious*

Child N: *They could get a sensible group of children to write it*

Child Z: *Or they could write it as a joke – you know, like a GOOD joke...*

Child R: *But that wouldn't work...*

Child M: *Well (not making eye contact with the rest of the group), The School Council did this but we didn't actually write it, Mr D. did – it was his idea and we just had to go along with it...* Taken from Rebecca's interview with Year5/6 focus group, March 2012

I'm reminded afresh of just how much I enjoyed this interview: no scope for boredom here, just some 'butterflies' connected to feelings of illicit behaviours (mine?) and of being 'caught off-task' (all of us?) At the time, I remember being struck by the ready wit and wry humour of the group (who weren't all from the same class or particular friends); their ability to banter, including with me; and to poke fun (gently); to challenge one another (pretty kindly); to defend; and what is more, to pour scorn (in bucket loads) on a very well intentioned (and no-doubt, time and labour-intensive) scheme designed to manage behaviour in the school loos. I remember having the sense that slight 'risks' were being taken. There was a certain 'frisson': a testing of the ground of just what it might be possible to 'air' both between the children themselves and with me. This is clearly a 'performance' and very well-crafted and choreographed one at that. In Butlerian terms, here are very different citational acts being played out which clearly constitute and contest 'the coherence of that 'I'' (Butler, 2004, p.376). These seem to be very different to some of the gendered performative acts of the citizen subject that I witnessed in the Student Council meeting. In this regard they amplify the way in which gender is neither a 'stable identity [n]or a locus of agency from which various acts proceed' (Butler, 1988, p.519). For example, it is a Child Y – a ten year old girl – who asserts that the Toilet Charter doesn't need to be written down and who then continues to take part in the ensuing banter: *'it sounds like a joke but they – the teachers – mean it to be really serious'*. This is an assertive and subversive interjection in which she presumes to know better than the adults, who, she indicates, have been enacting rights on her behalf. Here her 'power pervades the very conceptual apparatus that seeks to negotiate its terms' (Butler, in Benhabib and Bulter, et al., 1995, p.39) including that of her own subject position. Child N is equally gleeful in her command that: *'we know how to go to the toilet!'* With its satirical and sardonic

overtones and light, yet purposive enactment, this feels to me to be – again, in Butler’s own words – ‘the very precondition of a politically engaged critique’ ( ibid) of a very different quality to that we met in the formal space of the council meeting.

However, I do have to rhetorically challenge myself before I move on: why the selection of this piece of interview data (after all, I know I enjoy it and find it funny but....), as a way of further thinking through the interconnection of citizenship, rights and ‘the political’? Why this excerpt and not another? After all, the interviews I explored earlier in the chapter made ready reference to the Student Council as an example of a named and regulated official site of school ‘citizenship’. No such label can be attached to this ‘semi-formal’ space where the children and I have been given permission to talk together about the RRS initiative: I’m positioned as the researcher and they as school children sharing their thoughts and perspectives with me as part of the ‘participative’ and ‘empowerment’ agenda of the RRS strategy. But if I draw, once more, on the work of Isin, this becomes a ‘moment’ worthy of consideration. Isin suggests that to investigate acts of citizenship is ‘to draw attention to acts that may *not* [necessarily] be considered as political’ but which are, nonetheless, dialogic in character (Isin, 2008, p.19), and which make it possible to identify moments when...

*‘Regardless of status and substance, subjects constitute themselves as citizens – or, better still, as those to whom the right to have rights is due’ (Arendt, 1951, in Isin, 2008, p.18)*

And certainly, here are these young people, asserting their right to have rights in assessing the effectiveness – and even – the legitimacy of the type and level of instruction and surveillance of the school toilets that they all routinely use: *‘In our school they have got a bit carried away with the charters. Now we have gone over the top. Now they have got carried away because we have a ‘Toilet Charter’.* In a Foucauldian sense, there is their own implied critique of the management of their ‘conduct of conduct’ (*‘You have a right to feel safe and secure’...it doesn’t really happen so often that you need to put a charter up!’*) which sees these citizen subjects championing their right to go to the toilet without the interference of notices telling them how they may or may not go about this. Read in this way, it’s possible to assert that it is the very interaction in this school space (a corner of the Assembly hall that we have taken over) that we capture some meeting ground between ‘the technologies of domination and those of the self’ (Foucault, 1988, p.19 in Martin, Gutman et al.) implicated, as they may well be, in the ‘formulation of the subject’ (Pyckett, 2007, p.313). Here is this group of children, then, collectively, and dialogically, beginning to ‘call something into being which did not exist

before', to quote Arendt (1961) once more – 'Child X: *'Cos it's funny – it's silly...;* Child N: *Yeh, 'cos we already do it...we know how to go to the toilet!;* Child P: *I heard that somebody flushed the charter down the toilet...'* In Foucauldian terms, we can read this as discursive self-production and self-creation, resisting aspects of the instrumental and rational socialisation we heard spoken of in the interview extracts by some adult subjects in the first section of the chapter.

### **Dissensus?**

Can I therefore go as far as to suggest that this may be an example of 'dissensus' in Rancièrian terms? In this interview extract, the children not only elicit humour to mock the proliferation of the Rights Charters about the school, but they challenge the authority of the adults who have presumed to put up the Toilet Charter, in particular, on their behalf. The one child who sits on the Student Council is clearly embarrassed that the charter has been written in his name and he wishes to disassociate himself from it (*'The School Council did this but we didn't actually write it, Mr D. did – it was his idea and we just had to go along with it...'*). This group of children do not wish to recognise this charter as theirs: they are delighted that one child has – allegedly – taken it upon her/himself to *'flush it down the loo'*. On this basis, at least, this seems to be citizenship as a signifying 'political' act, which:

*'shifts a body from the place assigned to it [so that] it makes visible what had no business being seen and makes heard a discourse where once there was no place for noise'* (Rancière, 1999, p.30 in Bingham and Biesta, 2010, p.34)

This appears as a discourse of 'dissensus' which challenges consensus as 'an order' that is *'all-inclusive'* in that everyone has a particular place, role or position in it; [so] that there is an identity for everyone' (Bingham and Biesta, 2010, p.34). Rather dissensus emerges here as a *process* which generates subjectivity, and, in common with both Foucault and Butler, Rancière describes this process as one that 'does not happen before the act of politics but rather in and through it' (Rancière, 1999, p.40 in Bingham and Biesta, 2010, p.36). It is momentary, fleeting and re-constituted within new political acts which always engender an engagement in 'always undetermined political processes' (Biesta, 2011, p.141). It relies, however, on the presupposition of equality as something that is not given but that is 'practised' and 'verified' (Rancière, 1999, p.137). It emanates from an epistemological construction of these children as speakers who can speak for themselves on their own terms in their own right. And crucially, it



shifts the balance of this Rights Respecting School from one of mere generator of citizenship identities to one of 'producer of political subjectivities' (Biesta, 2011, p.150).

So configured, this short vignette – this tableau – exemplifies a moment of more than consensual citizenship identification and socialisation: not only do the children (with me – I have to confess) generate their own dialogic contestation of the Toilet Charter itself and its usefulness; but they also manage to draw in the wider 'political' context of the institution and what it means to have 'the right to have rights': they deign to speak back to the rights discourses from whence the very idea of rights charters sprang. This does not mean – of course – that the accounts that the children rehearse to each other and to me *did* actually happen. However, in Child M's anxious explanatory apology, the Student Council is positioned as that which is 'about the order'; it is one and the same as a range of governing technologies of schooling: it is about adult subjects who construct child subjects as *learners* of what it is they need to know in order that they *may* take part as citizens responsibly – at some future date – in the all-ready configured adult world to which they *shall* contribute.

### **Conclusion or 'Can I Have Some Closure Please?'**

And, so, having re-animated 'the Toilet Charter Incident' as a part of the warp and weft of the fabric of this text, it does feel possible for me to say a little more about the inter-relationships and connections of 'rights'; 'citizenship' and 'the citizen subject'; and the 'political' at Top Hill Primary; and to assert a position – mine at least – and mine for the time being. Clearly, the discourses of rights are very well intentioned: we have seen this as we have paced around and through the school: out into the playgrounds and grassy play areas; along corridors; in and out of classrooms; and into the assembly hall, over the course of the last three chapters, in particular. The discourses speak from a multiplicity of spaces and temporalities (which I have explored through each of the chapters). However, at least one of these spaces has been that of an international and national policy context, from whence the RRS initiative was initially crafted – of UNICEF UK - where a 'rights' agenda for schools in England and Wales had had bold ambitions. As Wittgenstein (1958, p. 46e, in Mouffe, 2000, pp.13-14) suggests: these are the spaces of '*the slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal*'. The point of them has been to challenge a deficit and reductionist view of state education and to champion the participative rights and the 'voice' of the child (as we see in Chapter 2). However, the rights discourses have fed into an educational citizenship agenda, introduced by New Labour (see Chapter 2) which has also been concerned with the 'citizenship formation' of the child (Pyckett, 2007). This ambition had been one of 'common sense' with a

transparent liberal and progressive flavour that seamlessly binds a 'new managerialism' of schooling with a community and socialisation mission.

It is these rights initiatives (where citizenship as backdrop and foreground still lives and breathes through the life of the school) which 'need some friction' (Wittgenstein, *ibid*) if they are to ever do more than enable the policies and practices of the RRS to do more than cope with the anxieties of power/knowledge. But, crucially, we have seen in this chapter how the practices and acts of 'citizenship' and 'citizenship formation' – have been - and remain, enacted, constructed and constituted in contemporary and future spaces, and temporalities, in ways that could not/cannot be predetermined. It is some of these enactments, constructions and constitutions that I have been following in this chapter. And what I have found is that they leave traces: in the rhetoric of the adults who speak of their hopes and aspirations for the type of schooling that the children receive at Top Hill Primary in the interviews; and in the comportments, rhetoric and enactments of the formal spaces of schooling, such as the Student Council meeting we joined. However, as I have sought to demonstrate, these are contested spaces all, open to a plethora of interpretations. And – as we have seen – in the 'semi-formal' space of my encounter with the Year 5/6 pupils, they do give birth to new processes and possible subjectivities, even if momentarily, in order to construct and 'imagine a different future or set of possibilities' (Staeheli, Attoh and Mitchell, 2013, p.92) by throwing off one mantel to grasp at another ('back to the rough ground', Wittgenstein, *ibid*).

## Chapter 7: Conclusion - Evoking and Resisting Closure

*The prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions from the sphere of the public, in order to render a rational consensus possible but to mobilize those passions to democratic designs.* Mouffe, 2000, p.16

### Introduction

This thesis text is the product of qualitative ethnographic research conducted in Top Hill Primary in England over a ten month period. Its purpose has been to scrutinise rights discourses which guide and shape everyday schooling practices. For the purposes of this research, I have focused upon values of rights and respect and equality and diversity. These values are encapsulated within the UNCF Rights Respecting School (RRS) policy initiative to which the school community has subscribed over a period of four or more years. The representation of my own readings of my empirical materials have been guided by one pivotal question: *how, when, where and why are discourses of 'rights' and 'respect' and 'equality' and 'diversity' constituted as a dynamic of practices and performances of schooling?*

Throughout the research process my work has been honed by a post-structural ethnographic gaze. I have sought to avoid an 'untroubled realism' (Lather, 1996, p.539, in MacLure, 2011, p.998) which can be too easily wrapped in 'comforting simplicities' (MacLure, 2011, p.998). This way of looking, somewhat sceptical and askance, has enabled my broad research question to cajole me around, between and through (and back through) different places, spaces and temporalities of the school (both indoors and out) generating empirical 'data' by drawing upon 'partial' and 'layered' accounts (MacLure, 2011, p.998). One such opportunity for data generation arose, for example, while ambling with the children down corridors to the assembly hall for Singing Practice. My approach enabled me to trouble subtle gendered and well-choreographed performances of the children as they moved in groups or alone as an internal dynamic of the RRS initiative which is described as 'relaxed' by many. My empirical data have been drawn not only from what I have seen and heard, and from what my research subjects have discussed with me, but also from my own senses. I have been able to represent an 'entanglement of body and language' (MacLure, 2011, p.1000), such as an occasion when I captured some sights and sounds of what went on around me in the school while writing notes and watching some children reading under a tree on the school field with their class teacher. My intention has been to jerk into relief, to breathe life into, the textual representations of my field work experiences in a way that does some small 'justice' to the mayhem, vigour and

dynamism of the primary school, located, as it is, within its own particular spatial temporality. 'Mayhem' springs to mind when I recall, for example, my attempt to introduce Rebecca the Ethnographer to the school community by leading an assembly soon after I arrived, dressed, as it turned out unintentionally, in a green wig and my underclothes.

More than this, however, I have sought to consciously weave in my own subjective experiences of 'being there', enfolding these within recollections of school and schooling, as both child and adult. I have done this, in order to illustrate the visceral memory work involved in evoking and translating the present as a dynamic of what has gone before and of what is imagined of the future. This has certainly applied to my experiences of the build up to Christmas in school, as I joined in with the practising of carols for an end of term concert, cloaked, as I was, in the pain and pleasure of my memories of such moments. I recalled them thus as a former teacher with responsibilities for 'school music', superimposed upon my own childhood recollections of school Christmases.

I have posed four supplementary research questions that I have addressed rhetorically, in order that I have been able to 'interrogate what the theoretical move that establishes foundations authorizes, and what precisely it excludes and forecloses' (Butler, 1995, in Benhabib, Bulter et al., p.39). This way I have opened up the '*how, where, when and why*' of my main question by also asking myself:

- How are the discourses 'seen' and 'articulated' by different subjects?
- How are the discourses embodied and performed and by whom?
- What is the interplay of competing discourses of schooling?
- Who and what is rendered more or less visible by the constitution of the discourses?

Such questions have enabled me to 'drill down' deep into the sub-strata of my empirical 'data' to capture the voices and experiences of a range of research subjects in the school, other than just my own. These have not only informed my empirical data but have also come to the shape this research text, as for example, when I was able to draw in the ideas and opinions of the teaching assistants on the school playground as we jointly undertook 'playground duty' together.

The whole gamut of questions has generated the reflexive space for me to challenge myself to use 'theory to think with 'data'' (and 'data to think *with* theory') to accomplish a reading that is '*both within and against interpretivism*' (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, p.vii). This has been a

process for me both non-mechanistic and creative in a way that has meant that I have, for the most part, resisted being pulled too easily towards recounting apparently transparent narrative accounts of what it is that I believe I may have seen and heard in the field. Rather, the framing of the questions has guarded me against too straightforward a treatment of ‘data’ and analysis, engaging me rather with the ‘opaque complexity of lives and things’ (MacLure, 2011, p.998), which has enabled a more dense and multi-layered ‘treatment’ of data/analysis. Thinking in this way enabled me to ‘hold open’ a wide reflexive space before generating an interpretation of, for example, the incident of the school Student Council meeting, concerning what it might mean to be a ‘child citizen’ in the school.

### **Organising the Chapter**

In the remainder of this chapter, I focus my attention in three sections. The first of these draws together the substantive conclusions I have reached from my various empirical engagements and my textual representations of them thus far. My emphasis here is upon, particularly, the ‘how, when, and where’ of my overarching research question in concert with the rhetorical questions I posed for myself as set out above. And, as though to ‘undo’ my many assertions and protestations of ‘innocence’ (*‘Not Me, Guv’*), to avoid an all too straightforward narrative structure, I impose one (in a way that I explain that I have grappled with in Chapter 3). I do this so that I may press – quite simply and tyrannically – something of myself upon this text. Stripping away some contingency, I ‘clear ground’ by ‘gathering in’ some over-arching headline conclusions, which I set down here. However, I recognise that these claims are one way, my way, of reading the school and what goes on in it, and in so doing, I emulate the stance that I attribute to Laws (2011) in my introduction to the thesis in Chapter 1.

In this first section, I principally pull together my findings from four key empirical chapters. The first of these relates to my deconstructive analysis of the RRS policy in Chapter 2. It is the deconstruction of this text that, in turn, informs the shape and construction of subsequent Chapters: 4, 5 and 6. I prioritise these next, in order to synthesise my findings further. Each one of these has focused upon a different, but related, aspect of rights constituted as *practice* within discourse. Throughout the thesis, I have demanded that each one should ‘speak back’ to my research questions, representing something of the polyvocality of research subjects and participants in this study. As I summarise these chapters in this section I elevate a particular ‘truth’ and privilege my own narrative voice above those of others, in a way that departs a little from some of the multiple interpretive possibilities I have represented in each of the

chapters previously. In so doing, I acknowledge that such social 'objectivity' at this stage of this thesis is constituted through an act of power – mine – as researcher and author. This is my 'political act' which leaves traces of exclusion (Mouffe, 2000) which I have sought to attend to in greater depth in the main body of this thesis.

However, in a spirit of 'refusal', I push just a *little* further at this research space, by taking up the analytic gauntlet, one more time, in the second section of this concluding chapter. I attend to some empirical material that has not featured in this text so far that challenges my analytic logic further. I 'think with some theory' again to interrogate interview data which has intrigued me and infused my musings and idle 'wool-gathering' moments for some time. I set this alongside an encounter I observed in the school shortly before my fieldwork came to an end which held a particular poignancy for me. I prise open some competing analytics concerning the contested terrain of the discourses of rights as always in the process of being 'fought for' to draw further conclusions.

In the third and last section of this chapter, I trouble the double bind of both invoking and resisting closure in bringing my thesis to an end. I fix my gaze upon the 'awkward' methodology of post-structural empirical ethnographic research. I ask what it may give that *cannot be retrieved* from clear and transparent reports of, and recommendations for, twenty-first century schooling. And I argue for its practical value nevertheless. So this entails me in shifting key. I do this, especially, to engage with some possible pedagogic implications of this research for thinking through how post-structuralism might allow rights discourses to be 'done' a little differently in schools. In Chapter 1, I began by exploring, in tabular form, the way in which I had arrived at a reframing of my assumptions of critical pedagogies to be transformative in a way that would allow me to be more 'thoughtful' *about 'constructions of truth, power, knowledge, the self, and language in discourses' in line with post-structural feminist re-conceptions* – Luke and Gore, 1992, p.54 (see Chapter 1). Here, I begin to set out a framing device that could be utilised to further support the development of democratic schooling practices.

## Section 1: And the Answer Is...

### **Rights and Respect and Equality and Diversity as Policy Text: the Rights Respecting Schools Initiative**

Through a compressed genealogical Foucauldian approach to the tracing of a 'story' of rights, I assert in Chapter 2 that it is the UNICEF UK's RRS texts (both website and paper documents) which inform the rights policy backdrop to the enactment of schooling practices at Top Hill Primary. The texts themselves present a set of 'ideological, political and permeated with values' assumptions (Schwandt, 2000, p.198) as a facet of their own internal architecture and construction. They are constituted to 'cope' with the anxieties of power in transnational contexts, as well as tensions and concerns about knowledge/power (where these are located; and who holds them); and the way in which these have proliferated as rights.

I suggest that the RRS initiative works to generate 'consensus' in a way that cloaks difficulties and contradictions implicit within fundamental assertion of 'rights', especially foreclosing any claim of them as inherently 'political'. They produce particular 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1980a) which mean that certain ways of 'doing' and 'saying' can be ruled in and others ruled out. The language, structure and form of the texts are premised upon a 'common sense' knowledge discourse. Key ideas – 'rights and respect' for example are wrestled together as binaries to suggest that they can be read off unproblematically. The texts have a strong, pedagogic, 'no-nonsense' register (*'Denying Children's Rights Is Wrong'*) which bring together a wide repertoire of differently positioned schooling discourses: evaluation; standards; 'normal child' individualised psychological development; empowerment; community; the assertion of 'voice' (especially that of children); and teaching and learning. They also promote universalist values; essentialised schooling identities and normative readings of equality and diversity. More than this, they champion a range of rather contradictory 'identity' positions for adults and children alike: teachers are to be 'leaders'; facilitators; fellow learners along with children; at once relinquishing power but also directing it. Children on the other hand, are to be self-directing in their learning but also obediently attentive to instructions from explicative teachers.

I conclude that the RRS texts represent what Edelman (1979) has termed a 'condensation symbol'. This means that it brings together ideas and ways of doing RRS practice that sit uncomfortably one with the other. For example, the RRS texts work through the portrayal of a series of binaries. One of these is that of children and adults. On the one hand, this suggests

that children are ‘not yet adults’ – the ‘yet-to-be formed’. On the other hand, with a focus on children’s rights at the core of the documents, it reads as though it is the adults themselves who are ‘less-than’ – less deserving of attention, perhaps, in order to rectify a previous, perceived imbalance of privilege and power. Likewise, the placing of rights and respect alongside one another is highly suggestive of the ‘contractual’ obligations of one with the other in a way that implies that rights cannot/should not be accorded without a demonstration of respect. I have also explored just how respect can very readily be conflated with responsibility in a way implies that any ‘collapsing’ of the terms, one into the other, is not problematic. One effect of this is that the ideas presented in the RRS texts can all too easily be associated in the public psyche with all that is efficacious, desirable and attainable as a dynamic of schooling practice: the RRS texts are about closing down difficulty and generating idealised consensus.

### **Doing Rights Respecting School Ethos (‘Doxa’)**

In Chapter 4 I am concerned with how the rights discourses are practised and performed. Here, I consider the way in which they are constituted as ‘school ethos’ drawing especially upon theorisations of Bourdieu and Foucault (as represented by Leask, 2012) to contest the limitations of ethos as ‘doxa’. In my working with these theorisations, I suggest ‘doxa’ as that which is *more than* the ‘doing’ of a set of ‘taken-for-granted beliefs about the world and existence’. ‘Doing doxa’ is a Bourdieusian idea in which orthodoxy and heterodoxy compete one with the other to form the institution of the school. ‘More than doing’, however, is a way of my conceiving of the school as an institution of post-structural fluidity which looks beyond the contestation of heterodoxy and orthodoxy, to enquire whether a doxa of institution can be anything other than a Foucauldian mode of governmentality. After all, the discourses are hailed by members of the school leadership, in particular, as fundamental to the generation of a value system underpinning all schooling practices.

I find that there are inherent contradictions in the claims made for a rights ‘doxa’. For example, it is avowed as both ‘natural’ (where the ‘innocence’ of children is invoked, for example) and ‘unnatural’ (interfering with parental responsibilities) by a variety of research subjects in interviews with them in a range of spaces and at different times in the school. It is also declared by research subjects as having an almost umbilical attachment to ‘desire’ such that the ‘doxa’ is imagined as that which ‘*ought*’ to be (many of the interviews I conducted drew on the use of the modal auxiliary verb, ‘should’, for example: ‘*this should be about team building*’; ‘*this should mean that we involve the children*’). In this way, I find that it has strong



connections with evocations of the future-orientated citizen we meet in Chapter 6 as a utopian normative wish.

The rights discourses are also asserted by a selection of research subjects as something that is both entirely new in the school, (introduced with the RRS initiative), yet also something enduring that has 'always been there', and thus representing an established tradition. In a similar way, the discourses are professed as the background to school practices, while also being evoked as necessary to the managing of the foreground, such that this requires an 'Equality and Diversity' senior leader to direct this work. The effect of this is to leave open the question of just how deeply embedded the discourses are/can be within the institution.

I conclude, therefore, that there are elements of the 'sameness' of the rights' discourses which do not disturb the tranquillity of the 'conducting of conduct'. For example there are 'Rights Charters' around the school that espouse values and behaviours which some of the children describe to me as rather obvious. They tell me that they would behave in these ways without needing to be reminded by posters. These charters also seem to me to be an effect of power in the form of a secularisation of a moral discourse which does not require overt forms of control. These become easily translated into 'background'. Expressions of 'difference', however, which require the 'seizing' of some power away from an orthodox to a heterodox of 'doxa,' are more problematic. This became apparent to me, for example, during our 'Professional Learning Walk' that we undertook, as a group of adults, to examine the children's work represented as displays on aspects of 'equality' and 'diversity'. In these displays of children's work was a 'doxa' expressed as a facet of the material environment and constructed as 'object. As a group of adults, it became apparent that we found it hard to ask questions of these displays such as: what are they for? What might they be achieving? And, how do we use such themed topics to talk about difficult questions of difference such as class and poverty with children? I feel that the displays inscribe a 'certain selectivity in what is to be seen, thought, felt and talked about' (Popkewitz, 1998, p.5). They are bright; positive; 'welcoming'; 'warm' with a focus on tolerance; the richness of diversity; community building; and 'pupil empowerment'. I sense that they exert a strong moral imperative with something of a 'missionary zeal': 'behave like this'; 'think like that' in ways reminiscent of a pre-secular era in which the norms of equality and diversity are required to produce a 'composite figure of perfection' (Popkewitz, 1998, p.21).

So, what the displays symbolise is the way in which the rights discourses do not challenge the 'discursive underpinnings' that 'frame what questions can be asked [of equality and diversity]

and what answers [might be] sought' or [even] 'the relationship of sameness and difference to equality' (Gedalof, 2013, p.118-119). I also conclude that the language of the rights discourses does particular work to forestall the exploration of inequalities (or perhaps even 'equalities' using such expressions as *'Equality and Diversity Is Fun'*; *'Together We're Better'*; *'Equality And Diversity Around The World'*; *'I Have The Right To Be Happy'*). This could be likened to a mode of bogus recognition of difference but only in so far as it can be assimilated into what is already in place. In this way I suggest that school displays – as a facet of the school 'doxa' of discourses of rights – are effectively about the erasure of the difficulties of 'difference' and more about the exposure of a very particular form of humanist valuing which erases by 'inclusion'.

### **Being Rights Respecting Subjects**

Chapter 5 examines what it means to be a Rights Respecting Subject. I ask just how the rights discourses animate everyday ways of being children and adults and just who and what kind of subject is one 'entitled' or 'obliged' to be (MacLure, 2003, p.176). I recognise the categories of 'child' and 'adult' as somewhat artificial in their boundary drawing. I acknowledge myself – as in *all* my assertions of my claims to knowledge within this thesis – as research subject caught within the very folds of the discourse, fellow traveller along with other research participants/subjects (with all that this implies for post-structural reflexivity). This is an especially pertinent acknowledgement in a chapter focused on subjectivities. I draw especially upon the theoretical work of Butler (and the interpretations of her work by Davies, 2008, in particular). I do this in order to focus, especially, upon the finely grained gendering of power and other 'social differences'. I highlight in this chapter the differences such as: 'class'; 'vulnerability' and 'Special Needs' especially.

I find that the boys and girls are caught up within 'performative' accomplishments which 'the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief' (Butler, 1988, p.520). What emerges are not performances by these subjects, per se, but a performativity that constitutes both the boys and girls so that their reiterative acts through time both 'reproduce *and* contest the developments and origins of stable identity categories' (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, p.67). For example, some boys demonstrate the pleasures and pay-offs of collective acts of living gender classification as they move around the school, asserting their own rather subversive 'right' to do 'maverick boy' which could – at any moment – have them brought to book. I question the 'commitment' of the rights discourses to 'do' gender as an equality strand and find it can all too easily be

disregarded and *not* brought into the everyday *doing* of the lives of school girls and boys. This means that a question mark remains over where and when gender is spoken, done, undone, silenced or 'tolerated' within the institution. I also find that the proclamation of the rights discourses as '*child-centred*' (made by senior leaders and some teachers especially) means that *some* children acquire individualised 'Vulnerable Other' identities which stick and which require them to be brought back into, and included within, the folds of a 'normal' development discourse, to be made 'recognisable' in a way that befits the rights discourses. One effect of this is that the apprehension of the child in becoming seen as 'bad' is incessantly reproduced as a cloud around her/him which begs the questions of how can s/he ever be seen/as good, as I find in a playground encounter with a teacher as he and I watch a child with 'anger management issues' playing a game with a group of other children harmoniously. I read the situation as one in which the teacher cannot easily conceive of the child as other than a problem.

I find, too, that many adults are challenged by performing the right sort of 'rights respecting' subjectivity in the school on an ongoing basis in a way that befits the RRS initiative. I use a Foucauldian genealogic approach, as I did in Chapter 2, to trace the formation of the school teacher. There are a wide range of competing discourses that are required to coalesce to constitute the expectations of her performative configuration in the contemporary space of the school. I note the high stake demands of such subjectification. By ethnographically observing the performances of some teachers in school assemblies, I suggest that the rights discourses require a complex measure of behaviours. These must embody both relaxed, 'anything goes' good humour infused with understated, yet assertively assured authority'. This must result in these teachers sending clear signals that they are – indeed – 'the boss' (or perhaps the 'puppet master') whose remit is to transmit 'desires' for being a good subject which will staple all school subjects into submission. I am impressed with the way in which Mrs J. manages this, performing her role in a school assembly in which she acts with nonchalant confidence to ensure that we all sing and clap the Christmas songs with the right sort of joy and humour (so that we all believe we do so at our own volition), while she also manages a faulty projector. I note that this is a 'master-class' of a performance which is exhausting to watch and hard to sustain.

At the same time in the assembly hall, it is apparent to me, too, that there are configurations of space that delineate differences in both status and position for all children and adults, which in Foucauldian terms (1979) are connected to 'architectural' compositions of space. These

bear little relationship to discourses of redistributive power relations which the rights discourses presume. Some teaching assistants do not see themselves as subjects constituted within the embrace of the rights discourses. Rather they view the RRS initiative as either rather disempowering, or irrelevant to them: for one, the effect of the policy is that some children 'assert' their 'entitlements' as a means of displaying some superior 'power' in a way that the teaching assistant experiences as humiliating. One other does not readily identify the RRS initiative as the vehicle by which her conditions of service or employment rights can more effectively be challenged or improved: 'it's all a bit woolly', she ventures. I find that both assistants bear inscriptions of having the 'wrong' dispositions and positions in an us/them economy of inter-gendered and class relations, which the rights discourses appear not able to hold to account.

Finally, in this chapter I explore the 'inter'/ 'intra' relationships of children and adults, and, more particularly, the co-constitution of rights respecting 'adulthoods' and 'childhoods' in the school. Once again, I use the assembly hall as the site of my ethnographic analysis where a play rehearsal proceeds in which one child with 'Special Needs' takes a lead. I use representations of 'THE SHOUT' and 'Laughter and Silence' as means to unpick complex and highly affective infusions of micro-flows of power, as they twist and turn, back and forth, between and through collective subjected bodies. I take account of a 'dynamics of power and control', encompassing and constituting the adult-child/ child-adult relationships (Devine, 2002, p.305). I experience both, in their different manifestations, as the 'lancing of boils' that have become pustulant in the fetid atmosphere of inclusion which cannot acknowledge the pain and difficulty of its execution on some occasions (such as that of the performance of James on the stage). I experience, in this final ethnographic scene, limits for, and limitations of, the possibilities for an empowered, participative, self-making Rights Respecting subjectivity. Nonetheless, I also see opportunities for 'the subject who acts' and who is involved in 'strategic games between liberties' (Foucault, 2000, p.299), illustrated by the collective and individual acts of those present in the assembly hall preparing for the Spring Show. It is such acts that can be the very precondition of some future agency, while, still, constituting the subject, even so, as 'a kind of fabrication' (Leask, 2012, p.64). Certainly, ambiguity is at the heart of subjectification which cannot be over-ridden by any performance, however proficient, of the rights respecting subject.

## Doing Rights Respecting Citizenship; Being Rights Respecting Citizens

Chapter 6 focuses upon the interplay of the rights discourses with conceptualisations of 'citizenship' and 'the citizen subject'. It explores the relationship of the rights discourses with the place and purpose of citizenship as a thread within democratic state 'common' schooling. Citizenship and the citizen subject also emerge from some of the interview data. I draw on: Foucault and Butler, to help me think through the way in which the practices of citizenship and the generation of the citizen subject may only ever reproduce dominant identities; Isin, to mobilise theorisations of 'acts of citizenship' (Isin, 2008); and Rancière, especially, in order that I consider any possibilities for dissensus in the generation of the 'citizenship subject' and what this might mean in the context of my research school.

In interviewing adult school subjects, I find that their views of 'citizenship' and the formation of 'the citizen subject' are those which are concerned with the way in which 'newcomers can [always] be inserted into an existing political order' (Biesta, 2011, p.142) already connected to an ongoing process of socialisation and identity formation. Ideas of the 'good' and the 'active' citizen are articulated as formulations of prefigured 'identification. In Rancièrean terms, I assert this construction as focused upon consensus and inclusion. I find that I am especially struck by the way in which the citizen subject is evoked as always future orientated: she is the 'Yet-To-Be'. This contrasts markedly with a conceptualisation of the rights subject who is forever present, realised and ubiquitous.

I draw on ethnographic data/analysis of what is identified for me as a formal space of school citizenship – a Student Council Meeting. I interrogate further the *practice* of socialisation or citizenship as consensus, asking what more might be said of it. In the meeting I attend, I draw on Rancière, to equate the performances of the child councillors and the head teacher as Chair with the parable of a 'world divided into knowing minds [that of the head teacher] and ignorant ones' [those of the child councillors] (Rancière, 1991, p.6). Using the earlier work of Foucault (1979a) I suggest that the meeting could be regarded as nothing more than a dimension of the 'great carceral continuum' (Foucault, 1979a, p.297) of the disciplined institution of the school. However, calling upon Foucault's later work which explores 'biopower' (1981), I also question whether it might be possible to identify some resistance as part of an ongoing creation of subjectivities via the strategic and localised assertions of some children's agency as exhibited in the meeting. I hold open this possibility while I bring into play the work of Staeheli, Attah and Mitchell (2013) to raise the possibility of the 'active citizen' of this formal space developing 'activist' citizenship subjectivities with 'propensities to more

readily challenge the status quo' (Staeheli, Attoh and Mitchell, 2013, p.93). I use Butler to theorise the micro-workings of power relations within the meeting requiring me still further to hold onto the space as one in which I can imagine (just a little) a future possible 'activist' citizen as constitutive of more than just the gendered, male, normative subject. I challenge myself, too, with the limitations of my own 'adultist' framing (Philo and Smith, 2013) of this meeting; asking myself whether there is – in fact – more to be said about the possibilities for 'political' agency if viewed from a child's-eye perspective.

Before I draw any final conclusions about resistance and agency in the council meeting, I engage with data/analysis from a focus group I have constituted with some Year 5/6 children. I do this to reflect on my uneasy sense of my final position on the Student Council meeting as somehow, 'undecided'. In particular, I ask myself whether it becomes possible to say anything more about the inter-relationships and connections of 'the political' as a facet of citizenship and of the rights discourses. I justify my selection of data as those which emanate from a semi-informal school space. I assert it as minutely attached to 'acts of citizenship formation' by virtue of Isin's work (2008). He theorises 'acts' [of citizenship] as those which may *not* [necessarily] be considered as 'political' but which are, nonetheless, 'dialogic in character' (Isin, 2008, p.19).

I find this to be a space of Rancièrian 'dissensus' in which the children discuss the apparent uselessness of 'Toilet Charters' that have appeared as notices about the school which remind them they have the 'right to feel safe and secure in the toilet'. These children wryly, ironically, and humorously assert their 'right to have rights': they collectively, and dialogically, begin to 'call something into being which did not exist before, which was not given, even as an object of cognition or imagination' (Arendt, 1961). On this basis, at least, this seems to be citizenship as a signifying 'political' act which emerges as a process which presupposes the equality of those who speak through the way in which the process is itself is 'practised' and 'verified' (Rancière, 1999, p.137). This means that I find, on reflection, that the citizenship space student council meeting is of a different order: it is one that exemplifies – in the main – consensual citizenship identification and socialisation. It is about the children fitting-in to an already configured adult world to which they *shall* contribute.

### ***And More than This...***

More than this, I conclude that the ambition of 'citizenship' and citizenship formation in the school is one of 'common sense' that seamlessly binds a 'new managerialism' of schooling with

a community and socialisation mission. However – crucially – I also find that the rights discourses and the acts of citizenship on the part of the children leave their marks (in what is said and enacted through the data/analysis with which I have engaged). They present possibilities for new processes and opportunities for democratic schooling which ultimately beg a broader question: ‘what is the *purpose*’ of the ‘common school’ (Fielding and Moss, 2010) with a focus upon altruistic aims such as we have met in the chaotic, ‘*carefree*’, ‘*joyous*’ milieu of Top Hill Primary? It is these ‘possibilities’ that I wish to attend to further in the remainder of this chapter.

## **Section 2: Opening One Last Front...‘It’s Not Political You Know’...**

### ***‘It’s Not Political You know***

Senior Leader (Gail): *‘I’m not worried about the award [RRS] but more the journey that UNICEF has put us.... I’m also passionate about equality and diversity. It’s not political, you know...I feel it is really important in terms of the planning for the school – I trained staff just before the summer – and then parents in the autumn and now I will be training other schools after half-term. It is all about having common values and a cohesive community. This is important in terms of every class: the infants; the juniors; the whole school and then the wider community. This has changed the nature of the curriculum. Everyone does lessons on equality and diversity. And I know the difference it has made from feedback from parents and children to minority family set-ups. It means that the children can talk without being ridiculed and, yes, there are other people out there – like them....about children not being frightened to speak out ‘cos there are other people out there...’* Interview with Rebecca, January 2012

This vignette of data is taken from an interview conducted part way through my time in Top Hill Primary. It was undertaken with a senior leader with specific responsibilities for overseeing the RRS agenda. This response was given by way of answer to my question, ‘Tell me more about the ‘Rights Respecting Schools’ initiative. I employ it here now as a way to further trouble some interconnections and disjunctures between the rights discourses; citizenship; the citizen subject; and ‘politics/the political’. I became intrigued by what it meant to declare that a school initiative is ‘*not political*’ while still in the school as an empirical researcher, and subsequently since, as I have turned this over. It has also held a resonance, I think, for the way in which it connects with the thoughts that I still harbour about the other

pieces of research I conceived early on (see Chapters 1 and 3) which focused upon ideas of controversy and the politics of the curriculum. The statement ‘it’s not political’, fascinated me, for the urgency with which it was proclaimed, within an interview context in which ‘politics’ and ‘the political’ had not previously been mentioned by either of us. I wondered what might be invested in such a declaration. What might it presume of the context in which it is said and enacted; and, of the subjectivities of those who speak it? What might also be presumed by way of a response? And – more than this – what might be expected of it in a way that would not be possible, had the RRS initiative been declared as ‘political’?

One way I read the assertion of *‘it’s not political, you know’* was as a possible reassurance to me as the researcher, at the time, – *‘you understand this stuff, Rebecca – you’ve been a teacher and a Local Authority advisor’*. After all, the senior manager might well regard it as part of her responsibility to assert the initiative as what could be conceived as ‘Germ Free’ (*‘you don’t need to worry, Rebecca, there is nothing nasty here...’*). This means that although for her, it introduces something of value (it has *‘changed the nature of the curriculum’*, she says), it nonetheless becomes important for her to show that she appreciates that other schooling discourses such as that of *‘standards’* or even the *‘good’* or *‘active’* citizen (which I explored particularly in Chapter 6) make prior claims. So, the *‘Not Political’* – becomes about having something to say that does not infect the space of other normalising schooling discourses. In other words this assertion is to occupy the territory of the neutral, where the ‘purity’ of educational discourses as rational, and ‘above’ (‘outside’?) politics can be made with some degree of confidence. So this becomes about making a difference (*‘I know the difference it has made’*) but also NOT making a difference (see Chapter 4; and the work of Ahmed, 2012, where ‘equality’ and ‘diversity’ are *not* performatives in her investigation) – so that it slots neatly into the *‘training’* cycle of the institution in similar ways to other schooling initiatives, for example. It is safe; it is rational; but it is also instrumental.

I interpret Gail’s comment as defensive. I hear them as a way of being accountable both to me, but also by way of a rehearsal to a wider, imagined public audience perhaps (governors; parents; OFSTED – stakeholders; surveyors of schooling practices). In my mind they become linked to ‘accountability practices’ which require on-going measurements, standardising, auditing; and the presenting of oneself and one’s professional actions in particular ways – *‘don’t worry, they’re not political you know...we are a ‘safe pair of hands’...Perhaps in Foucauldian terms we could say that the productive effect of the power of other dominant schooling discourses is such that it seeps into the senior manager’s need to remonstrate –*



albeit unconsciously perhaps – her defence of the *'journey'* that she and her school community are on – a journey along a non-contentious path. This means that she is required to effectively and affectively negotiate multiple discursive regimes which cannot, and do not, stack up.

More than this, however, I read the RRS 'political' rhetoric as occupying the proclamatory terrain of what is commonly termed a 'post-ideological era' of politics, a national, strategic claim of the Cameron-led government (Hall and O'Shea, 2013; and see Chapters 1 and 2). This means that education is required to be, as much as for any other public body, about common sense goals (the idea of which I push further in the final section of this chapter) : sound managerialism and a 'fair society' (Hall and O'Shea, *ibid*). On these terms, the discourse becomes incontestable. It is about 'The Bleeding Obvious'. It works as an empty unmarked sign of unity or sameness that doesn't need to be explained, that simply 'is' that belongs to nothing or no-one and that simply stands for everyone (Gedalof, 2013, p.9). It works to foreclose definitions and differentiation (*ibid*, p.9) so that the equality and diversity is left unexplained apart from the information that *'feedback from children and parents'* and *'minority family set-ups'* suggests to her that it makes a *'difference'*.

For Gail, as a 'Mover And Shaker', she is required to be seen to enact 'agency' and indeed, her enthusiasm is such that she demonstrates a belief in this agency: for her, she says, the initiative offers an opportunity which is not so much about the gaining of 'awards' but rather about changing practice. So her embodied 'agentic' energy enables her to enact her power position as a 'Mover and Shaker' through her disclosure here – indeed she uses the term *'passionate'* in describing how she feels about *'equality and diversity'*. In this manner, she demonstrates the way in which power reaches 'into the very grain of individuals touching their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes...' (Foucault, 1980, p.201). Despite Gail's protestations, it could be said, in this interpretation, that it is the award that marks a *'difference'* which is measurable and evidence-based. We could perhaps characterise this, then as a form of democratic schooling that is about conforming to a given set of predetermined procedures (Mouffe, 2000). It is about achieving a smooth-running consensus amongst all concerned. There are boxes to tick to achieve a RRS award. The school is working towards Level Two. Viewed in this way, the initiative could be characterised as a 'non-political' 'disciplinary technology for judging the efficiency and the accountability' of this particular school. Rights discourses therefore, become part of 'disciplinary regimes' (Ahmed, 2012, p.85) in which, as Ahmed suggests, such values characterise 'optimal performance'. This is discourses of rights internalised as *'not political'* at an institutional level.

But, I am troubled by the apparent ‘neatness’ of my own deconstruction here. After all, there are two important questions that Lather (2007) poses of post-structural research and researchers that may be pertinent to address here: the first concerns the way, as researchers, we deal with questions of the imposition of narrative authority; and the second is about how it is that we deconstruct the ways our own desires shape the texts we create. It seems to me that if I bear in mind both these concerns and, in so doing, draw on the work of Rancière (2004), then there is more work for me to do to sow a degree of doubt into the possible claims I have made thus far.

Is the senior manager’s assertion that *‘It’s not political’* merely a rhetorical device for consensus? (which, in Rancièreian terms, requires the foreclosing of any space for disagreement; a ‘reduction of democracy to the way of life of a society, to its *ethos*’ – Rancière, 2004, p.306). Similarly, is this what Mouffe might describe as a form of schooling democracy which has as its focus the achievement of a ‘normative rationality’ (Mouffe, 2000, p.2)? This could be said to be based upon the senior manager’s embodiment of tacit understandings (alongside all those with responsibilities for leading and managing the school) of the RRS initiative as that which marries liberal beliefs of the rights of individuals (encapsulated in the ‘School Charters’, for example) with a legitimacy of the popular sovereignty of school subjects ‘to have their say’ (through the Student Council, perhaps). This could be further captured as that which Benhabib (1996, in Mouffe, 2000) might champion as procedural form of democracy (see Chapter 2) that:

*...is a necessary condition for attaining legitimacy and rationality...so that what is considered in the common interest of all results from processes of deliberation conducted rationally and fairly among free and equal individuals...(Benhabib, 1996, p.69 in Mouffe, 2000, p.5)*

Is the declaration of *‘It’s not political’*, merely, therefore, the moral defence, or even the assertion, of a way of life that is, necessarily, institutionally *‘squeaky clean and neutral’*? Or is there more to it?

In order to address this last question, therefore, I return to ‘dissensus’ (see Chapters 2 and 6 especially). Here, however, I read it in its simplest form as to do with ‘disagreement’. I do so to challenge some of my own presumptions thus far in this section, in a way that works with the ‘doubled-science’ post-feminist methodologies of Lather (2009). Is there a way of me thinking through Gail’s subjection as a productively disruptive act, rather than as merely

consensual or procedural? What more might I be able to read into this vignette, if I assume less (and reflexively engage with the way in which my 'desires' shape the texts I create?) After all, perhaps I have foreclosed Gail's identity category such that I cannot sufficiently acknowledge the way in which 'body, speech and subjection' are always elements, as Rancière claims, at odds with one another (see Pelletier 2009, p.269)? Like Rancière, Butler reminds us that, 'language-as-social-practice does not reflect the intention (or the action) of the individual'...rather 'language *produces* the discursive possibilities of performance and therefore the doer becomes an effect of that language' (Butler, p.380, in Garry and Pearsall, 1996). Perhaps Gail's *passionate* body language gives away more than the words she ventriloquises before me here?

Supposing that I adopt an analytical position as researcher/narrator as a defence of the possibility of politics as the basis of the equality of all speaking beings, as Rancière espouses ('a state to be worked towards'...'a disruption of inequality' – Pelletier, 2009, p.274), rather than claiming a narrator authority as I have done thus far in this chapter. My deconstruction of '*the political*' has been as exclusionary category: one in which, I have constituted myself such that I have a 'coherent, valid and credible' access to a discourse of knowledge (Pelletier, 2006, p.270) *not* available to Gail. The effect of this is to constrain her as in some way unknowing (or 'ignorant' – Rancière, 1991a, in Biesta, 2010) of what it might mean to declare an initiative 'political'. But for Rancière, by virtue of being human the individual *is* political and *is* qualified to participate in politics which is 'dissensus' – in the way that I have set out in Chapters 2 and 6 – which is about the right to speak; to contest; and to make claims. This recognises *politics as process* and not as a space or sphere that has already been recognised (by me, in this analytic case). Read in this way, an assertion of '*this is not political, you know*' should acknowledge Gail's equality as speaking subject, constituted within discourse, and able to declare in the same way that which I take it upon myself to do. So, what more there might be to say about the declaration of '*it's not political you know*'? Indeed, what more might I be able to say about the 'why' question of the 'rights' discourses in the school, and the character of democratic schooling it embraces and wishes to embrace? I address this further by reference to an incident that I witnessed just before the period of my research in the school came to an end.

### ***A Classroom Case of a Cross Boy and Chocolates***

I had been discussing various final arrangements for my research with Gail in her empty classroom while her class were out in the playground. As ever she was thoughtful, kind and

generous with the time she gave me. Her class of children began to file back in to the room chatting together in groups and I prepared to leave. But one boy of 8 or 9 years old marched straight up to her looking perplexed and over-wrought. He began explaining loudly and with considerable agitation that he had just been passed the staff-room. He'd looked in and had noticed '*masses*'; '*loads*'; '*heaps of chocolates*' in the kitchen area which he said the teachers were '*all scoffing down*'. He said that he was '*really fed up*' because this meant that '*teachers didn't do the right thing*'. He said that they told children they all had the '*right to stay healthy*' and that they weren't '*allowed*' to eat chocolate and '*bad things*' in school. He put his short arms on his hips and demanded: '*why are they doing that then – stuffing their faces?*' Gail didn't interrupt him and she didn't look flustered. When he finished speaking she said that she understood entirely why he felt that this wasn't fair. She suggested that he think about what he might be able to do himself to address this, and also why he'd told her, and what he might want her to do. She also said that she'd make time to discuss it with him again at the start of the lunch break. I don't know what happened subsequently. I don't know if they met; what either of them said, or what actions, if any, were taken. I certainly didn't feel that Gail was either humiliated by 'being shown up' in front of me; or, indeed that she humiliated the boy for being 'passionate': I sensed that she took his palpable feelings of deep indignation seriously.

What more might this incident between the child and teacher bring to Gail's assertion that '*it's not political you know*' in concert with my own methodological and ontological 'disruption' in which I 'try out' the assertion of the 'equality of all speaking beings'? In Chapter 6, I describe and analyse the Year 5/6 focus group as a moment of dissensus where there has been: 'a gap in the very configuration of sensible concepts, a dissociation introduced into the correspondence between, ways of doing, seeing and speaking' (Rancière, 2010, p.15). In a similar way in this incident here, we witness the young boy inscribing himself with a new form of subjectification through the assertion of his will which allows him some momentary degree of 'emancipation' (Rancière, 2003a, p.219 in Biesta and Bingham, 2010, p.32). Gail does not seek to take on a more knowing role by exerting her capacity as 'Master Explicator' (see Chapter 6). Rather, she listens as his equal ('*It means that the children can talk without being ridiculed*' she has explained to me in her interview with me). Importantly, dissensus could be construed here as less about the disgruntlement of this young boy, and more about the possibility of the production of 'new inscriptions of equality within liberty and a fresh sphere of visibility for further demonstrations' (Rancière, 1999, p.42 in Bingham and Bietsa, 2010, p.37). Gail throws questions back to the young boy that are of an indeterminate nature. She does

not take his 'will' away from him. Rather she 'wills' him to think and act about how he may proceed next. In Rancièrian terms, by dint of being dissensual, this incident, therefore, *is political*: 'the essence of politics is dissensus rather than consensus (Rancière, Bingham and Biesta, 2010, p.36). So, here we have an example of an adult, and one with the power to lead and direct the trajectory of the rights discourses in school, exemplifying a dissensual act. She challenges the consensual bounds as always and only contested and enacted by the children, as we saw in Chapter 6.

But, why might Gail (placing herself as 'ignorant' teacher in *this* moment) *not* assert that the rights discourses are political? Perhaps she believes that there would be little to gain from such a declaration. Indeed, she may believe that such a declaration if made, may 'get in the way' of what she imagines can be instantiated in the school: she may think, what more might be 'achieved' through the disavowal of the enactments of the initiative as 'political', for example? After all, these are mere *words* and she declares, instead, that she is '*passionate*' about getting things done and changing things ('*I feel it is really important in terms of the planning for the school – I trained staff just before the summer etc...*') She may well sense that her purchase on her agency, and her sense of agency, is heightened through this disavowal. Ideas of 'the political' and 'politics' are 'dirty business' in the public Mind's Eye globally, nationally and locally and tacit mythologising of primary education, especially, constitutes it in some 'purer space'.. As Mouffe, has suggested, at the start of this twenty-first century decade, 'there is a marked cynicism about politics and politicians [in European countries] (2000, p.1).

Significantly, too, Gail, stresses that her 'passion' for 'equality and diversity' has meant changes: changes for '*minority family set-ups*', for example. She hints at the way in which this has entailed 'progress' in a way that Butler suggests always assumes 'new movements as [those] that follow upon prior ones, with the new ones establishing more radical claims for social justice or more copious notions of equality' (Butler, p.18, in Oleksy, 2009). Why, therefore, should she dabble with the contaminating influences of political hyperbole for seemingly unproductive ends? Why not just 'get on' with implementing the initiatives about which this leader is '*passionate*' and which promote some changes, she says, for some '*minority*' individuals or groups? So, for Gail, as for so many other members of the school community we have met in the course of this thesis, the 'getting on' of '*the journey*' of being '*passionate about equality and diversity*' is about a vision of democratic schooling as the fostering of 'human flourishing' (Fielding, 2004b) which is education as the living of 'a rich, full, abundant, joyous human life' (Macmurray, 1931b, in Fielding, 2012, p.678). More than this,

too, we have a hint in this interview of the way in which the freedom of ‘sexual politics’ – for ‘*minority family set-ups*’ – seems to rely on a conception of freedom as that which emerges through time, in a way that is assumed of a liberal ‘progressive society’ or ‘late modernity’ (Butler, in Oleksy, 2009) and which does not need/require/warrant the naming of it as ‘*political*’.

### ***Returning to the High Ground***

And so for me, once again, I take up some interpretive researcher/narrator ‘high ground’ to draw this section to a close. I suggest that the empirical data I have drawn on in this section presents something of a paradox of beliefs, whether ‘passionate’ or ‘political’ in nature. On the one hand, in the classroom incident with the Cross Boy, we have a vision of schooling as *more than* a fitting into a fixed and an a priori model of socialisation: of more than that which is constituted through an *always* normative rationality; and, a ‘common good’ of a moral consensus (Mouffe, 2000) which embraces contestation and dissensus in that moment which guards us against a too definitive curtailment of ongoing possibilities for resistance, not just for and by the children, but also from an adult, and an adult with power to decide. And on the other, in the interview, we have rhetoric that assumes, for example, an unproblematic instantiation of a consensus of school community: individuals and groups who have been previously excluded (such as ‘*minority family set-ups*’ of which Gail speaks) who are now unproblematically within the fold. But for Gail, both what she says and what she does go by the name of ‘*passion*’ and not ‘*politics*’ when she speaks to me as Rebecca the Researcher. After all, her ‘saying’ and ‘doing’ are components of a broader discursive frame that we have already explored in all its complexity and nuance in the body of this thesis text. The rights discourses are represented by the RRS initiative which is predominantly about promoting a regulative, procedural rationale of schooling. We have come to recognise this as a form of liberal democracy in the school that – in the main, despite the rhetoric which might suggest otherwise – finds disjuncture, diversity, and ‘difference’ difficult to deal with institutionally. The rights discourses of the RRS require a neutral terrain, insulated from ‘politics’ and ‘the political’. Here we have in all its rich complexity, a concoction of instrumentalism (in the form of the RRS policy); foundationalism and ‘participation’ (through the enactment of the rights discourses); which can cope with the occasional dissensual act thrown in (on the part of some school subjects). These jostle, joust, duck and weave, to shape the liberal school; school subjects (adults and children alike); and future-orientated citizens.

### Section 3: Implications in Practice

I want to end by troubling the double bind of both invoking and resisting closure. I do this by focussing upon the ‘awkward’ methodology of post-structural empirical research and the way in which it might be invoked to further meddle with rights discourses as dynamics of democratic schooling. I do this by suggesting a direction in which a study such as this might be further developed at some later date. To this end, I merely ‘tickle’ the surface of the practical utility of some post-structural ways of theorising that may enable us as practioners, professionals and researchers to make some sense of our own insertion into some ‘deeply contradictory discourses’ (Robinson and Jones Diaz, 2006, xii). I begin to ask, then, what questions post-structural theorisations might permit about the ‘how’ of democratic schooling that *cannot be retrieved* from clear and transparent reports of, and recommendations for, twenty-first century schooling such as I have referenced as dynamics of foundational discourses in Chapter 2, some of which suggest that implementing the RRS (or similar ‘citizenship’) initiative robustly, is a transformative tool for democratic schooling.

As I set out in my introductory chapter, I use post-structuralism as a ‘bundle’ of theorisations which do not deny the significance of structural theorisations (yet which challenge the unified Enlightenment subject), supplementing both by focusing upon complex ideas of meaning. These are meanings that are struggled over (as I have sought to do in this study through ‘thinking with theory and data’); which are intricately linked to ideas of power, that has a shifting, multi-directional fluidity (Kenway, et al, 1994); in concert with challenging ways of *seeing, being* and *doing*. Nonetheless, I assert here that post-structuralism has a practical utility. It can call into question, enrich and deepen ideas of rights, respect, equality and diversity as already conceived and implemented ideas attached to liberal, progressive schooling.

I want to suggest that a critical reworking of rights discourses can facilitate a shift from ideas of ‘common sense’ to those of ‘good sense’ (Hall and O’Shea, 2013) which do not hail us, into place as obedient readers of a manifesto which risks stifling productive democratic dissensus. I want to re-assert a focus upon ‘the gap’ that opens up between discourses as they are represented in the text of the RRS initiative, for example, and the performance of the everyday, as productive and energising rather than as that which is inconvenient (shameful even); that cannot be admitted to; as running counter to ever increasing ‘claims for [social] justice or copious notions of freedom’ (Butler, p.18 in Oleksy, 2009). As I have sought to demonstrate throughout this thesis text, these ‘gaps’ can remain ‘invisible’ (such as the

occasion of us not noticing collectively that it is only junior girls that get involved in the after school community work, for example); or ‘unspeakable’ (as when we decide that we cannot discuss the ‘class’ word, for example, when we scrutinise the effectiveness of the Equality and Diversity displays as part of a ‘Professional Learning Walk’). Democratic schooling, in Top Hill Primary, champions rights discourses that tend to focus, for the most part, upon smoothing over any cracks as they appear, in ways that are concerned with *not* disrupting. Post-structural theorisations, on the other hand, offer methodologies that can focus upon disrupting some certainties. Such methodologies see possibilities other than the ‘business as usual’ in the cracks/silences opened by such a disruption, if only we are brave enough to let this happen, now and again.

So, I end by unashamedly pilfering from recent work by Hall and O’Shea (2013) to help me theorise some quite practical ideas. In order to do this, I think of the policies (and some practices) of rights discourses rather crudely as *just* ‘common-sense’ and as the ‘already agreed’; those which ‘work intuitively’ (as devoid of ‘the political, perhaps, as in the examples I have given above). As Hall and O’Shea suggest, they are the pragmatic and empirical; ‘giving the illusion of arising directly from experience, reflecting only the realities of daily life and answering the needs of ‘the common people’ for practical guidance and advice’ (ibid, p.1). We have seen, throughout the thesis, how this ‘common sense’ discourse can be presented as though constituted outside time and as more of a product of nature than history (Gramsci, 1971, in Hall and O’Shea, ibid). We have also seen that, despite protestations to the contrary, it is also this ‘common sense’ that can lean towards tradition, sedimented as this is into a ‘popular philosophy’ but also, at once, containing utopian aspects that forever hail a brighter future (so that the rights discourses are described as always having been part of the school ethos, while the ambition for them is constructed as entirely new). We see this in the ‘passionate’ evocations of the discourses by the senior manager, Gail, above (*‘I’m not worried about the award [RRS] but more the journey .... I’m also passionate about equality and diversity’*). We hear it in the comments of the head teacher:

*It comes from your conviction of what on earth you think you are doing here [as an educator] in the first place...We are privileged to be part of shaping young people. It is about sending messages into a future we won’t see...it’s about a set of core beliefs...and core values.* Head teacher interview with Rebecca the Researcher, April 2012.



This, then, is the ‘common sense’ of the RRS initiative which is constituted to attempt to cover for all possibilities. However, drawing on Gramsci, what Hall and O’Shea suggest is that ‘common sense’ is an idea that is rather more ‘disjointed and episodic’ (ibid, p.2) than it might at first seem which concurs with the practical enactments of the everyday doing of some of the ‘rights’ discourses in the school, which I have explored most recently in the ethnographic encounter with Gail and the ‘Cross Boy’ above, for example. Gail displays the ‘good sense’ of opening a space for the Cross Boy to challenge power concerning the ‘right to be healthy’.

What is required, then, drawing on the work of Gramsci (as interpreted by Hall and O’Shea, ibid), is to ask what might be needed to facilitate a cajoling of ‘common sense’ into a position of ‘good sense’. Hall and O’Shea intimate that such a shift does not require the ‘slash and burn’ of all that has gone before. Rather, they postulate that within the internal logic of the ‘common sense’, a ‘good sense’ logic resides. ‘Common sense’ and ‘good sense’ need one another; indeed, they feed from each other and they, necessarily, co-habit. The trick, for Top Hill Primary, is to bring *more* ‘good sense’ of democratic schooling out into the light and *more* often.

As we have seen, common sense rights values tend to be constructed and held as ‘fixed points’ which require some hefty heaving away from an ‘anchorage in conservative logics’ (as Cohen suggests of ‘common sense’ in his recent blog in homage to Hall)<sup>56</sup>. This means finding ways to challenge the declarations of some adult research participants at Top Hill Primary, for example, concerning ‘citizenship’ ideals as always those that are matters of *just* socialisation into existing norms, as we witnessed in the Student Council meeting, for example. Rather, it requires that ‘good sense’ logics are taken seriously and allowed to be heard (such as those of the children with something to say about the suitability of a ‘Toilet Charter’ to ‘steer’ their behaviours). Such Gramscian logic means according *greater* value to the contingent and the dissensual at the expense of the rational and the consensual of rights discourses.

So how might we utilise this ‘awkward’ methodology to refract ‘common sense’ into a place of ‘good sense’? One suggestion I have is to use a framing device that builds on the one that I presented in Chapter 1, in order to interrogate rights discourses: to ‘demand’ of them; to make them work harder for those school subjects especially who are less easily recognisable within

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<sup>56</sup> See Phil Cohen website, March/April 2014, <http://philcohenworks.com/marchapril-blog-let-us-now-praise-famous-men/> accessed April 2014

current common sense versions, or for whom the present manifestations make little sense (such as the two teaching assistants we met in Chapter 5, who did not think the rights discourses held anything for them). Such a 'good sense' may work to enable the re-imagining of different but operable schooling 'citizenship' futures.

I set out just one example of a framing device on the following page using some key 'terms' that we have met throughout this thesis that populate the texts of the RRS initiative and that travel into everyday usages of the rights agendas at Top Hill Primary:

'Common Sense' <i>refracted</i> into 'Good Sense'?	
Destabilising 'common sense' values and ideas	Posing 'good sense' questions...
<p>COMMUNITY</p> <p>What sort? Who says?</p> <p>To what end? Who gains/losses?</p> <p>'Lessons' from the past/for the future?</p>	<p>HOW DO WE:</p> <p>Acknowledge that subject positions are not 'value free'?</p> <p>Consider whose knowledge is to be accorded value? Ask where does it come from? How it is obtained and constituted? Ask 'what'/'who' might it rendered as less/more visible by it? What might be the effect?</p> <p>Construct Knowledge as a product of dialogicality and tension with greater ease?</p> <p>Value knowledge as emancipation – that instigates a capacity that is already possessed and that is temporary?</p> <p>Recognise and value 'tacit' knowledges?</p> <p>Value reflexivity as a practice skill of the community?</p> <p>Seek/acknowledge new forms of subjectivity in a way that does not threaten identities that we may wish to hold close?</p> <p>Can we overtly/covertly recognise what we do as a 'political' project?</p>
<p>PARTICIPATION AND VOICE</p> <p>Who can be seen and heard? When? Where? Why? How?</p>	
<p>EMPOWERMENT</p> <p>How can we render power dynamics more overt?</p> <p>What are their 'limits'? How can we talk of this?</p>	
<p>CONSENSUS</p> <p>The 'when', 'where' and 'why' of consensus?</p> <p>How might we talk about what/who might be excluded/less or more visible</p> <p>How far can dissensus be embraced productively?</p> <p>How much 'chaos' can be endured?</p> <p>How is Active/activist citizenship embraced? (And by whom? When? Where? Why? And to what end?</p> <p>How can we cope with 'unknowable' outcomes,</p>	

I suggest that it would be possible to work with these ‘common sense’ terms, such as ‘community’; ‘participation and voice’; empowerment’ and ‘consensus’, to take just a few examples that populate the RRS initiative and the practice of rights discourses in the school.

After all, on its own terms, the RRS initiative is ‘radical’ in a way that Fielding and Moss outline to make their case for ‘democratic, common’ schooling (Fielding and Moss, 2011): it *does* require us to conceive of the purpose of schooling as always more than that which is only and ever to be about ‘education for a competitive market society and a growth-based and consumption-led economy’ (ibid, p.18). This is especially urgent at a time when these wider purposes of the ‘common school’ seem to be under threat in the UK, and on the wider global stage (Ball, 2013). This means, then, that it is not *just* ‘common sense’ for children to have experience of taking part in organised events, and on committees, that enable them to gain understandings of some of the traditions and ‘rationales’ for such socialising practices; however, it is also ‘good sense’ to enable them to contest and challenge them as ‘*a joke*’ (to use the expression of one child in the Year5/6 focus group). It is also ‘common sense’ for a child with demanding behaviours and low IQ scores, to be supported to learn skills and dispositions that enable him/her to be within ‘mainstream’ schooling, but it is also ‘good sense’ for her/him to not only be identified by a label of ‘vulnerability’, foreclosing all other possibilities for her/his subjectivity (such as when one such child leads a playground game with acumen, as we witnessed in Chapter 5). It is also ‘common sense’ to make claims for a policy such as the RRS initiative (as Gail has done earlier in this chapter), but it is also ‘good sense’ to identify the gaps to open it up, in order to ask questions that enable us to speak of: what we can’t/won’t do as school subjects; the trip-ups and the false-starts we make; the pain of being positioned as practitioners and professionals so that we must always and forever appear as able to ‘perform to the tune’ (joyfully) of every ‘new’ national educational imperative, at whatever cost.

‘Good sense’ can never be a perfected project and neither should it be, for the logic of its construction is that there is always ‘an excess’, a ‘spilling over’, a ‘dissensus’ that will not allow for the hailing into place of yet another foundational platform. But, crucially, the move to a ‘good sense’ implies the working of this excess by being given permission to ask questions (such as those I have suggested in the matrix above) about rights, respect, equality and diversity. What this cannot do, however, is to lead to the straight forward ‘ticking off’ at ‘Level 2’ of ‘common sense statements’ contained within the RRS policy text, such as: ‘*The school has an inclusive and participatory ethos based on the CRC*’. But perhaps, ‘good sense’ can, as

Mouffe suggests, allow us to acknowledge the vagaries of power and antagonism compatible with democratic values (ibid, 2000, p.10) in ways that enable us all to relinquish ideas of perfect harmony. After all, she reminds us that ‘every consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilisation of power... [which]...always entails some form of exclusion’ (ibid, p.11). We must be wary of the rational and apparently containable allure of the ‘Level 2 Question’ and, instead, embrace ‘the crucial role of passion and emotions in securing [our] allegiance to democratic values’ (ibid, p.9) for our schooling futures in schools such as Top Hill in England and beyond.

### ***Footprints...***

I want to end with one last reflection and that is to do with the importance of being mindful (‘post-structurally’) of footprints and traces and legacies and the constitution of Top Hill Primary in another time and within other practices:

*One day, while rifling through some old folders in a discarded heap in the corner of the staff room, I came across one that particularly held my curiosity. It was pretty tatty and dated from the late 1980s. It was full of scribbled hand-written notes; some typed letters to local community organisations; various children’s drawings and plans; hasty and rather excitable records of minutes of meetings, composed by adults and children alike (the spelling was ‘choice’)...more jottings and scribbles – lists of plants, shrubs and trees, many in children’s handwriting; and children’s drawings of an imagined outdoor play area, replete with their own notations alongside those of adults, on costs; and, on ideas for environmentally sensitive sourcing, etc, for all materials deemed necessary to establish an outdoor area around the school building. Rebecca’s notes, April 2012*

I found myself sniffing the rather musty loose leaf pages in order to try and recreate this scene of utopian imagination. It seemed to me, as I rifled through the folder again and again, that these were the records of some ‘good sense’ discourse, from a time long before a RRS initiative was ever conceived in Top Hill Primary, or indeed, anywhere. In my imagination, this was a project mindful of ‘the equality of all speaking beings’ (Rancière, in Biesta and Bingham, 2010, p.143), to be designed and implemented by adults and children together within the school but integral to the local community: one in which a vision of democratic schooling lay at its heart.

And, of course, the fruits of these labours are there now, for every new intake of children to enjoy, year on year. It was this rich, fascinating and chaotic space that held my attention when I first visited the school and when I began my field work which led to my sense of rights as 'suffusing the very ether' (see Chapter 1). Certainly, there is always a past in post-structuralism, and in visionary projects of democratic schooling, as well as a future. We need to be humble.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Research Proposal Matrix

Key Practical Issues of my Ethnographic Method and Data Collection

Focusing Question	Expansion
What is the time frame?	<p>1. This will take place over a year in order to provide data with 'thick descriptions' within a tradition of ethnographic qualitative participant observer research (avoiding the 'voyeurism' and 'intellectual tourism' implicit as a risk of short term cultural immersion – Gordon et al (ibid, p.58) ;</p> <p>2. The field research will be carried out over a school academic year between September 2011 and July 2012;</p> <p>3. The time frame will also allow for an effective engagement with the dynamic and fast changing 'politics of education' within the UK context, as policy initiatives from the 'Coalition' government are generated and enacted within the school context.</p>
What is the geographical location?	<p>1. I am currently negotiating access to a state urban primary school on the outskirts of a city in the southern half of England (recognising that this is on –going and constantly renegotiated (Gordon et al, 2000, p 10). The school draws children and parents/carers from a range of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds within a geographical area within close proximity to the school.</p>
How general is the focus?	<p>1. General focus on the construction of the curriculum (see Appendix A: Research Design). It will involve me in (ethically negotiated) participatory observation in public spaces within, and around, the school, allowing for a engagements in a variety of contexts and at different times;</p> <p>2. It will focus upon pupils within a 9 to 11 age range within the school for two reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils within a primary setting experience a curriculum that allows for some exploration of cross curricular themes with some degree of flexibility which is less likely to be the case within a secondary school setting;</li> <li>• Pupils within Year 5 and 6 at the end of the primary age phase will be developing the skills and aptitudes that will allow for the engagement with political issues as they become constructed within the curriculum;</li> </ul> <p>3. The focus will require on-going, negotiated 'open' access to the educational space to allow for an engagement with a variety of participants and discourses (official, semi-official, unofficial, 'expert', 'non-expert', planned, chance) concerning the co-construction of political understanding within the curriculum. However, this will be within the established ethical parameters agreed in advance with the school and which balance spontaneity and order with ethical considerations.</p>
What is the unit of analysis?	<p>What do I want to draw conclusions about?</p> <p>My own and different peoples' interpretations of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• possible meanings; problematizing of meanings;</li> <li>• practices</li> <li>• encounters and interactions</li> <li>• curriculum analysis – curriculum('official') policies of the school as part of a wider political discourse</li> </ul> <p>These units of analysis will provide an account of possible ways of engaging with a contextual and historically specific social reality.</p>
How abstract is my interest?	<p>My interest will be abstract in the sense of the research encapsulating 'snapshots' in time. It will be concerned with one way of engaging dynamically with possible meanings, practices and encounters. Any conclusions drawn will be necessarily contingent and micro.</p>
How can I balance the desirable with the practical?	<p>As feminist post-structural ethnographic research, I am not so concerned with balancing the abstract and the practical, for I am not setting out to generate specific policy or practice recommendations. This research will not be about developing or modifying existing practice explicitly. Implicitly, however, it will aim to challenge existing assumptions underpinning practices and encounters, and the meaning making of politics within the curriculum by deconstructing and revealing possible inconsistencies, ruptures and fissures in ways of 'doing' and 'being'.</p>

## **Appendix 2: Running for the Bus (and Not Getting On): a Play Script in which Rebecca Webb Meets Judith Butler at the Bus Stop**

(Setting the Scene: Busy High Street in Affluent Urban Space in Twenty-first Century in Northern Hemisphere. It's the middle of summer and early evening. People are heading home or out after doing whatever it is that they do in the day. Road full of traffic and all sorts of people: every colour, shape and creed. Well, men, especially men – bloody men – I mean there would be, wouldn't there?)

Me (breathless, panting, too warm): *Hi, Judith, sorry...I'm late...been very busy...you know. Got married, three kids, home and work, family, responsibilities...balancing...impossible, but, you know, I'm out now (sort of)...and running...ha! ha!*

Judith (looking chilled, calm, suave, and rather surprised): *Hey, no problem. What's the rush? Calm down. Stop. There's no hurry. Jesus, you must be boiling. Why not take that thing off...I mean...what's the problem? Hey? Sit down there and situate yourself dialogically.*

Me (confused, embarrassed): *No. I'll stand, thanks...Well, there is a rush, isn't there?... This wretched patriarchy thing: it doesn't go away, you know! I mean we have to do something, Judith...It's out there and everywhere. (More defiantly) It always has been and it always will be, unless... (Apologetically) I've been too busy for the last twenty years or so – you know how it is (well you don't, you haven't gone down that route, have you?) – but now the kids are grown up and don't keep making demands...well: I'm on board. (Shouting – in the street, by the bus stop. People staring.) Women of the world unite! Let's fight this sexist, monstrous macho machine! (More calmly, directly addressing Judith, once again.) I have to make up for lost time, Judith, and I'm with my Sisters now. Come to think of it, I don't know what you've been up to? Writing books or something, just sitting and thinking. Well, to be honest, Judith, I think that it's time that you put your money where your mouth is, and nailed your colours to the mast, and shouted about male bastards too. (Addressing anyone who will listen and shouting again) Bastards! Oppressors!*

Judith (considered, thoughtful, stroking her [not hairy] chin): *Hey, look, put that essentialist backpack down. You look exhausted. When we get on the bus let me introduce you to Pearl... She's a great friend of mine – discursively situated in Bournemouth...along the seafront. A few problems with her neighbours though, but she's working at it...*

Me (animatedly): *I bet, men, white men, heterosexual male bastards!*

Judith: *Well, no. Men and women and a range of gendered selves...Pearl is using the contingent tensions to open up spaces to interrupt and disrupt...It seems to be working, but it takes time and there are always those who just don't get it. Relativists you, know: wedded to their redundant epistemologies and ontologies...By the way, did you know that I've taken up weaving? It's great. No two things made*

*are ever quite the same, even though I follow the same pattern more or less, every time. No, each piece takes on its own contingent subjectivity, as the warp and weft does its stuff, entwining and interweaving. (Laughing) Actually, there is nothing more reflexively engaging ( I do yoga, too, you know) than weaving in Discursive Fields (indicates), just down the road...you should try it. Mind you, you can find that you get your subjectivities so entwined and enmeshed that it can be just a bit painful at times.*

*Me (Completely taken aback): But I thought you hated needlework! You always used to at school. You said it was part of the oppressive male hegemony, designed to keep women in their place. Me, I'm more into Power Tools.*

*(Bus turns up and stops and Judith spots Pearl and starts waving. Pearl stands up and waves back, beckoning us onto the bus. But what is Pearl wearing? Black lacy corset with stockings and a thong... My God! She's just turned round, and tattooed across her/his back is written: 'Reclaim your inner slut'. I realise that Judith is on the bus, embracing Pearl. The bus is pulling away and I'm still on the pavement. Actually, I'm bloody boiling...I think I'll take off my donkey jacket... Objectively speaking, it stinks, anyway.)*

## Appendix 3: An Example of a Plan of Research Action

### Plan of Research Action

#### TERM ONE

Week beginning	Main focus of activities * <sup>57</sup>	Details
Week 1	<p>Meeting teacher and head teacher</p> <p>(Get laptop and recording device organised. Decide what to write on and when and where in school)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completing admin re admission to school – CRB, Ethics</li> <li>• Agreeing provisional timetable of presence in school</li> <li>• Agreeing expectations governing my presence within school – including reciprocity<sup>58</sup></li> <li>• Sharing timeline of tasks</li> <li>• Agreeing date to meet with Head to identify meetings to attend, school personnel I could spend time with/interview<sup>59</sup></li> <li>• Agree time to meet Teacher Z to discuss specific sessions that she would like observed, my role, her role, childrens' role</li> <li>• Suggestions re pupil involvement</li> <li>• Agreeing who to tell what re my research/presence in school</li> </ul>

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<sup>57</sup> Each week I need to follow wider political contexts of educational developments and be alert to how these impact in the school, if at all

<sup>58</sup> Reciprocity could take the form of – playground duties; support teachers in a defined session on a regular basis

<sup>59</sup> I would like to identify training sessions, curriculum meetings, staff meetings, Assemblies, governor's meetings, meetings with individual staff (e.g. curriculum leaders) or staff with particular responsibilities, committees that I could attend as an observer.

Week 2	<p>Introductions class Y and wider school community</p> <p>School walks – me on own</p> <p>Document analysis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing relationship with class Y</li> <li>• Getting to know school community</li> <li>• Whole school Assembly introducing myself</li> <li>• Identify which documents to look at when with Head's permission</li> </ul>
Week 3	<p>Introduction to area – look beyond school and walk around catchment – on own</p> <p>Document analysis</p> <p>Session/s? In class Y. Intro. to children as a PO researcher</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What can I see? What does it mean to me? So what?</li> <li>• School intake documentation; Ofsted report</li> <li>• Level of observation/participation?</li> <li>• Teacher Z role – ask her?</li> <li>• My role?</li> </ul>
Week 4	<p>Introduction to start of school day</p> <p>School walk with some children from class Y - led by them as what to look at and why</p> <p>Session/s in class Y.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What goes on? How? When? Who?</li> <li>• Informal conversations with parents/carers on way in/out of school?</li> <li>• Where do we go? What do they identify for us to look at? What do they say about it? What meaning do they say they attribute to it?</li> <li>• Teacher Z role – ask her?</li> <li>• My role?</li> </ul>
	<p>Introduction to end of school day</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What goes on? How? When? Who?</li> <li>• Identify range of documents to scrutinise over half term – seek permission to do so.</li> </ul>



Week 5	Document analysis	
Week 6	<p>Introduction to a playtime session – (see what I have previously said about playground duty?)</p> <p>Discussions with Teacher Z and Head teacher to review first five weeks</p> <p>Session/s in class Y</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What goes on? How? When? Who?</li> <li>• Opportunities to raise issues and to reflect on aspects of research</li> <li>• Teacher Z role – ask her?</li> <li>• My role?</li> </ul>
HALF TERM	Document analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document analysis – from school docs that I have access to; national/local newspapers/websites; follow what is going on in news re national context of education esp.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 4: Re-design of Research Focus

**Research Design** (re-composed after a month in the field)

KEY

*Ethnographic method*

Rebecca's Field-notes (RFN); Data Collection Method (DCM); O= Observation; Participant Observation= PO; Informal conversation=IC; Semi-structured interview=SSI; Document analysis=DA

*Constituent Groups*

Subjects as participants= SAP ; Children=C; Teachers=T; Support staff=SS; Head teacher=HT; Parents/Carers=PC; Visitors=V; Governors=G; Rebecca As Researcher=RAR

Overarching questions	Subordinate questions	Data collection method (DCM) and Subjects as participants (SAP)		Broader methodological implications (which are relevant to ALL questions)
		DCM	SAP	
What are the dominant and subordinate discourses informing the 'Rights' 'values'?  To what end?	How are dominant and subordinate discourses 'seen' by different subjects, in a variety of contexts, at different times and in a range of situations?			Observations, reflections and rhetorical questioning
	<b>A. What can be gleaned about the discourses from the displays/signage/symbols around the school?</b>  1. Are there key messages/themes?	O   PO	RAR   With any members of	Feminist ethnographic 'ethics of care' that are situated socially and negotiated dialogically, and are reflected upon problematically  Need to develop rhetorical questioning of self to critique and problematize what it is that I construe as constituting 'values' – i.e. whose

	<p>2. What are they?</p> <p>3. By whom have they been generated?</p> <p>4. How are they regarded/interpreted and by whom?</p> <p>5. Are they static/transient?</p> <p>6. Where do they appear?</p>	RFN IC  SSI	the constituent groups  Especially with C, HT and staff member responsible for displays	<p>knowledge/understandings is it that I am hearing and critiquing?</p> <p>Adopting of stance of 'indwelling'</p> <p>Consider conditions mediating presence of hierarchies, power &amp; control</p> <p>Identify what can be said and by whom about the constitution of values, ethos, etc</p>
	<p><b>B. How are the dominant and subordinate discourses informing 'Rights' values read by different subjects?</b></p> <p>1. What can be picked up from what subjects say? Who are they?</p> <p>2. What can be gleaned from body language and facial expressions of subjects? Who are they?</p> <p>3. What can be gleaned from the way they speak to one another? (who speaks to whom?)</p> <p>4. How can these be picked up from the way the types of relationships that are to be formed between different groups – e.g. teachers and pupils; those in 'authority' and those not in authority; between those who work in the school and those who are serviced by it (e.g. parents/carers):</p>	O PO IC and SSI	<p>RAR</p> <p>RAR with All constituent groups</p>	<p>Develop awareness of multiple meanings of language and different textual accounts</p> <p>RAR and members of constituent groups positioned/are positioned by history &amp; context</p> <p>Problematize what counts as 'values' and what is perceived as political and by whom? To what end?</p>

How do the dominant and subordinate school discourse inform what is to be practised?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. What do different subjects say about who decides?</li> <li>6. What do different subjects say about dominant and subordinate discourses? How do they describe them?</li> <li>7. Are they identified as being <i>political</i>? How? Why? To what end?</li> </ol>			
	<p>How are the discourses practised? What is the function of the 'Rights' values in the learning process for a range of subjects?</p> <p><b>A. For children?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do these manifest themselves?</li> <li>2. What are the opportunities?</li> <li>3. Where do they take place?</li> <li>4. Are there formal opportunities as part of organised schooling opportunities?</li> <li>5. Are there incidental opportunities for practising these 'values' (or not)?</li> <li>6. How do these manifest themselves?</li> <li>7. How are these imparted and in which situations?</li> <li>8. Are they constituted as political?</li> </ol> <p><b>B. For adults?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do these manifest themselves?</li> </ol>	<p>O</p> <p>PO</p> <p>IC</p> <p>SSI</p>	<p>RAR</p> <p>RAR with C, T, SS</p> <p>With groups of children</p>	<p>Problematize my account of making sense of 'practice' and the way in which I create meaning out of 'the political' especially with regard to intersectionalities of gender, class, ethnicity, ability/disability where appropriate</p> <p>Problematize my account of making sense of 'practice' and the way in which I create meaning out of 'the political' especially with</p>

	2.	What are these opportunities?	O	RAR  RAR with HT, G, T, SS	regard to intersectionalities of gender, class, ethnicity, ability/disability
	3.	Where do they take place?			
	4.	Are there formal opportunities?	PO		
	5.	Are there incidental opportunities ?			
	6.	How do these manifest themselves?	IC		
	7.	How are these imparted and in which situations?			
	8.	Are they constituted as political?	SSI		
	<b>C. For parents/carers?</b>				
	1.	How do these manifest themselves?		RAR  RAR With PC and V	Problematize my account of making sense of ‘learning’ and the way in which I create meaning out of ‘the political’ especially with regard to intersectionalities of gender, class, ethnicity, ability/disability  For A, B and C, need to:  Ensure that I explore the dialogicality and tension involved in knowledge generation  Be alert to hierarchies, power and control that mediate  Develop awareness of conscious partiality  Tolerate ambiguity, contradiction  Continually seek to construct knowledge as shifting between the inductive and deductive, abductively
	2.	What are these opportunities?	O		
	3.	Where do they take place?			
	4.	Are there formal opportunities?	PO		
	5.	Are there incidental opportunities?			
	6.	How do these manifest themselves?	IC		
	7.	How are these imparted and in which situations?			
	8.	Are they constituted as political?	SSI		

<p>What are the wider political discourses informing the 'Rights' values?</p> <p>Do these align/or not with dominant and subordinate practices of schooling discourses of 'Rights'?</p>	<b>A. What are the wider political discourses?</b>			
	1. What are the messages being given by central/local government? Media? Tacit knowledge? Doxa? How?	DA	RAR	Resist scientist-as-subject critiquing of documentation
	2. How are these knowledges translated within school?	PO		
	3. Who hears them?/How do they react? (singularly/collectively)	IC		Reflexively construe myself as implicated within the knowledge construction
	4. How are these messages implicated within what is learnt?	SSI		
	<b>B. What are the subordinate discourses?</b>			
	1. From whence do these emanate?	DA	RAR with any constituent groups	Resist scientist-as-subject critiquing of documentation
	2. How are they translated?	PO		
	3. Who hears them?/How do they react? (singularly/collectively)	IC		Reflexively construe myself as implicated within the knowledge construction
	4. How are these messages implicated within what is to be learnt?	SSI		

## Appendix 5: Summary of fieldwork over first nine weeks

### Summary of fieldwork to December, 2011

What Have I been doing?	How have I been recording data?	So What? (Random collection of reflections, thoughts, questions and concerns...)
<p>Cycling to station – not ‘cycle friendly’ – no cycle paths and roadways clearly for cars, often end up using pavement in town</p> <p>Taking different routes in and out of school grounds – locked and bolted and need codes and finding different ways to station to develop better sense of town environ</p> <p>Striking up conversations with support staff: receptionists; teaching assistants (TAs) and playground supervisors (who have a myriad of roles including supervising the complicated ‘Winter’ lunchtime rota now that everyone eats their lunch inside; clearing up; monitoring playing; administering First Aid; overseeing ‘Playground Play Partners’), and some parents who I have met in the playground through children I have got to know; through the ‘Equality and Diversity Support Group’; and some parents I have got chatting with inside and outside school as they have got more used to me being about the place.</p> <p>Eating lunch in the staff room; going out to get some lunch from the town and from the local shop round the corner</p> <p>Spending time in the playground during break-times either on the main tarmac</p>	<p>‘Home’ journal which reflects specifically upon the research process as I am experiencing it – the highs and lows and how it makes me feel and what else it makes me think about. I often write entries in this, too, when I have spent time with my friend reflecting upon the experience.</p> <p>‘School’ journal that I keep with me in school to record any thoughts that may or may not be to do with field notes that I am making. Also record rhetorical questions here and more practical questions of things that I need to ask others or find out. Also using this to begin to suggest threads, themes based on writing that I am doing that seems to inform the process. I have subdivided this journal for ease of reference into ‘Observations and reflections beyond the bounds of the classroom’; ‘Questions and reflections linked to the classroom’; ‘Questions and Reflections for Head/Senior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <p><i>It’s all SO Middle class (<b>need to think about a way to theorise this: Bourdieu?</b>) – Certainly an initial perception and one that I carry with me so much of the time...How does this manifest itself? Well, in an air and sense of incredible togetherness – the parents, children, teachers and some teaching assistants carry an air of ‘knowing who they are’ and ‘filling’ the space with an ease and a confidence that pervades every nook and cranny. I suppose – ‘it takes one to know one’ – it reminds me of myself as a parent and I cringe at my own recollection of having kids at primary school and some of the things I did and some of the ways that I behaved that my kids remind me of. It is like looking into a mirror. It is an incredibly richly resourced environment: a lot of people work incredibly hard to provide an amazing experience for the children: there are so many clubs, and so much going on...every minute of every day is filled with stuff and this goes on well after school hours...possible to play an instrument, do sport, be artistic, be brainy (Chess Club, and creative - Contemporary Dance Club, ‘Folk dancing’ Club - all in the space of a few hours... The children have a ‘carefree’ air – there seems to be a seamless transition from the space from which they come – their homes – and then on into the school space (<b>think that embodiment of spaces and interruptions/continuities will be important...</b>). But – of course – that’s not everyone, it just sometimes feels as though it is because this ‘way of being’ carries a confidence. I feel that I ‘slot’ into this all too easily: I know ‘the speak’; I know the way of being; the style of parenting; the right way to be. I have a great fear of this for it often does not feel sufficiently uncomfortable for me in terms of .making the familiar strange’ (need to think about my identity and positioning here – again the <b>situational ethics of who I am, how I am, what I am</b> have constant implications for the way in which I am living out moments and reflecting on them afterwards. <b>Although I am an ‘outsider’ I think that many of the problematics of ‘insider research’</b> are becoming apparent to me: am I really an outsider- on whose terms? After all, although the area is new to me and I feel that this is a school (a very good one) that I recognise from my own parenting, teaching and advisory experiences, especially as I was an Equality and Diversity advisor. It feels like examining my own practice over the years and sometimes it all feels rather too close for comfort. <b>And what are the implications of all this for the power dynamics of my identity and positioning and for what it is that I can purport to say?</b></i></p> </li> <li> <p>But there are fissures and cracks in the smoothness of middle classness that present themselves</p> </li> </ul>

<p>area or on the edge of the side playground (where football is played on a class by class rota); playing 'Four Square' when invited to by the children; chatting to Child S who is always keen to ask me, 'So, how can I help you today with your queries?' Spending some Break/lunch time in the staff room –('engaged/disengaged') and thinking about who goes in there regularly and who doesn't and where they might be instead – a few people (TAs, Teachers) go and sit in a shelter in an area of a wild flower garden behind the school to have their break;</p> <p>Attending 'Equality and Diversity Support Group; meeting twice and then a meeting with the leader of the group – a school manager, to 'think through' the monitoring and evaluation of an Equality and Diversity staff meeting; attending a information session for parents/families about Equality and Diversity and how it fits in with the Rights Respecting Schools agenda</p> <p>Attending an INSET training for all teachers on 'moving from good to outstanding' (31.10.11);</p> <p>Attending training for Mid-day Supervisors on Rights Respecting Schools agenda</p> <p>Attending 'Curriculum' Assemblies for KS2; Attending Singing Practices – week by week – by mid Nov. these were 'carol' practices.</p> <p>Participating (increasingly) within Year 5 class for two days each week for almost 9 weeks so far:</p> <p>Participation has meant - Working with the same group for a maths</p>	<p>leadership team'</p> <p>In practice, the journal that I tend to keep at home and the journal I keep at school are interchangeable and the sections within the journal I tend to write at school are rather interchangeable (but I am careful to constantly cross reference) Everything is dated.</p> <p>Have 9 weeks of field notes now. I have continued to use the landscape format that I started with. In the first column I jot down what is going on or what I have remembered is going on. I have two columns for reflections and analysis – first column is for immediate thoughts/reflections and the second column is for subsequent thoughts or for slightly 'larger ideas' or links that I wish to follow up later or to cross reference with my journals.</p> <p>Digital recorder, as a way of 'thinking aloud' or making observations as I move from place to place – e.g. looking around the classroom, or looking around the school. This material is then stored on my laptop. To be honest I rarely do this: I'd be so embarrassed to be caught doing this. But I often speak into it at the end of the day when no one else is around. I also speak into it when I leave as long as the traffic isn't too noisy.</p>	<p>occasionally and which seep into everyday situations and interactions – these are the interesting bits: the Year X child (who is very different in a range of ways, some very visible and some less so...?? – <b>How do I know?</b> She sometimes works in the Heads office and out in the corridor for much of the time that I am in school because she is too naughty to be in the classroom – crawls under the tables ,exhibits disrupting behaviours, etc); the YearY child who plays on his own and who has befriended me in the playground and who has all sorts of food in his lunchbox that you are not supposed to have which lots of the children seem to pick up on and castigate him for; the Year Z child who is very able and very quietly defiant and often in trouble when not in lesson time...; the parent who told me that the Equality and Diversity meeting made her angry because it was so self-satisfied and hijacked by 'Do-gooders'; the angry supply teacher in the lunch hall, who expressed her frustration about the 'Pigs with no bloody manners' – presumably the children(?) in the corridor to a colleague after the lunch break (no reply: was it because the person to whom she was speaking was aware of me walking past or was it because she felt that this outburst was inappropriate or uncalled for?; the group of parents from 'the council flats up the hill from the school' who congregate together in the same place in the playground at the beginning and the end of the day? The fact that there are very distinct groups in the playground and that this doesn't seem to be addressed as part of 'equality and diversity' <b>The groups look very 'classed' to me</b> – which is hard to write because of my middle class squeamishness – again, <b>how do I know? What does that mean? What does it signify (about me?)</b>; the 'feeling' within the lunch hall that I had when I went to eat my lunch - of complete disjuncture with the pervading sense throughout the rest of the school which is one of managed carefree-ness...Makes me realise how well this 'carefreeness' is managed and how hard it is to maintain. the lunch hall is the only place I have heard an adult shout and look really at the end of her tether in front of the children the lunch time staff have a really difficult job – so many children, so many roles, so little time: such a responsibility (especially on wet days). And the children didn't seem that bothered when the mid-day supervisor shouted. I was quite surprised because it doesn't usually happen. <b>What does this say about the surveillance of different spaces and the way in which power works in these?</b></p> <p><u>Range of ideas/themes that I am mulling over at the moment...</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MY POSITION/MY IDENTITY? Me as an ethnographer – really? Feeling permanently liminal?</li> <li>• VALUES/what sort of POLITICAL SPACE is this? And so, what of POWER and the way in which it is played out...hegemony. There will be a great deal to be said, I suspect around the conceptualization of the individual as opposed to the group... How does it resonate with other geographical, historical and philosophical spaces around it in the town of which it is a part – will I be able to do this, however, because of anonymity?</li> <li>• Conceptions of CITIZENSHIP ('Rights Respecting Schools stuff'? Whole agenda of Equality and Diversity meetings This is really fascinating ...I need to watch and wait and see how all this stuff gets played out in different spaces. The leader of the group is so dedicated and gives up so much</li> </ul>
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<p>session – grouped by test scores; Working with different groups for literacy session (known as ‘Literacy Groups’) – grouped by ‘ability’ – children tell me that these are decided ‘by the teachers’ and they don’t seem that sure why certain children are in which group and why Joining in with dance, singing, and ‘Golden Time’ activities and Conversing with the children as I interact with them in the classroom, playground, in and around/outside the school as and when they seem happy to chat to me – try Not to force myself upon them Observation – introduction to lessons; During lessons; between, beginning and ends of lessons and other teachers who come in to work in the classroom – e.g. Teacher PY who works with the children to do Brain Gym games which they seem to love Teaching assistants within the classroom and moving in and out and working outside the classroom with individual children or groups of children. Attending CASE campaign in ULU to provide national context for ‘the political’ Conversing and reflecting with parent/friend/fellow DPhil student re-experience and sense/nonsense making...</p>	<p>The field notes and journal entries are all handwritten and stored in a file which I lock away at the end of the day. I carry these with me in a ruc sac all day. I have worked out a short hand system for recording names. No one is identified within the field notes.</p> <p>I still don’t make any notes or recordings ‘in public’ – it still doesn’t feel appropriate and I can’t do it. I have developed the habit of using some break times and some ‘time out’ sessions in school to record. This tends to be the nuts and bolts of what is going on. So far I have managed to keep up with this and to then using an evening session to reflect and to ensure that I feel that I have created a sufficiently ‘full’ picture of what I have experienced.</p> <p>As long as I do this, I find that I return to the journals time and time again to reflect upon the process and to tentatively do some thinking - linking this, likewise with the reading that I undertake.</p> <p>Perhaps need to reference my reading here?</p>	<p>time to it. A great deal seems assumed, and I’m not clear about why. But again – I feel that I’m looking back at my past: getting things done in groups is very tricky and ‘opening things up’ can mean so little gets done.... The dreaded ‘class’ word has yet to be uttered from anyone’s lips. It is fascinating that none of us mentions this. Whether this is because this is perceived as a Utopian classless school in a particular space, I’m not sure, or whether it’s because this stuff never gets theorised within school, or whether most of us just find it too hard to know how to broach this stuff in a ‘pc’ way, I’m not sure. Maybe we think we ‘dance’ around it and move other things to make society better: it seems easier to talk about ethnicity and same sex partnerships. Interestingly single parents in the school tell me they feel a ‘forgotten’ group too... Had an interesting discussion with Year 6 child during his Literacy work for Black History Week: told me that Rosa Parkes was ‘wrong’, because ‘she’d gone and got herself arrested and you should never get arrested’ – shades of memories of messages emanating from ‘London riots’ this summer? Kept thinking about when in class time this child might have a chance to have this view contested...hard to see in a busy curriculum schedule.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PSYCHOLOGICAL V SOCIOLOGICAL? This is very poorly thought through in my head, but I have a sense that there is a strong psychological discourse within the school focussed upon behaviour management and emotional literacy and staged models of what to expect when and deviations from the norm and gentle and therapeutic ways of thinking about working with children to ‘normalise’ them. But there is much time given over to thinking about the individual and how to deal with kindness and thoughtfulness so that individuals do not get written off. There is a counter discourse which finds all this ‘trying’ and just wants children ‘told off’! This seems to scoop up those that regard this way of carrying on as pandering to over-privileged kids who would be a lot nicer if someone said, ‘no’ to them some times.</li> <li>• Importance of LOCALITY and HISTORY of the school, AND of the town and TEMPORALITY – the school is 50 years old and there are many people who came to the school as kids and who have lived in the area for a long time...what is new and what has stayed the same?</li> <li>• CHILDHOOD – place/importance of play? How is this conceptualized in the school? Well – and ADULTHOOD? What seem to be the dominant models of each – how do they relate one to the other?</li> <li>• LIBERAL TRADITIONS - reference to ‘Equality and Diversity group as ‘Radical’? – What does that mean/and to whom/and for what? And what of readings of the dominant national educational discourse...so far haven’t had a whiff of an awareness of there being a big, bad world out there but this must happen at some point.</li> </ul>
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## Appendix 6: Feedback from qualitative ethnographic research

Conducted by Rebecca Webb (Doctoral Researcher, University of Sussex)  
carried out between September 2011 and April 2012.

### GENERAL REPORT

#### What Was The Research About and What Is The Research About?

My research started off by focusing on the way in which ‘teachers and pupils understand, and make sense of, learning... [linking] it to things that go on in the world around them that affect them now or might affect them in the future’<sup>60</sup>. However, like much qualitative ethnographic research, the focus of the attention of the research gradually changed once I had started conducting my research in your school. This happened as I began, with your help, to make sense of the issues and themes that emerged as underpinning your philosophy of education and schooling. This meant that rather than focusing on the curriculum per se as I had originally anticipated, I came to focus upon the wider ‘ethos’ of school life. In the information sheets that I gave to those adults that I interviewed this became translated into:

*My research concerns the way adults and children understand and make sense of the pedagogy and practice of the school. It seeks to find out how they link this to things that go on in the world around them. This is NOT a piece of research designed to establish ‘right’ from ‘wrong’. Rather it is about understanding how adults and children produce meanings about the micro-politics of education [or as I discussed with interviewees, the ‘culture’ or ‘ethos’ of the school].*

In practice, as I gradually had to ‘narrow’ the focus of my research attention, I began to hone in upon the ‘Rights’ and ‘Responsibilities’ ethos and agenda which was described, by so many of you, as forming the bedrock of a school philosophy and attitude. This linked also to the central focus placed upon ‘Equality’ and ‘Diversity’ last year which followed on from the training you’d had as a whole school in the summer term of 2011; your ‘Equality and Diversity Support Group’; and the displays and curricular focus on this aspect of school life, especially in the autumn term, 2011 and spring term 2012.

So as I approach the final year of my research now (which will be centred upon the writing of a thesis using my research), it will focus upon: ‘Rights’ and ‘Responsibilities’ as an overarching theme, that links ‘equality’ and ‘diversity’ to the purposes and functions of schooling and citizenship more generally in your school.

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<sup>60</sup> This was taken from the information sheet that I put up around the school to initially inform anyone who wished to know something about the reasons for me being in school

It has only been through your generosity – by allowing me to be in the school, for such a long time and for so much of each week - that I have really been able to work out what exactly it is that I feel able to write about!

### **How Was The Research Carried Out?**

As many of you will be aware, the research was carried out by me, seemingly, spending a great deal of time – well - ‘hanging out’. This meant being in the school in various places at various times:

- particularly one Year X classroom, where the adults and children kindly agreed to put up with me on a regular basis at different points during the school week;
- playgrounds and outside areas around the school;
- the halls – for lunch, ‘Singing Time’, assemblies, dancing, for ‘Shows’ and entertainments and celebrations (most notably the memorable Diamond Jubilee Event celebrating 50 years of Top Hill!)
- the staff room (and occasionally for meetings)
- the corridors and library area;
- The Art room;
- ‘The Cabin’ – with the children during lesson time and for the Equality and Diversity Support Group meetings;
- the Year Y teaching support room;
- ‘The Smile Room’;
- John’s office.

The ‘hanging out’ that I undertook felt strange and uncomfortable for me a lot of the time. After all, I am used to being a teacher in school and getting on with ‘doing’ to justify my existence. However, you were all very patient with me and put up with me trying to do this and I learnt a great deal from being in the privileged position of ‘just watching’. In practice, I did spend as much time being a ‘Participant Observer’ researcher as I did just being an ‘Observer’. I was allowed to join in with small group work in Year X and some really fascinating ‘Circle Time’ and ‘Philosophy for Children’ sessions especially once I got in to the second half of my time in school. I also enjoyed decorating the hall at Christmas and doing a spot of ‘gardening’ with a Year Z group on the plot down in the kitchen gardens. I also joined in, on several occasions with lessons in Helen’s classroom.

I spent a lot of time talking with people – children; teachers; teaching assistants and specialist support workers; visitors; parents; and other people who do important work in the school to keep it functioning smoothly – mid-day supervisors; administrators and cleaners. A lot of these conversations were ‘informal’ and therefore do not feature as reported speech anywhere. However, all these conversations – many very informal and ‘of the moment’ all helped to build a picture for me which I wrote about in the copious notes that I kept.

Towards the end of my time in school, many adults gave me permission to interview them. This included parents and family members (past and present), teachers (past and present), teaching assistants and other people who work or volunteer in the school. I also conducted 'Learning Walks' with groups of children from Year P upwards to provide evidence of values and attitudes for the RRS Level Two award for which you are currently collecting 'evidence'. This interview data you kindly agreed to me using as part of my research. However, *ALL* data will be entirely anonymised to protect the identity of those who took part in it, including the children.

I will use the data from both the interviews and from my participant observation notes to provide you with a summary below of what people told me, and what I heard and saw. It is perhaps important to stress at this juncture that this is not 'objective' research. This is not meant to give you the '*truth*' about Top Hill Primary. It is certainly not designed to give an evaluative judgement about the school such as you receive from an OFSTED Inspection. However, what it does do is give you access to the thoughts, ideas and feelings of a range of people that you may not otherwise have access to. Some of these 'thoughts, ideas and feelings' are, of course my own interpretation: they are based on my own observations and conversations with a whole range of people in school, both children and adults, at different times during my eight months in the school. They reflect the particular interpretations that I have placed on what I have seen and what people have said. You will see below that I occasionally use direct quotes from people. Where I have done so, I have been careful to quote only what people have consented to me quoting from the interviews they have given. This material is entirely anonymised. It is not possible to attribute what has been said to any one particular individual. In the data below, I do not distinguish between different constituent groups, whether they be adults or children, teachers, friends of the school, parents or support staff. This is important for you, I think. All are members of your Top Hill community with thoughts and feelings and ideas and views. And taking the views of all, regardless of their position and status, seems to accord with your Rights Respecting school values. You may find that you read these comments and that they resonate with you. On the other hand, you may well feel, that they do not represent the way you see things.

One of the privileges, I have discovered, of doing this type of research, is having time to stop and reflect. This has given me the opportunity to see things which might otherwise be missed or go unsaid. Ethnographic research such as this is not common in educational settings, partly because it takes a lot of time and is labour intensive. However, its scarcity does not mean that it should be discounted as of 'no use'. To my mind, it gives us all a range of insights that counterbalance, or sit alongside, the different sorts of evidence based research that tends to have primacy within education settings. The findings are partial, contingent and specific to very particular people, times and places. The range of thoughts, reflections and assertions express a wide range of views and positions. They are often contradictory. Nonetheless, my hope is that they provide some food for thought for those who read and ponder them and that they are a useful catalyst to fruitful dialogue between colleagues.

## What Does the Research Tell Us?

This section revolves around three main points:

1. the way in which the Rights Respecting Schools Agenda (RRSA) frames schooling and the way in which the school works and shapes learning and schooling;
2. being a child or an adult in Top Hill Primary and the way in which being a child or an adult is constructed through the Rights Respecting Schools initiative;
3. being citizens of a wider community and the values and beliefs and attitudes that the Rights Respecting Schools initiative might inculcate.

Within point 1 this research specifically argues that:

- RRSA is about the 'whole school community': it should include everyone – adults and children alike
- RRSA ensures a strong Head ('or does a strong Head ensure a Rights Respecting School?') - she [the Head] has 'nailed her colours to the mast' and shown her priorities with the way money is spent and the way that resources are deployed
- The 'nurturing' quality of the school has been institutionalised by RRSA
- RRS is 'at the heart of everything we do' at Top Hill Primary
- RRS is about the commitment of the leadership so that all strategic decisions are made to embed a particular culture and ethos that accords with this
- It builds on an existing ethos – many, many people that were interviewed and to whom I spoke talked of a particularly special 'ethos' within Top Hill Primary that stretches a long way back into the past. Various this has been described as 'happy'; 'carefree'; 'special' 'valuable'; 'precious'. Many people were able to give me examples of this 'ethos' as far back as the mid-1980s
- RRS should underpin all developments within the school- the quality of the curriculum, its delivery and the performance of pupils
- RRS should be about team building and it should counter notions of the 'cult of personality'
- RRS shapes a strong commitment by school staff – lots of people give up a lot of time and resources to support the school and display a great sense of pride in the values of the school
- RRS ethos [developed over many years] means that it has a reputation as 'the place to go' and aids its perception as having a vibrant social mix which adds to its creativity
- Supply teachers feel positively towards the school and are pleased to return
- Scope for the RRS to better to inform the way in which the curriculum is developed and delivered so that children become more active in shaping both
- Ethos means that the school is geared towards supporting all children – especially strong in supporting those with particular needs or requirements. This was mentioned time and time again

- 'There's just so much going on: the children are so fortunate – every need and skill is catered for: it's fun, exciting, rewarding'
- Sense that RRS shapes a very strong sporting ethos of which many children and adults are very proud. 'It's the taking part and not the winning that's important'
- RRS is about openness but sometimes the 'openness is more assumed than realised'. This means that there is scope for discussion about clarity of roles for those working and/or volunteering in the school – who does what; why; for what remuneration or recognition. 'In a place like Top Hill Primary there is too much scope for taking the 'little people' for granted. This is NOT very RRS!' More transparency and openness would perhaps allow for franker discussions about assumptions that are made about 'women's work' and gender roles and what is required and expected of people more generally
- 'Gender gets a bit lost – we're pretty good on sexual orientation, I think. Perhaps there is a hierarchy of 'rights' – ooh...hadn't thought about that before: sounds a bit clever - but important to think about if you are a Rights and Respect school...'
- RRS itself has a central focus upon a shared language which focuses upon ethos, values and beliefs. Reference to 'language' and the 'language of Rights Respecting Schools' was referred to on many occasions and in different contexts
- The 'common language' of RRS is referenced by many as a great strength, although some feel that:
  - There 'are just too many words'
  - The language can be insufficiently concrete for young children
  - The language needs to be 'translated' for many children. Worries that not all adults are up to doing this
  - If everyone 'is using the rights words' there is a danger that what is 'going on beneath' is not being given sufficient attention. Do the 'right words' sometimes disguise thoughts and feelings that are difficult to own given the values of 'Rights' and 'Responsibilities'? What happens to these thoughts and feelings if they cannot be expressed publicly?
  - It can become a little meaningless unless explored thoughtfully and with some nuance – both with adults and with the children
  - It can become boring and just about telling children what to be and how to be in a different way which could be seen to be counter to the notion of 'pupil voice' which is listened to seriously
  - It would be interesting to explore the language more philosophically to think about what it might mean in different contexts – a point made, particularly, by a group of children
  - Sometimes it can be too convoluted when there is a need for a clear 'right' or 'wrong' – a view that crept in on different occasions with adults and children

- RRS 'holistic ethos' develops an attitude and a sense of responsibility – 'having things like Family Teams really works and is important'
- The school (with its attendant values) 'has enriched our lives enormously'
- Ethos of school is 'open-minded' and 'aims to reflect changes in society'
- The aesthetics and the beauty of the setting and the environment seem to be imagined and experienced as a part of the school's values and ethos by many
- RRS has brought values and beliefs that were 'there before to the fore'
- 'I reckon that we ought to think about the complicated bits a bit – like looking into our own hearts and confronting our prejudices more – I think Top Hill Primary has really made a big difference to this and it encourages the children to do it but we need to keep doing it'
- 'In our school they have got a bit carried away with the charters [the Rights Respecting school codes of behaviour]. Now we have gone over the top'
- '[with all the posters] There's this stuff with up to 30 Rights. It's like forcing us...'
- '[Sometimes] the teachers 'are trying too hard'[with Rights Respecting] and [so] 'we don't listen'...'but we do behave because we do care and we want to do the right thing for the school'
- The 'Equality and Diversity' posters around the school mean that my child 'has observed these' and understood the underlying messages so that 'when her/his friends have been unkind s/he feels that s/he is able to stand up to people' [because of the messages on the posters]
- The 'Yellow Card' system is considered valuable as an awareness raising tool and the importance of this should not be underestimated. However, it can feel by some to be taking away from the professionalism of individual adults to make judgements about the right way to behave or the right course of action to take. There needs to be some attention given as to how a less 'value-laden' discussion could be had about the Yellow Cards and their appropriateness and in which contexts
- Scope for using incidents that crop up on the Yellow Cards for professional development – as a way of having open and trusting discussions so that no-one feels that they are not being judged for not being 'politically correct'. There needs to be a 'safe space' to say things that might not be politically correct so that we can 'talk about things that are not straightforward'
- Peer tutoring is an important and successful aspect of RRS which has benefitted this year from being more strategic with clear lines of consistent communication with benefits to the children so that 'they feel valued and supported'
- Peer tutoring has to become an integral part of the RRS school. It needs to be seen as belonging to the whole school and not as attached as a responsibility to one or two adults. This means that there is scope to develop it with support staff, some teachers and mid-day supervisory staff. The issue of communication is one that requires on-going attention

- Great thing about RRS and its link to equality and diversity is that it is about fairness. Perhaps more scope to address difficult things that can too easily be ignored or brushed over – such as class and accents: need to think of the ‘power of being middle-class’ in the school and the way this shapes things, especially for those who see themselves as being outside of this group
- Possibly scope for paying more attention to the fact that it is a middle class environment – mentioned by many different adults and meant that some of the following things were referred to:
  - [school needs to be] ‘more open to the implications of material poverty’ [of some of the children attending the school]
  - The idea that ‘you should never raise your voice is ‘highly problematic’ because ‘children get confused’ and want clearer signs of ‘right and wrong’ rather than always being spoken to gently
  - Meetings can be very middle-class which means that ‘class diversity is not acknowledged’
  - ‘We don’t really address the economic and material impacts of the lack of equality internationally and nationally and locally’
- Can be a ‘danger in having a RRS in school that’s instituting equality and diversity as something straightforward. It isn’t. The labels can become reductive so that no-one knows what they really mean’ and it is ‘taken for granted that you know and then you feel silly if you ask’

With regards to point 2.: being a child or an adult in Top Hill Primary and the way in which being an child or an adult is constructed through the Rights Respecting Schools initiative, this study suggests that:

- RRS means that children at Top Hill Primary are ‘happy’ and ‘carefree’ and ‘full of fun’ and ‘joy’ and ‘love being at school’
- RRS is child-centred
- RRS means that the school is saying ‘something profound’ about what it believes about the way in which power is exercised by adults over children. The RRS at Top Hill Primary is about resisting the power of adults to discipline children
- RRS is about developing a sense of openness and trust in adult and child relations
- RRS is about dialogue between adults and children. It is fundamentally about listening to children and taking what they say seriously
- RRS is about consistency in the relationships of adults and children
- RRS is about having clear, fair transparent boundaries in relationships and being open to discussing these and how they work and why
- RRS is about encouraging children to take a lead in shaping what they learn and how they learn it
- RRS is about adults in school showing some humility [to children]
- RRS is about challenging some more ‘traditional’ ways of seeing children as ‘empty vessels’



- 'They [the children] all know that whatever is happening in the classroom there is someone they can go to for developing their self-esteem within the school or in the parent group'
- It's about 'protecting children who may be vulnerable'
- 'It is [Rights and Respect] dependent upon the ethos of the teacher who the kids are with 6 hours a day' and more could be done to 'deal with staff well who are not on board with the ethos'...
- Seems to be an imbalance in whose rights are respected: children's rights seem to take precedence which means that it does not 'accord adults the rights due to them'
- '[As an adult] the lack of rigour [with the children] can be a problem'
- RRS seen by some as 'just about the children' and managing their behaviour – therefore some confusion about its depth and breadth as an underpinning a school value and belief system. Would like it to be more supportive of vulnerable adults in school, 'after all important for the children to see how we treat each other'
- Scope for eroding the sense of 'status' of some people within school as being more 'worthwhile' than others – goes against RRS. However, there have been huge strides in improving this but more needs to be done – 'need to be constantly vigilant with such a large staff drawn from such diverse backgrounds – feelings of resentment can so easily bubble'
- Lots of adults in the school with a range of talents and skills – and the values of RRS require that they are better looked after and valued and not taken advantage of ('I mean – it's not very RRS, is it?')
- RRS can mean that professionals within school become too focused upon individual needs rather than the needs of the whole group. 'Fairness is immensely complicated and it feels hard to get it right [in the class room with the children]. 'I'd welcome more discussion about difficult words like 'fairness'. These are all tricky words aren't they? We need to treat them with some respect so that we do not pretend they are easy. After all that would be dangerous'
- RRS is about 'openness' and there is scope for more of this in practice in terms of the relationships between children and adults so that those who work in the school feel able to share their worries and concerns about aspects of it that they feel might not be working or might be improved
- Even with RRS some teachers make assumptions about children based particularly on their class and where they come from. 'Some adults do not fully appreciate the level of prejudice they have, especially towards those who aren't like them. Children do notice it, however, and it can be very confusing for them. They don't know how it makes sense what with the other stuff [RRS] going on'
- Worry that some children internalise the notion of 'rights' as 'entitlement' which 'won't do them any favours in the long-run'
- Worry that RRS interferes with 'boundaries between children and adults so that relationships are less clear'

- Suggestion of erosion of innocence by some adults with RRS and equality and diversity work in school
- 'Children are too young to understand diversity'...s/he [the child in the view of the adult] sees everyone as just the same'
- RRS experienced as 'a challenge' by some parents/carers to their own authority and role as the prime carers of children. Some felt a resentment that they were being 'told how to do it'. Some felt that their children were all too ready to hear the language of 'rights' without the 'responsibility' which made lives at home difficult
- Perception that some adults find change hard – much harder than children – and that this can be a frustration for those who may be leading the change
- 'Our teacher goes on and on about them [Rights and Respect] and...like it doesn't work'...
- '[The Befriending System] is very good ...it's good to talk to someone who is like you, they [other children] can understand and 'cos teachers often just don't understand. Like, it's good...yeh, yeh...it's good'

And finally, in relation to point 3.: being citizens of a wider community and the values and beliefs and attitudes that the Rights Respecting Schools initiative might inculcate, this project concludes that:

- RRS is about a 'holistic vision of how people within a community get on together' and 'show a tolerance' for one another – it has to go 'beyond the school gates – no point otherwise'
- RRS is about 'education in its very broadest sense – for life'
- RRS is a way of saying that 'schooling is more than passing tests'...'it's about who you are and who you become in a democracy – now that's important...'
- RRS is about 'sending messages into the future' about the sort of world that it 'would be wonderful to live in'
- The children do exemplify a strong sense of 'values' when they play sport against other schools – they 'supported all the other schools...'; 'they do come across like that [politely] when they are down there [meaning when they are playing sport against other schools]'
- RRS provides a 'microcosm of how society should be'
- RRS develops a common language that can be employed within a wider society context
- RRS can influence behaviours 'beyond the school gate' and should be the way in which those growing into adulthood learn about having responsibilities to society – 'what you give is what you get'
- Developing 'active citizenship' and promoting 'Children's Voice' is an investment in a better, brighter future
- '...and you have the 'Right To Be Free'...but it's not to do with school...you just can't run out of school, I mean can you?...so what's the point about talking about freedom?'[interesting philosophical train of thought developed by a group of YearX/Y children as part of the 'Learning Walk']

- RRSA is regarded as not political by some and this is seen as a 'good thing'
- The promotion of equality and diversity is regarded as not political by some and this is equally considered the right way for it to be in a school environment
- Some said that 'it was important to be honest and recognise that all this [rights, responsibilities, equality, diversity, community cohesion] is hugely political – it is about life and values and beliefs and if that is not political, well...then, I'll eat my hat. It doesn't mean it's a bad thing. Not at all. It's all to the good'
- 'Kids[children] need to learn that life is political – that's the great thing about being free - saying what you think'
- 'Citizenship is all about politics – it's about making decisions about what sort of society you want. What's more important than that, I say? Thank-goodness for brave schools like Top Hill Primary that are about more than just Maths and English. We love [that about] this school...'

What will I do with the data as a researcher?

What you make of this data, how you choose to disseminate it and/or use it in practice in your school context, is, of course, entirely up to you.

I 'have to make sense of it' in an academic context in a manner that is befitting of serious doctoral study. In the course of my reading and research I have become very interested in an Australian academic, philosopher and educator, Bronwyn Davies. Through a book that she has recently edited, I have come in to contact with the author, Cath Laws, a former 'student' of hers, who is herself now an academic. Her book, based on her doctoral thesis, is about a school in which she had been the head teacher in Sydney. It is entitled: 'Poststructuralism at Work with Marginalised Children'<sup>61</sup>. Cath Laws writes with an integrity, richness and creativity that I find inspiring. She uses what is called 'discourse analysis' to make sense of her data in order to scrutinise the everyday occurrences of school life, acknowledging that they can be understood in many different ways, all and none of which can be seen as 'true'. However, what she wants to achieve is a way of 'reading' her school and what goes on there in a new and different ways to help her see things that she may have overlooked or taken for granted previously. She says herself that: 'The purpose of analysing the data is not to unravel and find a truth or even many truths. It is to trouble, to deconstruct the operations of dominant discourses'<sup>62</sup> on our everyday lives' (Laws, 2011, p.15). Indeed, in her study she produces data through taking on the role of 'observer' and 'participant observer' in much the same way that I have done. Much of what she draws on for the purposes of analysis is her own notes taken as she moved around her school interacting with members

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<sup>61</sup> Laws, C. (2011) *Poststructuralism at Work with Marginalised Children*, Bentham Science Publishers Ltd

<sup>62</sup> Discourse is used to mean more than a 'theme' – it is that which comes to form and govern the shape and feel of the essence of social experiences. It analyses the institutional basis of viewpoints and positions from which people speak, and the power relations these allow and presuppose.

of the school community. For her, viewing herself as an integral part of what she is researching is an important dynamic of her research framework.

I will use my data in a similar way. I will be looking for the ideas and practices (such as those referred to in the body of this document) that are dominant, and less dominant, and which bring into being the various discourses of values and ethos that shape my data. I will be deconstructing<sup>63</sup> this data in order that this may render insights that may not have been possible for me had I looked at the data in a different way. This poststructural<sup>64</sup> theoretical framework will enable me to reflect on my own practice, too, - both previously as a teacher and advisor - and now, most recently, as a social science researcher. My hope is that it will generate a range of thoughts and insights about 'Rights and Responsibilities' and 'Equality and Diversity' that are productive of new ways of thinking about these important concepts within schooling contexts.

And lastly...

And most importantly, the kindness and generosity of the staff, children and all members of the school community has enabled me to get this far. I am very grateful. As you all know, I had a wonderful time in the school and found it very hard to leave in the end!

Thank-you all very much indeed.

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<sup>63</sup> Deconstruction involves analysing language that is produced within discourse to scrutinise it and to consider what it might say and what it might leave unsaid; and what the effects of this might be.

<sup>64</sup> By poststructural, I mean the giving of primacy to discourse theory, such that meaning is not simply given but socially constructed.