

Producing the Academy School: an
Ethnographic Study of Failure,
Transformation, and Survival in English
Secondary Education

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Abstract

Academy schools have been the flagship education policy in England since 2000. The policy is controversial and its evidence base is contested, but it is also resilient and academy status continues to be extended to a greater number of schools. The claim to transform, which has played a pivotal role in the construction of academies in contexts of poverty, raises a set of ontological questions that have not yet been given the detailed consideration they require. The term ontology captures the nature of being, how particular entities come to exist, and how these shape the conditions of possibility with which we live. This thesis contributes to research on the academies policy by taking up this ontological direction of inquiry to analyse how academy status and the academy school are produced in underperforming schools in contexts of poverty. Combining Foucauldian discourse analysis and an ethnography of a secondary school – Eastbank Academy – it interrogates how the academy school is produced across different discursive spaces, and how this affects the identities and experiences of staff and students.

Across four analysis chapters I attend to the linguistic, material, spatial, and pedagogical shaping of the failing school that becomes an academy, making a number of central arguments. First, academies are shaped as policy objects through a set of representations and truths that enable them to mesh with other social policy narratives that are flourishing in austere times. Second, academy status is renarrativised around the recognition of poverty in Eastbank, which is part of ethical relations between staff and students. Third, academy status creates a context of threat and surveillance in a failing school in a context of poverty, the trace of which can be read through the shifting visual, material, and spatial culture of Eastbank. Fourth, academy status is produced through pedagogical shifts that divide, categorise, and monitor, resulting in unjust and exclusionary learning experiences for some students.

I combine these sub-findings to argue that academy status is produced in multi-modal ways, across which, a fluctuating, divisive, and fraught academy ontology emerges. This, in turn, produces increasingly fraught and divided identities for staff and students, and is implicated in unjust educational practices and experiences. I argue that this outcome is symptomatic of the delicate process of survival that marked the production of Eastbank Academy in the current education policy context.

To conclude, I outline the implications of this study for knowledge of the academy school and the methodologies required to study education policy as a complex, shifting, and multi-modal entity. This thesis highlights some of the silenced possibilities for how academy status is produced in schools that are categorised as failing, presenting academy status as a disciplinary tool. It draws attention to the negotiated nature of academy status and how these negotiations play a pivotal role in young people's experiences of schooling, in creating possibilities for resistance, and in creating unjust schooling practices. These are important considerations given the continued policy momentum to turn schools into academies.

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Glossary

AP – Alternative Provision

DfE – The Department for Education

EAL – English as an additional language

EFA - Education Funding Agency

FAP – Fair Access Panel

FSM – Free School Meals

MAT – Multi-Academy Trust

RSC – Regional Schools Commissioner

SEN – Special Educational Needs

SENCO – Special Educational Needs Coordinator

Referencing Data

The following abbreviations are used throughout to indicate who is speaking in interviews and fieldnote extracts.

AS – Member of administrative staff in Eastbank Academy

EH – Executive Head

FS – Former student

HOA – Head of Academy

LA – Member of staff at the LA

P – Parent

PA – Policy Architect based in central government

SLT – Member of the senior leadership team

SS – Member of support staff

S – Student (sometimes followed by a number to indicate their year group)

ST - member of the sponsorship team

TS – Member of teaching staff

Chapter One: Introduction

I attended a failing secondary school. I did not know this at the time rather I pieced it together in early adulthood. It was apparent when the school was turned into a sponsored academy in order to improve. It was present in several suggestions, from colleagues, acquaintances, and research participants, that it was strange that I had studied at a Russell Group university after attending such a school. The signalling of some deficit in my education always intrigued me. To discover that this school had a reputation that differed so starkly from my own memories and experiences provided one of my earliest perceptions of the complexities of how schools and schooling can be known and understood.

When I began to work in a secondary academy school in 2009, the issue of school failure re-emerged and took on new contours. The school, which drew students from a large nearby council estate, was being 'transformed' by a businessman and Conservative Party donor. It was destined for a complete overhaul; a new state-of-the-art building, improved results, and higher student aspirations. Those who favoured the take-over spoke of the improved life chances for local children. During a celebration of this transformation, the sponsor told me about the 'lefties' who had tried to block the deal.

I was part of a team who were recruited to be a core component of this transformative agenda; a team of 'high flying graduates' who had been employed to 'make a life changing difference' to young people in an inner-city school. We, like many across the country, were written into the academies policy as an example of its freedoms, in this case to employ unqualified teachers. We would tutor students one-to-one out of lessons, keep them on task in lessons, tutor them in the evenings and at weekends, and collect them from their homes. From the outside, this policy was a success. The school's results increased dramatically in one year, and an Ofsted 'Outstanding' rating followed.

Yet the problematic nature of this approach was increasingly apparent to us in our role as tutors and mentors. The pressure to enact and sustain this quick transformation was immense. My prior experiences of working in Alternative Provision (AP) made me particularly wary of the exclusionary practices of the school. This climate was producing an explicit student hierarchy between those referred to as 'bankers' who were certain to achieve 5 or more A*-C grades in English and Maths, those on the cusp who needed considerable investment to get to this level, and those who were considered incapable of attaining this, who did not qualify for tuition. Our role, as a tool for rationing education (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000), was facilitated by the increased funding and contract flexibility of the academy model. Some of the students who were not adapting to these changes attended an 'exclusion unit' porter cabin in the middle of the playground (Gillies, 2016). Students attended months of breakfast, lunch, after school, weekend, and vacation revision classes to get C grades so that they could study A Levels and go onto university. However, many struggled and dropped out of A-level courses once that high level of support was removed. Staff turnover increased and there was a shift to a younger workforce who were deemed to have the required energy for the task in hand.

These were my earliest understandings of the relationships between academy status, school failure, and transformation. There is much about this picture that has become ingrained in the representations of academy schools: that they replace and transform failing schools; that they raise the aspirations of children from disadvantaged backgrounds; that they have the flexibility of time-tabling and staff employment to provide innovative, tailored approaches. It is possible to see some of the characters of the academies story here: the saviours of children in poor contexts and the 'lefty' enemies of reform who are barriers to social justice. However, this example also reveals a range of other possibilities for how transformation is negotiated and produced. It raises questions about what transformation means and how it is justified, and it alerted me to a range of issues: the

categorisation of students; the rationing of resources; and the de-skilling and increased precariousness of the education workforce. These experiences and problems were the foundation of my interest in academisation, and I undertook this thesis to better understand them.

Research Aims

The academies policy occupies centre stage in the politics of English education. It is a controversial, shape-shifting policy that has come to dominate educational discourses in England. Originally the flagship education policy of New Labour, its role in educational reform strengthened with shifts in political power in 2010 and 2015. Academies have been mythologised by Labour and Conservative governments, positioned through emotive language, and repeatedly celebrated in speeches. Policy orthodoxy presents academies as a universally superior school model and as a tool for transforming failing schools in areas of poverty. The academy school category is understood through taken-for-granted assumptions about: the availability and merits of greater autonomy; what constitutes educational ‘failure’ and ‘success’; how schools ‘improve’; and the meanings, possibilities, and consequences of ‘transformation’. The academy school has become a pivotal educational entity, weaved into existing systems of categorisation, accountability, and governance.

Prolific press coverage has mapped the key controversies of the academies policy. Meanwhile, research has evaluated whether this policy can reach its stated aims and with what consequences. It has located academies as part of a policy lineage of school diversity, privatisation, and governance by targets affecting public sector institutions across the post-World War Two period. Research has provided important critiques of the policy, particularly its unproven impact on educational outcomes and dubious accountability concerning finances, democratic accountability, admissions, and exclusions.

The scholarly emphasis on challenging the claim that academies improve schools has been crucial, but has left other blind spots and has restricted the

range of critique. Moreover the centrality of 'transformation' to academisation in poorer communities raises a set of ontological questions that have not yet been given the detailed consideration they require. The term ontology captures the nature of being and how particular entities come to exist (Mol, 1999). Knowledge about the ways that academy status is negotiated and produced in schools and communities remains underdeveloped in research. This study foregrounds a set of interrelated ontological questions: What kind of entity is the academy school? How does it come into being? How and what does it come to mean? How are its meanings negotiated and sustained? What questions of truth and power are intertwined in its being? What processes and consequences ensue within schools that bear the label or identity of 'academy'? Rather than asking whether the academy model works, I ask what academy status means, how this meaning is produced, and what the consequences of its production are.

The question of what it means to become and be an academy is pertinent at a time when the policy is being positioned as the future for all schools in England, and when some schools are being forced to become academies as part of an improvement agenda. I take up this ontological direction of inquiry through the specific case of the so-called 'failing' school in an area of poverty that becomes an academy in order to improve, asking:

How are academy status and the academy school produced and shaped in different discursive spaces in relation to the failing school in a context of poverty? What are the consequences of this for the identities and experiences of staff and students?

I therefore focus on the strand of the policy that aims to transform the fortunes of historically underperforming schools in areas facing complex economic and social challenges. I do so because, at a time of continuing educational inequality and growing societal inequality (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Dorling, 2014a), successive governments continue to position academy status as a tool for greater social justice in education (Gove, 2012a; Morgan, 2015a). This prolific education policy is used as a lens through which to

critically analyse contemporary education politics and their relationships with a broader social policy context of poverty and inequality in England. I problematise the taken-for-granted status of the academies policy as a response to ‘school failure’, and a wider set of assumptions about education, schools, young people, staff, and parents in poorer communities. I locate the sponsored academisation of failing schools as a policy that connects with the wider social policy sphere in which poverty is conceptualised and managed.

Positioned at the intersections between social policy, education research, and sociology, this thesis works across these disciplines to understand how a contemporary education policy is implicated in unjust school-level practices in poorer communities. Taking academy status and the academy school as constructions that depend on and are legitimised through particular truths, this study adopts a context-rich, multi-modal analysis of how the academy school comes to be. I undertake this through a combination of Foucault’s work on discourse and an ethnography of Eastbank Academy, a failing school in an area of poverty. Foucault’s conceptualisation of discourse is used as a tool to analyse the particular relations of power that have been central to the creation and continuation of the academies project. Ethnographic methodologies draw out the role of context in negotiations over the meanings of academy status. This frames the academy school as the product of multiple accounts and practices, both from within and outside of the school. These reveal some of the ways power operates in contemporary education policy, and the particular role of academies within this. The resulting analysis explores the production of the academy school across discursive spaces, which encompasses narrative, space, materiality, and pedagogical practices, drawing attention to the fraught, contradictory and at times unjust nature of the processes through which the academy school, and those within it, are produced.

Arriving at this Project

My arrival at this particular set of questions and foci has multiple origins. I take up the question of how this thesis relates to existing research on

academies in Chapter Two, and to my interactions with theory in Chapter Three. This project is also influenced by the sense I have made of particular personal and professional experiences. I opened this thesis by reflecting on my interactions with secondary schools, as both student and staff member, in order to reveal something of the concerns and values that underpin this work. I tell these retrospective stories to highlight the impossibility of me “standing outside the cultural tensions” (Savage, 2015: 31) that permeate the academies policy, and whilst recognising that this invites a level of clarity and linearity into my biography, which is problematically simplistic (Bourdieu, 1987), although I talk about this in more detail in Chapter Four. I take it that each of us is capable of constructing multiple and shifting social identities and that the one I construct here speaks of one set of positions I have occupied at one point in time. I use this to explain some of the roots, concerns, methods, and intentions of this thesis.

First, tracing my own educational history provided the beginnings of my interest in the power of categorisation in education, which I have pursued through Foucault’s work. Throughout this thesis I contend with the nature and justifications of the label ‘failure’, its relationships with academy status, the wider policy circumstances of its implementation, the work that it does in a school, and its impact on the experiences that are shaped within it. It provided me with a lens to reconcile the reputation and categorisation of a school with the personal stories and moments that comprise it on a day-to-day basis.

Second, these biographical details open up a space to introduce the social justice concerns of this work. My experiences of working in an academy school were partly framed by prior experiences of working as an English tutor in an AP for young people who had been excluded from mainstream school. The complexity of these young people’s lives, and the many struggles, and in some cases trauma, they had faced were a poignant reminder of the difficulties that are an everyday part of the schooling landscape. These aspects are heightened in schools in disadvantaged contexts. This is the

foundation of my concern for social justice in education. It can be read through a number of ongoing threads throughout this work: an interest in those schooling populations who are categorised as ‘a problem’ and the ways their schooling experiences are shaped; an interest in the ways policies affect young people in contexts of poverty; and an interest in the micro instances of exclusion and injustice that recur throughout educational policy and practice.

Third, these biographical fragments have influenced my methodology. That I did not reflect on my own school as failing highlights the uniqueness of schooling experiences. The status and categorisation of a school does not necessarily tell us about the range of possible experiences within it. Experiences of schooling are multiple, and to understand a school takes time and detailed appreciation. This has fed into the methodology I present in Chapters Three and Four. It is for this reason, the gap between my memories of school and my retrospective understanding of how the school was positioned and viewed from outside, that my exploration of schools does not start from a presumption of deficit. I do not seek to understand what is inadequate about a school that is labelled as such by auditors. Instead I am interested in the ways a school, the individuals within it, and communities surrounding it, are categorised and understood, and the effects of this on staff and students.

This thesis takes from these different biographical phases, interweaving my concern with: narratives of transformation; the categorisation of schools and students as ‘failing’; young people at the margins of schooling; how educational professionals make space to work outside of the limits of policy; how the immense pressure for schools to improve materialises through micro practices; and the multiplicity of experience. These threads run throughout this thesis. They provide the foundations for an analysis of the production of the academy school.

Contributions

This thesis contributes by making the academisation of failing schools in contexts of poverty more and differently intelligible. The aim is not to offer an alternative system for education, although this work does operate through a set of values, which I do not attempt to veil. It examines the presumptions and discursive rules that operate around the terminology of transformation, success, and failure. It questions what these categories and concepts mean and foreclose in the academies discourse and how they are produced and encountered through schooling practices. Rather than providing an evaluative or impact study of academy status, it draws on ethnographic and post-structuralist approaches to problematise the production of the academy school. It is therefore a critical endeavour, where criticality is taken to be about exploring those possibilities (Butler, 1990) that are and are not available for crafting academy status in particular schooling contexts.

Chapter Outline

Chapter Two provides a review of the dominant literature strands that have been drawn on in this study, explains where this work sits in relation to them, and clarifies key concepts. Chapter Three explores the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the thesis, and discusses the fusing of Foucauldian discourse analysis with ethnography, given the different theoretical traditions these methodologies draw on. The focus of Chapter Four is on methods, which I take to be the practical processes of generating data; the relationships that were central to this; my position within the field; the ethics of fieldwork; and the analytical protocols followed.

Between them, the four analysis chapters analyse the role of language, space, materiality, and pedagogical practices in the production of academy status and the academy school. Chapter Five explicates the 'grand narrative' that accompanies the academies policy, offering an exploration of stories that have been told about failing schools in areas of poverty in government-produced texts. Informed by Foucault's work on discourse and insights from

narrative theory, this chapter questions: how academies are made compelling; the representations that are perpetuated, enabled and constrained; and how this discourse has been possible and sustained since 2000. This chapter considers the limits that are placed on what academy status can mean and the technologies of power (Foucault, 1996) that sustain particular truths about academies in the educational and wider social policy context.

After I introduce Eastbank Academy in Chapter Six, a further three analysis chapters follow based on ethnographic fieldwork. In Chapter Seven I continue the emphasis on language and narrative, using these as tools to analyse some of the located sense-making practices that were taking place around academy status during my time in Eastbank. I explore the rejection of academy status as a catalyst for profound change in the school and its repositioning as an opportunity to cement the historical identity of the school as inclusive and community-orientated.

In Chapter Eight, I analyse the particular pressures, fears and dangers that stem from being a failing academy, and the nature of surveillance that ensues. I explore how academy status is negotiated through day-to-day practices within the school, exploring its shifting visual, spatial, and material culture through a consideration of marketing, rebranding, transitions in and out of the school, and changes to the building and uniform.

In Chapter Nine, I use vignettes to explore some of Eastbank's grouping and pedagogical practices. These vignettes highlight: strategic decisions to accept pupils who are without a school place; tailored schemes to boost student attainment and progress; and programmes to support students with literacy difficulties. The production of data plays a central role in this and practices that ensue are increasingly divisive and unjust.

To conclude, I locate the production of academy status in a context of poverty as a fraught, contradictory, and divisive process, making sense of

this through the lens of survival. I reflect on what this analysis suggests about wider relations of power in the governance of education and possibilities for future research.

Chapter Two: Locating Academies

This chapter presents the scholarship that has informed my study of academies. Through it, I open up questions that remain fundamental throughout this thesis: what is the academy school and how can it be known? I begin to locate ways of addressing these questions through the meeting points of several research strands. I introduce key ideas, concepts and aspects of the policy context that I return to throughout this thesis. The literatures I draw on refer to the post-World War Two period, although the discussion centres mainly on the post-1988 context. The focus is on England rather than the UK because of the devolved, and distinctive, education systems of the four nations and because academies still only exist in England (Jones, 2016). Relevant international literatures and connections are discussed.

The chapter is split into three sections. First, I discuss the ideological and policy roots of academies across the post-World War Two period. Second, I discuss two policy-sociology (Ball, 1997) issues that have informed this thesis. I describe the shifting accountability regimes of secondary education and how these produce a logic of categorisation that has become part of common-sense understandings of educational success. I then review patterns of, and explanations for, educational inequality, situating this alongside debates concerning poverty, social class, and social justice. In the final section, I explain how this thesis is positioned in relation to existing knowledge about the academy school.

Section One: The Ideological and Policy Roots of the Academy School

Across the post-World War Two period, a comprehensive education system has been created and dismantled (Tomlinson, 2005). From 1945 until the mid-1970s England was characterised by economic growth that was shared relatively evenly across society; increased welfare provision; and tax systems redistributing in favour of the poor (Brown et al, 1997). Access to education

was significantly expanded during this time, underpinned by a new comprehensive ideal. This system was designed to provide a free, collective education for all young people, initially up to the age of 14, overseen by local authorities (LAs). It was established based on predictions that the labour market would require more skilled jobs, and therefore a more educated workforce. It was tied to the ideal that democracy required people of all backgrounds, views and dispositions to mix and cultivate mutual respect (Brown et al, 1997).

Despite wide cross-party support for comprehensive education, the system was never fully realised. The tripartite system that emerged meant that opportunities for differentiation according to wealth and social class remained through grammar and technical schools (Ward & Eden, 2009). By the 1970s there was growing disillusionment with the idea that the education system would create a more equal society. Comprehensive schools were denigrated and depicted as a failed policy that provided a mediocre and inefficient education (Maude, 1971; DfES, 2004; Benn, 2011). Emerging critiques of locally administered school governance in the US influenced this shift (Chubb & Moe, 1988), as Margaret Thatcher looked to the US for a policy steer (Levin, 1988). The English system was challenged by those who sought further school diversity to cater for specific religious and cultural views and practices (Brown et al, 1997). Teachers were criticised for allowing poor standards and poor behaviour, which was creating a culture of mediocrity (Tomlinson, 2005). This was accompanied by skepticism about the efficiency and effectiveness of the LA to oversee education and improve schools.

Neoliberal Ideas Enter Education

These critiques of the comprehensive system fed into education reforms. Following the economic crisis of the 1970s, neoliberal reforms emerged as the common-sense position of UK governments (Harvey, 2005). By the 1980s this logic was being extended to education, as it underpinned a pervasive set of arguments about how educational standards could be improved (Apple,

2014). Education policy reform was positioned as a means of keeping apace with wider economic and social shifts across the global North (Dimmock, 2011). The emphasis on developing human capital to compete with other countries played into the advent of managerialism (Savage, 2015), as the techniques and models of the business world were applied to the state sector to achieve choice, quality, and innovation (Ward et al; 2016). Education scholars have captured these shifts through the term neoliberalism (Ball, 1990; Ozga, 2009; Olmedo, 2014).

Neoliberalism is a “socially embedded policy regime, emerging at the end of the twentieth century...defined by microeconomic policies of privatisation, marketisation and deregulation” (Cahill, 2014: ix). It is an umbrella term that is debated and numerous defined (Fine & Saad-Filho, 2016), from which a set of central ideological components can be delineated:

- The individual, who is conceived of as rational and self-interested, is the focus of analysis.
- Preserving the liberty of the individual is the ultimate societal goal.
- Markets are spaces of voluntary exchange, which should be kept free of regulation so individuals can benefit from rational and self-interested transactions.

(Cahill, 2014).

Neoliberalism is embedded in “class relations, institutions and ideological norms”, and presented by its proponents as a mode of educational governance that is both moral and efficient (Cahill, 2014: ix).

In England, concerns over the quality of education were used to justify the introduction of new education policies that drew on this market logic. The role of education as an instrument for global economic success strengthened (Ward & Eden, 2009), and the role of private sector providers and rationale grew in state education (Hatcher, 2008). Power was devolved to a mixed economy of providers, offering parents and students greater consumer choice, resulting in a competitive education context (Ward, et al 2016). The key mechanisms of this religion of the market were introduced with the 1988

Education Act, which marked a departure from the welfare state principles of the 1944 Education Act (Tomlinson, 2005).

Parental Choice and School Diversity

Parental choice was designed to create systemic school improvement on the premise that the best schools would be more popular and prosper, whilst unsatisfactory schools would either improve or close (Tomlinson, 2005). Innovation is expected to thrive, as schools are incentivised to attract students (Levin & Belfield, 2006). These changes have been accompanied by a range of policy discourses, which tie them to an imperative of raising educational standards and of using the state education system to achieve greater equality (Tomlinson, 2005). Parental choice was advocated as a means of counteracting a perceived decline in educational standards resulting from comprehensive schooling, and as a way of responding to individual needs and minority groups (Miller, 2011).

To facilitate parental choice, school diversity is required so that there are options to choose between. Over the last 30 years English education has experienced “internationally unparalleled” diversification (Courtney, 2015: 699), which introduced some of the characteristics that would become part of the academy model. First, Thatcher’s City Technology Colleges (CTCs) introduced a new school type, independent of the LA and instead run by sponsors (Curtis et al, 2008). Second, in 1988 freedom from the LA became available through Grant Maintained status and the Local Management of Schools (Gillard, 2008; Ward & Eden, 2009:). Third, the Specialist Schools programme was designed to encourage business sponsorship into state education, alongside the development of curriculum specialisms to differentiate schools (Ward & Eden, 2009). Fourth, Labour’s ‘Fresh Start’ initiative reopened schools under a new name as an approach to tackling school failure (Green, 2005; Woods et al, 2007). Finally, Labour’s education action zones introduced area-based approaches to school improvement (Kerr et al, 2014).

School choice requires information systems to guide parents' decisions about which school would best meet their child's needs (Miller, 2011). The publication of school performance data was initiated in the late 1980s. Benchmark standards, particularly at GCSE level, have become the dominant way of measuring and comparing school performance, and of making schools accountable. Alongside ratings by the school inspectorate, Ofsted, they are intended to support informed choices (Levin & Belfield, 2006). I return to this in Section Two.

International Competition

Concerns over the quality of English education are inseparable from emerging instruments of global competition. Since the 1960s, the economic and instrumental goals of education have gained prominence with governments across the world, and education is presented as the means of providing a large and skilled enough workforce to meet economic needs (Hart, 2012; Savage, 2015). Each citizen is a "potential wealth creator" (Bansel, 2015: 12), thus those with low or no qualifications are positioned as a waste of economic potential. The demand to have a continually improving education system in England is part of a wider international context of competition anxiety in an increasingly globalised world:

What really matters is how we're doing compared with our international competitors. That is what will define our economic growth and our country's future. The truth is, at the moment we are standing still while others race past (DfE, 2010a: 3).

As national governments gradually lost power over economic policy in a context of globalisation, the political significance of education increased (Brown et al, 1997). In the emerging knowledge economy, the quality of national education systems came to be equated with the competitive advantage of a country (Grek 2009). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an authoritative figure in the global education policy space (Grek, 2009), and positions education as a producer of human capital. The OECD Programme for International Student

Assessment (PISA), which compares the skills and competencies of half a million pupils from 72 countries (OECD, 2016), is a powerful governance lever (Grek, 2009), which constitutes the globe as a comparative space for education policy (Sellar & Lingard, 2013). Those who emerge as global leaders of education are held up as examples for the rest to follow, informing policy borrowing (Sellar & Lingard, 2013).

Academies and Policy Trajectories

Post-1997 further developments ensued, inflected by the reforms of the Thatcher period. There was a continued emphasis on: choice and diversity; the knowledge economy; and the role of education as a route to economic competitiveness. However, there were subtle shifts. Particularly important to the study of academies are the new modalities of state power that emerged through the Third Way politics of New Labour (Ball, 2009a). This was characterised by a more flexible role for the state (Ball, 2017). The emphasis was less on the minutiae of day-to-day schooling practices and more on the structures of education systems. This is encapsulated in the shift from government to governance in education and other public institutions in England (Dimmock, 2011). ‘Government’ is depicted as hierarchical, bureaucratic, centralised decision-making, where the state is the main provider and accountable entity for public services (Frahm & Martin, 2009). ‘Governance’ is characterised by the introduction of a range of actors into the provision of public services. Mechanisms of authority, decision-making and accountability are more diffuse, and operate sideways as well as top-down (Frahm & Martin, 2009). The State indirectly governs by monitoring institutional outputs (Ward et al, 2016), seeking to modernise state institutions so they become self-improving.

Academies are symptomatic of the gradual alignment of the educational ideologies of the two dominant political parties across the post-World War Two period (Kulz, 2017). The key tenants of the academies policy speak to the centre left and centre right of the political spectrum because both Labour and the Conservatives have promoted the use of market principles to

reform education. The dual aims of the policy, to improve schools and ameliorate educational inequalities, can be tied to both parties' attempts to speak to a broader audience, either through the third way (Giddens, 1998) politics of New Labour or 'compassionate conservatism' (Gove, 2015).

There are now several academy-types. Sponsored academies were the original incarnation of the policy, first elucidated in Education secretary David Blunkett's speech to the Social Market Foundation (Blunkett, 2000). Sponsored academies are state-funded schools, independent of LA control, catering for students of all abilities (Long, 2015). They are overseen by sponsors, typically businesses, Further and Higher education institutions, philanthropists, and wealthy individuals (Dimmock, 2011; Olmedo, 2014). The sponsor is expected to steer the school's ethos and values. Academies were originally known as 'city academies' because the target was underperforming schools in disadvantaged city contexts. These were reopened and "rebadged" as academies (Gorard, 2014: 269). The policy broadened, initially to reach schools in wider contexts of deprivation, and then to provide additional school places in areas where this was required (Long, 2015).

Sponsored academies are given more budgetary and organisational autonomy than LA maintained schools, although they are accountable to their sponsor or multi-academy trust (MAT), and through their funding agreement with the Secretary of State for Education (Worth, 2015). Their budget comes to them directly and is no longer top-sliced by the LA to provide pooled services such as Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision and provision for pupils excluded from school (Coldron, Crawford, Jones, & Simkins, 2014). Academies' financial independence brings with it responsibilities previously undertaken by the LA, such as providing, commissioning and/or quality assuring services including payroll and SEN services (NUT, 2015). The legal status of academies sets parameters, "which are organisationally and educationally consequential" (Courtney, 2015: 803), as sponsored academies have additional freedom over: the length and

organisation of the school day; holiday dates; the curriculum, as long as it remains broad and balanced; staff pay, conditions and qualifications; setting their own oversubscription criteria; and the composition and size of the governing body (Miller 2011; Long, 2015).

Converter Academies were created by The Coalition Government through the Academies Bill (2010), which offered a streamlined converter process, and split the policy into two distinct strands (Bassett et al, 2012). The sponsored academy model continued, and schools could now be forced to become sponsored academies if they were categorised as failing (Keddie, 2015a). Meanwhile the converter model expanded the scope of the policy. The Coalition presented academies as “appropriate and even superior for all schools”, rather than just underperforming schools (Goodwin, 2011: 409-10). This model became a choice extended to schools rated as ‘Good’ and ‘Outstanding’. These schools could become academies without seeking sponsorship, and could therefore maintain their existing governance arrangements, specialisms, and staff structure. The idea of a sponsor initiating a ‘new vision’ was therefore not necessarily a feature of the converter academy model. What is consistent is that the converted academy receives its budget directly from the DfE, bypassing the LA, the school’s accountability relationship is refreshed through its funding agreement with the Secretary of State (West & Bailey, 2013), and academies have the additional freedoms noted above (Long, 2015).

Under the Coalition government academies’ “legal framework...has proven sufficiently flexible to enable this type to become the template for a range of sub-types” (Courtney, 2015: 800). These include free schools, which are academies without predecessor schools; Special academies, which cater for students with SEN; AP academies, which cater for students who have been excluded from mainstream school; University Technology Colleges, which offer a vocational or trade based education, combined with a broad academic curriculum, for 14-19-year-olds; and Studio Schools which provide 14-19-year-olds with a combined curriculum of core GCSEs, vocational qualifications

and work experience (Adonis, 2012; DfE, 2013a; DfE, 2013b; Edmond, 2017). Academy status was also extended to primary schools (DfE, 2014a).

The different strands of the academy model reflect the immediate policy climate at different points since 2000 (Courtney, 2015). There have been changes to the type and level of sponsorship and relationship structures supported through the policy. Academies that opened between 2002-2005 had private sector sponsors who contributed up to two million pounds to the school. Between 2005-2010 sponsorship was extended to new types of organisations, such as universities, and financial contributions from sponsors shifted to an endowment model, before they ceased in 2007 (Long, 2015). Since 2010 funding agreements have been subject to tighter controls, whilst the emphasis has shifted to diversifying academies into subtypes (Academies Commission, 2013).

By the time Labour left office in May 2010 there were 206 sponsored academies. Under the Coalition government academies have grown quickly. In July 2017, there were 6493 open academies with a further 1394 in the pipeline (DfE, 2017a). Academy and free schools make up 70% of secondary schools (DfE, 2017a). There has been a growth of Multi Academy Trusts (MATs), which oversee one or more schools (Keddie, 2015b). These trusts are envisaged as a way of replacing bureaucratic LAs with a more efficient model (Keddie, 2015a) where, for instance, economies of scale can be employed and teaching resources can be shared (DfE, 2016a). As of July 2017 there were 2745 MATs (2017a). The majority of these (1807) include one school, whilst the four largest have more than 41 schools each (2017a).

Academies are part of a policy trajectory that has been influenced by shifting perceptions of the relationship between the public and private sector (Hatcher, 2008; Gunter, 2011; West & Bailey, 2013), and faith that market principles and the business sector could improve state education (Adonis, 2012). They are part of ideological and legislative shifts towards the use of educational diversity to enhance parental choice and fuel competition

between schools (West & Bailey, 2013). They are the realisation of the “cultural, structural and legal ambitions of corporatised autonomy” that emerged across the post-war period (Courtney, 2015: 500). The school is increasingly comparable to a business, with new responsibilities for a range of marketing, administrative, commissioning, regulatory and negotiating functions. Increasing global interconnectedness can be traced through the academies policy, which was informed by US Charter schools and Swedish Free Schools (West & Bailey, 2013; West, 2014). Academies are part of the world-wide phenomenon of policy-makers recreating the same kinds of schools under new names and brands, with “no dismantling or radical re-engineering of the concept of schools” (Gorard, 2014: 268).

Section Two: Policy-Sociology Issues

The characteristics of the academy system, and the way these relate to the wider education policy context, raise sociological questions and concerns. I deal with two of these, which underpin the arguments made in this thesis. I examine the role of accountability and categorisation in the governance of English schools. I then explore the patterns of, and explanations for, differential educational outcomes and experiences. These contexts are fundamental for understanding the way academy status and academy schools have been produced in areas of multiple deprivation (DCLG, 2011).

Categorisation and Accountability

An intersecting theme that recurs across post-1988 education policy reforms is the use of categorisation and referential meaning as a method of governing schools. In this section I detail the current forms of school accountability in England, and consider the critical scholarship that surrounds this.

The 1988 Education Act introduced a National Curriculum with ten subjects and four key stages. This continues to form the basis for the timing and coverage of national examinations, which underpins accountability measures used to measure school and pupil success. Headline accountability data

measures attainment and progress (Leckie & Goldstein, 2017). The current manifestations of this are:

- **Progress 8:** Measures pupil progress across English, maths and six other DfE approved subjects from age 11-16. The stated aim is to “encourage schools to teach a broad curriculum and reward schools that teach all pupils well” (DfE, 2016b: unpagged). It shows whether “pupils in the school made above or below average progress compared to similar pupils in other schools” (DfE, 2017b: 6).
- **Attainment 8:** Measures pupil attainment across the same 8 subjects as Progress 8.
- **English and Maths:** The percentage of pupils achieving a C grade or above in English and maths.
- **Destinations:** The percentage of students staying in education or employment after key stage 4.
- **The percentage of pupils entering and achieving the English Baccalaureate:** Introduced in 2010, the EBacc measures the percentage of students achieving 5+A*-C in prescribed academic subjects; English, Mathematics, Science, a language and a humanities subject (DfE, 2016c). The ideological roots of this policy can be seen in the Conservative Party’s “cultural restorationist” approach to curriculum reform and teaching and learning throughout the post-war period, particularly under Thatcher’s influence (Goodwin, 2011: 419; Tomlinson, 2005). This approach favors a traditional humanist subjects, disciplinary models, and knowledge transmission (Goodwin, 2011: 419-20).

This data informs floor standards, which are the minimum attainment or progress the government expects schools to meet during a particular educational phase (DfE, 2016b). If schools dip below this level, this signals the need for intervention and inspection. Until 2016 a secondary school was below the floor standard if fewer than 40% of pupils achieved 5+A*-C or equivalent GCSEs, including English and mathematics. From 2016 the progress 8 measure determines the floor standard, and schools will be below the floor standard if, on average, pupils attain half a grade lower than predicted and the difference is statistically significant (DfE, 2017b; Leckie & Goldstein, 2017).

Categorising Schools

Ofsted have been the regulatory body with responsibility for inspecting schools since 1992 (Ward & Eden, 2009). Ofsted uses a “risk assessment approach” to ensure that inspection is proportionate and takes place where it can have the “greatest impact” (Ofsted, 2016:5). Risk assessment is based on the analysis of publicly available data including: academic attainment and progress over time; attendance; the outcome of previous inspections and monitoring visits; the views of parents; and any complaints or significant concerns (Ofsted, 2016). There are four Ofsted categories. Schools judged as ‘Outstanding’ are exempt from routine inspections, unless there is a decline in performance. Schools rated ‘Good’ receive a shorter inspection (1 day) every three years, unless there is a decline in performance. Schools rated as ‘Requiring Improvement’ or ‘Inadequate’ are monitored by Ofsted and have a full reinspection within 2 years. Schools in these categories may also require a ‘Notice to Improve’ or, at the extreme, be put into ‘Special Measures’ and receive regular monitoring visits.

Headline measures, floor standards and Ofsted categories are the formulae denoting “unacceptable educational performance” in England (NAO, 2014: 7). They are used to formulate the DfE school categories of ‘failing’ and ‘coasting’. These benchmarks shift and are purposely made more challenging so schools “aim higher” (NAO, 2014: 7). ‘Coasting’ schools are those that have fallen below a pre-defined performance benchmark for three consecutive years (DfE, 2016d). These measures are used “by oversight bodies to trigger intervention... all local authorities and 95% of multi-academy trusts were likely to intervene in schools that Ofsted rated ‘inadequate’ or where results were below the floor standard” (NAO, 2014: 7). Such intervention may take the form of a warning notice, a change to the school’s governing body or the appointment of the sponsor if the school is turned into an academy.

Schools are also categorised according to their type, which may be differentiated according to legal, curriculum and pupil selection criteria. Considerable and complex diversity now exists in the English system.

Depending on whether or not variations according to pupil age and gender are included, Courtney (2015) maps between 70 and 90 different school types in England. Academies, their sub-types and offshoots, have been central to the developing subtleties of school differentiation (Courtney, 2015). Through the academy model long-standing educational actors such as faith schools and grammar schools have been reinvigorated as forms of differentiation (Courtney; 2015; Burgess et al, 2017).

Central to this is the ideal of being other than the comprehensive school or the 'ordinary' school (Maguire et al, 2011). Cultivating specialisms and distinctive features as a sign of superiority has become central to schools' practices (Dimmock, 2011). This creates a milieu of differentiation, which schools and parents must navigate. It is tied to forms of distinction where the independent fee-paying school remains as the superior school type (Gunter & McGinity, 2014). Despite key differences - state-funded schools have a responsibility to collaborate and liaise with other schools and agencies to promote national policy agendas, a wider set of accountabilities and fewer resources - the independent-fee-paying-school-as-superior continues to shape and influence the diversity and categorisation in the state system (Glatter, 2010). The academy school has joined this terrain, taking its place "as another tier in the hierarchy of secondary schools...superior in public esteem to the bog-standard comprehensive schools" (Hattersley, 2002: unpagged). Academies have been presented as having increased curricular freedoms and subject specialisms, which can be drawn on as a badge of differentiation (Worth, 2015; Dimmock, 2011).

Governing through Targets

Schools are located through a set of mutually reaffirming categorisations and accountability mechanisms including school type, curriculum specialisms, headline measures, floor standards and Ofsted judgments (Coldron et al, 2014). Whether a school is understood to be 'failing', 'coasting', 'outstanding' etc affects its popularity and recruitment. These interlinked processes

continually remake the school through labels and numbers. Together they construct the current manifestation of ‘performativity’ in education:

Performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic) (Ball, 2003a: 216).

This method of holding schools to account is necessarily referential and hierarchical. The ‘failing’ school makes sense in relation to the ‘outstanding’ school; the academy to the LA or free-paying school; and the floor standard to the benchmark standard. This logic of categorisation and comparison has created “accepted linguistic forms” for talking about schools (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004: 55). It creates a “space of equivalence” where all schools, teachers and pupils, and indeed national education systems, can be fairly compared (Grek, 2009: 25).

These measures are the basis of discerning what is normal, expected and true about schooling and education. They articulate and govern the meanings of educational success and failure, not only of the school, but of individual pupils and teachers. This accountability framework has been used to justify the move towards an ‘academised’ system, as government testimonies have argued that academies are adept at improving pupil performance according to headline measures (Adonis, 2012). Categorising and ranking schools is a way of identifying those ‘underperforming’ schools that should be considered for academy status. (NAO, 2014).

Through these various audits and judgments, schools are given “identities and reputations” (Coldron et al, 2014: 390). Of these, the Ofsted rating is particularly powerful, affecting a school’s local and national positioning (Coldron et al, 2014). This has created a system where some categories of publicly-funded schools have privileges such as reduced inspections (Glatter, 2010). Schools rated as ‘Outstanding’ are exempt from routine inspection (Ofsted, 2016), and can become Teaching schools, with responsibility for teacher training. In contrast, Ofsted categorisations of ‘Requiring

Improvement’ or ‘Inadequate’ activate interventions and “intrusive ‘challenge and support” (Coldron et al, 2014: 390).

The Impacts of Performativity

There is a considerable body of literature attesting to the impacts of performativity on the curriculum; teaching practices; creativity; pressure; and the identity construction of students and staff (Fielding, 1999; Reay & Wiliam, 1999; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Ball, 2003a; Perryman et al, 2011). Equating a school’s performance in annual examinations with school improvement, means relying on a narrow outcome measure to appraise schools’ work. This is a system of “governing by numbers”, whereby the shift to supposedly decentralised forms of governance depends on the continual availability of more complete data (Ozga, 2009: 157). The emphasis is on target monitoring, and the inspection of key outcomes (Ozga, 2009), aiming to ensure greater compliance.

Instruments of audit are not neutral (Fielding, 1999), and those at work since 1988 have cultivated an “impoverished view of learning” (Ball, 1999: 196). These reduce an intricate developmental process, which aims to cultivate an array of personal, social and academic competencies in children, to a simplistic measurable entity (Torrance, 1997; Ball, 2003a). This creates a highly pressurised environment (Perryman et al, 2011), which can result in tactical ‘gaming’ practices in order to meet government-emphasised targets (Bevan & Hood, 2006).

In schools, ‘gaming’ manifests itself in practices that may have a detrimental impact on some students: channelling resources towards students at the C-D grade boundary (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Perryman et al, 2011); streaming students (Clark et al, 1999; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000); entering students for more vocational qualifications (Astle et al, 2011; Wrigley, 2011); more stringent behaviour policies and internal exclusions (Barker et al, 2010; Gillies, 2016); and higher exclusion rates (Blyth & Milner, 1993; PWC, 2008). Inflexible performance targets can reduce the scope for high quality pastoral

support or creative approaches to behaviour management (Macrae et al, 2003; Slee, 2011). School, teacher and pupil identities are increasingly constructed through external assessments (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). England faces a shortage of teachers and difficulties recruiting for the most senior roles (Thomson, 2009; HoC Education Committee, 2017a). Workload and increased accountability pressures are cited as key reasons for record numbers of teachers leaving the profession (HoC Education Committee, 2017). Recent reforms, particularly emboldening measures of progress over attainment, have been implemented to tackle gaming practices (Leckie & Goldstein, 2017).

Poverty, Inequality, and Social Justice

Despite improved educational access and outcomes in the immediate post-war period, education continued as a means of creating and justifying inequalities (Tomlinson, 2005). In this section I explore patterns and explanations for unequal educational outcomes, as a basis for exploring the role of academy status in schools in contexts of multiple deprivation.

GCSE results show that longstanding patterns of unequal educational outcomes continue in England (DfE, 2015c). Girls perform better than boys across all headline accountability measures, although the difference has reduced over the past decade. Pupils with SEN perform significantly worse than pupils with no identified SEN across all headline accountability measures. Disadvantaged children (those who are or have been eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), looked after children (LAC), and adopted children) have lower outcomes than their peers who are not in these categories. The attainment of Black Caribbean and White British pupils remains below the national average for A* to C in English and maths and EBacc achievement.

Inequalities in educational achievement are influenced by the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and poverty, whilst socio-economic background remains the main predictor of educational attainment in England (Francis, Mills, & Lupton, 2017). The attainment of White British pupils is particularly

polarised according to social class (Strand, 2014). White British boys and Black Caribbean boys who are eligible for FSM are the lowest achieving groups (DfE, 2015c). Yet amongst students from high socio-economic status backgrounds “only Indian students outperform White British students” (Strand, 2014: 131). Patterns of unequal attainment are mirrored in exclusion statistics. Boys, LAC, pupils with SEN, those eligible for FSM, and students of Black Caribbean or Irish/Gypsy/Roma Traveller origin are all more likely to be excluded from school. Pupils with SEN are over seven times more likely to be excluded than students without SEN (DfE, 2016e).

Educational inequality is important because attainment at 16 is related to long-term outcomes such as participation in further and higher education, improved employment and wage prospects, and reduced likelihood of poverty and worklessness in adulthood (Strand, 2014; Learning and Work Institute, 2016). Achieving the EBacc has been linked to opportunities to attend one of the most selective universities, as Ebacc subjects are required for many Russell Group University degrees (Russell Group, 2011; Francis, 2017). A degree from one of the most selective universities is associated with labour market prosperity (Social Mobility Commission, 2016).

These are social justice concerns because they mean that particular groups have fewer opportunities for equal resources, participation, and recognition, and are pushed to the margins of schooling. Social justice is a critical lens drawn upon in the education literature to question the implications of educational policies and practice and how these affect individuals and groups of young people (Vincent, 2003). Social justice analyses have centred on issues of equality of opportunity and achievement for people with different gender, ethnic, and income backgrounds, and experiences of disability (Dimmock, 2011). Social justice scholars have worked to create more encompassing definitions, which offer a complex account of the ways young people may experience schooling (Fraser, 1996; Gewirtz, 1998; Vincent, 2003; Lingard & Mills, 2007). This work has combined emphases on redistributive justice that seeks to redress economic injustices, with

injustices stemming from misrecognition (Fraser, 1996). Fraser (1996) argues that these axes of justice are “mutually intersecting” (p. 22). For instance, social class encompasses both issues of unequal income and resources, and injustices of recognition where those with less are perceived, represented, and treated in negative ways.

Explanations of Educational Inequality

There is a substantial literature that addresses different aspects of these patterns of educational inequality, seeking to explain their existence and longevity. I draw on a typology for organising this literature from Raffo et al (2009). Their research synthesis identifies three foci for analyses of the relationships between poverty and educational outcomes and experiences: a micro level focus on the individual; a meso level focus on families, communities, and schools; and a macro level focus on societal structures and relations of power. I use this typology to locate this study amongst key debates surrounding educational inequality and poverty. These intersect with understandings of social class and social justice, as the debates I recount consider both the distribution of wealth and resources, and issues of cultural and social capital, representation, and recognition (Savage, 2015).

Micro Level Explanations

Micro level explanations of the connections between poverty and educational achievement centre on the individual, highlighting the autonomy they have for shaping their own learner identity (Willis, 2006). They explore the increased emphasis on the individual as a site of ‘risky’ or ‘dysfunctional’ behaviours, and consider the “risk and resilience factors” that impact on individual performance (Raffo et al, 2009: 344). These explanations are reflected in any problem representation (Bacchi, 2012) that begins by identifying particular young people as disaffected or risky (Parsons, 2005). There are key questions here over the extent to which these young people might be divergently framed as “troubled or troublesome, disruptive or experiencing disrupted pathways, intolerable or just not

tolerated” (Parsons, 2005: 187). These different framings locate the cause of unequal educational achievement in different places.

The emphasis on the individual as the site of significance is a key tenant of neoliberal discourse (Cahill, 2014). Explanations that locate poverty as the result of individual and family deficit have a long-standing basis in the UK and USA (Greenbaum, 2015; McKenzie, 2015). Education has played an important role in scientific explanations of poverty, particularly using intelligence testing (Greenbaum, 2015; Brown et al, 1997). These explanations suggest that some people are inherently more able (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000), and that high achievers have particular personal characteristics including being hard working, diligent, and resilient. Narratives of ‘turning your life around’ sit comfortably alongside such literatures, speaking of those potential underachievers who managed to fix themselves and become a success. These narratives testify to the ideal of a meritocratic society, where anyone can succeed with talent and hard work (Todd, 2014).

Meso Level Explanations

Micro level factors, where the individual is the site of dysfunction or improvement, are often intertwined with the immediate social context, for instance the school or community. The skills, knowledges and experiences that students arrive at school with are shaped by their home and community contexts (Thomson, 2002). The literatures suggest that household and neighbourhood poverty negatively affect family life, as a lack of resources increase stress and pressure, which is linked to children’s relationships and social and emotional wellbeing (Wright & Case, 2016). This is particularly the case where there is a shortage of jobs, adequate housing, facilities, transport, and infrastructure in the local area (Thomson, 2002). Having access to high-quality early years provision is associated with literacy development, and future success in education (Wright & Case, 2016). Having a space to work, access to resources and enrichment activities, and opportunities to discuss ideas at home have been connected with educational success (Lareau, 2002; Vincent & Ball, 2007). Communities may provide resources, where formal

schooling is found wanting, for instance research has documented the strategies of Black Caribbean communities to intervene and counteract educational inequalities (Gillborn, Rollock, Vincent, & Ball, 2012; Wright; 2014).

Research on cultural and social capital are relevant here. These present the argument that particular families and communities are not adept at conferring the 'right kinds' of cultural and bridging capital to their young people. Despite recent analysis that illustrates that spiralling levels of inequality and cultural shifts are remaking social class in more nuanced and multi-faceted ways (Savage, 2015), the longstanding binary between working-class and middle-class students and families continues to dominate education research (e.g. Smyth, 2016; Stahl, 2016). There are well-established analyses of how middle-class students who are 'school ready' and equipped to be able to achieve according to the rules of the game (Bourdieu, 1979) experience education differently to working-class students who must overcome far more barriers to achieve success, which often entails a shift in social class position (Reay, 2001).

In England, as in other countries, state education was introduced to rescue poor children from family contexts where their reason and intellect would not be cultivated (Vincent, 2017), and where they had fewer opportunities to become a skilled member of the workforce. The continuing trace of these origins may be found where deficit views are held of young people from particular backgrounds and communities, and equated with lower aspirations (Reay, 2006; Walkerdine, 2011; Francis, Mills & Lupton, 2017). These deficit views can result in the over-direction of young people from poorer backgrounds towards vocational qualifications that hold less value with employers and education providers (Francis et al, 2017). They may result in highly unsatisfactory learning experiences, common amongst young people who have been excluded from school (Brown, 2007; McCluskey, Riddell, Weedon, & Fordyce, 2016; Parsons, 2005; Slee, 2011).

Successive governments have rejected income and class based analyses of educational inequalities, positioning them as ways of perpetuating low expectations and damaging stereotypes, and as a convenient excuse for underperforming schools (Gove, 2012b). Contradictorily, government policies suggest some recognition of the role that poverty plays in educational achievement. The Coalition government introduced the Pupil Premium, a government grant that follows pupils from disadvantaged contexts, which schools are expected to spend on boosting their attainment (DfE, 2014b). New Labour perpetuated area-based explanations of underachievement by proposing models of educational reform, that associate need with geography, such as academies and education action zones. These policies position schools as weapons of social mobility, which can redress the disadvantages that some students face (Reay, 2006; Kulz, 2017). The emphasis is on equalising the distribution of resources and opportunities, although such policies have been insufficiently radical or encompassing to reduce educational inequalities (Francis, Mills & Lupton, 2017).

Research and policies that present particular school types as more effective fit with the argument that schools mediate poverty, as do policies for paying teachers according to performance (DfE, 2013c). Research on alternative and democratic approaches to schooling also situate the school as an important means of intervening in disadvantage, through social-democratic models and models of innovative and child-centred pedagogy (Fielding & Moss, 2011; Noddings, 1992; Noddings, 2015). Pedagogy has been found to account for “more of the variance in student performance than any other in-school factor” and has been identified as a central concern for social justice in education (Lingard & Mills, 2007: 234). Yet the methods and practices teachers use are intertwined with curriculum and assessment, which are centrally mandated through policy.

Lupton (2006) found that teachers’ work in disadvantaged schools is markedly different to work in more affluent schools as there are: a wider

range of abilities and higher levels of additional learning needs; material deprivation which affects students' opportunities to engage in extra-curricular activities and their access to the space and resources to complete homework; low attendance; low parental attendance at parent evenings; high pupil mobility within the academic year; and emotionally charged environments (Lupton, 2006: 659-60). These are contexts where teacher's work is marked by a necessary concern for "serious pupil welfare issues...as well as academic outcomes", creating demanding working contexts (Lupton, 2006: 660). Relationships and pastoral work are an important part of teachers' roles in such schools, which are also the sites of various "compensatory measures" (Lupton, 2006: 654), including homework and breakfast clubs, extended school programmes, mentoring, and peer reading. A key tension that permeates these debates is the extent to which teachers made 'a' or 'the' difference. This is a contested point and creates a double bind. The recognition of teachers making the difference may be read as a valuing of teachers' work but it may also mask the ways wider social inequalities "impact on teachers' abilities to disrupt links between students' engagement with school and their socioeconomic backgrounds" (Francis et al, 2017: 422).

Macro Level Explanations

Education and policy-making systems play a role in reproducing and legitimising inequality because they "frame the possibilities for teachers and their pedagogies" (Lingard & Mills, 2007: 236). Raffo et al (2009) conclude that macro level explanations are neglected in analyses of education and poverty. Yet England is a context of significant inequality, situated within a wider global context of growing inequality, with severe economic crises affecting many regions of the world (Apple, 2014). Dorling's (2014a) analysis focused on the growing inequality between the richest 1% and the rest of the country. After the initial shock of the 2008 financial crisis, "the rich in both the US and the UK manoeuvred to become much richer" (Dorling, 2014a: 3). Although neoliberalism "provided the preconditions for the current global

financial crisis, the socially embedded nature of the neoliberal policy regime has made it highly resistant to retrenchment” (Cahill, 2014: ix). The Coalition and Conservative governments have stated that their key priorities are to reduce fiscal debt through policies of austerity (Youdell & McGimpsey, 2015).

In 2013 the average annual salary across the UK was £24,596, whilst the mean average salary for the top 1% was 15 times this (Dorling, 2014a: 6). The poorest tenth of UK households rely on state welfare to survive due to a lack of income, savings, pensions, or assets (Dorling, 2014a). This situation is part of a global context of inequality, where Oxfam estimate that the wealth of the world’s eight richest men is equivalent to the poorest 50% of the world’s population (Oxfam, 2017). Dorling (2014b) argues that the costs of providing for children are rising quicker than average living costs, and that “being in poverty means not being able to take part in the normal life of society” and “at the extremes it means going hungry” (p. 99).

Inequality is part of a wider context of poverty, where children growing up in poor households are more likely to face detrimental outcomes such as mental illness, higher incidence of ‘risky’ behaviours, signals of future health problems such as obesity, and fewer future opportunities for employment and education (ESRC, 2011). What happens within schools is affected by wider patterns of inequality, structural practices, and systems of power (Lupton, 2006). This undermines the idea that we live in a meritocracy (Todd, 2014), and suggests that redistributive social policies are a necessary accompaniment to socially just schooling practices (Lingard & Mills, 2007). The continued existence of a small fee-paying school sector (around 7% of children in England) plays a significant role in the persistence of structural inequalities as this 7% take 40% of Oxbridge undergraduate places (Courtney, 2015), who then disproportionately go on to work in influential sectors such as law, journalism and politics (Social Mobility Commission, 2016).

Education policies are wider macro forces that have implications for meso-level schooling contexts. School choice creates an imperfect market and exacerbates educational inequalities on the basis of socio-economic context (Miller, 2011). Geography places crucial limits on choice (Dimmock, 2011). Moreover, as the best schools quickly fill their places, the choice of attending such schools is necessarily denied to some (Miller, 2011).

Education markets do a disservice to less affluent families because they have fewer resources to draw on to navigate and act on school information (Allen et al, 2014). Complex admissions processes are also challenging for parents who are less educated (Gatter, 2010; Ball & Vincent, 1998). Education markets have created a context where “schools deemed to be ‘less good’ end up as the repositories for those students whom over-subscribed schools cannot/elect not to admit” (Youdell, 2004: 410). Schools use covert methods and branding to select in particular pupils and select out others (West, 2006; Courtney, 2015). This constitutes a school hierarchy, which maps onto wider patterns of inequality.

A hierarchy of knowledge and aspirations is mandated through education policy and its discourses. Education is the means by which “a nation defines itself and sustains its cultural existence, transmitting beliefs, ideas, and knowledge from generation to generation” (Ward & Eden, 2009: 1). This structures a hegemonic dichotomy where academic education is elevated above vocational and social education (Torrance, 1997). In the shift away from government, and towards governance, differentiation and hierarchy are key mechanisms through which the state has maintained power. These present narrowly defined student ideals, which link to curriculum ideals, favouring particular interests whilst excluding others (Courtney, 2015). Whilst some students succeed according to these narrow ideals others, disproportionately from less affluent households, struggle to attain them (Social Mobility Commission, 2016).

Section Three: Research and Evidence

In this final section I consider the position and role of academies in this context of categorisation, governance, and inequality. I set out the evidence base for academies, and position this thesis alongside the literatures I have discussed.

The academy model has been evaluated according to its stated aims. These situate academies alongside two educational concerns outlined above. First, academies have been positioned as a tool for improving schools and educational outcomes (Gove, 2014a). Second, academies have a social justice aim, as the model is deemed capable of ameliorating educational inequality (Gorard, 2009; Machin and Vernoit, 2010). The academies policy is based on the premise that inequality of educational outcomes is rectifiable through the school. This social justice goal has taken different forms as the policy has developed. Under Labour, it appeared in the focus on improving outcomes for young people attending schools in deprived contexts with a history of poor educational outcomes (Blair, 2005; Gillie, 2010; Gunter, 2011;). Academies' social justice mission was linked to their increased freedom to tailor their educational offering to better meet the requirements of local, disadvantaged students (Goldring & Mavrogordato, 2011). The policy was closely aligned with Labour's school regeneration programme, Building Schools for The Future (Adonis, 2012a: 81). A new building was one of several pertinent visual symbols expected to signify transformed schools.

Commentators noted the dilution of this social justice goal with the introduction of the converter model, through which the Coalition government initially targeted good and outstanding schools (Gorard, 2014). However, despite a shift in coverage, the espoused goals of the academies policy remain unchanged. School improvement continues to be the most emphasised goal, with a subsidiary social justice goal, present in the idea that academies benefit the most disadvantaged students and schools most

(Gove, 2012a; Morgan, 2015a). The converter model has become intertwined with social justice through new sponsorship and collaborative relationships, where high performing academies support 'struggling' schools to improve (Keddie, 2015b; Gibb, 2016).

Evaluative research on academies attempts to deduce whether the model is capable of reaching these policy aims. Early research on sponsored academies showed that the number of students achieving the headline accountability measures rose faster in these academies than in comparable schools (PWC, 2008; Machin & Wilson, 2009). However, later research has been either inconclusive, or has suggested that academy status is not systematically improving schools (Worth, 2015; Andrews, 2016). Research on academies' social justice agenda has contradicted government claims that the model reduces inequalities in educational outcomes (Armstrong et al, 2009; Machin & Silva, 2013; HOC, 2015; Kirby, Francis, & Hutchings, 2015; Wilshaw, 2016). Gorard's (2014) analysis found that the presence of academies, particularly converter academies, in a geographical area is "strongly associated with local levels of socio-economic school segregation" (p. 268). On average converter academies take less than their fair share of disadvantaged pupils, whilst sponsored academies tend to take more than their fair share (Gorard, 2014). This indicates that the impact of the policy extends beyond individual schools, affecting levels of educational inequality in communities and LAs. Given the inconclusive findings on whether academies are effective on their own terms, Gorard (2009) questions whether the expansion of the programme is economically justifiable or ethical.

Academies have been controversial since the beginning (Hatcher & Jones; 2006), and have been the subject of local and national campaigns. A national Anti-Academy movement has accompanied the policy and the journal *FORUM* has published several case studies problematising academisation in particular schools and areas (Benn, 2008; Elliott, 2008; Muller, 2008). Ideational and empirical concerns emerge from this scholarship and

campaigning, including the movement of public money and considerable power over state education to unelected people and the lack of evidence that academies improve schools or address educational inequalities (Elliott, 2008; Benn, 2011). Concerns have been voiced about the lack of accountability to parents (Hatcher & Jones, 2006), unclear procedures for parental complaints in an academised system (HOC Education Committee, 2015), and barriers preventing all but a minority of parents being able to set up schools in their local area (Pennell & West, 2009). The role of parents in education is being challenged through changes to school governance. MAT boards will increasingly “use professionals to hold individual school-level heads to account”, rather than parent governors (DfE, 2016a: 50). Academies have attracted negative commentary for their lack of transparency (Edmond, 2017). This was exacerbated by the original exemption of academies from Freedom of Information requests, although this is no longer the case (DfE, 2010b).

Studies have highlighted negative outcomes of the academies programme. Academies have over-relied on vocational qualifications, although changes to performance tables mean that schools are now penalised for this (Titcombe; 2008; Worth, 2015). They have higher exclusion rates than LA schools, and engage in unlawful exclusion practices (PWC, 2008; The Academies Commission, 2013). They are prone to corruption and are a way of channelling public money into the private sector (Wilshaw, 2016; Anti Academies Alliance, 2012). Ofsted criticised the high levels of pay for Chief Executives in some MATs, the practice of holding large sums of money in reserves rather than spending it on educational improvements, and overspending on educational consultancy (Wilshaw, 2016). Contributions from sponsors have often ended up being ‘in kind’, for instance their expertise, and some sponsors commission services from organisations that they have vested interests in (EFA, 2014a). However, whilst the evidence is that academy status is not a panacea for school improvement, academies now account for 70% of all state-funded schools, many of which have not

received notoriety for mismanagement or questionable practices. Furthermore, some academies have explicitly connected their academy status with opportunities for socially just practices, for instance using random ballots in admissions practices in order to admit pupils covering the whole ability range (Noden et al, 2014). I discuss positive academy exemplars in Chapter Five.

Academies have been integral to the restructuring of governance relationships noted at the beginning of this chapter. They are part of the diffusion of power through educational networks. Academies are encouraged into an array of collaborative partnerships, including MATs, federations and teaching school alliances (Coldron et al, 2014; Keddie, 2015a). In large MATs headteachers are akin to chief executives who manage relationships and work across a group of schools (Wilkins, 2017).

Academies have a specific place within the wider educational context of audit, categorisation and governance. They are central to the management of failure and underperformance. Different academy 'types' relate to different positionings within the performative system, with good and outstanding schools able to 'convert' to academy status, whilst 'underperforming' schools are forced to become sponsored academies. The need to rank schools is therefore part of the process of delineating the academies policy as an answer to school failure. The various new 'actors' of the academies policy are called upon to deal with school underperformance. Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) are responsible for "commission[ing] the turnaround of failing and coasting schools" (DfE, 2016a: 19). MATs that are considered to be system leaders are supported to "expand their reach" and "transform schools that need their support, particularly in the toughest areas" (DfE, 2016a: 19).

Concerns have been raised about MATs, particularly over their variable records on raising pupil performance (Andrews, 2016). MATs can command considerable power over the schools in an area. The largest academy chains

oversee 40+ schools; more than the LAs they replaced (Goldring & Mavrogordato, 2011; Benn, 2011). These trusts are not democratically elected and their relationship with local government remains variable and unclear. There is growing concern over ‘untouchable’ schools, a term used to describe those schools that trusts refuse to take on because they are an unattractive option (HOC, 2017b). Those schools that are advantageously placed in the schooling hierarchy are the ones that can become part of new systems and collaborations. They can shape “the new local order” (Coldron et al, 2014: 391), resulting in complex, local power games and hierarchical relations (Junemann & Ball, 2012). Attempts to address some of the concerns about MATs resulted in the introduction of RSCs in 2014. They are responsible for decision-making about academies and free schools in their local area, and their remit is to tackle school underperformance (DfE, 2014).

Questions have been raised over the ‘freedom’ of academies. Like state-funded schools, they are obliged to follow statutory testing and are accountable to the same benchmarks, floor standards, and to some form of Ofsted inspection (Simkins et al, 2015). This provides a powerful caveat to the promoted autonomy of academies. Evidence shows that few academies have used their autonomy to radically alter their educational offer or workforce (Bassett et al, 2012). Innovation may be further curtailed through MAT membership, if there is an overarching educational model that is rolled out across schools (Goldring & Mavrogordato, 2011). This highlights the existence of a rather contradictory combination of differentiation and standardisation that now marks English education. This context may enable parents to select a school on the basis of a particular ethos or academic emphases, but not on the basis of a different basic curricular or testing regime, without leaving the state-funded sector (Miller, 2011). Parents may be able to exercise a choice about which school is performing well, but the state controls the definitions of success and failure. The curriculum freedom that is available to academies, for instance to select a specialism, is steered

through the current government preference for particular curriculum areas, such as Science and Mathematics (Courtney, 2015).

Studies have contended with some of the theoretical and empirical issues that emerge from academisation (Green, 2012; Kulz, 2014&2017; Parsons, 2012). These have taken up various foci: leadership practices; the centrality of aspirations to the academies project; those academy cases where a high degree of transformation was needed, demanded, expected and fulfilled; and the impact of religious sponsorship on schooling cultures. Through such work the classed, racialised, religious and institutional-cultural dynamics of 'transformation' are detailed and understood to contribute to ongoing educational inequalities (Kulz, 2014&2017; Green, 2012). Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus have highlighted the exploiting of the symbolic capital of 'academy' status (Morrin, 2016; Green, 2012).

Two studies have utilised discourse analysis to explore national and local discourses surrounding decision-making over academies that are yet to open (Francis, 2014; Purcell, 2011a&b). Francis (2014) notes the lack of attention that has been given to "the rationales, rhetoric and discourses underpinning the academies programme" and she addresses this gap by providing a post-structuralist discourse analysis of written submissions to the academies commission (Francis, 2014: 437). Francis (2014) argues that a prominent discourse of 'crisis of English Education' has been tied to academisation. Purcell's research focuses on national discourses and their local interpretation in proposed academies and offers an empirical example of educational geography work that "transcends scale" (Purcell, 2011a: 58).

Positioning This Thesis

Academies exist in a global context of poverty and inequality, a national policy context of inequality and welfare retrenchment, and an education context that continues to be marked by unequal educational outcomes and experiences. Academies are charged with mediating this context, and of improving schools, whilst education continues to be positioned as a tool for

boosting the economic performance of countries in a global race to increased productivity, wealth, and power. Academies are part of a policy lineage that has invited neoliberal ideology and practices into education. They have consolidated processes that were already in motion, including governing through numbers and categorisations, and the creation of a performative school, teacher, and pupil. Meanwhile they have instigated new features of educational governance through new schooling hierarchies and networks, and their status as a governance tool to tackle school failure. The evidence suggests that the model is struggling according to its own aims, and ties academies to a range of existing and new perverse policy outcomes, posing important questions for social justice. To conclude I position my research in the policy and scholarly context described.

I adopt a different lens to the evaluative research on academies, instead working within literatures that critically analyse the underpinning values and assumptions of dominant educational reforms (Apple, 2014). This literature review has highlighted the importance of exploring how academies are implicated in, and affected by, wider education and social policy contexts. The focus on ‘transforming failing schools’ in areas of poverty has been a foundational part of the academies policy, and one that illuminates questions and possibilities for social justice. Yet the ontological nature of ‘transformation’ has not been considered in detail. ‘Transformation’ suggests a change of identity through the embodiment of a new schooling status or category. It implies that this shift is significant, hyperbolic even, rather than gradual or small-scale (Gunter & McGinity, 2014). There are, therefore, a set of questions that emerge from this line of inquiry which pertain to the process of becoming and being an academy, how academy status is meaningful in a context of poverty, how this meaning shifts and the effects of these processes.

My approach frames the academy school as a construction, and therefore raises questions of meaning and power relations. Academies have been constructed in varied, contradictory ways. The government, campaigners,

parents and researchers have advocated different truths about what ‘academy status’ is, means, and does. But the power to construct what policy means is unevenly shared. The “acknowledged virtues” of education are currently tied up in the academy model (Gutting, 2005: 71), as those with the power to write policy have created a discursive unity around the academy school (Gunter & McGinity, 2014). This thesis problematises this discursive unity, and its role in producing academy status as the latest ‘truth’ of educational improvement in schools in contexts of poverty, exploring how this policy intersects the sociological trends and issues I have outlined in this chapter.

It is my proposition that this ontological line of questioning is best accommodated through a study that considers the relationships between multiple discursive spaces, contending with the ways academies are shaped from outside, close by, and inside. To the best of my knowledge such a study has not yet been undertaken, although existing studies of academisation have highlighted the importance of accessing different spaces where the meanings of academy status are shaped (Francis, 2014; Purcell, 2011b). As Purcell warns, “focusing only on the presence of national discourses conceals the very real and practical concerns of those who were affected locally by the academy proposals” (Purcell, 2011b: 66). I take up Purcell’s call to transcend single-scale analyses to see what questions and possibilities this might illuminate in the specific case of the academy school. It is through this work that the complex layering of meaning constituting policy can be appreciated, but also that implications for social justice can be more fully understood.

I also heed Purcell’s warning that “the cases which usually attract attention in the press and in academia are not representative of the situation experienced in many places where academies are being established” (Purcell, 2011b: 67). Media and research case studies are dominated by the most ‘successful’ and high-profile academies or conversely by cases of failure and mismanagement (Kulz, 2017). In a polarised debate, these are inherently newsworthy. The ‘ordinary’ school (Maguire et al, 2011) that becomes an

academy, and is neither high profile or infamous, is neglected in government accounts, press pieces, and research on academies. These schools are largely missing from the debate. I address these gaps by exploring the production of academy status in a school in a context of poverty that is neither infamous or a poster school for the policy.

Bourdieu's work has been a popular and productive lens for exploring the academies policy. The analytical focus that Bourdieu's work invites has been fruitfully applied to explore the way academy status is leveraged to produce capital in local education markets (McGinity, 2014). The focus of this thesis is different. I draw on Foucault's theories of discourse, power relations and care of the self to address a set of under-theorised questions about how the academy school comes to be. Foucault's work highlights the contingent nature of academy status, opening up questions of who has the power to construct truths and why particular truths prevail in contemporary education discourse. This foregrounds an analysis of power relations, which is important given the political and contentious nature of claims to 'transform'. I outline this methodology in the following two chapters.

Chapter Three: **Producing the Academy School: A Methodology**

The aim of this chapter is to make explicit the ontological and epistemological positions inherent in this study, to explore their development through my interactions with theory and the field, and to consider potential implications for the status and nature of the resulting work. I explore fundamental methodological questions about the nature of the social world, the extent to which it is knowable, the status of knowledge that is produced about it, and the role of social theory in “empirical illumination” (May & Williams, 1998: 1). The practical processes of research are discussed in Chapter Four.

I begin by narrating shifts in my understanding of the project and the phenomena of interest. I highlight the role method and social theory played in these shifts, discussing the work of Foucault and post-structuralist ethnographic methodologies. Through this discussion the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of this work are elucidated and its challenges are discussed.

Shifting Critique

I recommend leaping into the abyss of discomfort and uncertainty that surely accompanies every study but is seldom described in the literature and working that confusion as rigorously as our imagination allows (Adams St Pierre, 2004: 332).

From the very beginning this was a project with a critical orientation, but the nature and extent of its criticality evolved due to the methodological tools used. In its earliest incarnation this thesis was concerned with the relationship between young people at the margins of education, and their schools and communities, and the transformation that academy status brings. The aim was to understand the extent and nature of the change that occurs when a failing school in a disadvantaged community becomes an

academy. I set out to understand this through an ethnography of a secondary academy school that could be positioned as failing according to the accountability frameworks described in Chapter Two.

The iterative nature of ethnography created space for a shift in my thinking, as it became apparent that the ‘change narrative’ that underpinned my framing of the project was not obvious in Eastbank Academy. Transformation was not spoken about explicitly, and was treated with caution by teachers. To begin with, this troubled and puzzled me. I questioned why participants were not speaking about transformative change as I anticipated, and what my own anticipation of change was founded on. This uncertainty was cemented when the HOA said:

I was re-reading your initial email and it seemed to me that you probably haven't picked the best school for your study as not much has changed in Eastbank with academy status (Fieldnotes, HOA).

The familiarity that the academy school had previously had was made “uncertain”, and a “number of difficulties” around the academy school were “provoked” (Foucault, 2003: 23-4). These uncertainties suggested that the questions, tools, and understandings I had were deficient in some way because they were not helping me to make sense of what I was told in the school.

This was the beginning of a shift in my work. It made me receptive to the tools of analysis offered by post-structuralism, particularly the work of Michel Foucault. Here I found a theoretical perspective that helped me to make sense of what I understood academies to be, how this was related to and limited by existing and dominant ways of talking about, writing about, and researching academies and education, and how this shaped the ways I went about knowing them. I became increasingly interested in how my epistemology and ontology had shaped, and could shape, research about academies, and what would be the most pressing foci for research with a concern for young people and schools in disadvantaged communities. I

reflected on the processes of categorisation and meaning-making I was working with; on how I constructed an ‘order of things’ (Foucault, 1966), where academies fit into this, and what was present, omitted and constrained through this. I searched for ways to deconstruct my preoccupation with change, and to make sense of what I was being told in the school. I sought “new spaces” and to “think differently” (Ball, 2013: 7).

I became aware that my approach and research questions were limited because they were directed by a particular set of habits I had developed or inherited for thinking about academies. While immersing myself in the literature on academies, I had become embedded in successive governments’ academy narratives, and my questions and expectations had become aligned with this. It was in government rhetoric and policy documents that I had so frequently encountered narratives that presented academy status as transformative. I was also influenced by the dominant body of research that focuses on assessing the extent to which academies achieve their stated aims of school improvement and social justice. Finally, I was influenced by my own experiences of working in an academy where transformation was pursued and celebrated.

But transformation was not what the staff and pupils at Eastbank generally spoke of. The data started to come together to paint a different kind of picture, and it was the ways that Eastbank Academy seemed to differ from what we are told to expect from academies that became most interesting to me, presenting a different set of questions. Post-structuralist approaches offered the thinking tools to turn a “given into a question” (Foucault, 2003: 24).

Post-structuralism

There is a lack of consensus about what the term ‘post-structuralism’ refers to, which results from “the peculiar nature of an activity whose most characteristic aspect is its own refusal of a definition” (Young, 1981a: viii). I focus on the unifying concerns of those theorists and works often

characterised under the heading post-structuralism (Benton & Craib, 2011; Adams St Pierre, 2000) discussing those that are central to this thesis.

Post-structuralism refers to a group of approaches concerned with “the relationship between human beings, the world, and the practice of making and reproducing meanings” (Belsey, 2002: 5). Theorists typically categorised as post-structuralist are interested in “how we are able to mean” (Belsey, 2002: 8) and the power of language to shape and reshape our realities. These are approaches that take seriously the work that “we have wanted language to do in this world and what that desire has really, actually done in the making of the world” (Adams St. Pierre, 2013: 650). Post-structuralists reject the idea that language is a transparent and neutral medium for representing a concrete reality (Belsey, 2002). They question the work that language does, particularly in imposing limits on thought and in shaping ontological possibilities. Post-structuralism does not present finality and absolute truths (Young, 1981b), rather the “prefix ‘post-’” indicates a “constant interrogation, a possibility that is ‘not yet’ but that may announce the prospect for something new” (Andreotti & Souza, 2012: 2).

Post-structuralism is attuned to capturing the shift, post-World War II, to a critique of the supposed innocence of knowledge (Adams St. Pierre, 2013: 648). It therefore shares concerns with the post-modern project, which questions “totalizing social descriptions” and engages in discursive analysis (Butler, 1992: 3). The ‘posts’ question the ability of traditional sociological methods and grand theories, with their privileging of the idea of progress, to capture the nature of the social world and the manifold experiences of people within it (Dickens & Fontana, 1994). The ‘posts’ provide “tools-for-thinking rather than theories-of-truth”, where only situated and partial accounts are possible (Andreotti & Souza, 2012: 2).

This style of approaching social research illuminated my fieldwork in new ways, and informed analysis and writing. Instead of questioning what had transformed in Eastbank Academy, my focus shifted to interrogate why I had

become interested in transformation in the first place. Transformation, I realised, is a central ‘truth’ of the academies discourse. It is presented as an inherent and positive property of academisation for failing schools. I discuss this idea in detail in Chapter Five. Once ‘transformation’ was isolated as a construction, the academies policy was cast in a new and potentially problematic light. Transformation was no longer an innocent thing to search for; it was a discursive mechanism for the construction of truth.

Having understood that ‘transformation’ was placing limits on what academy status could mean, the critical lens of this work shifted. Rather than seeking to understand academies in the terms laid out by the dominant discourse, I questioned those terms, the basis on which they have been formed, the research that maintains them, and the work that they do in schools, communities, and the wider policy sphere. The “disruptive force” of post-structuralism provided a new lens for viewing the academies policy and its underpinning assumptions (Gulson & Parkes, 2010: 78). Such theoretical tools are needed because they open-up avenues for thinking beyond the limits of the discussion that is handed to us by those with power (Adams St Pierre, 2013: 464). To reimagine possibilities for being, work is required to make sense of how being is currently moulded in the educational sphere, and the discursive and agentic practices involved. Such a task is not easy:

One cannot speak of anything at any time; it is not easy to say something new; it is not enough for us to open our eyes, to pay attention, or to be aware, for new objects suddenly to light up and emerge out of the ground (Foucault, 1969: 49).

It is difficult to say something new because researchers are part of the social world, and are subject to the same conditions for speech and thought. I return to this difficulty later in the chapter.

Epistemology and Ontology

This process of rethinking academies proposes ontological and epistemological questions (Baldwin, 2014). It recounts a shift in my understanding of what academy status and academy schools are and how

they could be known. This research shifted from an investigation of presupposed questions and views of the nature of academy status, to an emphasis on exploring how these presuppositions come to be, are maintained, and encountered in practice. By arriving at an ontological view of academy status as a discursive and an embodied construct, particular ways of knowing the academy school were foregrounded. Since the shaping of the academy school was happening in different discursive spaces I needed a methodology that would take account of these. I needed to attend to the production of academy status from outside, close by, and within, exploring the interrelationships between the different spaces where meaning is created (Ball, 2009b). Thus this shifting ontology of the academy school had epistemological implications, resulting in a multi-phase methodology that combined discourse analysis and ethnography. I explore each of these methodologies separately, before considering the opportunities and difficulties that stem from their combination. I begin by detailing the theoretical basis for Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA), and for the application of Foucault's thinking tools to the study of academies.

Bringing Foucault to the Analysis of Academy Schools

I locate Foucault's work within post-structuralism with an acknowledgement that his work has been categorised in various ways (Gutting, 2005; Benton & Craib, 2011; Adams St. Pierre, 2013), and of his resistance to categorisation (Ball, 2013). In common with the post-structuralist position outlined, Foucault's work is concerned with exploring the "history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects" (Foucault, 1982: 777). His work provides tools for understanding academy status as a mode of shaping particular educational subjects (Young, 1981b). Mine is one possible reading of Foucault's work, selected for the endeavour of exploring the production of the academy school. I have organised the discussion of Foucault's thinking-tools in a way that best clarifies the analysis that follows. I use headings to organise the section, but the central concepts – discourse,

knowledge, power and the subject – are not detachable from one another across Foucault’s work (Ball, 2013: 27) nor in my analysis.

The Foucauldian Notion of Discourse

Adopting the Foucauldian notion of discourse requires a departure from a linguistic or sociological position, where the term is used to refer to texts or conversations (McHoul & Grace, 1993). Foucault presents discourse as the relationship between groups of statements, the bodies of knowledge they constitute, and disciplinary apparatus that form the rules and constraints that control discourse, making it both possible and intelligible (Foucault, 1975). Foucault studied “ensembles of discourse”, seeking to understand the rules and thresholds that characterised them (Foucault, 1991: 55). He was concerned with their “conditions of existence” (Foucault, 1991: 60), that is:

the law of existence of statements, that which rendered them possible – them and none other in their place, the conditions of their singular emergence; their correlation with other previous or simultaneous events, discursive or otherwise (Foucault, 1991: 59).

Foucault questioned discourses “about the fact and the conditions” of their appearance at a particular moment in time, in a particular context (Foucault, 1991: 60), exploring the “rules of formation that allow... different objects and different themes to be spoken at one time but not at another” (McNay, 1994: 52).

In his earlier ‘archaeological’ work, *Madness and Civilisation* (1961), *The Order of Things* (1966) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault was concerned with statements claiming to speak the truth, their history, and the rules, knowledges, structures, and contexts that govern their existence:

In a society, different bodies of learning...all refer to a certain implicit knowledge [which]...makes possible at a given moment the appearance of a theory, an opinion, a practice...and it’s this knowledge that I wanted to investigate (Foucault, 1996: 13).

The work of archaeology is to explore the “limits and forms of the sayable” (Foucault, 1991: 59). Statements, delineated as “parts of knowledge” (McHoul & Grace, 1993: 37), are an important component of discourse because they are a mechanism for understanding what counts as the truth (Foucault, 1969). Statements, Foucault argues, are not representational. They are functional, made possible, and interpretable, through a set of discursive rules that enable and constrain what it is possible to know (McHoul & Grace, 1993). Discourses are part of the production of the real, “systematically form[ing] the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1969: 54). This renders illusory the idea of the subject who exists prior to language.

Discourse extends beyond linguistic artefacts (Foucault, 1969), and is present “in policy objects, architectures, subjectivities and practices” (Ball, 2015: 307) and in “people, behavior, timetables, lifestyles, intentions and actions” (Bailey, 2009: 25). Discourse is not to be understood as the text, artefact, or practice, rather it is what enables them to appear:

discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this more that renders them irreducible to the language (langue) and to speech. It is this “more” that we must reveal and describe (Foucault, 1969: 54).

Texts, artefacts, and practices are points of entry for an analysis that aims to understand the processes that made this particular manifestation possible. Through them it is possible to trace the interplay between truths, ideologies, values, and governing structures, and the rules and knowledges that underpin them (McNay, 1994).

Foucault traced the journey through which something is produced as a problem (Foucault, 1983). He traced those knowledges across time, which “bring into being something that did not exist previously—the hysteric, the delinquent, the idiot child” which is “the target of social regulation at a given moment” (Foucault, 1983: 6). Central to this is a questioning of the construction of rationality and common-sense in the production of problems and solutions (Kendall & Wickham, 1999). Foucault’s work challenges

assumptions of progress and regress (Kendall & Wickham, 1999: 4), to lay bare the historical processes of how certain knowledges come to stand for the truth, and the implications in particular disciplinary or institutional arenas.

Discourse and Power

Power is central to Foucault's conception of discourse as he was concerned with the role of discourse in the management of individuals and populations. Foucault explored how people and institutions are produced through discourse, and the knowledge and truth regimes that enable them (McHoul&Grace, 1993; Gutting, 2005). His tools offer ways of unsettling contemporary discourses that have acquired the status of truth. In his work the "production of knowledge is also a claim for power"; techniques of power are validated through systems of knowledge, which "produce classes and categories of subjects, endowed with specific characteristics and requiring particular forms of intervention or practices" (Ball, 2013: 13). Defining the truth is a practice of power, as are processes of classifying, ordering, and comparing. This relates to a central concern in Foucault's work with "the history of order" and "how a society reflects upon resemblances among things", and the limiting and constraining effects of these processes (Foucault, 1996: 13).

Foucault analysed the relationships between discourses and apparatus of social control (Foucault, 1996). This development of an analytic of discourse and power is conveyed most clearly through his later genealogies (Young, 1981b; McNay; 1996), as genealogy concerns the processes and apparatuses involved in the production of knowledge and truth (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003). This includes *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (Volumes I,II and III, 1976, 1984, 1984 respectively).

In *The History of Sexuality* (1976) Foucault explored the Repressive Hypothesis of sexuality that came to dominate during the Victorian era. He argued that the common assumption was that sex could not be talked about

except in relation to monogamous sex between married, heterosexual adults. Whilst not denying that processes of repression were taking place Foucault argued that contrary to common belief, sex was not absent from discussion at this time:

Rather than the uniform concern to hide sex...what distinguishes these last three centuries is the variety, the wide dispersion of devices that were invented for speaking about it, for having it be spoken about, for inducing it to speak of itself, for listening, recording, transcribing, and redistributing what is said about it: around sex a whole network of varying, specific, and coercive transpositions into discourse (Foucault, 1976: 34).

The very existence of this repressive hypothesis as the 'truth' of sexuality was significant. It functioned to encourage sex to be discussed more, but only in permissible ways:

What is peculiar to modern societies...is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it ad infinitum, while exploiting it as the secret (Foucault, 1976: 35).

As well as this proliferation of discourses about sex, Foucault traced a change in the apparatus used to govern sex from the 17th century. Two modes of speaking were pivotal here: the religious confession and the medical examination. Whilst the first ensured that sex was talked about in more detail than ever before, the second was concerned with categorising, pathologising, and treating particular forms of sexuality deemed to be perverse.

Discourse refers to the truths that dominate a particular body of thought, such as the repressive hypothesis of sexuality, and the apparatus through which these are made possible, sustained, and come to stand for the truth, such as religious confession and medical examination. What Foucault's analysis reveals is a paradox: these were the arenas of hiding where sexual activity could be discovered. Through these processes and institutions, subjects were encouraged to develop a greater knowledge of the self in relation to sex. Crucially, Foucault argued that the knowing sexual subject is

not discovered through these processes, but created through them. In the confessional and medical examination, discussions about sex operated so as to carve subjects able to govern their talk about sex, and perhaps their behaviour too, “as if in order to gain mastery over it [sex] in reality, it had first been necessary to subjugate it at the level of language (Foucault, 1976: 17).

Discourse, Biopower, and Technologies of Governance

The shift from archaeology to genealogy articulated a change in Foucault’s conception of power. Foucault’s earlier works positioned power as “what the law says, that which says no, with a whole string of negative effects: exclusion, rejection, barriers, denial, dissimulation” (Foucault, 1996: 207). This was a position that Foucault later found “inadequate...power should not be considered in terms of law but in terms of technology, in terms of tactics and strategy” (Foucault, 1996: 207). He sought to reformulate this conception to view “power as a series of complex, difficult and never-functionalized relationships”, which are diffused and present in all social relations (Foucault, 1996: 258). In this view, the ‘state’ is not a single entity; it is the product of multiple and dispersed discursive practices.

Foucault examined the diffuse mechanisms of power in daily micro-interactions, within particular domains and institutions, and how these served to normalise dominant notions of truth and shape individuals. This was a concern with “the art of governing...with what techniques, with what instruments people should govern and be governed” (Foucault, 1996: 258). This interest led to his work on what he termed “technologies of power”, which are the apparatus of governance (Foucault, 1996: 208).

For instance, in *The History of Sexuality Volume I* Foucault sought to uncover the way sexuality and its categorisation has operated as a mode of governance through the production of particular spaces and rules for talking about sex. He examined practices that delineate what is licit and illicit (Foucault, 1996: 37), and how technologies of ‘telling the self’, in relation to

sex and sexuality, were in fact technologies of power which constructed the subject in relation to sex. The confession and medical examination shaped the subject because they compelled processes of self-scrutiny through which people were to “discover the truth” about their sexuality and share it with others (Foucault, 1993: 211).

Foucault’s project was to explore the transformations produced through discourse (Foucault, 1991). His theory of biopower concerned how populations are managed and how productive individuals are created through power/knowledge relationships (Dickens & Fontana, 1994). This was a concern with how populations are made responsible through the normalisation of particular practices and ways of being, for instance within an institutional setting. Biopower connects with Foucault’s later concept of governmentality, which refers to the arts and tactics of government and how these produce self-governing subjects (Foucault, 2003: 245). Governmentality captures the “encounter between technologies of domination of others and those of the self” (Foucault, 2003: 147). Foucault saw state knowledge, which could be made more complete through the use of data, as a tactic for governing people (Foucault, 2003: 239). He charted the way statistics became central to the management of populations to achieve specific outcomes, analysing the “emergence of population as a datum, as a field of intervention, and as an objective of governmental techniques” (Foucault, 2003: 243).

The relations of power constituted through governmentality are always partly material. The art of government concerns people in their relations with others, including the material world (Foucault, 2003: 235). Foucault was interested in how power is present in buildings, institutions, and knowledge systems. His genealogies mapped infinitesimal and meticulous techniques of power that were present in different institutional spaces, (Foucault, 1975), and applied to bodies, objects, and spaces (Ball, 2013).

Foucault analysed how techniques of discipline and punishment shifted to create self-governing subjects. Using the example of Bentham’s panopticon,

he explored prison architecture as a tactic of power for moulding particular subjects. Foucault argued that the very idea of being watched at all times, which is central to panopticon, produced an internalisation of the gaze, to give the sense that power is everywhere and all-encompassing (Pickett, 1996). People learn to self-govern as the feeling of being watched transfers to the “soul of the subject” as a “punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations” (Foucault, 1975: 16). Here the body itself becomes the target of governance (Foucault, 1984). The outcome is a subject who responds in particular ways, and is limited from doing otherwise.

The Subject and Care of the Self

This reference to the self-regulating subject alerts us to the, sometimes oblique, presence of the subject that permeates Foucault’s work. In his later work, Foucault dealt more explicitly with the subject (Adams St Pierre, 2004), and particularly with the self as “an object of inquiry, as a problem, and as a locus for posing questions concerning knowledge, action and ethics” (Besley & Peters, 2007: 3). Throughout Foucault’s work there is a concern with how human subjects fit into certain “games of truth”, and how they are framed, managed, produced, and able to practice freedom (Foucault, 1996: 432). Yet his work has been accused of decentering the subject, and he avoids reference to speaking, intentional subjects (McNay, 1994; Foucault, 1996). For Foucault there is no subject prior to, or outside of, relations of power (Foucault, 1996). The subject is not constituted “in advance of the world but in material and discursive relations that always offer the possibility of transformation” (Adams St Pierre, 2004: 236). He rejected the idea of an a priori subject to consider how the subject is constituted in different institutions and power relations (Foucault, 1996).

In a 1982 lecture Foucault differentiated between the ‘technologies’ present in his analyses. In his fourth category - technologies of the self - we find an explicit reference to the subject:

technologies of the self...permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault, 2003: 146).

Foucault framed subjects as free individuals who “find themselves within a certain network of practices of power and constraining institutions” (Foucault, 1996: 445). This connects back to Foucault’s conception of power, particularly his view on domination, and the practices of freedom individuals can engage in. A recurring critique of Foucault’s work is that his focus on domination suggests the impossibility of freedom. Ball argues that this is “misleading...he was as much concerned with the modalities of freedom as he was with the production of docility” (Ball 2013: 4). Foucault argued that part of the practice of freedom may be a practice of liberation, but he was wary of the notion of liberation as underpinned by an idea that there “exists a human nature” that, through historical processes, humans have been kept from, and that if they can break free of repressive forces they can “rediscover” their true nature or origin (Foucault, 1996: 433).

Rather than a domination-liberation duality, Foucault focused on relations of power, which depend on the freedom of subjects (Foucault, 1996). Both power and resistance occur across multiple acts and moments, are underpinned by a range of purposes, and create possibilities (Ball, 2013). Foucault’s work aimed to understand “the possibilities of freedom that exists side by side with subjection” (Adams St Pierre, 2004: 239). There is an appreciation that “states of domination do indeed exist” in cases where “power relations are fixed in such a way that they are perpetually asymmetrical and allow an extremely limited margin of freedom” (Foucault, 1996: 441). Discursive practices can operate so as to limit possibilities for thinking outside of them (Ball, 2013). However, once something is present in discourse it can be reacted against: “discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (Ball, 2010a: 2).

Foucault considered how subjects may resist the ways they are constituted. Power is not “a cage”, and relations of power can be altered:

Power is not merely prohibitive it is productive, a lot of the time it makes us up rather than grinds us down... We are active within relations of power. Power is not then a structure but rather a complex arrangement of social forces that are exercised (Ball, 2013: 29-30).

What becomes important in the analysis that follows is not a concern with a state of domination, but rather with the shifting balance of constraints and possibilities for freedom that occur in schools, and the particular contours of this in the case of the failing school that becomes an academy.

Connections between the subject, relations of power, and self-governance were explicit in Foucault’s late work to develop ‘The Care of the Self’ as a theory of the subject. Care of the self is a practice that Foucault traces back to ancient Greek culture. It concerns the practices individuals engage in as a result of the freedom they necessarily have in power relations. Foucault locates ‘Care of the Self’ as an ethical practice that centres on self-knowledge, defining it as “an exercise of the self on the self, by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain a certain mode of being” (Foucault, 1996: 433). There is a concern with how subjects self-govern, which connects with Foucault’s technologies of the self. Care of the self is about:

Know[ing] ontologically what you are...know[ing] what things you should and should not fear...know[ing] what you can reasonably hope for and, on the other hand, what things should not matter to you (Foucault, 2003: 31).

Care of the self is necessary in order to care for, and behave in an ethical way towards, others (Foucault, 1996: 437). It is a theory of “ethical self-formation” (Adams St Pierre, 2004: 342), whereby self-formation arrives, in part, through the ethical treatment of others. Care of the self is about the transformations that the subject must carry out on itself “to attain an ethical mode of being” (Foucault, 1996: 443). It may include forms of “self mastery” (Besley & Peters, 2007, p. xvi), and can be viewed as a way of “limiting and

controlling power” (Foucault, 1996: 438). This is an important lens for analysing institutional practices which may appear as resistance (Ball & Olmedo, 2013).

Foucault and Academies

Foucault’s work is drawn on in this study defamiliarise the social arrangements that surround the creation and continuation of the academies policy as a response to failing schools in areas of poverty. I take academy status to be one of the more recent additions to the “art of government” in education (Foucault, 2003: 229) and I use Foucault’s work to explore the details of the power-knowledge relations in the case of the academy school. I take forward Foucault’s work in four analysis chapters, drawing to four ideas.

1) Discourse as constitutive

Since language does not describe a world that exists ‘out there’, and is instead a source and shaper of thought, I explore the work that is being done, socially and politically, through what is said, written, and produced about academies. In Chapter Five I use this approach to understand how successive governments have crafted academies as objects for thought through language and a particular set of discursive rules. I use Foucault’s work to defamiliarise statements about academies, and explore the systems of thought have enabled them to appear as a response to failing schools, and to be sustained in the contemporary moment. If discourse is more than the signs it is composed of, then I want to understand what this ‘more than’ is in the case of academies.

I inquire into the management of the possibilities and limits of what can be said and thought about academy status, and the ensembles of truth that have been constructed about the academy school. I consider the use of language in the academies’ space and ask what clues this provides about the wider system within which writing, talking, thinking, and acting are taking place. I explore the coherence that has been given to academies through discourse, through which certain ideas become permissible whilst others are

sidelined or constrained (McHoul & Grace, 1993). I use Foucault's work to probe the wider frameworks and truths that structure utterances about the academy school, and the processes through which some meanings and truths come to dominate over others. There is an archaeological component to this analysis because it explores the set of social arrangements within which academies are produced.

This is important to the study of academies because they are part of the order of things in current state-funded education. Their categorisation is part of a system of referential and linked concepts, through which particular schools are problematised. Foucault's work invites a questioning of how the apparent rationality of academisation as a tool to 'fix' the 'problem' school has been managed through discourse. It draws attention to questions about how a particular 'academy subject' is crafted. My aim is to understand how the academy policy 'makes visible' certain things about the education of young people living in poverty, and in so doing, produces "forms of visibility" which reinforce and contradict what is said and known about these young people (Kendall & Wickham, 1999: 25).

2) *Discourse as multimodal*

Statements, including language, are parts of discourse, but discourse is not irreducible to language. The term discourse captures the linguistic artefact, the way this was made possible in the first place, the technologies of power that legitimise and sustain it as a truth, and the way it becomes present through the practical and materiality of the school. I adopt the Foucauldian position that discourse can be realised in any of the semiotic modes that are available in a given culture (Foucault, 1981; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). This invites an analysis of the way the academy school is produced through the language, materiality, architecture, spaces, and practices of the school. It is the case that the latter is often the most prominent, because it lends itself to reproduction, however photographs and vignettes of everyday practice are used throughout this work as modes where the academies discourse is shaped.

3) *Policy as Discourse*

Education policy scholars have generated theoretical tools that draw on Foucault's work to clarify the relationships between discourse and practices, and who is served by the way policies are configured (Ball, 1993; Allan, 1996; Bacchi, 2000; Bailey & Thomson, 2009; Ball, 2010a). Foucault's work has been taken up within the field of education policy research through a branch of study that considers policy through the concept of discourse (Bacchi, 2000). This approach has been central to the development of critical policy analysis in education because it considers policy-making across levels and spaces, and captures institutional practices and cultures (Taylor, 1997). It emphasises the complexities of how schools 'do' policy (Ball et al, 2012; Ball, 2015). This thesis rejects theorisations that suggest a direct and linear relationship between policy texts and policy in practice. The concept of policy enactment has been developed to capture the complexity of the translation between "modes" that must occur as a policy text becomes practice (Ball, 2009b, unpagged). Practice in schools is "more than the sum of a range of policies" and is inflected by local values and expectations, which may be a source of contradiction (Ball, 2009b unpagged).

The work of these scholars shows that policy becomes in a school as a result of the interplay between different policy spaces, including: the context of influence; the context of text production which may be part of the context of influence and replicates "privileged versions of policy"; the context of practice; and text production within the context of practice as policy materials are produced (Ball, 2009b unpagged). Combining the analysis of text and context has been a key development in the critical policy scholarship, enabling more nuanced accounts of the complex processes through which policy happens. This approach recognises that meaning and interpretations are not stored in texts and are multiple and varied depending on the context in which they are encountered. This has been particularly helpful to research on schools, highlighting the importance of located factors such as school budgets and resources, local levels of poverty, professional

cultures, teachers' lives, policy cultures, and the external position of the school according to government targets and comparisons (Ball et al, 2012). Policy enactment is a situated process, and policy is produced through the struggles between different knowledge-claims and truths (Grimaldi, 2012: 446).

'Policy as discourse' scholars attend to how policies are formulated through rules that constrain what can and cannot be said, written, and thought in particular times and contexts. Policies are embedded within wider power relations, which are involved in the production of meaning and can condition the policy discourses that are available. Policy is an attempt to "coordinate and finalize" power relations (Foucault, 1996: 211). This suggests the utility of considering both texts and contexts of privilege or dominance, and those of practice. This analysis alerted me to the struggles for meaning that ensue in the process of a 'failing' school in a context of poverty acquiring academy status, and negotiating what this means.

4) *Governmentality*

Academies have become part of the science of school reform, with academy status constituted as an apparatus for school improvement. Once academy status is viewed as a discursive construction it becomes important to explore the effects of its invention. Foucault's theory enables a close analysis of the disruptions that were taking place in Eastbank Academy. My analysis locates the shifting technologies of power that have accompanied and sustained the production of academy status in Eastbank. I position academy status as a disciplinary tactic in the school, which normalises particular practices and ideas, and produces particular relations of power and effects. I utilise Foucault's work on governmentality, particularly in relation to space and the gaze, to understand how these shifts shape the meanings of academy status and the academy subject. The academy school is portrayed as a self-governing, responsibilised institution, which must care for itself. I examine the practices of self-governance and self-formation that staff and students engage in within such a context.

Since the subject emerges through discourse, Foucault's work guided my inquiries into the different possibilities for the academy subject, as part of the games of truth that surround the failing school that becomes an academy. I explore how individuals may be coerced into constituting themselves in particular ways within the discursive possibilities of the academy's policy. I consider how the disciplinary nature of academy status in failing schools positions teachers and students as certain kinds of subjects. Subjectivities are, in turn, a guide to the forms of power relations in play within the school and I consider the practices of freedom by staff and students. This analysis builds to argue that academy status – in this school at this time – required the crafting of a particular way of being. I explore how staff and students worked on themselves in order to survive in their current circumstances. This becomes a study of the practices of the self that produced the academy subject, with a particular focus on how staff make sense of their work as ethical and valuable.

Criticisms of Foucault's Work

I conclude this section by questioning what a Foucauldian approach might protect me from thinking or defer my attention from, which is “the ethical question we must inevitably ask” when using theory (Adams St Pierre, 2004: 327). Foucault's work offers one way of knowing the world; of knowing the academy school. His is one of many ways, and it “adds another dimension to our view of the world” (Hartman, 1990: 3). Like any theory it is partial and flawed (Ball, 2010b). It cannot offer a definitive way of knowing the academy school, nor would such a claim fit with a theory that demands we question overarching truths and essentialist positions. There are things Foucault's work may be less adept at clarifying or foregrounding, and being mindful of the careful criticisms that have been made of his work is important. Whilst this does not mean these criticisms can be resolved, it provides greater clarity about what this research is and is not doing.

I discuss three key criticisms in this chapter. First, although Foucault advocated close empirical study from within institutions, he did not carry

out such studies himself. Second, although Foucault writes about resistance, he rarely explored how it happens. Third, Foucault's avoidance and wariness of normative judgments means his project of critique failed to contend with how things might be different. I deal with the first of these now, in order to introduce a discussion of ethnography. The other two resurface in Section Three of the chapter.

Foucault testified to the need to take seriously the microphysics of daily interactions, and saw institutions as spaces where power-knowledge relationships could be uncovered (Allan, 1996). He emphasised that any discourse should be viewed in relation to "the practical field in which it is deployed" (Foucault, 1991: 60-1). However he did not undertake empirical work within institutions. That his work does not guide us in the activity of closely observing human interactions and institutions has not prevented researchers from drawing on his ideas to inform ethnographic studies (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003).

Foucault's studies relied on detailed archival work. However, not all voices and policy effects are archived, because they are not all given the sort of permanence – typically through written accounts – that this would require. His work recognises the plurality of voices and he "urges researchers to find the means to hear these, but fails to set an example" (Allan, 1996: 228). Foucault's work does not contend with how texts are lived. He adopts a multimodal definition of discourse but does not see many of these modalities in action, within institutions and social relations. In the case of academies, archives of this policy would tell us of those schools that have constructed academy status in the ways envisaged by policy architects, or indeed those high profile, controversial cases of evident mismanagement of academy status. These would not facilitate my intention of exploring the 'ordinary', 'failing' school that becomes an academy, without spectacle (Maguire et al, 2011).

We should not expect a complete fit between theory and data (Adams St Pierre, 2004: 342). Instead I take up Foucault's thinking tools to the extent that they are considered to illuminate this particular school at this particular time. This thesis does not provide the historical detail of Foucault's genealogies, but it does take up the idea of the constraints of what it is possible to say and know about academy status, and how this relates to relations and apparatuses of power. The question of how the academy school is produced cannot be addressed without attention to the micro manifestations of power within a specific context. Ethnography provided this opportunity.

Ethnography

An analysis that focuses on privileged and influential statements of education policy can make visible how people are conceived of and shaped through language, enabling a consideration of how this relates to wider technologies of power. However, it cannot suggest anything about the interplay between these dominant meanings and the local contexts, meanings and materiality of the people and places that comprise the subject of policy. For this situated study is also required. I explored the effects of educational truths through an ethnography of a secondary academy school. The four analysis chapters in this thesis combine text work with fieldwork (Bailey, 2009), to facilitate the richness of questioning that Foucault's work encourages in ways that lend themselves to opening up different avenues for critique and educational possibilities. This multiplicity of method, facilitated by ethnography and the time and relationships it enabled, allowed me to explore and better understand how academy status was being produced within Eastbank. Ethnography is a form of "embodied knowledge (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003: 6), which enabled a focus on the "micro-operations of power...local struggles and the achievement of local solutions" (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003: 4), providing an opportunity to see how policy becomes in a school (Taylor, 1997).

Ethnography has been a popular method of educational research since the 1960s, when pioneering studies of daily life in classrooms and schools emerged (Delamont, 2014). The field has since diversified, taking account of the variety of contexts in which education and learning happen (Delamont, 2014). A central concern of educational ethnography is how staff and students “experience and understand their educational lives” (Delamont, 2014: 7). Ethnography facilitates rich descriptions, which is crucial given the complexity of social institutions, in which multiple voices and truths interact with manifold policies and agendas within localised and broader socio-political contexts (Hartas, 2010). To understand how academy status interacts with other facets of schools’ work, I needed to spend considerable time in a school, engaging in the range of methods available to the ethnographer.

Ethnography provides descriptions of single cases and brief exchanges, grounded in context (Hartman, 1990), and shows how subjectivities are constructed over time (Skeggs, 1997). Through it I accessed moments where academy status was ‘becoming’ in the school, where it was being produced and managed into a particular kind of reality. Without situated study of academy status I would not have seen these processes of meaning-making, nor would I have been able to access the range of accounts and experiences that were implicated in Eastbank becoming an academy.

Ethnography is a way of bringing in those ‘practically lived texts’ such as buildings, classrooms and walls, which are places where discourse is managed, negotiated, and practiced (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001: 24). It provides opportunities to see the relations of power constituted through discourse and materiality in particular institutions, under particular policies, at particular times. Both genealogists and ethnographers are interested in how “the sinews of power are embedded in mundane practices and in social relationships” (Ball, 2013: 6). Ethnography has facilitated insights about the work that the academy policy did in Eastbank, and the practices of freedom that existed around it.

The remainder of this chapter has three aims. First to describe the particular form of ethnographic methodology that has informed this study. Second to explore the possibilities, tensions and reflexive concerns that stem from meshing ethnography with Foucauldian discourse analysis as a method for critical policy research. Third, to elucidate the assumptions inherent in this methodological position, addressing issues of ‘truth’, ‘values’ and the knowledge claims of this work.

Ethnographic Methodologies

At the opening of this chapter I referred to the reflective space created by ethnography for the development of a critical vantage point. It was during my time in Eastbank Academy that the trace of a framework of truth about academy status emerged. This was present in articulations of resistance in the school and in the way accounts of academy status were being crafted. It was apparent through my gradual reflections on how I had framed this project as one concerned with ‘transformation’. It was the ethnographic method that provided the insights to pursue a multilayered methodology. I did not begin my ethnography with Foucault in mind. Rather he emerged as I was listening to my data, and as the inadequacies of the conceptual orders I had entered the field with became apparent (Adams St Pierre, 2000). This early unsettling experience led me to Foucault’s work which, in turn, led me to struggle against the structures of traditional qualitative inquiry (Adams St Pierre, 2004). The combining of ethnography and Foucault’s thinking tools requires careful thought because these two methodologies are influenced by different theoretical traditions (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003).

Post-structuralist Ethnography

The roots of ethnography lie in the modernist project of enlightenment, with research positioned as part of a linear and progressive journey to more complete knowledge (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003). Ethnography stems from the anthropological project of discovering and labelling cultures and people, and “ethnography grew out of a master discourse of colonization” (Clair, 2003: 3). It began as a way of advancing ‘primitive’ societies, adding to the

science of human development by charting the progress of cultures. Early twentieth century ethnography was underpinned by a quest to understand in order to improve. This, and the idea that the ethnographer can and should represent 'the other' and that "one specific truthful interpretation and representation could be garnered", have been difficult assumptions to shift (Clair, 2003: 14).

In contrast, Foucault's work queries grand theories, normative categories, and the view that history documents linear progress towards greater knowledge, rationality and "social and moral betterment" (Habermas, 1981: 4). He presented interpretation as provisional and incomplete, and research as contending with interpretations of the already interpreted (Adams St Pierre, 2004: 326). In the discussion that follows I make two points about this apparent tension. First that I am working with a sub category of ethnography that is poststructurally informed (Cairns, 2013; Adams St Pierre, 2004). Second, that this goes some way towards addressing these critiques and tensions but that neither this, Foucault's work, post-structuralism or indeed any research approach is immune from the issues that surround assigning labels and categories, making judgements, and presenting truths.

Ethnography has diversified since its original incarnation in anthropology, and in particular ways in the sociological and education research contexts (Hammersley, 2006). Continuities remain, as ethnography is a method of studying "what people do and say in particular contexts" (Hammersley, 2006: 4), typically through a suite of qualitative methods, captured through "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973). Ethnography is concerned with the production, interpretation, and experiences of the social world (Mason, 2002). Methods of data generation are typically sensitive to context, flexible, and focused on understanding details and complexities.

Across the 20th century and into the 21st century there have been considerable challenges to traditional ethnographic practices and assumptions that are grounded in the colonial project of progress. The

dominance of positivism in the social sciences in the first half of the twentieth century meant that, when sociologists began to use ethnographic methods, they strove to validate their work through the ideals of positivism. The classic ethnographies of the early 20th century aimed to provide studies that had scientific reliability and validity, and ethnographers positioned themselves as “neutral scientists employing the best available techniques to collect data in the field” (Fontana, 1994: 209). Researcher authority was gained through close and extended proximity to what was being studied (Dickens & Fontana, 1994). The first educational ethnographies were preoccupied with “micro-level accounts of schooling” and “the interpretive concern with ‘describing’ a social setting ‘as it really is’; assuming this to be an objective, ‘common sense’ reality (May, 1995: 3).

However, Clair (2003) argues that “the days of naive ethnography are over” (p. 3). The questioning of positivism and functionalism in the 1960s and the filtering through of post-modern ideas into sociology brought a critique of the idea that the social world could be explained through meta-narratives and grand theories. The questioning mood of ‘post’ has challenged the traditional philosophical assumptions of social research, and led to a reassessment of ethnography (Fontana, 1994). The critiques offered by post-structuralism, post-modernism and other ‘critical’ perspectives such as feminism and post-colonialism, led to increasing interest in the status and problems of ethnographic methods, ethnographic data, the ethnographer, and the written product of ethnography (Clair, 2003). The idea that researcher authority comes from ‘being there’ was increasingly problematized. The “tendency to smoothly link ‘being there’ with ‘understanding’ risks stifling the inherently interpretive nature ethnography (Fontana, 1994: 207-8). This approach glossed over those wider relations of power that “shape both the setting itself and the ‘common-sense’ interpretations that participants and researchers have of it” (May, 1995: 3). Through this critical movement, the broader social and cultural contexts, that participants and researcher are entangled in, have become an explicit

concern of ethnographers. Ethnography has become a more reflexive, self-critical practice as much concerned with its own politics and aesthetics of representation as with the practices of data generation. That meanings, subject positions, and truths are multiple, partial, and fluid has come to be a more frequently accepted ethnographic position.

Post-structuralist ethnography is a sub-category that bares the influence of the critiques of traditional ethnography. It is this strand of ethnography that is drawn on in this study. In Chapter Four I consider what it means to do post-structuralist ethnography, in terms of practice and analysis, whilst continuing to contend here with the philosophical underpinnings of this approach.

In post-structuralist ethnography there is an explicit concern with those issues that permeated Foucault's work such as the interrogating of categories, subject positions, and truths, both in the practice and the writing of ethnography. Interpretations are viewed as situated, partial, and becoming. The deconstructive nature of post-structuralist approaches leads to a questioning of the “foundational concepts of qualitative inquiry like data, the field, interviewing...validity...time” (Adams St Pierre, 2004: 332), and “causality...identity...the subject and...truth” (Young, 1981b: 8). These foundational social science concepts are repositioned as part of a “powerful governing discourse” (Cairns, 2013: 326) that has been seductive to researchers because of the performative demands that are increasingly placed on them and their work (Ball, 2009b). Post-structuralist ethnography is concerned with the construction of dominant educational discourses, but also with the dominant discourses about what research is and how it should be conducted (May, 1995).

In this thesis, this translates into an interest in how established categories such as ‘academy’, ‘failure’ and ‘transformation’ are used, contested and reformed. I employ these terms throughout, whilst interrogating them, taking meanings, people and materialities to be fluid. Post-structuralist

ethnography continues the sensitivity to place of ethnography as a situated study, whilst viewing place as something that is itself 'becoming', along with subjectivity (Cairns, 2013). Pursuing a post-structuralist approach to ethnography means contending with how my research practices, including writing, contribute to the ongoing production of people and places (Singh et al, 2014).

Productive Tensions and Issues

At this point in time, in this school, I found the combination of Foucault's work and ethnography to be productive for rethinking the academy school. Combining these approaches opened up multiple spaces for analysis. This combination was required for addressing "the multifarious and complex ways" things happen "around us in the 'run-away' world" (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003: 2). I now deal with the tensions and philosophical questions that stem from this combination. Again the aim is not to neatly resolve these, but to position them as important and productive in the construction of this research.

The Subject and Subjectivity

Researching policy raises ontological questions, as it concerns how to conceive of the acting subject who is charged with bringing policy to life. Ontological politics are at issue in this work because it considers the production of academy subjects. Weaved throughout my methodology are particular assumptions about the nature of policy subjects, and how it is possible to reach a better understanding of their interactions with a specific education policy.

The subject is central to ethnography, but is not the starting point for a Foucauldian analysis (Benton & Craib, 2011). The roots of Foucault's project and ethnography imply different positionings for the subject, and this study is informed by both approaches. A meshing of Foucault's thinking tools with ethnography has focused my attentions of both the individual's interactions with policy, and the ways in which these interactions and ensuing

subjectivities are produced through discourses and relations of power. Academy status is one of the manifold things – both work-based and personal – that people within schools are contending with in the daily micro-interactions that combine to produce ‘the school’. The subject of policy is plural, mobile, and relational, and includes non-human entities (Bansel, 2015). Both policies, and subjects’ responses to them, are versatile and contextualised, whilst being shaped by discourse (Grimaldi, 2012).

Policy does not have a straightforward or linear effect on school-level activity, and what actors say about a policy is one of the ways it is brought into existence (Gowlett et al, 2015). Policies are a way of delineating new types of people “who in one sense did not exist before” (Benton & Craib, 2011: 168). For instance, the academies policy constructs the executive head teacher and the academy sponsor/pupil/teacher/parent. Alongside these human entities, this work concerns non-human entities where the policy can be traced, including buildings and documents. I am concerned with the construction of practitioners who work in a ‘failing’ school which is turned into an academy, and the construction of the pupils they serve in this context of ‘failure’.

Conceptualising Power

Traditionally ethnography has depended on a different conception of power to that which Foucault worked with. Ethnography stems from a view of power as sovereignty, which would, for example, invite the exploration of states of domination within schools. In contrast, Foucault viewed power as diffuse and present in all encounters and relations, and focused on the array of power relations that exist in any institution. His work was concerned with the effects of power rather than assigning intentionality (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003). He understood this ‘how’ of power in relation to the wider discursive context and governing apparatus of the phenomenon of interest.

Foucault’ theory of power has received considerable critical interest (Heller, 1996; McNay, 1994; Sayer, 2012). Foucault positions discourse as a structure

that is embedded in, and constructs, power relations. This raises questions about the forms of resistance that are possible when even modes of resistance are confined within socially, politically, and culturally produced discourses. If “each power relation can be referred to the political sphere of which it is a part, both as its effect and its condition of possibility” (Foucault, 1996: 211), and “teachers make meanings with the discursive possibilities available to them” (Ball et al, 2011: 612), this suggests there are limited possibilities for subjects to subvert power interests where these are experienced as oppressive or unjust.

For Sayer (2012) difficulties stem from Foucault’s reluctance to contend with causality in his theory of power. He criticises Foucault’s emphasis on the ‘how’ of power and avoidance of the ‘who’ of power, which creates ambiguity around if and how intentionality features in Foucault’s work (Sayer, 2012: 181). He connects Foucault’s ambiguous approach to intentionality with a desire to avoid conceptualisations of causation as deterministic, invariant and regular (Sayer, 2012). Sayer (2012) conceptualises power as a “summarising term for situations where some change is made to happen, or perhaps prevented”, and that although power is often ascribed to particular concrete entities, it “typically depend[s] on wider social relations” (Sayer, 2012: 181). Sayer argues that social science research should acknowledge that power often has an element of causality, albeit one that is extremely complex and difficult to unravel. He advocates an account of power as both ubiquitous and as constrained by structures (Sayer, 2012). This does not mean that the causal relationships should be understood as fixed, rather “the structures that give rise to them may themselves be susceptible to influence, or their contingent reproduction may fail” (Sayer, 2012: 182).

This has implications for attempts to critique policy effects, a style of analysis that is present in this thesis. Foucault’s work has been problematised for presenting as a critical project whilst failing to engage with how other possibilities might occur or how change may be explained (Sayer, 2012). As Allan (1996) notes, whilst Foucault would be critical of the

institutionalised practices around disability, for example, “he does not specify how these relations might be overturned” (Allan, 1996: 228). Foucault’s work has been criticised for being deterministic and presenting the way humans have “been trapped in our own history” (Foucault, 1982: 780). A linked critique is that he avoids passing judgement on “whether particular forms of power are good or bad”, which has been described as “‘crypto-normative’; in identifying often hidden and pervasive forms of power, his accounts seem somewhat ominous, and yet they draw back from saying whether they are and if so why” (Sayer, 2012: 180).

Butler (1990) argues that a similar argument has been made about post-structuralism more generally, as an approach that has ambiguous political aims. But, she argues, that need not be the case, and she uses feminist theories with post-structuralism to create a project of critique. McNay (1994) argues that in Foucault’s study of madness it is possible to read an “impassioned denunciation of the modern attitude towards madness which, in Foucault’s view, is profoundly dehumanizing” (McNay, 1994: 14). For Heller (1996), Foucault’s theory ensures both “hegemonic and counter-hegemonic subject-positions”, with resistance “structurally guaranteed for Foucault by the reversibility of power-mechanisms and the heterogeneous processes of subjectification” (Heller, 1996: 79). Foucault positioned resistance as a “chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their point of application and the methods used” (Foucault, 1982: 780).

Engaging with debates about how we make sense of Foucault’s work highlights the potential multiplicity of readings that have been ventured, partly as a result of the shifts and developments in his conception of power. It reemphasises the point that we always work with a particular version of Foucault’s, and in so doing inevitably “make him groan and protest in some way” (Adams St Pierre, 2004: 326-7). This is present in the work that follows, which draws on the Foucauldian notion of power as ubiquitous, whist

adopting a critical perspective on the effects and consequences of relations of power that remained more oblique in Foucault's work.

Foucault's conception of relations of power is taken as a way of studying the detailed practices of policy-making, and the processes of resistance, rearticulation, and cooperation that are part of this (Hewitt, 2009). I work with the idea that power relations are diffuse through schools and the wider policy context. These relations are in flux, and this flux creates important opportunities for practices of freedom. Power relations are manifest as tactics, which layer upon one another and interrelate so that the task of assigning intentions becomes very difficult but also not necessarily the most useful way of illuminating the academy's policy. The emphasis is therefore on relations of power as shifting, alongside shifting subject positions. This approach facilitates a consideration of practices that appear resistant, because relations of power are manifold and necessitate freedom. It enables accounts of agency in institutions that are constrained and governed (Ball et al, 2011). It accommodates the view that action is regulated through discourses, which manage "what is valued and thus made acceptable" but that this:

grooming to think and act in certain ways through pre-existing ideas is...not the same for everyone and nor is it deterministic; there is a fluidity in play. Actions are driven by pre-existing norms and then read by people through pre-existing norms, with the two not necessarily being the same. It is at this intersection of understanding that policy reception occurs (Gowlett et al, 2015: 152).

At the same time, the analysis that follows uses the ethnographic tradition to recognise that not everyone has equal access to power, and documents relations of power where the consequences for one or more parties are potentially unjust. In the final section I am explicit about the way normativity and judgment operates through this work.

Truth, knowledge claims, and critique

It is not that adopting this methodological combination introduces problems that are not present in other methodologies. However, this particular combination of Foucault's work and post-structuralist ethnography foregrounds the problem of 'truths' and I must therefore contend with the way I am shaping truth through the very act of research.

Silenced Voices and Practices of Freedom

I view this methodological combination as an approach to research that searches for those voices and stories that are silenced through dominant accounts of the academy's policy. Both ethnography and Foucault's work are concerned with voices and perspectives that have been marginalised in the grand narratives of history and policy, and the ways in which marginalised groups may engage in practices of freedom. Part of Foucault's critique of the human sciences where that, by centering on the modernist project of the progress of mankind, they failed to "satisfactorily represent the vast range of human experiences" (Dickens & Fontana, 1994: 5). Foucault's analyses of discourse enabled a consideration of the common-sense truths these produce, who is represented and in what ways, the effects of this, and the purposes that are served. His approach highlights how particular people and groups maintain power through their control of truth, knowledge, definitions, and categories, and it has been employed to illuminate these discursive processes and their relationship with power, oppression, and social injustice (Bailey, 2009). Foucault's work presents ways to see and understand resistance as a part of situated relations of power (Foucault in Chomsky & Foucault, 1974: 171). He was interested in "popular uprisings" and "anti-authority struggles; as attacks upon a technique, a form of power" (Foucault, 1982: 212). This fits more generally with his interest in those positioned outside of mainstream society; "the mad [and] abnormal" (Ball, 2013: 32).

This focus on partiality and locatedness is at the core of ethnography, which is a way of seeing subjectivity in action in social organisations. It is a way of

“engaging with and developing divergent accounts of the real” and “like genealogy, it is disruptive, it is about the play of power-knowledge relations in local and specific settings” (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003: 5). Ethnography is concerned with offering a sense of the complexity of social life, and is a tool for making sense of how some people, views, and truths come to dominate rather than others. It is in these richly described and considered context-specific moments that it is possible for new ideas and connections to be explored (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003). In both cases, the localised and situated is a means of foregrounding voices that are usually in the background. Post-structuralist ethnography and Foucault’s work can both be used to refute an approach to research that seeks to present a single truth, which is instead positioned as a way of contributing to the “hegemonic order” (Clair, 2003: 15).

Research Claims and Critical Aims

The philosophical approach underpinning this thesis foregrounds situated, partial, and multiple truths. This raises tensions with regards to the claims to knowledge being made in this project and the potential for criticality. One aim of this research is to create opportunities to see a widely discussed and implemented education policy in different ways. The combination of Foucault’s work and post-structuralist ethnography provided an aesthetics of research that relinquished some of the “restraints intended to limit ethnography” to “instead, recognize and relish its complexities, subtleties, and ironies” (Clair, 2003). The claim to knowledge in this thesis is to understand something about the way academy status is produced, rather than to see it as possible to understand this in its entirety (Geertz, 1973). This thesis does not propose to produce or find generalisable laws about how academy status takes form, but rather to explore the complex, fluid, and power-laden nature of this process. The view taken here is that there is no single truth about academy status to be revealed, and no grand theory to be generated. Aiming to extract a specific and homogenous truth would be to undermine the philosophical underpinnings of this work. Post-structuralist

approaches to ethnography are used to research policy as a complex, messy, nuanced, and situated process, and interpretation is understood as the process of making “contingent sense” of something (Adams St Pierre, 2004: 345).

I opened this chapter with a statement about my journey to a project of critique, through Foucault’s work. Now I have outlined my methodological approach, I want to return to this idea and clarify what is meant by ‘critical’ in the context of this project. Both Post-structuralist ethnography and Foucault’s work contest the idea of absolute or overarching truths, whilst attempting to locate silenced voices. This very endeavour suggests a project of critique. It suggests that providing space for the voices of those who are typically silenced or marginalised is an important thing to do.

In this thesis I do not pass judgement on whether a particular manifestation of academy status is preferred, or propose an alternative to academisation. The criticality of this thesis centres on the way particular schools and communities in poverty are positioned through discourse. Rather than causality, my work is interested in the production of truths about academy status. It starts from broader social policy narratives, using these as a foundation for exploring the particular power relations at play in a ‘failing’ school that becomes an academy. It questions whose truth is being presented in this school, and the potential effects of this. I recognise that I too have shaped academy status through the processes of research, which involved naming, asking about, and talking about academy status. Through the process of research I have implicated myself in the relations of power that exist around the academy school.

Research is a way of interrupting and challenging social arrangements that have unjust outcomes for some, which may otherwise continue to reproduce themselves (Staller, 2016: 453). This research engages with questions over what is being presented as ‘good’ policy and whose interests this serves (Ball 2009). My view on aspects of practice is apparent in the interpretations I

make. Present here are my concerns over potentially unjust experiences, and these moments are inseparable from my experience of working with young people who have had negative experiences of school. Yet I make it clear that these effects are far from straightforward. I read them as unjust, but this injustice results from complex processes.

Criticality is also present in my attempt to avoid researching academies in a way that evaluates the abilities of the model to achieve its stated aims. In seeking to account for the ability of academies to improve the number of young people achieving the dominant measure of school success and to improve the number of children in poverty achieving this in academies, the categorisations and beliefs that underpin these assertions remain in tact. Thus research that examines ‘transformation’ ‘innovation’ and ‘improvement’ works to reinforce the dominant accounts of academisation. Instead the ‘failing school’ and ‘academy’ are taken to be revisable realities (Butler, 1990: xxiv). This chapter has highlighted the journey I have taken from being situated within, to being critical of, this dominant discourse and how my methodological approach and data generation were key to this. This prompted a “rethinking of [my] basic categories”, and how they are produced and reproduced (Butler, 1990: Xxii). This is a process of querying the categories through which I see, a task that is never complete (Butler, 1990: Xxii).

Finally criticality arises in relation to the need to produce particular styles of outputs, including policy recommendations. I take Ball’s (2009) point that researcher’s should be wary of conclusions that operate as a “form of performativity” where the researcher demonstrates the worth of their text to the “grand enlightenment project” (Ball, 2009b, unpagged). Instead, this is another normative position to be wary of. Butler (1990) argues that normativity can perform violence, and that researchers must consider the consequences that proceed from their judgements. Research must be questioned on the work it does, whose interests it serves, and how it relates to existing “scholarly conversations” (Pelias, 2015: 610). This text does not

present an alternative to academies that, if followed, will improve education. Instead the aim is to “open up the field of possibility...without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized” (Butler, 1990: viii). As Ball notes, deconstructing the existing common-sense, to shift the debate in even a small way, is an important goal of research (Ball, 2009b). Shifting the ways we organise and think about problems is an act of criticality. It has enabled me to better understand how I am “captured by the discourse” of education policy, as a first and necessary step to try to think beyond it, and to reflect on the difficulties of such a task.

Writing Ethnography

Anthropology's self-critique in recent years is all about just such issues of representation and cultural hubris: 'I was there and let me tell you what it was like'. I hope the reader will also detect in these pages an awareness of this danger and a movement in another direction" (Devine, 1996: ix-x).

This thesis adopts a critical perspective to the production of truth, whilst inevitably producing and re-establishing truths through the very act of research and writing. What the ethnographer calls data is their “constructions of other people's constructions” (Geertz, 1973: 4). The expression of discoveries and interpretations through ethnographic writing is a complex and ethical task, where we deal with the “dangers and difficulties of words” (Woolf, 1935). Words are both part of the data and the medium for presenting the data. Through the influence of the ‘posts’ ethnography has become a more explicitly political and aesthetic enterprise (Clair, 2003: 13). This reflexivity is crucial, as writing ethnographic accounts is a process of giving permanence to “fleeting shapes” (Woolf, 1935: 75). Through this process the researcher is rendering the lives, meanings and experiences of others available to scrutiny and future consideration, as they fix it into an “inspectable form” (Geertz, 1973: 10).

The ‘posts’ ventured the idea that realities are constructed and that the “ethnographer is complicit in writing the culture into what is it” (Clair, 2003: 16). Ethnographic knowledge is produced in context and in turn it produces

that context (Cairns, 2013) as “ethnographic writing performatively constitutes the scene itself, demarcating what will count as subject-formation, what its contours will be” (Butler, 2006: 529). The partial and multiple truths of post-structuralist ethnography are still the result of the researcher’s selection, as they maintain overall control (Clair, 2003). What I present is my interpretations and reconstructions of the things that people in and around Eastbank Academy wanted to show and tell me about academy status. I am mindful that in “everything we communicate we are also communicating the self” (Arendt, 1958: 176).

The aesthetics of writing ethnographies cannot be removed from underpinning theoretical and philosophical positionings. Researchers draw on theory to reach an analytical understanding of the perspectives of participants (Hammersley, 2006). The researcher may present views that differ to those stated by participants, by way of drawing together the manifold fragments of data and accounts they have encountered, through the mobilisation of theory, and through a link to local and global contexts. This is a source of tension in the writing of ethnography; one which it is important to continually reflect on. Without doing so, researchers risk overstating the extent to which ethnography reflects ‘the voices’ or ‘experiences’ of participants.

The aesthetics of ethnography are inseparable from its contribution to knowledge and its political commitment. The ethnographer must make crucial decisions about how individual experience will be accessed and relayed to others. The ‘posts’ do not avoid long-standing social science concerns with truth, written accounts and normativity, but they do bring these issues to the fore and make them explicit elements of the research process. In my account of Eastbank I strive for “nuanced and non-reductive writing”, and I hope that the reflexivity that has been crucial to producing this research is apparent (Gordon et al, 2005: 114). However, in keeping with the post-structuralist emphasis of this work, I acknowledge the complexity of

written 'style' and that the styles available to a writer are "not entirely a matter of choice" and are not "politically neutral" (Butler, 1990: xix).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have detailed my methodology and engaged with some of its tensions and opportunities. This combining of different theoretical and methodological tools is seen as a crucial part of the critical orientation in this work because it is a way of trying to move beyond the current dominant ways of talking about, appraising, and researching the academy school. Throughout this discussion I have raised points that are difficult to address and reconcile. I maintain that these dilemmas are worth struggling with because they open up new avenues for thought (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003).

One of the benefits of combining approaches in this work is that the tensions and disjunctures have alerted me to those aspects of the project that require additional sensitivity. If the subject is sometimes ambiguous or displaced in Foucault's work, then ethnographic practices that brought me repeatedly into contact with the subjects of the academies policies, return the subject to the research foreground. Meanwhile, Foucault's work made me more alert to the diffuse potentiality of power, and to the necessity of maintaining a wariness of truths and judgements whilst inevitably constructing a new set, which will construct their own relations of power and risk being oppressive if they are not treated with caution (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003). In the next chapter I contend with the specific nature of the processes of data generation and analysis in this study, and with the ethical and practical issues that arose.

Chapter Four: Methods for Researching the Production of the Academy school

The focus of this chapter is methods, which I take to be the processes of generating data; the relationships that were central to this; my position(s) within the field; the ethics of fieldwork; the particularities of researching with multiple groups within one setting, including children and young people; and the analytical protocols followed. It explains how the analyses presented were carried out, and the ethical and practical issues that surfaced during this process. Section one documents the process of undertaking Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) of government-produced texts on academy schools. Section Two considers the overlapping activities I engaged in as part of a post-structuralist ethnography of Eastbank Academy. In both cases I consider what these research activities offered and how the resulting data was selected, analysed and interpreted. In section three, I reflect on the ethical and interpersonal dimensions of this research and their impact on the resulting data.

Section One: Foucauldian-inspired Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis that takes its lead from Foucault's work must contend with the lack of a clearly defined methodology. Foucault's work provides tools for thinking about and questioning phenomena, rather than a strict methodological protocol (Kendall & Wickham, 1999). Indeed, a strict protocol would be distinctly non-Foucauldian, since it would operate to construct a truth about analysis (Hewitt, 2009). Instead, Foucault's work or "anti-method" (Grimaldi, 2012: 446) has been understood through the metaphor of the toolbox (Ball, 2013), and he encouraged researchers to apply his tools to their particular questions (Gutting, 2005). I use Foucault's work as a guide to method (Given, 2008), as well as drawing on other studies that use Foucault's work (Bacchi, 1999; Bailey, 2009; Ball, 2013; Hewitt, 2009).

Such flexibility in method does not sit well with the imperatives of contemporary research agendas in the UK context (Ball, 2009b). The notion of a strict operational protocol continues to be aligned with contested, but still dominant, notions of quality in social science research (Torrance, 2014). Such protocols are depicted as being particularly attuned to making research replicable, but also attend to the demand for neutral or objective research that is useful to policy makers (May, 1997). One possible argument here is that by following a clear methodological protocol, researchers can show that they have not been ‘swayed’ in a particular direction, but have simply stuck to a pre-outlined method, and are reporting what this has generated accordingly. As Chapter Three discussed, post-structuralist approaches are critical of such arguments, which attempt to diminish the influence of the researcher. Foucault’s work offers a lens for critiquing positivistic privileging of rationality and objectivity, which are instead positioned as master discourses of truth, which must also be problematised. As Butler (1990) argues, the demand for clarity, for instance in methodological protocols, must itself be questioned about the messy realities it obscures. Analysing the production of the academy school requires tools that are capable of making sense of “an imprecise, fuzzy, woolly reality” for which we require concepts that are “polymorphic and adaptable, rather than defined, calibrated and used rigidly” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 23).

Research is necessarily intertwined with the particular theories being put to use, and the interpretations and judgements that accompany the entire research process (Law, 2004). The mark of the researcher is never absent from this, although it may be muted in the writing of research. Rather than aspiring to be a disinterested researcher (Jones, 2014), who is nonetheless present in every decision, I make explicit my processes of interpretation and judgement. It is a task I began at the beginning of Chapter Three, where I clarified how I had arrived at important decisions in the project. My methodological protocol has not been rigid or immovable, or a way of making claim to objectivity. Instead it is a framework that prompts reflection

and invites the documenting of shifts, developments and interpretations during analysis. The aim is to enable readers to make informed judgements about the nature of the research, the use of theory to illuminate the academy school, and the resultant interpretations.

The methodological choices made were driven by the problem of interest – the academisation of ‘failing schools’ - and through the concepts and definitions being worked with. In Chapter Three I detailed the theoretical underpinnings this work draws on to inform the aims and boundaries of analysis. I use Foucault’s definition of discourse, as the rules that govern what it is possible to say, write, think and know about a particular phenomenon at a particular point in history. His analytical approach aimed to reveal the rules of operation of discourse, attending to what is said and present, but also what is not said, what is forbidden or what is relegated to the shadows of discourse (Foucault, 1969).

I particularly draw on Foucault’s later genealogical works, since it is here that power relations are more explicitly dealt with (Hewitt, 2009; McNay, 1994). My work does not provide the historical detail that would be required for a genealogy, which would constitute a study on its own without the considerable ethnographic data I am also drawing on. Instead I adopt the Foucauldian approach to discourse to interrogate what has been said and written about academies across their lifespan. Discourse analysis is a research method that involves examining communication (Hewitt, 2009). In Foucault’s studies it relies on the close analysis of texts to explore patterns and rules of how language is used and narratives are constructed. I used his work as a guide to formulating the questions I asked of texts, which shaped the way texts were filtered and connected with one another, as well as the interpretations that ensued.

Foucault’s method facilitates an analysis of “how things have come to be the way they are, how it is that they remain that way, and how else they might have been or could be” (Given, 2008: 355). It guides an analysis of the

relationships and order that underpin discursive ‘truths’, and their relationship with wider discourses and operations of power (Hewitt, 2009). I apply this understanding of discourse to the task of addressing the following question in Chapter Five: How have academy status and the academy school been produced and shaped as objects for thought through discourse? The influence of Foucault’s theory is apparent here, since this is different to asking ‘what are academies’, and instead seeks to understand the shaping of academies through language, without aiming to assess the accuracy of these representations.

Through analysis the following set of sub-questions emerged and were refined, which were used to clarify subsequent analysis and writing:

- *How are academies made compelling?*
- *What representations have come to be associated with academies and what do these perpetuate, enable, and constrain?*
- *How are these representations sustained and why have they been possible at this time?*

Method

The ‘decision trail’ in this work clarifies and draws together analytical method, theory, questions and sampling. The analysis of discourse began with the literature review when a broad sweep of literature was first encountered and a sense of the dominant themes, contentions and representations emerged. These initial readings and understandings prompted analysis. It was during this phase of the research that I became aware of the repetitive presentation of academies as transformative, which became central to analysis in Chapter Five.

I then read the texts more thoroughly, in light of the literature review, and initial ideas and perceptions were trialled more systematically. I experimented with narrative theory as an initial framework to guide analysis

(Hewitt, 2009: 10). At this point the emphasis moved to government-produced texts as I began to realise the significance of discourse analysis as a stage of analysis in its own right. This second read supported the selection of texts for close analysis and coding.

During stages one and two a list of codes was created and refined. Some of these codes related to the types of statements being made about what academies are, and what they are expected to achieve. Others related to my emerging sense of an academy narrative, through which 'truths' about academies were created and perpetuated. Drawing on narrative theory, I investigated the extent to which narrative concepts such as 'character', 'narrator', 'metaphor' and 'storyline' were illuminating. I used the qualitative data package NVIVO to store and manage data (Gibson, 2010). I did not use any of the wider theory-building functions of NVIVO, and coding remained researcher driven. However, coding is problematic, since it can be positioned through positivist ideals of sorting, counting and organising data in such a way that "themes 'emerge' as if data and the interpreter are not always already theory-laden" (Adams St.Pierre & Roulston, 2006: 677). Instead, the view taken was that themes are shaped through my reading of theory, experiences, characteristics and aims, which I discuss in the final section of this chapter.

Coding continued to be refined through subsequent readings of texts, and through a consideration of the context of production for each text. Through this some texts emerged as key moments in the bid to establish academies as the unequivocal future of education in England, or as clearly illuminating the use of a particular narrative technique. This led to decisions about which texts to include in the analysis and which to draw on as examples in writing (see below). The emergence of narrative suggested the importance of scanning a wider set of texts to pick up on repeated and nuanced aspects of this.

By setting the analytical process out as a list of stages I am fashioning a level of clarity and linearity that was not present during the process, in the interests of readability. This masks the iterative nature of analysis, through which methodological protocol, theory, questions and sampling informed one another. Below I clarify particular issues relating to sampling, which should be envisaged as happening in tandem with one another and with the stages outlined above.

Text Selection

Some of the parameters of text selection were more obvious than others, because they stemmed more straightforwardly from the nature of the phenomena of interest. This project is an analysis of the academies policy, which was first mentioned by David Blunkett in 2000, and which remains an education policy at the time of writing. The timespan of the policy is therefore straightforward in one sense, although as noted in Chapter Two, the ancestors of the policy can be traced much further back, and to other national contexts. More specifically, this thesis is a close analysis of the strand of the academies policy that concerns ‘failing’ schools being turned into academies in order to improve. Thus texts that say something about these schools were the sampling pool. Since policy ideas do not “have a single starting point” but are “the product of the blending and clashing of other ideas, the origins of which are, in many cases, lost in time” I am obliged to select a starting point whilst recognising that others would have been possible (Ward et al, 2016: 47).

I wanted to understand how successive governments have constructed a particular set of representations and arguments for action around schools in challenging contexts. I therefore prioritised the analysis of texts that have been produced by governments since 2000. These may be considered as dominant policy discourses, although they are certainly not the only available discourses, for instance an analysis of counter and critical academy discourses would also be possible. The discursive outputs of key political figures in the academy movement include a range of text types, including

written texts such as legislation, policy documents, opinion pieces, blog posts, books, and spoken texts (which have been turned into written texts) such as speeches and interviews. In line with Foucault's work, the emphasis is less on 'who' speaks and more on what is spoken about academics, the positions it is spoken from, and "how this is mediated by the speaking positions of others; an architecture of policy positions" (Gale, 2001: 389).

Some sampling decisions were more difficult. My analysis draws on a wide body of texts, but conveys the points of this analysis by directly referring to only a fraction of these texts. This is common in discourse analysis, and qualitative researchers are always faced with important decisions about what will and will not be directly represented in written outputs. These are decisions to be wary of and to trouble (Butler, 1994). Two distinct sampling decisions emerge here: how to sample texts for analysis and how to select texts to develop understandings through writing?

First, the process of selecting texts for analysis is necessarily fraught because the limits of a 'discourse' are difficult to distinguish. One of the arguments made in Chapter Five is that the compelling nature of the academics programme has been produced, in part, by the way it meshes with other policy narratives that are flourishing. This is partly about the status of schools as a key institution for the production and reproduction of discourses, and as having a role within wider social and public policy spheres.

This makes it difficult to delineate the boundaries of an academy discourse. As Foucault observes of a book, and we might observe of policy discourse:

The frontier of a book are never clear-cut...it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network...it indicates itself, constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse (Foucault, 1969: 25-6).

In addition to the focus on government-produced texts about schools in challenging contexts that are turned into academics in order to improve,

other theoretical parameters supported the selection of texts in this analysis. I located these texts within a wider set of linguistic artefacts about academies. These say something about high achieving schools that become academies. Texts about academies are then situated within a wider contemporary literature about inequality, poverty and austerity. These have been purposively selected to highlight important stories that are being told about schools, young people and communities experiencing deprivation. There are a number of repeated techniques and tropes across these texts that are indicative of the particular kind of work being attempted through the presentation of academies. The actual work that this does is the focus of analysis in Chapters Seven-Nine.

Second, the texts cited in Chapter Five are purposive and illustrative. They are selected to exemplify overarching points from the body of government texts that shape academy schools. Analysis hones in on particular examples to highlight wider discursive and representational patterns across texts. Chapter Five focuses on identifying 'truths' about academies, how they are given coherence, and how they are maintained through their relationship with a wider social policy agenda. In Appendix One I document the texts that informed analysis, which have not all been directly cited, but which have each been influential in building up my sense of the 'truths' at work here. Documenting the texts that have been analysed was also a useful method of data management, of providing a chronology of texts and of spotting and interrogating any gaps.

Section Two: Ethnography

Sampling

I selected one school to study and sampling was purposive and theoretically guided (Mason, 2002). Given my interest in the positioning of academy status as a tool to improve and transform schools in poorer communities, it was crucial that the research took place in a school that: served a community experiencing multiple deprivation, according to national measures; was

deemed to be ‘underperforming’; and became an academy as one possible measure for ‘improvement’. I therefore sampled a school that was, at least superficially, an environment where these issues would be important (Mason, 2002).

I drew on national data and categorisations to inform sampling. Throughout analysis and writing I have remained critical of the way these categorisations operate. Yet given the supremacy of key performance measures in constructions of success and failure, it is likely that a school’s position in relation to these measures will relate, albeit in complex ways, to its policies and practices. I was interested in seeing what meanings these labels came to have within a school, and how they related to academy status. Once in the school, I became interested in how academy status was being shaped. Listening to the school guided the development of the project, as detailed in Chapter Three, and in this sense the specifics of the school are crucial to the way this project developed. This ethnography, like any, is a partial analysis and representation of the many possible stories that were available in the school, and of the ones I was able to capture. Sampling decisions have continued into the writing of this thesis in which I have picked one particular path through voluminous amounts of data.

Access

Ethnographic methods ask a lot of schools. Senior staff are agreeing to have a researcher spend a considerable amount of time in the school (Maguire et al, 2011). The experience of extra monitoring that comes with being a ‘failing’ school and a ‘turning around academy’ made some schools understandably wary of having yet another visitor. However, in Eastbank the very experience of being monitored and criticised by the government made the senior leaders interested in my research. That this was a school where senior staff were committed to education research and were critical of current education ideology and policy was clearly important in terms of access. Alongside this, the good rapport I appeared to have with the HOA undoubtedly affected the level of access I had and the frankness of our discussions. As in any

ethnography, a unique set of factors led to the eventual 'case' that became the focus of the project. The schools we see in detail may have particular characteristics at particular times, which make them more willing to be involved in research. However, these contexts are shifting, and it may be the case that other schools are more open for research at other points in time or with other researchers.

Ethnography requires continual sampling decisions, many of which are not in the control of the researcher. Gaining access to a school through senior 'gatekeepers' was stage one of an on-going process of renegotiating access (BSA, 2002), of asking "can I come to this occasion; can I join in this special activity; will I be able to participate in this conversation; can I sit here?" (Gordon et al, 2005: 116). I wrote to all of the staff to explain what I was doing in the school (Appendix Two), although there continued to be misunderstandings about this (I return to this point). I did not just 'turn up' to lessons. I wanted to ensure that I was expected, as I remained concerned throughout that teachers thought I was vetting their capabilities. In email exchanges I emphasised that my concern was not with passing judgements on the quality of teaching, but rather to get a feel for the school, which lessons are clearly a central aspect of. Planning my visits to lessons in advance provided teachers with the opportunity to specify which lesson, and when. Despite this approach there were opportunities to see unplanned lessons, for instance when I was accompanying another member of staff who took me to a lesson without prior warning, or when the staff I developed relationships with invited me to observe a lesson on the spur of the moment. The school gains umbrella permission from parents for its involvement in research projects. Where students were involved in specific research activities, such as the photo-elicitation project described below, I sent a letter home, and separate consent was received from parents and young people.

In addition to what we can access are questions about what, given the finite time available for any research project, we should arrange to see and whom

we should speak to. My decisions about this were guided by my ontological view of academies. The academies policy is difficult to extract as a clearly demarcated policy. A legislative shift reinvents the school as a business, which commissions, tenders, quality assures and is directly accountable to the DfE through its funding agreement. This begins a complex process of negotiations over the wider social identity of the school, of how the school is positioned by those within it and in the surrounding community. Academy status is a policy that focuses on what the school is to become, through an identity shift and rebranding. Rather than being devoted to one aspect of a school's work it can transcend different areas. Academy status is, at the same time, about everything in the school and about no single particular thing. It can leave a subtle mark across all, any or little of a school's work. It invites a questioning of what the school is and what its limits and connections to the community are.

That academy status was difficult to isolate was an important early finding, which fed into the particular research activities I engaged in during my time in Eastbank. It guided me to see the full diversity of the school, rather than try to anticipate where I might see features of academy status, or to see bits of academy status that I had been told to expect through government discourse. Direct questions about academy status were less of a focus than people's accounts and experiences. Academy status was understood indirectly (Allan & l'Anson, 2004). I agreed to see all that was offered to me, and that led me to better conceptualise the reach and limitations of academy status within the school. My time was loosely guided by the following aims:

- To understand the history of the school and its community to contextualise the shift to academy status and its relationships with how this school and the Eastbank area have been historically understood and located within the city and nationally.
- To focus on young people at the margins of schooling, since this was a catalyst for undertaking the project. This task is necessarily

fraught in a work that troubles categorisations, including those that refer to the ‘vulnerable’, ‘at risk’ or ‘failing’ student. Labels of vulnerability are multiple and variably applied. School staff have their own sense of which students are ‘vulnerable’, and students themselves will engage with their various labels in different ways, as shown during my analysis. Moreover, the students in this school were, in a national comparative sense, all ‘vulnerable’ to poorer educational outcomes and opportunities. In Eastbank, this focus drew me to young people who had very low reading levels and young people at risk of exclusion (see Chapter Nine), although being member of these groups did not equate to a uniform experience (Mason, 2002).

- Throughout I wanted to trouble the idea that academy status denotes ‘transformation’, ‘innovation’ and ‘improvement’, and understand how staff and pupils worked with these and other concepts surrounding the categorisation of their school.

Ethnographic Methods

I required a flexible programme for data generation, one that invited an iterative relationship between method, theory, questions and findings. I exploited the “supple” nature of ethnography (Adams St.Pierre & Roulston, 2006: 673), engaging with Eastbank Academy through a suite of qualitative methods. Data was collected and generated through a combination of distinct but interrelated research activities, which are typically associated with ethnographic research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Eberle & Maeder, 2011; Delamont, 2014). These were: (Participant) observation; interviews and conversations; focus groups; photographs; and the collection of documentary information. Here I use the word ‘collected’ to refer to the gathering of documents and artefacts, which exist in the case study schools regardless of whether the proposed research

takes place. I use the word 'generated' to refer to data that arises from my presence in the field. In both cases, it is my presence that has rendered these artefacts as forms of data.

The academy school is formed through the range of semiotic modes available in the cultural context being researched (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). The semiotic modes of particular interest in this research were linguistic, material and spatial. These were taken account of in the combination of qualitative methods outlined. The easiest entry point for discourse analysis is often linguistic statements. Language is the dominant mode through which people communicate ideas and make sense of their world and experiences (Arendt, 1958), and dominates my analysis and presentation in this project. However, points of analysis have been made by focusing on how different semiotic modes interrelate (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001), and photographs are drawn on as a way of presenting Eastbank Academy to the reader. My experiences of the linguistic, material and spatial world of Eastbank were captured through fieldnotes (Appendix Three) and a research diary. The first documents my account of activities soon after they happened, whilst the second includes commentary of my reactions to these events, and how things might have been done differently (Bailey, 2009). This combining of various forms of data is necessary to combine understandings of "the official, the informal and the physical school" (Holland et al, 2007: 222).

This study is an example of "newer ethnographic approaches" (Grbich, 2007: 55) and the nature of educational ethnographies, which are unlikely to be researched 'full-time' and unlikely to be entirely unfamiliar to the researcher. A more partial form of participant observation is typical of educational ethnography, which can also facilitate multi-sited study (Brockmann, 2011). Between July 2013 until July 2015 I spent approximately 250 hours over 48 days engaged in research activities that took me away from my desk. Here I include: research visits, participant observation, interviews, focus groups, document collection and taking photographs. The majority of this time was

spent in Eastbank Academy, but the research activities also occurred in other locations, as documented below. I also spent several months engaging in desk-based analysis of documents. Undertaking an ethnography of a secondary school required formal ethical clearance through The School of Sociology and Social Policy at The University of Nottingham. I used the ethical guidance of BERA and the ESRC during this process. All of the names used throughout this work are pseudonyms.

The timespan for this research was not planned. My first visit to the school was in July 2013, with a view to begin research in November 2013. However, after two months (November and December 2013), I took a role as a research assistant at The University of Nottingham working on another project. I did not return to Eastbank until September 2014, hence the apparent longevity of the research for a 'full time' PhD project. Significantly, I did visit the school during my role as an RA, as it was included in various ways in this other project. Although unplanned, seeing the school for a more fractured but longer duration, has fed into my data in important ways. It enabled the clarifications and realisations that were documented in Chapter Three, concerning the way 'change' is conceptualised in the academies programme. It highlighted shifts and continuities in the on-going experience of 'underperformance' that would not have been apparent if I had completed a focused four months in the school.

Data Generation

(Participant) Observation

Researcher gaze is fundamental to ethnographic practice (Gordon et al, 2005). To begin with, my aim was to observe in order to gain familiarity with the Eastbank environment (Bailey, 2009), including the school timetable, the different parts of the school building, how I got into and out of the school and where I might base myself when I was there. I observed daily school life, including lessons, assemblies, meetings, break times, after school sessions, tutor time, and related out of school meetings. My aim was to see whatever I

was invited to see, whilst ensuring the following core aspects of the school day were captured:

- Curriculum: I observed different subjects, different year groups, and different ability streams within year groups. My observations led me to understand the school's curriculum organisation, the role of ability assessments and reading ages within this, how year groups were organised and how students were categorised.
- Pastoral care: Key to this was understanding the arrangements for tutor time, behaviour procedures and student support services. I observed the student centre as well as in parent meetings for students considered to have complex needs. I observed group work and presentations in tutor time, and sought to understand behaviour management procedures.
- Participatory elements: I made myself available to help, and invited a blurring of the line between observing and participating. If a student needed help in a lesson and the teacher was busy, I helped. This enabled me to speak and interact with more students and to see what they were working on and their experiences of this work. I officially participated as a member of staff at a primary school transition event. I supported students in a GCSE sociology lesson for a number of weeks, and did a presentation about sociological research.
- Year group and whole-school gatherings: I wanted to understand what happened when all of the students in a year group or the whole school were brought together in one place. I observed several year group assemblies and a whole school Christmas assembly, which I audio recorded. These proved useful for understanding praise and reward systems, which in turn offered clues to the culture of the school and the qualities it values and

seeks to develop in students. Such gatherings gave me an insight into how large groups of students are managed, the relationships between staff and students, and the level of noise and ‘disruption’ that is tolerated.

- Insights from all of these aspects are drawn on in the analysis chapters that follow. Within any scene I tasked myself with the difficult work of “sensitizing” (Gordon et al, 2005: 117) my gaze to what was in the foreground, and those quieter, less obvious elements, and things that I had perhaps normalised through my own experiences of working in a school. This is necessarily a difficult task, and something that I became more aware of through writing my fieldnotes and reflections.

Artefacts

Alongside this ethnographic gaze I collected a range of documents from the school. Some of these were publically available, others were given to me in accordance with the principles of confidentiality. I combined these with other publically available material, building the following collection of artefacts:

- Hand-outs from lessons
- Data charts and other documents used to guide staff meetings about new pedagogical interventions in the school
- Printed brochures outlining the ethos and mission of the school, its curriculum and its uniform
- The school newsletter, and other letters to parents and carers, available in reception
- Letters and emails from parents and carers to the HOA
- The school’s website and twitter feed

- Reports about the local authority, including the index of multiple deprivation
- Local press pieces about Eastbank, other local schools, and education in the LA more generally
- Information on the school through the DfE website. School pupil data, Ofsted reports and national data
- Documents collected from other research visits
- Secondary video footage of recorded tutor time presentations and a staff Christmas song

I took photographs throughout my time in the school, using this as a tool for exploring its physicality and material culture (Bryman, 2008). These supported analyses of the “visual but hidden curriculum” (Prosser and Loxley, 2010: 203), drawing attention to the forces that “shape everyday activity in education”, which risk becoming “the unquestioned and unwritten codes of habitual practice” in schools (Prosser & Loxley, 2010: 203).

I took pictures of:

- Outdoor and recreational spaces.
- Corridors
- Building and facilities, including dance studios, multi-media suites, and theatres.
- Notice boards, which presented the school values, student work, reports of events, and praise and reward notifications.
- Disciplinary and pastoral spaces; where students went to be disciplined and to seek support.
- Ways in and out of the school and the school’s surroundings.

Photographs punctuate the account that follows, so readers are able to see aspects of the school as they are being discussed. Photographs are used to provide a richer sense of place. This connects to the development of an

argument about the role of space and materiality in the shaping of academy status.

Mobile photo-elicitation interviews with young people

Current students in years 7, 8, and 9 assisted me in this photographic documenting of the school. Throughout my research I spoke with young people informally, particularly when I was in their classrooms and during break and lunch times. However, towards the end of my time in the school I was mindful that my data was dominated by adult narratives, which tended to position the school as caring and inclusive, and as a largely ‘happy’ place to be. Yet I had observed moments that disrupted this image. These contentions highlighted the importance of attending more closely to student accounts. I wanted to see how students described the school, and to see the overlaps and departures from what I had already been told, to encounter the complexity of how meanings take shape in schools and the multiple readings and effects of policy and place. This is part of recognising the subject of policy as plural and as a “coalition of multiple subjects (both human and not)” (Bansel, 2015: 6).

Across the social sciences there has been a move to reconcile researching about children’s lives, with attempts to learn from children themselves (Christensen, 2010). This connects with the growing understanding of the evolving capacities of children, and there is now a body of research that highlights the abilities of young people to be responsible and engaged in research, and to enjoy participating in it (Thomson & Gunter, 2007; Christensen, 2010; Melanie, Boorman, & Clarke, 2012). I sought to explicitly engage with young people to better understand Eastbank, which required time with students away from the formal lesson space. Schools and lessons are characterised by particular power hierarchies and institutional dynamics, constituted around age and notions of ‘capability’ (Cairns, 2013). These power relations are “reinforced spatially, as schools are organised in ways that work to discipline students’ bodies and facilitate their ongoing surveillance” (Cairns, 2013: 329). I wanted to find a space that was potentially

marginal to this dynamic. This task was difficult because we inevitably remained within the controlled environment of the school site. I sought methods that would support me to resist a “teacherly identity” (Cairns, 2013: 329). I drew on my own experiences of working in a non-teaching capacity with young people in mainstream and alternative schools, particularly in small group settings, to find a positionality that was less hierarchical and put students in an authoritative role. I completed this part of the research at the very end of the school year, after the frenzied atmosphere of the May-June exam period, when there was slightly more freedom to take students away from their lesson.

In addition to being away from the formal classroom setting, I wanted to try something other than a face-to-face interview. Again, this was driven by the desire to disrupt traditional school power relations of adult-child as much as possible. It was driven by my experiences of interviewing young people in a traditional face-to-face spatial arrangement, and understanding the discomfort this can cause. By this point in my project the importance of the school space had become apparent. I wanted to incorporate space as a way of engaging young people’s voices and views on the school.

I made use of the developments in ethnography and the scholarship concerning how to engage with young people in research. I also spoke with the deputy head, who helped me to think through this part of my methodology. This guided me to the use of mobile photo-elicitation interviews. I engaged in this activity with a pair of students from years 7-9. These were selected by the school, an example of the complexities of engaging with young people within school ethnographies. I was not privy to the selection of students, and was mindful of the possibility that decisions were guided by staff views on which students would be more talkative, more engaged and better ambassadors of the school (Allan & I’Anson, 2004; Jones, 2014). However, by this point my gaze had been more attuned to those students categorised as ‘at risk’, therefore to speak with students who were categorised differently provided another lens through which to see the

school. Furthermore, student voice exercises should not be unproblematically presented as offering a pure, neutral or 'authentic' voice (Adams St.Pierre & Roulston, 2006: 677). Student voice methods offer another set of experiences and shapings, which impacted on my account of academy status. However, they cannot be generalised across students and I do not view them as more meaningful than any other account within the school (Thomson & Gunter, 2007; Adams St.Pierre & Roulston, 2006).

I would have liked to hear from year 10 and 11 students however, as with any ethnography, best-laid plans were interrupted by the needs and demands of the school. Delays in confirming a date meant this research happened in the last week of term. Year 11 students had left the school by this point and year 10 students were off-site visiting colleges. I was also mindful that I had already spent a considerable amount of time with year 11 students, due to the focus on this year group within the school (as documented in Chapter Nine).

The mobile photo-elicitation interviews began with a short face-to-face exchange in a meeting room, where I introduced myself and my proposals for the session. I asked students to imagine they were putting a Power Point presentation together to help to introduce new students to the school. I asked them to imagine that this was a student-to-student meeting, so they needed to think about all of the things a new student might want to know without worrying about whether teachers would agree with them or not. I suggested that they take me on a tour of the school, during which they could take pictures to use in their presentation. To guide them, and during our recorded exchanges, I asked the following kinds of questions:

- What would you show to new students?
- Which aspects or parts of the school are worth drawing attention to?
- Are there any rules new students would need to know?
- Where do students go at break and lunch times?

I encouraged them to talk about why they were taking a particular picture, or choosing to document a particular part of the school. Through this their descriptions of parts of the school were developed and negotiated with one another.

At the end of the tour we returned to the meeting room and went through each of the pictures, checking, ordering and discussing them. The entire encounter was audio recorded, with consent. Through this I got a collection of photographs that students had taken, as well as the conversations we had as they negotiated where to take me in the school, and what to take photographs of. Through this many opportunities were opened for me to ask questions and to seek clarifications.

This method more explicitly engaged young people in the production of knowledge about the meanings of academy status and the academy school. It stood in critical relation to categorisations of young people as vulnerable or incapable, positioning them as knowledgeable actors and as key to understanding how education policies are shaped and experienced. This methodology was a way of interrupting power relations in schools including those which stem from age-based norms about who 'knows' and has authority, and those which stem from the spatial dimensions of research encounters. Face-to-face interviews draw on an arrangement of bodies in space that is inherently power-laden because it is typical of formal exchanges, such as job interviews or disciplinary meetings. It suggests there is a person guiding and controlling, whilst another is required to answer. There is often a table in-between bodies, which forces eye contact, or makes it obvious when this is uncomfortable for one of the parties. In contrast, enabling young people to take me on a tour of the school gave them authority over the physical space of the school (Allan & I'Anson, 2004). Mobile methods provide a more flexible relation of bodies. They provided participants with the space, away from a strong research gaze, to think and to "observe passing objects and places, all the while talking about what is important to them" (Ferguson, 2011: 115). The mobility of the encounter

means that there are regular occasions to change the subject, as materials, bodies, and perspectives are continually in flux. It created a shared encounter, and opportunities for less scripted interactions. Taking photos provided them with a task to focus on. It can be a way of promoting rapport and of enabling “researchers to grasp young people’s viewpoints and social worlds” because images can be a way of triggering “richer conversations about the community, memories and reflections”, opening up different, more sensitive, lines of discussion (Meo, 2010: 150). The material world, and the task of photographing it, was a catalyst for young people to tell me about their experiences. Memories, emotions, sensory connections, descriptions, questions and negotiated meanings were present across these encounters.

The decision to include a visual component in this research is inspired by the growing literature that highlights this as a tool through which young people engage in more in-depth conversations (Meo, 2010; Thomson & Gunter, 2007). When visual methods are adopted there is a shift to focus on how young people encounter the visible world, rather than focusing only on what is written, said, or statistically represented (Prosser & Loxley, 2010). In doing so it is possible to draw attention to things that might otherwise be taken for granted, perhaps providing the space to look at these things anew. This research phase produced a set of photographs for me to draw on in my analysis and presentation of this study, alongside the photographs I had already taken.

Informal conversations and recorded interviews

During my time in Eastbank Academy I spoke with 29 members of staff, often on more than one occasion. I spoke with teachers, teaching assistants, academic tutors, pastoral staff, administrative staff, site staff, middle managers, and senior leaders. I spoke with staff who had been at the school for a long time and newer staff. Some of these conversations took the form of pre-arranged interviews, which were audio recorded. In these cases I emailed the person in advance to negotiate the time and place of the interview. Most of these interviews were with members of SLT. Speaking

with senior decision-makers was important in order to understand how they represented Eastbank Academy, and described and legitimised policies and practices.

In addition to these more formal exchanges, spontaneous and less formal conversations with a range of staff stemmed from participant observation. These were typically not recorded. It was common that, after negotiating to observe a lesson or meeting, I would have the opportunity to speak with staff afterwards. I documented these exchanges through fieldnotes (Walford, 2009). I took notes as the respondent spoke, making it apparent that I was documenting key ideas and points. This gave respondents the opportunity – which several took – to say that they did not want particular comments to be noted down or used. These exchanges were important because they enabled me to speak with people who were not necessarily ‘nominated’ by SLT. It provided the opportunity to hear multiple voices and realities (Hartas, 2010), particularly those that are more commonly neglected in education research, including administrative and site staff (Delamont, 2014; Miller & Bell, 2008). Again this was connected with my theorisation of the academy school as something that is difficult to extract from the wider work and identity of the school. Appendix Four documents the use of interviews, conversations and focus groups.

The view taken here was that these interviews and conversations were forms of interpretive practice in which people engaged in the construction of identities and place, (Brockmann, 2011). I typically began with an open question, such as ‘can you tell me about how you came to work in the school’ or ‘how have things been since we last spoke’ and remained open to how the exchange would flow and develop from this point. My style of questioning invited narrative. Questions such as ‘how did you come to work at Eastbank’ are akin to saying ‘start at the/a beginning’. This style of interviewing was attuned to gathering a less rehearsed story, yet the story gathered was still necessarily one possible construction. Each was “contextualized in time and space” (Bhattacharya, 2016: 709), shaped by participants’ perceptions of me

and of education research more generally, views of their duties and obligations in such a context, and the personal dynamics and details that shape any of us across the course of the day, which may have been very separate to the research or school context. This narrative style was important so that academy status did not subdue other issues and identities in the school. Instead academy status was seen in relation to these.

Narrative styles invite participants to construct themselves and the ways they wish to be known and seen within a particular encounter. It gives them the opportunity to reject particular categorisations and descriptions and to take control over meaning-making practices that concern them. However, they are not to be simplistically interpreted as a process of someone “telling it like it is...the pathway between how we know and tell about ourselves is never linear and smooth” (Bhattacharya, 2016: 709). The story constructed also says something about how the individual is crafting meaning, events, the self, and others, including me. Interpretation is similarly complex since “the emerging narratives are a result of the participants’ interpretation of their experiences and the researcher’s interpretation of the participants’ interpretations” (Bhattacharya, 2016: 711). The idea of these representations being ‘the truth’ is rejected here. Instead narrative is a tool for exploring other possibilities of knowing, which are multiple and in negotiation. These narratives are then taken up, extracted from and weaved together to form the overarching narrative of this research. Any overarching narrative should be viewed critically, and in relation to the positionality of the researcher, which I say more about in the final section of this chapter. This is a way of acknowledging the powerful position of the researcher, as one who interprets, selects and renders permanent.

Focus Groups

Ethnography provides the opportunity to construct liminal research spaces, “distinct from, but not entirely outside of, everyday schooling experiences” (Cairns, 2013: 331). I held two focus groups during my time in Eastbank, one

with parents and one with ex-students. In both cases the sample was selected for me.

The focus group with parents was the idea of a member of staff I shadowed at the beginning of my fieldwork. She suggested I attend a weekly parent coffee morning and turn it into a focus group for discussing academy status. Ultimately she led the focus group, with only occasional input from me (Jones, 2014). This was an example of the way the researcher is often required to relinquish authority during the course of research (Cairns, 2013). My gatekeeper knew the parents and drew on that rapport to engage them in a discussion on academy status. This exchange was not power-free, just composed of different power relations to researcher-led encounters. These groups generated “interactive data”, enabling me to observe how these parents unpacked the meanings and effects of academy status (Jowett and O’Toole 2006: 464). Focus groups are well-suited to an epistemological approach that views meaning as contextually produced, rather than located in individuals (Hollander, 2004).

The second focus group was arranged by the deputy head. I spoke with three ex-students who had left the school between 2-5 years ago and returned to work as academic mentors. They provided narratives that compared their experiences of the school as students to their current experiences of staff. Again their co-construction was apparent throughout this process as they jogged each other’s memories, built on each other’s answers, negotiated representations, and contradicted one another (Munday, 2006).

Beyond Eastbank

In addition to ethnographic work at Eastbank, I also engaged in the following research activities:

- I visited two feeder primary schools and three other secondary schools. Two of these were in the same local authority as Eastbank, and the third was in a neighbouring local authority.

- I travelled to and from Eastbank via public transport, during which I made notes and took photographs. I walked around the local area, exploring a local shopping precinct and areas where students congregated before and after school. I regularly wrote my fieldnotes in a local café.
- I travelled to meetings and visits at other venues with members of staff in their cars. This was a time of free-flowing talk. On two occasions this turned into a driving tour of the local area where staff showed me where different schools were positioned in the catchment area, and the areas where students lived. This was another opportunity to use a mobile research space, which avoids eye contact. The car is also a place where conversations cannot be overheard (Ferguson, 2011), and led to some blunt and personal commentaries from staff.
- I attended the LA Fair Access Panel (FAP) meeting on two occasions. These were at other local schools. I attended with a member of Eastbank staff. I interviewed two members of staff who oversaw the panel.
- I had one meeting at the academy sponsor's office, one with a senior member of staff in the Education department of the local authority, and one with an architect of the academies policy in London.
- I attended a local anti-academy meeting and the social gathering following on from this.
- I had email communication with Eastbank's Futures representative, who provides career guidance to students in the school and tracks their progression post-16. She provided me with the transition data for the 2013-14 cohort of Eastbank students.

Analytical Protocol

The analytical procedures of qualitative research include elements of individuality that reflect the uniqueness of the researcher and the research settings (Murphy et al, 1998; Gibson, 2010b). In this project, data analysis was dynamic and iterative, taking place throughout the data gathering, albeit with greater intensity once this was complete (Murphy et al, 1998: 132). The findings and experiences of preliminary analyses informed the development of subsequent data generation activities (Prosser & Loxley, 2010). This research led to the generation and collection of large volumes of data. There was a need to name, number, group, file and organise things so that they could be easily retrieved, and were confidential and secure (Mason, 2002). Recorded interviews required transcription so that they could be read, annotated and quoted. These are all processes of analysis since they are ways of handling data that are based on judgments and choices.

My analysis was guided by theory and the aim of creating internal consistency across analysis (Mason, 2002). Foucault's theories about the problems of categorisation, the materiality of discourse, governmentality, and Care of the Self were integral to the analysis. I used these ideas to draw out interpretive themes in the data (Mason, 2002). I kept traditional categories of qualitative inquiry in critical perspective, including "data, evidence, the field, method, analysis, knowledge, truth, power, freedom, discourse, language, representation, the subject," striving to interrogate descriptions and interpretation (Adams St.Pierre & Roulston, 2006: 677).

Visual Data

Photographs require a different form of analysis to the other data discussed since they are "not accessible verbally" (Pink, 2007: 361). The production and interpretation of images are separate analytical phases (Prosser & Loxley, 2010). I analysed the internal narrative of each photograph, that is what was captured and how objects are arranged, and the external narrative, which refers to the circumstances surrounding its creation. I created a reason, and immediate context, for the production of these photographs, which were

then produced either by a student or me. The mobile photo-elicitation interviews provided the opportunity to create 'staged photographs'. I was able to view the production of images; to understand the negotiations that led to the creation of these particular photographs, and what it was that students intended to show about their school.

Analysis is contextually located. It has a time, a place and a purpose, which all affect interpretation. My relationship to the photographs was to view them as a tool to document and capture a moment or an object whilst making sense of a particular aspect of the school. It was a way of rendering this permanent so that I could return to it to look at it again, often in a new light, and build an analysis of materiality and space into my account of academy status. I have used photographs illustratively throughout analysis to invite readers to see the school, its materiality and some of the objects people encounter there on a day-to-day basis. However, like texts, photographs have a fluid meaning and can be "viewed by different people in different ways" (Bryman, 2008: 426). My interpretation located these images in the wider school context and in relation to participants' commentaries on the physicality, culture and atmosphere of the school (Pink, 2007). I also inevitably drew on my own knowledge, experiences and positionality. Readers may draw on different contexts and ideas in their interpretations.

Section Three: Reflecting on Method

To side-step methodology means that the mechanisms we utilize in producing knowledge are hidden, relations of privilege are masked and knowers are not seen to be located: therefore the likely abundance of cultural, social, educational and economic capitals is not recognized as central to the production of any knowledge (Skeggs, 1997: 17).

This chapter has worked alongside Chapter Three to document my methodology. This study is located in a particular time and context, and produced by me; a researcher with particular characteristics, political positions, and values. In the introduction I wrote about some of the aspects

of my biography that led to this project, and in Chapter Three I documented a change in my thinking. I return to this style of writing to reflect on how I am positioned through this research, and the personal and emotional dynamics of the research process. I engage in this task to interrogate some of the power relations that have emanated from this study.

The influence of the 'posts' (Adams St Pierre, 2013) has increased the attention paid to the status of the researcher, inviting a more direct dealing with the question, 'who am I', and how this shapes research. Engaging with the subjective dynamics of research is crucial to acknowledging the ways that knowledge is produced through relations of power, which materialise differently at different points in research, and relate to the complex intertwining of identities and subject positions. Identity is developed through ethnography, not least through the ways researchers write themselves into their projects (Cairns, 2013). The discourses the researcher is embedded in are crucial to what they envisage as being possible and valuable through research (Skeggs, 1997).

However, whilst techniques for 'telling the self' have become increasingly necessary, they are also problematic. I engage in this task whilst recognising that the very process of 'telling the self' is a mark of privilege and power. It depends on having the appropriate space and linguistic tools. These are made available, in part, through educational success. This raises additional tensions in this study, since my position of educational success is a platform for the exploration of educational categories of success and failure. This inscribes a particular relation of power into this work, which was a continual tension.

The 'reflexive self' has been read as a master discourse of ethnographic practice and of credible research (Skeggs, 2002), and thus is another truth that needs to be queried and troubled. As Skeggs (2002) notes, 'the self' is a particular historical product. The reflexive researcher who has a nuanced moral compass, and who can recognise and rationalise their own

positionings, feelings and responses is a construction that is drawn on as part of the performance of 'researcher'. 'Telling the self' implies a level of clarity on the part of researchers who are able to stand back and 'see' and 'understand' themselves (Bourdieu, 1987). This opportunity is typically denied to participants. The "telling of the self" can therefore become "a manifestation and maintenance of difference and distinction" (Skeggs, 2002: 350).

However, it is also the case that writing in a way that omits the researcher has a particular historical location in research as a method of increasing rigor and objectivity. This continues to operate as a powerful meta-discourse of science, impacting on the research that is funded, completed, valued and used (Torrance, 2014). Obscuring the self in an impersonal aesthetic is therefore problematic too, clouding the ways that subjectivity, emotions and 'locatedness' shape data (Skeggs, 1997).

With these concerns in mind, there is a need to interrogate the self, whilst being mindful of the particular historical positionings of such a task, the rationale that underpins it, and the ways that it might be done. These concerns have informed my reflections on what I wish to discuss here, and the reasons why I feel the need to do so. These practices should be justified beyond the idea that they are a 'performance' of rigour in qualitative inquiry (Singh et al, 2014). I see them as necessary in this work because its critical exploration of overarching 'truths' demands that I also pay attention to the ways I am embedded within a particular set of truths. Through this final section, I do not aim to tie up my loose ends or reconcile my contradictions, through the construction of a seemingly rounded or complete account of myself and my role. Instead the self I describe is fluid, contradictory and ever-present. I write about some of the ways I appeared to "inhabit" this research (Skeggs, 1997: 18), discussing three points that I have interrogated during the research process: the fluidity of the field; the fluidity of my position; and the ethical nature of these, and other, issues, particularly in relation to the writing of research accounts.

The Fluidity of 'Field'

As my work has developed I have been increasingly troubled by the term 'field' as a way of making sense of the spaces of research. Drawing firm demarcations between being 'in' and 'out' of the field can be problematic because it positions the "field as a bounded site of cultural otherness" (Cairns, 2013: 326). It makes assumptions about what counts as the space/time of school and education, which may serve to legitimise particular forms of learning and identity over others. It clouds the fact that parts of my research – planning, analysis, writing – took place beyond, for instance, the physical site of the school. Yet my engagement with these tasks was central to data generation. I adopt a more fluid understanding of 'the field' as all of those spaces where ethnographic data was produced, including my production of 'the field' through writing. This amounts to a querying of what constitutes the analytical space of the ethnography. It "marks a shift from approaching the field as a backdrop or container in which research activities take place, to a spatial practice that actively constitutes the people and places under study" (Cairns, 2013: 324). It suggests less firm demarcations between the 'research self' and the 'private self'.

The Fluidity of 'Self'

Researcher positionality refers to researcher reflections on their own characteristics, worldviews and experiences and how these have shaped the research. Just as the 'field' is taken to be fluid and evolving, so too was my positionality within this research. I draw on my interpretations, through my research diary, of how people interacted with me and positioned me through language. The ways I was being produced by participants was sometimes apparent in things they said to me, in the ways they introduced me to others in the school (Jones, 2014), or in their unspoken interactions with me.

The Sympathiser

Not long into the research I wrote in my fieldnotes that I had been positioned as a sympathiser by senior staff. This was encapsulated in comments from the EH: 'You understand this school, you understand its

plight'. Upon reflection, I now understand this position to have been key to this project. To begin with I located this position of 'sympathiser' to be something staff had applied to me. Later, I reflected on the role I played in positioning myself in this way. This became apparent when carefully listening to audio recordings of interviews with senior staff, particularly in the key 'rapport building' moments of the exchange: settling in at the beginning; in-between questions; following breaks and interruptions; the close of the interview. These were moments where we discussed our experiences of education and our political views. During these exchanges I made my own political views open, and these aligned me with a critical perspective of current educational, and wider political, ideology and policy. My position as 'sympathiser' may have stemmed from this, and made these particular staff members more open to speaking with me. However, rather than deducing whether this 'helped' or 'hindered' the research, what is more interesting is what this suggests about relations of power (Cairns, 2013: 328). It is perhaps indicative of the feelings of powerlessness that the senior staff had in the current policy context. As I discuss in Chapter Seven, this context was marked by a series of rules and restrictions on what could and could not be drawn on to explain Eastbank's continued position as an underperforming school. In contrast, in these exchanges, the ability to speak and to vent was not only freer, but was met with 'sympathy'.

However, being positioned as a sympathiser was problematic for me when I began to analyse my data and write. I wondered about the ethics of drawing on data that enables critique of the school, when this data may have been enabled by my position as a 'sympathiser'. Surely I had to continue a level of this 'sympathiser' positionality into the writing, otherwise it was disingenuous? I reflected on how I might discuss some of the moments in the school which were problematic, without feeding into existing deficit narratives. This was part of the reason I was drawn to Foucault's work, as a method of problematising the way the school, and the people within it, were positioned through a limiting discourse that was shaping policies and

practices. My critical engagement with micro instances of data that troubled me was focused on tracing these moments back to the wider discursive context of the academies policy. This provided a way of embedding my sense-making of the data in a rich understanding of the limits the school was working in and with. It enabled me to work to ethical principles that I was comfortable with and to maintain my emphasis on possibilities for social justice in schools in poorer communities.

A Listener

During some of my interactions with staff I was positioned as a listener, as someone to reflect to and with, and at times, as someone to confess to. I was told that 'it was nice to have a moment to reflect' amidst the hectic business of day-to-day life in the school. A number of staff members sought me out to arrange times to speak. Some took the opportunity to tell me things that they asked me not to document or share. Some shared information about things that they found troubling and explicitly asked me to use the information, although reminded me that 'I didn't hear it from them'. This provided a different way for me to understand the way the school, and its staff, are currently positioned and the stresses and ensuing difficulties. I considered the possibility that this may be a form of practitioner activism. It was a way for staff to highlight things they perceived to be unjust about their work, but of doing so without threat to their job or the school. This is, as I document throughout my analysis, an intrinsic part of the culture of survival that marked the work of Eastbank. These voices of dissent raised ethical issues, making issues of anonymity and confidentiality particularly pertinent.

The Newcomer/Novice/Student

In exchanges with staff I was sometimes positioned as a newcomer who had come to learn. This resulted in mixed responses. People explained things thoroughly to me, perceiving me to be a novice who required detailed explanations (Cairns, 2013). Others drew defensively on my status as a novice. On one occasion, after I said that I had enjoyed speaking with a particular student a member of staff said: 'well you've only just met them

and you don't have to teach them every week' (Fieldnotes, TS). I realised that articulating sympathy or like for a student had to be done carefully. If a teacher was having a difficult day, my being seen to side with a student might be rather annoying. This is one of the difficulties of school ethnography, where the researcher wants to speak with staff and students. If the researcher sides too closely with either it can have implications for the way they are perceived, and lead to either students or teachers backing off. These dynamics located me as an "ambivalent borderliner...in a space where institutional practices constitute 'teachers' and 'pupils' in different locations" (Gordon et al, 2005: 116).

A person with authority

In one particular relationship with a TA I was positioned as a person with authority and knowledge, and potentially as someone who might be there to pass judgment. I was asked to shadow this TA for a day, and I saw her lessons several times during my research. I wrote about this positioning in my fieldnotes:

After this lesson I went along to [staff name] English year 11 functional skills lesson. They were watching a film. Because it was the last week of term, I asked 'is this for Christmas', as that was what I used to do with my own tutor group. The staff member said 'yes, oh why aren't we supposed to?'

On another occasion the same member of staff showed me a future lesson plan and asked if it looked okay. These were moments in the school where I was acutely aware, and uncomfortable about, potential power imbalances. I have since wondered whether the TA was given the opportunity to say she did not want me to shadow her. I have considered whether there was something about the way I conducted myself that made her uncomfortable, or feel that she was being judged. I will never know, but this encounter served as an important reminder that the gaze, including my own, "can be an exercise of power" (Gordon et al, 2005: 115). I was uncomfortable at the thought that I may have caused any anxiety, or that the TA felt she was being judged, as I saw her as someone to learn from. This experience encouraged

me to look at my own actions differently, affecting my relationship with myself (Ferguson, 2011).

A high achiever

During my meeting with a member of staff at the local authority I encountered another position:

LA staff member: We were losing 33% of all children learning an instrument...did you play an instrument?

JP: I did at school

LA staff member: You did at school, yes, because your parents would have encouraged you to do that. And alongside that your parents encouraged you, well if you went to [names my school] and you then went off to Oxford they must have encouraged you quite hard. Now those two things go together.

Here the member of staff at the LA is outlining a ‘truth’ held by staff at the LA that the ‘brightest’ students have been leaving the city schools, like Eastbank, to go to other schools (a point I return to in Chapter Eight). He uses statistics about learning a musical instrument to make this point, weaving me into his account. He uses the bits of my biography that he knows – the school and university I went to – and fleshes this out with his own assumptions, for instance that my parents encouraged me “quite hard”. He does so as part of his wider justification of a narrative about schools like Eastbank failing to appeal to the ‘brightest’ students, such as those who play musical instruments. This encounter was problematic not only because of the assumptions made about me, but because of the work these assumptions are made to do in order to confirm a deficit narrative about Eastbank Academy and similar schools. The member of staff painted me as the kind of student Eastbank needs to attract in order to improve, using me as leverage to highlight the distinctions he is talking about. He meant it as a compliment – I am sure – but it bought home, in a very personal way, how deficit narratives operate in current educational discourses.

Being produced through research encounters

These five positions were those I was aware of during my time in Eastbank. Other possibilities and framings would have existed too. I refer back to these, and other positionings, during my analysis. For instance, my own privilege gained through educational achievement underpins my analysis of discussions of local children's aspirations in Chapter Eight. I refer to my gender in a discussion of Vignette Fifteen. In both cases I do so in order to illustrate the ways researcher positionality may be intertwined with the textures of a research encounter, without attempting to pin these down to an exact or final reading, which I believe to be impossible when we are evaluating how we are seen by others.

The multiplicity of ways I was produced during this research are indicative of the variability of relations of power. It suggests that the self – researcher or participant – is never static. Accounting for my interpretations of how I was seen and positioned by participants is viewed as a key ethical question since it begins to untangle the multiple relations of power that exist in ethnographic research. Individuals are positioned in multiple and diverse ways, including by themselves. My identity was fractured and full of contradiction, and this will have shaped the data. This cannot be straightforwardly reconciled through reflexive writing.

These examples suggest that when researchers enter a school they “gaze with some power” since they are backed by the institution of academia and the authority of academic success (Gordon et al, 2005: 115). However, it also highlights a range of other positionings of the researcher, who is also “gazed upon” (Gordon et al, 2005: 115). This balance – being powerful and vulnerable – was a difficult but important tension through this research, and was productive for thinking through questions of power. I was produced in ways that troubled me, and I think that interrogating the reasons why I was troubled helped me to make better sense of the relations of power that were present in my research and in the academies policy.

The Ethics of Selecting and Writing

Throughout Chapters Three and Four I have emphasised the partial and interpretative nature of this study. This partiality continues into this written account. I have carved a path through voluminous data, selecting examples to construct a particular argument, making numerous decisions about “which knowledge to use” (Skeggs, 1997: 17). My mark is present throughout these decisions. Attention must be paid to the aesthetics of ethnographic representations, which is an ethical point since language does not just represent culture, it creates it. The data was co-produced, but I had authority over the resulting representation. This is a reminder that ethical research is about much more than following ethical procedures. Given the inherent intersubjectivity of the ‘researcher’ and ‘narrator’ in this work, ethical considerations must extend to the aesthetics of representations (Bhattacharya, 2016).

Vignettes and examples

What researchers do and do not see and hear (Mazzei, 2003), what they prioritise and value, and what they probe and make note of will be influenced by theory and by researcher subjectivity. This includes any number of experiences and characteristics: political stance, world-view, religion, experiences as a practitioner, and personal characteristics (Moje, 2000; Aull Davies, 2008). This is bound up in ethical questions, since it influences how the research project is theoretically grounded and framed, and which aspects are prioritised. I arrived at this project with a particular set of interests, experiences in education, political views, and characteristics. My work in education had largely been with those experiencing educational exclusion, broadly framed. This, and the ways I framed my project created additional sensitivity and interest in these young people in Eastbank Academy. This can be reconciled with the aims of this project, which are to consider the social justice implications of the production of academy status. However, this emphasis silenced other things. This is necessary in research,

which cannot look at everything at one time, but must be made explicit so that the focus of the research is clear.

The tendency to use the most ‘telling’ examples can be doubled edged. Examples that ‘speak’ to us often do so because they are suggestive of the complexities of the questions or phenomena being considered, where “a whole vision, an entire conception, seemed contained in that moment” (Woolf, 1935: 66). This is how vignettes are used in this work. They capture a moment, which brings together different ideas, emotions, relationships, narratives, and materialities in a way that allowed something to crystallise for me, or at least to become clearer. They are moments where I saw the opportunity to evoke this ‘sense making’ to the reader, to provide them with an insight into a particular dimension of the school.

At the same time, these ‘telling’ examples are not what my time in the school was mostly comprised of. Instead there were lots of seemingly ordinary moments or “unsurprising features” to sit through (Cairns, 2013: 327). Yet the “lacunae” and absences of an ethnography are equally important to interrogate (Delamont, 2014: 8). Part of my challenge was to render the ordinary strange, by interrogating those things that did not immediately ‘stand out’; sparse school walls, an assembly running order, students working on computers. In these examples I was mindful that my own experience of working in a school had rendered these features mundane and ordinary. This was the first step to rethinking them, and this rethinking can be seen through the analysis that follows.

The ultimate aim of interrogating my own positionality through this research was to understand whose interests my research works for, and who might be served by the particular account I produce. I view this as a fundamental ethical question. My decisions about what to include are grounded in my concerns to account for voices that are silenced in current power-knowledge relations and to challenge the dominant ‘truths’ about academy status.

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the methods used to generate the data that informs my analysis of academy status in Eastbank. I have located my specific position on qualitative research, articulating the importance of iterative methodology, on-going analysis, and reflection. Rather than aiming for a “clean and reassuring” account of this research, I have highlighted the tensions and “messiness” of knowledge production (Law, 2004: 18-9). Power dynamics have been central to this, and I have deconstructed some of the power relations that existed through this research, the decisions I have made throughout this written account, and how this has been grounded in decisions about whose interests I am serving through this particular production of knowledge (Thomson & Gunter, 2007: 329). This paves the way for the analysis chapters that follow.

Chapter Five: Shaping Academies as Objects for Thought

This chapter interrogates how academy status and the academy school have been shaped as objects for thought through a set of narratives and representations of individuals, schools, and communities. Underpinned by Foucault's theoretical tools and the method outlined in Chapter Four, it addresses the following main and sub questions:

How have academy status and the academy school been produced and shaped as objects for thought through policy discourse since 2000?

- How are academies made compelling?
- What representations have come to be associated with academies and what do these perpetuate, enable and constrain?
- How are these representations sustained and why are they possible at this time?

The focus is on those presuppositions or truths (Foucault, 1976) that underpin and sustain the strand of the policy concerned with failing schools in contexts of poverty.

Given the primacy of the spoken and written word in policy, this analysis relies on linguistic policy artefacts about academies that have been produced by those who have designed and promoted the policy (Hewitt, 2009). The statements embedded in these artefacts are taken as points of departure. I unpick the representations and stories that are used. I then analyse how these are made possible and sustained, considering the relationship they have with wider dominant systems of thought. This chapter interrogates the shaping of academies through discourse in order to consider its role in the management of possibilities (Butler, 1990) for academy status and academy subjects in Eastbank Academy.

Section One: Imagining Academies and Influencing the Public

City academies will create new opportunities for business, the voluntary sector and central and local government to work together...to improve the life chances of inner city children (Blunkett, 2000).

When David Blunkett announced the academies programme in 2000 he began the process of shaping academies into a particular kind of existence. Some aspects of those first attempts to shape academies have become ingrained in the representation of the policy and in its legislative status. Despite changes in government, 16 years, and policy diversification, the story of academies as the saviour of failing schools in contexts of poverty continues to be retold:

We will target disadvantaged areas and low performing schools and tackle failure wherever and whenever we find it (Blunkett, 2000: 14).

Hundreds of schools, often in disadvantaged areas, are already being turned around thanks to the help of strong academy sponsors - education experts who know exactly what they have to do to make a failing school outstanding (Morgan, 2015a).

Throughout the lifespan of the policy, academies have been shaped in relation to “disadvantaged areas” and “low performing” or “failing schools”. The first thing I explore is why these depictions have remained central to the academies policy under successive governments. Fundamental to this is understanding how the academies policy has been able to capture the public. During school visits, interviews and participant observation, I was struck by the reoccurring depiction of academies as ‘better’, ‘more business-like’ and ‘more professional’ schools. As outlined in Chapter Two, academies have been subject to criticism and critical research across their lifespan, and yet they continue to be popular with parents. Evidence suggests that many schools experience an increased demand for places once they become academies, and that they become more popular with parents the longer they are open (Cirin, 2014; Finch et al, 2014). The majority of oversubscribed schools in England in 2013 had secured academy status (Paton, 2013). This

suggests that the idea that academies are 'better' schools has gained the status of truth with some parents:

Reports in the Islington Gazette that parents hoping to get their children into another, soon-to-be opened Islington academy, St Mary Magdalene, are inundating local estate agents, seeking to buy homes inside the school's catchment area (Beckett, 2007: 112).

The perpetuation of this truth may serve to increase the popularity of academies as middle-class parents in particular confer with one another when selecting a school for their children (Ball, 2003b). Moreover, if these schools become oversubscribed they have more opportunity to select pupils who will count towards the school's standing in performance tables (Youdell, 2004). Thus the "technologies of power" (Foucault, 1996: 208) that govern education sustain the idea that academies are better schools.

I begin by considering how successive governments have managed to construct the truth that academies are 'better', unpicking some of the ways this discourse has been made compelling and to look at the representations of individuals, schools, and communities that are inherent within it. I am interested in the purposes this truth might serve, and in how it has continued to seem relevant and useful to successive governments' educational narrative. This takes up the argument that "politics, policies and national conversations make, change and manipulate public attitudes, sometimes to prepare the ground for major ideological or economic remodelling" (Alibhai-Brown, 2016) or indeed economic continuity.

Shaping Academies Through Narrative

Successive governments have assembled an academy narrative, which has been central to the way academies have been shaped as objects for thought in the public imagination (Stables, 2003). Research challenges this narrative and much of what we are told about academies (Elliott, 2008), yet they have been written and spoken into a particular kind of reality, and the academies story has come to exist independently of research, providing academies with an almost mythical status (Czarniawska, 2004). The following section

deconstructs this narrative and the ways it is made compelling through the construction of a consistent set of narratives in relation to ‘failing’ schools in ‘challenging’ contexts. It argues that narrative becomes a useful tool in the face of ambiguous policy evidence. The academies narrative provides clues to the overall policy vision. It is a starting point for questioning what language is being tasked with, and taking seriously its role in the construction of the academy school, and the identities and experiences of those within it.

Narrative, Story, and Discourse

The argument I make in this chapter depends on clarifying my use of the terms ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ and how they relate to ‘discourse’. Narrative and story have a range of subtly different definitions, are sometimes conflated and sometimes distinguished, and often understood in relation to ‘plot’ (Czarniawska, 2004; Thomson, 2013; Watson, 2008). I adopt the term narrative in this chapter, using it to refer to a spoken or written account of one or more events or actions, which are temporally ordered or connected in some way, and undertaken by characters (Czarniawska, 2004). Narrative has a subject, geographical locale and a beginning in time, and it refers to how events happen and how they are conveyed to us. It encompasses narrators, “main and minor characters” (Thomson, 2013: 171), the way events unfold, whether there is a single narrative track or multiple tracks, and whether rhetorical devices such as metaphor are used.

Story also refers to a collection of events or actions that are sequenced, but it refers to the entirety of these, also encompassing those events that are inferred. Stories must have a plot, which brings the events into a meaningful whole (Czarniawska; 2004). The production of intention and causality, that stem from plot, leads to a logical – or otherwise - conclusion. Some scholars have also identified plot as a feature of narratives (Thomson, 2013; Watson, 2008). Plot describes the ways the main events of a story or narrative are formulated and presented as a logical, interrelated sequence of causes and effects, organised to have a particular effect within a story or narrative. (Czarniawska, 2004). Plot creates patterns and relations across the events of

a story, for instance through a build-up of action to a climax or resolution. It can invite questions, particularly through the production of contradiction.

For the purposes of this analysis the difference between narrative and story lies in the space for negotiations. If a story is a complete unit, the whole set of events with an ending that provides the logic of the plot, then a narrative may be conceived of as something that is becoming. Narratives imply causality, but leave this open to interpretation and negotiation. This renders the plot more malleable; final decisions about its logic are suspended as the end of the story is continually remade. There is, therefore, an invitation for audiences to participate in the construction of possible endings.

Narrative captures the state of becoming and the multiple fragments that are used to shape academies as objects for thought. When it is enriched with the concept of 'plot' it enables a consideration of the multiple narrative tracks of the academies narrative, its characterisation, its attempts at logic, its unfolding nature, and its lack of a 'finite' ending. I draw on the idea that narratives are in a process of 'becoming' and are therefore subject to negotiation rather than an already concluded or 'whole' story. Narrative offers "an alternative mode of knowing" where the plot "rather than the truth or falsity of story elements" determines its power (Czarniawska, 2004: 19).

Connection with Discourse

Narratives are taken to be one linguistic tool that is part of the way groups of statements may be understood to function within discourse. They create a "discursive formation", that is a "coherent group of assumptions and language practices that applies to one region of knowledge" (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004: 54). 'Narrative' is descriptive of the way that statements are combined to say something about academy schools. It can be employed within individual texts or across a body of texts. Discourse is the rules, systems, and technologies that enable particular narratives to be produced.

Narrative is a powerful tool because of the centrality of story telling in human societies, as people narrate to teach, learn, entertain and interpret (Czarniawska, 2004). Narratives are also encountered as features of everyday talk, where they are used to convey lessons and morals, to describe experiences, and to make sense of the world (Gabriel, 2004). They are a persuasive tool and can bring people together in shared and unique experiences. Narratives convey “moral maxims and cultural norms” (Thomson, 2013: 171), which shape desires (Watson, 2008).

Narrative “does not contain meaning” (Thomson, 2013: 171), rather readers bring their own set of experiences, histories, values and contexts to the act of interpretation. The audience is in “dynamic relation with the possibilities offered by the text” (Ballaster, 2007). However, the possible meanings of a text are not limitless, rather they operate within complex boundaries linked to the nature of the text and the contexts of its production and reception (Ballaster, 2007). The regularities and boundaries of interpretation may be more pronounced in policy narratives; as the ‘full story’ is crafted across multiple texts (Needham, 2011) interpretation is increasingly contained and directed. Policy narratives are texts of actions, which aim to persuade the general public that a particular course of action is necessary and good (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2013).

Partly this works through the construction of a narrative voice, as narrators provide a partial version of events. The narrator of the academies policy is “the nation state” who “explicates the story in relation to itself and its interests” and guides attention to “key events, characters, emphases and lessons, making certain responses more likely” (Thomson, 2013: 172). These narratives occur amongst a wider web of policy narratives projected and encountered at a particular point in time. Across these dominant knowledges, values, and modes of understanding and being will emerge, as will narratives that aim to counter these. I have read the academies narrative within a wider network of stories about privatisation, individual accountability, and equality of opportunity. These are principles that, as

Chapter Two discussed, are part of the dominant neo-liberal ideology. Critiques of neo-liberalism, and of other aspects of the academies policy, form part of the wider, referential web of policy-story lines academies are part of, as discussed in Chapter Seven.

A narrative tool for considering these relationships is the idea of a main storyline and set of sub plots. Neoliberalism is one of the dominant storylines of contemporary society, which may therefore position academies as a parallel, or subsidiary storyline (Thomson, 2013). I also consider a range of subplots that are drawn on in the academies narrative, and how these might strengthen it or otherwise. These are important steps in understanding how the particular academies narrative has come to be, how it has been sustained, why it was possible at this time, and how academies function as part of a wider narrative web. It enables an exploration of why particular statements were chosen over others at a particular time and what we can learn from this about the knowledge- power dynamic at play, which can inform an understanding of school level practices.

Section Two: Making Academies Compelling

The academies narrative pivots on the idea and necessity of change or transformation. It promotes a linear change narrative depicting a journey from problem to transformation. It begins with the rationale for change, outlining the contours of the policy problem to which academies are the answer (Bacchi, 1999). It then frames a particular set of future imaginaries (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2013), through which it describes what is 'to become'. Finally it explicates how academy status enables transformation, and thus emerges as a saviour of failing schools.

A Change Narrative

The academies narrative foregrounds change and makes change necessary. But it also seeks to legitimise change through the construction of internal narrative coherence. This legitimisation depends on certain representations being situated as 'truths'. The dominant policy narrative begins with the

impetus for change; it begins by finding fault (Bacchi, 2012). This occurs through the negative depiction and criticism of the current state education context:

For too long, too many children have been failed by poorly-performing schools which have served to reinforce inequality of opportunity and disadvantage (Blunkett, 2000: n.p).

Andrew Adonis described comprehensive education in hyperbolic language:

Across much of England comprehensives were palpably and seriously failing. I regarded this not only as an educational crisis but a social and economic crisis too...I saw failing comprehensives schools, many hundreds of them, as a cancer at the heart of English society (Adonis, 2012: xii).

Adonis summarised the “fundamental weaknesses of the comprehensive era” as low workforce morale, weak leadership, weak LA oversight and poor reputation with parents (Adonis 2012: 11). By focusing on the lower achievement of children living in poverty and by stressing that “schools with low and historically unacceptable levels of achievement reinforce inequality and generational disadvantage” (Blunkett, 2000: 20), Labour created a case for reform that spoke of greater distributional justice (Fraser, 1996).

Criticism of comprehensive education is not new. It is a well-used starting point for the legitimisation of an education policy (Tomlinson, 2005). Academies continue this legacy and beginning with the failure of comprehensive schools has become the norm for successive governments in their bid to expand the academies programme. Thus the Conservative-led Coalition government framed the ‘problem’ in similar terms:

Futures are being blighted. Horizons are being limited. Generations of children are being let down [by] ingrained educational failure [and] failing school[s] (Gove, 2012a).

Again, the problem was inadequate schools, LAs incapable of assisting them to improve, and continuing educational inequality:

We want every child to have a chance to flourish. We inherited an education system, which was one of the most stratified and segregated in the developed world. Thousands of children - overwhelmingly from poorer backgrounds - were receiving an inadequate education (Gove, 2014b).

This concern was also apparent in his discussion of the “educational underclass”, described by Gove as “the lost souls our school system has failed” (Gove, 2011).

This articulation of ‘what is wrong’ continued into Nicky Morgan’s reign under the majority Conservative government, with a particular emphasis on complacent schools and low aspirations:

I am unapologetic and uncompromising in intervening swiftly to tackle educational failure wherever it lurks...the Education and Adoption Bill... will allow us to turn around failing schools much more quickly...it will shine a spotlight on coasting schools as well. Schools that aren’t stretching their pupils (Morgan, 2015b).

Thus the academies story starts with the construction of compelling and emotive stories about educational failure and mediocrity, which present an “apocalyptic picture of state education” (Benn, 2011: 13). It begins with what Bacchi (2012) calls “problematizations”, that is with comprehensive schools in challenging contexts being positioned as the “problematized phenomena” (p. 1). Bacchi (1999) argues that an important way that governments intervene is through the shaping of ‘problems’, which they then seek to solve or remedy through policy. A particular policy is never the only possible response in a given situation. This undermines the status of problematisations as “taken-for-granted-truths”, making visible the way that policies are grounded in particular statements about what is wrong with state education in deprived communities, and the role of academisation in ‘fixing’ this (Bacchi, 2012: 2).

Justifying academies has depended on being skilled at “diagnosing errors” (Finlayson, 2003: 68). The framing of ‘the problem’ that academies address remains remarkably consistent. It has survived through 16 years of

academisation, and yet academy status continues to be presented as the obvious remedy. The focus here is not with the truth of 'failure'; that is with whether it is possible to establish 'failure' as a justification for academisation. Instead the focus is on what this 'truth of failure' has enabled. It legitimises what comes next (Francis, 2014), making a logical policy narrative possible.

Responding to Educational Failure

As the academies narrative begins by problematising state education, the need to cure the problem becomes a potent story-line (Finlayson, 2003). The scene is set for academies to emerge as a response to the challenges and failures presented in struggling schools in deprived areas. Adonis (2012) saw his task clearly as "how to reinvent the comprehensive schools" and denoted academies as "a nationwide movement for educational transformation" (p. xii). Academies have been consistently positioned as an emphatic change; a transformation (Gove, 2012a), or reinvention, through which "life chances have been transformed" (Morgan, 2015b). The change that comes with academy status is depicted as radical and definitive, and draws on hyperbolic language. The implied logic here is that it is only through departing entirely from what came before that academies can bring about success in poor communities, and improvement in society. The level of change itself is persuasive. This is not a policy tinkering, it is a "revolution" (Adonis, 2012: 179) because only a radical solution will rectify comprehensive education.

Transformation is legitimised and flows through two narrative strands, which shape academies as common-sense and logical, but also as a morality tale: "We're implementing a long-term plan for schools - rooted in evidence - driven by moral purpose" (Gove, 2014b). On the surface these narrative strands may seem to be drawing on different rhetorical repertoires. Whilst one refers to the evidence, the other draws on the language of morality and values. However, they combined to construct academies as a 'common-sense utopia', a narrative that is able to defend against diverse sets of criticisms. I will take each of these narrative strands in turn before deconstructing how

the apparently contradictory idea of a ‘common-sense’ utopia functions to make academies compelling.

Confinement, Liberation, and Utopia

The academies narrative is formed through a collection of statements that present the academy movement as a moral endeavour. Contrasting semantic fields of confinement and liberation are constructed, conveying the change that comes with academy status. There is a comprehensive system where local authorities act as an educational “straightjacket”(Blair, 2005), where “horizons are being limited” and there is “chronic educational failure” (Gove, 2012a). These schools are unnecessarily bureaucratic, “caught in a cycle of low aspirations, with a poor ethos in the school and sometimes the wider community” (Blunkett, 2000: 18). This is framed as “the crisis of standards in English state education” (Adonis, 2012: 243). The descriptors that are drawn on here – ‘caught’, ‘straightjacket’, ‘limited’, ‘ingrained’, ‘cycle’ - are all about barriers, limits and constraints. They position comprehensive school status as a form of confinement, which is “weighed down by out-dated habits” (Finlayson, 2003: 74).

In constructing academies as a clear break with what came before, the opposite discursive repertoire is drawn on. Academy status is formed as emancipatory:

[An academy] belongs not to some remote bureaucracy, not to the rulers of government, local or national, but to itself, for itself. The school is in charge of its own destiny. This gives it pride and purpose...freed from the extraordinarily debilitating and often, in the worst sense, politically correct interference from state or municipality (Blair’s memoirs quoted in Gove, 2012a).

Particular verbs dominate in this representation. Academies “unleash”, “unlock” and “free” (Husbands et al, 2013). These words orient around the idea of liberty. They imagine some inherent ‘good’ in schools, which is being stifled by the LA, bureaucracy, and particular school and community cultures. The skill of academy status is to free or unlock this inherent and

constrained quality in schools; to emancipate teachers, schools and communities. Academy status provides the conditions for schools to steer their own destiny towards a form of schooling utopia. In part this is achieved through “dynamic independent sponsors” with entrepreneurial spirit, who become facilitators of liberation (Adonis, 2012: xii). This establishes a “culture of ambition to replace the poverty of aspiration” that existed before (Andrew Adonis, quoted in Curtis et al, 2008: 26). The academies narrative tells of the victorious overthrowing of mediocrity, ignorance and failure, so that a schooling destiny can be reached. Through such a discourse, change becomes “inherently liberating and progressive” (Finlayson, 2003: 76), and the term academy becomes an “up word”, making things “sound exciting, progressive and positive” (Finlayson, 2003: 67).

Achieving liberation is fundamental but not straightforward. A series of barriers must be overcome for the constrained comprehensive school to be liberated. First, academy status is targeted at communities that are ‘stuck in their ways’. The focus here is on “liberating individuals from ignorance” in those communities and schools that are trapped in cycles of underachievement (Gove, 2014a). A key task for the state is to “liberate people from their own counterproductive behaviours” (Finlayson, 2011:166-7).

The second trial comes from “a hard left ideological hostility” (Adonis, 2012: 19). These are people with strong pro-comprehensive ideals who aim to preserve the status quo (Adonis, 2012: xviii). An example of this is ‘the blob’ of academics and educationalists who opposed Gove’s education reforms (Simmons, 2015). These:

enemies of promise...are being obstructive. They are putting the ideology of central control ahead of the interests of children. They are more concerned with protecting old ways of working than helping the most disadvantaged children succeed in the future. Anyone who cares about social justice must want us to defeat these ideologues and liberate the next generation from a history of failure (Gove, 2012a).

Similarly Morgan has said:

That transformation has not been easy. We've challenged the status quo, debunked accepted truths and questioned vested interests. It takes determination, it isn't universally popular and there are always setbacks (Morgan, 2015b).

To pinpoint an opponent is useful in political discourse because it provides a target for discontent and something to define your position in relation to (Finlayson, 2003). Social justice, alongside related concepts such as fairness and equality, becomes a dominant form of moralising in the academies narrative.

Academies were designed to strengthen education's role as "an engine of social mobility" (Adonis, 2012: xiv; Gove, 2010), by "raising standards" in challenging educational contexts (Blunkett, 2000). The model has been described as bringing "new hope and breathing new life" into local communities (Blair, 2005), providing children from all backgrounds with an opportunity to succeed (Gove, 2012b). Within the discursive logic created here it follows that disagreeing with academies is tantamount to tolerating an unjust education system.

Those who contest academies are weaved into its narrative as 'enemies' or opponents, who "put doctrine ahead of pupils' interests" (Gove, 2012a). Once these opponents are imagined in discourse they can be drawn on to legitimise policy shifts. Morgan has used them as the rationale for changes to legislation, making it more difficult for people to contest the forced academisation of a school:

Today's landmark bill will allow the best education experts to intervene in poor schools from the first day we spot failure. It will sweep away the bureaucratic and legal loopholes previously exploited by those who put ideological objections above the best interests of children. At the heart of our commitment to delivering real social justice is our belief that every pupil deserves an excellent education (Morgan, 2015a).

Here local democratic accountability has been reframed as bureaucracy, and subsequently as a threat to the social justice academies facilitate.

These trials are depicted as a “challenge”, but the “mission has been worth it” because academisation in poor communities is a moral endeavour (Morgan, 2015a). Academy status is the saviour of failing inner city schools and children. Action is legitimised by the level of need: “fatalism and inaction in the face of social crisis are immoral. We have a duty to act” (Adonis, 2012). Academisation is legitimised through the “preaching” (Gunter & McGinty, 2014: 305) or “missionary zeal” (Finlayson, 2003: 74) of those who see themselves as key to understanding and fixing school failure.

Academy status is part of tackling ignorance and mediocrity. Academies are presented as a “shared moral purpose” and a “moral mission” because they are about “democratising access to knowledge...giving every child an equal chance to succeed” (Gove, 2014a). There are echoes of biblical language here. Gove saw tackling educational inequality as a “personal crusade” and spoke of “beat[ing] the evil of youth unemployment” (Gove, 2014a). He saw academies as enabling schools to be “reborn” (Gove, 2014a), presenting a form of salvation narrative.

Educational Utopia

Academy status is both the tool through which these things are achieved, and the utopian state that is realised. ‘Utopia’ is a useful way for thinking about how academies have been shaped as a superior vision of education. The term utopia conjures up a substantial literary and theoretical legacy, and has become an important method of sociological analysis (Levitas, 2013). Across the usage and understandings of the term there are subtle distinctions made about the extent to which a utopia is an achievable entity. Following Sir Thomas Moore’s coining of ‘utopia’ as constitutive of ‘nowhere’ (Moore, 1516), the word has often come to mean an unattainable good, and is drawn on to critique a position as idealistic and unrealistic (Levitas, 1990). Yet throughout the history of utopian thinking there has been a shift to conceptualise utopias as something that is attainable or partially attainable, particularly if designed with human flaws in mind. This shift was present in the change from god-made to man-made utopias in classic utopian writing,

and can also be seen in on-going attempts to achieve utopian states of living such as communes (Sargent, 2010).

‘Utopia’ is now used to refer to “many types of social and political activity intended to bring about a better society (Sargent, 2010: 7). Of relevance here are usages of the term that conceptualise “progress [as] the realisation of utopias” (Wilde, 1891). In this account, utopia is a shifting entity, which reflects the development of humankind’s ideas about how best to live. The continual achievement of utopias is what constitutes progress. It is this depiction that has resonance with the way academies are shaped as the best option for ‘failing’ schools. Academies are positioned as a leap in progress which is achievable and offers salvation. They are depicted as a vision for schooling based on the best available knowledge and values. Utopia is a useful way for conceptualising how academies have been shaped through divisions between what is ‘better’ and ‘worse’, focused on everyday transformations in schools and communities, and held “the present up to ridicule” to convey a case for change (Sargent, 2010: 24).

Utopia is envisaged in the case of academies through the construction of an affinity between academy schools and fee-paying or ‘independent’ schools. As Hands (2015) notes, the academies policy has been a way of reformulating the concept of ‘independence’, and perpetuating the idea that the independent school model is now available to all parents (Hands, 2015). Adonis and Gove both sought a blurring of the boundaries between state and private education:

A friend in No. 10 moved close to Mossbourne to get a place for his son, waving the acceptance letter at me one morning as if his son had got a scholarship to Eton (Adonis, 2012: 6).

My ambition for our education system is simple - when you visit a school in England standards are so high all round that you should not be able to tell whether it's in the state sector or a fee paying independent (Gove, 2014c).

Academies have been shaped to appeal to more ‘middle-class’ parents, who are equated with ‘ambition’:

I also never bought into this idea that somehow academies should only be targeted at the poorest kids. Part of my analysis of the education system is that it stopped being comprehensive. It was recruiting virtually no ambitious parents. Schools like [name] had very few, and virtually no middle-class parents (Interview, Policy Architect).

There have been explicit appeals for private schools to sponsor academies, although few formal partnerships have been formed (Hands, 2015). However, the government has celebrated redistribution from the private to the state sector via ‘advice’ from fee-paying schools to academies about how to run more successful and aspirational schools (Beckett, 2007).

Finally, there is the name ‘academy’ which builds on a “creeping gentrification” of the names given to state schools, which follows the replacement of ‘school’ with ‘college’ under The Conservative government in the 1980s (Beckett, 2007: 11). The name academy demarcated something different. Similarly, head teachers became principals, drawing on the American schooling lexicon. Academies can have executive heads, drawing on corporate terminology to introduce a new “actor” into the governance of education (Ball, 2009a: 100). These words are part of the way academies are framed as aspirational (Beckett, 2007: 121), as something new and better. This works through reference to the ‘independent’ sector and corporate world, where the idea of the ‘entrepreneurial’ school, teacher, and student have become increasingly drawn on in depictions of schooling success. The most popular specialisms of the early academies were business, symbolised by the “replica stock market trading floor” at Bexley City Academy (Beckett, 2007). Liberation has been positioned as an innate characteristic of the private sector (Finlayson, 2003). This is a discourse where the “opinions and voices of heroes of enterprise as sponsors are granted a special legitimacy” (Ball, 2009a: 103; Courtney 2015). This is linked to the demand, in an education market, for schools to differentiate themselves and to appeal to parents (Levin & Belfield 2006).

Evidence and Common-sense

Alongside this morality tale, four techniques have been used to present academies as a common-sense solution to evident failure. First academies have been presented as being “rooted in the evidence of what works” (Gove, 2014b) and “solidly backed by rigorous international evidence” (Gove, 2012a). This is used to position the government and the supporters of academies in opposition to anti-academy ‘ideologues’.

The popular critique of our reform programme has most often been of its underpinning motives. The talk was of an ‘ideologically-driven Academies programme’ and ‘ideologically-motivated school reforms’...yet the truth is rather different. The Academies programme is not about ideology. It’s an evidence-based, practical solution built on by successive governments (Gove, 2012a).

In this narrative, the government are the holders of the truth about schools, about their failure in particular communities, and about the route to solving this.

The second technique is a narrative of mutuality and agreement between opposing political parties. Academies have been a policy with the ability to unify the educational agendas of the two dominant political parties:

This has been an explicit continuation of a policy set in train by 2 of my predecessors, Andrew Adonis and Tony Blair: the academies programme (Gove, 2014a).

This has been taken as a sign of the common-sense-nature of the policy; party politics are suppressed in the interests of children.

The third aspect of this common-sense discourse is that academies give greater power to teachers and school staff (Gibb, 2014). They are framed as trusted experts who are best placed to personalise education to the needs of their intake. The work of academy status is to ‘empower’ these staff:

This Government believes that teachers and headteachers, not politicians and bureaucrats, should control schools and have more power over how they are run. That’s why we are spreading academy freedoms. This will give heads more power to tackle disruptive children,

to protect and reward teachers better, and to give children the specialist teaching they need (Gove, 2010).

Fourth, this presentation of academies as common-sense operates through multiple case studies and exemplars, which have become a regular feature of the academies story. The discussion that follows explores how case studies are used to draw on the evidence and to construct personalised stories. They are where we see a combining of the two narrative strands through which academies become a common-sense and grounded in fact-based obviousness, but also a morally superior educational utopia.

Leading by Example

The dominant academy narrative has been constructed through the interweaving of different text types (Needham, 2011). The common-sense claims of governments are verified through the use of best practice case study academies and academy leaders and “user testimonies” to exemplify the workings of this policy (Needham, 2011: 64-5). These case studies add detail to multi-interpretable policy ideas such as transformation, improvement and innovation, suggesting how the policy is expected to unravel in practice contexts (Needham, 2011). Case studies are personal and generalisable at the same time. They are another mechanism for improving the fidelity and coherence of the academies narrative (Czarniawska, 2004).

The Coalition government has used new forms of media as part of the information on academies, launching the Academies and Free Schools Blog. Here the government exploit the characteristically succinct and narrative style of blogs to construct texts that are informative and persuasive (Mewburn & Thomson, 2013: 1111). The posts are written in accessible language, can be read quickly, and provide a personal insight into academisation, using first person narratives, reflections and opinions (Mewburn & Thomson, 2013). Through them we are invited to celebrate particular ways that schools can use academy status to improve and become more socially just. They are written by school staff and therefore reaffirm the argument that policy is owned by frontline educational practitioners (Ward

et al, 2016). However, they are also all stories of success, and they all fit with the linear narrative outlined above. Through these blogs the government create an alternative space, and voice, in their shaping of academies, creating a public narrative of academisation.

In addition to these blog posts, examples of successful academies have been repeatedly referenced throughout the span of the policy. Whilst academies have been promoted as an opportunity to “break down monolithic ‘one size fits all’ provision” (Blair, 2005), so schools can flexibly respond to the needs of their students, after 16 years it is possible to discern particular trends in what have been celebrated as key academy successes, particularly for a ‘failing’ school that becomes an academy. This analysis draws on the 11 posts published on the DfE blog website between July 2014 and March 2015 (listed in Appendix One), and references other texts that refer to specific academies and leaders. The analysis that follows discerns an overarching and celebrated narrative across these texts, which presents a beginning, middle and a set of outcomes, which cannot be considered as an ‘end point’ but as something that must be maintained and shared if an academy is to be considered effective. Many experiences and details are glossed over in these stories. Time is linear and progressive, and the narrative serves to abstract moments of ‘being an academy’ from everything else a school has to do and be.

Beginning: The Case for Change

The blog posts describe the sorts of beginnings discussed above, whereby academy status is adopted because school results are not good enough and because of a “lack of aspiration” (blog 3). Academy status is targeted at “the lowest performing schools in the country” (blog 9). Some of these are based in areas of “high social and economic disadvantage” (blog, 7). The posts tell of schools seeking academy status in order to be “more responsive” (blog 2) and “masters of our own destiny” (blog 4), because they have “received minimal support” from the local authority (blog 2). Academy freedoms enable schools to have a “fresh start” (blog 4), and to restructure and reward staff, who are increasingly held accountable (blog 3). In some cases there is a

new building, and in many cases at least some refurbishment or refreshing of existing buildings (blog 1, blog 2).

Middle: Innovation and Transformation

As the story develops, schools speak of the uses of academy status to 'rebrand', to adopt a new ethos and set of values (blog 9), and to reposition themselves as entrepreneurial and innovative (blog 4, blog 7, blog 9). This might include the introduction of business links onto the governing body (blog 7), the use of new technologies (blog 2) or rewriting the curriculum (blog 3, blog 10). This can be achieved because they are benefitting from the support of a sponsor, and in some cases a MAT (blog 5, blog 11). This wider infrastructure enables them to not get "distracted" by back office functions (blog one). Schools can use their freedom to recruit additional staff. Across the posts, reference is made to the ways that academy status enables schools to do better for their most vulnerable students, for instance those in receipt of the pupil premium (blog 9), and those with complex needs (blog 5). Thus the morality of the dominant academies story is replicated across the posts.

Outcomes: Educational Utopia

Whatever the nature of these changes, it is crucial that they are depicted as being part of a turnaround narrative (Blair, 2005). These changes result in a rapid, linear and triumphant process of improvement and "transformation" (blog 4) whereby schools become high-achieving and aspirational. Improvement is centred on the dominant measure of attainment (blog 3), which is linked to higher educational standards and a social justice agenda where students' life chances are improved (blog 3, blog 4). Such improvements lead to increased popularity with parents, and these schools become oversubscribed (blog 3).

Super Academies and Super Heads

These outcomes are not a conclusion; instead the 'successful academy' is in a state of becoming, as success must be continually reaffirmed. In order for academies to fulfil their moral destiny, improvement must be maintained,

increased and shared. Once an academy has attended to its own success it is expected to be a catalyst for wider school improvement, as part of a “self-improving system” of schools (Gove, 2014a).

Successive governments have promoted the importance of partnerships between academies and other local schools (Blair, 2005; Gove, 2011). Under the Coalition government there was a focus on high performing academies supporting other schools to “transform” (Gove, 2011). The transformed school emerges as a “beacon of best practice” (Adonis, 2012b); a site where inspirational things are taking place, which can be shared locally and, in particularly good cases, nationally (blog 4, blog 9). This is positioned as an important part of academies’ social justice potential:

I want every child to benefit from the sort of education that young people get at schools like King Solomon Academy...Schools which are the real engines of social justice (Morgan, 2015b).

The truth that is carefully produced and maintained about academy schools means that they are held up as examples to other schools. They are therefore directly involved in the governance of success and failure, and the referential nature of distinction in English education. This is resulting in the emergence of a powerful network of educationalists. These are heads of outstanding schools who garner significant levels of power through a range of activities: leading MATs; holding regional and national strategic roles; training teachers; taking over ‘failing’ schools; engaging in research, philanthropy and profit-making activities such as educational consultancy (Junemann & Ball, 2012).

Across the history of the policy some schools have been repeatedly drawn on as examples, to the extent that they have gained a level of celebrity, such as Mossbourne Community Academy in Hackney (Kulz, 2017). As well as schools being celebrated, individuals attached to these schools have been able to garner a level of prestige and celebrity. Some have emerged as figureheads of the academy movement, endowed with special powers of

educational transformation which they must use to support other schools nationally. These ‘experts’ are positioned to observe and appraise the work of others (Ball, 2013). Honours lists illustrate a trend of Knighting academy heads, principles and sponsors (TES, 2015). Others have been able to gain employment through their reputation for academy success, including Sir Michael Wilshaw, former head of Mossbourne Community Academy, who became Ofsted’s Chief Inspector in 2012, and Lord John Nash, sponsor of Pimlico Academy, who became a member of The House of Lords in January 2013 and the Parliamentary under Secretary of State for schools. These figures are more likely to be men, which links to wider gender inequalities in educational leadership (Fuller, 2017).

Some of these celebrated figures are sponsors, who are expected to bring “drive” and a “willingness to innovate”, which can provide failing schools with a new “ethos” and “sense of purpose” (Blair, 2005). This is reinforced when the person in question comes with their own personal tale of succeeding against the odds (Kulz, 2017), and thus they embody the aspirational content of the academies policy. For example, academy sponsor Alec Reed has been praised for bringing his “entrepreneurial skills and expertise in leadership, innovation and enterprise [from his] successful recruitment business” which means his pupils are “more entrepreneurial and that enterprise underpins much of the curriculum (DfES website quoted in Beckett, 2007: 92).

This idealisation is repeated to form a parable: the super-head who took over and transformed a failing school in a deprived community. Just as governments have been keen to outline the opponents of academisation, to construct their antithesis – the academy hero - is another persuasive narrative feature. It provides another, non-governmental character to be ‘in the right’ and allows the government to link their claims to what is happening in ‘real’ schools and communities.

However such reputations and prestige are precarious, and based on the continued production of the data that counts (Simkin et al, 2015). People have been Knighted through their contributions to academies, but some have also been fired where an academy is underperforming (Parsons, 2012). In addition to the disenfranchisement of the local authority, head teachers and classroom teachers can be part of the collateral damage of the academisation of a failing school. This point is returned to in relation to Eastbank Academy in Chapters Eight and Nine.

A Common-Sense Utopia

I have unravelled the dominant academies narrative whereby academies are shaped into a “meaningful sequence” (Czarniawska, 2004: 32). This serves to ward off an array of potential discursive contestations. The utopian aspect of this narrative connects academy status with a set of moral implications. It perpetuates a truth that academisation is right and just in relation to failing schools in contexts of deprivation. It offers personal and emotive accounts of the necessity and abilities of the academy model and, in doing so, shapes what it means to be a successful school. This discourse is compelling because it produces academies through a powerful set of ideals including fairness, justice, opportunity and freedom.

Simultaneously, to counter the normativity of emotive stories of transformation, and the claim that ‘utopias’ are unattainable, a second narrative strand draws on the idea of an evidence base and the discourse of ‘what works’ (Simmons, 2015). These two narrative strands are combined through the use of case studies and exemplars, which provide both a personal insight and the ‘proof’ from ‘the ground’ that academy status works. They combine the demand for a policy to be persuasive and embedded in the science of school reform.

This is how academies have been shaped in relation to the takeover of ‘failing’ schools in areas of deprivation. The meaning and causes of school failure are taken for granted in this discourse, and ‘failure’ provides the

foundation for the discourse and the means of making it compelling. Successive governments have crafted an “inevitability narrative” about academy status improving the failing school, which functions to limit alternatives (Thomson, 2013: 173). This makes it important to consider the representations that dominate here, and what is being both enabled and constrained through discourse.

Section Three: Crafting and Sustaining Representations

The remainder of this chapter provides a closer consideration of the representations that are present in the assertion that academies liberate and improve the most disadvantaged schools. Particular representations are integral to the academies narrative, and they venture a set of taken-for-granted assumptions about young people, schools and communities in contexts of poverty. In part this is achieved through the careful characterisation of key actors. There is the missionary zeal of the educational heroes who have embraced the academy policy, and the success stories of schools that have become beacons of best practice. Meanwhile, those who question the policy are depicted as the enemies of progress and constitute a barrier to the realisation of a schooling utopia. In framing academies as being about schools in deprived communities, this policy is able to make a case for social justice, which simultaneously makes particular depictions of young people, schools and communities necessary and acceptable.

Academies were originally positioned as a powerful redistributive tool and many of the first Labour academies benefitted from expensive, state-of-the-art school buildings through the Building Schools for The Future programme (Beckett, 2007). These early academies were expected to receive 2 million pounds from their sponsor, and this philanthropy was an important way of gaining “moral legitimacy” for the academies policy (Junemann & Ball, 2012: 32). However, when it became apparent that few sponsors were willing to donate money, financial contributions were gradually phased out and the Labour government committed to providing the shortfall (Beckett, 2007).

The politics of redistribution are complex here. New Labour painted the beneficiaries of this investment as worthy causes. They were schools in high poverty areas. Whilst this additional spending may have been seen as supporting these schools to have opportunities equal to those of schools in more affluent areas, there were inconsistencies with New Labour's own goal of equalising opportunity. If community poverty was the benchmark of need, there were many more schools in need of redistributive justice (Fraser, 1996) than those that were reached in those expensive early days of the academies programme. The desire to make the policy work, which may have inspired the high spending on the programme (Beckett, 2007), meant that this policy was, in redistributive terms, socially just for a minority of schools but unjust for many others.

The politics of redistribution are intimately linked with issues of representation and recognition. To warrant the redistributive justice of early academy status, these schools had to be represented as 'cases for help'. This process gave particular groups a basis on which to demand a necessary redistribution of resources in their favour. Yet in exchange for these resources, particular young people, schools and communities had to be portrayed in ungenerous ways (Fraser, 1996). From the origins of this policy, announcing the need for academy status for schools in the least affluent areas of the country has been akin to announcing deficit. To justify this intervention and the redistributive justice that comes with it, a school - its inhabitants and its community - has to be framed as lacking. Where a case is being made for the academisation of a 'failing' school, it is common practice to refer to the school's surrounding community as part of the process of representation. Deficit is not contained within the school, it also contaminates and is contaminated by, the local community.

Post-2010 the Coalition Government removed the, albeit partial and flawed, process of redistribution that had accompanied the original policy. Unjust representations have continued, through an emphasis on what is lacking in particular communities, but without any recognition of the relationships

between poverty and educational inequality that I discussed in Chapter Two. The financial investment of a sponsor has disappeared and the contribution made by the government to new academies is now £25,000 (EFA, 2016).

In both cases, the academies discourse perpetuates a social justice framework within which particular depictions of young people, teachers, schools and communities come to light, are given meaning and are rendered acceptable and truthful. The academies discourse ‘reads’ these people and places, and their circumstances, in particular ways and constructs values and motives around their experiences and actions. Representations of ignorance, low aspiration and inflexibility are central to this picture of deficit. Individual units comprise the overall identity of school ‘failure’. Therefore, in announcing school failure what are also being shaped are the underachieving student and the underperforming teacher. These characters are subtly weaved into the plot through taken-for-granted characterisations. These ungenerous depictions have become crucial to the way academies are shaped as objects for thought. They are the basis for the internal logic of the narrative, and they function to make the story compelling because it is through academisation that these schools can transform into high achieving institutions which do great things for children growing up in poverty. This sets up a process where particular forms of negative and careless recognition can become disassociated from the experience of ‘having less’, and begin to take on a life of their own (Fraser, 1996). For the remainder of this chapter I consider what political conditions have made these statements possible and acceptable, and how they are sustained.

Sustaining Representations

I would like to explore not only these discourses but also the will that sustains them and the strategic intention that supports them (Foucault, 1976: 8).

A Foucauldian analysis takes the truth of the academies policy to be a “function of what can be said, written or thought” about academies at a particular point in time (McHoul & Grace, 1993: 33). Through an exploration

of what enables and sustains the academies narrative and the representations outlined above, I make two points. First I consider the educational systems of governance that sustain this narrative. Second I consider the way this narrative has been crafted to mesh with a wider repertoire of social policy narratives that have gained momentum during the lifespan of academies (Czarniawska, 2004), and which are flourishing in austere times (Youdell & McGimpsey, 2015).

As Chapter Two outlined, education policies govern the work of schools in England by constituting and limiting the meanings of success and failure and by perpetuating particular definitions, values, and rituals (Hewitt, 2009). Performance tables, benchmark standards and Ofsted inspection judgements are the “technologies of power” through which failure is governed and through which a school becomes ripe for academisation (Foucault, 1996: 208). I interrogate the status of the ‘failing’ school and the mechanisms used for denoting and measuring such failure since these are labels that present as neutral but exist through a set of normative judgements. Certain words are selected over others to do particular kinds of work to shape schools. In connecting the sponsored academy with its ability to transform failing schools, academy status becomes a tool for the governance of failure. The techniques of power which operate here are “validated” within wider “systems of knowledge” (Ball, 2013: 13) and a wider determinism, for instance about the role of the market in raising educational standards (Finlayson, 2011), which shapes the possibilities for thinking about schools and communities. These construct a web of self-sustaining truths about educational success, of which academies are one element.

Narrative Meshing

The academies narrative is sustained through its ability to mesh with other influential narratives of welfare state reform, which speak of disadvantaged individuals and communities, and the institutions that serve them (Needham 2011: 60). The academies narrative is not the only one that is told about the poorest communities in England. It is part of a wider map of

narratives and truths, not only about schools and schooling, but also more generally about the worth and limits of particular people, and how both could be improved. Thus in addition to having a level of internal coherence, the academies narrative forges an external coherence with other policy narratives.

The Individualising of Blame

Austerity has been conducive to the strengthening of narratives of individual blame, deficit, and “bad behaviour” (Cameron, 2011). This has been shaped as a strong explanatory factor for why so many people’s day-to-day lives have become tougher, particularly since the 2007 global financial crisis, and the welfare retrenchment that followed (Clarke & Newman, 2012; Binder, 2013). Academies accord with neoliberal logic, which situates the individual – school, teacher, student, parent – as the site of risk, blame and improvement. The state’s responsibility is to ensure individuals have the appropriate freedom and access to resources to fulfil their potential. Once these are provided it is the responsibility of the individual to ensure they are a useful and productive member of the knowledge economy (Finlayson, 2011). Under this logic “if you haven’t ‘made it’, then that is a position you have justly earned for yourself” (Finlayson, 2011:172). In schooling, parental choice and school autonomy work together as policies to absolve the state of responsibility (Miller, 2011).

This discursive presentation of an equal playing field hinges on the idea that class is no longer a relevant concept for social analysis (Finlayson, 2011). New Labour were intent on tackling a culture of “snobbery”, focusing on the “equal worth of all” rather than “privilege, class or background” (Blair, 1999 quoted in Finlayson, 2011:167). The aim was not to end elitism, but instead to ensure that people earn, rather than inherit, their elitist position through hard work (Francis, Mills & Lupton, 2017). The Coalition and Conservative governments have continued this narrative about equal opportunities, hard work and personal responsibility (Cameron, 2011).

Throughout the lifespan of academies, governments have embraced micro level understandings of poverty including “behavioural economics, evolutionary psychology and neuroscience in the effort to govern individuals’ behaviours and ensure that they become appropriately aspirational citizens” (Finlayson, 2011:168; Johnson, 2013). Prominent social policy narratives across this period have increased demand for people who are hardest hit by poverty to take greater responsibility, and to be motivated and aspirational (Walkerdine, 2011). Character and worth are the basis for explanations and justifications of inequality (Ball, 2013). Under David Cameron, The Conservative Party produced a “broken society” narrative (Social Justice Policy Group, 2006), which told of the “slow-motion moral collapse that has taken place in parts of our country” (Cameron, 2011). This painted young people in some areas of the country as feral, immoral and in need of tough love, communities as deficient, and the schools that serve them as failing:

Do we have the determination to confront the irresponsibility. Selfishness. Behaving as if your choices have no consequences. Children without fathers. Schools without discipline. Reward without effort. Crime without punishment. Rights without responsibilities. Communities without control (Cameron, 2011).

The idea that the institutions that work with the most vulnerable young people in society are not good enough is prevalent beyond the teaching profession, for instance it has been vehemently applied to social work (Munro, 2004).

Under this logic, once failing schools benefit from the liberation and sponsorship of academy status, they have everything they require to be able to transform. Perhaps one of the roles fulfilled by school exemplars is that through them academies are visibly shaped as mechanisms for handing power back to the local: to schools, teachers and communities. This means that if particular outcomes are not met, the blame can more easily be situated at that local level. Academies are part of this discourse of blame. They are part of a policy culture that seeks to regulate and change unproductive and risky behaviours. This operates through what Piketty

(2015) terms “meritocratic extremism” (p. 7); the unequivocal pronouncement of an equal playing field.

What this also facilitates is comparison:

We gave successful schools the freedom to chart their own future - and they seized the opportunity to shine. They show us what is possible. Their success inspires others. But these bright spots also provide an ever-stronger contrast with the continuing failure of others. And that's why some of our opponents have a problem with encouraging success and unlocking potential. Because the contrast is uncomfortable, and because the stellar successes undermine traditional excuses (Morgan, 2015b).

Since 2010 there has been an explicit government aim to enable and encourage all schools to become academies. Now the ‘failing’ school in an area of deprivation that is turned into a sponsored academy, exists alongside high-performing converter academies, in an increasingly complex referential web of distinction.

‘No Excuses’ Narrative

This emphasis on the individual as the site of blame and improvement connects with another ‘meshable’ narrative that is present in social policy discourse: that poverty should not be used as an excuse for ‘failure’ because this would suggest it is acceptable to have lower aspirations for children from poorer backgrounds (Blunkett, 2000; Gove, 2012b). This argument has been perpetuated by successive governments as a way of censoring schools who draw on poverty as part of their analysis of student performance. It is regularly accompanied by examples of case study schools in poor contexts that have ‘succeeded’ (Kulz, 2017). The inherent contradiction is that academy status is sold as a tool for fixing educational challenges that arise in contexts of poverty, whilst limiting poverty-based explanations of educational outcomes.

This connects with a wider set of social policy narratives that have gathered momentum across the lifespan of the academies policy. These have obscured experiences of poverty with narratives of deficit and blame. The discursive

space to draw on poverty as an explanation for life chances and outcomes has been replaced by a set of negative portrayals of people who are most affected by poverty and most reliant on the state. Dorling (2014b) describes New Labour's approach to welfare as "populist and punitive", based on the presentation of benefit claimants as "feckless" (p. 90). The Conservative party have continued these depictions, and this has been linked to a "growing hardness" in public attitudes to those in receipt of benefits (Dorling, 2014b: 93; Binder, 2013). Dorling (2014b) notes that as the gap between the rich and poor has grown, the language used to refer to the poor has become harsher to justify cuts to state benefits. There is a trend in government and popular discourses, which projects a severe, cynical, and mocking view of poor people. This has been produced through stories about the poor being lazier than the rich and being thieves of taxpayer money:

For years we've had a system that encourages the worst in people - that incites laziness, that excuses bad behaviour, that erodes self-discipline, that discourages hard work... Some of the worst aspects of human nature tolerated, indulged - sometimes even incentivised - by a state and its agencies that in parts have become literally de-moralised (Cameron, 2011).

This ventures a particular 'other' and in doing so it draws on familiar fears about the unproductive drain on society, and the social evils that are prevalent and replicated in certain communities. This has produced a level of "resentment...and even disgust at those we could imagine to be beneath us" (Finlayson, 2011: 171). This disgust plays a pivotal role in depictions of working-class life (Lawler, 2005), and has been explored through the characterisation of the 'chav' (Jones, 2011; Finlayson, 2011), and "revolting Families" (Jensen & Tyler, 2015). Young people are said to emerge from this context with a "poverty of ambition, a poverty of discipline, a poverty of soul" (Gove, 2011). Sociologists have chartered the experiences of poor communities and people against this backdrop of resentment (McKenzie, 2015; Skeggs, 1997). They highlight the oppressive nature of these representations, where the problem is "not poverty but the poor" (Finlayson, 2011: 68; Greenbaum, 2015). The stigma that comes with these forms of

distinction has been found to be inherently damaging (Skeggs, 1997; Reay, 2001). It constitutes a form of mis-recognition, because through it particular identities are being “pervasively downgraded”, which means some groups “face obstacles in the quest for esteem that are not encountered by others” (Fraser, 1996).

Research illustrates that living standards have fallen since 2000, and fallen most for those with the least (Dorling, 2014a: 93; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). This may explain the endurance of deficit discourses. Since, “concealing poverty becomes ever more difficult in an age of high and increasingly unequal consumption” (Dorling, 2014b: 95), the government needs new methods for obscuring poverty and for crafting it into something more acceptable. Meritocracy is a more palatable narrative than poverty.

Academies are one of the ways that poverty becomes hidden or legitimised, within the institution of education. In Foucauldian terms, ‘poverty’ is something that is carefully managed and constrained through the academies discourse. Here I am taking-up Foucault’s point that in order to gain mastery over something it might first be important to control it at the level of language (Foucault, 1976). Foucault argued that:

There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized...there is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses (Foucault, 1976: 27).

Part of Foucault’s method of attending to discursive rules was to pay attention to the details of what is said, what is unsaid, what is forbidden, what is skirted around and what is “consigned...to a shadow existence” (Foucault, 1976: 35). This raises questions for the analysis of the discursive regulation of poverty within the academies discourse, which I turn to now.

The experience of poverty, and its impact on individuals, schools and communities, is reconstituted through a set of rules and constraints, which

manage how poverty is spoken of within the academies discourse (Gove, 2012b). These discursive rules dictate that poverty cannot be used as an excuse for school 'failure'. The utopian discourse of freedom, autonomy, liberation and responsibility serves to stifle considerations of the ways poverty is experienced within schools and communities on a daily basis. Poverty is consigned to the discursive shadows, ensuring that any harmful experiences of having less are replaced by representations of rectifiable deficit.

In the educational context, what is pushed to the discursive sidelines is the idea that 'failing' schools are experiencing wider problems which are associated with poverty as a material experience of having less. This ignores the educational literature that highlights the ways learning is intimately bound with other experiences like feeling safe, happy and calm, being healthy, and being well-fed (Raffo et al, 2009). Similarly the powerful effects of distinction and stigma, which accompany class associations, are to have no impact on educational experiences and outcomes. This ignores the structural arguments for educational inequality that were discussed in Chapter Two (Thomson, 2002; Greenbaum, 2015). Structural inequalities are reframed through the prism of individual deficit, repositioning blame (Cameron, 2011). In focusing on what an individual lacks, the analysis of social and economic contexts can be replaced by a consideration of how the individual can be changed to rectify their deficiencies. In the context of academies this individual lack can be fixed or improved through the improved aspirations and social mobility enabled by academisation.

Class is important here because deficit is conveyed through a set of referential cultural indicators, which draw on popular contemporary cultural representations and understandings of those with less (Reay, 2004). Class can be seen "a mile off...in dress, speech, manner and numerous other ways of being and behaving" (Walkerdine, 2011: 258). Poverty occupies the discursive shadows but we can still see its shape through a set of referential 'classed' terms that are drawn on such as 'inner city' and 'low aspiration'

(Skeggs, 1997). These are loaded terms, and they denote a wider politics of distinction in contemporary Britain. This is how class markers and positions are inherent in the policy, in ways that render class “inexplicit but pervasive” (Ball, 2003b: 11). Academies plays into the key class boundaries that have crystallised in England; both between the middle and working-classes, and between the deserving and undeserving working-class (Savage, 2015).

The way that class permeates the academies discourse is conveyed most powerfully through the attempts to shape academies in relation to the fee-paying school. The suggestion embedded here is that certain communities have lower aspirations, which are intergenerational, and which means that parents lack the sense of what is right for their children. The focus of problem formulation is thus on a set of cultural factors that are deemed to be lacking (Fraser, 1996). This is how the experience of having less in a material sense is turned into having less in a more abstract sense, for instance less morals, values and aspirations, or less of the right versions of these. The academies policy has been fundamental to this assertion, and part of the way academies have been shaped as objects for thought is through the idea that they enable a form of mobility and that they promote higher aspirations. In this context transformation is both necessary and socially just. But in this narrative social justice takes on a particular, and impoverished form, because it centres on becoming ‘something other’ than the self (Reay, 2001). Part of the process of transformation that takes place is a transformation away from a “miserable existence” (Adonis, 2012:241) into a more middle-class one. This highlights the “continuing powerful allure of mobility fantasies” in education and wider society (Kulz, 2017:101). It suggests that the academies policy fits with a wider policy goal that is about altering “people’s sense of themselves” (Finlayson, 2011: 167).

The links to independent schools and business are key aspects of this shaping. It is not that successive governments have thought it possible or desirable for all schools to become like independent schools, rather, that academies have been inflected with the flavour of the independent school,

and of the business world, in order to have greater control over the activities and aspirations of schools. In educational terms, the fee-paying school and the failing school in a poor community is one of the most poignant forms of comparison that can be made. Academies are part of what Finlayson calls “the culture of class”, which:

tells each of us that dignity and worth are not universal properties, but due only to some...We assign value and status to all sorts of things (appearance, accent, possessions, postcode, holiday destinations, clothes) and then attempt to possess or display these things so that others may see them and grant us status (Finlayson, 2011:170)

Academisation is an opportunity for the school, its pupils, and its community to buy into what is framed as a middle-class education, and therefore to become something better. This is a way of demarcating superiority through systems of inclusion and exclusion: of what you are, what you are not, and what you should be. Class is inherently relational and referential; we are all enfolded in webs of discursive and material distinction (Savage, 2015). It is a way of explicating sameness and otherness, and of suggesting our worth and value in relation to others (Skeggs, 1997). Academies promote a vision that ties in with prevalent ideas of those people, those jobs and aspirations which are “worthy of respect” and recognition (Finlayson, 2011:172). Academy status is the latest way of acquiring competitive edge in a context of global competition. It is a new discursive space for revitalising the truth of social mobility and meritocracy. This suggests that as well as understanding academies in terms of what they are not – failing comprehensive schools – researchers must also try to understand what they are trying to be like. This is about unravelling the “conditions necessary” if the academy school “is to exist in relation to other objects, if it is to establish with them relations of resemblance, proximity, distance, difference, transformation” (Foucault, 1969: 49).

Poverty alleviation centres on the aspiration “to leave, to do better which is supported by community role models and innovative pedagogies” (Walkerdine, 2011: 257). The academies discourse is a space where

misrecognition thrives and serves the wider misrecognition and othering taking place in social policy discourse. McKenzie notes the way people living in poverty balance the array stereotypes that are perpetuated about them, “absorbing them into who they are, and how they want to be seen, but also in what they do” (McKenzie, 2015: 112). This is concerning as popular narratives are far more likely to define the poor in terms of what they don’t have, rather than what they do have. These narratives are constructed about them, but they are not partners in these representations (Czarniawska, 2004). They are denied “the status of full partners in social interaction simply as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of interpretation and evaluation in whose construction they have not equally participated and that disparage their distinctive characteristics or the distinctive characteristics assigned to them” and represent them as “comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem (Fraser, 1996; 24-6).

A student whose material experience of poverty has impacted on their schooling “is harmful”, their “very existence constitutes a threat” to this carefully mapped out truth:

The game consists not of recognizing this person as a subject having the right to speak but of abolishing him, as interlocutor, from any possible dialogue; and his final objective will be not to come as close as possible to a difficult truth but to bring about the triumph of the just cause he has been manifestly upholding from the beginning. The polemicist relies on a legitimacy that his adversary is by definition denied (Foucault, 2003: 19).

These ungenerous choices about how to represent inequality and poverty are important because they determine the level and nature of support that is provided for young people who are having a difficult time in school. In a context where narratives of ‘individual blame’ and ‘poverty is not an excuse’ are combined, the support available to these young people is “likely to be very limited” (Parsons, 2005: 189)

Conclusion

This chapter has deconstructed successive governments' discourses about 'failing' school in contexts of poverty that become academies. There are a number of findings that have pertinence for the overall argument I make in this thesis. First, that academies are shaped as objects for thought through a compelling narrative of the common-sense utopia. Second that this narrative is sustained and given meaning through systems of educational governance. These play a crucial role is demarcating school failure and thus in making the case for academisation. Third, that this narrative is sustained and given further shape through its ability to mesh with a wider web of social policy discourses, particularly those that are flourishing in austere times, which frame those living in poverty through notions of deficit. I have drawn out important symmetries between the academies discourse and the assumptions that underpin wider social policy narratives. The example of academies serves as a reminder that schools are intimately linked with other social and welfare institutions. Analyses of education policies that consider the wider social policy context may create opportunities to question and challenge, in more coherent and joined-up ways, the narratives that are produced about people living in poverty and those who work to help them.

This analysis has made visible the discursive logic of the sponsored academy school. It highlights how academies, as a discursive site, are partly about the state's role in the management of poverty and the governance of failure. This discourse speaks of transformation and social justice, whilst simultaneously representing individuals, schools, and communities as lacking. It provides an education that is shaped in the image of the fee-paying school whilst limiting the ways poverty can be discussed. It positions itself as a liberator, whilst ensuring greater centralised control of the failing school through the discursive tools of 'blame' and 'responsibility,' which are supported through technologies of educational governance. It locates the school as an equalising force in highly unequal times (Pickett & Wilkinson, 2009; Dorling, 2014a).

The texts analysed here are texts of power, through which “new organisational sensibilities, values, perspectives, interests and policy narratives are brought into play and given legitimacy” (Ball, 2009a: 102). These narratives suggest that academies have strengthened existing “ways of knowing and...powerful interests” (Gunter & McGinity, 2014: 221). The dominant narrative about academies relies on a particular view of the educational landscape, the purpose and function of education, the things that make a difference in schools and what motivates school staff. This version is not the only version that could have been presented, and likewise this policy response is not the only possibility (Bacchi, 2012). Instead the academies story is shaped through the perspective of the internal narrator – the nation state – in ways that serve a wider ideological purpose (Thomson, 2013). In doing so, successive governments have limited alternatives and placed “limitations upon the scope of contemporary political thinking” (Finlayson, 2003: 77; Butler, 1990). These discourses may impact on the values that are available and prioritised in practice contexts (Adams St Pierre, 2000).

By exploring how language has been put to work in the construction of academies, this chapter paves the way for an exploration of what this has achieved in a failing school that becomes an academy (Adams St. Pierre, 2013). I analyse the implications of this analysis for a school operating in a context of poverty when poverty is constrained through a set of discursive rules and technologies of governance. The rest of this thesis explores how this discourse operated, and was shaped, in Eastbank Academy. I explore the “local solutions” (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003: 4) to some of the dissonances that are perceived between these truths and the located production of academy status. The focus is not on the truth of aspects of the academies narrative, but rather on the work that it does in crafting the academy school and academy subjects, within the wider context of educational governance.

Chapter Six: A Portrait of Eastbank Academy

In this chapter I describe Eastbank Academy (2014-15 academic year) so that the analysis that follows can be spatially and temporally located, and so that Eastbank can be understood to be the type of school that the academies policy speaks of and to. Whilst writing it I have been attuned to the need to adhere to the ethical demands of confidentiality, and I have therefore obscured some details of the school and community. This portrait has been pieced together from several sources. It takes account of the annual school census, which produces the school's external, numerical identity through government mandated data collection (DfE, 2015a). Although this data is a normative construction, which propels a selective image of schooling success, it is crucial for understanding why Eastbank is a 'case for help' through the logic of the academies discourse. This data has an impact on how school staff understand and evaluate their practices. It is implicated in practices that are attuned to the school's 'data image'.

Data are imperfect, but potentially useful, shorthand for signalling some of the experiences of young people in a school. Eligibility for FSM remains a flawed, yet widely used, proxy indicator for deprivation (Hobbs & Vignoles, 2007; Ilie et al, 2017), which feeds into pupil premium eligibility. Similarly, SEN data might indicate how well young people are able to access the curriculum and the forms of assessment that will be used to judge them and their school. To place Eastbank within its local community context I include data from the 2011 census, and the school's analysis of pupils enrolled in the 2014-15 academic year, using the 2010 Indices of Multiple Deprivation data (DCLG, 2011). This is combined with the publically available set of Ofsted reports on the school, which are also problematised in the literature, particularly in relation to the reliability of Ofsted lesson judgements and the pressure that ensues from the inspection process (Waldegrave & Simons, 2014; Perryman, 2009). This data is part of the apparatus used to denote school failure, and is crucial for understanding how the school positions itself.

This numerical and official-external portrait of the school and its surrounding community is combined with a consideration of the qualitative experience of the school as presented by those who occupy it, and remake it on a daily basis. Here I draw on how staff and students spoke of the school, and shaped it through language, stories, photographs, and their actions and movements. I add to this my own experiences in the school, since I was a transient part of its materiality and social interaction, and since the version of the school presented here is the product of my observations, interactions, interpretations, reflections and writing. I draw on the memories and views of those who used to attend the school as pupils, or who are passing visitors to the school, such as parents, academy sponsors and local authority representatives.

In part, the challenge here and throughout this research has been to locate where 'the school' is. That is, where does the school begin and end? Buildings alone do not constitute a school (Stables, 2003). Rather, if the school is:

the sum total of anything, it is the sum total of perceptions and experiences of it. Such perceptions and experiences are certainly refined through the school's social networks, but these are themselves indefinite and elusive, linking those who work in the institution, those who have personal connections with it and those who know it only at second or third hand (Stables, 2003: 896).

I adopt a broad and fluid conception of 'the field', which extends beyond the school gates to cover the local community and, at times, wider city context (Cairns, 2013). The focus is on what we can learn about the school by going beyond numerical representations to recognise that what also constitutes the school is a shifting amalgamation of a range of entities, attending to the school as a discursive, material, visual, audio and affective domain.

Eastbank by Numbers

Eastbank Academy is an 11-16 secondary school in the North of England. The school has an intake of two-thirds its capacity. The proportion of students

supported at School Action Plus or with an Education and Health Care Plan is in line with the national average. The proportion of students who have English as an additional language (EAL) needs is below the national average. The majority of students designate as White British (83% in the 2014-15 academic year), although many other ethnic groups are represented in small numbers. The proportion of students for whom the academy receives pupil premium funding is over 50%, which is well above the national average of 29%. Chapter Two highlighted the complex and stubborn links between poverty, achievement and experiences in school.

A review of the past five years of school data reveals an unsettled picture, rather than the sustained and linear progress imagined in policy narratives of academisation. The school received its best ever results just prior to becoming an academy, which took it above the government's floor standard. However, historically it has been under this level, and it has since struggled to maintain this level. Across the last five years the school's results have always been below the national average and, except for the year it received its best ever results, it has been below the LA average. During my fieldwork the school received an Ofsted rating of 'Requires Improvement'. Academic progress, literacy and numeracy, and low-level disruption were raised as concerns. The combination of these aspects means that this school met government criteria for forced sponsored academy status at the time of the study. However, the school took this decision of its own accord in 2012.

A Context of Multiple Deprivation

In addition to school census data, the school has analysed the local community context using student postcodes (2014-15 cohort) and The Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) information from the 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation (Eastbank Academy, 2014; DCLG, 2011). This provides data on a broad sweep of deprivation indicators at a small geographical unit, of between 400 and 1200 households. The results sort these geographical units into 10 equal groups. Over 77% of Eastbank's pupils were in the three most deprived bands nationally for health and disability, local crime levels,

Education, skills and training, employment, income, and for their overall index of multiple deprivation score.

According to the last census, almost 30% of local people reported having no formal qualifications and 65% were economically active and evenly distributed across the employment categories listed. This data reveals something of the community context of the school and its students, and the nature of the challenges facing some of them. A recurring point in the analysis that follows is the impact of multiple deprivation on day-to-day life in this community and in its schools, within an LA that has recently ranked in the top 10 most deprived LA districts in the country.

The complex performance trajectory of the school, and the wider social issues it is contending with, can be further detailed by considering the presence of particular neighbourhood resources: community infrastructure; local employment; the voluntary efforts of parents; the age and locality of the school facilities; and factions in the local area. This encourages attention to the “thisness” of the school (Thomson, 2002; 73), that is the uniqueness that comes from the particular composition of the school at any point in time. Schools are formed through a:

distinctive blend of people, happenings, resources, issues, narratives, truths, knowledges and networks, in and through which the combined effects of power-saturated geographies and histories are made manifest...The school as a place is embedded in context and cannot be detached from it. It is simultaneously ‘context derived’ and ‘context generative’ (Thomson, 2002: 73).

Paying attention to the ‘thisness’ of a school may help to maintain some of the distinctiveness that it loses when classified as disadvantaged (Thomson, 2002).

I travelled to and from the school by bus and wrote up notes in a nearby café. These interactions provided an extension to my interactions in the school, developing my sense of the local environment and community. My frequent bus journeys provided snap-shots of where the key stopping points

and attractions are in the community. It highlighted Eastbank’s position in relation to important city infrastructure; shops, leisure facilities, cultural facilities, and higher and further education institutions. At peak times, the bus was occupied by many Eastbank students, and students from other nearby schools, as well as members of the local community. It was a site where ways of showing politeness and respect seemed to be mutually understood and regularly practiced; keeping noise to a minimum, leaving easily accessible seats for older members of the public and saying thank you to the bus driver were all frequently observed.

The Eastbank area is comprised of low-rise council housing, intersected by green spaces such as playing fields and parks. The area is “sparse” and there “isn’t much to do” for young people (Fiedlnotes, TS). There is a community centre, a children’s centre and a well-equipped council-run leisure centre within a thirty-minute (walking) radius of the school. The 2011 census shows that 65% of household spaces in the Eastbank area are social housing, compared with 18% nationally. The area around the school is more ethnically diverse than the UK population as a whole (67% self designated as White, compared with 86% nationally), but is less ethnically diverse than other areas of the LA (2011 census).



Photograph one: taken by a year 8 pupil to show how close the bus stop is to the school entrance.

In the local community there are few noticeable businesses, but the school is connected to the city centre by several bus routes. There are a couple of convenience shops in close proximity to the school, where students congregate before and after school. There is a shopping precinct within walking distance, with a supermarket, café, and pharmacy. Cultural spaces such as museums, galleries, and theatres all require a trip into the city centre. There are “geographies of distinction” in the city (Thomson, 2002: 20). House prices and the indices of multiple deprivation converge to reduce the desirability of the Eastbank area. Parents explained the local dynamics of desirability to me, positioning Eastbank as less desirable than a neighbouring area, yet not one of the city’s ‘notoriously violent areas’.

The Eastbank area is typical of the wider LA context, which contains many areas that score as having high and multiple deprivations. The LA is surrounded by a county context of much lower deprivation. The city, like many others, has lost much of its former industry, which contributes to unemployment and, in turn, economic insecurity and poverty (Thomson, 2002).

Eastbank by Reputation

Eastbank’s has a reputation for being a difficult schooling context. Staff told me that the school and surrounding area are associated with gang activity and the school is associated with a history of poor behaviour and violence. One member of staff told me that the leaving present from her previous school was “a bullet proof vest and some shin pads”. There was wide recognition amongst the staff that things have changed in recent years and that this reputation is no longer justified:

It has a poor reputation which is a bit unfair because it is based on the school 10 or 20 years ago. The students are not like people expect. (Field notes, TS).

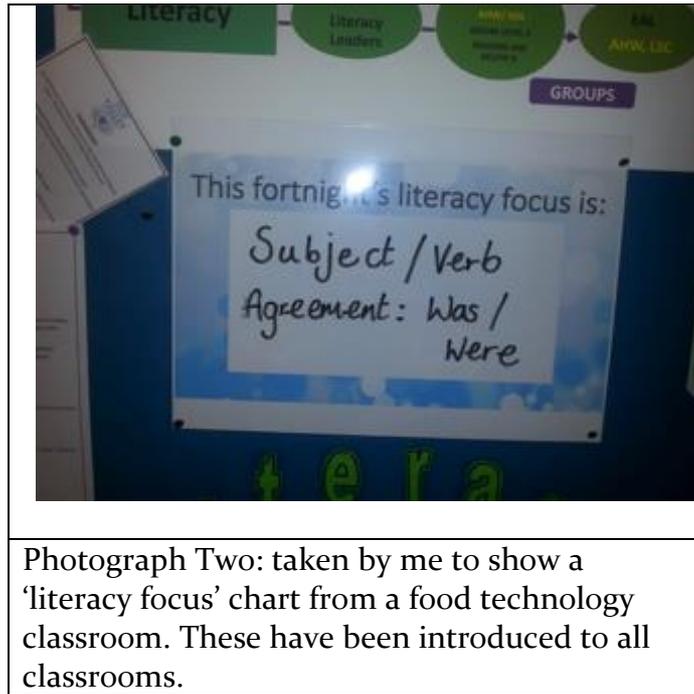
Former students who had returned to the school as mentors spoke of the alteration in the school since they had attended it:

I think the issue is the school serves quite a disadvantaged area potentially...And I think with that you've got families that have been to Eastbank and they're staying here and they don't move out of the area so you've got this concentration of 'well I went to Eastbank it was crap' kind of thing, 'why should it be any different now'. I think that's the same if you apply that to any brand and I think it's very difficult to shake off (Focus group, FS).

This local history and the stories and images of the school nested within it, combined with the lack of government-recognised improvements in data, may work together to maintain a negative image of the school.

Eastbank Students

Eastbank students are grouped into two bands based on their level of achievement on arrival at the school. This informs subsequent setting in some lessons. The school has a small group of pupils who have low reading ages, making it difficult for them to access parts of the curriculum. Two students in the latest year 7 intake were working at above the national average on entry; the government expectation is that a third of the year group will be working at this level. In the 2014-15 academic year, 32% of year 7 pupils had a reading age of below 9.5 years (compared to their biological age of 11 or 12). Additional provision is in place for these students in the form of peer-reading strategies and literacy interventions. There is a small 'nurture' group, providing highly structured, specialised literacy teaching for pupils who arrive with a reading age of between 5 and 9 years. Staff perceived low reading ages to be a significant barrier to student learning across the curriculum. There were attempts to embed literacy across all subjects, and to create a culture where all teachers took responsibility for improving literacy. Photograph Two illustrates a new school policy to have a fortnightly literacy focus across all subjects, which teachers review with their students.



Photograph Two: taken by me to show a 'literacy focus' chart from a food technology classroom. These have been introduced to all classrooms.

In the same year 7 group, Eastbank had 40 students who arrived with a national curriculum level of 4c or below, which the government has designated as below the expected level of achievement. In year 11 there are ten students who cannot access the GCSE English curriculum and are instead taking functional literacy qualifications. The educational literature highlights literacy as a key “platform on which much curricular endeavor is built” (Kellett & Dar, 2007: 2; McCoy, 2013).

As well as having a proportion of students who are struggling on entry to the school, several teachers reported a long-standing difficulty with getting pupils to do independent learning and extended writing. This was observed in lessons, where there was sometimes a reluctance to search for answers in reference materials. In internet-based research tasks a common practice was to copy and paste large amounts of text from web pages. Both of these practices worried and frustrated teachers.

The school was praised in its most recent Ofsted inspection for the level of care provided for students. Many different interventions take place in the school. Some students are receiving support with literacy, others with progress across the national curriculum subjects, and others with their

behaviour and engagement levels. A group of students with high levels of need receive intensive support and resources, including in-class TA support and regular liaison with home and external agencies. During my time in the school I attended a multi-agency meeting consisting of the school Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), the senior teaching assistant in the school, a LA educational psychologist and an LA behaviour support worker. It took the team 3.5 hours to discuss and plan for 13 students.

Historically there has been a problem with persistent absenteeism (PA), where students have more than ten half-day absences in a half term. Although the PA level has gradually declined from around 170 to 30-40 over the last six years, Eastbank continues to battle against this every year and pride themselves on this area of their work. They have a '100% club' to reward full attendance each academic year.

The Student Centre



Photographs three and four: Taken by a year 8 student who, during our mobile interview, became interested in why the student centre was closed.

There is an integrated student support centre in the school which combines various types of welfare and pastoral support: SEN; a visiting school nurse; behaviour support; attendance support; safeguarding; careers advice; AP; and fair access. This centre is run by a group of teachers and support staff who are responsible for liaising with external agencies. During my time in the school there was always a steady flow of student traffic through the support centre, with students seeking out particular members of staff and

telling of specific events, difficulties and misfortunes. There were usually some students seated in the centre who were either writing incident statements, a common practice for sorting out disagreements between students, or completing work after being sent out of/leaving a lesson. Three students were enrolled in the school's new in-house AP programme, which was based in the student centre.

Rules and Discipline

The student centre is a disciplinary space in the school. It is where students who are 'on report' take their cards to be checked and signed at the end of the day. It is where students sit if they are sent out of lessons or are involved in incidents. There were other important disciplinary spaces in the school. The school gates at the beginning and end of school, and the playground and lunch areas, were monitored by staff. Weekly year group assemblies were spaces where silence and full school uniform were expected, and where I witnessed older students being told off for talking. A year 7 girl informed me of the codes that managed the limited scope uniformed students have to express autonomy over their appearance. Nail varnish, acrylic nails, and "light foundation, mascara and light eye-shadow" were permitted. Lip-gloss was ok "as long as it's not bright" and boys can wear their hair how they like "as long as it's not too crazy, like bright green".

The Building

The reception of the school does not depend on an intercom system, although access to the rest of the school site is via reception during school hours, ensuring all visitors make themselves known. This saved me from the experience I have encountered at other local schools of finding it quite difficult to get to the school reception, sometimes waiting for some time to be buzzed in. It instead means that any waiting is done in the school reception, allowing visitors to see what is on display there, and the other interactions that take place.

In reception, visitors are greeted by trophy cabinets and a TV screen illustrating recent (not live) tweets from the school’s twitter account. Flyers describing the latest lunchtime clubs are placed on a coffee table, and there is always the latest copy of the school newsletter. It looks like a school, which is an important point in an age when the design of new school buildings has been closer to business headquarters (Benn, 2011). On early visits to the school I was treated cordially. As I became a regular visitor, I was greeted warmly and given a personal ID badge.

These first glimpses of the school are in many ways indicative of its wider presence, which I explore in the analysis that follows. The building is worn and well used. Pieces of student artwork are hung sporadically, perhaps to add some elements of interest to the large expanses of blank walls. Where there are wall displays, these narrate the latest trips and activity days, documented through photographs and quotations from students and staff.

	
<p>Photograph five: taken by me to illustrate the sparse nature of corridor walls.</p>	<p>Photograph six: taken by a Year 7 student showing a wall display, mapping the different topics covered in the History curriculum.</p>

Students have to walk to get to different parts of the school, which was described as being laid out like a “small town” by an ex-student. Younger students told me that students from different year groups commonly mixed at break times, although there was a tendency for boys to play football on

the tennis courts whilst most of the girls stood around the edge engaging in their own activities.

Summing up Eastbank

This work is about how academy status was negotiated in this school. Eastbank's case is not one of a high profile academisation process attracting lots of controversy and protest. It is not a case where a large, nation-wide academy trust took over a school, and it is not one where there was a state-of-the-art new building. This is the story of academisation for an under-populated, 'underperforming' school in a context of multiple deprivation, which chose its own route through academisation. Amongst the specificities of this portrait are traits which will exist in other 'failing' schools across England. This study is therefore situated and focused on the Eastbank case, but has relevance for schools beyond this context, particularly in adding to an understanding of how academy status is related to the governance of failure in English education.

Chapter 7: Rearticulating Academy Status

Chapter Five explored the production of the academy school through government-affiliated texts. The focus was on the way schools are produced from a distance, which accounts for much “of the debate about schools, that shapes them in the public imagination” (Stables, 2003: 897). In this chapter, the level of analysis is relocated within the physical boundaries of a school. This chapter works with Chapters Eight and Nine to explore the individual and collective shaping of academy status in Eastbank, how it was experienced in this ‘underperforming’ context, and the relationship between this and the rationalities and ambitions of the policy, as explored in Chapter Five. I consider what happens when a policy narrative with its internal logic, set of discursive rules, and position as part of a wider set of social policy narratives, is encountered in its context of intention.

This chapter examines the role of language in the localised production of academy status. I address the following questions:

- How do Eastbank staff talk about academy status and the academies policy?
- How does context feature in these accounts?
- How do these accounts function within the school and what purposes do they serve?

I draw out what it means to be an academy alongside the other things Eastbank – a school in a context of poverty - must do and be, and how this context and work was viewed by those within it.

Theoretical Clarifications

As discussed in Chapter Three, the view taken here is that policy does not straightforwardly become practice, and staff and students are not “empty vessels for the enaction of discourse and power” (Bailey, 2009: 25). Instead, staff can reinterpret and recast the ‘academies message’ through their practices. The extent to which these reinterpretations carry the trace of the

dominant discourse, and the trace of the uniqueness of context, are important questions for analysis. This chapter explores the ways Eastbank staff rearticulated academy status within their context (Angus, 1986). It describes the practices of freedom that are possible in the localised language-orientated production of the academy school.

The policy meta-narrative presented in Chapter Five is taken to be part of the constitution of truth and reality about the academy school. The meta-narrative, and the technologies of power that enable and sustain it, frame what is possible in schools, but also what is available to contest, resist or reframe (Foucault, 1976). This affects how academy status is understood and what it comes to mean in Eastbank. Working with Foucault's view of power as productive, I consider what power relations produce in Eastbank in relation to its academy status. Rather than focusing on a binary between whether policy is implemented or refused, I focus on the negotiations that take place around policy and those local tactics (Foucault, 1996: 207) and "pluralities of resistances" (Foucault, 1976: 96) that were present in Eastbank's shaping of academy status. The chapter presents the ways educational practitioners construct their own policy narratives, drawing on their values, history and context to respond to, and contradict, the dominant policy narrative. Yet, since there is no version of us that is outside of or prior to power relations (Ball & Olmedo, 2013), it is also about making sense of how the practices of Eastbank staff are culturally and discursively constructed and possible.

Finally, the epistemological status of the data reported here requires discussion. This data was expressed to me, either through direct speech, or because someone handed me a document, invited me to a meeting, or alerted my attention to something. I was (part of) the intended audience for these comments, activities, or documents. It is therefore important to reiterate that "the individual offers his performance and puts on his show for the benefit of other people" (Goffman, 1959: 28). This research created explicit opportunities for reflection, and for the rearticulation of the

academies policy, and a willing audience for such an endeavour (Madison, 2012: 167). My presence with a research proposal about academisation may have created moments of rupture in the everyday of the school, posing questions, that perhaps had not been openly considered or articulated before (Madison, 2012).

The Eastbank narrative reported here was crafted as part of a social interaction where meanings were negotiated with me. Perceptions and judgements about my identity were integral to this. Comments were conveyed in ways intended to make sense to me, as “neither gossip nor character assassination...makes much sense unless there are shared standards of what is deviant, unworthy, impolite” (Scott, 1985: xvii). The accounts offered were culturally produced through models already available in this particular social group (Foucault, 1996), including recognisable performances of dissent, anger and exasperation. This is important because, as discussed in Chapter Four, I was positioned as someone who understood and sympathised with the plight of the school. This data therefore has a particular status: academisation was being framed as part of a performance of contestation to a researcher who was perceived to be sympathetic. Performance is not taken to mean something insincere or deliberately misleading, rather it is a way of describing how we present ourselves in social interaction in day-to-day life through speech acts.

Renarrativising Academy Status

I draw on the definition of narrative from Chapter Five to analyse the ways academy status was reimagined within the Eastbank context. I analyse how “a collective narrative is woven from disparate events” and accounts within Eastbank (Czarniawska, 2004: 32), positioning narrative as central to “communal memory” and the construction of organisational identity (Czarniawska, 2004: 40). I use narrative analysis to draw out connections between people’s accounts of events and descriptions of place (Bryman, 2008). At any point in time, secondary education will have a set of common-sense narratives in circulation. These are “offered to newcomers as the

means of introduction to a community” and repeated amongst the community to solidify particular accounts, interpretations and truths (Czarniawska, 2004: 42). Narrative constructions are valid at a particular time, in a particular place, and are part of the continual remaking of place.

I introduce the concept of renarrativising to capture the interplay between grand narratives and living stories within Eastbank (Rosile et al, 2013). Renarrativising is used as a conceptual tool for understanding the ways academy status was shaped, negotiated and given meaning in the school. It describes those moments where staff contested or reformulated some existing truth of what an academy might be, relocating it in the “thisness” of Eastbank (Thomson, 2002: 73). It is a tool for analysing those speech acts that aim to interrupt an existing narrative, or to render it meaningless (Czarniawska, 2004). Drawing on vignettes, fieldnotes and interview data, I unravel these renarrativising practices and the ways in which they were embodied through day-to-day practices and policies.

“I don’t feel the difference hugely”: Negotiating Academy Status Through Understandings of Change

The narrative I was most often retold during my time in Eastbank, by staff and parents, was that not much had changed with academy status. The narratives of profound change and transformation, which were the centrepiece of the dominant academies narrative, were replaced in the Eastbank context by depictions of change as moderate, subtle, tokenistic or as focused on reforming administration, rather than teaching and learning:

We got a new sign and a new uniform...it’s structural. Day to day in terms of teaching it hasn’t made a difference (Interview, TS)

We got “a new plaque outside” (Fieldnotes, TS)

It is the same staff and the same students. There was no attempt to ‘rebrand’ the school...staff member suggested that there might be more change and higher exclusion rates in academies which are relaunching and rebranding themselves as a new school (Fieldnotes, TS)

I don't know anything about academies and I, as a mother with children who have been here, haven't noticed a difference since you've become an academy, though I can say it was a smooth transition (Focus group, Parent).

This difficulty of tracing the mark of academy status was also gestured through speech. Some participants performed reflection and uncertainty, using pauses, speech fillers such as 'hmmm', the slow and audible exhalation of breath, or the reposing of a question to themselves 'was this linked to academy status?' The implication was that no meaningful change could be drawn out of the complexity of day-to-day practice; no illustrative 'change' example came to mind in these moments.

One member of teaching staff spoke of misplacing the vision statement of the sponsor:

They have probably given me a vision statement at some point but if I'm absolutely honest I don't remember it. Unless I pull it out of a drawer, which I won't because I'm not that good at filing, I'm not going to find it anywhere. But somebody will have it.

The academy vision statement is a document where changes to the school ethos are outlined. The dismissal of this as something that does not need to be kept at hand, and the story of its being lost through 'bad filing', was in-keeping with the recurring dismissal of a transformed ethos within the school.

There was a parallel storyline that any changes that were being discussed or implemented in the school would have happened with or without academy status:

There's no massive change because it's actually been quite a drawn-out process and it's all been planned for (Fieldnotes, TS).

Ex-students who had returned to work as academic mentors, provided accounts that were particularly attuned to the idea of change. They reaffirmed the staff narrative that change had been happening for a while:

Student: the school got better as time went on...It was always evolving I guess...I think the teaching got better as time went on I think they definitely had better teachers...the ones who were not as good kind of got filtered out.

Transformation was being rejected here, replaced by a narrative that resisted the idea of academy status as a catalyst for change, instead presenting it as a symptom of change that was already occurring. Rather than being imposed from outside, these narratives reconfigure change as something that was located in the school's progression plan. Change is owned within the school; it is something that was controlled and planned for (May, 1995). This was a way of depicting academy status as one part of the school's work, and one part of a gradual change trajectory rather than a stand-alone component sought to transform the school.

This provided a contrary approach to the 'high degree of change' narrative found in the dominant manifestations of academisation. Of course, things had changed in the school. At the very least, its legal status and its new relationship with a sponsorship body and the LA constituted change. Moreover, staff and students did connect academy status with change at times, a point I return to in Chapter Eight. However, as with Chapter Five, I am less interested in 'the truth' of these claims that academy status was not a catalyst for change, and more interested in detailing this narrative and its internal logic, in order to consider the purposes this narrative served. The analysis that follows unravels the presence, detail, repetition and role of this narrative that positioned change as limited and already accounted for.

The Reluctant Academy

Eastbank sought academy status and wrote directly to the DfE to instigate the process. It is therefore tempting to think there was a pro-academy agenda in the school, which is difficult to reconcile with the dismissal of academy status as a catalyst for change. However, to draw this conclusion would be to ignore the wider policy agenda around academisation. Given the policy directives post-2010 to change failing schools into academies,

Eastbank would be an academy by now had it not chosen to change of its own accord (DfE, 2016f). Leadership staff in Eastbank were aware of the momentum behind the academy movement, and its developing implications for a school externally positioned as failing. Eastbank's decision to become an academy should not be confused with a strong pro-academy agenda. I was told quite the opposite:

There was this growing agenda around academies. I have to say you couldn't have found anybody in the country politically or emotionally less supportive of that whole agenda...but we had no support (Interview, EH).

The decision to seek academy status was driven by a perception that the LA lacked the capacity to aid school improvement:

We had a very fractured relationship with the LA...we lost confidence in the LA's ability to protect us and it became quite hostile (Interview, SLT).

The member of staff depicted academisation as a pragmatic move that was in the interests of the school. Rather than an avowal of faith in the academies programme, in the discussion that follows I argue that this was a subtle form of resistance to the academies agenda because it created opportunities for the school to shape academy status.

School leaders have stressed that academy status was something that they sought in order to "take charge of our own destiny" (Fieldnotes, SLT) and "go before we were pushed" (Fieldnotes, TS), in a shifting policy context, which made academisation increasingly inevitable. The school's decision to become an academy followed a period of time in special measures, where the experience of heightened surveillance contrasted with the promise of greater autonomy. Aware of the likelihood of being encouraged or indeed forced to become an academy, school leaders took the decisions themselves, creating a little more space to manage how academy status would be shaped.

A Community Sponsor for a Community School

Eastbank used this freedom to select its own sponsor, which would not have been the case if it had waited until the mandate for forced academy status for underperforming schools arrived (Simons, 2016). In their reflections on the value of the sponsor, staff highlighted the importance of what the sponsor offered, but also of what the school has avoided in selecting this particular sponsor. The dominant policy narrative outlined in Chapter Five presents an expectation that the sponsor introduces a new ethos, and brings the values of entrepreneurialism and innovation to the school. However, it was important to Eastbank staff that the sponsor was not exerting a “corporate influence”, or was a large powerful academy chain which was taking over lots of schools, without having a relationship to the local community (Fieldnotes, TS).

In current guidance, underperforming academies are adopted by a MAT (DfE, 2016f), which is the sort of sponsor the leadership at Eastbank explicitly did not want. Instead they:

chose Walton College because the governors thought they were a local provider, understood our context, were committed to working with the community (Interview, SLT).

The senior managers at Eastbank told me that Walton College had not imposed a strong agenda or rationale for high levels of change in the school:

Staff member feels that they have largely been left alone so far and have stuck to the traditional culture and feel of Eastbank. However, he did note that the sponsor might take over a bit more if the results did not improve (Fieldnotes, SLT).

The current arrangements with the sponsor suggest a relationship of trust, resulting in considerable autonomy for the school, although this relationship was precarious and dependent on results. These descriptions emphasise the fit between the sponsor and the Eastbank ethos, and thus large-scale rebranding was not required. Instead, the school used this autonomous and

trusting relationship with the sponsor to reconfirm its existing identity and culture.

An Inclusive, Community-Orientated School

In Eastbank, this sense of identity centred on the idea of being “very much a community school” (member of teaching staff), which was understood as a commitment to serve the local community, and to offer its own sense of community within the school walls. In this section I detail the core elements of Eastbank’s caring, inclusive, and community-centred ethos. I use ethnographic data to illustrate how this ethos inflected many aspects of the school’s work.

Vignette One: Assembly: Christmas is a time for...

The HOA takes the assembly. He begins by saying “every single person has contributed in some manner to today’s assembly, that’s why I am particularly excited because I think this assembly does genuinely reflect all of us”. The theme of the assembly is ‘Christmas is a time for’ and the HOA lists a number of aspects to be covered that are important at this time of year: singing, dancing and celebration; recognising contributions, effort and achievement; reflecting on what has happened; and looking to the future.

Before the activities begin, he asks the audience “Are you ready?” and the students are encouraged to respond vocally. The room erupts into cheers and applause, but most of the noise reduces quickly. The audience participate, cheer and applaud throughout, at accepted times, such as when someone performs or collects an award.

The assembly begins with student performances and the awarding of prizes to students and staff. An award goes to one student from each year group, accompanied by a short speech justifying the award. The speeches contain recurring themes including ‘progress across subjects’, ‘100% attendance’, ‘a positive attitude’, ‘effort and hard work’, and ‘getting the job done’.

A video is shown of the staff version of a popular, charity Christmas song. Staff have been working on this for weeks, and it is met with adulation by the pupils who laugh enthusiastically as they watch their teachers, dressed as elves, Rudolph, and Santa, singing the words of the song. There are reflections on the 2,500 students have raised through fundraising activities. A member of staff from Cameroon talks about the difference the computers they donated have made to a school in the

village he grew up in. He tells Eastbank students that they can learn from the students in Cameroon: “You can learn from the that you are very very privileged, and try to appreciate what you’ve got”.

Photograph Seven: Taken by a year 9 student to show an example of a student prize hamper for 100% attendance.



A teacher presents on the Spanish exchange trip, and invites students to spend a week in Spain with a Spanish family, and to have a Spanish pupil live in their home for a week in exchange. The EH talks about the life of Nelson Mandela:

We are very fortunate. We're fortunate that in our society that, although some of us are better off than others, most of us are better off than other people who have difficult lives in the world. So it is a reasonable thing to do at times to think and sit back and think about how fortunate we are.

Finally, the HOA praises the young people for their behaviour in the assembly. He asks them:

to take a small risk...What I want you all to do now for 30 seconds is first to look around the room and I want you to identify a student or a member of staff that stands out as someone very special to you.

He follows this up later with:

Sometimes I think the best presents you can give is your time and your openness. My invitation to you today, before you leave, tell that person that they make it extra worthwhile for you to be here, because it will be the best present you give that person today.

At the end of the assembly every child received a small gift, a selection box of small, assorted chocolate bars. They are reminded not to drop any litter on the floor because that would mean that they could not be given gifts in future. The students lined up calmly, chatting and laughing, each collecting their selection box from staff dressed as elves. When I left I didn't see any litter on the floor.

This vignette provides a platform from which to explore the culture and identity of Eastbank Academy.

Contexts, Communities, and the Curriculum

This assembly provided an opportunity to see a whole school gathering. This cultivated a whole-school culture and systems of value and reward, and showed how staff managed the whole school group together in one space (Parsons, 2012). This assembly may be read as a performance of school values (Allan & l'Anson, 2004: 130) in a group space where attentions and behaviour are managed. The assembly is a bureaucratic space (Allan & l'Anson, 2004: 131), where decisions have been made about the questions, problems, and themes Eastbank students should be exposed to (Desai, 2009). The theme of contexts and communities was central to this whole-school exchange. The coverage of topics meant that Eastbank students were included in multiple communities, from the local – the individual, family, and school – to the global – Spain, Cameroon, and South Africa. Connections were made across these contexts, as school-level practices such as fundraising were connected with international contexts, for instance through donations to students in Cameroon. By drawing on accounts of fundraising and donations, and the story of Nelson Mandela, the assembly contends with issues of justice across different contexts (Desai, 2009).

This assembly suggests that Eastbank staff are encouraging “global interconnectedness and global responsibility through citizenship education” (Pashby, 2012: 9). It introduced the interconnectedness of troubling issues such as poverty, racism, and war and implied a “moral imperative for extending a notion of citizenship to those outside of our national borders” (Pashby, 2012: 10). Differences between people were recognised, within a framework of common humanity and values.

Later in this discussion I problematise some of the approaches that were taken to this part of the school’s work. For now, I want to focus on the celebrations of identity and difference that were “formalised within the structures of the school” (May, 1995: 5). Eastbank had recently reformed its tutor time curricula for years 7-9, introducing a Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education curriculum covering: safety; individual, national, and

shared identities; celebrating diversity; and preventing discrimination. This work culminated in tutor group presentations to members of SLT, after which students are given detailed feedback and awarded a badge. This was symbolic of their responsibility to help others in the school. This curriculum, which promoted inclusivity and care, was geared towards building good relationships between students.

Understandings of communities, an individual's role within them, and notions of justice were crucial to learning in the school. The foundation for this was that staff understood the contexts of their own students. There was recognition that there is a "real depth of knowledge about the local area centred in the support team" (Interview, TS) as some members of support staff knew the students, their families, their circumstances, and the local area well. There were members of support staff who had lived in the local area for their entire life, some attended Eastbank, and some sent their children to the school. Support staff were attributed provisional authority in pastoral matters, particularly where their relationships with local families were perceived as fundamental to activities such as home visits and parent meetings (May, 1995).

As described in Chapter Six, over 50% of students qualified for the pupil premium, and there are local issues with health and disability, crime and safety, and employment and low income. These young people are not poor in global terms, but they are not those "better off" children that the EH referred to during the assembly. This is the context for a small gift such as a selection box or an ice cream, which the school funded at Christmas and the end of the school year. This gift is symbolic of inclusion, received as a result of being a member of the Eastbank community, regardless of any other characteristics (Slee, 2011). It comes with a responsibility – to not drop litter – that was accepted, at least within the school gates. During my time in the school I observed a teacher providing use of his classroom, fridge, and toaster for a group of girls to use at morning break times because of concerns they were regularly missing breakfast. Acts of kindness, particularly those

preoccupied with welfare matters such as being well-fed, are not insignificant in a school like Eastbank, and were part of the caring culture of the school.

During my time in Eastbank, staff drew on the local context, and its challenges, as a way of making sense of their practice and the status of the school. This is contrary to on-going criticisms, by successive governments, of schools drawing on poverty as a part of their practice. As documented in Chapter Five, this has been viewed as schools making an excuse for poor performance. This government narrative was resisted by those staff who referred to the local community context in their discussions with me.

Vignette Two: The Belgium Trip (A discussion with two humanities teachers)

They took a group on a trip to Belgium and some of their parents had not realised that this was a different country and that they had to get their child a passport. For many of the young people, this was their first passport and first trip abroad. Some had only been as far as the nearest sea-side town, which some students thought was abroad. They did not know what a ferry was or that you could drive onto it. They did not understand that other countries had different money and tried to pay for things in pounds. One teacher said that even if they did not pay any attention in the museum, at least they had had this experience of being in another country.

The Belgium Trip narratives suggest that it would be problematic to discount the particularities of context in the planning of school activities. In this example, current knowledge and experiences did matter. These young people lacked the cultural capital to understand the administration that a trip to Belgium would require (Bourdieu, 1979). If staff had not been aware of this, some students would have missed the trip, and thus been denied an opportunity considered to be part of typical UK living standards (Dorling, 2014a; Savage, 2015). The Belgium trip was seen as an enriching experience, which could deliver important life-lessons for students. The school heavily subsidised activities like this, and supported parents with applying for

passports. These rich learning experiences were always dependent on staffing and financial resources.

Geographical scale is important here, as the comfort of the local and ‘the known’, and the discomfort of ‘unknown’ places, were important things to challenge. This was also present in the plans to develop the Spanish exchange so that Eastbank students could stay with a Spanish family and vice versa. This was framed as “taking a bit of a risk...it’s gonna take you stepping out of your comfort zone a little bit” (Fieldnotes, TS). Expanding geographical contexts was connected with expanded horizons in a more encompassing sense, as a route to personal development. The HOA also referred to risk taking in the assembly when he asked students to think of someone in the room who makes a positive difference to their life. He asked them to ‘take a risk’ and tell that person. Before showing the video of staff performing the Christmas song, the HO said:

I was absolutely blown away by their [staff] willingness. We talk about you guys taking risks all the time, and sometimes it’s ok to take a risk and look a bit daft.

Part of the culture of Eastbank was about reducing a fear of failure, highlighting particular kinds of risk-taking that might be conducive to new experiences, learning, and personal development (May, 1995). This is role-modelled by the staff in their “daft” performance of a Christmas song. School notice boards depicted risk taking as an aspect of ‘excellent Teaching and Learning’ (Photograph Eight).



Photograph Eight: Taken by me.

Alternative Provision

Another area where the threads of a distinctive Eastbank culture came together was in the development of in-house Alternative Provision (AP).

Vignette Three: Alternative Provision

The school was developing in-house AP options for young people at risk of permanent exclusion. Staff commissioned an external provider, with a military ethos, to do group work with students on the school site. This programme was piloted with a group of nine girls in year 11. The rationale for including these girls in the programme was that they met one or more of the following criteria: low attendance; high levels of behaviour sanctions; below expected' academic progress; and at risk of being out of education, employment, and training at post-16. The girls engaged with this programme for 2-3 hours per week across an academic year. The military ethos of the provider enabled different ways of teaching, with an emphasis on collaborative working, comradeship, trust, problem-solving, fun, fitness, and resilience.

The girls met in a designated space in the school and, for two days a week, got to wear a different uniform. This consisted of army-style trousers, walking boots, and a bomber jacket. This demarcated them as a distinct group in the school. The school had built a sense of responsibility into the programme, training the girls to be reading mentors for younger students. During a focus group, the girls reflected on how they might continue to support a group of children with disabilities in a local primary school.

First, there was a careful process of selecting, and then trialling, a provider. This was particularly important, due to concerns that the provider's military ethos might manifest as a form of military recruitment. Senior staff felt that the rapport that AP staff were able to develop with the young people was impressive and – similarly to the selection of Walton College as their sponsor – they felt that this was an organisation that would fit with, and enhance, the culture of Eastbank. This sense of rapport was confirmed by the girls during a focus group, as they told me that they “get on with” the AP staff, who are “nice”, and “build people up”.

Second, the curriculum was focused on team-work and collaboration. For instance, the girls had to work together to push a large tyre from one end of the school site to another. The girls said they had formed new peer relationships through the programme: “It brought us together because we didn't know each other before we joined the programme”. Rather than being exclusionary, it had included them in new social groups. These relationships were focused on their shared group identity and how this could be used to help others. They told me that it “was really nice” to work with local primary school students with disabilities, and that they hoped to do this “as a community thing as well”.

The girls were trained as peer readers as a way of improving the literacy of younger students, and of the girls, some of whom found reading difficult. Situations were created to empower these girls to help others, to frame them as individuals with something valuable to offer. In developing this responsibility for others, this group of girls were supported to “do ethical work” upon themselves (Allan & I'Anson, 2004: 132) which created “new assemblage of the self” and possibilities for being other than ‘at risk of exclusion’ or ‘troublesome’. The girls spoke of some of the outcomes of the project:

It makes us think different.

It made us, like, proud to wear the uniform.

And it's made our behaviour better and our attendance.

This scheme also presents an alternative version of change. Here change was moderate, and piloted within the school rather than an externally imposed transformation. Its particular vision, aims, and goals were shaped within the school, by staff, the provider, and the group of girls, who were empowered to “choose their change” (Interview, HOA). By reframing the position of these girls, the school created new possibilities for viewing and working with students at risk of permanent exclusion. It was an inclusive approach to AP, seeking to avoid exclusion from school, and to avoid within-school segregation, instead focusing on raising the esteem and reputation of the pupils involved, and including them in new peer groups. The school took responsibility for disengaged students, and sought ways to support them within the schooling community rather than moving them out to an alternative provider. I return to this example in Chapter Nine to problematise some of the wider work with ‘at risk’ students that was taking place in the school.

Philanthropy and Social Justice

The above examples suggest that philanthropy, compassion and social justice are central to Eastbank’s culture. For instance, the presentation of Nelson Mandela’s life takes the form of a story, and invites a discussion of justice, through the prism of discrimination. Stories are a well-used tool in moral education (Lovetta & Jordan, 2010), and in Eastbank they were key to developing “moral sensitivity” (Lovetta & Jordan, 2010: 175). Critical engagement with discrimination was promoted across the curriculum, in the tutor time and AP curriculums as noted above, and in formal subject curriculums for instance in my observations of History and Sociology lessons. By drawing on the story of Nelson Mandela, the EH drew on a set of

issues around which he could expect widespread agreement. This enabled Eastbank students to confirm and develop their moral views with confidence and authority (Lovetta & Jordan, 2010).

Philanthropy and compassion are core themes of the assembly vignette, where student fundraising practices were praised, and where Eastbank students were shown a video clip of students in Cameroon using the computers they had sent. They are also central to curriculum changes, particularly those intended to serve young people at risk of exclusion. Philanthropy was a form of “moral training” in the school (Allan & I'Anson, 2004: 126) through which students were encouraged to care for others. This is part of a process of “awakening...students’ civic responsibility” in relation to others, who may be viewed as geographically or culturally distant (Allan & I'Anson, 2004: 137). Through this, students had opportunities to be generous to others. These activities and behaviours were reinforced as those that ‘ought’ to happen (Lovetta & Jordan, 2010: 175), celebrated during prize giving and praised during assembly (Lovetta & Jordan, 2010: 175). They were an integral part of a vision for the ‘Eastbank student’.

Moral messages were being controlled in the school, dictated and disciplined through discourse. A school is a “speech community”, which provides “an ‘order of discourse’ for its participants; ‘ways of talking’ and ‘ways of seeing’” (May, 1995: 2). Some of these ‘ways of seeing’ offered an alternative to mainstream discourses in education. Eastbank’s moralising emphasised the importance of community, collaboration, and inclusivity. Eastbank students were encouraged to reflect on the self and to work with others to act in positive ways (Allan & I'Anson, 2004). The responsibility of each individual was bound up in their membership of the Eastbank community. Notions of community were developed across the curriculum, and students were positioned as members of local and global communities. Relationships within the school were key to facilitating this work. Eastbank staff were working to create a space for something other than the dominant focus on the individually performing unit in current neoliberal educational discourses

(Cahill, 2014), where the focus is on the individual student achieving a predetermined and expected set of outcomes. Moments occurred in the school where a decision was taken to shift the lens of focus to what the individual can achieve as part of a community. This is not a straightforward process in the school, and I return to the balance between the group and the individual in Chapter Nine.

However, this moralising also reinforced other dominant discourses. The data I have drawn on highlights how students were “helped to attribute meaning to their lives by relating them to the legitimate narrative of the society to which they belonged” (Czarniawska, 2004: 17). Some of the complexities of contemporary issues of citizenship and identity were neglected in this assembly and the school’s wider fundraising work. First, Eastbank’s philanthropic endeavours positioned the young people as part of a charity culture where the emphasis is on how particular people can ‘save’ others, who are positioned as cases for help (Wagg, 2014). This taps into wider narratives, which often unjustly represent the recipients of charity as dependent on the magnanimity of the wealthy. There was a depoliticisation of poverty in the school, whereby poverty was treated “as a regrettable fact”, with little attention paid to its causes (Wagg, 2014: 101). The complex structural reasons for poverty and famine were absent from these philanthropic endeavours (Pashby, 2012: 10). In this apolitical context, charity is presented as an unequivocally good thing, and the role of wealthy, developed nations in creating and sustaining global poverty and inequality is absent.

Meanwhile, Eastbank students, who are growing up in relative poverty in England, are encouraged to reflect on how this position manifests as privilege when it is viewed from a global perspective. Eastbank students are shaped in particular ways in relation to the world; ways that pivot around how they can use their opportunities and relative privilege to help others through caring practices and fundraising. However, some of them are caught up in wider structural inequalities, which see their families accessing

foodbanks and benefits to top up low pay, and at the mercy of reducing social housing stocks (Cooper et al, 2014). Through these depictions 'real' poverty becomes associated with other countries and other people. Wagg (2014) connects this with the move, from 1970s onwards, to challenge the post-war consensus over the right to national assistance in the UK. With this right no longer taken for granted

the term 'scrounger' entered public discourse... since there wasn't any significant poverty in contemporary Britain, and people who claimed otherwise were lying, this purported lack of poverty could form part of the basis for constructing a persuasive British identity, set against the ('genuinely') impoverished "Third world" (Wagg, 2014: 102-3).

The implication is that "underdeveloped' countries remain the locus of 'real' child poverty" (Wagg, 2014: 107). These positions are problematic, both in terms of the explanations they offer of charity, and the way they undermine the experiences of poverty faced by some of the young people in Eastbank. In both cases, attention to the structural inequalities that create poverty is absent. Through their engagement and complicity in this master narrative of charity as a depoliticised and unequivocal good, Eastbank staff unwittingly serve to undermine their own students' experiences of poverty and access to more complex, structural explanations of global poverty and inequality.

Relationships

Another theme that permeates the above examples, and the culture of Eastbank, is the valuing of local and global relationships. Relationship building was evident in the assembly, as the HOA thanked everyone for their contribution. Students were invited and encouraged to make noise during the assembly, and there were occasions for students and staff to laugh together. There was not a fear that permitting loud noise would lead to the disintegration of the focus in the room, rather this was easily regained by staff.

An institutional truth had arisen in the school around trust and sustained relationships. Several teachers told me that the first year in Eastbank is challenging because the students do not always trust that staff will stay:

Once the students see you're sticking around they begin to trust you more. It takes the older students a while to put their trust in you, as they have experienced a high staff turnover in the past. They react well to staff who stay. You have to prove yourself...there is a lot of low self-esteem amongst the students so they don't have that level of trust (Fieldnotes, TS).

Staff perceptions of relationships with students suggest that stability and the opportunity to develop relationships over a longer period of time were important. Staff recognise that in some cases the school is “the only stable thing in these young people’s lives” and that as well as educating them, additional duties “come with the territory” of working in a school in a context of poverty (Fieldnotes, SLT). They saw wider caring and welfare work, and things like building up the students’ self-esteem, as vital to their day-to-day activities:

they want the school to be an inner-city haven, a safe environment with an open door where staff and students feel safe and happy...The complexity of their students means that the welfare stuff is just as important as the academic aspects (Fieldnotes, SLT).

Eastbank students have particular ways of getting to know visitors and of making sense of them within their existing set of knowledge and experience. During my time in different classrooms, students regularly asked who I was, what I was doing in their school and whether I was going to become a teacher there. This way of vetting strangers; of them assessing whether they want to speak with you, whether you are ‘sticking around’ and investing in the school, or there to judge it and them, and whether you had the ability to do so fairly (McKenzie, 2015). Ofsted had informed the school about the importance of students being polite to visitors, and the HOA felt that Eastbank students were often misconstrued because they were ‘on guard’

with visitors, rather than “making polite small talk or holding open doors” (Fieldnotes, HOA).

This tallied with another institutional truth. Staff regularly commented on the quality of the relationships with students, which were characterised by “mutual respect” (Interview, TS). Examples can be drawn from Vignette Four.

Vignette Four: Spanish Lesson

A friendly, enthusiastic teacher took this class, and was able to hold the attention of a group of students described as ‘needy’ by the SENCO. He clearly had an excellent rapport with the group, and one of the students asked ‘can’t we have you for all our lessons?’ The teacher allowed moments of energy and volume but could confidently calm this down when he required quiet and concentration. The young people were allowed to ask questions and to ‘be themselves’. For one of the activities they were singing a song in Spanish and were allowed to stand up and accompany this with dance moves, or remain seated. All but one eagerly joined in with the dance moves.

The teacher was able to dispel potential tensions and focused on building relationships between students e.g. one accidentally put his chair leg on another’s foot and the teacher asked the student to apologise, saying ‘is it okay if you apologise even though we know it was an accident’ in order for the students to reconcile quickly. He was not dismissive when a student complained of a headache. He treated them with compassion, and encouraged them to work on but to let him know if it got any worse. He asked the other students to keep noise to a minimum so as to not aggravate the headache. I later heard a student asking another to speak in a quieter voice because of the student with a headache.

Students were encouraged to take care of one another, to reconcile, and to demonstrate care (Noddings, 1992). Their concerns were taken seriously and they were given choices within the structures of the learning requirements for that lesson. Compromise was something that seemed integral to staff’s approach to difficult scenarios and resistance from students:

Compromise is important with the most vulnerable students...the adult and young person come to a mutual decision about what would be best

for the young person, if they are having a particularly bad day at school. They try to pre-empt and counteract some of the things which have the potential to 'go wrong' in a lesson, leading to negative experiences (Fieldnotes, TS).

Given the wider and complex needs of some of the students in the school staff viewed it as important that the school was somewhere that the students wanted to be. There was also an explicit programme of activities to support attendance, and this was one of the school's priorities. Staff were proud of the school's above national average attendance in the school, as this has been a long-standing concern. Staff felt they must be getting something right if students wanted to be in the school. Intensive work went into achieving this in particularly complex cases. I observed a two-hour meeting to discuss a student's poor attendance, attended by a parent, a member of school staff, and a representative from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. The aim was to support the parent and the child, and to avoid having to fine the family, as legislation permits. During discussions with students, many positive comments were made about staff, who were described as one of the most important things about the school "cause they're really nice" (Year 7 student).

Eastbank was also depicted as a place where staff want to be. Staff recognised the pressure the school is under, and the way that this affects them. However, overall the staff spoke very positively of the school and its students:

Staff member described Eastbank as consisting of positive and passionate teachers and pupils who want to learn. She is very proud of the calm, purposeful and safe environment of the school... The fact that she has been here for twelve years says a lot about the school' (Fieldnotes, TS).

"I love it here" (Interview, TS).

The staff have been genuinely welcoming, which she has really valued as a Teach First candidate. They greet you and ask how you are, not like in some schools where they keep their head down. This feeds through to

the students. Students that she doesn't even teach will say hello and speak to her. "I felt really lucky...as soon as a walked through the door...it has its problems, every school does, but staff are welcoming and supportive" (Fieldnotes, TS).

Eastbank was described as a school that "gets under your skin", and a teacher referred to the idea of being 'Eastbank-evised' to depict to the way staff and students become invested in the school and well-versed in its culture. Staff spoke of a strong sense of loyalty towards the school and its students. They spoke positively of the SLT, who were perceived to have the best interests of the school at heart: "they do this job because they truly want to make a difference" (Interview, TS).

This sense of loyalty, and of overall satisfaction was connected to a number of features of the culture and values of Eastbank. First, Eastbank is a school that "grow their own.... everybody here gets the opportunity if they're good enough to grow in their roles, there is stability therefore" (Interview, EH). Many staff have been given additional responsibilities, or the opportunity to undertake training and qualifications. Second, the "open door approach" of senior staff was appreciated:

This is a transparent and honest school. It has a no blame approach, and open door policy and a culture of mutual respect amongst staff. Staff member thinks it is the same with pupils and these values are at the Principal's core. It doesn't mean they always get it right "we are talking about humans here" but they want staff to enjoy working here. Even with all of the scrutiny they have had in the past year, they still managed to make it fun (Fieldnotes, SLT).

Third, they avoid a culture of blaming and threatening staff:

Although we challenge people I think we do it properly, we don't blame people. At points of crisis - we've had two or three major points of crisis for the school -what we try and do is mobilise people around some key ideas that are manageable, and we don't go round ranting at people. Internally that's very popular (Interview, SLT).

For example, a senior member of staff used data for the pupils he was teaching to illustrate a point about data and performance, rather than picking on other teachers' data. Senior staff continue to teach in the school,

ensuring they have this connection with staff and pupils. They recognise that:

there's a premium placed on morale in the school. I think the culture and ethos of the school is the only thing that matters and if the adults are positive, relaxed, committed, and enjoy themselves then that has a beneficial effect on them and pupils (Interview, SLT).

Academy status enabled the school to create a double-layer of senior leadership. The former HOA became the EH, with overall strategic responsibility for the direction of the school, whilst the HOA looked after the day-to-day running of the school. The EH saw this as vital for the school:

(HOA) has been here as long as I have. I think it's very important that he stays here and he could have been at the point where he looked to leave to get opportunities so he's been made HOA (Interview, EH).

Academy status enabled the school to retain staff it valued. In Eastbank, the HOA had risen through the ranks. His knowledge of the school was perceived to be integral to the continuation of its inclusive and community-centred values. This positive image of relations between senior and other staff may be skewed, since staff were unlikely to make negative comments about senior staff to a researcher. However, they did not have to go out of their way to praise senior staff, as they did.

Every day Forms of Resistance

So far, this chapter has described the renarrativising of academy status in Eastbank, and positioned this within a detailed discussion of the school culture. Academy status began to be “Eastbank-evised”; to take shape through a set of alternative values and priorities to those articulated in the dominant policy narrative. A mission to transform the school was replaced by the idea that academy status could reinforce a historical schooling culture, which presented community, inclusivity, care, and relationships as priorities. There was resistance and contestation around some of the ideas and consequences of the policy climate. However, this strategic shaping of the academy was not about risking “outright confrontation” (Scott, 1985:

xvi). Instead the policy morphed through small moments of contestation, such as rewriting the story of becoming and being an academy. Given this rearticulation, it is important to explore the problems school staff saw in academy status and the potential threats it posed. In the section that follows I consider diverse expressions of resistance to the policy context, and the ways this fit with the process of renarrativising academy status.

Vignette Five: Conversation with HOA

Setting: I am in the HOA's office. We discuss the assembly from vignette one.

HOA: I know you made that very kind observation about our Christmas assembly, but if Ofsted had come in I would have been damned for the learning loss. Yet that's proper education as far as I'm concerned. It's collective education.

JP: I'm interested to know what their perspective would have been

HOA: They would have damned it. They would have damned it. They would have damned the learning loss in EBACC students which would have enabled every one of these students to have a sense of social mobility to a Russell Group University. I shouldn't have taken them out of the curriculum at all. They should have been learning maths and English and the [school's AP Provider] should have been blasting them on the field the day before Christmas. I mean I'm being stupid but at the same time its true...They don't care. They don't care.

The same assembly I used as a basis for exploring Eastbank's culture provides a starting point for exploring the lack of alignment between what Eastbank promoted and valued and what was promoted and valued by those it is accountable to. I draw out four points to illustrate some of the everyday forms of resistance I encountered in Eastbank.

1) Repetition, Morality, and Judgements

The HOA draws on emotive language and repetition to make his point, repeating "they would have damned it" as a way of emphasising the disparity

of views between himself and an imagined Ofsted inspector. The specific use of “damned” resonates with the way government commentators have drawn on moral language to make the case for academy schools, as noted in Chapter Five. This vignette presents as a moment of sense-making, where the HOA is drawing on this dominant framework of morality, and the way it operates to rationalise judgments that are made about the school. It illustrates how these formalised expectations figure in his assessment of his own practices. The HOA predicts the judgments that would have been made about this assembly, noting that it would have been “damned” because it took students away from their EBACC subjects. He attempts to make sense of the ways this would have been rationalised through the moral framework of those he is accountable to, in this case Ofsted. He suggests that social mobility, class, and aspiration would have operated as frameworks of judgments about this moment of schooling practice and concludes that the school would have been portrayed as providing insufficient opportunities for social mobility.

Through this sense making, the HOA positions himself as offering an alternative philosophy or moral framework for education, which instead focuses on collectivity. This vignette is indicative of the resistant nature of the sense-making practices in the school. Discursive space is created to contest views that are perceived to judge, restrict, and condemn practices. This draws attention to the “ideological struggle[s]” at work, in this case over the priorities of the school (Scott, 1985: xvii).

2) *Humour and Nonsense*

The HOA’s discussion of the assembly draws on humour, exaggeration, cynicism, and a construction of ‘nonsense’ as tools to articulate resistance. At the end of the vignette the HOA draws attention to his use of cynical humour and hyperbole with the statement “I mean I’m being stupid”. Yet he immediately retracts this statement with “but at the same time it’s true”, which serves to shift the ‘stupidity’ to those making the hypothetical judgement. The ‘truth’ he refers to suggests the idea of taking Ofsted or

government rhetoric to what he views as its logical conclusion. If schools are forbidden from losing learning time, and holding an assembly on the last day of school amounts to losing learning time, then whole-school gatherings like this will be increasingly marginalised from school activities. Similar articulations of resistance are present elsewhere:

It's ludicrous it's ludicrous it's ludicrous. We have a framework now that is so formulaic to achievement based on national averages which compares this school with [lists nearby fee-paying schools] and we're all put in the same table to generate national averages and then we are compared equally...So it's a crazy city at the moment, it's a crazy city. We're all becoming very obsessed with data...It's ludicrous. It's absolutely ludicrous. It would be easy for me to be very defensive about it but it's ludicrous. It's absolutely ludicrous. It's crazy. It's crazy. (Interview, HOA).

Here the repetition of 'crazy' and 'ludicrous' suggests that demarcating the policy context as nonsense is, somewhat contradictorily, an integral form of sense-making. Humour reads more as incredulity here and, alongside nonsense and cynicism, functions to provide an alternative discursive space. The words 'crazy' and 'ludicrous' function to suggest that too much is being asked of schools and that what is being asked does not make sense within this context. By depicting something as nonsense, there is an attempt to dismiss it or downplay its relevance, for example the focus on data or Ofsted judgements. It suggests contempt for these things, but also the idea that they have surpassed a level at which they can be taken seriously. This offers a cynical reading of the direction of schooling and highlights the existence of discontent.

Emphasising something as nonsense, and drawing on sarcastic and cynical forms of humour to highlight the ridiculousness of what is being asked, was perhaps a way of feeling better, of coping with pressure, and a way of cutting through 'ridiculousness' with a message that is more attuned to self-care (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). This idea of humour as a coping mechanism was drawn on explicitly by the HOA when he referred to serious case reviews in the school:

The way we manage those cases is with a sort of degree of humour and sarcasm, but it's right and proper to create a sort of separation for us not to get emotionally involved...it comes from experience...you become quite separate from it because you have to.

Humour, cynicism, and nonsense enable a form of control over those aspects of the job that are the most challenging. They are ways of opening policy up to critique, providing discursive spaces to question and subvert. They interrupt the commonplace, illustrating the contingent nature of social norms (Kenny & Euchler, 2012).

3) Drawing on 'Forbidden' Discourses

Discontent is a theme that is pronounced in other forms of resistance too, for instance explicitly drawing on discourses and ideas that are understood to be forbidden, taboo, or regulated through the dominant schooling discourse. In Eastbank the most pertinent of these was drawing on poverty and context as part of explanations for school practices and outcomes. There was an example of this above when the HOA emphasised how "ludicrous" it is that national averages that apply in Eastbank are the result of the data from all schools, including grammar and fee-paying schools. Other examples were present across staff accounts:

What we do know is that schools in urban contexts, schools that serve predominantly white working-class former council estates, schools that are coastal towns with certain elements of deprivation, schools that struggle to recruit teachers particularly in English and Maths are inevitably different to schools in the leafy bits. And we see that even in this city, don't we? Of course that is heresy and I could be executed for it because you're not allowed to say that because it smacks of low aspiration. But I think it's very difficult, I mean we've got all the academic stuff, we know how deprived our community is, we know what impact that has on aspiration, self-esteem, confidence in terms of academic outcomes but of course what we have to believe is the lie that is being peddled that everybody operates on a level playing field...Now the problem is if we say that in any public forum then we are seen to lack aspiration...we are fuelling the forces of low social mobility (Interview, EH).

The EH acknowledges that he is operating outside of the discursive rules as dictated by successive governments. However, he continues to draw on

“what we do know”; suggesting that those working within this school and similar schools know that context does matter and does create distinctions between those schools in “white working-class former council estates” and “the leafy bits”. He argues that even though the school’s approach is substantiated by research, local data, and experience, staff are still told to “believe...the lie that is being peddled that everybody operates on a level playing field”. Resistance becomes a battle over who talks sense, and what ‘makes sense’ in the Eastbank context.

Similar arguments were made in a document that the HOA gave to me, which he had prepared for a meeting he was attending with other local head teachers.

Vignette Six

This document discusses the following points (paraphrased for anonymity).

It considers the continual state of flux of the policy climate. It provides a summary of the educational context impacting on the local area, including structural changes, academisation, and failing schools being rescued by MATs. This is described as leading to fragmentation, uncertainty, and heightened local competition for pupils and staff.

It considers how local contextual factors impact the school, drawing on understandings of how social class and ethnicity intersect with educational achievement and experiences. It discusses the contextual factors facing the school due to local arrangements such as schools in the city serving a deprived cohort of students, who are more likely to be White Working-class. Education research is drawn on to illustrate the links between this and lower achievement. It defends the use of such information, not as an excuse for poor performance, but as an informative context for practice. It argues that such information should accompany judgements and comparisons of schools.

It considers the popular definitions of a good school used as part of the accountability frameworks that are used to judge schools. It argues that what makes a good school must be connected to context.

This document was produced for other schools and head teachers, and was subsequently shared with me. It performs the practices of sense-making and

contestation that were happening in the school. It is a policy artefact; a document where the HOA is “consciously attempt[ing] to ‘draw attention’ to the substance of policy through the production of...resources” (Ball et al, 2012: 121). The document espouses the forbidden discourse of using poverty in discussions of school activities. It offers an evidence-base as a way of discrediting the idea that poverty does not matter to schools’ work.

Academy status was explicitly acknowledged as something that has caused fragmentation and competition locally, and is drawn on to emphasise the ‘problem’, by a school that is itself an academy. This might suggest that the HOA has drawn distinctions within the academy school category. There are those aspects of academisation that are problematic, for instance a large MAT coming into the city and taking-over and rebranding schools, which results in greater local competition. These are produced as something different, and more problematic, than a school such as Eastbank becoming an academy as part of a two-school MAT with a local sponsor. There was more acceptance of the things that have changed with academisation outside of the school whilst there was a muting of discussions of how academy status had affected change within the school. However, as Chapter Eight argues, the two are interlinked.

The document engages with philosophical questions such as ‘what makes a good school?’ At the end of the assembly (Vignette One) the HOA said: “What makes a good school? We do, we make a good school, every person here”. Both the assembly and document present a philosophy of collective education, and a desire for a broader conception of education. The resistance that arises here may be read as a reaction to threats, a manifestation of anger, and political engagement with questions over the purpose and nature of education and schooling. It illustrates “a struggle over how the past and present shall be understood and labelled, a struggle to identify causes and asses blame, a contentious effort to give partisan meaning to local history” (Scott, 1985: xvii). This is an attempt at recognition that is missing from government discourse. It is an example of teachers trying to explain the

difficulties of a relentless focus on learning. It is this style of commentary “that has regularly been categorised by policymakers, and also by some academic researchers, as deficit, patronising and an avoidance tactic” (Thomson, 2002: 17).

4) The Government’s Approach is Dangerous for our students

At times, the renarrativising in Eastbank goes a step further to suggest that policies are harmful to pupils. Examples of this emerged in discussions about the impact of a persistent focus on data by the DfE and Ofsted. This was criticised by many staff who felt under pressure to engage in data-driven practices due to the school’s status as an underperforming academy. Such practices were seen to go against the caring culture of the school because they necessitated approaches that did not serve all students well. The HOA told me they had “let some pupils down in the summer exams by paying lip service to government measures and targets”. Some students had been entered for qualifications “they weren’t going to get” because of complex SEN and difficulties, and some left with no GCSEs or very few poorly graded GCSEs. The HOA said he is “bored of politics” and its impact on the school, and he expressed regret and frustration at feeling pressured to enter students for exams he knew they would struggle with. He said that the 70 pupils in the school who required the most resources and investment were those who are not valued in dominant accountability regimes. These are students who will:

count as failures...they will statistically be a failed cohort in this academy. Well failed on whose measure? Failed by what? (Interview, HOA).

The designation of failure is central to both the shaping of Eastbank’s academy status, and to the characterisation of individual pupils within it. Crucial to the school’s concerns here were the multiple experiences of failure that some students had to endure, particularly those with SEN or who work at below GCSE level.

Shifts in the policy landscape over the past decade were deemed to have disproportionately affected schools like Eastbank. The stripping of the value of many vocational qualifications and the reduction in the value of coursework, impacted those students who struggle to achieve a C grade in the English Baccalaureate subjects. There is a feeling in the school that some students are better equipped to experience success when they have a mixed curriculum that enables them to do some vocationally orientated qualifications:

We were a school that was quite committed to vocational qualifications...we suddenly found ourselves really adrift because the switch then was to including English and maths...Far more emphasis on grades, far less emphasis on inclusion. It all became English and maths. And we were quite poorly equipped (Interview, EH).

This shows staff resisting processes that treat young people as though they all learn in the same way, instead suggesting that “learning might not be linear or logical or proceed according to neat stages of development” (Thomson, 2013: 176). It is a critique of the lack of respect for difference that permeates policy discourse, and the way in which learning below expected levels is perceived to be a problem with the student and school, rather than with policies and processes taking place around them.

The current policy climate is such that the school feels it is constantly being asked to respond to the latest whim of government. It works out a programme that suits its students, but regularly has to re-evaluate this to correspond to another change in what is counted or permitted, for instance in curriculum and accountability goal posts:

We'll it's very unstable now isn't it because all the changes to exams. Mr Gove decided that we can't teach of Mice and Men anymore so we don't teach of Mice and Men anymore...it just throws more uncertainty into the system while we accommodate new syllabuses (Interview, SLT).

Senior staff expressed contempt for such political interference which was seen as a way of threatening and controlling schools but actually resulted in a climate of instability and difficulties for students:

It's the kids that suffered this year with all this political interference which was meant to teach certain schools a lesson (Interview, SLT).

We should have done much better last year on progress and I think we would have done but for the interference with the examination system which really hit our kids...our kids took 30% more final exams than they had in the previous years. Well, our kids if they're going to be successful in that sort of culture where the coursework is going, where there's this final exam, we have to – and we can't magic it – we have to find strategies to build their resilience (Interview, EH).

There is concern that the climate of heightened accountability “will result in more students being permanently excluded and placed into AP” (Interview, HOA). Staff wanted to protect students from the negative consequences of policy reforms. As discussed above, they had decided to bring all AP ‘in house’, rather than excluding pupils.

There was a querying of how well served Eastbank pupils are by current policy and measures. Bound up in this were negative views about how central government sees the school and treats it. The school had heard a narrative of surprise from many visitors to the school, including Ofsted and representatives from the DfE, because they expected to find a school in chaos with poor behaviour:

People think they know the school before they arrive...They think, based on the data, that it is crap. But when they visit and see what the school is doing they think the work is great. Then the cycle begins again – the data doesn't improve so they decide that the school is crap. We just want someone to recognise that, hang-on, maybe there is something going on here with context (Fieldnotes, SLT).

Through these comments staff expressed discontent and “resist[ed] performativity at a discursive level” by questioning the taken-for-granted assumptions of policy (Ball & Olmedo, 2013: 89). There is a level of contempt expressed here which may help to explain those attempts to redefine what academy status meant in the school. There were moments where the lack of alignment between the views of the senior staff and the government appeared so overwhelming that senior staff spoke of leaving the school. I was

told that the loss of EH would be keenly felt in the school, as he had been a dedicated part of it for many years. I return to this point in Chapter Eight.

Rearticulating Academy Status: Care of the Self

This discussion has recounted some of the narratives that were in circulation in Eastbank. These narratives created a set of localised, adapted truths, providing discursive rules through which academy status operated. Rather than signalling radical change, academy status was a tool for reaffirming aspects of the school's identity, particularly its ethos of care, community, and inclusivity. This truth was structured through another; that poverty plays an integral role in shaping practices and experiences in Eastbank. These narratives were used to make sense of, and contest, what were perceived to be the threats to Eastbank's culture and identity in the context of policy reform. In this final section, I consider the purposes that these localised truths served in the school.

This renarrativising was a practice of 'Care of the Self', which was focused on constituting the self in ethical ways (Foucault, 1996). Care of the Self is about the ethical and political choices staff made every day to determine the main dangers and challenges they were faced with (Foucault, 1984). Renarrativising was a way of them behaving ethically towards the pupils in their school and the local community. Through it, staff determined what was important, and communicated their hopes and fears.

Foucault's work has been used to understand the ways academy status is embedded in a wider set of truths that govern the practices of staff and students in Eastbank. Yet it also guides a consideration of if and how staff in a failing school can practice freedom through the mastery of discourse (Foucault, 1996). The systems of power through which educational discourses are created and sustained as truths are systems of productive power, which necessitate practices of freedom (Foucault, 2003: 35). The stories recounted in this chapter highlight the "constant, grinding conflict" that takes place as policies enter their context of intention (Scott, 1985: xvi).

The dominant academy discourse, and the technologies of truth that sustain it, were points of struggle in Eastbank, points that were worked with and worked against (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). This dominant discourse provided a basis for Eastbank staff to challenge the ways they were being governed, through which they could question:

How not be governed like that, by that, in the name of those principles, with such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them...as an act of defiance, as a challenge, as a way of limiting these arts of governing and sizing them up, transforming them, of finding a way to escape from them or, in any case, a way to displace them (Foucault, 1997: 28).

Academy status was a stimulus for a new process of resignification within Eastbank. It began a process of “thinking otherwise to manoeuvre around performance regimes” (Singh et al, 2014: 833). Community, inclusion, and the effects of poverty became centrepieces for the resignification of academy status. There are four potential consequences of this process, which illuminate the functionality of renarrativising in Eastbank.

First, the dominant narrative perpetuates and sustains deficit readings of schools such as Eastbank and their pupils, staff, and surrounding communities. Renarrativising was a way of challenging dominant conceptualisation of educational failure as a consequence of individual deficits, relocating problems as complex and structural. This was a form of moralising, which is protective rather than transformative, and worked to rebut the misrecognition of students and the local community. It was a basis for “struggles against the privileges of knowledge...” and a way of opposing externally imposed representations (Foucault, 1982: 781).

Second, the policy context was positioned as a source of danger for the students, and of anger and frustration for staff. There was critical engagement with the dominant policy ideas and governance systems, and their effects in the school, which provided a pivot for opposition and for the creation of ‘new’ narrative threads. Resistance was a form of protection, based on day-to-day experiences of how Eastbank students are served by

national policy mandates. It was a way of Eastbank staff positioning themselves as “moral agents” in relation to their students (Foucault in (Adams St Pierre, 2004: 334):

We try and protect them... I think we try and play government [policy] and try and make it have more meaning or resonate better with our children (Interview, SLT).

This policy context was read as adding to the difficulties of particular young people who, in a neoliberal context, constitute a risk by failing to accrue the necessary cultural, social, emotional and educational capital (McGregor & Mills, 2012). Not engaging in a process of radical change, which might see a weakening of the traditionally inclusive approach of the school, was social justice work; a way for its core values and priorities to remain intact. Staff used “contextual material to make sense of their own organizing” (Czarniawska, 2004: 36), and created “shared vocabularies” (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004: 90) to express their experiences. Through this they created the space to talk about poverty, and its implications for schooling practices and experiences, at a time and within a policy system, where poverty occupies the shadows of discourse. The recognition of poverty was fundamental to practices of care within Eastbank.

Third, renarrativising was also a form of ethical practice because it enabled ways of sustaining optimism, despite the hostile and tense policy context. Through renarrativising, deficit discourses were discouraged, and replaced with more appreciative stories about the school. Academy status was being renegotiated to keep morale high. This is a story of hope, resistance, resourcefulness, and a willingness to “engage with a completely different set of ideas about what schooling might be about”, to produce different versions of success (Singh et al, 2014: 834). Academy status was shaped to invite new ways of understanding, which created space for optimism, pride, and community values in a time of pressure, judgement, and individualism.

Fourth, staff may have ventured these stories as a way of protecting themselves, and of working through those external accounts of their practice as 'lacking' in some way. The defensiveness of staff was part of attempts to construct an alternative "regime of truth" (Ball & Olmedo, 2013: 92), which was more acceptable and comforting because it relocated blame away from their practices. Eastbank was presented as a less problematic type of academy because it was not taken-over and rebranded by a large, corporate,, and impersonal academy chain. Instead, the sponsor was committed to local children, and therefore fit into the school's project to reaffirm and continue its community centeredness. Thus Eastbank had also become a 'more acceptable' type of academy. Academisation "has the potential to loosen [a school's] relationship with their broader local community" (Simkins et al, 2015: 2), yet Eastbank was reemphasising its accountability to its local community rather than national policy mandates. That the school's intake was still improving, despite its data, was taken as a sign that the local community "has faith" in the school (Fieldnotes, EH).

There are important questions about the impact of renarrativising processes on the crafting of particular practitioner subjectivities. Documenting and exploring the everyday struggles and counter-politics that staff and students engage in is a platform from which to consider the new ontological possibilities that stem from academisation (Gowlett, 2015). Narratives are a tool for social negotiation (Czarniawska, 2004); a practice for thinking differently and subverting. Through them, some Eastbank staff discovered "a voice through which they [could] build truth on their experience, communicate it, debate it and share it with other people" (Gabriel, 2004: 71). It was a way of staff articulating their separateness from the dominant narrative, and of constructing "a more desirable narrative", which involved the "active deconstruction of the dominant narrative order" that governs the school and the individuals within it (Rosile et al, 2013: 564).

This study involved interactions and dialogues, through which staff were given time and opportunity to reflect and consider academy status, which

may have provided them with an opportunity “to think in terms of what they do not want to be, and do not want to become” (Ball & Olmedo, 2013: 86). Ontological questions come to the fore here. These narratives draw attention to processes through which staff ask “Who are we?” (Foucault, 1982: 781). Eastbank staff presented fragmented subjectivities: politicised, reflective, optimistic, concerned, and fearful schooling subjects were formed in response to academy status. This is how staff have been “compelled to decipher [themselves] in regard to what was forbidden” (Foucault, 2003: 146), in this case in relation to poverty as a forbidden discourse. This fragmentation highlights the struggles that are produced when teachers reflect on the relationships between their own beliefs and priorities and those that are promoted by the government. These narratives were part of the ongoing reformulation of the professional identities of school staff, in ways that they find acceptable at a particular point in time.

Conclusion

Against the wider discursive ideals and policy context outlined in Chapter Five, I have reflected on how the particular “thisness” (Thomson, 2002: 73) of Eastbank shaped how academy status was present and presented in the school. This chapter documents struggles over the possible meanings of academy status, as conveyed through narratives. This analysis has taken account of spoken and written practices, which were essential for the ongoing process of crafting acceptable meanings for academy status. Academy status has been reinterpreted and remade in Eastbank Academy to fit with the assemblages of the school. These are practices of freedom that are crafted in response to, and constituted through, the relations of power in and around Eastbank (Bansel, 2015).

This discussion has laid bare some of the contestation and critique that took place in Eastbank. The process of rearticulating academy status was punctuated by opposition, which drew attention to the school’s relationships with national policy agendas. These narratives presented a set of arguments about what academy status meant in Eastbank, which could be viewed as

undermining aspects of what academy status is intended to achieve in a school 'like this'. These renarrativising practices are a starting point for understanding the relations of power that surround the academy school.

This analysis highlights the work of staff to make policies, and the categorisations and judgements they carry, liveable. The process of rearticulating policy is "a means of self-formation" which "makes it more difficult to act and think 'as usual' and makes it possible to rethink our relationship to ourselves and to others, and our possibilities of existence, differently from what is expected" (Ball & Olmedo, 2013: 90). An optimistic reading of these might draw attention to the ethical stance of staff, who were seeking to minimise policy disadvantage within the school by dismantling some policy assumptions. I have traced the renarrativising of academy status in Eastbank, taking account of its nuances and contours, to see it as a self-forming activity (Adams St Pierre, 2004: 339). It is a way of making the work of becoming an academy school more ethical. It is a way of caring for the self and others in a context where misrecognition thrives.

The value of this analysis is that it disrupts the more regularly offered readings of academy status as sites of change, and instead shows the way academy status can become a site of negotiation. It suggests how, over time, the staff in this school have managed a set of difficult circumstances (McKenzie, 2015). Through these processes, change was reformulated. It was made safe and bearable, at least at the level of language.

However, attempts to diminish 'change' through discourse sit rather awkwardly against the performance and accountability policies that school staff highlighted as dominating school governance. As Chapter Five illustrated, the academies policy is underpinned by a particular form of moralising, which this chapter highlights as sitting at odds with the moralising of Eastbank staff. These two discourses draw on fundamentally different understandings of the purpose and function of education. It is to this tension that I turn in the next chapter.

Whilst this chapter highlights the role that unsettling established truths played in this school, it is also the case that this led to the establishment of another set of truths within the school context, which must also be problematised (Staller, 2016; Ball and Olmedo, 2013). Just as the dominant discourse of academies is founded on, and replicates, common-sense assumptions, so a set of assumptions underpin those in the school, which must also be questioned and troubled. For instance, whilst staff are politicised through their care of the self, which results in critiques of accounts of schooling, which ignore the impact of poverty, the school's philanthropic efforts did not facilitate young people to consider the political and structural dimensions of poverty and inequality. In the following two chapters I question the workings of Eastbank doing academy status 'its way', considering the extent to which this was possible, but also the ways it might be problematic, particularly in relation to how it was experienced by different young people within the school.

Chapter Eight Looking the Part: Surveillance, Fear, and the Aesthetics of Academy Status

The previous chapter charted the renarrativising of academy status in Eastbank. It highlighted the space for staff to practice freedom through their contestations of the dominant narrative construction of the academy school. However, there are costs associated with the commitment to this rearticulation, as well as the precariousness that faces an underperforming school (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). The focus of this chapter is the potential fears, costs, pressures and dilemmas associated with the production of Eastbank Academy.

Through this chapter I position academy status as a disciplinary tool; as a way of disciplining school staff, through particular forms of surveillance and normalisation. This analysis is formed around the following questions:

- What is the experience of surveillance in an underperforming academy?
- How does this shape the production of the academy school and academy subjects?

My argument is that surveillance shapes the academy in multimodal ways, marking its visual culture, materiality, space and pedagogical practice. I deal with the first three of these in this chapter, leaving the consideration of pedagogical practice for Chapter Nine. I begin by analysing the particular layers of surveillance on and in Eastbank. I then explore how surveillance, pressure and threat materialise through the visual, material and spatial cultures of the school. I consider Eastbank's rebranding, marketing and transition strategies, connecting these changes to its altered surveillance culture, and tracing its relationships with the directing of student aspirations.

Section One: A Failing Academy

The first task of this chapter is to explore the status of Eastbank, as determined by the technologies of power that exist in education, and how this categorisation triggers particular forms of surveillance. My research took place at a turbulent time for Eastbank as it faced unprecedented scrutiny and assessment of its capacity to meet government produced targets. The change to academy status followed the school's best ever examination results in 2011/12. However, the percentage of students achieving the dominant performance measure then declined for two years, and despite a small improvement, remained below the LA and national average, and below the government's floor standard. As described in Chapter Two, these floor standards and targets pertain to the "headline accountability measure for secondary schools", which was the percentage of students achieving 5+A*-C GCSEs including English and Maths at the time of this research (DfE, 2015b). These results illustrate Eastbank's complex performance trajectory and, alongside its Ofsted judgement of 'Requires Improvement', cemented its status as an underperforming school.

School staff reflected on the pressures of Ofsted inspection. Several local schools had recently received negative judgements from Ofsted:

That's what's just happened in this city. Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) described [the recent Ofsted inspections] as a purge which is really interesting language for someone who is supposed to be truly independent. It's all very frightening...one of the HMIs came in and said your time is up...So it's turbulent at the moment. The LA are being inspected in two weeks as well. I wouldn't be surprised if after putting [those] secondary's into special measures if they do that to the LA (Interview, HOA).

This is a geographical context that the government has depicted as providing inadequate secondary education. It was in this climate of fear and a perceived close inspection of, and even attack on, the LA schooling context, that Eastbank awaited its Ofsted inspection.

Staff discussed the impact of such a context on aspects of their work. As highlighted in Chapter Seven, they linked this to a context of instability for their students:

Staff member recalls feelings of shock over the spate of Ofsted inspections and questions why it was done in this way. They are all under this pressure and surveillance and all that happens is (a) teachers leave, because “why would you work in such conditions of extra pressure and surveillance, not being able to teach the lessons you want to teach” and (b) there is a fall in student numbers which impacts on money, “how are either of these things going to help schools to improve?” (Fieldnotes, TS).

This was the context of inspection and accountability during my time in Eastbank. My argument, in this chapter and the next, is that the trace of this can be seen in everyday practices in the school.

Surveillance and the Academy School

There has been a shift in the lens and consequences of surveillance on schools with the academies agenda, particularly post-2010. Academy status has not reinvented the surveillance and accountability mechanisms for schools, but it has amplified trends that were already present, and in some cases allowed them to take on particular nuances. In Eastbank it has shaped the context of pressure, which is marked by “the fear of being caught out” (Interview, SLT). It has shaped the policies and practices that have taken form in the school in recent years.

Academy status changes the chain of accountability for schools, ending the “middle tier” of accountability provided by the LA (Simkins et al, 2015: 3). An academy is a “business in education” (Interview, AS), accountable through its funding agreement with The Secretary of State for Education, who is the principle regulator of academies and oversees their compliance with their funding agreement. The Secretary of State is assisted in this role by the RSCs and EFA, who supervise academies’ compliance in matters of funding and governance, and have “intervention powers” where there are concerns about financial management or governance (EFA, 2015: 10). DfE Intervention

powers include the issuing of a Financial Notice to Improve (FNTI), in cases where there is deemed to be a mismanagement of funds or inadequate governance. If this notice is not complied with, the academy is deemed to be in “breach of the funding agreement”, which may then be terminated (EFA, 2015: 10).

This emerging and increasingly detailed guidance around the management of finances and risks marks a departure from a time when elected LA representatives oversaw the organisation of effective and equitable schooling within local areas (Simkins et al, 2015). LAs powers have been reduced by education reforms since the 1988 Education Reform Act, a trend that has been cemented by the academies policy, “significantly weakening the ability of LAs to manage the pattern of schooling in their areas” (Simkins et al, 2015: 2). RSCs are envisaged as filling the accountability and planning gap that has been left by the reduced role of the LA (Durbin et al, 2015).

The purpose of this discussion is not to celebrate the former role of the LA. As noted in Chapter Seven, Eastbank staff were critical of the support they had received. I was told that consultations for any proposed changes were often lengthy and the LA were “quite prescriptive”. Instead I want to emphasise the fundamental shift in the process of monitoring and supporting schools, and that this has particular implications for Eastbank. In the past, Eastbank had experienced the LA as a ‘critical friend’, particularly regarding financial deficits:

Historically the school has been in financial deficit...the school roll was significantly reduced in those years and so they had to make a lot of redundancies to get the deficit down...When they were under the LA they could negotiate overspends and repaying the deficit...As an academy they are not supposed to go into deficit. It is a “torturous process” to get this approved, “an example of high up politicians making these decisions rather than them being made locally”. The DfE’s stance is that if you are not getting enough students it is your fault. Your grades are not good enough and you are not popular enough. (Fieldnotes, TS).

Whilst schools that are members of large MATs may have the support of some centralised services, stand-alone or small MATs, such as the MAT Eastbank is a member of, have lost an intermediary support. In Eastbank, this has been keenly felt around financial management, as the LA historically supported the school with financial deficit. The management of this by central government has become more disciplinary. Financial deficit is now a reason for the imposing of a FNTI (EFA, 2015). It is the school's fault if student numbers dipped, thus the ensuing dip in funding is also its fault. However, as I will discuss later in this chapter, Eastbank's dip in numbers coincided with several local academies receiving new state-of-the-art buildings. The school is being held responsible for a dip in numbers, in an ideological context that thrives on competition (Simkins et al, 2015: 3) and on the idea that successful schools will become more popular and pull pupils away from other schools.

Eastbank is a school that walks a tightrope between close scrutiny and intervention. If it is judged as Inadequate by Ofsted then the RSC can terminate the funding agreement, identify a new sponsor and move the academy to that new trust (DfE, 2016f). This means the school is put into the hands of one of the DfE's list of approved sponsors, the celebrated figures of the academy movement discussed in Chapter Five, who are aligned with the dominant policy message. This is the omnipresent threat the school faces. However, even without this ultimate judgment from Ofsted, the new category of 'Coasting' school could be used as a justification for taking the same measures. If a school is defined as coasting (see Chapter Two) and is not deemed to have a satisfactory improvement plan, RSCs will intervene (DfE, 2016f). If the school is already an academy, it will be asked to take specific action, and may ultimately be moved to a new sponsor (DfE, 2016f). This is a context where "take-overs and merges" are increasing normalised (Courtney, 2015: 809). As the categorisation of schools evolves, and the meanings of what is 'good enough' becomes more stringent, schools such as Eastbank are continually at risk of intervention.

The immediate threat to Eastbank is being unable to illustrate sufficient progress quickly enough, which is out of kilter with the academies agenda of efficiently ‘turning around’ schools. Eastbank has become an academy, but has not seen a revolution in its data performance or categorisation. This story is one that the DfE does not perpetuate about academies. Eastbank is aware of the dangers of being “off message”:

They’re not interested in the story behind it, they’re not and I think that’s because they’re trying to demonstrate particularly the academies division, is trying to demonstrate a political progress...they’re trying to demonstrate that a political strategy for education – i.e. academies – is working. Therefore, when the schools flag up as being off message with that they have to have quite a robust strategy for dealing with them, and it’s all very macho and all very tough (Interview, EH).

When school data dips or is below a set ‘floor standard’ the academy is flagged up to The Academies Division at the DfE, who seek answers from the school. Over the past three years Eastbank’s senior staff have been to the DfE in London four times, had two DfE visits, an Ofsted inspection and an Ofsted monitoring visit to “account for the school...the scrutiny on the school is immense” (Interview, EH). This is a “symbolic, ritual, and theatrical” process in which school staff must explain themselves; a context where senior staff are called, almost as penitents, to account for the school (Foucault, 2003: 164). However, this is a carefully controlled conversation, where only certain discourses are acceptable. The HOA told me that during one of these meetings the school’s celebration of above national average attendance was met with the dismissive response; “this is not a youth club”. When data is unsatisfactory, additional obedience is required, and alternative discourses are even more carefully managed. Through this process DfE’s authority is “recharged in the ritual display of its reality as ‘super-power” (Foucault, 1975: 57). Against a backdrop of complex social and economic challenges, young people overwhelmingly wanted to be in Eastbank Academy but until its data improves talk of this is forbidden.

This suggests that the stakes of perceived failure may be higher for Eastbank under the new, increasingly direct accountability regime. In this context, schools are offered less breathing space, and intervention is intended to escalate more quickly, as the government takes swift action to deal with underperformance (Morgan, 2015). The LAs capacity to offer guidance, in a less high-stakes context, has gone, as has the possibility the LA may block or defer the gaze of central government for a time. The nature and frequency of surveillance is linked to a 'message' about what it means to be an academy, and the dangers of being 'off message' are clear to Eastbank staff. The academies narrative has been accompanied by an argument about who is 'best placed' to make decisions about schooling, and presents a persuasive argument about giving more power to teachers. However, this storyline has legitimised a shift in gaze, necessitating a more direct surveillance of the school's outputs (McNay, 1994).

As I noted in Chapter Two, Ofsted has moved towards a risk assessment model of inspection, whereby the frequency and depth of inspection is correlated with school data (Ofsted, 2016). This continues a shift away from direct lesson observations, towards a greater inspection of the documents and data through which the school accounts for itself. The school is governed through numbers and must illustrate the continual improvement of achievement and progress (Ozga, 2009).

Key to this are the school's internal accountability and scrutiny processes. These are increasingly what is checked, and self-evaluation is central to staff's ability to be answerable for what they do. Data management has become a risk management practice (Lupton, 2016a). Data inform the categorisation of the school, which is a catalyst for intervention or greater autonomy. This intervention is intimately entwined with the academies agenda. If a school is not an academy, intervention equates to turning it into one. If a school is an academy, it will be given new sponsorship. If an academy is coasting, without 'sufficient' improvement plans, it will get a new sponsor. In the current accountability regimes, all roads lead to academy

status. For schools that are already an academy, the emphasis is on channelling them towards 'acceptable' sponsors.

This connects with Foucault's work on the gaze, discussed in Chapter Three. (Foucault, 1975). His work frames the importance of questioning how the particular form of gaze on underperforming academies, and an emphasis on governing by numbers can be traced in the particularities of the gaze on and in Eastbank Academy, alongside how this impacts on individuals within the school. In the discussion that follows I connect those vertical shifts in the gaze on the school from 'outside' and 'above', to the horizontal or internal gaze that operated within the school.

The Impact of Surveillance

The impact of this wider context of surveillance is the preoccupation of the remainder of this chapter. The first implication was a loss of autonomy:

HOA: The problem I've got is because of Ofsted I might not get the luxury to do all that

JP: right so if Ofsted give you a certain rating

HOA: oh they take over the world, they write plans for you and dictate what you do

JP: ok so if you got a four

HOA: I would in effect need their permission

JP: ok if you get a four regardless of being an academy, regardless of the extra autonomy

HOA: I can't assume I have any control because they write the recommendations and they have to approve the plan and if it doesn't, and this is the problem in this current climate, if it doesn't tick all of his fucking boxes, they won't authorise it. And they're a bunch of micro managers this lot. The level of detail they look at is frightening.

Getting an 'Inadequate' judgement would undermine some important reasons why the school became an academy, such as introducing new aspects of the curriculum tailored to particular groups of students:

Although if you are an academy you can do things differently and technically no one can stop you they can “brutalise you through various measures” (Fieldnotes, HOA).

This illustrates the limits and boundaries of academy autonomy in a context where data reigns. Academies are only as autonomous as their data allows, and freedoms can be revoked as easily as they can be granted (DfE, 2016f). Contrary to the academies narrative, the State does not disappear (Ozga, 2009). Instead, the State has a mandate for more direct surveillance of schools such as Eastbank. In Chapter Seven I suggested that Eastbank garnered some additional freedom, particularly in relation to its sponsor, by selecting to become an academy ‘before it was pushed’. However, it was also the case that the longer the school spent ‘underperforming’, the more this breathing space diminished. Being a failing school means that sponsors and management can be changed. This is meaningful threat to Eastbank, which selected its sponsor to fit with its ethos.

The second implication is that performance dominates the school’s work, leading to a constant assessment of where the school is, how it is doing, and what it can do and say to avoid ultimate sanctions. This is exemplified through the pedagogical examples detailed in Chapter Nine. The third is that pressure is felt by staff, as they become aware of the risk and threats presented by their categorisation as a failing academy: “I am at risk of being put in special measures at the moment” (Interview, HOA). The head of English spoke of the pressures of this particular role: “It can be a stressful job. There is so much emphasis on English and Maths. It can be viewed as make or break”(Fieldnotes, TS).

It was viewed as important to have “the thick enough skin that comes from experience of the trade...to keep coming back and doing this” (Interview, SLT). This pressure is not an unintended consequence of the policy, rather it has been written into it from the very beginning, as my discussion with one of the policy architects illustrated:

JP: Do you think academies are under more pressure to improve or show results than schools generally?

Policy architect: Yes because they've got a lot more attention focused on them...and I think it's a good thing as well, and actually I think they also help to put pressure on other schools to improve as well, so there's been a knock on effect.

Whilst performance is a concern for all maintained secondary schools, these concerns are exacerbated in the academy context where there is additional pressure to swiftly improve examination scores (Leo et al, 2010). Academies have been an expensive, time-consuming and controversial policy, thus the requirement for results has been more prominent than for non-academised schools.

These depictions of a pressurised educational context, where accountability regimes are used to 'catch schools out' highlight a potentially threatening side of the academy movement for particular schools. Although senior staff celebrated their no blame, supportive approach to performance management, this was an emerging area of difficulty in the school. Performance management includes target setting and monitoring and is part of a context where people must give "more and better accounts" of themselves (Glatter, 1999: 255-6). Senior staff noted that although their supportive approach is popular internally:

Externally it's not the way to go because most of the new academy movements that come in the first thing they do is sack everybody, frighten everybody, bully everybody because if you're fearful for your job then you probably do perform but it doesn't make you a better professional and you don't necessarily sustain it and if you're good enough you probably leave (Interview, EH).

However, senior staff are increasingly in a situation where good, hard-working staff are not passing their appraisals because they:

Haven't got the data, so there are constant challenges. That's an externally exposed expectation from all this appraisal crap...I'm caught out because I have to demonstrate a robust appraisal process or else we can't get a satisfactory Ofsted, so that's very compromising in a sense (Interview, EH).

Teaching staff highlighted the dilemmas that stem from these systems:

Staff member thinks his job is “morally great, I love working here and trying to get these kids what they need”. But he thinks that performance related pay risks creating elitism in the state system. If good teachers choose to work in difficult contexts, but can’t meet the data targets, they will move out to easier schools in leafier suburbs where this is easier to do. Why would they continue to work in tough contexts where they don’t get a pay rise, if they don’t have to? It is not the context of Eastbank students that is difficult it is the policy context that is difficult because we can no longer talk about context or ask for this to be taken into account. Performance related pay is raising “difficult moral questions” for him (Fieldnotes, TS).

This highlights a potential consequence of systems that continually demand more of staff, and that equate data to pay. It suggests the evaluation of teacher’s work in Eastbank is shifting from a “constructive and collegiate” model, to something that demands the performance of toughness, and risks damaging staff relationships and morale (Ball & Olmedo, 2013: 89).

This is also a context where huge amounts of pressure are directed at those in charge. Senior staff recognised the vulnerability of the school, its sponsorship arrangements, and their own roles:

I think we’re vulnerable in terms of our own employment. I think we’re vulnerable to further interference from the DfE in terms of structure, they would think nothing, and there are no particular powers that would stop them changing our sponsor (Interview, EH).

Senior member of staff is fed up at the moment and said it has been hinted that he will lose his job if results do not improve this year. He has started to consider how long he should stay and whether he should jump before he is pushed (Fieldnotes, HOA).

This mirrors the wider context of difficulties in recruiting head teachers, which has been linked to the pressures of accountability systems (Thomson, 2009). Despite positive views on the school, several staff, and particularly those with managerial responsibility, spoke of ‘getting out before they are pushed’. This is a context where “demoralisation, depression, frustration,

and stress' are tropes of experience that recur" (Ball & Olmedo, 2013: 90). In a context of increasing scrutiny, where there is an omnipresent risk of intervention, the one thing staff might feel in control of is whether they stay in the job. Leaving (before you are pushed) may be read as the ultimate form of self-regulation and care of the self.

As minimal and constrained as it was, Eastbank wanted to hang onto its relative freedom and avoid the ultimate level of government intervention where every decision is monitored, and the values of the school are renounced. This context of surveillance is pivotal to understanding the images, comments and vignettes that follow in this chapter and Chapter Nine. Through these I make sense of some of the activities that were taking place in the school. To avoid intervention, the timely production of the data and image of a 'Good School' became integral to Eastbank's practices. However, staff also resisted dominant conceptualisations of what academy status means. Eastbank staff sit in a place of tension: to do academy status 'their way', whilst attempting to avoid omnipresent sanctions of intervention, take-over and job loss. The rest of this chapter is dedicated to exploring how this tension thrives and is dealt with through schooling practices directed to the visual culture, rebranding, marketing and transition work of the school.

Section Two: Marketing and Transitions

The trace of the dominant academies discourse infiltrated aspects of the school and some of my discussions with staff. I explore this through staff's work to shift the aesthetics and reputation of the school.

Branding and Marketing: Signifying Academy Status

Being an academy is about being something different to the "ordinary school" (Maguire et al, 2011) and, as discussed in Chapter Five, this difference is discursively connected with being 'better'. In a context of data scrutiny, Eastbank must be seen to draw on its academy branding to attract more pupils, and ideally to attract those pupils more likely to improve its data. It

must become an enterprising institution, which stresses its difference. It must do so to compete with other local schools, although, contradictorily, being an academy is now 'the norm' for secondary schools. Only certain versions of success count and the policy environment moulds representations schools seek out (Ball, 2003a).

Branding and marketing are crucial to this process since, in an education market, difference must be exhibited to parents and the outside world for it to matter. Branding and marketing are products of the encouragement schools have received to respond to market forces (Maguire et al, 2011). This is part of the way academies have come to occupy a quasi-business mode of operating, which shapes how they represent themselves.

Although Eastbank has not 'improved' it has become an academy, and therefore can draw on a discourse of superiority, or at least parity with other local schools. Despite a tendency to diminish the change that came with academy status, Eastbank's academy status was performed to the outside world as a signifier of change and improvement. The academy brand was drawn on as a tool to improve the local positioning of the school, and it was simultaneously problematised and exploited. There are two aspects of this I want to explore here: narrativising school events, and changes in visual signifiers such as uniforms and the building. The aim is to consider how these aspects are inflected with the discourse of 'improved aspirations', which is a foundational truth of the academies policy.

Vignette Seven shows an opportunity for primary school children to visit the school in advance of selecting a secondary school. One aim is to make them more familiar with the secondary school setting so that their Year 7 transition is less disruptive. By hanging their decoration on the school's tree, students are told that they have become a part of the Eastbank community. They also take a decoration home as a reminder of the event. They are invited to bring in food bank donations, and therefore become involved in

Eastbank's fundraising activities even before joining the school. This event is taken as an opportunity to embed them into this integral aspect of the

Vignette Seven: Transition event

Eastbank has a calendar of primary school 'transition' events, aimed at forging and maintaining links with local primary schools. They offer local students opportunities to visit, prior to deciding on a secondary school. I assisted at one of these. In the session students were making Christmas baubles, one to be taken home and one for the school's tree, which exhibits similar work from previous events.

This event was celebrated on the school website, through a narrative account of the day, pictures, and quotations from the primary school pupils and their teachers.

Quotations from the pupils expressed their enjoyment of the day and excitement at the prospect of joining the school in the future. As part of the day students were invited to bring in food donations to contribute to the food hampers that Eastbank delivers to local food banks over Christmas.



Photographs Nine and Ten: taken by me showing the food donations and student work from the transition event.

Eastbank culture. The event was targeted at local children: Eastbank was not targeting more affluent students to boost its results, a tactic used by other academies (Parsons, 2012).

These transition events also provide an opportunity to produce narratives and marketing materials, through which Eastbank can promote its

relationships with local primary schools. The story of this event, aided by pictures and quotations, is promoted through the school's website, twitter account and in various 'hard-copy' textual materials produced about the school. These can be shared with the parents of children attending local primary schools, and therefore provide an opportunity to present the school in a certain way.

This was also the case with the Academy Launch event, where the school celebrated its transition to academy status. Local primary school children, local government representatives, parents, the academy sponsor and current staff and students attended this event, which was described as denoting "visual" shifts in the school (Interview, EH). Again, there was the event itself, which took place prior to my fieldwork, and there were the materials produced about the event, which remained available. They provided an opportunity to see how academy status was being drawn on and celebrated. The messages from the day were summarised as follows on the school website:

Something special is happening in this school. We are proud and excited to be an academy. We are proud of our school results. The future is full of excitement for the school, and we are privileged to be a part of it. We have done this for our community. We will continue to work towards being an outstanding academy for local people (Paraphrased for confidentiality).

Presentations of the school in the accounts of the transition and launch event aligned with the presentation of Eastbank outlined in Chapter Seven. Promoting inclusive activities, giving to others, and building a sense of community were all present here. However, the process of turning this event into something 'marketable' aligns with a performative agenda in which schools must demarcate themselves as superior. The way the school represents itself, and the mechanisms it uses to do this, bare the mark of the business rationale that is shaping contemporary schooling in England (Maguire et al, 2011). Eastbank has experienced a boom in the production of materials about itself, which monopolise on the idea that academy status

does indeed change something about the school, and implies that school staff were buying into the sense of superiority that accompanies academy status. Eastbank, a closely watched school, takes this opportunity to produce an account of itself that concurs with the forms of surveillance and expectation it is subject to. In doing so, contradictions and tensions arise with those renarrativising practices discussed in Chapter Seven.

I was told that marketing and branding had become increasingly significant to attract more pupils and ensure the financial security of the school. Eastbank has had difficulties with its intake in previous years:

Up until last year the school was experiencing a decrease in numbers. It went from 700 to 600. Now it is working its way back up. A bad year has a knock-on impact for five years (Fieldnotes, AS).

This was linked on several occasions to the new school buildings two other local schools had received, leading to a “boom in numbers” for those schools; something one staff member referred to as “shiny school syndrome... a new building is a selling point”. In this context, Eastbank has felt compelled to work on its marketing strategy:

A lot of work now goes into selling the school. This is a big spend in the school and they set aside part of the budget for marketing each year. They have paid for adverts on the back of buses, which other local schools have also done (Fieldnotes, AS).

We had to go out and present the school in a completely different way. We had to really think through what our transition was because superficially we were a poor choice...we used a marketing company, who were able to advise and support (Interview, SLT).

There is now a dedicated marketing budget and a member of staff who works as ‘strategy manager’ for transition events and the marketing of the school. The wider performative regime that dictates the need to sell the school is thus assimilated into a member of staff’s job title and everyday work. It is normalised, becoming a taken-for-granted practice in the school. There has been some rebranding to attract pupils, such as advertising on buses. There is an important comparative and competitive element here;

Eastbank must keep pace with the tactics of other schools in this competitive local climate. This is particularly the case when some schools, especially those overseen by sponsors outside of the city, were accused of engaging in “tactical behaviour” (Fieldnotes, TS), including writing directly to students and staff at other schools to ‘poach’ them.

Theoretically, all schools are in competition with one another. But schools with overlapping catchment areas are also in competition in a more tangible sense. There have been years when Eastbank’s year 7 intake has plummeted. The financial impact of a small year group reverberates for five years, necessitating redundancies. Staff do not want to risk this happening again. The move to academy status has been used as an opportunity to rebrand and take more rigorous approaches to pupil recruitment. On a pragmatic level, this work is aimed at marketing the school to ensure a sufficiently high intake in future years. This works through the production of progress: the crafting of a narrative about a school ‘on the up’. These activities are aimed at improving the school’s reputation for a more secure future. Transitions are now an area of focus and resources, and the school has a calendar of transition events through which it connects with local feeder primary schools. School intakes for the last two years, and projected intakes for this year, suggest the school has been successful at attracting higher numbers of pupils. However, it has other outcomes too, as I discuss below.

As well as transitions into the school, there was now an increased focus on transitions out of the school post-GCSE. There was felt to be a notable input from the sponsor in this area of Eastbank’s work:

Ideally...they move on to us...then we progress them through as well into employment or FE or HE, so it’s about making sure there’s that progression route all the way through. So it’s good to actually work in those two academies with those kids quite early on, just raise aspirations a bit (Interview, ST).

Senior staff felt they were offering better post-16 advice for students, which would improve systems around pupil progression. Advice giving and

transition work now began earlier in the school. Taster days and visits from colleges become a formal part of the timetable for year 9 students and they had 'Colleges Week' for year 11, which includes presentations from local colleges and opportunities for questions.

Section Three: Uniform, Name, Building

In addition to materials that are used to produce a narrative about academy status, there are other visual signifiers of a rebranding process in the school. Ex-students noted that Eastbank's improvement over time had been marked by regular changes in uniform:

Student 1: like the whole place as a whole like everything got like nicer, I don't know and like they changed the uniform. When we first came it was just like a blue polo shirt, and it didn't look like a school. But we got the ties and everything and it is that thing, it seemed, we were very cynical about it when it first came in but the thing about if you dress smart everyone feels smarter and it kind of worked I think.

Student 2: they changed the uniform as soon as they turned into an academy

Student 3: my brother and sister are year 8 and year 9 and they get a new uniform every year. It's not based on income or anything

This suggests that the uniform had been changed over time to cultivate particular feelings. For example, students picked up on the associations staff had tried to engender between looking smart, by wearing smart clothing, and being smart in terms of academic ability. Uniforms, like all clothing provide visual clues to observers about the behaviour and status of the wearer (Hertz, 2007). Former students associated the move from a polo shirt to a more traditional shirt as symbolic of a shift to a more business-like school.

Uniform change was tied both to general changes in the school, and to academy status. Uniform change was overtly regulated through written

codes, which were disseminated to students and their families. Students were provided with new uniform items as the uniform changed. The uniform was an important signifier of being a member of the Eastbank community, and was therefore free, continuing the inclusive practice that is concurrent with Eastbank's self-characterisation in Chapter Seven.

The school created a student council badge to demarcate those who were members, and a badge to illustrate the completion of tutor-time projects on inclusion, diversity and community. These badges were symbolic of a culture where there was something material to strive for. Aspirations were being cultivated around visual signs and forms of distinction that mark out those who accord with the dominant culture and values of the school. This also showed in the assembly prize giving presented in Chapter Seven. As the school culture shifts, structures are in place to reward student compliance with these shifts through rituals of prize giving and public praise.

The use of clothing as an unspoken "visual marker" (Hertz, 2007: 43) of identity, change and improvement was also present in staff commentary:

Vignette Eight: Discussion with SENCO

This time round it doesn't feel that we're fighting a fire. It feels like we're in control of the fire and now we're gonna put the fire warden in place to stop it spreading any further. So and that has only happened since we became an academy. I think it was constant fire-fighting beforehand...Very short term and reactive rather than proactive...My job title is strategy manager. I think it comes from that. It isn't 'SENCO' I don't just go and deal with the SEN, I don't just go and deal with EAL, I don't just go and deal with Pupil Premium. It's strategy. Deal with it as a strategy. Not as an individual pocket...more a business model...it is very business orientated...I can see that more and more of what I do isn't necessarily to do with children it's to do with coordinating people to work with children and to do with coordinating what goes on around those children. Whereas I suppose it's quite specific to the SENCO role I suppose. SENCOs have always been the mother hen...kind of cluck around the little SEN kids, 'ah are you okay, give me a hug and oh my nice comfy cardi' type of things, you know. It's one of those things. And it's not so much that now anymore. Its more business suit than it is comfy cardi... I do think that is academy. I don't think that's just the school changing.

Here the metaphorical shift from “comfy cardi” to “business suit” is drawn upon to explicate the more business-like culture that has stemmed from academy status. This is indicative of a more formal, entrepreneurial aesthetic, which ex-students connected with perceived improvements to the school. Change is positioned in relation to a staff member whose remit is to manage inclusive practice in the school. The shift from ‘mother hen’ to ‘strategic coordinator’ means less time with children and more time producing a strategy around those who do work with them. The language of ‘strategies’ and ‘strategic approaches’ becomes normalised in the school.

Finally, there were further visual shifts. Changing the name of the school resulted in a new school sign, new letterheads and new branding on paperwork, which swallowed some of the start-up grant the school received (Fieldnotes, AS). Brochures had to be changed to include the new name and refer to the school sponsor, who uses its sponsorship as an opportunity for its own marketing.

Changing Buildings and Spaces

The relationship between academy status and a new school building has been an integral feature of Eastbank’s recent history, both in relation to its own building and other local schools receiving new buildings through the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. Throughout the lifespan of the academies project, new buildings have been connected with the “wider educational transformation” academies were expected to effect (DfCSF, 2007: ii). New buildings were seen as an opportunity for the visual realisation of the sponsor’s vision and influence; a way of mirroring their pedagogical approach through the learning environment (Leo et al, 2010). As documented in Chapter Five, new school buildings were expected to provide a powerful contrast with the dilapidated buildings of the failing schools being replaced, symbolic of the holistic transformation that academy status was expected to bring (Leo et al, 2010). Such a physical transformation is

available for all to see, including parents, and other local schools, anxious about the impact on their own intake in a competitive education climate (Parsons, 2012).

There was a significant delay in Eastbank receiving its school building, due to the change in government policy in 2010 (Curtis, 2010), although this was confirmed and being planned by the end of my fieldwork. The school's journey and relationship with this school building had important consequences. First, staff felt a strong sense of injustice when they were told they were not receiving their new school building, because this was seen to deny the school the opportunity to be on a fair footing with other local schools that had received new buildings. Staff told me that the delay in their building, alongside two local schools receiving new builds, had cost them some difficult years of pupil recruitment:

It fuelled this sort of resentment and we lost a lot of kids, that first year afterwards we had 85 kids in year 7, and if you multiply that by 5 you don't have a viable school...what we were hearing anecdotally pretty much was kids were going up to [names two local schools] and they were hugely impressed by the new building superficially so perhaps so we dropped to 85. The next year we had 130. Last year we had 165 and I suspect we'll have 180 this year. So it's interesting (Interview, EH).

Second the new building was perceived to be symbolically important:

It's evidence to our kids and our community that it is a school that's being invested in. It's sort of symbolic as much as anything...the EFA is investing 11 million in the school (new building) so we must be considered value for money (Interview, SLT).

From the beginning BSF was suffused with the discourse of 'serving the community', as part of a "community renewal strategy" (Parsons, 2012: 75). There were various visual features referred to as signs of this investment and new sense of confidence in the school. I return to the ambiguity of this idea after detailing the changes – both carried out and planned – to Eastbank's building.

Making the Most of the Building

Whilst the school awaited its new building it used the initial injection of money that accompanies academy status, alongside the pressure and opportunity for change, to made subtle alterations to their current building. Visual changes were deemed important: an opportunity to “refresh and show confidence” and to “smarten up” the “tired old building” (Interview, SLT). The school strove to look like an academy whilst it waited for its building:

We got a certain amount of funding and we re-tarmacked the drive and immediately, visually the impression, you know you didn't come down the drive and hit a pot hole. You actually came down to this newly tarmacked drive with clear delineation of linings and all the rest of it...all that stuff it just gives you the chance to show confidence. So it was very subtle (Interview, EH).

Artwork and display boards were changed to reflect the shift to academy status. A student told me that these changes, particularly making the corridors more decorative, was important:

JP: so, is this what you meant when you said things look good?

Year 7 Student: yeah, there's never like, a dull like part of the school

JP: there's even art work up in here

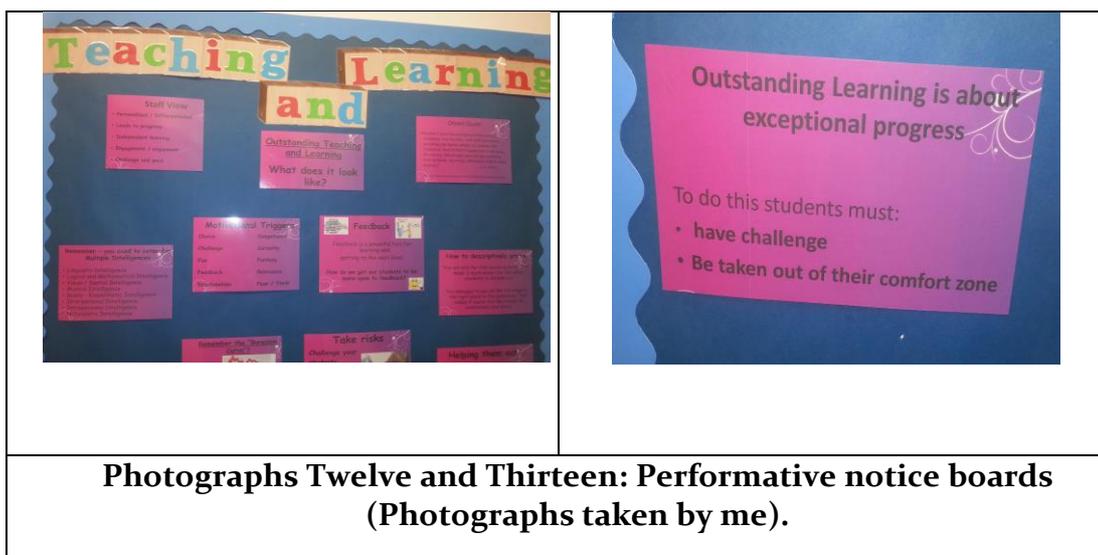
Student: it's amazing

JP: I wonder if they'll be able to do this in the new building?

Student: mm maybe. It's literally painted onto the wall



Photograph Eleven: taken by a year 7 student to show the wall art.



As well as artwork, notice boards appeared, performing compliance with Ofsted’s guidelines about what constitutes good teaching and learning. Display boards were visual spaces for the celebration of GCSE results and other victories, such as sports awards.

There were attempts to improve facilities and make changes to those ‘hidden’ areas of the school, such as the toilets and areas behind buildings. The sink areas in the toilets were opened up so they were no longer a closed space associated with misbehaviour and, for some students, feeling unsafe. Spaces behind buildings and back exits to the school were closed off, and back gates were locked. This links to the reputation that it was in those corners of the school that students engaged in forbidden activities:

Ex-student: there’s lots of little corners where mischief can be done I guess

Ex Student: round the back if you go towards the dance hall, round to the right, it’s all closed off now but you used to be able to go round it, it’s kind of the back of the school and canteen, and obviously that was where people used to go to smoke and stuff. People would just jump over the fence and stuff, but since I left, I guess the year after, they closed that off so you can’t go round there anymore.

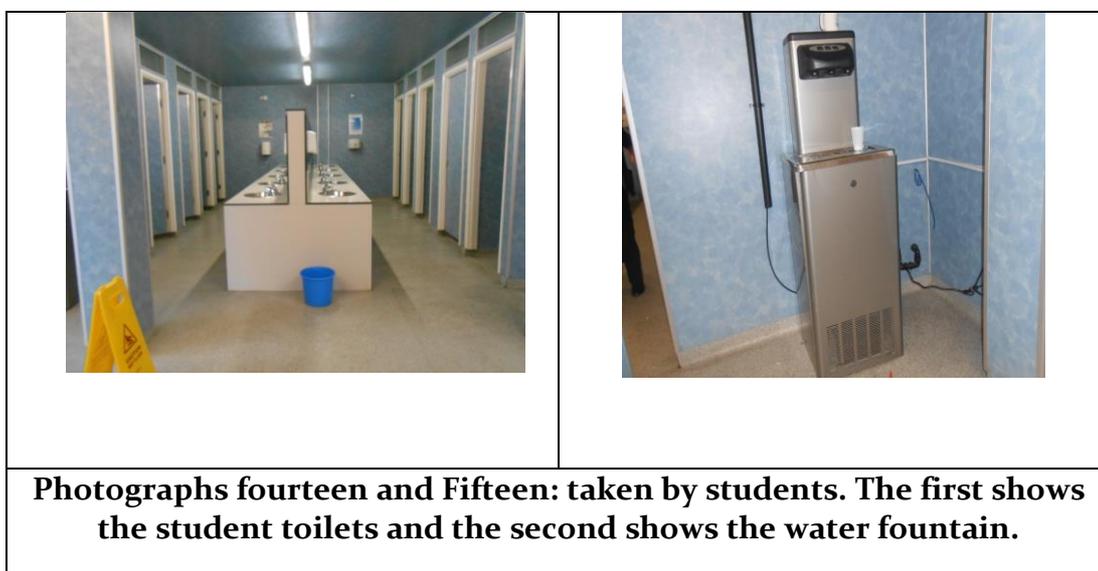
Water fountains were provided and reinforced the introduction of an unpopular rule that students were not allowed fizzy or non-water drinks during school time:

Student 1 (year 9): They took fizzy pop away

Student 2 (year 9): Yeah that's a bit disappointing. You're not allowed them at all...water goes warm after a bit

J: How has that gone down with students?

Student 1: They don't get it out in front of [staff] but they still bring it in



Small shifts to the space and artefacts in the school were therefore intertwined with the management of behaviour (Foucault, 1975), or at least with the performance of managing behaviour, as students had navigated the 'no fizzy pop' rule.

The shifts since academy status served to render some school spaces more visible and controlled. Spaces obscured from view were gradually shut off. This was a step towards what would be a significant spatial shift with the new building away from the "small town" design, as an ex-student described it, to a single school building. The small town design is not 'gaze friendly': it

is impossible to see all, or indeed much, of the school from any single vantage point. The new building will create a tighter, more controllable space, where the length of the corridor can be seen on each floor, and where there is only very limited reason to be outside of the school building. Since the early freedoms and excesses of the BSF programme have been curbed, the school has been given one of the formulaic “baseline design” buildings based on a set number of students (EFA, 2014b). The process has lacked the “deep consultation” of staff, pupils and the community that was advocated in earlier phases of school rebuilding (DfCSF, 2007: ii).

These changes may create a space where some students feel safer, and may tackle one of the complaints from Ofsted, that there are low-level behavior problems throughout the school. There was a sense that the new building would spatially carry out some of the needs and demands of being an academy, creating a more professional environment. However, discourses on new school buildings tend to emphasise the positive elements of this process, guiding analysis away from a problematisation of such changes. There are gains but also losses anticipated through these changes. Students had been told that the new building would “make dinner-time shorter” (SY7), because it will have to be staggered due to the smaller dining room. Tutor time was also being shortened, yet students told me that it was a valuable opportunity to complete homework, revise, have “free time... we can play games on computer as long as they’re not violent and stuff” (SY7), and improve their maths and literacy.

The designs painted onto the walls by staff and students would also be lost, and even if replicated, would never be exactly the same. A member of staff acknowledged further important losses:

We’ll certainly lose space. This school has about 700 kids in it. And it was probably built comfortably for about 1000...what we have is a huge choice of large spaces but the move now in terms of making cost efficient buildings is the idea that you duplicate space, so a space will never sit there empty whereas of course we have plenty of spaces sitting there empty where people just sort of go to...So you lose that flexibility

and its strange to be the bearer of bad news in the context of a new building, so we'll just have to work through that. There's no choice...well I think it would be a very brave school that declined a new building (Interview, EH).

Changes to make the building appear more professional are validated by a discourse of safety and safeguarding. However, some students may feel less safe when they are increasingly visible. Increased safety for some can also be the increased observation of others, particularly those having a difficult time in school. The shift from a “small town” with multiple buildings and corridors, to a single building with un-obscured stretches of hallway, is the shift to a more panoptical use of space, to “render visible those who are inside it” (Foucault, 1975: 172). Hyper visibility has been a trend across academy new builds: balconies, classrooms without walls, large atriums and viewing platforms have been repeated, celebrated architectural nuances (Parsons, 2012: 82). Young people prefer curved school spaces, and associate square architecture, rows, and corners, with a stronger disciplinary agenda (Burke & Grosvenor, 2015).

This change shows the importance of children’s schooling geographies and their relationship to experiences of schooling (Kraftl, 2015). It poses important questions about changes to where children can and cannot be, and what must be visible and invisible, as part of the process of academisation and ‘improvement’. Staff are also more visible in these new school buildings. It is possible to look down a single stretch of corridor and see how multiple members of staff are managing the space. Through this questions emerge about how “spatial arrangements encourage or constrain ways of working together” (McGregor, 2004). This, and its implications for individual young people in the school, is addressed in Chapter Nine.

The Ambiguity of Changes to Buildings and Spaces

Opinions and responses to the impact of changes to buildings and spaces were ambiguous. Staff recognised that the pull of a new building does not last long, and that buildings are not indicative of the quality of what is taking

place inside the school. A parent's comment encapsulated this idea when he said: "all that glitters isn't gold". There was a reluctance to see the 'glitter' of academisation as important:

But we've, out of necessity, we've coined this idea of 'it's not about the buildings is it'...while we sort of recovered and our numbers went up we did it despite the buildings...I have prospective parents year 6 and year 5 coming in and saying 'ooh it's not about the building is it' so there's sort of been some subliminal stuff happening, but of course it's absolutely true. So what we have to do is make sure that whatever we pride ourselves on in terms of our culture, our relationships, we have to sort of pick all that up and put it in the new building and not think the new building solves all our problems because it doesn't...lots of schools that actually did get the building are those facing quite some challenges now. So it obviously isn't the answer is it? (Interview, EH).

Whilst there is research suggesting school buildings can be a catalyst for 'school improvement' (Woolner et al, 2007), in some cases new academy buildings were symbolic of improvements that did not materialise in data (Leo et al, 2010). At its worst, connecting academies to the BSF programme may have been a way of exhibiting transformation whilst drawing attention away from large inequalities in the distribution of resources taking place in the policy's early years.

Staff saw other schools having a new building as responsible for its own downturn in numbers, and articulated a sense of injustice at the delay to their new building. Staff welcomed the opportunity to make changes to the building prior to the new build, suggesting some importance was placed on the physical environment, although this importance remained difficult to capture. Whilst much of this was described as subtle or tokenistic, there was nonetheless a recognition that these aspects were imbued with a symbolism that was somehow important:

I think it gave us the opportunity to rebrand the school and of course some of that is very superficial. Erm...but nevertheless somehow important...so whatever people inferred about what an academy was it worked positively for us (Interview, EH).

The place has been smartened up and it needed it...(staff member) likes it and thinks it has an impact, but not necessarily in a way that is easy to discern. It helps a greater sense of “pride” in the establishment and a “sense of togetherness”. It “elevates the status of the school in the community” It is difficult to quantify this but he does believe that it has had an impact. (Fieldnotes, TS).

Although difficult to quantify, staff felt that these changes had affected Eastbank’s reputation, and shown the local community the school was worth caring about. These changes were described as a “breath of fresh air” and an opportunity to restore a sense of “togetherness”. The new building was ambiguously tied to a sense of “pride”, a discourse that has been present across accounts of academisation (Parsons, 2012). These examples of staff describing the aesthetics of academy status highlight the reigning ambiguity of the visual and spatial components of academisation. Attempts to connect changes to the schooling environment with improvement were present in the school’s discourse, but treated as difficult to convey empirically, and also fraught since changes to the building also meant a loss of something.

Despite this ambiguity and tension, Eastbank staff recognised the value of the visual aspects of the academy brand, and saw this as an opportunity to appeal to local parents (Fieldnotes, AS). The opportunity to do this might be read as opportunistic; the cynical exploitation of a potential selling point of the school. There is a recognition that this has not:

got a great deal to do with the education but it just gave us that opportunity to put ourselves out into the community in a slightly different way in a more modern more advanced way (Interview, SLT).

Whether or not a building helps a school to improve, Eastbank’s experience highlights the pull of a new building for parents, in this competitive education environment. It is an attempt to shift those negative stories and perceptions that have become associated with Eastbank. All a new building really needs to do, in this context, is play its part in suggesting that improvement has taken place.

Section Four: Shaping Aspirations

In this chapter I have presented those changes in Eastbank that enabled it to align with the aesthetic expectations placed on an academy. Academy status has been drawn on as both a rationale and a tool for changing the material and spatial dynamics of the school, and of visually performing improvement and aspiration. Key to this has been the marketing and rebranding of the school to shift its reputation, making it more responsive to local competition for pupils. This connects with how the school and those within it are seen through policy, how they might want to be seen, and how they need to be seen for survival. Academy status has provided an opportunity to draw on a more favourable categorisation.

The change to academy status in Eastbank had placed increasing emphasis on transitions, both into the school – in terms of year 7 recruitment – and out of the school at post-16. Academy status strengthened the connection between schooling and preparation for students' futures. The question of 'what happens next' began to be considered more carefully in Eastbank, since this is the site where the government assesses whether pupil aspirations have been 'raised'. In government policy this is focused on the linear achievement of a set of credentials, which are framed by "moral judgements...about which aspirations should take preference" (Hart, 2012: 81). Aspirations have come to centre on how young people can best mediate the demands and risks of the education and employment markets (Ball, 2006). Embracing a more professional, aspirational aesthetic, both in relation to the 'smartly' uniformed, badged individual and the straight-lined, visible, tarmacked building, shows some aesthetic conformity to the business and entrepreneurial rationale that underpins the academies programme. This focus on aspirations also materialised through more regular interactions with colleges and universities, and through work experience initiatives.

The academies project had become intertwined with a locally perpetuated truth about a historical lack of aspirations in the Eastbank area:

I think you would still find some pockets of that ‘what do you expect from kids from this estate?’ because [teachers] taught their parents, then 16 years later they’re coming through (Interview, LA).

This member of staff at the LA told me about the “bleed of middle-class students” from city schools to schools in more affluent areas, and that if city schools were to improve they needed to attract “more level five students, who play musical instruments” and have above national average attainment. Academy status was positioned as one of the ways schools could become more appealing to such students and families, and as a way for city schools to hold on to more aspirational and desirable pupils and families, improving the LA’s overall educational performance. Attracting more of these students was positioned as a way of ameliorating “serious problems with white working-class or non-working-class” students who “lack interest in education” because of their parents’ “lack of aspiration” and “dependency” on state welfare (Interview, LA). It is these students that populate city schools like Eastbank.

The implication is that the academy brand is able to capture middle-class parents, and that the presence of more middle-class students will improve the aspirations and education of all pupils within city schools. This was very much in keeping with ‘the problem’ as Andrew Adonis saw it (Chapter Five), that failing schools were not attracting enough middle-class students. The references to aspiration in these local narratives are positioned within the same set of discourses as the grand narrative of academisation. This is a discourse where value is attached to particular ways of being, in a move that simultaneously undermines or misrecognises other ways of being (Reay, 2001), and makes a range of assumptions and judgements about what counts as an aspiration’

Academy status operates as a wider prism for the reinforcing of ideals concerning what is respectable and worthwhile, and what is not (Skeggs, 1997). Worth is equated with the ease with which a young person realises and achieves particular aspirations. The ‘underperforming’ academy must be increasingly attuned to these aspirations and the need to cultivate them.

Chapter Five presented the ways that class and distinction permeate the academies discourse: framing academies as innovative and entrepreneurial, and their predecessor schools through a set of deficit truths about particular schools, young people, and communities. Academy status comes to be understood as inherently aspirational. The semiotics of academy status are marked by visual tropes from the business-world, entrepreneurialism, and private education, which are drawn on as indicative of superior ways of life.

Problematizing Aspiration

There are locally held beliefs that connect academy status with understandings of poverty, social class, and aspiration. However, these connections remained ambiguous in Eastbank. As explicated in Chapter Seven, some staff were angry at the way the school and its students were perceived and negatively judged through government language and accountability measures. I illustrated those attempts to diminish or critique the expectations placed on the school in relation to what academy status should mean, and what students should be achieving and aspiring to achieve. Eastbank’s relationship with academy status was fraught and complex. There were simultaneous attempts to improve student and public perceptions of the school through visual signifiers of betterment through academy status, and to dismiss the dominant discourses of academisation. The adoption of techniques to brand and market the school may have been cynical:

We play their games to some extent...when you convert to an

academy one of their obsessions os this thing about getting a corporate website up. It's a requirement of conversion and it's actually all about this kind of presentation of corporatised bullshit (Interview, HOA).

The school retains its focus on inclusion and diversity but also exploits the visual and branding potential of academy status as symbolic of 'something better'.

What emerges are contradictions and tensions across the multiple shapings of academy status in Eastbank. My aim is not to reconcile the "comfy cardi" and "business suit" aspects of Eastbank's identity, but rather to understand how these contentions arise, are affected by the school's status as an underperforming academy, and play out through daily interactions. My argument in the remainder of this chapter is that the reluctant embracing of some of the capital of the academy brand, whilst negating the need for transformation, created opportunities to see problematic shapings of student aspiration in Eastbank.

Staff emphasised their knowledge of students and argued that some of the policy directives do not work in their best interests. But critical policy work must also engage with the problematics of this protective discourse. In reframing the dominant discourse, those with power in schools may replace one influential discourse with another, with its own common-sense, and its own hierarchy of values.

The fragments of data (Vignette 9) about young people's skills, talents, and future aspirations raise uncomfortable but important questions about what counts as aspirational, who decides this, and the role that context should play in discussions about aspiration. The assembly vignette depicts the expectations of the school with regards to what

Vignette Nine: Shaping Aspirations

1) A female external speaker from a local FE college has come into the assembly to discuss post-16 options. The speaker stressed the importance of students having the skills they need for employment, but that this does not necessarily have to come from getting a degree. A-Levels were introduced as “for people who are quite clever”. Vocational qualifications were described too: they “can also be academic but it probably means you have chosen what you want to do for a career”. To promote certain options the speaker highlights the money students will get. Students are told that apprenticeships pay at least £95 per week at age 16. The speaker specifically addresses the girls at this point; “Girls imagine how many Primark outfits you can buy for that money?” To promote college, she talks about the later start time and greater timetable flexibility and again addresses the girls: “so you can curl your hair and put your fake eyelashes on in the morning before you come to college” (Fieldnotes).

2) “The achievement is going to be the one we struggle with because historically our students come in at quite low levels so you know I said to someone earlier it’s silk purses and sow’s ears. You’re trying to make something of some children that with the best teaching in the world they are not capable of getting to those levels.” (Interview, TS).

3) “It’s a struggle because they don’t have the circumstances that a child in well I won’t name it because I’ll show my prejudice but other parts of the city or other parts of the country where the home circumstances are different, where there is a greater wealth placed on education. Where there is a tradition of people doing A-levels and going to university. It’s a totally different context (Interview, SLT).

4) There was evidence of an institutional truth in the school that the students are not necessarily the most academic. They can struggle with how to put things down in words. They “love kinaesthetic work” and are “more practically minded” (Fieldnotes, TS).

happens for young people ‘like these’ at post-16. It is an example of a planned event where aspirations are formed, contextualised, and negotiated (Hart, 2012). It shows that long-standing categorisation and ranking processes continue to thrive, and are part of the way aspirations are shaped in Eastbank (Skeggs, 1997). The first is the divide between academic and vocational futures. The former is

associated with being “clever” whilst the later is for those who demand immediate gratification in the form of an apprentice’s income. The second is a gendered binary, which intersects with social class (Skeggs, 1997; Gillborn, 2010), to represent Eastbank girls in limited ways. They are positioned as being persuaded into further study through the additional freedom it offers, which can be usefully spent attending to their appearance. The speaker draws on the bargain clothing chain ‘Primark’ as indicative of where their money would be spent.

Distinction permeates this vignette, through commentaries on what young people ‘will’ and ‘should’ be. The focus on vocational options, and the framing of the merits of FE, sustains a wider discourse of the appropriateness of particular futures for all but a ‘bright’ minority of working-class young people. Typically, those aspirations that do not depend on attending higher education are devalued, positioned “lower in a socially constructed hierarchy” (Hart, 2012: 82). The shaping of aspirations in this assembly works alongside those quotations from staff where they testify to students’ capabilities in more vocationally orientated subjects, to their kinaesthetic talents, and to the fact that they are ‘not the most academic’. Here Eastbank “generates a network of subject positions”, defining “what it is to be cultivated and clever against what it is to be practical, useful, and responsible” (Skeggs, 1997: 60). The metaphor of ‘making silk purses out of sow’s ears’ is particularly telling here, indicative of a truth that, no matter how hard staff work they will never be able to turn some young people into something that ‘matters’, in terms of data. Eastbank is clinging onto long-standing and popular assumptions and anxieties about its largely white working-class intake (Gillborn, 2010). This data is evidence of the continued relevance of decades of research that documents the socialising and channelling of working-class young people into certain jobs and futures (Willis, 1977; Mac an Ghail, 1994; Cummings et al, 2012).

This is a context where layers of misrecognition exist. These vignettes highlight a problem of staff overstating the extent to which they know what Eastbank students want and are good at, raising questions about the extent to which this claim to know them actually shapes them. The female assembly speaker may have been attempting to make the options she was presenting comfortable, attainable, and worth striving for. Her talk operated through recognisable symbols of young people's culture, and she spoke of things she imagined they would find desirable including the freedom over identity and consumerism (Pilcher, 2014). But in doing this, she also shapes and normalises such desires. She renders particular aspirations into words, and makes them acceptable things to strive for (Skeggs, 1997).

Eastbank's protectionist discourse and self-presentation of clinging onto its historical identity is important here. This is a tension at the heart of Eastbank's work, which has intensified with the shift to academy status, as aspirations have become more of a focus. Recognition of locally held knowledge, and local histories, were seen as an important way to make learning meaningful in the school. Some staff provided complex explanations of young people's engagement with learning, taking account of how trust and experiences at home might interweave with educational experiences. They spoke very positively of young people and the pleasure and pride they took in working with them.

At the heart of the school reemphasising its historical ethos and focus was an attempt to undermine the misrecognition that young people faced in policy discourse. But misrecognition may also thrive in a school that creates truths about the capacities of 'these' young people, even if this is positioned as a way of protecting them. Staff rejected the need to change whilst continuing to produce their own limiting truths about the capabilities and desires of students. Staff fear of the misrecognition of students is perhaps intertwined with a fear about

the ways their work with these students may be undervalued. Those discourses of 'not needing to change' and being 'misunderstood' may serve staff but leave students operating within the same rigid set of tensions.

The perpetuation of particular binaries and assumptions in the school meant that the dominant meritocratic rationality of education policy was not being challenged. These were: binaries between 'academic' and 'vocational' talents; gendered and classed norms about appropriate aspirations and desires; linking background to particular occupations; and attempts to position academisation as a policy tool for improving aspirations because it improves routes into university and more 'worthwhile' occupations. These all left schools manoeuvring within, and failing to problematise, a set of narrow truths about success, aspiration, and social mobility (Barker & Hoskins, 2015).

In this context, 'aspiration' is a term that refers to the credibility of a select set of jobs and skills, whilst serving to denigrate others as being for those who are seeking instant gratification: non-academic, worthless. Denying change and clinging onto a historical identity, might also mean that historical ideals of what young people 'like this' are good at and desire are also held onto. Denying change will shape the school, as much as change will. It will shape those opportunities that are more likely to be available to students.

Continuing to work within these narrow reference points, as they are perpetuated through policy and practice, restricts the imaginative possibilities that the freedom to aspire may offer. The capability to aspire is "a freedom in its own right" (Hart, 2012: 79) but this freedom is conditioned through current policy and practice domains. What freedom do young people have to aspire through the confines of the various structures that surround them: academy status, 'failing' school

status, their status as girls or boys, as working-class, as part of the majority White ethnic group or minority non-white group? In this context, young people are shaped to adhere to particular aspirations perceived to align with their 'characteristics' and talents, whilst "other less conventional 'latent' aspirations never have the opportunity to emerge" (Hart, 2012: 80). This context stifles aspiration as an imaginative capacity for an individual to "pursue a future they have reason to value, and instead develops it as "goal-oriented", concerned with the future in relation to goals others have decided are worthwhile" and appropriate (Hart, 2012: 79).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have charted how the dismantling of local school accountability systems has served to make central mechanisms more powerful (Ozga, 2009). This situation is not specific to academies, rather it is shared by all schools in a climate where pressure is omnipresent and tied to a school's data and position in relation to national averages. However, in an underperforming academy such as Eastbank, the close relationship between the technologies of accountability and the normalisation of narrow notions of success and aspiration has particular consequences.

I have traced some of the consequences of this surveillance context, and the subsequent fear and threat that marks the working environment of Eastbank. I have explored some of the ways academy status was performed through localised representations of policy in the visual, material, and spatial aspects of the school. By modifying its aesthetics, Eastbank staff represented the school to external visitors, projecting the image of a school 'on the up'. The reconfiguring of material and spatial elements of the school appeared to be creating a more controllable, observable school space, a point that recurs in Chapter Nine.

I concluded this chapter by positioning academy status as a lens through which a complex problematic of aspiration comes to the fore in Eastbank, one which has restrictive implications for young people within the school. This was partly about understanding the complex ways young people are positioned (Hart, 2012) as a result of the tensions to perform, reject, and remould academy status in the school.

Chapter Nine: Producing the Academy Through Pedagogy

In this Chapter I analyse the pedagogical shifts and grouping policies that came into practice during my time in Eastbank, in a context where academies are expected to improve educational standards through innovative teaching and curricular (Gorard, 2009). I investigate moments of being educated in an underperforming academy; those that are silenced in the narratives of social justice and school improvement that suffuse the academies project. I analyse the pedagogical approaches that came to be normalised and seen as the solution to Eastbank's underperformance, considering their effects on student interactions with schooling. I explore how the production of academy status works on the subjectivities of staff and students, considering how academy status shifts what they do, and impacts on how and who they are in the school. This analysis addresses the following questions:

- How was the 'high achieving' academy school being produced through pedagogical shifts in Eastbank?
- How did this shape young people's experiences of schooling, and their interactions with staff and students?

I address these questions through four vignettes, tracing the increased surveillance on students through pedagogical practices which categorise, divide, monitor, and discipline. The first explores Fair Access procedures in a context of competition and fragmentation. The other three explore different forms of grouping and pedagogical work occurring in the school: the critical cohort; the accelerate group; and the year 10 students learning to read. These provided opportunities to see the demand to produce the 'high achieving academy'. I conclude this chapter by drawing out the social justice dilemmas that arose from these practices, and their relationship with the production of academy status.

Negotiating the Fair Access Panel

During my research the spotlight was not only on Eastbank's 'transformation', but also on transforming the wider city secondary education context. The introduction of academies complicated local relationships between schools. In a context of comparison and competition for student numbers, academy status provided a 'label of specialisation to strengthen competitive edge. Meanwhile, academies are expected to collaborate and share good practice (Keddie, 2015b).

I encountered examples of sense making around local competition and how it functions, which elucidates how academy status may unravel at the local level and affect schools in challenging contexts. The fates of local school are intertwined; their fortunes connected, often in unhelpful ways. Chapter Eight detailed the connections staff made between other local schools receiving new buildings and their own downturn in student numbers. In this context, collaborative work between schools was necessary but increasingly difficult. Eastbank was striving to demarcate itself as a better school to avoid repeating that year of poor intake, redundancies, and financial deficit. It could not risk its data getting any worse. As well as attracting parents to maintain funding levels, it worked to ward off anything potentially detrimental to performance.

However, Eastbank is surrounded by similarly positioned academies, all struggling according to their data and Ofsted judgements. Eastbank shares the same feeder primary schools with nearby secondary schools, which means there is competition for the same students. Eastbank is in a LA where the majority of secondary schools are academies, and there are concerns about large academy chains coming into the city to 'take over' failing schools, and establish Free Schools. Both of these were connected with increased local competition for pupil numbers and for more able pupils. Eastbank faced multiple layers of competition; with neighbouring schools

which are also struggling; with new and distinguished city schools set up by ‘outsiders’; and with more affluent ‘county schools’ which have a history of being attractive middle-class families.

This, combined with poor Ofsted grades for local schools, has been attributed as the reason for the 30+ mid-year transfers Eastbank received. Eastbank was on track to be oversubscribed for the first time for its year 7 intake in September 2015. However, it is problematic to celebrate this success if the fate of a low intake, and resulting budget deficit, is simply transferred to a nearby school, serving a similarly disadvantaged community. These schools are locked in a battle in which each benefits from the other’s bad news.

It is in this context, at the intersections between individual and collective ‘underperformance, that I explore the collaborative effort to organise Fair Access for pupils within the local authority area (DfE, 2012). FAPs exist to ensure school places for children who are “unplaced” (DfE, 2012:3). Every LA must agree a protocol with the majority of local schools. Unplaced young people are some of the most marginalised in society including those: experiencing exclusion; with SEN; new to the country, including asylum seekers; fleeing domestic violence; and in foster or residential care. It is a space for the management of long-standing patterns of inequality and emerging arenas of educational exclusion affecting children who are entering the country in the current, contentious ‘post-brexite’ context.

This is an area of work where the retrenchment of the LA has left important gaps in provision (DfE, 2012). The increased fragmentation caused by the academies programme has raised questions about how to forge new ways to take shared responsibility for local young people. Schools in the city have pooled resources to set up a partnership to oversee this work. FAPs are attended by a member of staff from each of the schools who fund the partnership. This panel is a direct consequence of a perceived need to work collaboratively within this fragmented context. It speaks to the idea that

social justice in education cannot be managed within the gates of a single school, and requires collective thinking and working.

The following fieldnote extracts provide opportunities to observe how the local context and Eastbank's work are interconnected. These extracts stem from two visits to the FAP, as well as the preparatory discussions at Eastbank, my analysis of the paperwork I could see, and two meetings with staff from the Partnership.

Vignette Ten: Snapshots of Fair Access

1. [Eastbank Panel representative] told me the case pile is huge when they first come back after the summer holiday. He told me [the panel lead] does a lot of 'pre-brokering' ahead of meetings. He has an idea of what he wants for each young person and he asks schools to think about cases in advance. Staff member said that because Eastbank did not go into special measures when so many other schools did, they were under pressure to take students as other schools had "shut their doors".
2. If schools hear of particular student cases prior to the panel meeting they can call and discuss the student and offer to take them. Eastbank had taken three new students with EAL who were new to the LA. They heard about them before they got to the panel, and requested to have them. [staff member] told me they would rather do this than take the "naughty students". Taking students prior to the meeting gives them more "clout" so they can turn down students with behavioural difficulties at future panels.
3. The aim is for there to be a fair distribution of FAP cases amongst the schools. Staff member told me that, because Eastbank had picked up three students prior to the panel, they did not intend to leave today's panel with any new students. When I was observing a panel meeting, one school agreed to accept a child that had named another school. They made it very clear that they had done this, and I wondered whether they would call upon this at a future meeting as a bargaining tool. Compliant children were more popular with the panel. Referring to one of the young people being discussed, a panel member said: "if I were you I would snap her up. As far as FAP goes she would be a good student to get in terms of your figures".
4. I met a member of staff who works at the partnership. She referred to the partnership as "fragile" and explained that an important part of her job is making sure each school feels listened to so they stay invested in the process. She suggested a positive contribution government could make

would be to offer a monetary incentive, e.g. introduce a rule that a certain proportion of school budgets had to go to collaboration. She fears that academisation has made Fair Access work, and looking after the most marginalised young people, more difficult.

2013/2014		1	5	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2014/2015		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
YEARS RECEIVED (PARAMETERS 2014)	Registration	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Unsettled After Children	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Admission to Education	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Out of Education and Poor Attendance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Flawing Domestic Violence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Secure	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
YEARS RECEIVED (PARAMETERS 2014)	YEAR 7	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	-	0	0	0	0
	YEAR 8	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	-	-	0	2	0	1
	YEAR 9	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	-	-	0	2	0	0
	YEAR 10	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	-	-	0	0	0	0
	YEAR 11	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	-	-	0	0	2	0
PLACES AVAILABLE	YEAR 7	20	134	0	70	0	55	60	50	0	0	0	-	6	49	30	-1
	YEAR 8	0	-1	12	51	-5	94	7	27	0	49	-	-	9	13	58	-1
	YEAR 9	0	-19	2	60	-5	99	-5	-14	0	18	-	-	10	-2	101	-
	YEAR 10	2	-5	15	78	-2	86	9	1	0	0	-	-	0	4	5	65
	YEAR 11	1	-6	0	41	-3	76	24	19	0	7	-	-	-	-	-	-

This chart (photograph sixteen) documents the running total of how many pupils go to each of the schools. It is updated after each meeting and sent to schools.

Against the competitive, fragmented, and high-surveillance context described throughout this work, local schools made considered arrangements for the provision of Fair Access. This is testimony to their ethic of care (Noddings, 1992) and sense of professional obligation to local children, rather than a result of government policies creating a context conducive to effective collaboration. However, this process is a space where the collision of the personal, moral, and performance related pressures within the school is heightened. These extracts highlight the necessarily fraught nature of Fair Access work in a fragmented, competitive climate (Glatter, 2010).

Eastbank staff described the level of competition in the local area as “unhealthy”, and argued that academisation has restricted collaboration between schools within the same LA (Coldron et al, 2014). Eastbank

collaborates with two schools in a different LA, those it does not directly compete with for student numbers. Distant collaborations were felt to enable more transparent working, not hampered by the climate and culture of competition. Shifting school structures have left their mark on schools' collaborative work, rendering it precarious. Geographically-distant collaboration misses opportunities for shared responsibility for local young people and for the educational and wider regeneration of communities. In areas of deprivation, learning from another school that seems to be 'getting it right' with a similar intake may be particularly valuable (Keddie, 2015b). In a climate that encouraged and enabled schools to collaborate, expertise and money could be pooled for community-centred projects that supported local families living in poverty (Parsons, 2012; Kerr et al, 2014).

The FAP data documented the high exclusion rates of some academies in the local area, particularly those recently given new management, with a remit to transform the school. This data revealed schools using over 800 fixed term exclusions across an academic year, and over 30 permanent exclusions. Permanently excluded pupils would then have to go through the FAP to find a new school place, which may be in another local school facing its own challenges, highlighting another way in which the fates of schools are intertwined. Strategies for 'skimming off' the 'best' students is a popular tactic in a competitive educational context (West et al, 2006). Exclusion is a skimming process that works in the opposite way, separating out unwanted students. Research highlights the damage of such experiences, both immediately, "dislocating" young people from their peer group, negatively labelling them and posing a risk to underachievement, and into adulthood, where the risks of unemployment and poverty are high (McCluskey et al, 2016: 529; Parsons, 2005; Brown, 2007).

The tensions that are produced in this context materialise at the FAP. Schools navigate the panel with the hope of receiving the least complex cases. They pre-broker with the panel lead prior to formal panel meetings, aiming to take students that are less resource intensive. The context creates

an unspoken hierarchy of children from those most valuable to a school's data image, through to those most problematic. A premium is placed on children with EAL or those newly arrived to the country, who are seen to be less troublesome than children born in England. Those working at or above the expected levels of achievement were viewed as an asset. Amongst the least popular were those considered to have lower ability. Particularly problematic were those with a combination of lower ability and perceived complex social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. Pre-brokering and accepting more 'valuable' students quickly gave a school more bargaining power - or "clout" (fieldnotes, TS) - to refuse future complex cases it is named in, or those refused by another school. Taking as many of the 'least worst' cases was a key tactic for navigating the FAP in this competitive context. This categorising knowledge is produced and reinforced through the power relations of the FAP (Foucault, 1975).

The increasing diversity of the school, as it received students who were new to the country and who had EAL, was something that students discussed with me:

Vignette Eleven: Discussion with two Year 9 Students

Student 1: we've got a lot of new people coming from like different countries now as well in our year

JP: oh ok, so they transfer in during the year?

Student 2: yeah. Some came last year

JP: ok what countries are people from?

Student 2: Afghanistan, Romania,

Student 1: Dominican Republic. Ecuador. Where's (name) from again?

Student 2: Holland

JP: ok how's that, having all those people from different counties?

Student 1: we've got quite a lot of people from other countries in my tutor. Most of the people who are in like the friendship groups, some of them

are from the different countries, some of them will hang together. Even though they can speak other languages they all speak Spanish fluent and then quite a lot of them when they speaking they'll be having like a conversation in Spanish, some of them speak Spanish and some of them speak Romanian and I'm just there like 'wow'

Student 2: I don't like it when other people...I know it might sound sad but it's the type of people they are like they cause trouble a lot as well but like quite rude and that

Student 1: yeah

Student 2: as in like they'll talk to you in your language and that and two minutes later they're talking another language after you've just had an argument with them or something

Student 1: so you don't know what they're saying

This suggests that what is perceived as easier or more beneficial from the point of view of the school's data was not so seamless from the perspective of current students. The more multicultural school may be perceived as a more high-achieving, less problematic school (Devine, 1994), but it entails both possibilities and tensions. The above comments are suggestive of the discomforts of introducing new languages into a school that is historically White British, and the continuation of problematic discourses that suggest white majority students are at risk from ethnic minority students (Gilborn, 2010). The increase in young people new to the country and LA suggests this is an area of immediate importance for Eastbank. This example also testifies to the different experiences of staff and pupils, and the ways in which the power-plays of the FAP have implications for the micro dynamics of pupil interactions.

Performances at the FAP were attuned to the idea of 'taking your fair share'. Schools were keen to do this, and be seen to do this. But this performance of 'fairness' was intertwined with the performance of 'toughness', of not being a push over or taking more than your 'fair share'. The document pictured (photograph sixteen) was an apparatus capable of showing which schools

were taking their fair share. But it was also a way in which 'fairness' became associated with schools' performance of taking their 'fair share' of pupils, rather than about fairness to the individual young person who goes through the panel to secure their educational entitlement. In this context 'fairness' morphs from the socially just rationale of the panel, into something to chart and use as a tactic to navigate future panels. The chart comes to be more of a focal point than the young person. The academies policy has disrupted and altered this work around some of the most marginalised young people in the LA. The trace of the wider technologies of power that govern schools can be seen in the micro tactics that present here. The FAP has its own politics and power plays, which are formed around the production of knowledge regarding what constitutes a problematic student, and a set of tactics to avoid receiving them. The knowledge that is created about who is more or less problematic can be traced to wider systems of school governance and accountability, which determine what counts as educational success.

The rationale of having to look after existing students in the school frames attitudes to other local children without a school place; introducing 'risky' students is perceived to be problematic for existing work in the school (Jonathan, 1997). Contrary to the broad sense of community espoused in the assembly detailed in Chapter Seven, here the notion of community becomes parochial. Tactics for navigating the FAP are justified through a discourse of looking after 'our own', that is, current students, although my discussions with pupils suggest this is not necessarily the outcome of the school's approach. This data highlights shifting subjectivities, including school staff who increasingly focus on charts and tactics, through which their relationships with other schools and local children are shaped.

Tracing, in this way, the impact of national policies on the operations and values of a school, brings to the fore questions of social justice. These examples query the seamless convergence of independence and collaboration in government academy narratives (Purcell, 2011b), and the connection between collaboration and social justice. They suggest the

importance of looking more systematically at the impact of academisation at the local level. The vignettes that follow continue to trace the mark of academy status and its associated shifts in Eastbank, and how these affect young people's daily experiences of schooling.

The Critical Cohort

Despite a strong spoken rejection of chasing data, that is what Eastbank was starting to do through some of its new practices. Eastbank categorised itself as an inclusive school but there was an increase in grouping and categorisation practices during my research, some of which appeared detrimental to inclusive practice. The Critical Cohort was the most high-profile of these. It coheres with the literatures on the impact of high stakes targets in education which find that it is those students most likely to matter to the school's data image who are the focus of its work (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Perryman et al, 2011).

Eastbank's critical cohort strategy was described as a response to the school's latest Ofsted judgement and guidance on how it could improve, which included:

- Having clear improvement plans which outline what action will be taken, with identifiable milestones for checking progress.
- Ensuring more students make the expected progress in English and Mathematics and reach the government's benchmark standard.
- Having greater aspiration for students' academic targets so that more progress is made. Have tracking and analysis systems for progress so students can be targeted when they are underachieving.

The critical cohort consisted of around 80 year 11 students viewed as capable of achieving the dominant performance measure at the time: 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE including English and Mathematics. These students were deemed to be 'critical' in terms of the school improving its data image, and were tracked rigorously. Regular, lengthy meetings were held to discuss their

progress, attended by their teachers, heads of department and members of SLT, with the aim of removing any barriers to achievement.

Vignette Twelve: Critical Cohort Meeting

During this meeting, each student on the list was discussed in turn. Senior staff sought input from teachers and pastoral staff to explain why a student was not reaching their targets, and what action could be taken to improve their achievement. Strategies included: parent meetings; mentoring; extra revision classes; and reducing the number of GCSEs the student was taking.

Underperforming students had meetings to discuss which subjects they would continue with and which they would drop. Where a subject was dropped, the space would be filled with additional revision sessions in the subjects they continued with. P.E., for those not studying it at GCSE, was another area where additional revision time could be found. Staff introduced revision passports, where students could document the revision sessions they had attended. In addition to lunch time sessions the school had opened for 14 weekend revision sessions in the 2014-15 academic year.

This meeting was informed by data charts, based on mock exam results and teacher assessments. Data was being collected earlier and more regularly this academic year.

The data chart is a large grid with the following columns from left to right:

- Surname Forename
- KS2 Enr
- KS2 Ma
- KS2 APS
- Forecast En/Ms A-B
- Forecast En/Ms A-C
- Forecast En/Ms A-D
- GCSE number A-C
- VCC number A-C Excl
- ECCL
- Target En
- Not forecast C1-3
- Target Ma
- Not forecast Ma 1-3
- Target Sci
- Not forecast Sci 1-3
- Additional Subjects
- Target All
- Not forecast All 1-3
- Target PE
- Not forecast PE 1-3
- Target Art
- Not forecast Art 1-3
- Target DT
- Not forecast DT 1-3
- Target RE
- Not forecast RE 1-3
- Target Music
- Not forecast Music 1-3
- Target History
- Not forecast History 1-3
- Target Geography
- Not forecast Geography 1-3
- Target Languages
- Not forecast Languages 1-3
- Target Other
- Not forecast Other 1-3

The rows represent individual students, with their names in the first column and their performance data in the subsequent columns. The data is color-coded, with red indicating lower performance and green indicating higher performance.

Photograph Seventeen: Data chart used at the Critical Cohort meeting

Each critical cohort student had a mentor from SLT. They, and their

parents, signed a contract at the beginning of the year:

We developed a contract for parents and kids and us to sign...I sent them all home with a choice, to speak to their families about if they wanted to have me as a mentor. What they would be signing up to was hell for two terms (Interview, SLT).

In discussions about the Critical Cohort staff espoused a now familiar cynicism, depicting it as a “numbers game...I am turning the school into a bit of an exam factory, which is what the government want” (Interview, HOA). The Critical Cohort had encouraged staff to engage in practices they were uncomfortable with. When something happened to students with good prospects to achieve the dominant measure, they had to “scrabble around” to find someone to “replace” them, so this did not impact upon their data (Interview, TS). One specific example was noted by the HOA:

I have a young man in year 11...he was one of my only level 5 boys on entry...he probably won't do very well this year and I will be damned for it but he is the third generation who were living in a council house round here with his mum, his two older sisters who have long gone. The weekend when I took them all outward bounding he had to pull out and cancel at the last minute because his mother had finally been given an eviction notice because she was not in a position to pay the bedroom tax... so they were evicted and he ended up in the other side of [names area] and didn't walk into the exams in a very good frame of mind. But that will be my fault (Interview, HOA).

This is a student who, according to year 7 entry levels, should be on track to produce the data that matters. In Chapter Five I illustrate how poverty becomes the ‘unsaid’ of the academies discourse, yet this example depicts the porous relationship between the school, community, and wider social policy context (Devine, 1994).

The current context produces such dilemmas and tensions. Work becomes based around the production of forms of success that count. The Critical Cohort is a disciplinary “technique for the transformation of arrangements” in the school, one which recalibrates groups of young people and how they

relate to one another (Foucault, 1975: 146). It is a context where data is “repurposing” (Lupton, 2016a: 302). Each batch of student data is documented and informs meetings and decisions, whilst continuing the need for further data so comparisons can be made and progress can be monitored and produced.

Although rationing procedures like the critical cohort are not an academy phenomenon, Eastbank’s categorisation as an underperforming academy increased the perceived necessity of data-driven practices in the school. Academy status reinforces practices such as rationing because it renders the stakes of underperformance more acute. Historically Eastbank has used a mixture of streaming and mixed ability strategies, priding itself on inclusive practice and collective education. The rationing imperatives of the Critical Cohort were new to the school. The demand to improve examination grades was interrupting Eastbank’s inclusive work (Ball et al, 2012).

These practices propose new ways of being in Eastbank, which constituted a shift in the institutional culture of the school. Staff cynicism highlights their awareness of the problems of rationing and data-led practices. The focus is therefore not on uncovering such practices, which are widespread in education across academy and non-academy state-funded schools, but on understanding their ontological effects in Eastbank, where they are new. The focus is on understanding how staff make sense of them as part of their work, and the affects they have on staff and students.

The critical cohort was treated wryly and cynically by staff, and yet consumed considerable time and energy. There were signs that this ‘game of numbers’ was becoming normalised in the school. First, practices such as young people attending weekend revision sessions were read in a positive way:

We’ve taken some very different approaches and it’s all been driven to change a culture and sense of value to education. I think it’s been highly successful in year 11 (Interview, SLT).

Conversations about numbers become much more common place in the school:

Vignette Thirteen: Data Monologue

I'll show you the process I'm trying to apply at the moment...it's data! I'm looking at a year group and saying what is an issue. In history I know that against expected rates of progress I have 17 out of 61 children who are basically off target. I know in that cohort the 61 represent an average of 88% attendance so it could be a learning loss issue so that might be what requires the intervention. I've got ten students in history who are greater than one sub level off. Of which I have 7 girls. So there's this kind of question I'm asking myself at the moment is what is it that's going on in the history syllabus that we could improve on to accelerate those 7 girls? Is it different to what we need to do for the boys? Is it the same? I don't know. Is it a factor that of the boys half of them are FSM, so we understand what that means in terms of deprivation at home and those different things...(continues in this manner for at least the same amount of time).

I have produced this example of what I have termed a 'data monologue' to illustrate the lengthy and complex nature of the data talk and work Eastbank staff were engaging in. Eastbank's practice of reducing the number of subjects a student takes, was another example of chasing data that counts. Staff were aware they would only be able to engage in this practice in the 2015-16 academic year:

With the Progress 8 measure being brought in by the government, they will have to rethink this approach as they will be penalised for students who do not do 8 subjects. The government have come up with the measure because they have got 'wise to schools' strategies' (Fieldnotes, TS).

As the ideal student shifts so do the relevant gaming practices. This has become an important part of staff's work: to understand and respond to shifting data requirements. This tactic of taking students out of subjects they are unlikely to get a C grade in produces a particular message about education. It suggests that it is only worth studying for things you will have measurable success in. Any intrinsic value of learning subjects is lost in this

message, which may mean that students miss out on a varied curriculum. Pupils' physical and mental health are neglected through such practices. Losing PE lessons is problematic given rising concern over the impact of sedentary lifestyles (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2014). The idea of pupils signing up to "two terms of hell" is indicative of the pressurised nature of school life as a member of the Critical Cohort.

Contracts and revision passports are new apparatus to support the governance of progress and transformation. Through them, the school seems to take up the question of "the art of governing", that is "with what techniques, with what instruments" people should govern and be governed, (Foucault, 1996: 258) in an underperforming academy. Contracts become normalised through academy status. Just as the academy – a business in education – has a contract with the DfE, now 'critical' students have a contract of performance with the school. Parents are involved in this too, and are also liable. This "new strategy falls easily into the general theory of the contract", which means the pupil has accepted the strategies, rationale, and accountability of the Critical Cohort, and any punishment that arises from breaking "the pact" she/he has signed up to, such as missing a revision or mentoring session, or indeed 'underachieving' (Foucault, 1975: 89-90). Learning becomes framed through a business rationale, and accountability is intensified for the student, who has agreed to work hard and to achieve, both for the self and the schooling community.

Revision passports are aligned with the technology of report cards which already existed in Eastbank as a form of behaviour management, with the aim of adhering to Ofsted's call to improve students' attitudes to learning, eliminate low level behaviour issues, and follow behavioural policies consistently. These report cards are repositioned through the introduction of their 'buddy' apparatuses, the revision passport and learning contract. These combine to document how hard students have worked or, conversely, how badly behaved they have been. Contracts are symbolic of personal responsibility. What you have agreed to do, what you have done, and what

you have not done are rendered permanent, as a method of accountability. Together these tools depict the school's shifting culture, with new emphasis on documenting progress and cultivating individual responsibility. They suggest new ways of conceptualising students (Devine, 1996). These are tools for governing the self, and therefore strive to reconfigure the young person's relationship with themselves. The student can tick off and monitor the minutiae of their own revision, just as teachers can detail their behaviour and achievements on report cards and revision passports, checking that they are meeting the stipulations of their learning contract. Coming into school at the weekend is normalised through these processes, and positioned as a sign that students value education.

Such techniques align with the prize giving systems in the school. In the assembly documented in Chapter Seven, students were being rewarded for 'getting the job done'; a rather pragmatic choice of words, which encapsulates the way the 'business' of performing was becoming more dominant in the school's practices. If each student has documented what they have contributed to their own improvement, and that of the school, this can be used to inform decisions about those most deserving of prizes.

The Critical Cohort constitutes an identity shift in the school, from an inclusive school to a school that increasingly operates through divisive systems of categorisation. Wherever there are students who are ripe for triage (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000), because they are better placed to achieve the dominant measure of success, there are other students who miss out on these resources. In Eastbank, there were 30+ children who were not on the Critical Cohort list:

One member of staff said that word had got out in year 11 about 'the list' and a girl begged to be on it. She said she has been working non-stop so they put her on the list (Fieldnotes, TS).

The critical cohort has crafted a new lens through which staff see students, and through which students see themselves. If those on the list are 'critical',

it implies a level of unimportance or insignificance for those who did not make it onto the list. Students' importance comes to revolve around a list. Social justice is partial here with some young people positioned as more deserving of additional resources. Students who cannot access the GCSE curriculum, or who access it at the 'insignificant' end of the grade scale, will not have access to these additional resources.

This highlights how data can affect people's life chances and demarcate some as "threats to others" (Lupton, 2016a: 308). It can clarify those students who need to be taught separately, in bottom sets or in small groups. In Eastbank such groups are regularly led by teaching assistants rather than teachers. Students understood these differentiations. They understood who was placed into low-achieving classes despite the euphemistic terms that are created to refer to such groups (Devine, 1994). All the students I spoke to were able to explain the banding system to me. My observations in the functional skills group also highlighted some students' acute awareness of their status as 'underachievers' by their peers:

There was an incident at the start of the lesson. A male student came to the door and said 'is this bottom set, look it says G on the door, that is quite low.' The teacher replied 'no it isn't bottom set', and the boy said 'yes but it is bottom set, I know it is a low set as (name) told me'. The teacher followed him out and had a word with him. When she came back in she said to me 'that has made me really angry', and when we spoke about it later she said she was going to follow it up. The students had their heads down during this and didn't respond, but had clearly been able to hear the whole exchange (Fieldnotes).

The Critical Cohort is illustrative of Eastbank's shift from the inclusive school documented in Chapter Seven, to one governed through a logic of data, lists, categorisation, and exclusivity. Names on lists were becoming the focal point, and the students behind them, or indeed, on the 'other' lists, were becoming less clear to see (Devine, 1996). Staff were aware of this:

There is a point at which you can gather too much and lose sight of what it is you're doing actually...the second you get obsessed with all of this nonsense that runs round and round children you lose sight of the

job and that's the problem at the moment we've all lost sight of the job (Interview, SLT).

I continue to explore these shifts through the remaining grouping examples of this chapter.

Accelerating Progress

The surveillance on Eastbank demands the demonstration of progress as well as achievement. This was the rationale behind a new learning programme designed to boost students' progress, regardless of their predicted levels of attainment. Again this aligns with the demands of Ofsted, in this case to monitor progress and target those who are 'falling behind'. I begin with a vignette from one of these lessons.

Vignette Fourteen: Accelerate Lesson

I am observing and participating in a year 9 lesson designed to 'accelerate' the literacy of a group of 15 students. The lesson takes place in the library.

The teacher works with two students at a table in the middle of the room, whilst the rest of the students work on computers dispersed around the edges. Each with a set of headphones plugged into a computer, they access an online computer package offering them a range of literacy-based tasks. The idea is that they work through their 'learning gaps'. They progress through levels and are prompted by the computer package to repeat those sections that they have not satisfactorily completed. The teacher told me that the programme does not work as well for some pupils in year 9 as it does in years seven and eight.

I move between students and attempt to answer their questions when the teacher is busy. Two students in the class are learning EAL. They diligently tap away, verbally celebrating the victory of completing a level and moving onto the next.

A group of female students sit in a row and regularly express their dissatisfaction with the work, telling me it is "boring". One of them has already completed the programme and is therefore doing it for the second time. They keep exiting tasks without saving their work, so they have to complete the same tasks again. I explain this to them, as does the teacher, but they continue to do it.

One male student arrives late. His computer login details do not work on the first computer so he moves. He selects a pair of headphones and, after

fiddling around with them for a while, he returns them saying they do not work, and picks a new pair. He repeats this again. Not long after he starts working he begins to ask the teacher general questions about the school. The teacher scolds him for not getting on with his work.



Photograph Eighteen: Accelerate Classroom, taken by me.

Foucault saw disciplinary mechanisms and the teaching of self-discipline as key aspects of schooling. Through disciplinary mechanisms individuals become a subject “in two senses: as subject to someone else, through control and restraint, and as subjects tied to their own identity by their conscience and self-knowledge” (Allan, 2003: 18). We see both aspects of this in this lesson vignette.

This lesson was intended to provide students with opportunities to work independently, at their own pace, to ‘accelerate’ their literacy learning. It was a way of the school demonstrating they had taken measures to tackle low literacy levels, which was a long-standing issue in the school. The method this took, with the use of a computer package, meant that it would be easy for the school to monitor, record, and display the number of students accessing the programme and the amount and content of work they had completed. This was a school-level policy that could be easily drawn on

to demonstrate progress through numbers. It appeared to have spoken to Ofsted's requirements, as they praised the school for its targeted programmes and use of digital technology.

However, to achieve this performance of progress, pupils were placed in a working environment that appeared to benefit some students whilst frustrating others. The programme was organised to manage the bodies and attentions of the students, to focus them on the task of progress. This was:

a question not of treating the body, en masse, 'wholesale', as if it were an indissociable unity, but of working it 'retail', individually; of exercising upon it a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanisms itself – movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity. An infinitesimal power over the active body (Foucault, 1975: 136-7).

This lesson involved the management of the body in the classroom space. The computer stations pictured designated where students could sit and how they were arranged in the classroom. Stations managed how far away from one another students were and determined whether it was possible to touch others whilst staying in your seat. The "acoustical space" (Devine, 1996: 79) was carefully managed using headphones, through which the lessons and celebratory soundtrack, or otherwise, of the computer package could be heard. The hands were managed through the keyboard and mouse, which was dictated by the computer package. The eyes were managed through the screen, which was the object of attention and, combined with the soundtrack, managed attentions. A routine was also crafted around these learning materials, the spaces in the room, and how one enters and prepares for this lesson (Bailey, 2009; Kraftl, 2016): arrive at the lesson, collect a pair of headphones from the box in the centre, sit at your designated station, log in, and continue from where you got to in the previous lesson, unless told to come to the middle of the room to do group work with the teacher. Through these practices Eastbank performed the 'good school', which is equated with routine and order (Bailey, 2009).

Particular interactions between the human and non-human/material (Lupton, 2016a: 301) created the “formulas of domination” (Foucault, 1975: 137) in this context, producing echoes of Foucault’s panoptical cell, where a “policy of coercions” is designed to act upon, manipulate, and rearrange bodies (Foucault, 1975: 138). Viewing this lesson through the Foucauldian politics of governing the self suggests that the endeavour works to produce the self-monitoring pupil who is working at their optimum utility, without distraction from others (Dickens & Fontana, 1994), to fill important learning voids that would impact on future high-stakes data for the school. New technologies provide new forms of evidence-directed gaze in the school, which create a new “micro physics of power” (Foucault, 1975: 139). This is part of a wider process across the global North through which individuals are configured as data subjects (Lupton, 2016b). This lesson serves to create individually performing and monitor-able units, and the computer package was part of a growing self-surveillance culture in the school (Lupton, 2016b). It provided a way to illustrate success, since the data collected through this programme can be turned into numbers and graphs. This was achieved in a way that appeared to attend to the need to be innovative and attuned to changes in the way young people learn.

Staff focused on these technologies as producers of progress, shifting the emphasis away from students and their experiences of this pedagogical technology. This lesson was an opportunity to see how the same policy may result in different reactions and experiences for the young people within a school or group. The appearance of a positive engagement with the learning package by some pupils resonated with the research on the use of technology to support learning. The computer package worked in ways that are familiar to young people, encouraging them to complete levels to achieve commendations (Lupton, 2016b). It might be a way of replicating some of the “playful dimensions of digital encounters” during learning (Lupton, 2016b: 710). This computer package enabled individual learning in chronological levels. The students learning EAL responded to the opportunity positively,

and perhaps enjoyed the immediate feedback, the chance to work at their own pace, and the opportunity to work through things they did not understand away from potential public embarrassments (The MacArthur Foundation, 2008).

For others, this lesson signalled exasperation, boredom, and repetition. Perhaps because immobility is common in classrooms my gaze was drawn to the movements in the room, and because the use of voice was denied in this lesson, I was drawn to uses of it (Gordon et al, 2005). I observed some young people's attempts to practice freedom within the confines of this learning space, when the apparent rationality of this apparatus became oppressive for them (McNay, 1994). As noted in Chapter Eight, for some heightened surveillance comes with a sense of safety, but for others, it produces different effects.

Some students illustrated their frustrations through their unwillingness to do the work, and their attempts to do anything but the work, such as fiddle with headphones, talk to one another, ask questions, and get into trouble with the teacher. Some students used this opportunity for self-governance to refuse to do what was being asked. One example of this was the students who completed tasks, then exited without saving their work. This meant that they would have to keep repeating the same task.

These young people were not simply docile bodies in this space (Foucault, 1975). Just as staff practiced freedom around the rearticulation of academy status, young people practiced freedom with the "resources they [had] at their disposal" (Hier, 2003: 399). This involved young people customizing the power available to them, thus the increasing normalisation of data-led practices in the school created the circumstances for the particular practices of freedom I observed.

Three female students found a way to disrupt the processes designed to monitor their progress. At first I saw the not saving of the work as a self-

defeating resistance. Yet through it, they found a way to challenge or undermine this technology that was used to monitor how many levels they had completed and how much they understood; to interrupt the gaze they were under. The girls' practice of not saving their work allowed them to disrupt the ways they were being formulated through a logic of progress monitoring.

The boy's behaviour - arriving late, not being able to log on or find headphones that worked, and then asking lots of questions - appeared to be a work avoidance tactic. However, when students are chastised for going 'off task', very often they do have a task, but it may differ to the one the teacher wants them to engage in (Noddings, 1992). The student challenged the minutiae of the spatial environment, creating reasons to leave the confines of his little work station, engage with and be close to other bodies, speak to others, question, and listen to responses. This student subverted the "ways in which power flows through architecture" and the special organisation of the room (Ball, 2013: 6); to disrupt attempts to make him into a non-communicative, individually performing unit.

In this lesson, learning was produced as a solo endeavor. Across the school there was a move to "partition off space" (Foucault, 1975: 144) and analyse "individual units" (Foucault, 1975: 145). These shifts conflicted with student accounts of the value of group learning:

Year 7 student: most of the time maths lessons are really fun

JP: how do they make them fun?

S: like we'll work in pairs or groups and stuff and sometimes we'll have to present it in front of the class

JP: so you like doing stuff like that?

S: yeah, because it makes it more like it's just better than doing it by yourself cause say you like don't understand a question someone in your group might get it and they can help you instead of waiting for the

teacher to come round

JP: so you can actually learn from other people in the group

S: yeah and not just the teacher

Present in these examples are the forms of power relations that Foucault expressed through his work. This is not simply a case of a top-down relation of domination. Instead what are presented are signs of those “conflictual, unstable, and empowering elements inherent in any set of social relations” (McNay, 1994: 3). This kind of transgression illustrates some of the ways power was circulating in Eastbank Academy, as students avoided outright confrontation with adults, but engaged instead in an “agonistic struggle” (Allan & l’Anson, 2004: 128). Young people have very little choice about whether or not to attend this lesson, but they do maintain some choice over how they are present in it.

However, there are problems and limits that need to be recognised here. In many respects this freedom remains contained and illusory. These young people still have to face the weekly antagonism of this lesson. They still have to engage in a pedagogical approach not responsive to their needs, appropriately flexible, or enabling them to engage in a deep and genuine questioning of the world (May, 1995; Noddings, 2015). They are still subject to an array of data that is being produced about them, without their full understanding or consent, which reveal them to outsiders and present them as cases for intervention and transformation (Lupton, 2016a). Their transgressions allow these “individuals to peer over the edge of their limits, but also confirms the impossibility of removing them”, and for those who transgress, “otherness lies ahead in new forms of subjectivity” (Allan & l’Anson, 2004: 129). I explore the demarcation of ‘otherness’ and ‘risk’ in the final vignette of this chapter.

Learning to Read in Year 10

Eastbank was making a concerted effort to address another criticism in their feedback from Ofsted:

A stronger emphasis is required for developing students' reading, writing, communication and numeracy skills from entry, particularly for those who enter with lower levels of performance. A higher priority should be given to reading for pleasure and regular opportunities to read.

There was a group of four year 10 students who were accessing a class to support their basic reading and comprehension. The existence of a group of year 10 students who are learning to read is particularly problematic in a school that is under the spotlight for insufficient progress in literacy.

Vignette Fifteen: Learning to read in year 10

I was talking with a teacher in her office as the bell rang for fourth lesson. Instead of going into the library, where the lesson usually takes place, the students joined the teacher in this room because it was a cold day and this room was warmer. The teacher invited me to stay, providing me with an unanticipated opportunity to observe this lesson.

The group consisted of three boys and one girl, who accessed EAL. The office we were in had recently been appointed as the space where in-house alternative provision (AP) takes place. We were sharing the room with a male student who accesses the AP programme who was sitting one of his mock exam papers. The room inadvertently became a literacy lesson for four year 10 students, alongside an AP session for a year 11 boy.

This lesson was fraught from the beginning. The students and teacher appeared tense and frustrated, which seemed linked to things that had happened on previous occasions. As a newcomer to the situation all that was apparent was that this lesson was not an enjoyable experience for the three year 10 boys or the teacher. I wondered whether my unplanned presence exacerbated the evident tension.

The girl, who was accessing EAL, settled quickly. She read a book, completed a set of questions, and began reading the next book. She did so despite many distractions, keeping her head down and working diligently throughout. She seemed to have a different view of this work to the three boys; at least seeing it as worthwhile if not enjoyable.

It seemed to be different for the boys. One was immediately sat away from

the other two. I wasn't sure why, which suggested this was a pre-existing arrangement. If it was intended to reduce distractions it was not very effective. He was now sitting closer to the year 11 boy who was accessing the AP provision and completing his mock exam. They provoked each other through gestures and whispers throughout the session, and the year 11 boy threatened the year 10 boy on several occasions.

The other two boys shared a table with the teacher, the female student and me. One of them was very disengaged from this work. It is difficult to know whether this was because he struggled with it or found it tedious. This boy realised that if he sat and wrote the questions out - "I'm just gonna copy it out" - without answering them, he could get away without too many complaints from the teacher. The student was free to openly apply this tactic. Other statements exemplified the fraught relationship between this student and teacher:

Teacher: (with reference to the other boy sitting at the table) "He probably finds you irritating and annoying, like me".

Teacher: with reference to the other boy sitting at the table "he's on the harder questions"

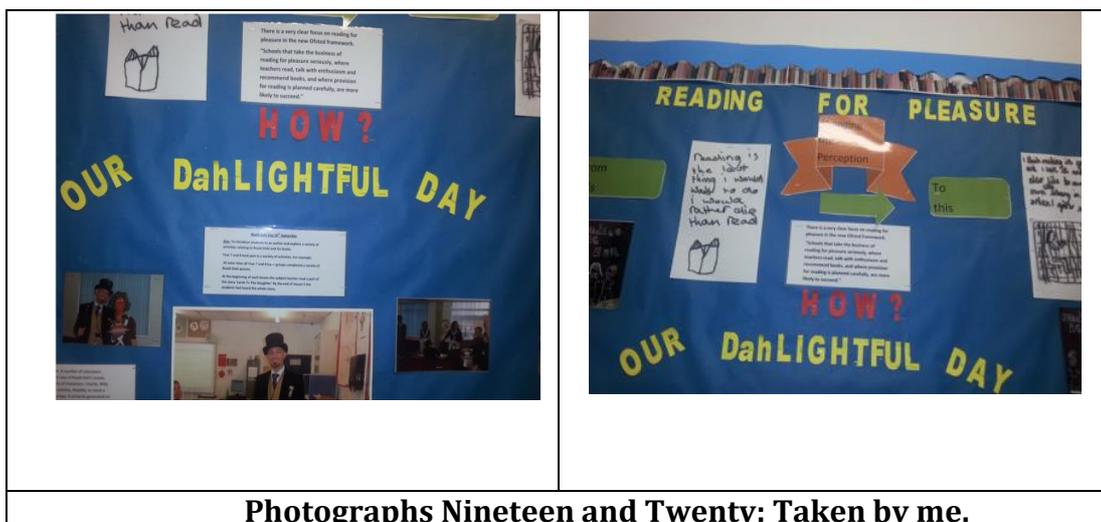
Student: "so, that's him, I'm not bothered anyway".

This lesson ended with an explosive incident, as the bickering between the year 11 boy and year 10 boy, sat apart from us, reached its climax. The year 11 boy became infuriated, kicked his chair over and chased the year 10 boy down the corridor. The teacher didn't follow but told me that another member of staff was sorting this out. I didn't see who.

My presence in this lesson was unplanned. This is not only symptomatic of the nature of ethnography, which is punctuated by unplanned moments, but also serves as a reminder that schools are full of 'accidental' and 'unplanned' moments like this. The library was 'too cold' on this day; or perhaps the teacher did not want to move lots of resources on this occasion. Such accidental occurrences shape experiences of schooling. They might also be viewed as not so accidental, but as produced through the wider context of the school.

The school's rationale for lessons like this was to accelerate the literacy progress of these students, who are currently working at below GCSE level.

This lesson fit with a wider remit to engender a love of reading. One of Ofsted’s requirements for the school was that reading for pleasure became a part of its culture. Photographs (nineteen and twenty) show the school’s performance of attempts to build a culture where reading is perceived as a pleasurable activity. The notice board in these photographs presents a narrative about a ‘reading for pleasure’ event in the school, and draws on the language of Ofsted, who encourage “schools that take the business of reading for pleasure seriously”. Reading for pleasure is a ‘business’ matter; it must be attended to with a strategy. Ofsted commented that “results from targeted intervention to improve low levels of reading are encouraging”, which suggests this work is paying off. Yet this vignette highlights the fraught nature of learning to read as a year 10 boy in a high-surveillance learning setting. Far from pleasurable, reading appeared to be a painful and embarrassing activity for these young men.



Photographs Nineteen and Twenty: Taken by me.

First, the apparent tension in this scene may have been exasperated by the acrimonious relations between students and teacher. The teacher’s practice of “choosing not to see” (Devine, 1996: 14) was central here. What Devine (1994) notes of his study of violence in New York secondary schools is insightful in this example:

Meticulous observation of detail has given way to a willful determination not to see misbehavior...In this climate, the guards far from representing the all-seeing surveillance contemplated by Foucault, feel constrained only to enforce the majority of the rules when they themselves are being observed (Devine, 1996: 98).

The teacher decided to 'not see' that the student was only copying out the questions, despite this clearly being visible to her in such a small group and being explicitly told by the student. This meant that the student could access little of the formal lesson. This student realised that if he stayed quiet and appeared to be writing then he would get away with not addressing the difficult work of reading, which may have been particularly embarrassing on this occasion because he was doing it in front of a year 11 boy and a strange (female) visitor.

The teacher did see and understand the student's tactic. Not seeing was itself a tactic, that of a tired, frustrated teacher who sought to avoid confrontation. This example of 'not seeing' appeared to contradict the increasingly meticulous school-wide surveillance I have documented, and which is still apparent here in the high staff-student ratio. Devine's point that the rules are only enforced when the enforcers are themselves being observed may be telling here. In a school that is rather cynically and critically engaged in the process of performing a 'transformation', it is being able to prove that there are technologies in place through which to 'see' that is important. This reading lesson could be produced as an example of intensive literacy learning, which would attend to Ofsted's demands. It highlights the ambiguities and tensions of seeing and not seeing in a context of surveillance.

The data that is produced about these four young people is less important than that produced about the critical cohort and accelerate group. Their literacy levels meant they were unlikely to make the critical cohort 'list' when they moved into year 11. Instead this group might function in two other ways. First, as noted, as a way of showing that work is being done with students with low literacy levels. Second, as a form of risk management.

These students are unlikely to have a positive impact on the school's data performance, but they may have a negative impact on it. These young people are configured and reproduced as risky through the technological apparatus in the school (Lupton, 2016a). These data apparatus are a source of new risks for them, impacting on the ways they are viewed, represented, and managed.

The boys in particular were positioned as risky in this lesson. The girl was learning EAL. As noted in the discussion of the FAP, in Eastbank such students were viewed as less problematic than native learners. In contrast, English was the first language of the boys; they 'should' be able to read it. This differential relationship with learning to read may have marked their differential responses to this lesson. Their reactions may have also been marked by gender. Although girls and boys do not all behave in gender-stereotypical ways, "children of the same gender tend to gravitate towards one another, and what has been termed 'doing gender' results in different behaviours" (Francis, 2004: 42). Whilst the female student kept her head down and worked hard, the boys were uneasy in this lesson. Whilst the girl produced the stereotype of the diligent, quiet girl (Gordon et al, 2005), the boys' behaviour was marked by avoidance, confrontation and, eventually, violence. The discomforts of being compared to one another, and of being criticised in front of a strange female (me) are additional challenges setting the tone for this exchange. Again this example demonstrates young people seeking opportunities to practice freedom within their context. Bickering, fighting, and copying out questions were practices of freedom employed as strategies to avoid reading. The boys rejected the school-wide emphasis on learning to read, and took the opportunity to do 'other than' what was being asked, which appeared as a more fulfilling option in this scenario. Separating these students was a way of segregating this frustration, and risk of distraction and violence, from other students in the school capable of the data turnaround the school needed. The students were made aware that they were being observed, compared, and problematised through the teacher's

comments, which compared them with one another and pronounced them as irritating. This risk was manifest in spatial terms too.

Spaces and Learning to Read

We're not talking about bad kids, we're talking about kids who can't read (Devine, 1996: 34).

In this vignette I was observing 'kids who can't read', and yet it was significant that these students became, through the use of space, conflated with students who were at the point of exclusion who had been transferred to the new in-house AP (Learned, 2016). I make this observation not to suggest that the young people accessing the AP provision in the school are less deserving of concern, but rather to suggest that dealing with literacy difficulties in a behaviour management setting may be indicative of the way these young people were viewed in the school. All the students in this room were, to some degree, posed as risky in a context of turnaround. As a stratagem of risk management they were relocated to another shared space, rather than being in class with their peers (Devine, 1996).

My analysis of the importance of space developed when I saw the same three Year 10 boys in an art lesson a few weeks later:

Vignette Sixteen

The student who was sat away from us in the literacy lesson was calm and focused, and enthusiastically talked me through his work. He asked me questions about what I wanted to do and whether I wanted to be an art teacher. He told me that he had worked on some of his drawings at home.

The boy who sat at the table with us during the literacy lesson was also working hard, quietly sitting on his own. He had told the teacher that he 'knows me'. The teacher told me she is working on building up his confidence.

The third boy, who avoided work in the literacy lesson, was also here. During my perusal of student work I happened to be looking through his. He came over and asked me "do you like them?" I said "yes", showed him my favourite and explained why, and we discussed his work. The teacher told me that he has a flair for art and will do very well at GCSE

The difference between my first meeting with the boys, and this exchange, was stark. There are several spatial aspects that may have played a role in the apparent disparity between these two lessons. In GCSE Art, the boys were achieving success. The notion of success was somewhat broader here, and included scope for originality and creativity. The atmosphere was calm. Bodies were less confined; movement was possible and did not require permission. Autonomous movements included collecting utensils, washing paintbrushes, and moving objects of study. These movements were guided by the learning of a craft, but not in a way that was audited. Work was considered and advice was given, but there was no 'list' for boosting achievement. This lesson was not streamed, and the boys worked alongside a mixed group of peers, only demarcated because they were all taking art GCSE. The body and the self were shaped differently in this space (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003) in ways that gave two of the boys the confidence to discuss their work with me, in conversations that they pursued. These learning spaces, the art room and the 'learning to read' room, had different meanings and associations for the boys (Ferguson, 2011).

The literacy work with these young people is highlighted as pivotal through the work of the school, yet the three boys' experience of this lesson suggested exasperation. This is highly problematic. Literacy is foundational for educational achievement (McCoy, 2013), but also for social and political participation in society. Segregating these 'risky' students and offering them a literacy lesson that failed to stimulate three of them, may have further damaged their relationship with reading. This raises important questions for the shifts that were happening to Eastbank's inclusive culture. What these examples illustrate is that those very practices held up as productive examples of the school being a 'turning around' academy result in work that is unjust for some students.

A shifting Eastbank Ontology

It's a very inclusive school but I am at risk of being put in special measures at the moment. Which means that this school is failing to provide an adequate level of education for children (Interview, HOA).

Staff portrayed the school as caring, inclusive and community-orientated. New curricular had been introduced, directed toward specific, identified groups of students. Senior staff noted that introducing some of these changes, particularly the accelerate programme, had been made easier by academy status. Yet the new pedagogical arrangements in Eastbank were preoccupied with the production of improved attainment data. The wider policy landscape can be traced through these examples. The surveillance that is directed at the underperforming academy is cast, through the micro interactions of the school, onto individual young people. Academy status enhanced the opportunities, mandate, and justification for transforming pedagogical arrangements in Eastbank (Foucault, 1975), and for shaping a testing-led pedagogy (Lingard & Mills, 2007).

In a context of surveillance and the demand to perform, Eastbank has introduced new apparatus for managing risks and performance. The number charts, lists, groups, computer packages, contracts, and revision passports documented in this chapter were examples of new disciplinary apparatus in Eastbank, which required certain actions and ways of being from staff and students (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). These increased the production of data and exerted a biopolitical power over the social life, relations, and subjectivities within the school (Lupton, 2016a). Normalising judgements and hierarchical observations were heightened through these apparatus (Bailey, 2009), providing a new “anatomy of detail” in Eastbank (Foucault, 1975: 139). The “concern with surveillance [was] expressed in the architecture” of the school, through the organisation of classroom space, grouping of students, and the changing school building (Foucault, 1975: 173).

Eastbank came to adopt its own increasingly complex logic of categorisation as part of the demand to be a high performing academy. Students were

managed in ways that enabled teachers and staff to “answer for them” (Foucault, 1975: 142). This included those ‘critical’ to the school achieving the benchmark standard; the accelerators, who were being invested in to secure future successes; and those learning to read at an ‘age appropriate’ level who were managed as a ‘risk’ to performance.

Across these practices, there is a pronounced shift towards more divisive practices (Foucault, 1982). Students are “variously positioned within biopolitical and social orderings” of the school (Kraftl, 2015: 221). They are increasingly divided from one another, and through an increasingly complex differentiation process. They are grouped with those they are deemed to be ‘similar’ to, according to their relative status as a risk or benefit to the performance of the school. These divisions are also present in the transformation of space. Different groups were enclosed in different spaces, and for some this resulted in the disciplinary monotony of repetitive, silent, individualised learning experiences (Foucault, 1975).

If the ‘small town’ layout described by students was indicative of a sense of community and a softened gaze, the transition to an increasingly controllable ‘single-building’ space may be read as a shift to focus on the individual as a site of examination and risk assessment (Bailey, 2009). These practices rearranged the balance between the individual and the community in Eastbank. These shifts were mirrored through pedagogical spaces, where the “discipline of the minute” (Foucault, 1975: 140) was carried out through the organisation and placement of students. The changes to the building, the ‘cell-like’ lesson configuration, the small group learning for children who are a ‘concern’, and the shift to focus on charts and lists rather than individual students were all connected to an ontological shift within Eastbank. The school required young people to be more responsible and capable of greater self-management, for instance through their revision passports and contracts. These practices illustrate a shift in the culture of the school towards a “neoliberal agenda of work on the self” (Walkerdine, 2011: 256). Through these divisions students are evaluated and assigned different values,

and “judgemental relations” become more prevalent (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). Staff too must govern themselves, in a context where they can be monitored through the same systems that are designed to monitor students. There was a shift to a narrative of ‘getting the job done’; with ‘the job’ focused on adequate progress.

Relations of Power and Implications for Social Justice

These examples illustrate the shifting relations of power that were present in the school. They demonstrate how young people are implicated in the production of the high achieving academy school, and how they interact with this process. These examples do not depict young people as docile, rather they reveal the particularities of the practices of freedom available to them. They show power relations to be “mobile, reversible, and unstable”, capable of being altered “during the course” of interaction (Foucault, 2003: 34). Eastbank students maneuvered within the space they had. The tasks they were given were challenged, undermined, and altered, as young people exploited the space available for doing ‘other’. Instances of staff ‘not seeing’ left space available for bickering, avoidance, and violence. These undermined any attempts at the ultimate ‘efficiency’ of the learning encounter.

Yet this freedom was shaped by the wider context and status of the school, and the performance it needed to muster and exemplify. Young people have little control over the resources available to them and the wider social structures they are part of (Parsons, 2005). Students could undermine a particular task, yet what was more difficult was undermining the identities they were given through these new divisions. Avoiding work, bickering, and fighting were ineffective ways of reformulating a risky identity. On the other hand, the boys who were learning to read could challenge this risky identity in other lessons, such as the art lesson I observed (Allan, 1996: 225). This highlights the way space and materiality shape relations of power. It draws attention to the ways young people interact with policy changes and the expectations placed on them.

These relations of power have concerning implications for some Eastbank students. There are students who fall between the gaps of recognition because they are deemed neither sufficiently troublesome to impact on other students, nor sufficiently able to positively alter the school's data. Those begging to be on the list had bought into the logic of performance and differentiation and suggest that "performativity works best when we come to want for ourselves what is wanted from us" (Ball & Olmedo, 2013: 89). The invisibility of some students in these new pedagogical regimes sat rather uneasily alongside the espoused inclusive and community-oriented ethos of the school.

For those who were visible there were other issues. First, for some there were inherent risks in this increased data production, in terms of their relative freedom and autonomy within the school (Lupton, 2016a). As the school itself was delineated as a 'problem school' this need to outline risks pressed down, and the "problem populations" (Bailey, 2009: 23) of the school were rendered increasingly visible in these new arrangements. Students learning to read in Year 10 were marked as risky others (Lupton, 2016a), particularly through the careless use of space, which aligned literacy difficulties with the threat of exclusion from school.

Unjust pedagogical encounters were one of the unacknowledged costs that arose for some students from these changes, despite an apparent commitment to inclusivity, care, and community. Some young people documented in this chapter had school experiences that were punctuated by regular, timetabled, moments of injustice. Computer packages may be easily presented as innovative curricular, which tap into the best available technologies and 'speak' to young people in 'their language'. Yet the accelerated lesson showed that this would be far too simplistic an assumption. In this lesson and the Year 10 reading lesson, conversations and listening were rendered difficult by the pedagogical arrangements. Clues to student experiences, such as exasperation, were missed or ignored in the focus on performance (Fielding, 1999). For students categorised as 'lower' achievers,

copying exercises and worksheets were used. Dialogue was limited across these lessons as the emphasis was on vertical rather than horizontal discourses, and there was no emphasis on developing the “capacity to think critically” (Lingard & Mills, 2007: 234-5).

In these cases the curriculum was tailored to the needs of the school, but not always to the needs of the young people involved. Rather than examples of innovative pedagogy and curricular, which were promoted as a feature of the academies policy, these practices appeared to bring Eastbank into line with a range of long-standing gaming practices that have been documented in the educational literature (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Perryman et al, 2011). This process was fraught at times, in the very micro instances that shape how a young person might feel about how that lesson or school day went. These moments build and combine to construct individual feelings, memories, and truths about education and schooling. The wider backdrop of growing inequality highlighted in Chapter Two, and the local Eastbank context of poverty, makes it particularly important that Eastbank’s pedagogies make as much difference as possible by “being intellectually demanding, connected to place, space, real and virtual, and biographies, supportive yet demanding, and working with and valuing difference” (Lingard & Mills, 2007: 238).

Conclusion

This chapter explored the pedagogical practices that ensued from Eastbank’s transition to academy status. I have used vignettes to explore the “hierarchization” of the school” (Devine, 1996) and the way pressures pass down, and morph, from policy visions to micro interactions with young people. These demands chipped away at the community-orientated culture of the school, replacing it with more emphasis on the performative individual, as results became the “central organising theme” (Kulz, 2017: 101). These practices made inclusive work increasingly difficult and had unjust consequences for some students. These examples suggest how, even in a school that remains committed to “get[ting] away from data and look[ing] at children” (Interview, HOA), the opposite can happen. They raise important

questions about how young people and objects may be arranged differently to create more or less pedagogical justice (Kraftl, 2015; Devine, 1996). Through these examples it is possible to see the traces wider shifts taking place in the school, and to think through their implications for young people.

Chapter Ten: Conclusion

The Reluctant Academy: Uncomfortable Truths, Discipline, and Survival

This thesis has pursued an ontological exploration of academy status and the academy school. It has addressed the following questions:

How are academy status and the academy school produced in different discursive spaces in relation to the failing school in a context of poverty? What are the consequences of this for the identities and experiences of staff and students?

Working across the disciplines of social policy, sociology and education research, I have combined Foucauldian discourse analysis and ethnography to account for the linguistic, material, spatial and pedagogical shaping of the failing school that becomes an academy. I explored the policy through its various levels and modes of operation, working across the junctures of policy and day-to-day schooling practices. To conclude I draw together the recurring analytical motifs to address the research questions. I discuss how these findings relate to existing literature and knowledge of the academies policy, the limitations of this study and opportunities for future research.

Surviving Academy Status

The insights generated from my time in Eastbank show that academy status does not manifest in straightforward ways, rather it becomes part of the school's constant process of reviewing and revising its practices in a shifting accountability context. Eastbank staff did not present a coherent academy identity. Instead academy status was produced in multi-modal ways, across which a fluctuating, divisive and fraught academy ontology emerged. This, in turn, produced increasingly fraught, divided identities for staff and students, and was implicated in unjust educational practices and experiences. I argue that this fraught and contradictory ontology is symptomatic of the delicate process of survival that marked the production of Eastbank Academy. I summarise the contributions that each of the four analysis chapters have

made to this argument, before I describe the nature and implications of survival.

Academies are shaped as objects for thought through compelling policy narratives, and sustained through their ability to mesh with a wider set of social policy narratives.

In Chapter Five I explored the representations, truth claims, and assumptions that underpin the academies policy. Academies are shaped as objects for thought through the reiteration of particular narratives and representations. I found the tool of ‘narrative meshing’ to be fundamental to this process. This meshing embeds academisation in wider social policy narratives, through which poverty is conceptualised and managed. Academy status becomes a new normal of education and schooling, whilst academies also become a potent space for reaffirming wider policy truths positioning children growing up in poverty, and the institutions that serve them, as ‘lacking’ and ‘risky’. This meshing constructs a powerful metanarrative, positioning individuals as the sites of measurement and improvement, and shifting the effects of poverty to the discursive shadows.

Academy status is renarrativised to make sense within the Eastbank context. This renarrativising pivots around the recognition of poverty. It is a form of care of the self, which emphasises ethical relations between staff and students.

In Chapter Seven drew on Foucault’s work to understand how Eastbank staff fit into the taken-for-granted truths of academy status (Foucault, 1996). I focused on the possibilities for academy schools and subjects in a context where poverty occupies the discursive shadows. I explored how subject positions might be negotiated, and the role of school-based values and truths within this. Eastbank staff responded to dominant policy narratives with cynicism, frustration and anger, and they were particularly averse to the idea of transformation. Staff renarrativised academy status, making it acceptable within their context, reconfiguring it as a milestone on a pre-planned journey. Academy status would only change the school in ways that aligned with its history as caring, inclusive and community-oriented. This

renarrativising was an ethical practice of care of the self, as staff sought to protect students and themselves from national policies and processes, which undervalued them and were not in their best interests. The idea of not drawing on context was formulated as nonsense. Through this process staff shaped versions of themselves, refusing external attempts to determine their aims, priorities, and values. Yet reaffirming an Eastbank identity was complex and problematic, and students were not supported to develop more nuanced understandings of the structural arrangements of which they are a part.

Academy status created a context of threat and surveillance in Eastbank. In response, academy status was shaped through space, materiality and aesthetics in ways that brought a problematic of aspirations to the fore.

In Chapter Eight I explored interrelations between policy discourse and surveillance, and the way these combine to situate academy status as a disciplinary tool in Eastbank. The point is not that the academies policy provides “a range of absolutely new tactics and techniques” (Foucault, 2003: 242), rather it has “accelerated” and “changed [the] scale” of shifts already present in education policy (Foucault, 1975: 139). Academy status has made Eastbank subject to more threatening, intense and direct feedback from central government. School leaders were working in a climate where being “off message” threatened their jobs, and the school might be forced to change its leadership and sponsorship if improvements in outcomes were not demonstrated. In this context, some of Eastbank’s oppositional narratives and practices appeared to wane. Academy status was being performed, with brand management occurring through transition events and local advertising. A more aspirational aesthetic was materialising as Eastbank projected images of a ‘school on the up’ through marketing practices, new uniforms, and building changes. Narrow channels of aspiration were being reaffirmed through Eastbank’s framings of student post-16 options.

Pedagogical shifts in the school were becoming attuned to the need to divide, categorise and monitor. For some students, this resulted in unjust and exclusionary learning encounters.

In a context of threat and surveillance, I explored the uncomfortable truths of the balance of performing and reformulating academy status in Eastbank. Data-focused practices, such as the critical cohort, were gaining prominence in the school. Young people were categorised and hierarchised through increasingly divisive grouping policies, which delineated those who were most welcome in the school, those needing to accelerate their learning and those requiring risk-management. Rather than achieving academy status with innovative flair, academy status was resulting in more orderly schooling subjects. There was a shift from the inclusive to the effective school, and from community to the individual.

Survival: A Divisive Ontology

I don't know that we do balance it very well and I do think sometimes I'm just waiting to be caught out...I probably play the game as well as I can through gritted teeth (Interview, HOA).

Survival was the logic producing academy status in Eastbank. It describes a way of being that requires the balancing of sets of duties and influences that often ran counter to one another. I use the term survival to capture the ways staff governed and regulated the self, becoming versatile actors in a context of competing demands and values. Staff had to simultaneously exist in two regimes: resisting enough to be comfortable with their practice, whilst performing enough to avoid intervention.

Survival was produced by the power relations existing in and around Eastbank Academy, and created a new context within which teachers and pupils understood and modified the self. It can be read through the process of producing outcomes demanded in the high-surveillance climate of a failing academy in a context of poverty. The dominant academy narrative informed the performance style required to appease the various auditors of the school. Work to present visual signifiers of school improvement became

logical in a context where staff were embroiled in daily, termly and annual cycles of reflection on how to survive against the fear of being 'caught out'. Survival denotes the point of tension at which staff work, and is pursued "not by playing a game that [is] totally different from the game of truth, but by playing the same game differently" (Foucault, 2003: 37). Staff do not risk outright confrontation, and perform conformity in accountability settings, whilst maintaining a consistent rhetoric of cynicism in safe, private spaces (Scott, 1985).

Survival describes the approach of Eastbank staff as they both attended to, and subtly shaped, policy mandates in a bid to be just enough of an academy. Academy status might be produced to align with dominant accountability regimes, but it was done unwillingly and unenthusiastically. Staff performed elements of academy status but attempted to do this on their terms, forming acceptable language to describe it. Renarrativising was one of the methods through which staff modified and adapted to their circumstances in the current policy moment. It was a particular formulation of care of the self; an ethical activity towards the self and others in an increasingly threatening context. Staff created a different morality tale around their work, challenging narratives of transformation that accompany academy status, and critiquing the way poverty is an unspoken, structuring absence within this.

Through renarrativising, staff located their 'otherness' to dominant policy truths. They rearticulated academy status as a way of creating space to better serve their students, distancing themselves from practices they did not want to own such as the new grouping and data-led practices, which were largely absent from discussions. These could not be aligned with the depiction staff gave of the need for inclusive, community-orientated and collective pedagogies. Staff also distinguished between the type of academy they were producing, and other problematic academy types, such as large, corporatised MATs.

Fraught Identities

You can't survive in this trade. There's no longevity in it because it's tough (Interview, EH).

However, the balancing act I have described as survival was not a straightforward way of being. Survival is a divisive ontology. For Eastbank staff, finding the compromise between doing what they thought was best and what was promoted and compelled by policy technologies was not easy work. Fraught identities were produced, symptomatic of a range of contradictions underpinning the work of staff and the demands placed on students. The maintenance of such conflicting identities was challenging work, and the situation I have described appeared difficult to sustain.

Eastbank's pursuit of academy status was a survival tactic for a school that felt unsupported. By going before it was pushed, Eastbank garnered a level of freedom, could select its own sponsor, and continued to advocate community-orientated and inclusive principles. This was the only tool available to a small, failing school to create spaces to do things staff valued. The aim was to work within the limits of the system to minimise disadvantage.

However, academy status itself became something to survive. It heightened surveillance and introduced new risks, particularly the fear of being taken over by another sponsor or put into special measures. Attempts to be enough of an academy to avoid this fate resulted in changes, and the pockets of breathing space the school had created for itself gradually closed. The risks and harshness of national accountability regimes, alongside the discursive emphasis on autonomy that is presented through the academies policy, created a context of heightened inward and horizontal surveillance. Contradictory messages were being produced. The community ethos was still promoted, but there was a growth of individualisation through policies such as the critical cohort, and new monitoring technologies, including

making the individual more available to the gaze through spatial shifts, grouping practices and data collection.

The way academy status was being produced in Eastbank was increasingly inimical to an inclusive ethos. Enacting 'sufficient compliance' resulted in unjust practices for some young people as it began to normalise data-led pedagogies. Increased attention on individual children as units of performance undermined some of the school's collaborative, caring values, and effected staff-student relationships. Like staff, students were not docile bodies in this process. Some indicated their exasperation, and practiced freedom around how they were being configured through new pedagogical arrangements. However, the space to do this was limited; performances of discontent often served to reinforce 'risky' labels, resulting in further division and exclusion for some young people.

Contributions to Knowledge

The warrant for this thesis was a research gap concerning the ontological nature of a school's shift to academy status in those cases where a failing school in a context of poverty is expected to transform. It fills a gap in the literature by exploring the shift in identity that accompanies academy status, and the meaning-making practices existing around this. This work adds to the educational policy-sociology (Ball, 1997) literature, concerning how policy happens and how this effects schools and communities facing multiple deprivation. It adds to methodological literatures on how policies can be researched and understood. I summarise seven specific contributions to the literature.

1. This study coheres with evidence on the located, complex and conflicting nature of how policy happens (Ball et al, 2012; Ball, 2015). It shows the academy school is produced through complex interrelations between policy, discourse, materiality, and pedagogy, highlighting the shifting, contingent nature of these aspects of schooling. It argues that the production of

academy status is inflected by local and wider social policy contexts (Gunter & McGinity, 2014), which contributes to its fluid and multifaceted meanings. It provides relevant insights for wider organisational literatures regarding how meanings are created, reformulated and sustained in organisations, and the quest for meaning that occurs around policies (Czarniawska, 2004).

2. It is important that the production of academy status is understood across a range of schools and contexts, yet in-depth studies and government exemplars have gravitated towards popular, controversial and extreme examples of academisation. I have addressed this research gap by providing an in-depth study of an academy that is not high profile (Purcell, 2011b). Eastbank is typical of many academies that operate without press attention and celebration from government figures. These findings speak to schools that are not currently well positioned in education policy (Coldron et al, 2014).

3. This thesis contributes to an understanding of some of the possibilities for how and why academy status might be adopted by schools. The Eastbank case suggests that schools becoming academies will be buying into academy policy logics to different degrees. A school's appearance of being 'on message' with the academies policy may obscure a range of tensions, modifications and compromises in practice. Eastbank practices not an outright rejection of academy status, but a renegotiation of it. This is likely to have wider relevance across schools given the intricate ways schooling cultures and histories intersect with policy.

4. The emphasis on ontology creates space for optimism for those critical of the current direction of education policy (Apple, 2014; Gunter, Hall & Mills, 2014), because it focuses on the production of academy status as a process of becoming that continues beyond this research. The ending is continually deferred, hence there is space for Eastbank's consequences and situation to be reshaped. There are potential opportunities for it to become less threatening if the direction of education policy shifts. Despite a history of

cross-party support for the academies policy, there are signs of change, with Labour's waning support for the policy (The Labour Party, 2017). The beginning of 2017 observed an unsettled political climate in Britain, as Brexit was negotiated and the general election culminating in no outright majority for a single political party. Under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, The Labour Party is proclaiming an anti-austerity politics as an alternative narrative to that of The Conservative party (The Labour Party, 2017). To observe how this develops, and its implications for education and wider social policy developments, are key questions for future education policy research.

Aside from government policy shaping, this work illustrates how policy is accomplished through rearticulation, offering varying lenses to make sense of policy (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). Schools can and do find spaces to negotiate and reinterpret, leading to different ways of conceptualising the purpose and function of schools and education, and of depicting young people growing up in contexts of multiple deprivation. The practices of freedom in Eastbank may be a source of optimism because they were focused on reformulating academy status around inclusivity, in contrast to its presentation in formal policy narratives. This thesis illustrates the care, humour and creativity that can thrive in challenging schooling contexts, as a school strives to fulfil its perceived duties of inclusivity and community-centeredness against a backdrop of threat, fear and pressure. Instead of a grim tale of underachievement, and salvation through policy, it shows the work staff do to present positive pictures of their school and students. It suggests schools working in difficult contexts of threat and surveillance will strive to find meaningful spaces to do social justice work.

5. Although the conclusion to Eastbank's shift to academy status is, in one sense, continually deferred and unfolding, it is also shaped by potential plot developments and the fear surrounding these. The threat of the senior leadership team and sponsor being replaced, alongside practices adopted to deflect this, loomed large in Eastbank, reaffirming the coercive nature of national policy discourses (May, 1995; Ball, 2009b; Ward et al, 2015). School

staff tended to position Eastbank as a reluctant academy and ventured policy modifications, but when pressure to perform and risks to staff jobs intensified, efforts were focused on producing government-desired outcomes. Policy discourses began to shape what was valued, discussed and done in the school, and how new ideas were interacted with. This was beginning to erode the school's painstaking work of rearticulating context, poverty and educational values, guiding it into previously resisted practices. Rationing, data-led pedagogies and exclusionary practice began to occupy a more central place in Eastbank's work.

Staff found limited opportunities to act outside of the academies discourse (Ball, 2009b), because a set of circumstances meant that academy status operated as a disciplinary tool in Eastbank. Its position as a failing school, combined with the discursive logic of not using poverty as an excuse for failure, crafted the disciplinary framework marking Eastbank's work. The disciplinary potential of academy status depends on referential webs of meaning, through which schools are categorised and ranked. Some school types emerge as superior, and the leaders of well-positioned schools and MATs garner a level of local and national strategic influence over education policy (Courtney, 2015). This is part of the way the state has co-opted additional actors to enact this policy, and speaks to the diffusion of power relations characteristic of the shift away from 'Government' towards 'Governance' (Ball, 2017; Frahm & Martin, 2009). This impacted on Eastbank's local manoeuvrings, through its branding and advertising activities, and FAP work.

I positioned academies as a disciplinary regime in order to contribute to understandings of power relations that exist in underperforming academies in contexts of poverty. There were opportunities to exercise freedom within the power relations in the school, yet these were not based on equal exchanges of ideas (Fraser, 1996). This is exemplified by the way Eastbank staff were called as penitents to account for the school, a conversation that was carefully managed by DfE representatives. Other possibilities were

available to staff and students but not ones that would significantly alter their situation.

This thesis shows how the academies policy has adjusted and refined existing accountability mechanisms (Foucault, 1975), becoming a potent part of the order of things in education. The policy consolidates and exacerbates trends and practices acknowledged as present within schooling since policy reforms in the late 1980s, including competition, governance by numbers, and performativity (Ball, 2003a; Ozga, 2009; West & Bailey, 2013). Through this consolidation process, neoliberal agendas are refreshed and intensified, as they are connected to the very identity of the school. Academy status aligns with existing policy technologies and governance mechanisms, rendering these more acute in contexts of multiple deprivation. The policy forms a coherent tactic for subsuming myriad demands on schools to perform to benchmark standards and to strive to particular notions of success.

6. Social justice is an important lens for examining large-scale educational reforms, but particularly when this reform claims to have some intention or ability to address unequal education outcomes and experiences, as the academies policy does (Beckett, 2007). This thesis contributes to understandings of social justice in education by drawing out the creative work taking place around this concept through the academies policy. Academies are a policy space where social justice has been reconfigured and muddied, rendering it ambiguous and potentially problematic for young people, schools and communities in contexts of multiple deprivation. Academies are part of the way social justice has been reimagined as the product of greater management of individuals, rather than as something that requires wider, collective social policies. The academies policy plays a role in exacerbating the long-standing patterns of educational inequality outlined in Chapter Two.

This thesis clarifies various connections between academy status and social justice concerns such as exclusions, AP and FAP. New local divisions were

being created through Eastbank's fair access, branding and marketing practices. Social justice became more parochial through these practices; to the exclusion of other local children and to the detriment of neighbouring schools working in a similar contexts of multiple deprivation and threatening policy mandates. In this context, there were new skills and tactics to develop, for example being able to delineate the easier cases at the FAP. The pursuit of more orderly students in Eastbank resulted in patterns of exclusionary and divisive practice. There was a drive towards individual accountability through the introduction of performance related pay for staff and technologies such as revision passports for students. Staff claims to protect their students were also problematic. They offered their own set of limiting depictions of young people, particularly in relation to their future aspirations and what they could and should be. Careers advice was grounded in long-standing gendered and divisive categorisations of aspiration as either academic or vocational. Young people were not equipped to challenge dominant discourses and the structural arrangements of which they are a part.

The academies policy reveals much about the way young people, educational practitioners and schools are envisaged in the present (Parsons, 2005). These examples highlight the role of the sponsored academy model in on-going patterns and experiences of educational inequality, suggesting how these patterns are challenged and maintained. It adds to an understanding of how, even when the government and school staff attest to the importance of greater equality and justice in education, these results do not materialise.

7. This thesis contributes to understandings of the methodologies required to research policy as complex, multi-modal and becoming. It illustrates how Foucault's work can be used to examine the taken-for-granted assumptions underpinning education policies, and the conditions of existence sustaining policies (Butler, 1990). The idea of policy as contingent, and forming the very problem it claims to address, was particularly valuable in this work (Bacchi, 1999). This thesis challenges the unproblematic and appealing simplicity of

transformation, which sustains the academies policy. Foucauldian discourse analysis enabled me to explore how the subject of the academies policy is constructed through the domains of problem and solution articulation, and how staff and students are represented through this (Bansel, 2015).

Meanwhile, the ethnographic tools I used enabled me to do things that Foucault's work alone would not facilitate. The arguments I have made in this thesis depended on human contact, through which I researched policy as nuanced, fluctuating and multi-modal, whilst using data moments to capture the everyday tensions it creates. As I noted in Chapter Three, these moments are not present in Foucault's work, which largely depended on archival material.

The multi-level analysis I have used was key to addressing the particular research gap I was contending with. It enabled me to capture the production of academy status as multi-modal, adding to an understanding of policy as something written, spoken, felt and lived (Fielding, 1999; Hewitt, 2009). Combining ethnography and discourse analysis enabled me to find relationships between different levels and domains, taking account of policies as texts, practices, space, and materiality, which was crucial to understanding the production of academy status. This methodology was also necessary given the difficulties in extracting 'being an academy' from other aspects of schools' work.

The Scope of this Study

I now return to points I raised in Chapters Three and Four regarding the claims to knowledge made available by my methodological choices, clarifying what this thesis does and does not do. I have provided an in-depth study of one academy school, taking seriously the importance of context in relation to how the meanings of academy status are shaped. Many of the difficulties of Eastbank's context are shared with other schools. However, I do not use these findings as a basis for building an explanatory theory of how the academy school is produced.

This thesis is underpinned by assumptions of a world that is unstable and becoming (Adam St Pierre, 2013). I have captured Eastbank Academy at a particular point in time, and view any claims to provide a definitive reading of this school as incongruent with the methodological position adopted. My analysis has centred on a deconstruction of the truths operating in current education policy, thus to conclude by offering a set of my own prescriptive truths would be problematic, aligning this thesis with a wider governing discourse of the practical social sciences (Ball, 2009b). My aim has been to elucidate the current state of affairs and build on existing knowledge of the academies policy, not to propose an alternative (Ball, 2009b). This may inform policy but it will not determine it (Stables, 2003).

Rather than asking whether the academy model works, this thesis has asked what academy status means, how this meaning is produced and what the consequences of its production are. This style of questioning is not designed to create simple arguments and solutions that can feed into a set of policy recommendations (Ball, 2009b). I do not evaluate whether Eastbank is doing a 'good job', or whether the academies policy 'works'. The complex and contradictory account I provide of Eastbank Academy may not be welcomed by policy makers, since it disrupts the presentation of policy as a rational response to problems that exist 'out there'.

Academy status offers one lens through which to view a school, which will foreground particular ideas. My work has also been shaped by the personal and professional concerns that led me to undertake this thesis as outlined in Chapter One, particularly my interest in schools and students who are labelled as failing. As discussed in Chapter Four, this study is shaped by some of the ways I was positioned by through the research. For instance, my positionality as a sympathiser opened spaces for critical dialogue, and some expectations that I would do justice to the concerns and difficulties of Eastbank staff. These concerns have shaped what is foregrounded through this research, creating underexplored and undertheorised spaces in this work (Bailey, 2009). My interactions with students were largely shaped by the

dynamics of the lesson, and their free time came to occupy a marginal space in my study, partly due to difficulties I experienced when attempting to mix with young people in their 'down time'. Given the way space has become central to this thesis, this might have proffered some further insights, for instance on how break times are implicated in the production of Eastbank Academy.

Future Research

This study, its findings, and limitations suggest several possibilities for future research. The intensity of the academies programme has increased across the course of this project. The majority, if not all, schools are set to become academies. They will be involved, at some stage, in the process of making sense of what academy status can and will mean for them and their students. This suggests the fruitfulness of developing work that advances further accounts of how academy status is produced across schools in a range of contexts. Further research is needed to understand how local and national positions of schools impact upon how academy status is produced. The process of survival I have mapped here is one approach to this, which may be particularly productive in those cases where schools would like to remain within the LA, are in contexts of poverty, and/or are underperforming. It will also be important to understand how academy status is produced when the threat of surveillance is more removed. What are the points of overlap and variance between how academy status materialises in schools that are positioned differently in the schooling hierarchy I have described throughout this work? What ontological requirements are placed on staff members in differently positioned academies? Do well-positioned academies have greater opportunities to work in the best interests of young people at the margins of education?

Academies are perpetuated as a social justice policy for shifting problematic schooling identities, yet this thesis suggests the policy is a site for unjust practices. The impact of these processes on the wellbeing and experiences of young people and staff warrants further research. My approach

foregrounded a concern with educational inequality and young people and schools in contexts of multiple deprivation. Ethnicity was not an explicit lens for this study, yet my data has suggested ways it is implicated in the production of academy status, with important implications for social justice. The FAP appeared as a space where ethnicity-based inequalities were present. Preference for students with EAL was a taken-for-granted tactic for navigating the panel. However, this 'white-working-class-student-as-most-problematic' logic does a disservice to all students. It side-lines voices, issues, and continued educational inequalities experienced by minority ethnic groups, whilst providing space for deficit narratives about poor white children (Gillborn et al, 2012). It is important to understand whether the categorising practices I described are wider features of fair access work across the country, particularly in a contentious context of Brexit negotiations. Despite the pertinence of this aspect of schools' collaborative work for issues of educational inequality, to my knowledge there has been no systematic study of fair access procedures.

Final Thoughts

Eastbank Academy continues to become beyond the scope of this thesis. So too does the wider political context, which has become increasingly complex after the Brexit vote, a close 2017 general election, and a resurging anti-austerity movement in the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. The production of academy status is intertwined with this social policy context, just as it is inflected with local histories and values. This leaves open the question of if and how academies will remain the flagship education policy, how long a wider social policy context of austerity can continue, and whether the current unsettled political climate presents opportunities for new educational possibilities.

Failing to Survive: A Post-script

As the production of Eastbank Academy continued beyond the scope of my fieldwork the worst fears of staff were realised. After an Inadequate rating from Ofsted the school was moved to a new academy trust to be improved. The best attempts of staff did not enable them to survive this fate. Academy status has not enabled Eastbank to align with the technologies of power that determine educational success in England, yet it has created a context where ever-closer attention must be paid to this task. Eastbank's new educational experts have intervened quickly. Several fixed-term exclusions were soon given to students falling foul of new stricter uniform codes. Replacement uniform items must be quickly purchased in compliance with the new policy, undermining the previous inclusive approach to uniform where this was provided free of charge. This is school improvement and social justice being delivered under the logic of academy status.

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Appendix One: Discourse Analysis Data Corpus

In addition to the texts cited in Chapter Five, discourse analysis was also informed by the following texts on academies:

- DfEE (2000). City Academies, Schools to make a difference: A Prospectus for Sponsors and Other Partners.
- DfEE (2001). Schools: building on success. Green Paper
- The Education Reform Act (2002).
- Kelly, R (2006). Academy Programme Reaches Halfway Mark, Speech to North of England Education Conference: 6th January.
- The Academies Act (2010)
- Adonis, A (2011). Birmingham unleashed: an elected mayor, high-speed rail and academies, Speech to the Lunar Society: 15th March.
- Adonis, A (2011). Speech to special schools and academies trust: 28th June.
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- Adonis, A (2012) Beyond Our Berlin Wall: The New Statesman.
- Gove, M (2012) Evidence to the Education Select Committee: 21st January.
- Laws, D (2013) Speaks to the National Education Trust on Raising Standards: 6th March.
- Gove, M (2014). Securing our children's future, speech to London Academy of Excellence: 3rd February.
- DfE (2014) Do academies make the most of their autonomy?
- DfE (2014) The evolving education system in England: A temperature check
- Morgan, N (2015) Nicky Morgan: We will step up our school reforms so every child can thrive, The Telegraph.
- Miliband, E (2015). Speech on education at Haverstock School: 12th February
- DfE (2016). Educational excellence everywhere: White Paper.

Blog Posts from DfE Academy and Free Schools Blog (Retrieved 18.7.15:
<https://academyschools.blog.gov.uk>).

1. Why I chose to build on success with academy status (22.7.14).
2. Freedoms provide 'dream' facilities, says academy trust CEO (30.7.14).
3. We're educating the whole child (2.9.14).
4. We've an increased purpose that feeds into our community (24th October 2014).
5. Academy status put school at the 'heart of community' (28.10.14).
6. Education and early years at academy (21.1.15).
7. Academy prepares pupils for work (23.1.15).
8. Talking directly to teachers (13.2.15).
9. Academy uses freedoms to achieve excellence (16.2.15).
10. School food: serving up high standards (5.3.15).
11. Governance: view from the top at Harris Academy Trust (23.3.15).

Appendix Two: Introductory Email to Eastbank Staff

I am Jodie, a PhD student at Nottingham University. I am exploring what academy status means for individual schools, which will include:

- Exploring what, if anything, has changed in the school since it became an academy
- The views of staff and students on these changes, and academy status more generally
- The impact of academy status on the school's ability to support all students well

In order to explore these questions it is helpful to immerse myself in the life of the school and to have conversations with as many staff and students as possible. This will include attending as many events and meetings as I am permitted. I am also hoping to see a cross-section of lessons.

Whilst I have had the all-clear to be in the school, each member of staff and student absolutely has the right to say if they would rather not have me in their lesson/speak to me. I appreciate how busy you all are and it is really important to me that I don't get in the way of your core work.

That said, I realise that there may be a lack of clarity about what it is I am interested in when in lessons. Most importantly, I am not considering the quality of teaching and learning, as might be the focus of an Ofsted observation. I am not qualified to do this, nor is this my research interest. Instead, I want to get more of a general feel for the culture of the school, which may be seen through, for example, relationships, values and the types of conversations and educational tasks that take place.

Also, I am more than happy to help out in any way I can. I worked as an academic tutor and mentor in an alternative provision and a secondary school for three years. English and Social Sciences are my most comfortable subjects – but if I can be helpful in any way when in lessons, please let me know. This will help me too, as it means I can get to know students.

I really appreciate the opportunity to be in the school. Academies have been a controversial policy and, to date, a lot of the research on them has either been ideologically-led or focused on large-scale data sets which comment on academies' ability to improve the number of students achieving 5+ A*-C etc.

With your help, I hope to offer something alternative to this; a more qualitative, detailed and small-scale look at this policy through the eyes of staff and students in a sample of academies across Nottingham. If you have any questions or comments, I tend to be based in (name staff members) office, or you can get hold of me on lqxjp7@nottingham.ac.uk.

Appendix Three: Sample Fieldnotes

2nd December 2013 (pseudonyms used)

I arrived at 8am and had considerable time waiting in reception (I didn't get collected until 8:30). I looked at the display cabinets, photos, student art, and brochures that decorate the reception and took some photographs. There is a TV monitor, which has extracts from the school twitter feed (recent, not live). The latest GCSE results are celebrated on a notice board and there are plaques celebrating some of the school's partnership work.

Clare, a senior TA, collected me and I shadowed her lessons for the day. The first lesson was a Year 8 SEN class. We worked on writing play scripts. I didn't observe for long as I saw a student staring into space. I sat down next to her and supported her for most of the lesson. This provided me with a good insight into level of need. The student worked very slowly and I am not sure how much she would have been able to do without support.

Lessons 2 and 3 were Entry-Level English Year with year 11. I was told that this qualification is for students who would not be able to get a G grade on the GCSE paper (i.e. they can't access the GCSE English curriculum). The paper seems to focus much more on functional literacy. There is an emphasis on the literacy skills these students would need to be able to enter the workplace. For instance, one of the modules was very health and safety orientated, and one was focused on filling in job applications. I looked through the folders and exam papers of these students and noticed that certain stock phrases had been learnt off by heart and then applied to several pieces of work and in the mock exam.

I felt that these students were intrigued by my presence but I wasn't really introduced to them, so I am not surprised. In fact this has been the case on a number of occasions. I have always been introduced to adults when I am sitting in on a meeting, but I haven't always been introduced to the students. Perhaps this is because members of staff aren't sure how to introduce/what to introduce me as. However, it can lead to questions from students, and intrigue. This is usually dispelled once I work with them as then they seem to just assume I am a TA. I also felt as though Clare thought I was vetting her in some ways and I had to reassure her a couple of times that this wasn't the case, and that I was just trying to see a typical day in the school through her eyes. First thing in the morning she was slightly elusive/not engaging with me so I had to follow her about a bit. Once we spoke and she saw that I was there to help her in lessons, any awkwardness disappeared I think and throughout the course of the day she did open up to me quite a lot. However, at the end of the day she did ask me if she'd done ok, and I had to remind her that I wasn't judging her ability to carry out her role! I will have the bear this in mind when I observe other lessons in the school.

Appendix Four: Conversations and Interviews

	Number who had an audio recorded interview	Number who participated in pre-arranged conversations, recorded through note taking	Number involved in audio recorded focus groups
SLT	3	2	0
Teaching Staff	1	14	0
Support Staff	0	6	3
Non Teaching Staff	0	3	0
Pupils	0	0	5
Parents	0	0	6
Academy Sponsor	1	0	0
Local School Partnership Staff	2	0	0